

Constructivism in social psychology

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Abstract

Genetic constructivism developed by Piaget and his school is considered to be a grand theory which is also of great relevance for experimental social psychology. However according to J. M. Baldwin, the founder of genetic psychology, and to contemporary researchers in the area of moral judgement and development social psychology, the notion of social performism should be incorporated in constructivist theory. Deutsch's crude law of social relations is cited as a theoretical assumption implying that social preformism can be studied experimentally.

INTRODUCTION

Social psychology, as psychology and science in general, develops following orientations provided by general theories and at the same time is characterized by the more specific dynamics of research methods and procedures. Both sources of influence intervene together with other influences, as for instance competition between scientific teams; furthermore their interrelations are complex. For all these reasons I shall necessarily be incomplete in dealing with the problem of the possible guiding role of constructivism in social psychology.

Still another reason urges me to consider this question with caution. If grand ideatory systems such as evolutionarism, positivism, functionalism, structuralism, dialectical and historical materialism, have undoubtedly been of great influence in the development of social sciences, these grand theories have sometimes also impeded scientific progresses. When discussing the impact of aristotelism Lévy-Bruhl (1927), at the beginning of this century already, developed the idea that general theories can encourage contempt for specific and detailed studies since everything is explained in such general terms as matter and form, means and end. But even more dangerous seems to me the dogmatism often aroused by grand theories and which results in *a priori* condemnations of research efforts not directly linked to those theories. Such condemnations have abounded; perverse effects of grand theories can be indeed

dynamics of 'propaganda'. Moscovici (1961) has described them downstream scientific activity but they seem also at work during scientific activity itself (Doise, 1987).

In my eyes constructionism as developed by Gergen (1985) in social psychology is a grand theory. He emphasizes, along with other authors as Smedslund (1985) in his cultural psychology or Sampson (1987) in his constructionist view on personhood, that 'reality' studied by psychologists is socially constructed, that 'meaning' is culturally and contextually defined, and that therefore the search for general objective laws to account for human behaviour and understanding is not an obvious aim to be pursued by social scientists. Several authors (see for instance Brandtstädter, (1987) Gergen, (1987a) in the constructionist tradition adhere to a new kind of nominalism, according to which the ultimate foundation of our understanding is not to be found in objective reality itself but in language. Gergen (1987b, p. 122ss) for instance stresses that 'the definitional system for psychological terms is essentially self-contained', that mental predicates are usually defined in terms of other mental predicates and that even 'propositions about the external world may generally be converted or reduced to statements about mental conditions'. According to Brandtstädter (1987, pp. 74-79) the study of development in the area of emotions or moral judgment can to an important extent be reduced to the study of the development of conceptual structures characteristic of emotional or socio-moral terms.

My aim here is not to discuss the usefulness of constructionism for social psychologists but to draw their attention to another grand theory: genetic constructivism. Without doubt, the latter theory enjoys historical precedence on the former. If constructivism does not have recourse to the relativistic ideas favoured by many constructionists it nevertheless has important things to say about how individuals, and especially children, construct their reality to paraphrase the title of a classic book by Piaget (1954), originally published in French more than fifty years ago. Surprisingly, constructionists generally do not go into detailed discussions of the Piagetian school of thought (see for instance Gergen and Davis, 1985; Stam, Rogers and Gergen, 1987). Gergen (1985, p. 4) satisfies himself with a reference to Piaget in a footnote explaining that the term constructionism is chosen among other reasons in order to avoid confusion with the term constructivism applied to Piagetian theory. Such a terminological choice is of course fully justifiable but on the other hand it should not prevent social psychologists from inspecting current developments in genetic constructivism. After all, both grand theories share more than a similarity in denomination, and I will try to show in this chapter that also constructivism in the Genevan sense ultimately is to be considered as a form of social constructivism which can inspire social psychologists.

However, in line with my conception of the role of grand theories, constructivism will not be considered as the ultimate salvation for social psychologists. Especially, the scope of this paper is not to propose criteria for defining the nature of research which contributes surely to the development of social psychology and research which does not. In a first section I will briefly present some authoritative views on recent developments in genetic constructivism. Thereafter, a presentation of two approaches of the study of moral judgment will allow me to comment on a research tradition characteristic of social constructivism. In the next sections this conception will be rooted in the programmatic ideas of founding fathers of modern developmental psychology, and contemporary Genevan research on social marking and sociocognitive conflict will be reported as another illustration of a constructivist developmental social psychology. Finally, the compatibility between experimental

method and a constructivist orientation will be commented in referring to Deutsch's (1973) crude law on social relationships.

CONSTRUCTIVISM IN THE PIAGETIAN TRADITION

How can we define constructivism? For Piaget it was first of all a guiding idea in his research on individual cognitive development. Since the thirties Piaget 'determinedly tries to show that neither the structures of the physical world nor the pre-existing cognitive structures can account for the way knowledge is acquired. He elaborates the hypothesis of a subject who actively explores his environment, who actively participates to the creation of space, time and causality. The central question of construction of cognition is raised, which postulates at the same time conservation of the past and creation of novelty. The answer to this question involves determining invariants of thought and explaining innovations and their characteristics which are not reducible to cognitions previously acquired'. (Inhelder and De Caprona, 1985, p. 8). For Piaget constructivism was also a theory to be used in history of science since he postulated a kind of parallelism or continuity between the development of scientific thought and individual cognitive growth to the extent that in both realms: 'the intervening mechanisms have very important common characteristics'. (Piaget and Garcia, 1983, p. 292). Such a generalization is of course characteristic of grand theorizing, but it is not sure that historians of science have taken Piaget's ideas very seriously until now.

For my present concern I prefer to point to a recent development of constructivism in cognitive psychology. This development is due to Inhelder (1983) who has introduced a distinction between structure and procedure, macrogenesis and microgenesis, construction of grand categories of thought as described by Piaget and construction of more specific mechanisms of problem solving as she studies herself. Inhelder and De Caprona (1987, p. 11) develop this distinction in following terms: 'Whereas the former studies were intended to elucidate the epistemic subject — i.e. what is common to the cognitive structures at a given point in development — the new approach was meant to help in getting closer to a real subject, including his intentions, plans and means for controlling his actions. It also allowed us to realize that it was possible to reach mechanisms that would be more subtle than those that were demonstrated as macrogenetic transformations'. Procedures are necessary to make function structural organizations although both systems of regulations can generate reorganizations in the other system (see also Inhelder and De Caprona, 1985).

Other researchers have used similar distinctions between operational structures and various cognitive regulations, for instance in the field of differential cognitive psychology (De Ribaupierre and Pascal-Leone, 1984). It is important to underline that such distinctions do not prevent their authors from envisaging reciprocal influences between structural development and other regulations. This is an innovation in Piagetian theory; cognitive development is not longer exclusively thought of as a linear development of basic structures, other regulations can intervene in that general development. However, both kind of regulations, procedures and structures, and their interlinking remain generally conceptualized as individual organizations. This is no longer the case for an important offspring of Piaget's work on moral development and for recent Genevan research on social marking and sociocognitive conflict.

Reporting below on these research traditions will also enable me to show how recent developmental social psychology explains novelty in individual development, an

important task attributed to constructivism by authors as Gréco (1985) and Inhelder and De Caprona (1985).

DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF MORAL JUDGEMENT

In order to illustrate the usefulness of constructivism in domains familiar to social psychologists I will first describe a less constructivist and a more constructivist explanatory model. Both models have been heuristic but I think that the more constructivist one can solve problems, theoretically and practically, which are not accounted for by the less constructivist one.

Lerner and Kohlberg have worked on the problem of justice, but undoubtedly the latter has developed a more constructivist approach. According to Lerner (1980) a fundamental belief in a just world is very widespread in modern societies and makes people think that positive and negative sanctions are not randomly distributed among individuals. Although the origin and development of this belief is not studied, it is assumed to be a prerequisite for individuals' functioning in our society; it is indeed difficult to conceive of motivations to act and to obey rules in a world where the fate of individuals would be randomly determined. Lerner's experiments are designed to illustrate the intervention of this belief in very different conditions, and often use the procedure of the 'innocent victim' who receives electric shocks during a learning task. The victim is relatively derogated when he or she is not paid for participating in the experiment, when suffering has to go on, or takes place to the benefit of the observers. In such conditions it is postulated that their belief in a just world leads observers to seek for justifications, which they locate in unfavourable characteristics attributed to the innocent victim. Such justifications are less necessary when the victim has a reason for suffering (e.g. monetary rewards), or does not have to suffer longer, or when the observers are less concerned. Recent research on victimization (Janoff-Bulman and Bulman and Hanson Frieze, 1983) is often guided by similar hypotheses.

This does not mean that belief in a just world cannot be called in to account for more altruistic reactions. According to Meindl and Lerner (1984), knowledge that rights of others are violated makes people feel highly indignant and gives sometimes rise to 'heroic' attempts to restore justice. Belief in a just world would explain, on the one hand, intense efforts to meet the needs of near relations and, on the other hand, discriminatory behaviour to distant people who live in a world of injustice they apparently 'deserve' (Lerner, 1977). Hence the relevance of this theory for the study of intergroup relations as indicated by Tajfel (1984).

The same organizing principle is invoked by Lerner to explain very different feelings and behaviours. The construction of the justice belief itself is not studied and therefore the theory can only be considered constructivist to the extent that it allows researchers to analyse how people give sense to various situations using the same basic principle. Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories on moral judgment are constructivist in a more basic sense: both theories aim to study how justice principles change during individual development. In Piaget's (1932) theory interaction with peers is an important motor of change as it leads to systematic coordinations of intentions between individuals allowing them to negotiate transformations of rules and contracts and to establish standards of truth and honesty. According to his theory, relations of authority and obedience alone could not generate such moral autonomy. To an extent perhaps greater than Piaget admits it, Durkheim's (1902) distinction between mechanic and organic solidarity is echoed in this theory.

Kohlberg's (1981, 1983) account of moral development is much more sophisticated as he distinguishes six stages from a very egocentric first stage to an idealized sixth one. At this most advanced level individuals are supposed to reason in terms of moral universals and to take into consideration on an equal basis the points of view of all other individuals to be affected by one's decisions. The developmental status of Kohlberg's stages has been widely discussed; from my point of view it would be as wrong to pretend that one individual in a given developmental phase functions necessarily at one single stage as to assume that the order of succession of the different stages is completely arbitrary. For my present concern it is however important to evidence the particular theoretical status of the sixth stage.

Kohlberg, Levine and Hower (1983) admit that reasoning at this stage is exceptional. More importantly, requirements for functioning at such an advanced level include intentions to communicate freely, in full respect of oneself and all others, in order to reach an agreement on truth and justice. Such an ideal of rational communicative activity is also the cornerstone of other modernistic theories and is to be considered as an important social representation bearing on idealized relationships which can never become completely true but which are nevertheless important organizing principles of actions and judgments: 'In our theoretical conception, a sixth stage is based on a process of ideal role-taking or "moral musical chairs" in which each person imaginatively changes places with every other in the dilemma before stating his claims as rightful. This conception of ideal role-taking attempts to synthesize Dewey's views, Mead's (1934) reconstruction of Kant's categorical imperative as universalizable role-taking, Rawls' (1971) social contract theory, and Habermas's (1979) conception of discursive will formation' (Kohlberg *et al.*, 1983, p. 87).

It seems to me that such a conception may explain the results obtained by Emler, Renwick and Malone (1983) or by Sparks and Durkin (1987) who do not only find out that students who consider themselves to be conservative or radical use more arguments respectively of stage 4 (respect for law and order as necessary for social functioning) or stage 5 (contractual basis of social rules and hierarchy of values), but who also show that conservative students invited to answer as radicals reach the fifth stage and that *vice versa* the radical students remain at the fourth stage when they are supposed to act as conservatives. Such results mean that relevant social representations are actualized in these pretend conditions, but more generally, they illustrate the role of social representations in moral development.

I have mentioned that Piaget (1932) considers peer interaction as the motor of moral development and it remains important for Kohlberg who also stresses the function of socio-cognitive conflict. Oser (1986, p. 922) summarizes the conditions for generating constructive discussions based on such conflicts in order to further moral education: '1. presentation of the subjective truth completely and exhaustively (competence) as conceived by the participants in the conflict; 2. absence of an authority presenting an outside or observer's point of view of the "right" answer; 3. creation of a disequilibrium by presenting different arguments and different opinions to stimulate development of moral judgment on increasingly complex grounds; 4. interaction among students (discussants) coordinated in such a way that everyone reacts openly and fairly to one another's point of view (positive climate and transactional discourse); 5. linking of the principles of discourse to the principles of justice'.

Oser's five conditions are without doubt difficult to meet permanently in most educational and institutional contexts and few empirical illustrations, if any, are

available proving the validity of these ideas in applied research. On the other hand short term and experimental interventions have often resulted in progress of moral reasoning (see Oser, 1986). These difficulties are inherent to the constructive nature of the theory. In order to establish its validity not only the researchers, but also the population studied, have to adhere to the basic assumptions of the theory. More particularly, advanced stages of moral reasoning cannot emerge if subjects under study, but also other key figures in their environment, do not pursue at least implicitly the ideal of free communication which is at the same time a necessary condition as well as an important result of moral development. In the remaining sections I will show that this theoretical problem of the restructuring of effects in its antecedents has been envisaged since the beginning of developmental psychology and that recent empirical research shows that the problem is solvable.

HISTORICAL ROOTS OF DEVELOPMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In Doise and Mugny's (1984) experiments on the social development of the intellect, experimental situations are constructed in such a way that they permit individual deficient approaches to be coordinated in more complex regulations which are of course already known before by the experimenters. These regulations can be considered novel for the child but they nevertheless were previously incorporated in the experimental material and situation. To some extent the more advanced cognitive structures to be achieved by the child are already modelled in the situation. This brings us to the beginning of constructive developmental psychology, and more precisely to Baldwin who has 'opened perspectives in his "genetic logics" which could be assimilated to a construction of cognitive structures' (Inhelder and De Caprona, 1985, p. 7).

But in opposition to the Genevan developmental psychologists Baldwin's thinking is directly based on a general conception of society: 'The society into which the child is born is, therefore, not to be conceived merely as a loose aggregate, made up of a number of biological individuals. It is rather a body of mental products, an established network of psychical relationships. By this the new person is moulded and shaped to his maturity. ... Society is a mass of mental and moral states and values, which perpetuates itself in individual persons. In the personal self, the society is individualized' (Baldwin, 1913, pp. 107-108). Furthermore contemporary social psychologists were congratulated by Baldwin (*ibidem*) for having already studied man as 'a society individualised': 'The outline of the individual gradually appears, and at every stage it shows the pattern of the social situation in which it becomes constantly a more and more adequate and competent unit. This process the social psychologist has patiently traced out; and apart from details, on which opinions differ, it constitutes a positive gain to our knowledge'.

Is constructivism therefore to be reduced to a modelling effect or to social learning only based on positive and negative reinforcement? Another important intellectual tradition has produced tools which were not very apparent in Baldwin's work inspired by Tarde's (1890, 1898) ideas on the role of imitation. The place where these tools can be found is to be located 'between Philosophy and Psychology' (Doise, 1985) and was described by Cattaneo (1864) in one of his five lectures delivered to the Royal Lombardic Institute of Sciences, Letters and Arts. This lecture recommended in its title 'Antithesis as a Method for Social Psychology'. Social psychology is defined as a

'Psicologia delle menti associate' and has to study 'how the most eminent performances of science and ethics are obtained in agreements and disagreements between men in close interaction. . .' (Cattaneo, 1864, p. 264).

The main mechanism formulated by Cattaneo to explain the difference between the achievements of collective and single minds is conflict, and he describes how the negation of an idea during conflicts between individuals can lead to the elaboration of a new idea 'which arises from the conflict between different minds and would not arise in agreeing minds or in a single mind' (*ibidem*, p. 265). Merely raising an idea may be sufficient in creating an opposition, and even if the resulting conflict can be considered as affective, it also involves cognitive coordinations. 'Each objection asks for answer; each reasoning asks for a reasoning which is logically complementary and which forces opposed ideas into an unseparable whole. In regard to passion, people who discuss are fighters, in regard to the world of ideas they are smiths hammering the same iron-piece; they are blind instruments of a common undertaking. Each new effort adds a link to the chain which tows both parties into the vortex of truth' (*Ibidem*, p. 268).

A certain exuberance in emphasizing the positive aspects of conflict characterizes the lecture by Carlo Cattaneo. But his ideas on what is now called sociocognitive conflict are still valid and deserve to be studied in relation to historical as well as to individual cognitive growth. In this sense, his social psychology points to the necessity of integrating the study of individual and social dynamics: the *Psicologia delle menti associate* is a necessary link between the cognitive study of the individual (l'ideologia dell'individuo) and the cognitive study of society (l'ideologia della società). Half a century later, Baldwin (1913, p. 106) reached the same conclusion: 'The need became apparent for a genetic and social psychology, which would reveal the state of the individual mind in given social conditions; the relation, that is, between individual and collective "representation", to extend somewhat the phraseology of the French writers referred to in the discussion of primitive thought'.

I think that the task of contemporary social psychologists is to translate such general ideas in the study of specific processes. At least this was the aim which has guided the research on the effect of social marking and sociocognitive conflict in cognitive operations.

SOCIAL MARKING AND SOCIOCOGNITIVE CONFLICT

The notion of social marking refers to the correspondences which may exist between, on the one hand, the social relations presiding over the interaction of persons actually or symbolically present in a given situation, and on the other hand, the cognitive relations bearing on certain properties of the objects through which these social relations materialize. The specificity of social relations in a given situation depends on a system of norms and representations which exist prior to the situation. Of course these norms and representations may be modified in a particular situation. These changes do not occur in an arbitrary way: a certain necessity characterizes the principles and schemata which govern the development of social interaction. But also at the level of cognitive organization, necessity is invoked, especially that which characterizes the operational structures described by Piaget. The notion of social marking was introduced to study the links between principles of social regulation and principles of cognitive regulation; experiments were designed to show how the

regulatory effects of the former intervene in the cognitive structuring of judgments on physical objects.

There are now plenty of experiments showing such effects as a recent review chapter by De Paolis, Doise and Mugny (1987) reports. These experiments have in common to compare conditions in which social relations are made salient with conditions in which these relations are less salient, and to use materials involved in these social relations (conditions of social marking) compared with materials less relevant for them (unmarked conditions). In specific conditions cognitive actions carried out on socially marked material are better structured than actions on other objects. After having participated in socially marked conditions individuals carry over their more advanced structuring on unmarked materials. An important mechanism for producing such effects is sociocognitive conflict.

Sociocognitive conflict is assumed to exist when, in the one and same situation, different cognitive approaches to the same problem are socially produced. Especially in conditions of social marking, the confrontation of these different approaches may result in their being coordinated into a new approach, more complex and better adapted to solving the problem at hand. This confrontation does not necessarily occur between individuals; in order to cause a cognitive reorganization it is often enough that an individual's incorrect cognitive approach to a given task is opposed to a social regulation.

Let me briefly summarize one experiment on social marking (Doise, Rijsman, Van Meel, Bressers and Pinxten, 1981). Only children who were initially non-conservers on a conservation of liquids test took part in the experimental task; in certain experimental conditions (with social marking) the experimenter told the children that because they have both done a good job they both deserved a drink, one as much as the other. Ensuring that the shares, to be poured in two glasses of different dimensions, were indeed equal was left to the children themselves. Being non-conservers (i.e. tending to evaluate the amount of liquid in the glasses only in terms of the level it reached without also taking into account the width of the glasses) they usually made errors in estimating the equality of their respective shares. In other conditions without social marking, the experimenter did not stress the two partners' equal merits, and children had to judge about the equality of amounts of liquid. Moreover, in one half of every condition, the experimental session took place directly with an actual partner, in the other half with a 'symbolic' partner who allegedly was to join the child later. Results in fact showed that the subjects who believed they deserved equal shares progressed more (and also on generalization measures which vouch for the authenticity of their progress) than the subjects in the control condition where the requirement of sharing equally had not been stressed. Furthermore, even when the child was left alone to pour out and decide on the equality of the shares for himself and for his absent partner, the same effect was observed: an individual working on his own may still be faced with conflicting responses if he must abide to a social rule. Also, the fact that the children in the condition 'without merit' progressed considerably less indicates the importance of emphasizing a social norm in order to generate the sociocognitive conflicts that lead children to cognitive progress.

Social marking and sociocognitive conflict are not only important theoretical tools for studying particular cognitive restructurings, they are also important for building a more general constructivist theory of cognitive development. The social marking notion allows for introducing a kind of pre-structuring in the theory, and its articulation with the notion of sociocognitive conflict makes room for novelty and

variety or at least for reorganizations for preexisting approaches. To some extent both notions translate the more general ideas of Cattaneo and Baldwin in research paradigms to work with. They offer a social psychological version of notions such as disturbance of equilibrium (Piaget, 1975), response competition (Berlyne, 1960), mismatch of responses (Andrew, 1976), and stress the social origins of the complementary schemes and procedures described by Inhelder (1983).

CIRCULAR CAUSALITY AND EXPERIMENTAL SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

In experiments on the social development of cognition situations are structured in such a way that they necessarily make intervene the experimenter's conceptions of advanced cognitive functioning. A series of experiments, rather than a single experiment, will not only illustrate the appropriateness of this preconceptions, but often will transform them. The fact remains that very often cognitive or social moral structures are shown to function because they were already present in the way experimenters constructed their research procedures. This was not often made explicit by genetic constructivists, therefore constructionists should be credited for drawing attention to this important characteristic of experimentation. Indeed I do not hesitate to apply to experimentation itself the following statements of Gergen (1987a, p. 6) on the contextual dependency of meaning: 'The forestructure of understanding is generated within the social process of developing intelligibility systems. In this sense, what we take to be facts owe their existence to the social process whereby meanings are generated and events indexed by these meanings. There are no independently identifiable, real world referents to which the language of social description is cemented'. Such a conclusion is certainly not incompatible with the social constructivist approach underlying the work on the social development of the intellect. If it is also generally true that there 'are no independently identifiable, real world referents' this does not prevent me from assuming that experimental situations, constructed as such, refer in fact to other social situations with whom they are linked in complex ways. It is for instance very likely that experimental situations actualize organisatory principles of social representations which intervene also in other more naturalistic situations (see Semin, 1987).

Of course the above considerations necessitate changes in current conceptions of causality in sociopsychological experiments. If the intervention of antecedent conditions in subsequent effects is studied in a specific experimental setting, the links which are brought into focus are only local links and it is indeed very important to locate them in the more general frame of a 'forestructure of understanding'. In such a framework causality should often be envisaged as bidirectional and also the effects of anticipated consequences should be taken into consideration. Sociopsychological research on moral and cognitive development has recourse to such experiments in limited settings and they illustrate aspects of relationships which are difficult to observe in more naturalistic conditions but which are without doubt forestructured in such conditions. In that sense, it is obvious that not only the experimental situation, but that also the whole social and cultural context common to the experimenters and their subjects contained the set of cognitive structures actualized by subjects in experiments on social marking and on sociocognitive conflict.

The intervention of such 'forestructuring' is not only true for research in developmental social psychology. More than fifteen years ago Deutsch (1973) has

already formulated a general 'crude law' vehiculating a conception of causality which is compatible with the ideas developed above.

In a survey of his work on conflict and cooperation Deutsch (1985, p. 68) tries to answer the following question: 'What are the conditions that give rise to a constructive or destructive process of conflict resolution?' The answer he draws from his multiple experiments is summarized in 'Deutsch's crude law of social relations' which states that *'the characteristic processes and effects elicited by a given type of social relationship also tend to elicit that type of social relationship'*. Applied to the study of conflict and cooperation the general law is illustrated in the following way: 'Thus, cooperation induces and is induced by a perceived similarity in beliefs and attitudes, a readiness to be helpful, openness in communication, trusting and friendly attitudes, sensitivity to common interests and deemphasis of opposed interests, an orientation toward enhancing mutual power rather than power differences, and so on. Similarly, competition induces and is induced by the use of tactics of coercion, threat, or deception; attempts to enhance the power differences between oneself and the other; poor communication; minimization of the awareness of similarities in values and increased sensitivity to opposed interests; suspicious and hostile attitudes; the importance, rigidity, and size of the issues in conflict; and so on' (Deutsch, 1985, pp. 69-70).

Knowing the effects of a social relationship it is therefore possible, according to Deutsch's law to induce the relationship itself. Actualizing consequences lead to the actualization of complex systems of relationships which preexist to a specific experimental situation. This is possible because more generally causes and consequences are parts of social wholes. Experimentation can lead to the elucidation of the organizing principles of the whole, or at least to specifying and clarifying our ideas on the matter. This seems to me especially evident in the experimental study of social representations (see for instance Abric, 1984; Codol, 1984; Flament, 1984).

CONCLUSION

Making explicit implications of genetic constructivism seems useful for orienting research in other domains of social sciences. As a general theory it assumes a close intertwining of explanatory models, of research procedures and of reality under study. This was more particularly illustrated in this paper for the case of developmental social psychology but elsewhere (Doise, in preparation) I have also argued that in the area of intergroup studies concepts used by investigators and the general beliefs attributed to their subjects are not separate universes.

Another conclusion is that cognitive constructivism in the Piagetian sense is to be completed by a more general theory of socioconstructivism. Social psychology was from the beginning entrusted by Baldwin with an important mission (see above) and some contemporary scholars on the borderline between developmental and social psychology have now got the message. Much remains to be done contrary to Baldwin's optimistic statement on social psychology.

Inhelder (1983) has added an important new idea to Piagetian development constructivism with her distinction between different kinds of cognitive regulations. But her distinction has to be further elaborated in order to give an explicit conceptual status to social regulations and social procedures intervening in cognitive development. Research on social marking and sociocognitive conflict pursues this aim.

In order to explain similarity between cognitive functioning of children and aspects of social representations Moscovici distinguished already in the beginning of the sixties between a system of cognitive operations and a metasystem of normative social regulations orienting and controlling the cognitive functioning. Indeed different systems of communication may ask for different forms of cognitive functioning and that is not only a central idea of developmental social psychology but also of research on social representations (see Palmonari and Doise, 1986).

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