MARIE CURIE ACTIONS

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5   Social representations: old and new

1   From mental to collective and social representations

Every concept of lasting importance is couched in history and displays duration. Nevertheless, concepts of lasting importance radically change. For example, the concepts of atom and continuum in Greek philosophy and in modern quantum physics display both a duration and a radical transformation in human thinking regarding the phenomena to which they refer. Similarly, the concepts of democracy in ancient Greece and in contemporary society reflect both the permanence and variation in human condition.

Equally, let us consider the concept of social representation. One can hardly write a book that has in its title the term 'social representations' without discussing the concept of collective or social representation[1] of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858–1917). Yet Durkheim's explicitly proposed concept of collective representations was already implicit in the moral philosophy of Charles Renouvier. And Renouvier stood on the shoulders of Immanuel Kant. And Kant – but one cannot always go back to the beginning of the world.

It was Durkheim who put the concept of collective representation at the centre of the theory of sociological knowledge. Durkheim presupposed that knowledge of the external world could be established only through collective representations and he was convinced that the sociology of knowledge must be built on this concept. Having put forward such an argument, he then proposed that sociology should be instituted as an independent science based on the study of collective representations.

Durkheim's concept can be viewed as being at a cross-road between the *mental representation* of the static foundational epistemology (Chapter 1) on the one hand, and the *social representation* of the dynamic and dialogical epistemology (see below and Chapter 6), on the other. These epistemologies imply different theories about the origin of representations, different perspectives on science and common sense, on communication and the change of representations. In order to bring home the continuity and the

dramatic difference between Durkheim's *sociological* concept of representation and Moscovici's *social psychological* concept, we need to reflect on both.

1.1   'Représentation' *and* 'representation'

While collective representation was a fundamental concept of Durkheim's sociology of knowledge, apparently, he never defined the term *'représentation'* (Pickering, 2000a). The term *'représentation'* was, in his time, commonly used and understood in various spheres of intellectual life in France, ranging from philosophy, social science, arts and literature on the one hand, to professional fields, e.g. law, on the other. Thus, there was no urge for Durkheim to define the term *'représentation'* and it appears that he was not criticised for this 'negligence'. On the basis of his writing we can safely infer that for Durkheim, collective representations referred to various activities of the mind, rather than to specifically defined phenomena. As Pickering (2000c, pp. 98–9) maintains, Durkheim spoke about *représentations* in different senses, referring to scientific, collective or social, individual and religious *représentations*, the *représentations* of feelings as well as other kinds of *représentations*. For him, everything could be represented and this view was shared by other French scholars of his time.

The word *'représentation'* was already known in the French language in the thirteenth century. It has always been a highly polysemic term, referring to various activities of the mind, like the production of images, symbols and signs, as well as graphic demonstrations, e.g. Cartesian coordinates and imitation. Most importantly, however, the first meaning, listed in the French Dictionary Robert, characterises *'représentation'* as an action of placing something in front of the eyes of another or in front of the mind of another. This indicates that the French *'représentation'* displays, above all, social and dialogical characteristics. One of the earliest meanings refers to a theatrical *représentation*. Acting is by definition communicative and is directed at others. In a play, the actor communicates to others her images of an absent object. An absent object is made meaningful to others by means of an image or a sign or by discourse. In a dramatic dialogue the actor never repeats or mirrors an absent event but through *représentation* he creates a new interpretation. We also need to emphasise in this context that the prefix *re-* in *représentation* has nothing to do with repetition but, linguistically speaking, it is an intensifying prefix.

In contemporary French *'représentation'* maintains its dynamic meaning (cf. Pickering, 2000a; Prendergast, 2000). It refers to various kinds of activities and is widely used in anthropology, sociology, arts and literature

as well as in daily discourse. In the same way, *'représentation'* in the philosophical and psychological sense retains its dynamic and communicative characteristics. Moscovici (1976a), in the Preface to the second edition of *La Psychanalyse* draws attention to this fundamental characteristic of *représentation. Représentation* is always directed at others: through pointing out something to someone, it speaks; and through expressing something to someone, it communicates (1976a, p. 26).

The word *'représentation'* was exported into English and it is already found in the fourteenth century. However, the meaning of 'representation' in the two languages has never been the same. Although in English the term is also polysemic and dictionaries display a range of meanings, it is the emphasis on these different meanings that directs attention to their diversities in the two languages. English meanings emphasise representation as likeliness, a picture, a model or a reproduction, imitation and mirroring. It evokes static rather than dynamic meanings. Today, the meaning of representation in human sciences is largely associated with individual cognition, with the mechanistic and computational approaches in the study of the mind/brain and with the idea of internal mirroring of the external world (cf. Chapter 1). In the history of philosophy, from Locke to Kant, representations have been conceived usually as signs of reality and as appearances that the mind accepts from the external world or constructs from sensations and perceptions. In modern cognitive science, representations have become formalisations, processes and rules, symbols, images and pictures produced by the mind of the individual.

1.2   To represent means to think

Philosophers and researchers in natural and social sciences have different choices when approaching the study of mental phenomena. For some, the starting point of inquiry could be sense-impressions or individual perceptions, for others it could be cognition; still some others choose thinking, concepts, ideas – or representations – as a point of departure.

Yet whatever the choice, we find one pervasive tendency both in philosophy and science. It is the tendency to conceive such mental phenomena in a similar manner as we conceive the physical matter or material. For example, ideas are often considered as coming from inside the brain or the outside world; representations are discussed as constructs that mirror reality, or are defined as social facts. Cognition can be treated as a mechanism, a tool, an organ, a device or a computer. In other words, these metaphors tend to treat mental phenomena as entities to which you can point in the same way as you point to material things and which you can

define with the same precision as you define material objects like hammers or bananas. Such images or metaphors, although they do not say very much on their own, may fashion our understanding of mental phenomena. Perhaps then it is not surprising that the question 'how do you define social representations?' is posed in the same manner as if, when talking about social representations, one was dealing with objects like a banana, a hammer and so on. What is more surprising is the frequently posed question 'how do you operationalise representations?' This request is still made not only by those who subscribe to some versions of empiricism and positivism or at least to their residuals, but also by those who would never perceive themselves as being associated in any way with these approaches.

In contrast, let us make an alternative choice in the study of social representations. Following the French meaning of the word, let us consider representations as thoughts in movement. And thought, we have argued earlier, is conceptual and communicable. If we insist on this proposition then the question of operationalisation of social representations, which invites defining them as something finished and complete becomes meaningless. Social representations are dynamic and open phenomena and the concept of social representation is formed and re-transformed together with the transformation of its theory.[2] The theory and the concept of social representations both develop as long as there are researchers who make significant contributions to their study. This is why concepts of lasting importance both display duration and radically change. In order to understand Moscovici's concept of social representation, let us reflect on the historical transformation of the concept of collective representation into social representation.

2   The sociological theory of collective or social representations

2.1   From Kant to Durkheim

According to the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, representations are formed through perception and cognition of the external world as it exists independently of the mind. However, according to Kant's epistemology, the mind does not have direct access to the real world or *the world-in-itself.* Kant perpetuated the belief of earlier philosophers about dualism between the objective world and the subjective mind. Kant believed that the mind cognises the world only indirectly. It combines the sensory data into representations of objects and thus it constructs appearances of the world. These appearances are regular and

orderly but they exist *only* in the mind, in our sensibility (Kant, 1787/1929, A 127) and *not* in the real world, which remains unknown. By producing appearances or representations, Kant claimed, the mind gives laws to nature. One can interpret Kant's claim concerning the law-giving capacity of the mind in a *psychological* sense. It is the constitution of human cognition that determines *what* we comprehend about the world behind appearances (Marková, 1982).

Although Kant followed in principle Cartesian thought, his position with respect to representation constitutes an interesting twist, which contrasts with earlier philosophy. According to Kant, representations are not the passively produced mirrors of nature, but are actively constructed by the mind through experience. The constitution of the mind makes representations *a priori* possible, but they can be constructed only through experience. Although the mind does not have access to the world as it is, its constitution enables it to give meanings to reality and to form representations. The law-giving capacity makes the mind active.

This Kantian twist eventually led to an important question: do these representations belong to the single mind or are they commonly shared experiences?[3] While it is unlikely that Kant himself was preoccupied with this question, the issue, as to whether representations belong to the individual mind or whether they are commonly shared, became a subject of debate for the neo-Kantians in France (Paoletti, 2000). Among them, the French philosopher Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), following Kant, was concerned with establishing morality as a scientific field. Today, Renouvier is largely a forgotten philosopher, but it was he who went beyond Kant in a revolutionary manner. In particular, he built on Kant's point of view, which had already established the centrality of representation in the theory of knowledge.

Renouvier rejected the Kantian idea of the *thing-in-itself*, i.e. the idea that we can have no knowledge of objects and of the selves as they really exist and that we can only acquire knowledge of appearances. He argued that the general sense of the concept of Kantian representation was possible only because representations are socially shared. It seems thus that it was Renouvier who made the first explicit proposal for the social, rather than mental origin of representations. The logic, on which Renouvier built his argument, underlined the authority of collective representations (Stedman Jones, 2000, p. 47). With respect to morality, in contrast to Kant, for whom morality was *a priori* mode of knowledge, Renouvier argued that morality is socially determined. He maintained that it is based on co-operation and solidarity and that human society, in order to exist and progress, must establish legitimate social relations.

2.2   Durkheim's sociology of knowledge

When Durkheim came on the scene, the ground had already been well prepared for him. Strongly influenced by Renouvier, Durkheim was much preoccupied with the sociology of knowledge. His main question was the following: 'how does one acquire knowledge of the external world'? Durkheim followed Renouvier in his post-Kantian and social direction. Like Renouvier, Durkheim rejected the Kantian thing-in-itself and adopted the point of view that the world can be understood not through *a priori* representations of single minds, but through social experience. Having made his position clear, he went beyond Renouvier in giving to the concept of representation an explicitly social meaning. Representations are generated collectively in social life. They are the key to the knowledge, logic and understanding of mankind (Pickering, 2000b, p. 12). We can comprehend things because we can imagine, visualise and feel them. We experience things, they live in us in the form of the representations that express them.

Durkheim's sociology of knowledge has a number of specific characteristics of which I shall emphasise the following:
- duality of human nature
- stability of collective representations
- institutional and constraining nature of collective representations
- collective monologism of representations
- continuous genesis of collective representations from religion to science.

2.3   Duality of human nature

For Durkheim (1914/1970), the constitutional, or one could say, the *ontological* specificity of human nature was a dualism and it appeared in at least two forms (Moscovici, 2002a). First, Durkheim conceptualised dualism in a manner similar to that of philosophers before him: as dualism between body and mind. He considered body and mind as the two components of human nature that are not only different but also mutually opposed to one another. They are largely independent from one another and often in conflict (1914/1970, p. 315). He ontologised this kind of dualism and consequently, this had direct implications for his epistemology. According to Durkheim, psychological activities of the body inhered in sensations and emotive tendencies. Activities of the mind, on the other hand, consisted of conceptual thinking and morality.

Durkheim extended this traditional dualism of body and mind to the second kind of dualism, that between the individual and society. On the

basis of these kinds of dualism he postulated two different kinds of psychology: individual and social. Accordingly, he sharply distinguished between individual representations and social representations. The former individual representations are studied in individual psychology and the latter should be studied by social psychology. Durkheim restricted individual representations to physiological and neurological phenomena (Durkheim, 1898). Consequently, he insisted that if perceptions and knowledge were to be based only on individual representations, people would not be different from animals, whose behaviour is guided by sensations. Individual representations, according to Durkheim, do not have much to do with knowledge. They result from the physical and biological nature of the individual and therefore, they are variable and personal.

While degrading the epistemological status of individual representations, Durkheim at the same time elevated the epistemological status of collective representations. He made them the basis of the sociological theory of knowledge.

Collective representations, e.g. images, beliefs, symbols and concepts, arise directly from social structures. They include all socially produced phenomena that circulate and are shared in society, like religions, myths, science and language. Collective representations are social facts and they form social reality in the same way that physical facts form physical reality. They are external to the individual who does not contribute towards their formation. Instead, they impose irresistible pressure on individuals. Yielding to their coercion, individuals internalise and perpetuate these social forms of acting, thinking and feeling. Collective representations are above the individual and they have the power to generate new representations.

Despite the fact that Durkheim repeatedly proclaimed the dual nature of humanity and representations, in the second preface (1901) to *The Rules of Sociological Method* he raised the question about the relations between individual and social representations 'since both are equally representations' (1901, p. 41). He was aware that the question of the relations between these two kinds of representation should not be trivialised. Society constitutes individuals and sociology cannot understand group activities without paying attention to the individual. He maintained that little was known, at the time, about the theory of ideas of the individual and he thought that, apart from hypotheses about the association of ideas with one another, there was no other knowledge available about individual representations.

Durkheim thought that even less was known about the formation of collective ideas, a subject, which, according to him, should be studied by social psychology. However, he pointed out that current, 'social psychology'

was no more than 'a term which covers all kinds of general questions, various and imprecise, without any defined object' (1901, p. 41). According to Durkheim, social psychology should explore how collective or social representations attract and amalgamate, and repel and exclude one another. However, neither the sociology nor the social psychology of his day tackled this problem in a satisfactory manner.

Durkheim himself did not pursue the question about the relations between individual and collective representations. Having made the decision about the differences in the epistemological status between individual and collective representations, and having proclaimed that the relations between individual and collective representations should be studied more adequately, he did not go any further.

2.3.1   Culture and society   While nowadays cultural and social sciences pertain to different fields of enquiry and belong to separate university departments, 'society' and 'culture' were not so distinguished in Durkheim's time. Cultural and social phenomena were viewed as being intertwined and the idea of collective representations, as proposed by Durkheim, formed an interface between culture and society. Durkheim's collective representations concerned cultural phenomena, like religion and systems of beliefs and knowledge, as well as social phenomena, like normative constraints of society, moral order and social solidarity.

Durkheim developed this idea, integrating the cultural systems of representations and the structure of society, through the study of primitive societies, in which society and culture are less differentiated (Parsons, 1974) than they are in modern societies. He used the term 'social' both for social and cultural systems and did not distinguish between them. One can hypothesise that in pre-modern societies people shared their experiences more intimately and therefore, they also held more similar representations than in modern societies. In other words, through collective representations in pre-modern societies, Durkheim was able to study collective representations in the forms that were more transparent to his observation. In these societies, interpersonal and institutional relations appeared less complex than in Durkheim's own time.

Let us consider the following question: in what ways, according to Durkheim, do collective representations form social reality? Social reality, which is created by social facts, like collective representations, language, morality, myths, and so on, has above all an institutional and coercive role. Society imposes constraints on the individual through norms and through sets of standards for goals and actions. If the individual does not fulfil these standards, society enforces sanctions. Originally, Durkheim's focus was primarily on legal and moral norms. Later he came to emphasise more

general aspects of institutionalised norms and values. These social facts and constraints constituted essential parts both of culture and society. Durkheim considered them to be external to the individual and he argued that the individual adopted them through the process of internalisation. Social facts grew into the individual's thinking and personality.

With these presuppositions concerning social reality, Durkheim conceived of the sociology of knowledge as being firmly based on the concept of stable collective representations that reproduce themselves through the process of internalisation in single individuals. His view of societal sanction and guilt arising from deviation from norms is not too distant from George Herbert Mead's concept of the 'generalised other' and from Freud's 'super-ego'. However, careful analysis of these different concepts is required before one makes a direct comparison between them on the basis of a superficial similarity (Marková, 1987a).

Like collective representations, for Durkheim language is a social fact. Language is a system of signs and symbols, something above sensations. It circulates in society and imposes its power on individuals. The power of a word is particularly important in religion where the word can attribute certain characteristics to objects that those objects do not have. When we acquire language, we also acquire a whole system of ideas that have already been classified and differentiated from one another in collective thought. There would be no general ideas without language; words fix ideas and transmit them from generation to generation. Language therefore is a social 'thing' (Durkheim, 1915).

However, language is not merely an external expression of thoughts, it is also internalised. Moreover, not only does it express thoughts, but it also creates them. Durkheim assumed, however, that the laws of thought and the laws guiding language are different and that, therefore, words can deform and violate thinking. In particular, 'It is a deformation of this sort which is said to have created the special characteristic of religious thought' (Durkheim, 1915, p. 75). Language forms the individual's social environment, imposing on him or her irresistible pressure. As words always have an influence on the ways in which phenomena are classified and thought about, they also affect collective representations. Durkheim sometimes goes even further. He claims that the ideas, which correspond to various elements of language, are actually themselves collective representations (1915, p. 434).

Although one can find references to the power of language exerted on thought throughout Durkheim's work, these references did not play any significant role in his study of collective representations. Durkheim's account of language as a social fact corresponds to his static view of collective representations. Of course, Durkheim knew that neither collective

representations nor language are totally stable. He assumed that they change slowly over time. In his sociological analysis, nevertheless, he ignored their change. While his rival, the sociologist Gustav Tarde studied conversation as an inter-psychological fact and proposed that the study of conversation should be part of social psychology, Durkheim did not take this proposal on board as something relevant to the theory of collective representations.[4]

We can conclude that social facts are facts of collective solipsism and of a collective monologue. Being impersonal constraints on the individual, they do not allow for dialogue between individual and society.

2.4   From religion to science

In his analysis of Durkheim's sociology, Piaget (1965) emphasised the concept of a continuous genesis in Durkheim's work on collective representations, which connects contemporary society with the past, including most pre-historical societies. Durkheim sought to explain rationality, logic, morality, legal and religious institutions in terms of the past, showing systematically the origin of collective representations in religion and myth. Durkheim, however, did acknowledge both the diachronic and synchronic character of social representations. Piaget, nevertheless, appreciated above all Durkheim's diachronic approach, i.e. the sociogenetic method in sociology, but he pointed out that Durkheim's sociogenetic method ran into problems because it did not deal with synchronic structures.[5] One cannot explain new representations solely by references to history and past culture, argued Piaget, one also needs to study the contemporary, i.e. the synchronic structures of society.

Piaget's theory of child development is well informed by Durkheim's ideas. In particular, and as Moscovici (1998a/2000) shows, Durkheim's ideas of rationality and of an uninterrupted continuity of development from primitive to modern societies are reformulated in Piaget's genetic method. Like Durkheim, Piaget adopts the idea of 'an uninterrupted continuity from child to adult' (Moscovici, 1998a/2000, p. 219). However, Piaget reverses the Durkheimian process from thought to action and instead, 'makes action or ritual the principal agent endowing people with stable and shared representations' (Moscovici, 1998a/2000, p. 219). Moreover, in order to grasp synchronic structures, which Durkheim omitted, Piaget proposes the mechanisms of accommodation and assimilation. Through these two mechanisms the existing elements in synchronic structures are rearranged and through them equilibrium in the developmental process is achieved. However, despite its sophistication, the concept of equilibrium does not resolve the epistemological problem

of change (Chapter 1). That will be achieved only through tension between the *Ego-Alter* in the dialogically conceived concept of social representations (Chapters 6 and 7).

Durkheim thought that there was a direct relation between religion and scientific knowledge. According to him, both religion and science are based on collective representations. Religion is the product of society and the ideas of God, myth and magic became collective fixations or collective representations through socially shared beliefs and commitment to beliefs (Durkheim, 1915). Beliefs[6] originate in religion and from religion they enter into the field of science. Starting from beliefs, slowly and gradually, humans approximate knowledge. In this position of a continuous progress in the acquisition of knowledge we can see clearly why Durkheim rejected the Kantian 'unknowable thing-in-itself'. The world becomes knowable through the development of science and education. For Durkheim, the difference between religion and science is a matter of degree. Scientific knowledge is built slowly, systematically, piece by piece and surely, with all steps being subjected to verification. Science, for Durkheim, is the surest of all kinds of knowledge. Scientific representations are therefore closer to the truth and more perfect than religious representations. Religious representations are contaminated by symbolic meanings and by language. Moreover, religious representations distort reality by attributing to objects characteristics that they might not have, like for example, being sacred.

These thoughts about science and religion have another important consequence in Durkheim's theory of collective representations. Like many of his time, Durkheim privileged scientific knowledge to common knowledge. He went even further and argued that common thinking is erroneous and usually trivial. Collective representations are often based on religious beliefs and despite being rational, they thwart reality. Scientific knowledge, according to Durkheim, must therefore be superior to the knowledge of an ignorant layman (Pickering, 2000c, p. 113). This kind of reasoning also assumes that the scientist does know reality, whereas a non-scientist does not. Therefore, the scientist has a better representation of reality than a non-scientist. Pickering points out that this elitist view of knowledge Durkheim also applied to other mental activities, like morality. Throughout his entire life Durkheim upheld the view that the professionals' representations were closer to objective reality than lay representations. This view he applied both in science and morality.

Durkheim was convinced that beliefs were fundamental to the wellbeing of society. Society has to believe in something in order to live. He argued that a long-term Cartesian scepticism about reality is untenable. If society has no available knowledge about reality, belief is the

best substitute. Beliefs assure an escape from scepticism because they are fixations of the mind, they are certain. As Durkheim (1955, p. 184) maintains, 'Society cannot wait for problems to be solved scientifically' (Durkheim, 1955, p. 184). In fact, he was not the only one who expressed the point of view that beliefs are an indispensable part of life. While he argued this point as a social scientist, the famous French writer, Balzac, expressed the same point of view in one of his novels some decades before him. Thus Balzac writes in *Une Ténébreuse Affaire*: 'The absolute doubt which Descartes demands of human thinking is no more possible to come by than is the emptiness in nature. The mental operation by which this doubt could be achieved would be like an effect of the pneumatic machine, an exceptional and hideous event. Whatever is the matter, one must believe in something'.

Durkheim thought that beliefs were necessary to compensate for the limitations of science. To that extent, his sociology of knowledge, Paoletti (2000) maintains, responds to fundamental human concerns.

2.5   *Durkheim's realist position*

Let us now probe into the following questions: What kind of science did Durkheim celebrate? What was the Durkheimian vision of science? Despite the fact that in the history of philosophy of science one often talks about the origins of science in ancient Greece, China and Babylonia, European science has its 'true' origin in the seventeenth century (Lloyd, 2000). The concept of seventeenth century science was initially based on mechanistic principles. Later on, both mechanistic and organic principles constituted the basis of the realist theory of knowledge. According to this view, science aims to discover 'true' characteristics and 'the natures' of the objects of knowledge, and in this effort it gradually approximates the understanding of objective reality. This concept further presupposes that, in order to approximate understanding of phenomena in the world, science must proceed systematically from the corpus of evidence, from rules and scientific methods and it relies on what it considers to be facts. Science represents continuity in its struggle of the mind to make sense of the physical and social world. Its method is to constantly doubt 'evidence' and to question the accepted 'truths'.

Durkheim's vision of science basically fitted this point of view. Since reality cannot be grasped immediately, society creates collective representations, which contain some truth, some beliefs and some false convictions. This also means that as sciences progress, representations approximate reality more adequately and this view expressed Durkheim's realist conception of knowledge (Pickering, 2000c, p. 103).[7]

However, during Durkheim's life in the second half of the nineteenth century, science was dramatically changing. It was turning, in various aspects, from a mechanistic to a relativistic science. While mechanistic science was based on the idea that scientific progress was a continuous process, relativistic science came up with the ideas of discontinuity and instability. In this new science, reality was no longer something concrete. Durkheim's theory of sociological knowledge, however, remained unaffected by these new ideas of science that were taking place at the time. While he was very interested in science, Durkheim stuck to the perspective of continuity in the scientific progress. Yet, despite his interest in science, Durkheim studied collective representations in the context of religion rather than in the context of science. Moscovici has drawn to my attention yet another reason why Durkheim studied representations in the context of religion. Durkheim was committed to the collective and social nature of representations and it could not be disputed that religion is 'social'. In contrast, scientific knowledge, while it does have social bases, also accentuates the leading role of individual scientists or small groups of researchers in the scientific enterprise. It is not social movements that produce scientific knowledge.

2.6   An unfinished task

Durkheim's separation of the individual and the social was a crucial step in the further development of psychology and social sciences. Psychology has established itself as a science concerned with the mind and actions of the individual. Sociology has become a science concerned with collective mental processes and collective activities.

Having moved the pendulum from the focus on individual mental representations towards that on social and collective representations, Durkheim nevertheless remained Kantian and even Cartesian in his theory of knowledge. He insisted that knowledge must be certain and stable, otherwise, it would not be knowledge; therefore, collective representations, in order to have the status of knowledge, must be stable. Or if they change, they change very slowly (Pickering, 2000b, p. 16). As he studied collective representations as more or less *stable* concepts, the question of *change* of representations arose for him only as an empirical problem. It seems that it did not occur to him that change of collective representations raised an epistemological problem. Since collective representations change very slowly, Durkheim granted them the prestige of being constitutive of objective reality. They should be studied by social psychology in a comparative manner in mythical themes, popular legends, traditions and languages.

Durkheim holds a firm intellectual position in sociology in most of the areas he examined, e.g. religion, ethics, institutions and the rules of sociological method. However, it is significant that sociology on the whole has remained unmoved by Durkheim's theory of knowledge generally and by his concept of collective or social representation specifically. With the benefit of hindsight we can hypothesise why Durkheim's concept of collective or social representation has been passed over. First, both his proposed theory of social knowledge and the concept of collective representation are static. Modern sociology is concerned with phenomena in change and with phenomena that tend to turn society upside down. Therefore, from this perspective Durkheim's theory of knowledge could be seen, today, as irrelevant and outmoded. Second, Durkheim developed his concept of collective representations in the study of pre-modern societies. Therefore, sociologists might have ignored the compelling relevance of collective representations for complex modern societies in rapid change. Durkheim, of course, viewed collective representations as pertinent to any society and his choice to study them in pre-modern societies could be viewed as a strategic decision in an attempt to clarify his theory in more 'pure' human conditions. Parsons (1974) pointed out that because Durkheim studied social representations only in less differentiated societies, he could not touch on the explanation of the relations between collective representations and complex social structures in modern societies. Thus, while his concept of collective representation could have become very fruitful, Durkheim left, one could say, an unfinished task.

3   The social psychological theory of social representations and communication

If Durkheim's *sociological* theory of collective representations has not succeeded in gaining primary consideration as a sociological theory of knowledge, we need to answer the following question.

What it is that makes the *social psychological* theory of social representations and communication the most plausible candidate for being the social psychological theory of social knowledge and consequently, the theory that should re-define the field of social psychology? The answer to this twofold question lies in four issues:
- common sense as a resource for social representations
- dialogical triads the *Ego-Alter-Object*
- cultural embeddedness and dynamics of social representations
- communicative genres

In the remainder of this chapter I shall discuss the first issue, i.e. common sense in relation to science. Dialogical triads will form the basis of

Chapter 6. The cultural embeddedness and dynamics of social representations and communicative genres will be discussed in Chapter 7.

3.1   The concept that got lost

Although Durkheim was a very influential social scientist during his life, after the end of the First World War new trends were coming to the fore, for example, Marxism and structuralism, among others. Durkheim's work lost its impetus and his concept of collective representation more or less disappeared from French sociology. In fact, and as we have already commented, it has never come back to sociology with any force. Nevertheless, the concept of collective representation continued to have some impact in other social sciences. In anthropology, it was adopted by Lévy-Bruhl, who used the notion of collective representation with reference to the modes of thought of 'primitive mentality'. Like Durkheim, Lévy-Bruhl claimed that collective representations are social facts. People are born into collective representations and therefore, through them their mentality becomes objectively defined (Evans-Pritchard, 1981, p. 123). However, while Evans-Pritchard drew attention primarily to commonality of the social modes of thought in Lévy-Bruhl's work, he left out another, and an equally important defining feature of collective representations: that they are not only common, but that, above all, they have an institutional and coercive power. They have a constraining effect on thinking and on language meanings.

In developmental psychology the notion of collective representation strongly influenced Piaget both in his genetic epistemology and in his studies of child thinking. Equally, the concept of collective and social representation played a significant role in the work of Vygotsky and Luria in their research in Uzbekistan in the early 1930s (Luria, 1976). In developmental psychopathology, Janet (1926) found the notion of collective representation applicable to his studies of psychopathy and pathological beliefs.

It was only after the Second World War, throughout the 1950s and 1960s, that the concept of collective or social representation was re-instituted in the social psychological studies of Serge Moscovici. Since the concept had disappeared from sociology, Moscovici (1961) referred to social representation in the first chapter of *La Psychanalyse* as the lost concept. He recognised its significance for the study of thinking and language as genuinely social and dynamic phenomena.

Inspired by Piaget's studies of common sense knowledge in children, Moscovici turned his attention to common sense knowledge in adults. Thus he declares (Moscovici and Marková, 2000) that his interest in

social representations originated from Piaget's work rather than directly from Durkheim. Via Piaget's child psychology Moscovici then proposed a transformed concept of social representation based on common sense thinking, knowledge and communication.

3.2   The science of discontinuities and instabilities

Every scientist is a child of his epoch. Durkheim's sociology of knowledge was deeply rooted in the image of science that was informed by the Newtonian-Kantian philosophy. It was guided by the idea of science as accumulating knowledge, progressing and providing humans with more adequate approximations of realities. Within this context, Durkheim's primary concern was to follow the route from religious to scientific representations. However, during the second half of the nineteenth century science took a dramatic turn.

Above all, the scientific discoveries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries undermined the realist conception of 'the world out there' that could be reached more adequately with the accumulation of already existing knowledge, like a jigsaw puzzle that would come to completion when all the pieces were properly assembled. The image that science traditionally provided of the world of continuities and equilibria, has disappeared. Science no longer satisfied the notion that reality is something concrete. Instead, science has become preoccupied with discontinuities, disequilibria and relativities. Moreover, in contrast to the past, science was becoming more of a public property due to the growth of educational institutions and concern with public education.

Discoveries of new phenomena like X-rays, radioactivity, wireless telegraphy and the theory of evolution, were not secrets hidden in laboratories but they were publicly discussed. They were producing images that were not thinkable before. For example, the discovery by Roentgen in 1895 of what has become known as X-rays fascinated not only the science world but also the art world and the general public. The possibilities of seeing the human body through clothes and even through skin and flesh inspired a multitude of images and new representations. These images of X-rays ranged from those that were something like an extension of photography, to those that invoked extrasensory reality and occult phenomena (Henderson, 1998).

The discovery of X-rays also became a strong argument against positivism relying on the sense data. Sensation and reality were now clearly recognised as being two different things and this recognition contradicted everything that had been previously considered as certain. Artists of the time, like the Czech mystic painter František Kupka and the French

painter Marcel Duchamp, were fascinated by X-ray imagery. Duchamp's paintings of the time, specifically, represented X-ray images of dematerialised forms, transparent figures and the fourth dimension of figures. Both Duchamp and Kupka were exploring X-ray plates in order to represent invisible realities in their paintings (Henderson, 1998).

This science not only revolutionalised laboratories and arts but it also had a profound influence on literature, public education and public common sense. Popular art, songs, cartoons and advertisements presented abundant images of the invisible possibilities of the world that exists beyond senses and which the senses cannot capture: the extrasensory world. Science of the twentieth century has become a major source of occult ideas, it supplied images of immortality as well as images of the imminent death of the universe.

In her brilliant analysis of the effect of this science on literature and more generally, on public education, Beer (1993) draws attention to its conflicting epistemologies, relativism and the cerebration of disequilibria as the conditions of life. It was thought important that this science would also reach the general public. Beer comments that the physicist Clerk Maxwell hoped that thanks to this new science 'the intelligent public' would be weaned from determinism. Instead, he expected that the public would pursue 'the study of the singularities and instabilities, rather than the continuities and stabilities of things' (Campbell and Garnett, 1882, p. 444). We could speculate that transformation of this scientific knowledge into common sense knowledge, with its new images of far reaching possibilities, might require more varied, and indeed, different forms of thinking than those necessitated by the earlier science.

3.3   Against the point of view that 'le peuple ne pense pas'

In contrast to Durkheim, Moscovici has lived through the science of discontinuities, instabilities and relativities. Equally important, he has lived through the age of social sciences that have been profoundly shaped by two world wars and by totalitarian regimes like Nazism and Soviet communism. Thus, when he asks questions like 'How is scientific knowledge transformed into common or spontaneous knowledge?' (Moscovici and Marková, 2000, p. 228), and, more specifically, 'how are scientific discoveries transformed into social representations?', the meanings of these questions are very different from Durkheim's epistemological concerns.

The question of science and its meaning, Moscovici (Moscovici and Marková, 2000) comments, was an attractive topic for the young generation in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when he was a political refugee in Paris and a student at the Sorbonne University. He says about that:

There was a problem that my generation widely debated: the problem of science. It was after all the problem of modernity. We were all interested in understanding in what ways science had an impact on historical change, on our thinking or our social prospects. All young people who were attracted by Marxism, communism and socialism were preoccupied by the question of science, technology and such matters (Moscovici and Marková, 2000, p. 227).

He was not, at that time, interested in how science affects everyday thinking and how scientific ideas could become part of common beliefs. However, to move from an issue like 'in what ways science had an impact on historical change' and 'on our thinking' was an easy step to the question as to what happens to scientific ideas when they spread to community. This question became important for him after he had initiated the study of social representations of psychoanalysis in the late 1950s. For him, specifically, that question has had a life-long significance. Even at the beginning of the Second World War (cf. Moscovici and Marková, 2000, p. 227) he was critical of the Marxist and Lenin's point of view that spontaneous and common knowledge is inferior because people cannot think rationally, that 'le peuple ne pense pas'. Marxists insisted that spontaneous knowledge contains many irrational ideas like folk myths, religious beliefs and reactionary and idealistic views. The Marxist, materialistic and scientific view of humans and of history and nature should substitute this irrationality in the process of the development of a socialist man and woman. Moscovici comments: 'Marxists did not believe that the diffusion of scientific knowledge could improve common knowledge or thinking. The former had to eradicate the latter' (Moscovici and Marková, 2000, p. 227).

3.4   Common sense as a social sense

One cannot understand the concept of social representation without taking a fresh look at common sense knowledge. Humans are born into symbolic and cultural phenomena and they do not invent everything by themselves in their individual experiences. These facts do not need to be laboured. Cultural phenomena, into which we are born, like the modes of social thinking, collective ceremonies, social practices and language, are transmitted from generation to generation through daily experience, communication, collective memory and institutions, often without much individual effort and without much cognisable change. These phenomena form the large panorama of our social realities and become imprinted in our common sense knowledge.

Thus, through common sense knowledge we intuitively know what kinds of things are and are not edible, we use moral categories like
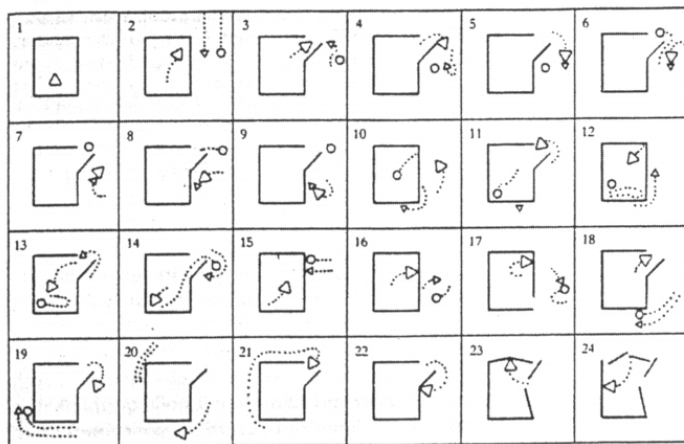
Figure 5.1 Outline of story in a picture film. Broken lines indicate a path of movement. From Heider (1967). Copyright © 1967 by the American Psychological Association. Reprinted with permission.

good/bad, we treat people as agents who are responsible for their actions and we learn to understand specific meanings of words. For instance, in interpersonal interaction we treat others as agents who have intentions, goals and motives. We spontaneously understand their bodily movements as intentional actions. We perceive activities as meaningful wholes rather than as disconnected movements. Classic examples of these facts come from experimental demonstrations of Heider and Simmel's (1944) cartoon film (Figure 5.1), showing movements of three geometric figures in time and space. 'Objectively' speaking, the cartoon shows no more than the changing positions of triangles and a circle in a sequential order.

Despite that, individuals who take part in these demonstrations have no difficulty in seeing directly these changing positions of geometrical figures as meaningful actions guided by goals, intentions, reasons and motives. They use words attributing the meanings to interactions and diagnosing them as chasing, following, pursuing, being in love, being jealous, and so on.

In a similar manner, From's (1971) filmed demonstrations of simple activities such as a man moving his hand down his thigh, then up under the bottom of his jacket and so on, have shown that such movements are spontaneously interpreted as meaningful and connected actions. Observers of these filmed demonstrations did not see simple movements of a

man's hand in time and space. Instead, they saw a man lighting his pipe, a man leaving a room, a man sitting, writing or a man smoking his pipe. Such results, of course, are not at all surprising to anybody who shares, in general terms, the same culture as did the participants of From's and Heider and Simmel's demonstrations. Indeed, our perceptions and cognitions of others are so ingrained in our minds that we abstain from questioning to whether what we 'see' is correct and thus, we relinquish alternative explanations of others' actions and of the contexts within which they operate. Common sense knowledge is a kind of knowledge that is taken as certain and that does not leave any space for doubt. It is socially established. Common sense, Moscovici argues, is a social sense (Moscovici, 1998b/2000; also Bergson, 1932/1935). Common sense knowledge constitutes a fundamental resource for the theory of social representations as a theory of social knowledge.

3.5   Common sense knowledge and scientific knowledge

Philosophically, interest in common sense knowledge goes back to Aristotle. Historically, common sense knowledge has been one of the main resources for the development of scientific knowledge. Despite this, throughout the development of civilisation, common sense knowledge has been treated, implicitly or explicitly, as inferior to scientific knowledge. More specifically, natural science has become associated with the power of reason and rationality. In contrast, folk knowledge, beliefs and myths of common sense knowledge have been affiliated with lack of rationality or even with irrationality. This perspective dominated rationalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Enlightenment, Marxism, and more generally, the generations of philosophers and social scientists defending Cartesian rationalism. Let us consider the views of some rationalists that have had a significant influence in social sciences.

Chomsky argues that the study of common sense knowledge could be of interest only to the extent that it is based on 'naturalistic inquiry', i.e. on its study from the perspective of natural sciences. Since in his study of the mind/brain he always likens organs of the body to the organs of the mind/brain and considers that they are localised in the mind/brain, he also transposes this metaphor to the faculty of common sense. More specifically, Chomsky even refers to a science-forming faculty on the one hand and to a faculty that yields common sense on the other. While the products of the science-forming faculty constitute fragments of scientific understanding, the common sense faculty grows and penetrates into the semantics of language and into belief systems. For him, it is 'a commonplace that any similarities to common sense notions [in science]

are of no consequence for science' and he believes that with progress in understanding, scientific theories will become 'divested of the distorting residues of common-sense understanding' (Chomsky, 2000, pp. 22 and 23). His perspective degrades common sense thinking to something that is of no scientific interest and that is conceptually inferior.

Ernest Gellner, the important sociologist and philosopher, held similar views on common sense knowledge to those of Chomsky. In his influential book *Reason and Culture* Gellner (1992) claimed, in the Cartesian spirit that human rationality is innate, universal and that it exists independently of cultures. Although all humans have a *potential* for rationality, it is culture and common sense knowledge, which may hinder this potential. While 'reason is latent in us all', 'most cultures fail to promote it' (1992, p. 53). As a result, the universal potential for rationality that exists in all humans results in two kinds of knowledge. The first kind of knowledge is universal. It originates from the universal rationality and therefore, it is knowledge that comes from the mind of the individual. The individual achieves it on his own: 'we discover truth alone, we err in groups' (Gellner, 1998, p. 3). This kind of knowledge is superior and it is entirely rational. The laws of physics and mathematics, for example, must be universally valid in order to count as scientific laws. Scientific rationality follows the principle that concepts must subscribe to the same rules in relation to evidence; rationality rejects contradiction and the logic of the argument must be seen through. The ideals of scientific knowledge are universal truths.

The second kind of knowledge, Gellner argued, is communitarian and cultural. It is less rational and therefore, it is inferior. This knowledge is a product of the collective. Gellner points out that this kind of knowledge endorses the hypothesis that no individual can achieve knowledge on his own, but that knowledge is essentially 'a team game'. Individuals interpret and understand the world in terms of concepts, which have been transmitted to them from generation to generation through culture and language.[8]

While the former kind of knowledge is universalistic, the latter is relativistic; the former represents rationality and reason, whereas the latter represents irrationality and culture.

For rationalists, the capacity to think rationally has emerged in the process of anthropogenesis involving cognitive, innate and universal capacities of *the individual*. During ontogenesis, this capacity unfolds throughout the development of the individual's cognition.

In contrast to rationalism, dialogicality is based on the hypothesis that rational thinking has emerged in anthropogenesis due to the *Ego-Alter* dialogical relation. Therefore, *the cognitive capacity to think rationally is by*

definition the capacity to communicate. The capacity to think rationally and to communicate constitutes the potential for common sense thinking. Rationality, we can say therefore, is not an *individual rationality* but a *dialogical rationality*. Thinking and language originate from the *Ego-Alter* antinomy and consequently, common sense knowledge is both the source and the product of dialogical rationality.

When we are born into society and culture, we are also born into common sense knowledge. It is all around us and we adopt it for better or worse. For example, we learn unwittingly to eat certain kinds of things and to avoid others, we adopt cultural criteria of beauty and ugliness, morality and immorality and we are socialised into common sense physics. We learn these things through communication, through daily activities and through our own activities. Common sense knowledge is also interwoven with diverse forms of thinking, knowing and communicating. For example, it guides us in conversations, it structures our daily routines and organises social encounters. It also comprises manifold kinds of knowing like beliefs, myths, understanding interpersonal relations, experiential knowing and practical skills. Since common sense knowledge guides humankind through living, directs attention to danger as well as to the extension and satisfaction of life and is the source of scientific knowledge – where do we have evidence that it is inferior? As Moscovici argues, common sense knowledge is accompanied by a variety of cognitive goals ranging from 'a search for truth, persuasion and exerting power, to seduction and the enjoyment of life' (Moscovici and Marková, 2000, p. 246). For a social psychologist, therefore, common sense knowledge forms an enormous source of ideas, imagination and of social scientific research.

Before pursuing the ideas about common sense further let us not forget the following point. The two alternative perspectives, the one concerning *individual rationality* and the one concerning *dialogical rationality* are two different hypotheses about what it is to be human. Scientifically, neither of these hypotheses can claim that they provide conclusive evidence about the nature of rationality, i.e. that it emerges in the mind of the individual or that it emerges from *Ego-Alter* interdependence. All we can claim is that they are two competing hypotheses and they should be treated *as* hypotheses, despite the fact that the former, the one based on individual rationality, has dominated European thought for centuries. This of course does not prevent us, in this book, from treating dialogicality as the more plausible of the two hypotheses.

Rationalists like Chomsky and Gellner are explicitly outspoken about the unequal status of the two kinds of knowledge, i.e. scientific and common sense knowledge. However, even those who accept the parity between common sense and scientific knowledge, often make allusions that

send similar signals concerning the unequal status of these two kinds of knowledge. For example, in psychology, there are well-established points of view that compare knowledge based on common sense and scientific knowledge.

Fritz Heider (1958), in discussing common sense psychology, recognises its significance in everyday life. He defends the point of view that scientific psychology has a great deal to learn from common sense psychology. He points out that all psychologists use common sense ideas in developing their scientific theories. Nevertheless, despite the fact that Heider aims to support the significance of common sense knowledge, unfortunately, he blurs the matter. When discussing common sense psychological knowledge, Heider calls it *naïve* knowledge and he compares it to a naïve physics, which relies on non-scientific ways of understanding of simple mechanical laws in everyday life. In other words, Heider implies that even naivety can be useful in scientific thinking!

Psychologists often present the image depending on whether scientific and common sense thinking are similar to one another. Gruber (1973), in discussing Darwin's scientific work, describes creative activities of children and likens them to those of scientists. He argues that just like children are born into the already existing world, so creative scientists find themselves in the world of existing social, scientific and semi-scientific ideas. In order to develop their own ideas, both children and scientists must depart from those ideas that are commonly accepted by their culture. They have to cope with pressure from others and with fear of punishment for non-conformity.

More recently, again in developmental psychology, Gopnik and Meltzoff (1997) suggest that our ordinary and everyday thinking should be viewed as being analogous to scientific thinking because these two kinds of thinking have similar qualities. While the authors do not say that children actually make science, they insist that the cognitive processes that underlie scientific thinking are identical to the cognitive processes that underlie cognitive development: 'Scientific progress is possible because scientists employ cognitive processes that are first seen in very young children' (1997, p. 32).

All these metaphors, that either turn naïve people into scientists or that liken scientific thinking to cognitive processes of young children, are seductive. Their authors not only present arguments showing that common sense knowledge and scientific knowledge are underlined by similar cognitive processes; they also pinpoint some common problems shared by children and scientists, like pressure towards conformity and fear of punishment. Nevertheless, these metaphors hide some essential differences between the logic of science and the scientific method on the

one hand, and the logic of common sense and the method of common sense, on the other.

3.6   *Studying the products of knowledge*

Throughout his academic career Moscovici has argued that common sense knowledge and scientific knowledge are two essentially different yet complementary kinds of knowledge. They are based on different kinds of rationality. Through history and culture, scientific and common sense knowledge have each developed their specific kind of logic and different methods of thinking. Accordingly, these two kinds of knowledge, scientific and common sense knowledge are irreducible to one another and one cannot replace the other. Moscovici's argument, which is essential to the theory of social representations, is often misunderstood and therefore, we must consider it in some detail.

We have already presented the hypothesis that humans are *born with dialogical rationality* (cf. also Newson, 1979, Trevarthen, 1979, 1992). We claim, at the same time, that they are *not* born with *scientific rationality*. They are born into common sense knowledge but they are *not* born into scientific knowledge. Moscovici brings to our attention the fact that scientific rationality and scientific knowledge is something that humans acquire in the process of education (Moscovici and Marková, 2000). Those who present us with metaphors concerning children's and scientists' thinking (see above) ignore the following important point.

Scientific knowledge is a specialised knowledge. In order to become a scientist, the individual is educated in a specialised way. She needs to acquire a specific intellectual discipline in order to pursue scientific tasks, as well as the ways of thinking that enable scientists to continue work that others have been unable to complete. The scientist needs to be able to build on other people's knowledge and reach beyond. This means to evaluate critically and consciously build on the work of previous scientists. Whether the scientist chooses to continue working on something that others carried out before him or to originate something 'totally' new, he must acquire scientific ways of reasoning. Science formalises theoretical reasoning; its ideal is universal knowledge independent of the content of the phenomena it examines. It constantly doubts the products of his knowledge.

Scientific knowledge, although it is generated from social knowledge, acquires, to a considerable extent, an individualised and a monologised character. Although we must not be too dogmatic about it, this means that the scientist develops above all his own scientific perspective, often independently of others and sometimes in spite of others. Scientific

creation is a largely individualised process despite its implicit social nature.

Scientific knowledge, Moscovici observes (Moscovici and Marková, 2000, pp. 246–7), is studied from the point of view of its *products*. In order to explore the nature of scientific knowledge, a researcher or a practitioner comes to analyse scientific theories, to examine the relevant experiments and to review research articles or written documents. He may also observe how research is carried out in the laboratory or in the field. Hardly ever is scientific thinking examined through psychological tests of reasoning, memory tasks, syllogism, statistical inferences and information processing tasks in order to find out how scientists think, and whether or not they are 'biased'.

In contrast to scientific knowledge common sense knowledge is not usually studied through its products, but it is studied in psychological laboratories from information on how ordinary people 'think'. Experimental subjects are given artificial tasks of syllogism, anagrams, nonsense syllables and so on, so that their 'distortions' in thinking process and their 'biases' in thinking are exposed. For example, the notion of error has always been crucial to studies in deductive reasoning. In these studies, the standards of thinking have been the Aristotelian logic of syllogisms and the formal logic of propositional and predicate calculus. An error of thinking in such reasoning tasks has been defined as an arrival at a conclusion that differs from the one determined by the rules of syllogistic inference or by the logical calculus (Marková, 1982, p. 33).

Such experiments sometimes acknowledge that the content of the task has an effect on subjects' thinking or that it may 'bias' the ways in which subjects approach the problem. However, *the content of the task* has rarely been the subject of study despite the fact that common sense thinking is embedded in common sense knowledge of phenomena around us. Therefore, scientific knowledge on the one hand and common sense knowledge on the other, have been studied in very different manners. The products of common sense knowledge exist everywhere around us, in discourse, human activities, texts, language, folklore, and in literature. These products are based on and developed from, what I have called above, a dialogical rationality. These products include different kinds of knowing. Some of them concern interpersonal relations, others involve daily routines, yet others concern common sense knowledge of specific objects and phenomena like an animal, a human, France, the United Kingdom, and so on. Common sense knowledge never concerns the knowledge of objects and phenomena in isolation but of objects and phenomena in relation to one another.

At this point the reader may pose the question: 'You have discussed these two kinds of knowledge, scientific and common sense, but you

have not operationalised common sense knowledge. What is common sense knowledge?' I have argued throughout this book that we cannot define social phenomena in the way that we define physical objects like bananas or hammers. Social phenomena are dialogical phenomena in relations. It is meaningless to define them as independent entities. We can only define or characterise them with respect to other social phenomena. In this chapter I have presented common sense knowledge *in relation to*, or in antinomy to, scientific knowledge. Common sense knowledge of course could be in antinomy to other kinds of knowledge, e.g. professional knowledge, knowing how, knowledge of rules and norms. These different kinds of antinomy all foreground different features of common sense knowledge because they are parts of different kinds of relation. The human mind always sees phenomena in relations.

The choice, in this chapter, to oppose scientific knowledge and common sense knowledge, has been determined, in the study of social representations, by historical and epistemological reasons. Moscovici started studying social representations by drawing a distinction between these two kinds of knowledge. He was concerned with the traditional argument that 'le peuple ne pense pas'; that common knowledge is inferior to scientific knowledge. This has also given him an opportunity to reflect on the fact that scientific knowledge, despite being social in its origin, is usually produced by individuals or by small groups of scientists. Common sense knowledge, in contrast, retains its genuinely dialogical character.

3.7   From common sense knowledge to social representations

The relations between common sense knowledge and social representations now need to be characterised.

Any object or phenomenon, whether physical (e.g. a kitchen), interpersonal (e.g. friendship), imaginary (e.g. a Loch Ness monster) or socio-political (e.g. democracy), can become an object of a social representation. However, this does not mean that the theory of social representations studies 'just anything'.[9] Despite the fact that we can 'know' and 'represent' any conceivable phenomena, *the theory of social representations and communication* studies very specific kinds of representations. It studies and builds the theory about those social phenomena that have become, for one reason or other, the subject of public concern. These phenomena that are thought about and discussed, they are phenomena that cause tension and provoke actions. Such phenomena in public discourse can pertain to different kinds of *Ego-Alter*, i.e. to individuals, groups or societies that *actively engage in thinking and communicating* about such phenomena.

Let us explain. Psychoanalysis became the subject of Moscovici's study of social representations in the late 1950s. At that time, psychoanalysis was the subject of intense public interest. Notions that were part of the professional vocabulary on psychoanalysis proliferated into daily language and became subjects of metaphors and puns. They diagnosed relationships and personal activities. This, however, did not happen by a peaceful transfer of scientific vocabulary into daily language. Moscovici (Moscovici and Marková, 2000, p. 239) described the penetration of psychoanalysis into public life as a cultural fight and an intellectual polemic between different ideologies.

Social representations of such specific phenomena, like psychoanalysis, are embedded in, or interrelate with, various social practices and with professional and scientific discourses. This means that social representations must be extracted, by social scientific methods, e.g. by observation, analytical methods or by thought (*Gedanke*) experiments, from common sense knowledge, from practices, and from discourses in which they are embedded or with which they interrelate. In other words, while for Durkheim collective representations referred to different activities of the mind, social representations are concerned with specifically defined phenomena that must be analytically discovered. Not 'everything' is a social representation. Let us consider a concrete example.

In hospitals for people with learning disabilities, for instance, we can find different kinds of discourses and social practices. These may include:

- medical and social routines and activities, e.g. those arising from attempts to improve the quality of life and independence of residents;
- practices and discourses determined by economic constraints. For example, economic conditions of the country determine the proportion of resources assigned to learning disability;
- political demands of self-help groups;
- practices resulting from various kinds of social problems like overcrowding, low motivation of staff, insufficient number of trained staff;
- historically rooted social practices, e.g. of a religious nature. For example, Andrew Jahoda (1995) has analysed social practices in mental handicap hospitals throughout history. He has shown that many hospitals for people with learning disabilities in the nineteenth century were prompted by Christian principles. At the same time some people believed that learning disability was a divine punishment for parental immorality. Still others believed that learning disability was a throwback to primitive stages of man. Such differences in beliefs instill different communicative and behavioural patterns among those involved in the daily activities of residents in hospitals.

- totalitarian or democratic routines in political systems of the country as a whole, which reflect themselves in daily life and which also manifest themselves in hospital practices. For example, authoritarian practices based on obedience outside hospital may have a strong projection inside hospital.

Thus we see that social practices and the ways they are spoken about, involve a variety of heterogeneous phenomena, some of which might involve social representations, while others could reflect political, economic and institutional issues. It is not always easy to distinguish between these different discourses and practices on the one hand and social representations on the other. The task of the researcher is to extract social representations from these discourses, practices and common sense knowledge, using analytical procedures and theoretical concepts. This task constitutes and will continue to constitute a challenge for the theory of social representations for years to come.

NOTES

1. Durkheim used the concept 'collective representation' and 'social representation' interchangeably, although he used 'collective representation' more often.
2. In contrast to Durkheim, who, as Pickering observes, did not change his theory of collective representations throughout his life, Moscovici has substantially developed the theory of social representations and communication over the years. At the beginning his theory was more informed by Piaget and later more by Durkheim. Today, the theory of social representations and communication stands much on its own as a theory of social knowledge clearly grounded in dialogical epistemology.
3. In his analysis of Kant's metaphysics, Walsh (1975, p. 89) comments that this question cannot be easily answered. It is not clear from Kant's expressions, whether appearances (and therefore representations) belong to a private or to a common experience. It is not clear whether it is the structure of the mind that produces representations or whether representations are socially constructed.

   In this ambiguity, however, we can already see an impending problem: individual representation versus collective representation. This problem, however, was not just a problem of Kantian philosophy. It was the problem of the time. Antinomies between the individual and society were felt everywhere in economic and political changes, in struggles for democratisation, equality, rights and for social recognition in general (Chapter 7). Antinomy between the individual and the social also emerged in new concepts of language. Among others, Kant's contemporary, Wilhelm von Humbold, was preoccupied with the nature of the social and individual in language.
4. It is only when Durkheim was concerned with ethics and morals that he explicitly treated language as action that binds society together by contractual relations and solidarity. The declarations of moral significance are carried out by means of words which have 'power to bind and compel those who pronounce