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Some further points: replies to Augoustinos and Páez & González

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SOME FURTHER POINTS: REPLIES TO AUGOUSTINOS AND PAEZ & GONZALES

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We enjoyed reading the comments by Augoustinos, Paez and Gonzalez and we think that they have raised important issues and concerns about social representations theory and research. There are many points particularly in Augoustinos' commentary, which we find a clear overlap between her views and ours. There are however, some important misunderstandings and disagreements that are necessary to clarify.

In our paper we aimed at analysing the relationship between research practices and the development of a concept. We were also concerned with those features of the concept of social representations (i.e. openness), which would allow such practices to take place leading to the concept's closure. Thus, we attempted to explicate the two facets of what we called the "versatility" of the concept. In doing so, we were clearly advocating a view which challenges the dichotomy of knowledge and practices.

As far as Augoustinos' commentary is concerned, we would like to stress that by analysing the versatility of the concept, we do not imply that the concept of social representations should be "tightened-up". Our view is that concepts must remain suggestive and open in an attempt to understand the phenomena they refer to. This does not mean however that a concept should lent itself away without any rigour, even if sometimes this implies marginalisation from mainstream scientific practices.

With regard to cognition, we have no doubts that social representations imply cognitive structures, which is not the same as stating that any theory of cognition can be merged with social representation theory. Social representations as symbolic phenomena, very actively define reality and build up a knowledge of the social world. Therefore, they involve cognition and they are essentially subjective phenomena. Yet they construct an objective reality. Here, we would say that the problem does not lie in cognition and subjective phenomena as such, but in dissociations which have set up an over-sharp distinction between subject-object, cognition-social and so on. As we have argued in our paper, social representations theory has called into question such dichotomies, which for so long have been taken for granted in social psychology.

We strongly agree with Augoustinos' concerns regarding a theory of society and the importance of power relations in the construction of social representations. Although this is neither an easy nor a quick task, we believe that clarifying such issues should be part of a social representations research programme.

Páez and González's commentary is more a clarification of their previous papers rather than a comment on ours. The two specific aspects of our paper that they chose to criticise, that is the relation between description and explanation and the method as a guidance to

'good science', are in our view simple misunderstandings of what we have stated. We have never stated, neither implicitly nor explicitly, that method should guide science. What we did state however, is that the relationship between theory and method should be of prime concern in scientific practices.

Secondly, our usage of description has no link with a deductive nomological model of explanation. We do not think that an event is explained by the assertion of its occurrence as derivable from descriptions of initial conditions and universal laws. In the context of our paper we have used the terms description and explanation, in line with Moscovici's concern. "Our problem in social psychology - perhaps in cognitive science as well- is the *compulsion to produce predictive theories* concerning an isolated mechanism (explanation, categorisation, group polarization, etc.) ... Instead, let us now try to build some *descriptive and explicative theories* that have a wider range and a deeper grasp of phenomena, such as social representations." (Moscovici, 1985, p. 91, our emphasis). Although we have been wrongly placed amongst logical empiricists, misunderstandings as these make further discussions on such terms necessary.

REFERENCES

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