

# Questions for the Twenty-first Century

*Serge Moscovici*

## I

The questions that I wish to raise have emerged over the last twenty years, a period in which we have seen and even perhaps helped to bring about a society which has emerged from a kind of hypnotic sleep to work out a different understanding of life. These questions have penetrated our daily lives through social upheavals, various forms of revolt, and through the communication of experiences between West and East. These facts and issues which are now firmly fixed within our minds have aroused debates and social movements to the point of fashioning a new sensibility. However, it is my view that, although they are spread throughout our collective conscience, these questions have still not really penetrated into the social sciences, where they are seen through the eyes of Minerva's owl as it waits for the coming of the evening. Doubtless the last few years of this century will still find us listening to the old instruments, even if they appear to be playing new notes. This situation will continue until the increasing pressure for thoroughgoing change, deriving from the faltering contents of our consciousness, finally overcomes scientific reserve with the completion within the social sciences of a thematic shift.

I do not propose to draw up an exhaustive list of these questions, nor to specify the nature of all the resistances to which they are subject. What I do intend to present, however, in my occasional guise of sociologist in spite of himself, are a few all too rapid reflections pertaining to an exceedingly large domain. They continue some of my earlier thoughts (Moscovici, 1968, 1972, 1974), which happen to have found an echo in the spirit of the times, and to have figured among the germinating influences of social movements, with the result that they have come to assume, too quickly in my opinion, a familiar character. Nevertheless, setting to one side the exceptions that one

---

*Theory, Culture & Society* (SAGE, London, Newbury Park and New Delhi), Vol. 7 (1990), 1-19