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# Science and Ideology: the Role of the Political Context

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## Two Types of Knowledge, Two Types of Thinking

The title of this paper refers to the distinction that must be made between two types of knowledge and discourse – the scientific discourse and the ideological discourse – by-products of two types of thinking which differ fundamentally one from the other but which are nevertheless forced to coexist. **The scientific knowledge** (individual, rational, logical, dealing with generalities and universalities) tends to stay away from social, contextual and socio-affective influences, pursuing just one objective: the establishment of universal truth. Although seemingly in opposition with such an approach, the **commonsense knowledge** (naive, cultural, dialogical, communitarian, transmitted through activities, language, customs and folklore) has the same objective: the increase of knowledge, cognitive progress, and the search for the truth. Although different, they do not exclude each other but complete each other. Both have at their foundation similar cognitive processes, are often preoccupied with a set of common problems, both pursue the same objectives (Marková, 2004). Even if scientific knowledge is specialized, individual and appears as a result of education, while the one achieved with the help of commonsense is dependent on the common heritage, on practice and communitarian experience, they are not by any means antinomic but complete each other, sometimes even overlapping each other. Both types of knowledge coexist, sometimes practiced successively by one and the same individual who acts as a scientist within the laboratory, while in her private life she is an analyst of the ways in which people relate and behave within certain groups, of their means of communication. The lay individual acts as a true savant when he experiments with different interactional strategies, when he negotiates ways and methods of action, when he evaluates different practical solutions. The difference between the lay individual and the scholar is that the former does not act in a systematic way but, by taking advantage of all the acquisitions stored in the collective memory – validated by experience and consensus – seeks for the solution which is convenient for all. The commonsense thinking has its own rationality but seeks for one and the same truth for everyone, is reasonable, sensitive to the others' expectations. Our knowledge about action in common obeys the rules of scholarly knowledge and its laws of functioning. The commonsense individual is an ***amateur-***

*scholar*; he is, Moscovici believes, a lay devotee of science, a novice preoccupied with metaphysical speculations (,,Where do we come from?" "Who am I?" "Toward what do we head?"), a "realist" who thinks depending on the context, on common norms, on "accepted ideas". Moscovici's distinction has a polemic character: to the traditional argument that *,,a people does not think"*, he opposes the idea according to which common people always think practically, realistically, communicating and relating among themselves.

The two types of knowledge become two types of thinking which coexist: *scientific* and *social*. Scientists resort systematically to a rigorous organization of discourse, to arguments, to logic, to *scientific thinking*. Scientific thinking is characterized by four interconnected features: the logic of reasoning which is canonical, submitting everything to the test of facts, the existence of powerful institutional regulations and the need for reproducibility (Rouquette, 2009). The incoherent or abusive ratiocinations which come in contradiction with scientific thinking are, theoretically, discarded or at least put into parentheses, the institutions (universities, academies, editorial boards of publications, scientific advisory bodies of research laboratories) being those which define and control the canonical character of productions, while the individual subject loses autonomy when confronted with a detailed explanation of standardized procedures. The democratic principles and the State which provide the equality of its citizens and the chance to express themselves, represent the guarantee of an objective treatment of information and lack of discrimination.

In their day-to-day actions, people do not use a scientific language, nor do they resort to logical procedures to demonstrate their theories. Their cognitive processes are deeply influenced by the *social knowledge*, by their *interactions* with other subjects, by the stimuli which come from *the social field* (Beauvois, 1999). *Cognitions have a powerful social component* because they are attached to familiar objects, to a context, to a mode of production. These "objects" can be other people, groups, even the individual, socially positioned. (Haas, Jodelet, 1999). Human cognitions, therefore, possess a specific characteristic: they are not independent from the conditions within which they have formed, as they are born and then develop within a characteristic social environment, within a cultural and social context which generates the individual's social insertion. Any change, any modification of the individual structure, incorporates within itself also the *status-quo* of the social field, the entire configuration of the events generating them. The human cognitive universe translates the result of the treatment to which the social individual has been subjected; his integration into events presents characteristics which are going remain in the individual memory having the exact significance which

they bore when they were first incorporated. Therefore, the development of the individual cognitive structures cannot bypass those frequently employed social practices, types of social interaction, category belonging and the norms and values highlighted in the process of learning. The premise of our analysis is that cognitive development, when unfolding in certain social conditions (opposition, pressure, confrontation, and conflict), is marked by the characteristics of the social field. Oftentimes the scientist's dependence on the social context, both ideologically and politically marked, produces a distortion in the scientific discourse through the dominance of the contextual social thinking.

*Social thinking*, a product of everyday life, unpretentious, popular, sometimes using a populist language, employs a different type of discourse than the one used by scientific thinking. However, scientists, especially those acting in the social sciences, may sometimes glide towards compromises, letting themselves influenced by the "ideologically correct" discourse, sometimes only in conversations, in certain evocation of facts, in exchanging ideas during informal meetings, but oftentimes also in their scientific work. The cognitive activity of an individual is motivated and conditioned by her particular social insertion, by the citizenship circumscribed to a certain type of society within which she yields a certain discourse, learns professional and social practices and articulates her cognitive activity. This type of thinking has its own logic but this is socially positioned, circumscribed to the socio-cultural context, to the group, space, to the here and now, to the community within which it is utilized. If the bearer of scientific thinking wants to be listened to, she must adept her discourse to the local norms, to the ideology and values that dominate the social field.

We illustrate this statement by recounting a story specific to our field. The Russian psychologist Lev S. Vygotsky (1896-1934), who lived and worked during the Stalinist era, that is, in a socially unfavourable context, elaborated and developed a theory which is still valid today. He was forced to declare that he was living in "a new society and new culture" and therefore it is only natural for his model to have certain "cultural and historical" connotations belonging to that era. Despite this, he remains famous for several key concepts which opened the way to research in the field of social thinking: social contact, social cooperation, social interaction, and social conscience. He discovered and put to practice two paradigms which act as two complementary "social functions": the social-historical context and language, viewed as a means of communication specific to a given context (Tardif, 2002). According to the Russian psychologist, individuals interact and develop socially and cognitively depending on the roles they were socially assigned, and also on the practices of the social context. His theory proved viable and can nowadays be applied to the analysis of the society he was

born into: the peculiarities of the social context, the political and ideological concepts, the social practices employed (we are talking about closed and controlled societies but we can also refer to the democratic societies in which the "correct discourse" becomes a situational criterion) all become part of the social-cognitive patterns people make use of.

Serge Moscovici (1976), from the perspective of an interactional model, has come up with the term *socio-cognitive conflict*, viewed as a key notion of the socio-cognitive development and later on, in 1995, he discovered in Vygotsky a forerunner. He believes Vygotsky inspired him in the enunciation of the social representation theory, that by means of his extraordinary intuition, he built up a fresco of his times and offered us the possibility of understanding the nature of social conscience (as it was seen in the epoch). Social conscience (or social knowledge) presents itself as an autonomous social creation, "objective", having a public character. It is not to be inferred from the individual psychic facts, but is constructed through a combination of "forces" such as the society, culture, language and imagination. Then social conscience transforms itself in social products such as ideology, folklore, beliefs and language. The unique contribution of his important precursor, Moscovici believes, derives from his idea to make use of his personal experience as a scientist living and working in a specific socio-ideological context. Vygotsky was forced to interact with his social environment, with his epoch. The "exterior", the given social context, permeates the individual, providing him with fundamental cognitive patterns and practices. Appropriating the social for himself, the individual "learns" a certain social logic, acquires a certain social sense and also a sense for articulation. Although he came up with a theory which was consonant with his epoch, Vygotsky was considered an opposer of Marxist theories and for this reason he was marginalized, isolated and ostracized.

The product we today call social thinking was first proposed by Vygotsky under a different name: *public social conscience* (i.e. collective, institutional). What does Vygotsky's originality consist of? By criticising the reflexological theory of Pavlov and Behterev's, arguing that reflexes cannot explain consciousness satisfactorily, Vygotsky advances the idea according to which, this superior psychic product that conscience is, has a social genesis. The individual element, in other words, conscience's specificity, is derived from the social basis of conscience, as the individual lives a particular collective life, engaging in relations of solidarity and social relationships. Vygotsky considers that society, the educational system and all institutions in general, influence social conscience, social contacts, social cooperation and social interaction. The whole social context becomes a laboratory inside which sui-generis social learning takes place and which plays the role of a determining conjunction for the future

evolution of the individual as social subject. Knowledge, normative initiation, personality formation, and even individual psychic functions emerge and develop in a certain social and cultural environment and they are stimulated by the social context which the social subjects belong to. The internal construction follows the external one and therefore is stimulated from the outside. Thus, we deal with "an internal reconstruction of the external activity", Vygotsky wrote. From what we have said so far it seems that the crucial role in the cognitive and social development of the individual is determined by the social and cultural characteristics of the socio-political, ideological and cultural environment. Against this, the individual measures himself in his efforts of adaptation, it is this environment that provides him with all the important information and determines him to internalize it. However, not only does the environment provide him with knowledge but it also offers him ways to interpret it, in other words, it provides him with patterns of thought.

### The Interference of Ideology

We have reached a decisive point in our presentation. The information which the social subject is fed with, is not objective, neutral, logical, technical, "rational" or "scientific" but tainted with rumours, beliefs, ideologies, magical practices, furnished by the social context (Guimelli, 1999). It is therefore context-shaped, adapted to the peculiarities of the context. Social thinking, as a way of judging and evaluating events depending on the social context, on the shared experience, on acquired social practices, makes its way into the scientific discourse. As it is insufficient and irrational, aberrant, marked by evaluation errors, oftentimes social thinking distorts the objectiveness of the researcher. How does this happen? Catherine Garnier (2002) offers a powerful interpretation of the way in which social thinking comes to inhabit the individual: the social space, in which the individual performs, is culturally invested and permeated by social thinking. Thinking is "secreted" by the brain according to how the computer treats the information which it is served with. The selection of stimuli, objectives, events which the individual comes in contact with, ties him socially and his thinking is affected by these influences. Once localized, thinking becomes controllable, managed as if it were a mechanism, albeit a social one. The social context filters information and events and delivers them according to those ideas, social representations or practices which it favours.

The functioning of social thinking is guided, undoubtedly, by those values and ideologies which dominate the social field. Values are seen as intrinsic, absolute truths, embedded ideals, axiologically established, collectively shared, and placed at the foundation of a common moral edifice. Transposed into action, values demand respect for norms, defending them and passing them on. In order to be accepted and incorporated, they attach themselves to the discourse of power which then imposes and propagates them. Ideology is seen as a form of attachment toward the collective values, a form of partisanship and militantism in the service of power (Feertchak, Gamby-Mas, 2009).

We have many contributions, classics today, about the way in which ideology acts upon both collective and individual thinking. In his *German Ideology*, Marx says it clearly, the production of ideas, representations, thinking and conscience are all coming from the material behaviour, from the environment, from the context. People and the relationships established among them seem to be inside a *camera obscura* where the processes of their historical lives impress like objects on the retina. Lenin, in his turn, saw in ideology the perfect tool to fight against his enemies. Ideology, he wrote in, *What Is to Be Done*, is a system of ideas and theories which the protagonists of the class struggle employ in their battles. Ideology is thus a useful tool which is not necessarily dependent on the truth it proposes. To this, we can also add Althusser's contribution. In *Pour Marx*, he maintains that human societies "secrete" ideology as an indispensable element for their breathing, for their historical life.

The conditions inside the context influence the discourse and imply actual relations, interactions, influences. The discourse, including the scientific one, is fuelled by the ideology belonging to the dominant group. Ideologically guided, the discourse "anchors" the individuals in a field, it controls them. Individual biographies are sometimes histories of the way in which the social actor became a "prisoner" of his environment, culturally and ideologically.

What else is to be added? Ideology was and still is used by totalitarian regimes as a tool, having been assigned a utilitarian purpose. It is used to fight against opposing viewpoints, to "counsel" the actors in the social field as to make them understand what the "scientific truth" is, evidently the one favoured and spread by the dominants.

**Context control and the "Psychosocial Net"**

The social context is responsible for the elaboration of the dominant social thinking which determines the social, cultural and economic orientation of a society but also for choosing the practices, including those which are active in the field of knowledge and scientific production. We are going to insist on the importance of the psycho-social context because it plays a determining role in shaping the human thinking which decodes and evaluates information. We will mention some older theories, according to which cognitive development is modelled by the social relationships of those learning (Vygotsky, Piaget) and we will also invoke Doise and Mugny's theory (1997) according to which intelligence develops through the interaction and cooperation of the involved social actors, found in a specific social context. These researches prove that the cognitive development of the individual, his future evolution, is dependent on the social relations, on the relationships among the involved social actors and their reference to the common values, to social thinking or to a dominant ideology. Social context, plays, therefore, an important role in the decoding and processing of information and in the shaping of social thinking.

In dictionaries we find that "**context**" (lat. contextus) means assembly, fabric, interweaving of elements which form a combination, providing meaning and value; assembly of circumstances in which a fact is inserted, ambiance, environment, situation, vicinity. Also, a science of establishing a body, a chemistry of transformation, profound changes, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, even secret, of these bodies (their synthesis, their energy, their power). As an interweaving of norms, laws, traditions and social movements, context puts pressure on the social structures, as well as on the social actors, demanding efforts of adjustments to the proposed and authorized values, attitudes, relations and role-plays. Social context presents itself as a system of ideas and beliefs, norms and traditions which form the cultural and social entourage which the individual evolves in and which is transmitted through education and language. It also provides reference frameworks, brand images, behavioural models and everyday practices, ensuring the socialization and social integration of the individual (Neculau, 2010).

People and human groups form and differentiate themselves according to the cultural environment they frequented and to the behavioural practices within which they developed. Surrounded by specific stimuli, the individual discovers keys with the help of which he will proceed

to decipher all the cultural and ideological messages he will come across. Some biographical details are also important: for instance, if someone during his or her adolescence and youth and even later, frequented a particular group, network, and/or cultural and ideological environment of a certain orientation, (s)he will remain marked by it for the rest of his or her life. Thus, it appears that through its characteristics, context induces value tables, determines the axiological system, and offers behavioural norms and styles.

Not only does context influence social thinking which it decisively marks but it does the same to the social practices and the production of ideas. It has a "mobilizing" role, it polarizes, it provides instructions – for instance, it can determine conformism and stereotypical thinking or cognitive structures (basic cognitive schemes) which can be controlled from outside and manipulated. Moral, economical, cultural and ideological history impregnates the social thinking practiced in a certain context, it particularizes it and anchors it. The contextual influence facilitates a certain type of communication, determines the building of a certain type of discourse, delimits the margin of reflection and offers benchmarks for decisions.

A controlled context or manufactured after a certain recipe produces a particular "social logic" which guides the cognitive activity of the individual, familiarizes him with a certain "normality", helps him rationalize the information from the environment, subordinating it to the basic concept and makes him reject the "anomaly", the exception, everything that comes in contradiction with the "scientific norms" of functioning or with common practices. It is extremely important to remark that controlled context fuels the process of building social representations and it is this social-cognitive heritage that the social actors are going to operate with.

The researchers of the phenomenon of social representations invoke the "effect of the context" on the actors in institutions and communities (Abric, Guimelli, 1998) and describe a reality expressed through norms and cultural practices, a direct consequence of the gradual evolution of democratic societies. For those who formed themselves in countries where the social control was absolute (like those in Eastern Europe), context meant even more: a coercing reality, a social marking, a body of conduct norms which did not give the social actor a chance to reject or choose among many variables. We refer to the socio-global and ideological context and to the immediate, situational context, which, together, built a certain social-historical reality which covered each and every individual as in a net, forcing them to process certain information and to form certain images, beliefs, representations and acquire certain cognitive solutions.

The ones who fuelled their representations from a certain context, "built" according to certain coordinates, "acquired" certain significations and interpretations of the social phenomena and built certain patterns of knowledge organization. Therefore, context can determine a certain outlook of life and of the way society functions, can demand the acquisition of certain norms of conduct by controlling and affecting the situation, can determine the use of particular evaluation frames which mobilize and/or polarize the social actors. Finally, this controlled context forms a certain socio-cognitive scheme, directs the thinking, and determines habits and adherence to standardized normalities. Closer to the reality we have in mind, Ivana Markova (1999), born in the Czech Republic, so in Eastern Europe, says it clearly: the context is responsible for the controlled formation of social representations. They are built (elaborated, maintained) and they evolve within a socio-cultural and historical context, during a very long period of time. They are passed on from one generation to another, in various ways, be them informal (as in the case of socialization, every day practices, collective memory, individual behaviours and the interactions among them, or symbolic communication) or institutional (language, education, legal systems).

From what we have said so far it follows that the individual builds up his or her social representations by reshaping the reality (s)he comes in contact with and which feeds him/her. He integrates this "objective reality" to his cognitive organization and values system, he shapes his history and his reference system by relating himself to the given context. The enunciation of ideas, the production and organization of discourse, the discovery of theories, are all situated in time and space, and are fuelled by the ideological field, by the position the individual or the group holds in the social system. In a way, the individual, by means of his biography, is the "prisoner" of his context, he is counselled as to appropriate a certain discourse which he then spreads out. The significations transmitted through discourse bring individuals closer together, providing them with recognition signs. They establish relationships, they remember things, build images, speak and make people speak, summon up in a few words or sentence a cliché, or a label (Moscovici, Vignaux, 1994). The force-ideas are for the most part induced by mentalities and beliefs, by those representations and practices encouraged by the context. Oftentimes they are productions about something that already exists, about elaborated contents; in our case, they create and maintain identity, the collective equability, the socio-discursive cohesion, the "unity", the "front" and the "line".

Several times (2001, 2006, 2008) we advanced a model of approach and analysis of the various ways in which a context can be controlled, starting from the examination of the social field

in the closed (totalitarian) societies of Eastern Europe, with a special reference to Romania. We first noticed that a context can be built according to certain ideological orientations, benchmarks, instructions and "guidelines". A social actor educated in a controlled context will react according to the images and representations formed within that context. By feeding him with a particular kind of information, by placing him in contexts which are modelled by the guardians of conscience, by bombarding him during his life with certain types of images, interpretations and categories of thinking, that person will acquire these models and reject everything that contradicts that pattern of thought which for him represents normality. The individual does not know that he does not know anything else. In order to stimulate the elaboration and fixation of collective representations, the approach of those leaders who desire certain collective reactions is to group the individuals in artificially created and well-controlled structures, to involve them in collective activities, having common aims, imposed from the outside. Thus, they are directed to establish the expected social representations, to acquire certain cognitive schemes which are then practiced and strengthened in perfectly controlled conditions! Because he did not have the opportunity to be exposed to alternatives, he will consider his context to be the only objective one, the only one real and comprehensible. The social and ideological context, the particularities of the situation, the immediate finality, will provide him with a certain frame of interpretation of the events, with a certain history, with a specific culture, with a discourse having certain characteristics and identification signs. "Armed" with such knowledge, his cognitive productions will look for coherence and harmony with the germinal context.

What is to be understood by a "controlled context"? It refers to the accreditation of an "ideal" social model, the only one authorized, and the institutionalization of a system of unifying norms and practices which come to confirm it. The controlled context functions as a coercing system in which the social values are assembled in a unifying vision, in a cultural and social field which is based on value hierarchies and on appropriate moral references.

For the East Europeans it meant a combination – subordinated to a single objective, that of Control – of cultural ideological prescriptions, expressed through norms and cultural practices, a socio-political "directive", an order which could not be ignored. Both the global, ideological context and the immediate, situational one formed together a network of provisions, stipulations, recommendations, indicators, prescriptions, signs, imprints and symbols which engulfed each and every individual, covering him in a "psychosocial net" which coerced him to think, feel and act in

conformity with the authorized image-symbols, norms, solutions and rituals. This controlled context established a certain "social logic" which influenced the cognitive activity of the individual, familiarizing him with a certain type of "normality" and helping him rationalize the information inside the environment by subordinating it to the basic concept and making him reject the "abnormality", the exception, the aberration, what came in contradiction with the "scientific" norms of social functioning provided by the controlled context. In any totalitarian regime, the context exercised a social pressure toward conformity, cognitively manipulating the formation of social representations or, in the favourite words of Communist Romania, *"the view on the world and life"*.

By analysing the case of totalitarian Romania, we have identified several ways of using the context as a means toward controlled cognitive formation. We have focused upon several areas of social life, deeply marked by ideological pressure and the establishment of some new social practices, areas which shaped the formation of a certain individual profile. This type of individual remained stuck in those cognitive schemes and social practices learned within a system of social control, she has formed adequate representations which she activates every time she is confronted with similar situations. These were: the ideological control of education and social formation; the annexation and loyalization of all public intellectuals, including the academia; the formation of a new, pro-establishment elite; the isolation and elimination of those who refused to join the new regime, the establishment of a generalized atmosphere of fear and the institutionalization of violence ( arrests, deportations, work camps); the control and standardization of everyday life by establishing certain norms of authorized practices, all aiming for a generalized conformity and last but not least a pedagogy of the formation of "the new man", an educational ideal present in all utopian  systems (Neculau, 2008).

We have called *the psychosocial net*, the tool used for total control, which is a combination of psychological pressure and controlled formation. Its aim was to identify, classify, subdue and hypnotize the individual. Since everything was stipulated, controlled, censored, (the word, the gesture, the attitude, the public behaviour, the production of ideas), this atmosphere of distrust and continuous pressure encouraged duplicitous behaviours and obedience. The individual did not have other solutions except for taking refuge in a surface conformism, faking adherence and embracing duality. Oftentimes, however, this adaptation meant an alteration of his personal life and of his cognitive production. Consequently, the individual, slowly but surely, came to identify with the

encouraged model while the social penetrated into the core of his personality smothering his own set of ideas, attitudes and practices until the convenient social roles would set in.

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