Attitudes, Social Representations and Points of View[1]

Introduction

Over the years, numerous scholars have pointed to problems that are inherent to the clash of beliefs, ideas, and perspectives in contemporary pluralistic societies. The scholarly efforts directed towards the clash of beliefs have aimed at understanding and identifying ways to reconcile divergences and promote cooperative relations between human beings (see Giddens, 1991; Huntington 1996; Benhabib, 2002; Moghaddam, 2008). In social psychology, the problem of clashing beliefs struggling for recognition has been put firmly on the agenda by Moscovici (1961, 1985a, 1985b, 2000). The problem, as Moscovici (1985a) articulates it, is to understand how a minority can see things as it does and how it can think as it does. In contexts of cultural diversity, intergroup relations are embedded within interpersonal relations. Individuals encounter each other as individuals, but their relations are framed by their relative group relations (Sherif & Hovland, 1961). In such circumstances, understanding how individuals relate with one another is an imperative concern. How do individuals orientate themselves in what appears to be a plurality of perspectives? Why do they adopt one perspective and not another? And in adopting a certain perspective, how do they then treat others who hold a different perspective?

The concept that social psychology has put forth in studying the manner by which individuals orientate themselves towards objects in their environment is the attitude, along with its collective counterpart–public opinion. These, however, have come to overlook the requirement to understand individual relations in a way that includes a reference to the social framework which validates some perspective over others in a given public sphere (Gaskell, 2001). As Asch (1987) succinctly claims, "to act in the social field requires a knowledge

of social facts" (p. 139). Individuals participate in public life and orientate themselves to others and to objects in their environment by adopting mutually meaningful outlooks towards social objects and events that others recognise as legitimate and sensible. Neither attitude nor public opinion include such a reference to social knowledge.

An alternative way for understanding such individual orientations was proposed by Asch (1952/1987) in the notion of the *point of view*. This chapter reconciles this notion with the theory of social representations to propose a nested model of social behaviour that includes reference to societal dynamics, situational circumstances of orienting oneself amidst a plurality of views, as well as socio-cognitive inclinations that individuals demonstrate in social relations. In this conception, the ingredients for a 'synthetic approach' (Moscovici, 1963) come together, including a focus on 'the organization of mind', which Moscovici (1963) highlights as the last necessary concern for an integrated social psychological science. As this chapter demonstrates, the inclusion of this focus in the study of social behaviour enables the discipline to address the concern of clashing views, as noted above, and understand the degrees to which alternative perspectives are afforded a legitimate place in social dialogue, or dismissed without a hearing.

Attitudes

The pervasiveness of the 'attitude' concept in social psychology and the social sciences at large has been extensively documented (Moscovici, 1963; McGuire, 1985, 1986; Zaller & Feldman, 1992; Farr 1996; Gaskell, 2001; Howarth, 2006). The study of attitudes spans the historical development of the discipline (McGuire, 1986). Moscovici (1963) observes that for a long time social psychology was considered to be the science of attitudes. In spite of its popularity, however, the conceptual meaning of attitude has a chequered history. Attitude has gone from a social concept in its origin, to an individual, asocial and apolitical concept at present (Howarth, 2006). The general influence of individualism on the social sciences (Graumann, 1986), and the influence of cognitivism on social psychology in particular (Farr, 1996), have redefined

attitudes as an individual's valuation of an attitude object (see Fishbein, 1967). A contemporary definition of attitudes, and the one that this chapter adopts, is that the concept represents evaluations individuals hold towards elements (i.e. attitude objects) in their environment (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005). The purpose this serves in the social sciences is that of an independent variable that can be measured efficiently and concisely towards predicting behaviour. As an empirical concept, its popularity is largely unparalleled.

Attitudes are held to be cognitively based if they are based on information and facts, affectively based if they are emotive and value-laden, and behaviourally based if they stem from people's observations of behaviour towards an attitude object. Moreover, people's attitudes can be explicit if consciously endorsed, or implicit if held unconsciously (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005). This conception of attitudes gives rise to various problematic issues concerning their nature and the circumstances that condition their activation. Attitudes are conceived as inherent dispositions (Tesser, 1993). In this way, they are reified as continuing states that mark an individual's stable sense of self over time (i.e. personality based). On the other hand, attitudes are held to be malleable in the face of changing circumstances as well as social influence (Sammut & Bauer, 2011). As such, they are conceived as context-dependent and to reflect only an individual's orientation towards an attitude object at a particular point in time.

Naturally, these conceptions of attitudes have attracted much critique over the years (see Asch, 1952; Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965; Farr, 1990; Billig, 1991; Gaskell, 2001; Howarth, 2006), and various scholars have sought to address the attitude's primary shortcoming of overlooking the 'social' in its conceptualisation. As some scholars have pointed out (Farr, 1990, 1996; Fraser & Gaskell, 1990; Fraser, 1994; Gaskell, 2001), the theory of social representations has come to serve as a countervailing force to individualistic theories like 'attitude', by foregrounding the social rather than the individual (Gaskell, 2001). However, most theorists retain that the two concepts are incommensurable due to their differing underlying epistemologies (Farr, 1994; Howarth, 2006). Whilst attitude is clearly a cognitive attribute of the individual

even in its aggregate form – i.e. public opinion – social representations are held to be intrinsically social. They are conceptualised as existing across minds rather than inside individual minds (Wagner et al., 1999; Wagner & Hayes, 2005; Wagner, Mecha & do Rosário Carvalho, 2008). According to such conception, the individual extends into the social as a relational unit in a *systemic* network of social meaning. In this tradition, rather than being two sides of the same coin, the individual/social dichotomy is a false dichotomy to begin with, as the individual is ontologically part of the social firmament.

Theoretical usage of concepts, however, cannot escape reification and for this reason problems persist in reconciling the dual focus of the social and the individual contemporarily. Gaskell (2001) has outlined this as the challenge that can reinvigorate the discipline. Traditionally, researchers either study the social field as a collective by looking at things such as social representations and discourses but failing to locate the individual within these wider polemics, or they study individual orientations, possibly even in aggregate, but failing to account for the wider social meaning that legitimates individuals' evaluations (see Harré, 1984). The gap between the two remains a ubiquitous challenge.

Overlooking the processes of social legitimation served by systems of knowledge handicaps an adequate explanation of social behaviour. This handicap is characteristic of attitude scaling and has long been identified in this tradition, as Thurstone (1967a) notes:

> "It is quite conceivable that two men may have the same degree or intensity of affect favourable toward a psychological object and that their attitudes would be described in this sense as identical but that they have arrived at their similar attitudes by entirely different routes. It is even possible that their factual associations about the psychological object might be entirely different and that their overt actions would take quite different forms which have one thing in common, namely, that they are about equality favourable toward the object" (p.21).

Thurstone goes on to provide the example of an atheist and a pious believer both expressing similar attitudes to a statement such as 'Going to church will not do anyone any harm'. According to Likert (1967), whose simple attitude scale has, according to Allport (1967) enabled the discipline to better measure than define attitudes, and whose widespread use across the social sciences is perpetuous, this state of conceptualisation is unsatisfactory as the measure should be in such way that "persons with different points of view, so far as the particular attitude is concerned, will respond to it differentially" (p. 90). For this reason, Likert (1967) claims that attitude scales, like intelligence tests, should be standardised for cultural groups, and one devised for one group should not be applicable for another. Likert's suggestions have, however, gone largely unheeded in the measurement of public opinion.

The divide between the 'social' and the 'individual' is ontological as much as it is epistemological and involves different levels of explanation (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). The social pertains to the collective life of human beings and applies to processes that take shape at this collective level, such as ideologies and discourse. The individual pertains to the human being as a single specimen and applies to processes that take place at this level such as cognition and perception. The gap between the two is well explicated by Harré (1984) in his distinction of aggregates from collectives. Whilst aggregates bring together individual specimens, collectives exist independently of individual cognition. Social behaviour, however, retains elements of both. Insofar as it involves an element of positioning relative to other, equally agentic beings, then such behaviour can be deemed social. And insofar as such interpersonal relations involve an element of perception and interpretation, then such behaviour can be deemed personal and cognitive. Alternatively, one could characterize this demarcation as between the intra-personal and the inter-personal spheres of psychological activity (Kruglanski, 1989).

This characteristic dichotomy of social behaviour has confounded explanations on either side. Attitude thus serves to understand an individual's inclination towards some social object on the basis of characteristics of that individual,

including affect, behavioural tendencies, cognition, and external influences. Put simply, an attitude represents an individual's sum total evaluation of an attitude object (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2005). It does not, however, provide an explanation for why individuals resort to certain courses of action given a certain stimulus. For instance, two individuals may be equally appalled by some event, but their individual responses may vary as a function of different cultural conditions in which they are embedded. Social representations, on the other hand, describe context-rational behaviour that is deemed reasonable in certain circumstances. They describe how for a certain social group, a particular course of action is reasonable given certain conditions. Social representations do not, however, explain why such context-rational behaviour may be adopted by some individuals but not by similar others facing the same circumstances. Not all individuals react in the same way to similar events, even within the same cultural context. In other words, neither attitudes nor social representations are useful for a situational explanation of social behaviour, that is, for an explanation of why a certain individual acts in a certain way at a certain point in time to a given stimulus.

Our everyday understanding of relating individuals serves as a useful guide in gaining some further understanding. In everyday language we use attitude to mean opinion (how one thinks) or orientation (one's mental posture). What we commonly mean by an attitude is one's mental outlook, rather than the narrower meaning of a cognitive evaluation of an attitude object that reflects that mental outlook. Furthermore, etymologically, what we often want to capture in accounting for social behaviour is not common sense either (i.e. a social representation), but a *perspective²* that is rooted in common sense. This chapter proposes the point of view as an intervening concept that can bridge the gap between the intra-personal and the inter-personal, i.e. the individual-social spheres of psychological activity. This, as detailed hereunder, provides a transitive explanation of the social as the context in which a particular perspective is located, which perspective is itself socio-cognitive, and which relates to other perspectives on the basis of its own inherent cognitive and affective structure–attitude being one such component.

The Fact of Culture and the Social Attitude

The aim to counterbalance the individualisation of 'attitude' in social psychology is not exclusive to European forms of social psychology. Even before the advent of societal forms of social psychology (Himmelweit & Gaskell, 1990), such as social representations theory (Moscovici, 1961), social constructionism (Berger & Luckman, 1966), and discourse analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), Asch (1952/1987) took issue with 'attitude' as a purely individual construct and drawing on Sumner's notion of the *mores*[3], went on to postulate the notion of the point of view to develop a social psychology that in understanding the complexity of social behaviour, accounts for the social as much as it does the individual.

In line with more recent scholars such as Farr (1991) and Billig (1987, 1991), according to Asch, measuring attitudes does not provide any insight into societal processes, factors, or conditions. For Asch, material and social conditions are far more than objects of reflection. They bear significant consequences on how individuals relate with the world they inhabit: "the surroundings do not look quite the same to one who believes in reincarnation and to one who has studied the principles of genetics" (1987, p. 365). Moreover, this has clear implications for how we conceptualise individuals, for "[h]ead-hunting, polygamy, Mohammedanism are not simply traits of individuals like height or color vision. They are properties of individuals in so far as the individuals are members of a given society" (1987, p. 16). Asch goes on to give another example of how social behaviour is rooted in social facts having historical direction:

> "It is not enough to say that some societies observe rules of cleanliness and others do not. It would be more consequential to ask whether one can as readily teach one group to adopt the habits of cleanliness as another to surrender them; whether one can as readily convert an American community to curing illness by sorcery as persuade a primitive group to adopt modern medical practices" (1987, p. 382).

One notes that in this early conception, attitudes are not regarded as inherent and stable dispositions marking some individual's personality. Rather, they are conceived as context-dependent variables that accrue in social circumstances. Attitudes, Asch argues, join central processes in the individual with central processes in society. They orient individuals by ordering the data of social surroundings, and their function "is to be found in the effects it exerts upon current experiences and the appraisal of new conditions. Generally an attitude functions as an orientation to and context for current events" (p. 582). Attitudes do this on the basis of social knowledge that orders meaning in the world:

> "Only if the knowledge exists that there are germs and viruses that produce disease will it be meaningful to have an attitude about the right of the state to compel children to be vaccinated against smallpox regardless of the wishes of their parents. If, instead, the available data contain such entities as spirits and the belief that they produce illness, medical problems will be solved by medicine men and there will be different attitudes towards vaccination and hygiene. In order that the burning of witches make sense it is necessary to have as part of the intellectual climate the propositions that there are devils and that persons can be in league with them. In each of these instances a particular factual definition of the given situation is the necessary condition for conviction and action" (p. 564).

It is worth again bearing in mind that Asch's conception of attitudes differs from its predominant conceptualization as an evaluation of an attitude object today. On the one hand, as in Asch's works, attitudes transpire as a discursive display of social circumstances. Its contemporary usage, on the other hand, marks the attitude as a stable attribute of an individual regardless of social circumstances. The social, in this latter conception, does not feature as a discursive condition of the production of attitudes, but as an extrinsic variable of influence (i.e. social norms), amongst other variables of influence, on the intrinsic disposition individuals hold towards elements in the environment. The social constitutes normative standards that influence an individual's evaluation of something on the basis of what others seem to also be doing. For Asch, however, attitudes are

social due to the fact that they "arise in view of and in response to perceived conditions of mutual dependence" (p. 576). They form part of what Asch describes as "the mutually shared field" (p. 577), that is, a phenomenal field that for subjects in relation constitutes reality.

Asch argues that humans experience their surroundings in an experientially objective manner. Individuals do not experience their perceptions of the world as cognitive products of their internal physiological processes, they experience objects in terms of properties attributed to objects themselves. In this way, the biological basis of human cognition orients human subjects to a phenomenal inter-objectivity (Latour, 1996; Sammut, Daanen & Sartawi, 2010; Sammut, Daanen & Moghaddam, 2013). The presence of others effects human subjects by bringing within their psychological sphere the thoughts, emotions and purposes of others, bringing them into relations of mutual dependence. It is not simply that individual action is mutually oriented and elicits in another a similarly oriented response. Mutuality is a systemic condition that refers to an *interpenetration of views* that forms the basis of social interaction. It is not the awareness of others' evaluations of an attitude object that influences one's attitude on the basis of normative influence (Sammut & Bauer, 2011). Rather, it is that others' orientations towards a social object, alongside one's own, define the object systemically and constructively for a particular social group. As Asch explains, humans do not live in their own space, in their own time, and in their own systems of cause and effect. They live in a shared space, in shared time, and in shared systems of causality. When humans interrelate, they do so on the basis of this inter-objective, open field that surrounds them and which stands in similar relation to all of them. One necessary requirement for studying attitudes, therefore, is that human actions and experiences, being in relations of interdependence, be studied systemically, in terms of the units of which they form part.

In outlining his theory of social attitudes, Asch then goes on to call for a specification of the individual's frame of reference, that is concerned with the centre of gravity of a person's outlook, how wide or narrow it might be, whether

it is oriented to a future project or a present situation, and what the place of the individual's assertions might be in the context of his outlook (Asch, 1987, p. 559). This does not equate with the contemporary conceptualization of attitudes however, despite the fact that in its contemporary usage attitude bears the overtones of individual disposition. The contemporary definition of attitude lacks a concern with the social, as detailed above. On the other hand, neither do social representations include a specification of an individual's frame of reference. Asch's proposal for addressing these issues is the 'point of view', which constitutes an individual's perspective towards a social object or event, oriented towards others' perspectives, in terms of which individuals act meaningfully in their everyday social relations. It is by means of this operation that alignments and oppositions arise in the social order.

Points of view, according to Asch, allow individuals to engage in psychological processes of far-reaching importance. They enable individuals to engage in social checks, to verify the nature of their surroundings. They also enable individuals to participate in a mutually shared psychological field, where the actions and orientations of others have a bearing on one's own. In a systemic and relational context, each subject's point of view is mutually intelligible. A subject is able to adopt a perspective and interrelate with others on the basis of it, because others can comprehend one's point of view even if they can disagree with it. As Asch argues, social action requires a unique organisation between participants who stand on common ground, oriented towards one another and to the same environment, and that their acts *interpenetrate* and regulate each other.

On the basis of social interaction we are able to derive the reasonable grounds for divergences, based on differences in perspectives. We realise that certain points of view and certain experiences are our own, but we do not maintain that we are in singular relation with the environment. We turn to the thought of others for confirmation of our relations, because we understand that they can illuminate us with some perspective that is inaccessible from our point of view. Social relations are enabled by means of the critical capacity of human subjects to take the perspective of the other. As Asch argues, I am able to understand my

own action as it appears to another, and to view the action of another as if it were my own. Furthermore, divergences in perspectives are considered as more than brute differences. We are able to understand that one perspective may be capable of correcting another distorted view by appeal to a deeper-lying unity of shared action, feeling, and thought.

To sum up Asch's postulation, the mutual relations in which human subjects engage extend and deepen their individual psychological field and form a systemic, psychosocial, phenomenal field that enables the interpenetration of views. In a clash between divergent views, individuals are induced to take a stand and view their actions as others view them, and conversely to view the actions of others as their own. In this way, limitations of individual thinking are transcended by inclusion of the thoughts of others. Individuals become open to more alternatives than their own unaided individual cognition makes possible. This knowledge, that our understanding can be in disagreement with that of others, is of high significance. It makes evident to us the possibility of error as an intellectual fact, and prepares the way for entertaining errors in our own view. In consequence, individuals become able to deliberately approve one view and dismiss another on the basis of a process of social validation, by appeal to a common frame of reference that serves to provide 'logical' proof for one's own thinking.

Social Representations

Since Moscovici's (1961) pioneering study on the social representations of psychoanalysis in France, the study of social representations has proceeded along a number of lines. This has been permitted as a result of an eclectic definition of social representations. Social Representations have been variously described as a concept, a conceptual framework, a theory, and an approach (Allansdottir, Jovchelovitch, & Stathopoulou, 1993; Bauer & Gaskell, 1999; Carugati, Selleri, & Scappini, 1994; deRosa, 1993). Moreover, a further distinction is applicable to the term social representation. Used as a verb, 'social representation' refers to a *process* of representing 'socially', whilst as a noun, it

refers to some *product*, a representation, whose content it is possible to study (Chryssides et al. 2009).

Social representations are the outcomes of processes of communication that represent reality for a given people, and once in existence they constitute social reality *sui generis* (Moscovici, 2000). Social representations as phenomena pertain to "a world that, although belonging to each of us, transcends all of us. They are a "potential space" of common fabrication, where each person goes beyond the realm of individuality to enter another-yet fundamentally related-realm: the realm of public life" (Jovchelovitch, 1995, p. 94). Moreover, "More than consensual beliefs, social representations are therefore organizing principles varied in nature, which do not necessarily consist of shared beliefs, as they may result in different or even opposed positions taken by individuals in relation to common reference points" (Doise, Clémence, and Lorenzo-Cioldi, 1993, p. 4).

In public life, each individual is uniquely positioned in relation to others in the process of social representation, on the basis of the point of view that they adopt. Whilst individuals within a social group share a holomorphic frame of reference, they will not hold the same positioning within the social representation (Clémence, 2001; Doise, 2001; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Clémence defines social positioning as "the process by which people take up position about a network of significations" (2001, p. 83). This is corollary to Asch's notion of adopting a point of view. Divergent positions are expressed by individuals who attempt to define the phenomenon from their points of view, as Sartre (1943) has pointed out, using a framework of normative rules based on ideas, values, and beliefs characteristic of their group for the elaboration of meaning. The frame of reference must be shared by individuals if they are to interrelate at all. Whilst positioning may be idiosyncratic (an individual's point of view may be unique), it cannot be idiomorphic, as others would be unable to relate meaningfully to the frame of reference that legitimises the actor's point of view (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Diversity within the social field means that individuals position themselves differently, engaging with the phenomenon from a particular point of

view relative to other agents, who are similarly engaged in the process of social representation (Clémence, 2001; Liu & László, 2007). Social positioning in terms of adopting a point of view in social relations is not only the expression of an opinion (Thurstone, 1967b), it is a way of processing information in order to align our thinking with what society thinks (Clémence, 2001).

This account of social representations is consequential for Social Representations Theory [SRT]. It serves to demarcate social representations as systemic and collective phenomena (Harré, 1984), settling the issue of how social representations differ from individual representations (see Breakwell, Lahlou, this volume). In social interaction, individuals stand in relation with others and objects in their environment, that is, they position themselves relative to elements in their environment. By virtue of the positions they adopt, they come to occupy a point in social space and time that grants them a particular view, or perspective, of the object. In doing so, they bring to bear their own idiosyncratic inclinations towards the object (i.e. beliefs, cognitions, attitudes, individual representations) to bear on their perception and interpretation of it. Together, these serve to articulate their points of view, on the basis of which they inter-relate with others who hold similar or different points of view. In this clash of beliefs, some alternatives they incorporate into their own perspectives through an interpenetration of views, and some others they reject.

The totality of the various discursive points of view that provide different objectifications of the element in question, in Sartre's terms revealing different aspects of the phenomenon, emerges as a systemic product in its own right, i.e. a social representation. It is in this way that social representations exist across rather than inside individual minds. They include the conglomeration of diverse points of view that define the object in multifarious ways for a certain public at some particular point in time. This systemic characteristic of social representations provides the conditions for cognitive polyphasia (Arthi, Provencher & Wagner, 2012) – the plural, and at times contradictory, composite of co-existing objectifications in the same public.

The conceptualization of points of view/social representations in these mutual terms thus overcomes the Cartesian individual/social dichotomy (Marková, 1982) as well as resolves the challenge of retaining this dualistic focus contemporarily (Gaskell, 2001). In these terms, the point of view provides an explicit focus on an individual's frame of reference as embedded in a network of social relations. As detailed hereunder, this conception presents a model of social behaviour as drawing on intra-personal dispositions like attitudes, to articulate an inter-personal explanation of social behaviour *in situ* (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012), given a systemic network of social meaning that grants that behaviour legitimacy and meaning in others' views. The social/individual dichotomy is resolved through a systemic conception of social representations, where the social is not treated as an extraneous influence but a systemic condition of production. On the other hand, intra-personal characteristics like attitudes are retained as cognitive features that bias one's inclination towards an event, object, or other, to formulate a point of view towards it. At this junction, the intra-personal gains inter-personal moment and becomes participative in societal structures like social representations. Accordingly, individuals can not be held to position themselves relative to social representations in social intercourse. In formulating and articulating a point of view, they position themselves *within* social representations, relative to others and objects in their social environments.

The point of view is thus that feature of social cognition that achieves positioning – an act that accrues by virtue of holding, articulating, and defending some point of view. Were an individual to hold a different set of intra-personal inclinations relative to the object, such as a different attitude, her point of view would change accordingly. In turn, a social representation changes inasmuch as individuals either come to occupy previously non-existent positions relative to the object, from which they articulate new points of view revealing some new aspect of the phenomenon, or if they cease to occupy certain previously legitimated positions relative to the object, they go on to make that point of view redundant. This process of changing points of view in its systemic totality marks the evolution of social representations over time (see Sammut, Tsirogianni, & Wagoner, 2012).

Modeling the point of view

Social representations are social insofar as they retain a sense of the collective existing across individual minds, and they are representations insofar as they are phenomena representing reality[4] and constituting the real[5]. This conception of the social representation is found in Bauer and Gaskell's (1999) toblerone model that postulates social representations as elaborated by a collective in an inter-objective space. This is similar to Asch's (1952/1987) conception of the shared phenomenal field. For Bauer and Gaskell, representations can be formally characterised as the relation between three elements: subjects, or carriers of the representation (S); an object that is represented, which may be a concrete entity or an abstract idea (O); and a project, or pragmatic context in which the representation is meaningful (P). Subjects, object, and project form a *system of mutual constitution*. This enables an understanding of how "in the object, the project of the subjects is represented; or how in the subjects the object appears in relation to a project; or how the project links the subjects and object" (p. 168).

Bauer and Gaskell argue that social representations, unlike mental representations that require a single individual, involve a minimal triad of two persons (subject 1 and subject 2) concerned with an object (O), constituting a triangle of mediation [S_1-O-S_2] that is the basic unit for the elaboration of meaning across time. This formulation is similar to Heider's (1946) account of the balance of reciprocity in the cognitive organisation of attitudes between three entities. The links between any two entities in this formulation represent attitudes, which are balanced systemically in their reciprocal relations, or within what may be held to be a social representation. In this formulation, the angle that is the subject's perspective, oriented towards another subject's perspective and the object in question, represents an aspect of the phenomenon in Sartre's terms, that is, the subject's point of view. This point of view is constitutive of the subject's attitudes towards the object and the other (Fig. 1).
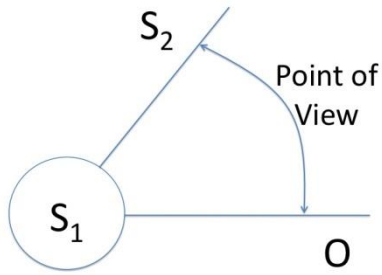
Fig. 1: Point of view

Bauer and Gaskell argue that a final extension to their model concerns the differentiation of social groups. Over time, they argue, various triangles of mediation emerge and coexist to form a larger social system. This leads to the 'toblerone pack' model, where O is the linking pin of different representations, their common referent being the brute fact. More recently, the authors have proposed a 'wind-rose' model of social representations that denotes different representations in different communities at different points in time (Bauer & Gaskell, 2008). The surface of each triangle, which is a section through the toblerone pack, denotes the different common senses that prevail in different social groups at the same time, whilst the elongation of the triangles denotes the evolution of common sense (Sammut, Tsirogianni & Wagoner, 2012) in the various groups.

The extension of the toblerone model to a toblerone pack model or wind rose model is required to model divergent points of view pertaining to different social representations (i.e. when the object is the linking pin between two different social representations [S_1-S_2-O, O-S_3-S_4][6]) that come into contact in some public sphere. In relations between points of view based on different social representations individuals engage in processes of social re-presentation (Chryssides et al., 2009) on the basis of which they seek to comprehend alien perspectives and make the unfamiliar familiar (Moscovici, 2000). Until a new social representation is forged to provide a frame of reference that enables alternative perspectives to be understood in their own legitimacy, they will be incomprehensible from any point of view as embedded in another social representation. In such cases, an individual's perspective would impede one

from seeing the potentiality of another perspective in its legitimacy, or, to put it in other words, as a result of the way I see it, I cannot see how it can be seen differently. In the event of an encounter with an alternative perspective that draws on a different rationality, the alternative point of view may appear abhorrent or bizarre (Asch, 1952; Giddens, 1991; Benhabib, 2002).

A Nested Model of Social Behaviour

So what are the consequences of conceptualizing points of view and social representations in this manner? Asch suggests that it is necessary to describe their main lines of organisation and their degree of structurisation; insofar as attitudes are part of wider systems, they cannot be understood in their own terms alone. It is also necessary, according to Asch, to understand the directions of individuals' outlooks, and the cleavages that may exist between different outlooks. In this way, we can understand an attitude's place and function in the general scheme of social behaviour, how it takes shape and changes in a medium of already functioning views, and how a change in part leads to a change in whole.

The cause of behaviour, as Moscovici (1984) argues, lies with the individual's interpretation of things in a particular situation, in which individual perception is mediated by a social representation that describes how things are and prescribes what behaviours ought to follow. Whether the individual follows through, or otherwise, is a function of the individual as well as extraneous influences in his or her environment. The two come together in an individual's point of view: his or her actual perception of the event in a given situation and given the individual's own inclinations (i.e. attitudes) and environmental factors. Behaviour follows by virtue of the point of view, in response to certain conditions or events that occur to the individual. Causality, as outlined in Moscovici's model, is still located in the interplay between a stimulus and a response, but resides at the situational level of explanation.

At this point, we are therefore in a position to outline a nested model of social behaviour that includes attitudes, points of view, and social representations

(Figure 2). The model is nested due to the fact that underlying concepts are necessarily implicated in overarching ones, that is, attitudes are necessarily implicated in points of view–in terms of the person's characteristics; and points of view are necessarily implicated in social representations–in terms of social positioning. Neither social representations theory nor attitudes on their own provide a situational explanation of social behaviour. Social representations theory provides a societal-level explanation. It describes societal prescriptions that bear on the way people interpret events and what they will hold to be legitimate courses of action. Attitudes, on the other hand, provide a personal-level explanation of social behaviour, outlining the individual's evaluation of an attitude object that bears on their inclination to act in a particular way. Whether, in a given situation, individuals do act in a given way depends on their point of view at the time and in the situation, given the conditions they find themselves in.
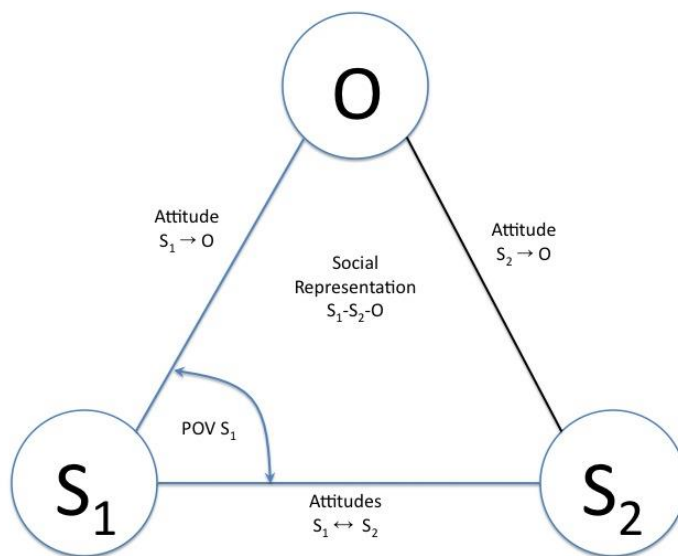

Fig. 2: A nested model of social behaviour: social representations, points of view, and attitudes (adapted from Bauer & Gaskell, 1999 and based on Heider's (1946) balance of reciprocity in the cognitive organization of attitudes).

To illustrate with an example, the culture of honour prevailing in certain societies provides a suitable hypothetical example. Whether two individuals to

whom the same dishonourable event happens, for example a daughter falling pregnant out of wedlock, behave in the same way may be due to different attitudes they may hold towards the attitude object. For example, one might evaluate the event more harshly than another. Such would be a characteristic explanation of behaviour as a function of attitudes. Yet two individuals may hold the same evaluation of the attitude object that is dishonourable, but still act differently. They may be equally appalled by the event, and equally inclined to punish whom they regard as the perpetrator. In such a situation therefore, the attitude variable is constant. Their actual behaviours, however, may differ due to the fact that different societal prescriptions bear on the interpretation of the event and the legitimacy of the ensuing behaviour. In one group, for instance, it might be reasonable to attack the perpetrator whereas in another it may only be reasonable to request maintenance payments. Such would be a characteristic social representations explanation. However, behaviour differs even more widely than this. Two individuals, with similar attitudes and in the same social setting, may nevertheless opt to do very different things when faced with the same event. One might opt to save face and lose the offspring, whereas another may opt to lose face and save the offspring. This is because whilst the experience of the event may be similar to both, the way the two *see* the event may differ. One might adopt a certain point of view in relation to the event and the community, whereas another might take a different standpoint. If we are to truly understand social behaviour, then aside from knowing what social representations prescribe and what evaluations people may hold, we also need situational-level explanations that account for the individual's situational reality given certain events.

The present characterization of 'point of view' provides this missing link. At each level, however, one needs to pay due consideration to characteristics particular to that level as well as adopt an epistemology suitable to that same level. The manner by which we can come to understand attitudes may be different from the manner by which we can come to understand points of view, which might be different in turn from the manner by which we can come to understand social representations. The analogy with water is apt in this case. Water may be

understood at the molecular level: H_2O. That understanding however is different from the way we understand masses of water, such as seas and oceans. Neither understanding however is adequate for an explanation of tides and currents. Whilst the latter are implicated in the existence of oceans, and whilst physically the molecular structure is none other than H_2O, at each level a different understanding of water is required despite the fact that the phenomenon in its materiality remains the same.

Conclusion

The assimilation of Asch's conception of social attitudes within the social psychology of attitudes as it stands today is largely impossible due to the individualisation and cognitivisation of the concept (see Farr, 1996; Graumann, 1986). This stems largely from discrepant epistemological assumptions between the two. Yet, Asch's approach and the social representations paradigm share an underlying epistemological base, and their assumptions derive largely from common roots (Marková, 1982; Farr, 1996). Reconciling the two, as proposed above, in a formulation of points of view based on social representations, presents social psychology with new challenges and requires of it new explanations, such as: How can we come to understand individuals' outlooks towards the social phenomena they face? Why do different individuals adopt different points of view when they orientate themselves towards the same social phenomenon? How is it that certain different points of view may appear sensible whilst others may appear nonsensical? What happens in encounters between divergent points of view, when these draw on the same worldview? What happens when they do not? And conversely, what happens in encounters between similar points of view when these draw on similar world views? And what happens when they do not? These questions present themselves as new and worthy challenges for the social representations programme on the one hand, and for social cognition on the other hand, as well as for the discipline of social psychology in general. The linking pin between the two is the concept of point of view, which provides a specification for the location of the individual *within* a social representation.

Points of view draw on systems of knowledge that are legitimated in public spheres, which public spheres may themselves be marked by a multiplicity of knowledge systems that co-exist within them. In this state of affairs, typical of cosmopolitan publics, encounters between different points of view may represent more fundamental encounters between distinct world views. Interpersonal relations in these publics instantiate intercultural relations. On the other hand, points of view may draw on systems of knowledge that are not legitimated in a given public sphere. Such alien points of view present a twofold empirical concern: (1) The requirement to study the alien point of view from the outside, as it seeks to negotiate its version in the context of a discrepant system of social representations; (2) The requirement to study the reception and encounter with the alien point of view from the inside, as it is received by individuals for whom this version is out of the ordinary. Clearly, understanding social behaviour on these bases requires a deeper appreciation than mere evaluative judgments, as not only dispositions but also perceptions and common-sense bear distinctly on social behaviour.

This chapter has introduced a conceptualisation of the point of view concept. The overarching contribution of this, to the social sciences in general and the discipline of social psychology in particular, is the formulation of a concept that effectively bridges the gap between the social and the psychological. It does this by retaining a dual focus on overarching social structures and underlying psychological processes that is achieved in a nested model of social behaviour. Such a concept enables researchers to gain a fuller understanding of the individual in terms of the individual's social-psychological characteristics, and of human relations in their social-psychological complexity. Formulated at the situational level, the point of view is able to provide an explanation of social behaviour as it takes place *in situ* (Sammut & Gaskell, 2012). Empirically, if one wants to understand some particular aspect of social reality, the model outlined helps in recognising what to look for as well as outline where (i.e. at which level) to look for it.

In the course of research, the discovery of certain points of view might warrant detailed investigation into their characteristics. This clearly overlaps with a social representations study, but such extended inquiry aims to understand how some individuals or groups are positioning themselves in some particular way, given a particular social representation and given particular other points of view (i.e. contrasting ones) that exist toward the object. This is the study of points of view at the situational level that looks at orientations, the justifications provided for them, and the cognitive characteristics that typify them. A full understanding at this level requires an understanding of the argumentative structure that legitimates that position as well as an appreciation of the relational aspects of relating to someone else's position, both manifestly in social relations and introspectively in social cognition. At this level, the distinction between different types of points of view is a useful one (see Sammut & Gaskell, 2010). This in itself can be discerned from accounts or assessed through self-categorisation (Sammut, 2012, 2013). The study of the points of view of some regarding some object, as they relate with others aims at understanding (1) how the object exists for the subjects being studied, (2) who is the other in relation to whom the subject/s position themselves in social affairs, (3) the argumentative content of a point of view, and (4) its socio-cognitive structure. Together, these fulfill Moscovici's (1963) call for studying closed-mindedness and investigating the organization of mind in achieving an integrated social psychological science.

A concrete example illustrates this point more fully. Moscovici's (1961) own *La Psychanalyse: son image et son public* can be held as an example in mapping the social representation of psychoanalysis in France at the time from the liberal, the Catholic, and the Communist points of view. Another of the few empirical works to claim an explicit inquiry into points of view is Moghaddam's (2006) "*From the terrorists' point of view: What they experience and why they come to destroy*". Moghaddam's work illustrates the fact that a given social representation in a given public does not prescribe any specific behaviour, but legitimates certain action sequences (Wagner, 1993). Given a certain stimulus, some are compelled to take up arms and sacrifice themselves to the cause whilst others are not. A social representations inquiry would investigate the sense-making of matters

such as war, foreign policy, the West, Islam, and so on, in a given public. One finding of such inquiry might be the plausibility of martyrdom or suicide-bombing. This, however, in and of itself provides no information as to the reasons why certain people resort to such behaviours amidst a myriad of alternative and equally plausible positions that they are able to take within the same social representation. Why do some individuals advocate diplomacy whereas others advocate armed conflict, given the same struggle? For instance, the divergent perspectives between Hamas and Fatah in the Palestinian struggle against Israel at present bear testimony to this. What changes between the two factions is not the struggle itself, nor the representations of the other, but the point of view on how the issue may or may not be resolved.

The point here is that what might be changing across these identified groups is not a representation of the object *per se*, but a preference for particular relations with that object. These preferences are justified by reasons; justifications are reasonable given the social representation. The study of points of view inquires into these reasons, and answers the question of *what* points of view people are taking towards the object given the social representation, and *why*.

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[1] Parts of the arguments presented in this chapter were originally advanced in a doctoral thesis by the author. See Sammut (2010) for further details.

[2] 'Perspective' is etymologically similar to 'point of view', denoting a view of something that is acquired by virtue of looking at it. As such, this represents a phenomenal view, one that is perceived (or experienced). Having a point of view denotes that a subject stands in relation with an object such that the object can be perceived by the subject phenomenally. Having a point of view enables the subject to develop a perspective of the object. In psychological terms, the two concepts can largely be used synonymously, as both terms represent an individual's perception of an object that accrues by virtue of their point of view relative to the object. Yet, given their current usage in psychology, we prefer the term points of view for the present purposes to perspectives, due to the fact that perspectives can be construed in purely individualistic and cognitive terms. Inasmuch as a perspective refers to an individual's phenomenal perception of an event or object, it constitutes the specific image of what the individual 'sees' (i.e. perceives) of the object. The reference to point of view adds two elements to this conception that are somewhat given in routine interaction, that is, it establishes the individual's perspective as (a) relational and (b) relative. Inasmuch as a perspective is a property of a person, i.e. an image of an object that is somebody's own perception of it, then it represents a cognition (perspective) in social terms by linking the person perceiving with the object perceived. It marks an individual's *view* of something. Additionally, the point of view establishes that perspectival view as one point amongst others, one that is relative to the perceiving subject. By implication, other subjects will hold different views inasmuch as they occupy different points relative to the object. They orient themselves to the same object from some other *point*. Not only, in communication, subjects can articulate their perspective to the object with reference to other points of view that reveal features of the object which do not transpire in their own perspective. This marks the interpenetration of views. As an example, we do not all have to get injured after crashing a motorbike at high speed before we develop a perspective of motorbikes as dangerous when ridden at high speed. The implications of the term 'point of view' thus refer explicitly to these socio-cognitive processes. These enable human subjects to position themselves in relation to objects in their surroundings on the basis of their own perspectives and experiences as well as those of others that lie outside their own perceptive and experiential realm, but that stand in systemic relations with one's own.

[3] Mores are the customs and habitual practices of a community that reflect moral standards that a community accepts and follows.

[4] The noumenon, or object-in-itself.

[5] The phenomenon for a given community.

[6] Angles of view in different triangles, such as S_1 & S_3, not only characterise divergent perspectives, they represent perspectives which draw on different meanings of the same object. In this case, the object is not the same to the two subjects in question, the object is a wholly different phenomenon for the two groups S_1-S_2 & S_3-S_4.