

A BOOK OF RECONCILIATION?

Review of
M. Augoustinos & I. Walker,
Social Cognition—An Integrated Introduction.
London: Sage, 1995 (pp. 345)

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A book on social cognition which promises to integrate cognition with modern social constructionist and social representation approaches creates interest. It is a daring enterprise if one considers the sometimes "hot" discussions between representatives of these different approaches in modern social psychology as well as the mutual regard existing between those and social cognitivists. Nevertheless the present book attempts to integrate social cognition within a general framework of social representation theory. Having in mind the rather misleading treatment of social representations theory in the recently published second edition of Hewstone, Stroebe and Stephenson's "Introduction to Social Psychology", such an attempt must be applauded.

The book consists of two relatively disparate parts: The first one, Theoretical Perspectives in Social Cognition, provides an overview of core theories in present day social psychology. These are attitudes, social schemas, attributions, social identity and social representations. The chapters are written in a mainstream text book format for students and therefore do not transcend what we are used to from those books. The only exception is the rather extended chapter on social representations which usually is not treated in mainstream text books.

The second part, Integrations, Applications and Challenges, appears to be the core part of the book and is refreshing to read for scholars in the field. Three chapters of the second part are dedicated to the relationships of social representations to schemata, attributions and intergroup stereotypes. They present evidence for the fact that the working of the cognitive apparatus is widely influenced by underlying social representations produced by groups. An additional chapter on ideology, a field of special expertise of the first author, Marthy Augoustinos, embraces social representations, discursive processes and material practises in large groups.

A separate chapter on Postmodern Challenges to Social Cognition discusses discursive psychology and social constructionists' theoretical perspectives and their consequences

for social cognition. While valuable by itself, this chapter fails to connect to the overall intention of the book: to integrate modern and classical social psychology.

Like so many other books in English language, this part as well as the next one suffer from a consequent neglect of non-English research literature. This is most—but not only—evident in the social representations chapter. Neither originating from the US nor from another English speaking country, social representations theory has produced a wealth of French, Spanish, Portuguese and Italian papers in various journals and books. None of these papers is used in the respective chapter. This explains the authors' rather "traditional" approach towards social representations theory which rarely considers any research more recent than 1990. (To be just: the omission of more recent literature may also be due to a lag in the publication process.)

The authors share an empiricist approach to social psychology. This allows them to compare social cognition with social representation research and theories. While it is true that one *can* compare divergent approaches on this level, a more thorough comparison would need to include a meta-theoretical discussion as well. On a meta-theoretical level social cognition and social representation approaches diverge much more profoundly than on the empirical level. At this super-ordinate level, integration is a much more difficult job and it is legitimate to doubt whether integration is possible at all. This implies to compare the epistemological preliminaries of representative authors in the fields, their interest in what to explain or describe of social reality and their ontological presuppositions. What usually goes unsaid in the majority of theoretical and empirical papers are exactly these presuppositions. Knowing them makes the difference between understanding the gist of a paper and missing its point.

I am sure that the authors are aware of the meta-theoretical preliminaries of social cognition on the one hand and the social representation approach, discourse analysis and social constructionism on the other hand. This makes their omission even less understandable. Such a discussion would deserve mention in the book which declares itself as an integrative text.

At the end of the day I was left with an ambiguous feeling. On the one hand it is an excellent introductory text to traditional and modern approaches in social psychology. In any case it deserves a warm welcome and serious recommendation on the reading lists for our students. It covers to a considerable extent—with the exception of non-English literature and a time lag of 5 years—the existing research and gives a particularly well structured overview on all topics covered. On the other hand, the attempted integration of social cognition—being rather exclusively based on the methodological fast-food of paper-pencil tests and arid research topics—with discourse psychology, social representations and social constructionism is at best an *hors d'œuvre*.¹ It leaves one hungry and waiting for the main course to come.

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¹ What about a Taramasalata Martha?