

THE CYCLE OF RIGHTS AND DUTIES IN INTERGROUP RELATIONS: INTEROBJECTIVITY AND PERCEIVED JUSTICE RE-ASSESSED

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► The Research Context

From the late 1960s, a group of European researchers launched a historic movement to provide a corrective balance to reductionism in psychology (see Moghaddam, 1987, 2002, following Doise 1978, 1986). The senior members of this movement, Serge Moscovici, Henri Tajfel, and Rom Harré had the collaboration of a highly inspired and productive group of younger scholars, among them Willem Doise, John Turner, and Mick Billig. The long-term influence of this movement is most clearly visible in at least three lines of research. First on social representations (Doise, Clémence & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993; Moscovici, 1976), second on social identity theory and its variations (Turner, 1999), and third on narrative psychology and positioning theory (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). However, the movement has also had a wider, more indirect global influence. The social representations approach to human rights, spearheaded by Doise (2002), has evolved to be international, and has led to a greater focus on universal and local features of both rights and duties (Finkel & Moghaddam, in press).

In this discussion I turn my attention to a puzzling question that arises from the research of Doise and his colleagues on human rights (Doise, 2002; Doise, Clémence, & Lorenzi-Cioldi, 1993). Through multi-national surveys, Doise and

In line with efforts by Doise (1978, 2002) and others to give more importance to collective processes and justice, this paper outlines a cycle of rights and duties in intergroup relations. It is posited that in situations of conflict and/or change, minority groups give priority to rights and majority groups give priority to duties (Moghaddam & Riley, in press). However, once a minority comes to power and becomes the majority group, it shifts from giving priority to rights to priority to duties. The concept of interobjectivity (Moghaddam, 2003), an understanding shared within and between groups about social reality, is used to examine how majority groups can shape minority group representations of rights and duties, sometimes to the detriment of minorities.

Keywords: justice, majority/minority, rights & duties, interobjectivity

Le cycle des droits et des devoirs dans les relations intergroupes : ré-examen de l'inter-objectivité et de la justice perçue

Dans le sillage des efforts déployés par Doise (1978, 2002) et d'autres pour accorder davantage d'importance aux processus collectifs et à la justice, le présent article présente un cycle de droits et de devoirs dans les relations intergroupes. L'idée est que dans des situations de conflit et/ou de changement, les groupes minoritaires donnent la priorité aux droits et les groupes majoritaires aux devoirs (Moghaddam & Riley, à paraître). Toutefois, lorsqu'un groupe minoritaire accède au pouvoir et devient majoritaire, il cesse de donner la priorité aux droits pour donner la priorité aux devoirs. Le concept d'interobjectivité (Moghaddam, 2003), conception de la réalité sociale partagée au sein des groupes et entre les groupes, nous permet de voir comment les groupes majoritaires peuvent modeler les représentations des droits et des devoirs chez les membres de groupes minoritaires, quelquefois au dépens des minorités.

Mots-clés: justice, majorité/minorité, droits & devoirs, interobjectivité

others have shown high consistency among young people across national groups on social representations of human rights. Their findings show that young people of different Western and non-Western nations now hold very similar social representations of human rights. This raises questions about how people come to have shared representations, such as in the area of rights and duties. I argue that shared representations are fundamentally influenced by, among other factors, the characteristics of groups. In particular, I focus on the priority given to rights and duties by groups that enjoy different levels of power. Specifically, a 'cycle' of support for rights and duties is identified in the course of power struggles between groups: in situations of conflict and change, minority groups give priority to rights and majority groups give priority to duties (Moghaddam & Riley, in press). If the minority group manages to gain power and becomes the new majority group, then it will switch priorities from rights to duties. Conversely, a majority that loses power and becomes a minority group will switch priorities from duties to rights. I begin by briefly reviewing research on the concept of *intersubjectivity*, the idea that different individuals can and often do have different worldviews, but in order to communicate with others, they collaboratively construct a worldview that is to some extent shared. Next, I explore the concept of *interobjectivity* (Moghaddam, 2003), the understandings about social reality that are shared within and between cultures. This is a new term encapsulating old ideas, much discussed by scholars concerned with collaboratively constructed and mutually upheld social realities (e.g., Harré & Secord, 1972). Finally, I outline a

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'cycle' of support for rights and duties among minority and majority groups.

Traditional Psychology and Intersubjectivity

How do I come to share understandings of the world with the other? Such questions have been addressed through philosophical inquiry, as in Wittgenstein's private language argument (1953, paras 240-315), but the return of mental life and the self to psychology has also allowed for empirical exploration of shared understanding. Perhaps the most interesting line of research related to this question is focused on infants and addresses the possible inborn ability of imitation (Nadel & Butterworth, 1999). Meltzoff and others (Meltzoff & Moore, 1983) have argued that newborn infants demonstrate imitation behavior, and that instances of 'deferred imitation' and corrective behavior to alter imitation show that infants are capable of behavior that is truly imitative, rather than just reactive. Furthermore, the argument has been made that imitation involves intersubjectivity, implying that some basic aspects of intersubjectivity are innate. For instance, when an infant pokes her tongue out after she sees an adult poke her tongue out, some basic level of an understanding of another is involved, and was already present when the infant arrived into this world. The evidence so far does suggest that imitation at some level may be inborn, but the implications of this evidence for understanding of the other remain open to interpretation (Moghaddam, 2003).

Research on intersubjectivity has neglected two fundamentally important issues: first, power inequalities between parties who come to develop shared understanding. As the case of the infant and caretaker makes clear, although there is mutual influence between the two, clearly the caretaker enjoys far greater power. The relative powerlessness of the infant compared to the caretaker is symbolic of other relationships in society: the relative powerlessness of the economically poorest compared to the richest groups in society, those with low education compared to the highly educated groups, the politically disenfranchised (for example, in the US this includes about two million people in prison, a very disproportionately high number of African Americans among them), compared to those who hold high political office, and so on. Clearly, the influence of different groups in shaping understandings in areas such as rights and duties, both their own and that of others' is unequal.

The second neglected issue in research on intersubjectivity is the collective context from which more complex understandings of the other arise. The infant and caretaker do not exist in a vacuum. Rather, their relationship develops within a cultural context that provides strong guides about who they are, what groups they belong to, and how they should behave. The infant and caretaker are located within various larger groups, based on ethnicity, gender, religion, social class, sexual orientation, and so on, and from these there arises individual understanding of justice issues related to the self, the in-group, and others. Indeed, the shared understanding of justice and other important issues, within the cultural context, together with various differences in understanding across groups, are already present and ready to impose their influence when the infant arrives on the scene. This larger context deserves greater research attention.

Interobjectivity and Power

My argument, then, is that intersubjectivity arises out of interobjectivity; that the understanding that individuals have of one another arise out of the understanding that groups have within and between themselves. By implication, the characteristics of the group are important in shaping individual understanding, an issue I want to explore by focusing on group power and using the example of human rights, a demand placed on others by the person who possesses it (Moghaddam, 2000), and duties, a demand placed by others on the person who owes it (Moghaddam, Slocum, Finkel & Harré, 2000).

Our starting point is the relationship between rights and duties. I have argued elsewhere that rights and duties are almost always replaceable: a right can be reinterpreted as a duty, just as a duty can be reinterpreted as a right (Moghaddam, 2000; Moghaddam & Riley, in press). My right to vote in an election can be reinterpreted as my duty to vote, my duty to speak out can be reinterpreted as my right to speak out, and so on. Given that in most instances the same action can be interpreted as a right or a duty, what influences whether an act is actually interpreted as a right or a duty? I argue that a major influencing factor is the characteristics of the in-group! This point can be clarified by considering an instructive case where rights and duties are not readily replaceable.

Consider the case of my 'duty to obey the law', which is not readily replaced by inserting 'right' for 'duty'. My 'right to obey the law' is nonsensical, because the law already implies a lack of 'choice', in the sense that the law has to be obeyed, and there are punishments for breaking the law. Besides, whether we agree or disagree with a specific law, we generally agree that law and order will break down if people decide it is their right to choose to obey the laws they like and to disobey the ones they do not like. Indeed, widespread disobedience and disregard for the law is a characteristic of a breakdown of social order and even collapse of society, as it is known, after riots, rebellions, and revolutions.

This implies that the law is not politically neutral on the question of the survival of a particular political order. Rather, the law upholds the *status quo*, the existing power structure and relationships between groups, be they characterized by inequalities or otherwise. By extension, the agents of the law, the police, the law courts, and others who help to uphold 'law and order' also serve to uphold the existing social roles and social relationships. They do this particularly by enforcing restrictions on behavior, and these mirror the specifics of the general 'duty to obey the law' (specifics such as speed limits on the road, zoning restrictions for businesses, age limits on drinking, and so on). Of course, formal law does not encompass every type of behavior.

In addition to formal or 'black letter' law, there are informal or 'commonsense' duties that also regulate behavior. Most such duties are associated with particular social roles, such as duties associated with the role of being a mother, a father, or a 'good friend'. There are countless duties associated with the role of citizen. Some such duties are in the special category of *supererogatory duties*, these being duties an individual will be praised for performing, but not morally blamed for omitting (for example, saving a child

from a burning building). However, the most important duties of citizens, particularly those of obeying the law and supporting the authorities, are obligatory from the viewpoint of authorities and the power elite, and become controversial in times of inter-group conflict. This is particularly so when the conflict is between minority and majority groups, characterized as they are by power inequalities.

In most instances majority groups emphasize and endorse duties, particularly duties in relation to law and order. Thus, the elite in different sectors of society, including business, government, the military, the church, the media, and education, have a vested interest in supporting duties as traditionally understood in their societies, particularly the duties of employees, students, and citizens generally to obey the law. On the other hand, the non-elite, those who lack power and wealth, have a vested interest in extending rights. Thus, the main slogans of movements representing minorities have been about rights rather than duties, as in 'women's rights', 'Black rights', 'gay rights' and so on, and not 'women's duties', 'Black duties', 'gay duties', and the like. Differences between the views of the elite and the non-elite with respect to rights and duties become highlighted under certain conditions: "In relationships that are (a) changing, so that the norms and rules of behavior are uncertain, or (b) adversarial, so that conflict is actual or very possible, those with equal or less power will give priority to rights and those who enjoy greater power will give priority to duties" (Moghaddam & Riley, in press, pp.6-7). Consider, for example, the relationship between parents and children, characterized as it is by continuous change and actual or potential conflict, as the child gets older and strives for greater independence and freedom from parental restrictions. In the process of growing up and making new demands ("I am old enough to drive now, I should be allowed to stay out later at night", "I am old enough to decide for myself what kinds of clothes I need", and so on), children focus on their rights, whereas parents highlight the duties of children ("you can't go out tonight, because you have to do your homework", "you have to change your clothes and make yourself presentable in front of our guests", and the like). The duties of children are also given priority by schools and other agents of socialization, particularly the church.

This tendency for the less powerful (e.g., children) to highlight rights, and for the more powerful (e.g., parents) to highlight duties is most visible at times of social change, such as the decade of the 1960s in Western societies. In the next section, I explore this issue further by considering the case of revolutionary change, when those who emphasize rights before a revolution often emphasize duties after they come to power.

The Cycle of Rights and Duties

My contention in this section is that support for rights and duties on the part of groups that enjoy different levels of power follows a cyclical pattern. In order to better understand this pattern, it is useful to use Pareto's (1935) elite theory as our guide, because the cyclical pattern of support for rights and duties shadows the cyclical relationship between elites and non-elites as described by Pareto.

Pareto's elite theory in important respects follows up on ideas already presented by Plato over 2,500 years ago,

particularly in *The Republic* (for a recent social psychological variation of this theory, see Taylor & Moghaddam, 1994, ch.8). The ideal society depicted by Plato is governed by the most 'talented' and well-educated group. However, this group faces dangers, because in order to survive society must remain open to circulation:

"You are, all of you in this community, brothers. But when god fashioned you, he added gold in the composition of those of you who are qualified to be Rulers...silver in the Auxiliaries, and iron and bronze in the farmers and other workers. Now since you are all of the same stock, though your children will commonly resemble their parents, occasionally a silver child will be born of golden parents, or a golden child of silver parents, and so on. Therefore the first and most important of god's commandments to the Rulers is that in the exercise of their functions as Guardians their principal care must be to watch the mixture of metals in the character of their children. If one of their own children has traces of bronze or iron in its make-up, they must harden their hearts, assign it its proper value, and degrade it to the ranks of the industrial and agricultural class where it properly belongs: similarly, if a child of this class is born with gold or silver in its nature, they will promote it appropriately to be a Guardian or Auxiliary, and this they must do because there is a prophecy that the State will be ruined when it has Guardians of silver and bronze" (Plato, *The Republic*, Book Three, 415 b, c, d).

Pareto also gives central importance to the idea of circulation between the different strata of society, but his starting point is in some ways different from Plato. Rather than assuming that social stratification and circulation of individuals is in some important ways flexible and can be organized to some degree in different ways, as Plato did in *The Republic*, Pareto claims to be discussing a universal and fixed characteristic of human societies as they always exist: the rule of elites over non-elites. According to Pareto, elite, who serves their own interests rather than the interests of the non-elite, governs all societies. The elite start off as markedly above the non-elite in terms of individual talent, as well as in terms of their superior organization. However, in order to maintain their superior position and serve their own interests, the elite also use subterfuge and deceit. Pareto's theory is conspiratorial, in the sense that he sees political ideologies, labels, slogans, and so on, simply as the means to mislead the non-elite and camouflage the real motives of the elite. Thus, Pareto sees labels such as 'socialist', 'capitalist', 'democratic' and so on, as nothing more than smokescreens. According to Pareto, irrespective of the particular ideology or political system that is dominant in a society, an elite always manages to usurp power and rule over the non-elite (Foucault, 1979, 1980, has been particularly insightful in articulating the processes through which such dominant power is achieved and maintained). Irrespective of whether the ruling group has a figurehead such as Castro in Cuba, or Bush in the United States, or Khomeini in Iran, according to Pareto the shared goal of the elite is to rule and to maintain control. But in order to continue to rule, the elite must remain open as a group. In line with the writings of Plato, Pareto argued that some children born into the elite will be less talented, while some children born into the non-elite will be more talented and constitute a potential 'counter-elite'. Talented individuals

born into the non-elite will attempt to rise up into the elite. However, if their path to upward mobility is blocked, these talented individuals will turn their attention to organizing the non-elite and leading them to rebellion. The mobilization of the non-elite, by talented members who constitute a counter-elite, will put pressure on the elite to 'open up' and allow new members to join the elite. If collective pressure does not prove effective and upward mobility remains blocked to talented individuals, there is a possibility of revolution and an overturning of the existing system. The collective uprising of the non-elite through the leadership of a talented counter-elite can only be avoided if the elite remains open to individual upward mobility (and, correspondingly, to the downward mobility of those who lack the talent to remain part of the elite).

But Pareto was skeptical that any elite would be able to resist acting on the basis of short-term self-interest. According to Pareto elites always close ranks and prevent circulation of individuals up and down the hierarchy (whereas Plato remained more optimistic on this point). Pareto described history as "...a graveyard of aristocracies" (1935, III, p.1430), meaning that throughout history one elite after another has failed to operate an open system, and been brought crashing down by counter-elite led revolutions. But the continual cycle of elite downfall and replacement does not change elite rule. According to Pareto, after a revolution has succeeded and the old elite has been toppled, the counter-elite will act opportunistically to grab power and perpetuate inequalities. My proposal is that parallel to this cycle of elites being replaced by counter-elites is a cycle of support for rights, then support for duties. A counter-elite that leads the non-elite masses to revolt against the current elite in an attempt to overturn the system does so by emphasizing rights. More specifically, counter elites give priority to the rights of the non-elite and proclaim war on the 'unjust' violation of rights by the elite. Thus, the right to free speech, health care, the right of workers to strike, the right to work, all kinds of rights are given priority by the counter-elite in an effort to more effectively mobilize the non-elite masses. There seem no limits to the 'rights' that counter-elites will promise the non-elite in their bid for power; we get a hint of this in the speeches made by opposition parties before elections in Western societies, and also in speeches by revolutionary leaders before they actually gain power. Again and again, the same trend is evident in the period leading to revolutions, from the great French revolution of 1789 to more recent ones, such as the 1978-79 revolt that brought Islamic fundamentalists to power in Iran.

The emphasis on rights prior to the collapse of the old order is particularly evident during the American revolution of 1776. Typical of writings in this period in America is a pamphlet declaring, "Parliament is abusing the rights of Americans" by Stephen Hopkins (1764/1992, p. 54), elected governor of Rhode Island by members of the colonial assembly. In Pareto's terminology, Hopkins was a member of the counter-elite, and later he served as a member of the Continental Congress and was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. Thus, he was one of the counter-elite who replaced the British elite as rulers of North America. An important strategy for Hopkins and other members of the counter-elite before the revolution in America was to stir up

feelings of deprivation among the non-elite, by influencing the non-elite to make upward comparisons with others who were seen to be better off in some important respects. One way to achieve this was to persuade the colonists in America that they were being denied the rights owed to them, and thus they should feel discontent: "From what hath been shown, it will appear beyond a doubt, that the British subjects in America, have equal rights with those in Britain; that they do not hold those rights as a privilege granted them, nor enjoy them as a grace and favor bestowed; but possess them as an inherent indefeasible right; as they, and their ancestors, were born-free subjects, justly and naturally entitled to all the rights and advantages of the British constitution" (Hopkins, 1764/1992, p. 59).

Just as revolutionaries highlighted the violation of rights as a justification for the overthrow of the authorities and the rejection of the *status quo*, defenders of the ruling authorities highlighted duties and the necessity of obedience to rulers. Around the same time that Hopkins wrote about violated rights as a justification for disobedience to the British authorities, Jonathan Boucher, a leading Anglican Minister, preached on the duty of every person to obey the authorities, "Obedience to government is every man's duty, because it is in every man's interest; but it is particularly incumbent on Christians, because (in addition to moral fitness) it is enjoined by the positive commands of God; and, therefore, when Christians are disobedient to human ordinances, they are also disobedient to God" (1775/1992, p. 203). The same theme of support for duties and the necessity of obedience to authorities is evident in the arguments of defenders of all other elites faced by revolutionaries.

However, after a counter-elite has succeeded in overthrowing a ruling elite and taking its place, then the new elite shifts from support of rights to support of duties. This new emphasis on duties is justified by a claim that the revolutionary authorities now legitimately represent the interests of the population; the 'new government' is not like the unjust authority of the pre-revolutionary era. In order to maintain law and order, the new elite finds it necessary to restrict rights and, in reaction to such restrictions, opposition groups and a new potential counter-elite emerges to support rights. Thus, the cycle of authorities supporting duties and oppositions supporting rights is perpetuated. The general rule I am proposing, of elites supporting duties and counter-elites supporting rights, sees some variations under conditions when a counter-elite attempts to bring about reform from within a system, rather than to change a system altogether. For example, now that legislative reform has given minorities equal rights 'on paper' in the United States, there are numerous instances of minority group members bringing prosecutions against the authorities for failing to carry out their duties and implementing the equal rights laws that are already 'on the books'. In these cases, the focus on duties by minorities serves the ultimate purpose of winning rights for minorities. Thus, in this respect the ultimate goal and focus for minorities remains rights rather than duties.

Interobjectivity and Shared Views of Rights/Duties

My argument, then, is that the power status of a group will

determine whether it gives priority to rights or duties. Individual group members will for the most part develop worldviews in line with that of their groups. There are two central issues I address in this final section. First, the extent to which the worldviews of individuals deviates from that of their groups; second, the extent to which the worldviews of groups accurately reflects their own material interests, rather than the material interests of more powerful outgroups.

Interobjectivity and Individual Freedom

Interobjectivity is concerned with shared collective worldviews, and an objection to this idea might be that individuals have freedom to develop their own worldviews. It could be claimed that it is not a matter of being elite or non-elite, rich or poor, powerless or powerful, and so on, that shapes worldviews, but the characteristics of the individual person. This argument could be supported by pointing to individuals who hold worldviews radically different from that of their groups, such as a child who grows up to become a liberal in a strongly conservative family. But such exceptional cases do not negate the idea of shared group worldviews influencing individuals.

The research literature on social influence strongly supports the idea that most individuals are likely to conform when they are placed in a group and obey when confronted by an authority figure (see Moghaddam, 1998, ch.7). Of course, minorities can also influence majorities (Moscovici, 1976), but under certain very limited conditions. For the most part, it is the more powerful groups and individuals who get the less powerful to conform to their worldviews. Not everyone will conform or obey: in the classic studies by Sherif, Asch, and Milgram, there was always a minority who did not conform or obey. Thus, there are always exceptions: as suggested by the example of the child who grows up in a conservative family to become a liberal. But these are exceptions, not the rule.

Given that individuals in many respects appropriate the worldviews of their groups, to what extent do such views reflect the material interests of the ingroup?

Elites, Non-Elites, and World Views

Integral to interobjectivity is the idea that in order to achieve intergroup understanding, groups develop worldviews that are to some degree overlapping. But there are many different ways in which worldviews can overlap, depending in large part on the relative power of the groups involved. For example, worldviews can overlap by a dominant group, such as an imperialist power, imposing its worldview on smaller groups, such as relatively weak nations. Or, to take another example, worldviews can overlap when an elite imposes its worldview on the non-elite in the same society. In such instances, the weaker group takes on a worldview that reflects the interests of the more powerful group. The findings of Doise (2002) and his associates concerning cross-cultural similarities in representations of human rights in some respects reflect such a trend. For example, the representational similarities in question reflect the characteristics of the *United Nations Charter of Human Rights*, which highlights individual rather than collective rights. Indeed, collective rights (e.g., the collective rights of Native People in North America) are neglected in most international human rights discussions. This reflects the

influence of Western powers, and especially the United States, through the mass media and modern education system. Increasing globalization has meant that the expansion of education in non-Western societies has come about through the exportation of knowledge from western to non-Western societies. Interobjectivity has taken shape through the worldview of Western power groups being adopted by non-Westerners.

Concluding Comment

I have claimed that the cycle of support for rights by minorities and duties by majorities is characteristic of all stratified societies where there is minority-majority competition and change. There are two issues that particularly deserve closer attention in future research. First, in some conditions, minorities do not accurately recognize their own interests and come to neglect their rights and, instead, emphasize their own duties as defined by the majority. For example, until the 1960s many ethnic minorities in the United States accepted it as their duty to obey race segregation laws. It was only after collective mobilization in the 1960s that most ethnic minority members recognized the importance of giving priority to their own rights. Many other minority groups in North America and around the world have yet to experience such an awakening. A second issue that deserves further research attention concerns altruism: it could be argued that my analysis assumes a 'selfish' model of humankind, because I seem to be suggesting that individuals only support rights and duties when it is in their own interests to do so. There are possible exceptions to this trend, such as the case of affluent intellectuals who support the rights of disadvantaged groups. Such 'exceptions' and the issue of 'selfishness' in relation to rights and duties deserve closer research scrutiny.

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