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The Rehabilitation of Common Sense: Social Representations, Science and Cognitive Polyphasia

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Abstract

In *Psychoanalysis, its image and its public* (PIP) Moscovici introduced the theory of social representations and took further the project of rehabilitating common sense. In this paper I examine this project through a consideration of the problem of cognitive polyphasia, and the continuity and discontinuity between different systems of knowing. Focusing on the relations between science and common sense. I ask why, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the scientific imagination tends to deny its relation to common sense and believe that can displace it. I argue that the psychosocial dynamic between common sense and science is revealing of how heavily they are entangled in, and indeed indebted to each other. Even more, this dynamic allows for a full appreciation of what the theory of social representations calls states of cognitive polyphasia. Different systems of thinking and knowing do not displace each other but live side by side, co-existing in a variety of ways, fulfilling different functions and answering different needs in social life.

Keywords: social representations, common sense, science, cognitive polyphasia, psychoanalysis, everyday life.

Introduction

In 1924 Otto Rank spoke before an audience at the New School for Social Research about psychoanalysis as a cultural factor (Rank, 1996). He argued that Freud's genius consisted in demonstrating the continuum between the psychopathological and what is 'natural and human everywhere'. He pointed to the applicability of psychoanalysis to 'vigorous life' and went on to say that it had "a closer relation to the content of folk beliefs and popular traditions than to dry doctrine, and so it has never lost contact with reality" (Rank, 1996:85). Some 30 years later a social psychologist working in France set out to study and to demonstrate in a systematic and detailed manner how psychoanalysis meets 'vigorous life', enters the public sphere and becomes a cultural factor. The result was a book that went on to become a classic in the social psychology of knowledge and the original foundation for the theory of social representations. It is a book that brings to the fore the continuum between life and knowledge, between science and common sense, between a psychology of rationality and cognition and a psychology of experience, emotion and society.

Psychoanalysis, its image and its public (from now on PIP) is a book about Freud's theory in the public sphere and about how one form of knowledge, psychoanalysis, becomes another, common sense. It is exemplary of Moscovici's aims towards social psychology, of what it should and it could be. Indeed in it we find all the elements that make it not only a study on the social psychology of knowledge but also the point of departure for a social psychological perspective that actively seeks to address the more general questions being posed by the social sciences as a whole. What are the relations between science and common sense, how does social knowledge evolve as it moves between different social contexts and is appropriated by different social actors, how do emotional and social forces shape systems of knowing? These are just some of the central questions permeating the book as it unravels the trajectory of psychoanalysis in the public sphere. None of these questions has aged. They are still central to

social scientific inquiry and remain, to a large extent, unresolved theoretical problems.

The appearance of PIP in English some fifty years after its publication in France gives us the opportunity to readdress some of the questions Moscovici introduced then and position them in a historical context. It also gives us the chance to juxtapose Moscovici and Freud and consider some of the underlying issues that even though neither addressed explicitly can be explored further using theoretical resources offered by both. Freud and Moscovici are at one when it comes to the problem of continuity and discontinuity in apparently disparate, oppositional phenomena. Each in their own way dealt with the co-existence of opposites and the relational nature of all reality. They rejected the view that common sense and folk beliefs are a lesser form of knowledge that at some point should be overcome by a more dignified and superior form of knowing, which in our contemporary world happens to be science. On the contrary, they engaged with everyday thinking and sought to understand how it operates in our psychological and social lives. Whereas neither Moscovici nor Freud would deny science and rationality, both challenged the sovereignty of the rational subject and pointed to the antinomies embedded in human reason.

In fact Moscovici and Freud were fascinated by both the rational and the irrational and actively sought the line of continuity between the objective, cold and succinct laws of a cognitive outlook capable of dispassionately understanding the world, and the subjective, hot and erratic dynamics of human passion, imposing disorder and capturing the world by feeling and imagination. If anything I would say that they wished for a wiser reason and an emancipated emotional life, each able to engage and establish a dialogue with its other, so that both reason and emotion could face the various and multiple reasons each tends to deny. Freud pointed to the unconscious as our double, our ‘other’ side; Moscovici pointed to common sense, as the unrelenting undercurrent of science, its *doppelgänger*, its denied other. But both views contain more than catches the eye, for the

unconscious and common sense are not just the 'other' of reason and science. They require understanding in their own right and this can only come from the permanent and reciprocal pathways that make the continuities and discontinuities between all of these phenomena.

In this paper I reflect on these issues addressing the problem of continuity and discontinuity between different systems of knowing through a consideration of the inter-relations between common sense and science. I ask why, despite considerable evidence to the contrary, the scientific imagination tends to deny its relation to common sense and believe that can displace it. I argue that the psychosocial dynamic between common sense and science is revealing of how heavily science and common sense are entangled in, and indeed indebted to, each other. Even more, this dynamic allows for an appreciation of the insight Moscovici introduced in PIP about cognitive polyphasia. Different systems of thinking and knowing do not displace each other but live side by side, co-existing in a variety of ways, fulfilling different functions and answering different needs in social life. This assumption can both illuminate the empirical study of encounters between knowledge systems in the contemporary world and perhaps even more importantly, the very epistemology of social representations and its overall conception of human thinking (see Marková, this issue).

The Battle between Science and Common Sense

In a recent personal communication Moscovici pointed out that all the key issues of our thinking tradition in one guise or another collapse into two major and inter-related themes: the first is the opposition between philosophy (as high thinking) and common sense (as low thinking), the second is the struggle between the vanguard/elite and the masses/crowd. Hannah Arendt (1971) calls these oppositions the warfare between philosophy and common sense, to be found in a line that goes from Plato straight into Kant and Hegel and all the way down to more contemporary philosophies and the dynamics of the sciences. The related

struggle between the elite and the crowd is found in all political philosophies of the West, ranging from Marxism's dismissal of the masses fully expressed in Lenin's theory of the vanguard, to populist and fascist ideologies, which use the masses but conceive of them as childish and ignorant, in a state of perpetual lack. Most of these theories, whether in acknowledged form or not, find parallels in Le Bon's study of the crowds and the popular mind (Le Bon, 1982). These issues were extensively discussed in Moscovici's (1985) treatise on mass psychology. Indeed to my mind it is not accidental that he identifies these as major themes. His own work can be read as an attempt to deal with the oppositions described above. This is clearly the case in PIP but it is equally important in the work dedicated to the psychology of crowds and active minorities where he seeks to understand how ordinary people operating as a minority can make a difference and change societies and cultures.

The battles between science and common sense and between ordinary people and elites are magnificently exposed by Hannah Arendt in her study on the life of the mind (Arendt, 1971). There she shows how deeply the thought of philosophers has struggled with the world of common sense and how they recurrently considered withdrawal from the world an imperative for the exercise of reason. The cleavage between thinking and ordinary everyday common sense is deep and widespread. As she remarks, "the whole history of philosophy, which tells us so much about the objects of thought and so little about the process of thinking and the experiences of the thinking ego, is shot through with an *intramural warfare* between man's common sense, this sixth sense that fits our five senses into the world, and man's faculty of thought and need of reason, which determine him to remove himself for considerable periods from it" (1971:81).

In her observation two issues are salient: the problem of nominalisation (see Billig, this issue; Marková, this issue) which separates thought from its connection with situated thinking practices, and the rejection of everyday social

life as a potential source of enlightenment and reason. Philosophers have recurrently detached thought from thinking processes and the experiences of the thinking self so that an idealised, and disconnected, form of thought could emerge. Thought becomes an abstraction, a solipsistic practice carried out by an individual removed from the world, a highly individualised practice. In this process thought is opposed to ordinary everyday life; indeed everyday life does not comport thinking and in order to think properly the philosopher must withdraw from the world. Through a painstaking examination of philosophical conceptions of thinking and common sense Arendt shows the extent of the separation between thinking and the world of everyday life. It is common sense that concerns itself with the latter; thought is only preoccupied with itself. Arendt shows that this antecedes by far the modern era; in fact the Cartesian cogito is just another instance of a much older Western tradition that requires for thought an attitude of detachment from the world. Contemplation reserves to itself the higher ground and all the critical capacities of an observer who can afford the perspective of a non-participant. Involvement with a life that must be lived is not in the realm of the philosopher; lived experience and its demands of full immersion in the everyday necessities of biological, social and cultural pains are left to common sense.

It is thus common sense that must sustain a human life and indeed the survival of the species – not to mention the survival of the philosopher. Not accidently then that it is called by many languages the *good* sense. The notion of common sense is very old, being a direct translation from the Latin s*ensus communis*, which in its turn translates more or less directly from the Greek *koinos nous* (Lewis, 1960). From Aristotle throughout the medieval tradition s*ensus communis* appeared strongly tied up to notions of inter-subjectivity and commonality uniting the faculties of understanding and imagination. Medieval anatomists, whose early explorations of the brain were firmly entangled in philosophical assumptions, positioned *sensus communis* in one of the three chambers of the brain next to the intellect, the imaginative capacities and the memory (Bennet and Hacker,

2002). Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of a skull depicts the *sensus communis* as the very seat of the soul (Da Vinci, 1482). The Islamic medical philosopher Avicenas saw it as a cerebral ventricle together with the faculty of fantasy and imagination (Davidson, 1992). Later, philosophers of the modern era cut off the connection between *sensus communis* and the brain but continued to indicate its being a sense of and for community. Arendt (1971: 50) observes that "what since Tomas Aquinas we call common sense, the *sensus communis*, is a kind of sixth sense needed to keep my five senses together and fit the sensations of my private senses into a common world of shared others". In this definition she is already pointing to Kant who spoke of *sensus communis* as an extra sense shared by all – like an extra mental capacity – that fits us into a community and facilitates communicative understanding by linking each one of us to the lives of others and the social world. Such definitions are also compatible with the Scottish school of common sense philosophy, whose hidden influence in the making of critical psychology Billig has recently dissected (Billig, 2008).

Common sense is thus conceived as shared understanding, a 'sense' that transcends the individual mind and belongs to the community. However, notwithstanding its positive connotations as belonging to all and allowing understanding, any sense that belongs to the community and is common to all is surely to be somehow problematic. The modern age, but not only the modern age, has displayed great resistance to the idea of communities of thought, which is better left to the individual (Jovchelovitch, forthcoming). Lewis' (1960) illuminating and amusing study on words captures well the ambivalence of this construction. Lewis refers to the various positive and negative meanings of common sense, showing how they come and go in unexpected and deeply connected ways, so that a very positive meaning turns into something quite negative as the mood of the day changes. He shows that the semantic connections between sense and reason are complex enough but it is the ambivalence of the word 'common' that exercises its pressure in the way we understand common sense. It is this ambivalence that "permits what may be

called a maximising or a minimising of that sense (or reason) that is common to all men. On the one hand, because it is universal, cutting across all frontiers and surviving in all epochs, it may be reverenced. On the other, if it is as common as that – like having two legs and a nose in your face – it can't be anything very wonderful" (Lewis, 1960:153-4).

It is the ambivalence of common sense that interests us here and contributes to our understanding of the warfare in which it is entangled. What is common and shared is at once valued and devalued, desired and vulgar. A sense that is common to all expresses a wisdom that can be easily trapped by the distortions and illusions of the popular mind, whose difficulties lie in its lack of reflexivity and thinking *because of the social influence it is under*. Collectives do not think, at most they possess a sense because thinking properly so called is reserved for individuals. What is common, and thus social, is antithetic to thinking. The link between the social, the communal, the abnormal and the deluded are too well known in psychology and cannot be addressed here. But there is no doubt that this link is also to be found in the ambivalence of common sense. Here we are back to the separation between thinking and common sense, between the individual and the masses, between the elite and the crowd. Individuals and elites think, the masses and the community draw on common sense and from this semantic (and political) perspective there is no meeting point between the two.

However, it is important to re-state the ambivalence of the construction. This ambivalence fuels the contradictions of modern rationality and the very roots of all psychologies including those of critical inclination. Billig's recent exploration of the historical roots of critical psychology shows that individualist conceptions of cognition and knowledge developed hand in hand with social ones. In retrieving the work of Scottish philosophers Shaftesbury and Reid on common sense and assessing how deeply it was entangled with the work of Locke, it becomes clear to us that ambivalence between high and low thinking and between the individual and the social are present from the start. Billig helps us to see that the warfare

between philosophy and common sense was not a unified, homogenous matter. Common sense, the *sensus communis*, is the feeling humans have for their community, a sense that is perhaps the most important of all senses. But is not seen as such by all: "Common sense, or sense of community, lies at the heart of human nature. This itself is common sense (or plain, good sense), known to all except religious bigots or individualist philosophers (whose cool, intellectual theories conflict with the good sense of ordinary people)" (Billig, 2008:106). This conflict continues to live in the contemporary battles between science and the knowledge of everyday life. I turn to it next.

Can common sense think?

Moscovici's study of psychoanalysis developed in an intellectual context very much shaped by the battles between science and common sense. Concern with what happens to scientific knowledge once it enters the semantic universes of ordinary people guided what in France and other Latin countries was called the process of 'vulgarisation' or 'popularisation' of science. This corresponds approximately to the field of public understanding of science in the Anglo-Saxon world. The use of the word vulgarisation in the sixties was not accidental; vulgarisation refers to a process of disqualification and loss of credentials. The word 'popularization' is equally detrimental. Moscovici notes in PIP that "the very word popularization has a pejorative meaning and arouses opposition" (2008: 49), with many informants directly associating popularization and distortion. This view of popularization as distortion was well established in the French public sphere of the fifties and sixties, in the thinking of both scientists and lay people. It is tempting to think that this view has been undermined by recent developments in the social sciences, but the prevalence and relative dominance of the 'deficit model' (Hilgartner, 1990; Schiele and Jacobi, 1988) for theorizing the diffusion of scientific thinking shows that it has not.

As most intellectuals of his generation in France, Moscovici worked and wrote under the impact of Marxism and the deep suspicions it held in relation to psychoanalysis, common sense and any kind of 'mental', 'idealistic' construction. Marx's assessment of ideology as a *camera obscura* – a system of ideas that distorts reality by turning them upside-down to serve the interests of the dominant class – informed the view that the common sense of ordinary people reproduces the ideas of people at the top and fails to see reality as it is. In a slightly but not altogether dissimilar form the assumption of common sense as error and distortion influenced a great deal of psychological research. Concerns with what Piaget called the 'education of reason' (Piaget, 1995) were directed to investigations on how human thought progresses from primitive to higher forms and ascends to a rationality that can displace the emotional and social elements expressed in lay thinking. The education of reason was seen as a linear process of progress, where human reason moves from lower to higher systems of thinking expressed ultimately by science. The Vygotskyan research programme, albeit not as explicit as Piaget's, sustained a very similar concern with the education of reason. Soviet psychologists were testing the hypothesis that socialism was to produce a society based on science, capable of leaving behind myth, superstition, belief and common sense (Luria, 1931). In comparing the knowledge of peasants in Central Asia, considered to be the bearers of irrational and backward beliefs, to the new rational subject produced by the novel societal conditions of socialism, they sought to demonstrate how social engineering of one particular kind could transform common sense into science (Jovchelovitch, 2007).

This was the intellectual atmosphere in which studies of vulgarization and popularization took place. The goal was to assess the extent to which science could be 'extended' – in Freire's sense of transportation from one community to another – to the lay public and yet retain its integrity and avoid distortion (Barbichon and Moscovici, 1965; Dulong and Ackermann, 1972; Jacques and Raichvarg, 1991). The view of transportation, of extension, of transference was

recurrent then and it has not lost its appeal today. Indeed the study of common sense continues to be permeated by an attitude of suspicion that systematically deprives it of epistemological status and often equates it with distortion, bias, error and ignorance. Within psychology, but not only in psychology, there is a strong tendency to consider lay knowledge and everyday understandings as obstacles, noise, and errors to be removed: the superstitions, mythologies and false beliefs they carry should be replaced with the truth of expert or scientific knowledge. Entire fields of research and intervention are based on this assumption. Health educational programs, for instance, tend to operate with the assumption that lay beliefs have to be removed and replaced with scientific knowledge (Campbell, 2003). Development interventions have equally treated local knowledge as an obstacle to the aims of progress and technical achievement (Escobar, 1995). And the whole idea of public understanding of science has been based on the assumption that the public must be educated and taught to understand scientific theories 'correctly' (Wynne, 1995).

Behind all these efforts is the underlying premise that be it the public, be it the locals or be it lay people, they all must abandon their existing common sense beliefs and ascend to the superior form of knowing offered by experts, technocrats and scientists.

Common Sense and the Scientific Imagination

The devaluation of common sense goes hand in hand with the modern tendency to glorify science and to conceive it as the source of true knowledge, technological innovation and human progress (Bauer, forthcoming). These are two sides of a single process that inaugurates one system of knowing as preponderant and superior and by the same token defines all others as inferior stages in a scale of development. We know that much of this impetus came from the trajectory of the scientific imagination since the Enlightenment and in particular from the utopias of the first half of the 20th century, when science was

powerfully connected to projects of understanding and change both for self and for society. Science was conceived as a liberating system of knowing, the only one that could give us reality as it is and therefore be therapeutic at the level of the subject and emancipatory at the level of society. However, as discussed above, this impetus also expresses, although buried in a much longer past, the uncoupling of thought and everyday life and the belief that critical capacities and progress necessitate a reason detached from its own living context.

Freud and Moscovici shared this legacy and did not completely escape from the pressures of the scientific imagination. In fact I would say they were part of it and actively reinforced it, albeit in different moments and in a highly ambivalent way. This is exemplarily articulated by Freud in *The Future of an Illusion*, where he triumphantly declares “no, science is not an illusion. But an illusion it would be to suppose that what science cannot give us we can get elsewhere” (1927: p.241). Yet, Freud went in search of illusions and so did Moscovici. Freud’s theoretical edifice was constructed step by step on the basis of taking seriously the world of culture and common sense. Freud listened to his patients as no doctor did in his day, and scandalously enough allowed their lay words enter into his theories (see Billig, this issue). Jahoda argues that “throughout his working life he [Freud] was concerned with assembling confirmation to the idea of closeness of opposites. He found it in folk wisdom, in myth and fairy tales (the ugly frog turned into the beautiful prince), in legend and poetry, in primitive ritual, but above all in language with its remnant of primitive thought” (1977:44-5). Moscovici took a very similar route. He considered the struggle of ideas in the public sphere and the structure of everyday thinking as related to science but not necessarily subordinated to it; he saw these as highly expressive phenomena to be understood in their own right, systems of knowing akin to Winnicottian potential spaces where identities are formed, worldviews take shape and traditions are perpetuated and challenged. They cannot, and should not, be reduced to science. In fact, they constitute science and can be found at the very origins of science.

These assumptions have now been largely demonstrated, even if not fully incorporated into practices and accepted by researchers. Marková (this issue) shows how scientists operate within epistemological environments that, searching for certainty and unchangeable universals, preclude new ideas in science. Yet the evidence amassed by studies on the public understanding of science has shown convincingly that ordinary people invest science with ideas, values and meanings that are linked to their social and psychological contexts (Farr, 1993; Hilgartner, 1990; Wynne, 1989). And so do scientists. Even though Moscovici's main goal in PIP was to map the transformation of science into common sense, the original study opened up a new platform for researchers interested in doing precisely the opposite. This is clearly the case in Bauer and Gaskell's research on biotechnology in the public sphere (Bauer and Gaskell, 2002; Gaskel and Bauer, 2001) which constitutes a comprehensive theoretical and empirical examination of how common sense resists, reframes and eventually reconstitutes science, co-creating scientific agendas and establishing the basis of a common language in both scientific theories and fields of application. The extent to which Moscovici's original programme has inspired this large international comparison has been elaborated in detail by the authors in the pages of this journal (see Bauer and Gaskell, 1999; and Bauer and Gaskell, this issue). Likewise research on social studies of science teaches us that there is an intimate connection between the institutional and reified world of the lab and the informal, consensual world of everyday life and common sense (Knorr-Cetina and Mulkay, 1983; Latour, 1987). Whereas the two-way exchanges between science and common sense are now beyond doubt, this was less so in the mid-fifties and certainly not so at the beginning of the 20th century when the sciences, and in particular the human and social sciences, were fighting hard for their epistemological credentials.

Psychoanalysis, its Image and its Public tried to capture precisely the exchanges between science and common sense by showing how representations of psychoanalysis in the public sphere went far beyond the idea and practice of

psychoanalysis described in books and held by its professional practitioners. But rather than seeing it as distortion and vulgarisation, Moscovici saw the process as an expression of what happens to knowledge systems when they move from one context to another through communication and social exchanges. Moscovici juxtaposed to the idea of vulgarisation, the view that contexts of reception actively appropriate the symbolic materials they receive. The appropriations and social transformation of psychoanalytic knowledge expressed the symbolic and social dimensions of all knowledge, its sensitivity to local contexts and debunked the idea of transfer and extension. As in Freire (1973), communication rather than extension was the key to understand the transformation of knowledges.

In addition, and perhaps even more radically, Moscovici's study postulated the wisdom of common sense and its irreducibility to any other knowledge system (see Jesuino Correa, this issue). Only a historical perspective allows us to understand just how daring this is and how fully it is related to what Duveen (2000) has called Moscovici's social psychological imagination. What Moscovici is rejecting here is the long and deep-seated cleavage between thought and the common sense of everyday life. Communities can think and understanding how they do it is a pivotal task (Jovchelovitch, forthcoming). Studying social representations of psychoanalysis meant going counter to the spirit of the times and to the ethos of bringing the commonsensical knowledge of ordinary people to the higher stage of true knowledge, i.e., science. The everyday, he showed, is a powerful source of knowledge; it may be a different type of knowledge than scientific and technological knowledge, but no less *wise* in the "know-hows" and "know-whys" it contains. What may look irrational, or wrong to the observer makes sense to the actors of knowledge, and it is also, if not only, in this sense that a knowledge system must be assessed: in relation to the significance and psychological reality it has for those who actually produce it and use it. Besides, ideas are generative in social life, as much as economic and "material processes", and with Weber, Moscovici understood the "power of the idea" (Moscovici, 1993; Duveen, 2000).

In this sense and from the very beginning the theory of social representations militates against the view that everyday knowledge is distortion and error. It seeks to recover the epistemological status of common sense knowledges and 'to understand the understandings' they express, the functions they fulfill and the human needs they address. This is perhaps one of the most important lessons that comes out of research in the social psychology of knowledge: the realization that common sense knowledges do not go away for the simple reason that they are functional to human life responding to problems and needs that science does not, and indeed cannot, respond to. Let me examine this in what follows.

The Lifeworld, Common Sense and Cognitive Polyphasia

The world of common sense – or the lifeworld, as it was named by the phenomenological movement – is our paramount reality, an evolved achievement of our species. Common sense, common knowledge, social intelligence, folk knowledge, habitus, thinking-as-usual, collective and social representations; all of these terms have featured in frameworks that dealt with the problem of what constitutes the human and what holds social life together (Durkheim, 1905/1963, Gadamer, 1975, Goody, 1998; Heider, 1958; Schutz and Luckman, 1974). In Habermas' (1989) theory of communicative action, the concept of the lifeworld is central to define both the context of community and the conditions for all possible communication. He characterises the lifeworld as the space where people communicate in order to reach understanding and in this process come to construct and consolidate the intersubjectively recognised elements of a shared understanding about the world. The lifeworld takes shape in language and communication and appears as 'a reservoir of taken-for-granteds, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation' (Habermas, 1992:124). It refers to the unproblematic knowledge that supplements, accompanies and provides the context for communicative action: the traditions, the natural languages, the presuppositions

and assumptions that govern everyday life. While seeking mutual understanding actors engage in processes of communication that do not disappear, but solidify in symbolic structures of meaning and understanding that become the common sense knowledges of the lifeworld.

This multifaceted and intersubjectively achieved knowledge of the lifeworld provides the points of reference, the parameters, the resources against which individuals make sense of the world around them, develop the theoretical and practical competencies to deal with the everyday and establish the communicative relations that allow for the development of bonds of solidarity and cooperation. By making possible and facilitating social action, establishing and renewing the inter-personal relations that provide the developing child with a sense of self and giving to social actors a framework for identity and belonging, the common sense knowledges of the lifeworld construct and reconstruct self, society and culture. Whereas the common knowledge of communities appears in everyday life as a given, as an already-there stock of meanings and resources from which community members draw norms, regulations and patterns of behaviour, its horizon is also constructed through the experience of life each day. The concept of the lifeworld captures well this double character of common sense knowledge: of being already there, of providing foundation and ground and at the same time of having to be constantly produced and renewed by social actors.

Elsewhere I have suggested that the theory of social representations intersects with phenomenological traditions in important ways and nowhere more clearly than in its approach to everyday life and what in PIP Moscovici called natural thinking and common sense (Jovchelovitch, 2007). Social representations are *per excellence* instances of common sense knowledge and the effort to theorise and study social representations can be easily placed in the tradition of the phenomenology of everyday life. With other neighbouring disciplines, the theory shares an interest in bringing to light the structure of worldviews, of beliefs and

forms of life that can produce a theory of everyday life and the knowledge it produces. This knowledge, which is always plural, is deeply entangled in the lifeworld and lived experience of a community, demarcating its frameworks for thinking, doing and relating. It is a type of knowledge that has been historically questioned; indeed some would not call it knowledge at all. The phenomenology of everyday life, however, is concerned precisely with the legitimacy of such common sense knowledges and the dimensions they express: identities, practices, relationships, cultural traditions and the history of a community.

In this vein, the study of social representations has developed a social psychology of common sense that tries to capture its constructive energies and fundamental functions in social and psychological lives. Social representational theorists point to the historical character of common sense (Moscovici, 2000a; 2000b), to its socially shared nature evidenced in the role of language and communication in its formation (Marková, 2003) and to its centrality in providing frames of reference that allow interpretation and orientation in social life (Jodelet, 2002; Wagner and Hayes, 2005). Current empirical studies in this field are amassing evidence and theoretical insight into new exchanges between knowledge systems, on the nature of the dialogues shaping representational fields in complex public spheres and on the variety of knowledge outcomes being produced by these novel conditions. No single knowledge/public juxtaposion is homogenous and straightforward; there are complex mediations between different forms of knowing and different publics, with new forms emerging in-between. Such is the case with what Wagner (2007) has called vernacular science knowledge, a widely distributed form of understanding science somewhere in-between everyday thinking and scientific literacy. New forms of common sense are continuously being produced by the dialogues between knowledges, which in turn push back into the parenting knowledge systems generating states of cognitive polyphasia in representational fields and provoking a psychological, social and historical process of transformation in knowledge.

The study of common sense and lifeworlds is thus pointing clearly to the variability and plasticity of the knowledge and the thinking of human communities. Common sense and the structures of lifeworlds are constantly changing and readjusting in novel and complex dialogical relations. Science, religion, common sense, beliefs and ideologies to cite just some of the potential forms of knowledge do not remain untouched by the inter-group contexts in which they are bred and grow (Duveen, 2007). They produce states of cognitive polyphasia, the concept first introduced by Moscovici in PIP. Despite having remained for a long period buried within the theoretical corpus of social representations, cognitive polyphasia is now guiding research theoretically and empirically. The concept expresses the plurality of representational fields, where differing, and at times conflicting, styles of thinking, meanings and practices co-exist in the same individual, institution, group or community. But as Marková argues in this Special Issue the concept also refers to an epistemological conception of human thinking. It helps us to understand the multiplicity of voices expressed in the language of individual speakers and within public spheres. It is a concept that captures the inter-subjective, and therefore communicative, nature of all knowledge systems, and the heterogeneity and diversity of human communities. As we argued elsewhere “it links cognition and knowledge to their social context of production and provides the means to theorise how different representations, meanings and styles of thinking co-exist in public spheres” (Renedo and Jovchelovitch, 2007).

Polyphasic representational fields are assets from which individuals and communities draw the tools, concepts, practices and meanings that enable them to cope with the everyday and make sense of what is going on (Jovchelovitch, 2002, 2007; Renedo and Jovchelovitch, 2007). They are functional to the life of communities, for the survival of the species and of course for the survival of the thinking philosopher who shares with his fellow human beings the accumulated wisdom of the knowledges operating in the lifeworld. Rather than being monological in content, cognitive polyphasia in representational fields expresses

the dialogical nature of all knowledge systems and the constant networks of inter-relations that form the experience of life each day.

Return of the Repressed? The Negation of Common Sense and Everyday Ideas

It is difficult to understand how, given the foundational role of common sense in social and individual lives, it has not been able to preclude the generalised derision it elicits. Scientists, in one way or another, continue to be disdainful of common sense, considering it as 'defective knowledge' that is incapable of rejecting the world of appearances and operating counter-intuitively. Seen as the work of the masses it is judged as irrational and blind. Einstein, who greatly appreciated the importance of daily experience (Einstein, 1983) was still able to observe that 'common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by the age of eighteen'. Simone Weil bluntly remarked that 'collectivities do not think' and Bachelard (2002: 25), speaking of common sense as opinion, noted that 'opinion thinks badly; it does not think but instead translates needs into knowledge", underlined in the original). However, and ironically enough, no computer program has ever been able to replicate common sense. That is why even the smartest of all computers cannot sustain a basic conversation. Common sense may well refer to the obvious and be considered as just a collection of self-evident common places but scientists are struggling hard, and until now unsuccessfully, to find the key to replicate it (Elio, 2002; Lifschitz, 1990; McCarthy, 1984).

Science therefore tends to deride common sense despite its foundational role, its complexity and its capacity for adaptation and change. Even more, as discussed above, a great deal of the effort of science is to displace common sense, to raise it to the realm of science, to make sure that, as Freud used to say in relation to the Id, "where there is common sense there shall be science". Now the belief that science will one day replace its crucial functions and displace common sense is in itself a belief amenable for psychological interrogation. Why would science

want to do away with common sense, can it ever do without common sense? Why the warfare against common sense? What is at stake in its rejection by the thinking philosopher, and by the scientist of today?

Let us then, in the manner of Freud, pursue the clinic of the scientific attitude and lay bare its unconscious operations. The first psychological operation is the sharp division between the scientist and the lay man: we are not alike, we are not the same. The second is the devaluation of common sense, the devaluing and rejection of the other: common sense thinks badly or does not think, it is error and distortion. The third psychological operation that follows is displacement of the Other by the I: get rid of common sense and replace it by the one and best way of thinking. In the troubled relation of science to common sense we find the combination of a double denial and an underlying illusion of omnipotence: a denial of the intelligence, wisdom and necessity of common sense, a denial of the role common sense plays in the making of science and the illusion that one day science, the one and best knowledge, will replace common sense.

Bronowski analysed the dangers of a mental state characterized by a sharp division between the scientist and ordinary people. He notes that “the fact that science is there, mysterious, powerful; the fact that people are impressed by it but ignorant and helpless – all this seems to me to have contributed to the division in our minds. And scientists cannot escape the responsibility for this. They have enjoyed acting the mysterious stranger, the powerful voice without emotion, the expert and the god” (1960:146). The combination between denial and omnipotent wish-fulfillment takes us back to the problem of the *doppelgänger*, which Moscovici presented in PIP and Freud characterised in his study of the uncanny. The double as a defense against the fear of annihilation by the Other, who is at once like and unlike what I am, who is partly me and partly not-me. The rejected Other is, in fact, close to home. For without common sense, without the feeling for what is real, without star gazing and the primary perception of immediate experience there would be none of science. It was millennia of

perceptual speculation and immediate perception that have allowed the development of science and its insistency in denying its roots speaks more about its own blindness than about that which it tries to disavow.

But why would science seek to do away precisely with that which needs in order to know in its own way? It is easy to go back to Freud here and re-establish the continuum between science and common sense: underlying the warfare between science and common sense is the dream of a human condition free from its own grounding in the world, holder of a rationality that would master itself and all around it, that in renouncing the stars, the beliefs and mythologies that provide comfort and existential grounding, would develop itself as a final transcendental ego. So Freud again: the attempt to kill all fathers, so as to become the father; the danger of a superman, the dark undercurrent of human reason.

From Warfare to Co-existence: Towards Dialogicality and Polyphasia in Knowledge

There is of course a problem in juxtaposing science and common sense in the way I have done. There is no such a thing as one science and one world of common sense (Ryle, 1960). There are many. The dynamics I have tried to expose may constitute a large part of the story between science and common sense but it is not the only one. The ambivalence I have pointed to has been active and there can be no doubt that despite the derision and denial that science has bestowed on common sense the frictions and asymmetries between these two systems of knowledge and thought have been engines for creativity and development.

Scientists and philosophers know this well. As much as Bachelard led us to think about the development of scientific knowledge in terms of obstacles, of which primary experience and common sense are the most important ones, he himself

made clear that science is itself born out of primary experience and common sense knowledge (2002). This is also what phenomenology so clearly taught us. Before we can even think of possessing knowledge we actually *belong*: belonging, not knowing, is where we all start from. We belong to a culture, to a society, to a family, to a historical time and this belonging frames the knowledge we construct from the outset. Blumenberg's (2000) magnificent study on the genesis of the Copernican world demonstrates well these assumptions when he shows that all the essential preconditions of Copernicus' work were extra-scientific, that Copernicus understanding of heavenly bodies was possible because he had before him millennia of perceptual immediacy. Our scientific knowledge of heavenly bodies has been made possible by the activity of star gazing, whose ancestry goes back to the very beginnings of a distinctive human form of life. Bachelard's (1987) study of fire is equally revealing as it makes clear that before we know the chemistry of fire we know we should not touch it. Most, if not all, cultures have tales of interdiction for children and fire. Moscovici's analysis of the psychology of scientific myths shows that myths are engines for creativity and change, that they come out of the communication between science and common sense, originate in both realms and produce a polyphasic post-rational intelligence that expands both reason and common sense (Moscovici, 1992).

And philosophers too have known this well being aware of how much philosophy renounces when withdrawing from the world of common sense. Arendt (1971) points to the loss of common sense as a great loss and makes this beautifully clear in the two stories she tells about the encounter between the philosopher and the layperson. There is the story told by Plato of the peasant Thracian girl who explodes in laughter when she sees Thales fall into a well while watching the motions of heavenly bodies above him. Taken by laugher she declares that "he was eager to know the things in the sky but what was just at his feet escaped him". Much later Kant, and probably unaware of Plato's story of the Thracian girl tells a similar tale about the Danish astronomer Tycho de Brahe and his

coachman. In trying to find their way during a night journey the astronomer proposes that they should follow the stars he so well knew, to which the coachman replies: “My dear sir, you may know a lot about heavenly bodies, but here on earth you are a fool.” In the warfare between high thinking and common sense there has been disdain and laughter both ways.

So what for the dream of science without common sense, of cognition without culture, of thinking without everyday life? It is surely more desire than fact; but a desire to be reckoned with, given its power to frame our perception and self-understanding. And yet, whatever the power of this dream, common sense persists and will persist for the simple reason that it fulfills essential functions of survival and responds to human needs that no other system of knowing can address. As Habermas recently pointed out “the scientific theories which intrude upon the lifeworld do not touch on the framework of our everyday knowledge, which is linked to the self-understanding of speakers and actors. No science will relieve common sense, even if scientifically informed, of the task of forming a judgement” (2003:108) Because of all this common sense holds it ground and insists in its perspective.

There is no need of creating a sharp divide between the worlds of science and common sense, nor of trying to see them exactly alike. They are different and in this difference resides the great potential of all human knowledge. This difference is made of continuities and discontinuities. There is a line that separates and a line that unites the pheasant Thracian girl and Thales, Tycho and his coachman. What unites them is a continuation in knowledge, the remarkable plasticity which humans display in processes of knowledge construction, a knowledge continuum that does not erase one knowledge with another but is polyphasic and combines both cognition and emotion, abstract thinking and action, philosophy and pragmatics, science and common sense. It is a knowledge continuum that shows how accomplishments in knowledge grow out of, without necessarily invalidating other moments and contexts of human experience. In the social psychology of

representations we call it cognitive polyphasia, the co-existence rather than displacement of knowledge systems.

Situating thought and knowledge, linking cognition and life, putting reason in its place: this is the main lesson that I take from the writings of Serge Moscovici; to seek an understanding of how humans construct a symbolic landscape that is capable of functioning both as science and as common sense, as a reality-setter and as a reality opener, of giving us accuracy in cognition and at the same time disregarding it altogether so that the human imagination can fly, and in this fly re-set what we call science, imploding and violating its boundaries to produce previously unimagined and unrealised scenarios. As Blumemberg has remarked: what a fragile balance between the indispensable and the sublime.

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