

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY

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Phenomenological sociology, rooted in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, offers a distinctive approach to understanding the social world through the lived experiences of individuals. Building upon Max Weber's notion of meaningful social action, Alfred Schutz translated phenomenological insights into sociological analysis, emphasizing key concepts such as the life-world (Lebenswelt), intersubjectivity, typifications, and the stock of knowledge. This framework underscores how everyday interactions, shared meanings, and reciprocal perspectives construct the reality of social life. By distinguishing between "in-order-to" motives and "because" motives, Schutz explained how actors interpret and make sense of actions within specific contexts. His further classifications of social relationships Umwelt, Mitwelt, and We/They relations illustrate the complexity of intersubjective life. The phenomenological perspective has also significantly shaped later sociological traditions, notably Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. Despite criticisms regarding its abstractness, micro-level orientation, and limited engagement with power and structural analysis, phenomenological sociology remains a foundational paradigm. It provides enduring insights into how meaning is produced, sustained, and negotiated in everyday life, thereby bridging philosophy and sociology in the study of human action and social reality.

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Abstract

Phenomenological sociology, rooted in the philosophical traditions of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, offers a distinctive approach to understanding the social world through the lived experiences of individuals. Building upon Max Weber's notion of meaningful social action, Alfred Schutz translated phenomenological insights into sociological analysis, emphasizing key concepts such as the life-world (Lebenswelt), intersubjectivity, typifications, and the stock of knowledge. This framework underscores how everyday interactions, shared meanings, and reciprocal perspectives construct the reality of social life. By distinguishing between "in-order-to" motives and "because" motives, Schutz explained how actors interpret and make sense of actions within specific contexts. His further classifications of social relationships Umwelt, Mitwelt, and We/They relations illustrate the complexity of intersubjective life. The phenomenological perspective has also significantly shaped later sociological traditions, notably Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology. Despite criticisms regarding its abstractness, micro-level orientation, and limited engagement with power and structural analysis, phenomenological sociology remains a foundational paradigm. It provides enduring insights into how meaning is produced, sustained, and negotiated in everyday life, thereby bridging philosophy and sociology in the study of human action and social reality.

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Introduction

Phenomenologists consistently emphasize the importance of examining the world, including social reality, just as people experience it in everyday life. Or, as many phenomenologists prefer to put it that phenomenology must examine the 'life-world'. Phenomenologists generally stress that social reality should not be conceived as a fixed and objective external reality. Rather, social reality is essentially a product of human activity. Inter alia through processes of 'typification', we 'constitute' a meaningful social world around us. This is obviously not the achievement of isolated individuals acting alone; most of our typical assumptions, expectations and prescriptions, indeed, are socially derived. However, phenomenological sociologists insist that we must not downplay the role of individual subjectivities. Social reality cannot be reduced to relations between individual subjects; without inter subjectivity – there is ultimately no social reality. Phenomenology continues to be of relevance to the sociology of everyday life and has the resources to respond to the criticisms typically directed against it.

The term of phenomenology etymologically derived from Greek root word "phenomenon" or "phenomenon" which literally means "symptoms" or "what has appeared" so it is real to us. This term was introduced by Johann Heinrich Lambert, in 1764. Nevertheless, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is more viewed the father of phenomenology, because of the intensity of his studies in the realm of philosophy. But, the phenomenology that we know through Husserl is the science of phenomena. However, Alfred Schutz is better known in building this perspective. Through Schutz the Husserl's thoughts, which were felt to be abstract, could be understood and were more "grounded". Schutz was also the first in apply phenomenology to social science research. For that, in understanding of phenomenology, the researcher will more refer at Alfred Schutz's thoughts.

Max Weber's theory of social action historically become the basis for the birth of a phenomenological perspective (also symbolic interactionism). Weber calls social action when all of a person's behavior when and to the extent concerned gives subjective meaning to his behavior. According to Weber, human action is essentially meaningful, involving interpretation, thinking and deliberate action. Social action for him is an intentional, deliberate action for others and for the actor himself, whose thoughts are actively interpreting each other's behavior, communicating with each other, and controlling his own behavior according to the purpose of the communication. So they mutually direct the

behavior of the interaction partners in front of them. So for Weber, society is an active entity consisting of people who think and perform meaningful social actions. For this reason, understanding of social action is carried out by examining the subjective meaning that individuals give to their actions, because humans act on the basis of the meaning they give to these actions (Heidegger, M., 1962).

The Phenomenological Movement (The History and Varieties of Phenomenology)

The movement of phenomenology is more than a century old. In fact, the inauguration of the movement can be dated precisely to 1900-1901, the years in which the two parts of Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) *Logical Investigations* were published. Husserl was originally a mathematician, whose interests in the foundational problems of mathematics led him to logic and philosophy. Despite the title, the *Logical Investigations* does not merely address logical problems narrowly conceived. Rather, Husserl advanced what he believed is the right approach to philosophical problems in general: instead of resorting to armchair theorizing and speculation, we must consult the 'the things themselves', or that which 'manifests itself' or 'gives itself' (Greek: *phainomenon*). On this basis, Husserl claimed that the traditional notion of the mind as an inner, self-contained realm is misguided. Rather, the mind is in various ways directed upon objects external to it. Influenced by the Austrian psychologist and philosopher Franz Brentano (1838-1917),

The *Logical Investigations* made Husserl widely known, and contributed to the formation of phenomenological schools in Göttingen, where Husserl himself taught from 1901, and Munich, where, among others, Max Scheler (1874-1928) advocated a phenomenological approach. After Husserl became professor of philosophy in Freiburg in 1916, the phenomenological movement became increasingly influential outside the old phenomenological strongholds. In Freiburg, Husserl became acquainted with the young philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Heidegger claims that the human being cannot be understood independently of the world in which it is experientially and practically engaged. As he puts it, the Being of Dasein is 'Being-in-the-world'. Heidegger is particularly concerned to emphasize the practical involvement of humans in their environment. A human being is not primarily a spectator on its environing world, but an agent in it; and the world is not a collection of neutral objects or things, but more like a web of functional relations between practical 'tools' or 'equipment' (Garfinkel, Harold 1967).

It is in the space between Husserl and Heidegger that one must locate the main inspiration for the later French phenomenologists. Emmanuel Lévinas (1906-1995) studied philosophy in Freiburg when Heidegger succeeded Husserl. Even though the ostensible topic of Lévinas's dissertation *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, published in 1930, was Husserl's thought. Jean-Paul Sartre's (1906-1980) phenomenological magnum opus *Being and Nothingness*, published in 1943, draws upon Husserl, Heidegger, and Hegel, in an attempt to articulate a radical distinction between consciousness, which Sartre labels 'Being-for-itself', and all types of objective being, which he collects under the heading 'Being-in-itself' (Sartre 1943/1956). Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) phenomenology of body and perception, elaborated in the 1945 masterpiece *Phenomenology of Perception*, is to some extent a continuation of Husserl's later works. But Heidegger's influence is also tangible, not least in Merleau-Ponty's contention that the phenomenon of human embodiment is an aspect of the structure that Heidegger calls 'Being-in-the-world' (Merleau-Ponty 1945/1962).

The influence of phenomenology, however, extends beyond philosophy. Philosophical phenomenology offers general ideas of relevance to the social sciences (anthropology, economy, law, political science, and so on). But in addition to this, there are phenomenological traditions in psychology and psychiatry, and, more relevant in the present context, there is a distinct phenomenological approach to sociology, which was developed by Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) and his students. Schutz's main inspiration was drawn from Husserl's later thoughts on inter-subjectivity and the life-world. In the next sections, we will briefly sketch these ideas.

Phenomenology and Inter-subjectivity

It is sometimes claimed that phenomenology has nothing valuable to offer sociology. Jürgen Habermas, for example, accuses Husserl's philosophy – and by extension phenomenology as such (Habermas 1992:42) – of being solipsistic, that is, of being able to conceive of the existence of only one single subject (*solus ipse* is Latin for 'only I'). Thereby, Habermas obviously questions the relevance of phenomenology for social thought in general. However, there is reason to regard Habermas' claim with a good deal of skepticism. For the criticism seems based on a misunderstanding of the phenomenological perspective on sociality. Instead of viewing the individual and society – or subjectivity and sociality – as mutually exclusive options, phenomenology explicitly attempts to combine them. Husserl's

claim that a subject can only be a world-experiencing subjectivity insofar as it is member of a community of subjects (Husserl 1995:139) suggests a key phenomenological claim: the individual subject qua world-experiencing is dependent on other world-experiencing subjects. But on the other hand, one should not downplay the role of the individual subject. Phenomenology insists on understanding sociality in its most fundamental form as inter-subjectivity (Zahavi 2001). It only makes sense to speak of inter-subjectivity if there is a (possible) plurality of subjects, and inter-subjectivity can therefore neither precede nor be the foundation of the individuality and distinctness of the various subjects. Thus, one cannot invoke the notion of inter-subjectivity without committing oneself to some form of philosophy of subjectivity. Yet, on the other hand, Husserl maintains that a sufficiently radical and thorough phenomenological reflection not only leads us to subjectivity, but also to inter-subjectivity (Husserl 1962:344).

Phenomenologist emphasized the importance of Life-World

As part of their ongoing concern with the relation between science and experience, phenomenologists have often emphasized the importance of the 'life-world'. The life-world is the world we ordinarily take for granted, the pre-scientific, experientially given world that we are familiar with and never call into question. The life-world needs rehabilitating because, although it is the historical and systematic sense-foundation for science, the latter has forgotten or ignored the life-world. Even the most exact and abstract scientific theories rely on the type of pre-scientific evidence that the life-world offers. And life-worldly evidence does not merely function as an indispensable but otherwise irrelevant station that we must pass through on the way toward exact knowledge; rather, it is a permanent source of meaning and evidence (Husserl 1970:126).

Science and the life- world

However, the relation between science and the life-world is not static but dynamic. Science is founded on the life-world, and bit-by-bit it may, as it were, sink into the ground on which it stands. With the passing of time, theoretical assumptions and results may be absorbed by everyday practice and become part of the life-world. When phenomenologists emphasize the significance of the life-world it is not at the expense of science. Phenomenologists have no desire to deny the immense value of science, and they agree that science has the potential to profoundly expand and alter our conception of reality. They do reject, however, the tendency within the natural sciences to advocate scientism and objectivism (Alfred Schutz, 1932).

Scientism, life world and phenomenology

Phenomenology, however, rejects the idea that natural science is the sole judge of what is real and what is not, and that all concepts that we wish to take seriously must be reducible to concepts of the exact sciences. According to phenomenology, the exact sciences do not describe a world that is different from the ordinary world. Rather, they simply employ new methods to describe and explain the world we already know and thereby enable us to obtain more precise knowledge about it. The scientific ambition of describing reality objectively – that is, from a third-person point of view – is a thoroughly legitimate one. Yet, one should not forget that any objectivity, any explanation, understanding and theoretical construct, presupposes a first-person perspective as its permanent ground and precondition. To that extent the belief that science can provide an absolute description of reality – a description purged of any conceptual or experiential perspective – is an illusion. Science is rooted in the life-world: it draws upon insights from the pre-scientific sphere and it is conducted by embodied subjects. For the phenomenologists, science is not simply a collection of systematically related, well-established propositions. Rather, science is something that people do; it is a particular – markedly theoretical – way of relating to the world (Bayne, T., and Montague, M., 2011).

Human nature, scientific rationality and practice

Phenomenology does not attempt to explain human nature through science. Rather, it aims to make sense of scientific rationality and practice through detailed analyses of the cognizing subject's various forms of intentional experience. A central task is thus to give an account of how the theoretical attitude that we adopt when we are doing science – including sociology – arises out of, as well as influences and changes, our everyday 'Being-in-the world'. The phenomenological examination of the life-world obviously constitutes an important part of this project. Husserl himself articulated the basic ideas for such an analysis, and other phenomenologists such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, made important contributions. All of these thinkers, however, considered the analysis of the life-world a mere part of a larger philosophical project. A more independent interest in the phenomenology of the life-world – in particular its social structure – is found, above all, in Alfred Schutz and his successors within phenomenological sociology.

The Phenomenological Sociology of Everyday Life

Among the key figures in phenomenological sociology are Alfred Schutz (1899-1959), author of the works *The Phenomenology of*

the Social World (1932/1972), Collected Papers I-III (1962-1966), and The Structures of the Life-World, co-authored by Thomas Luckmann and published in 1973; Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, authors of the book The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge (1966/1991); and finally Harold Garfinkel, whose most important publication in this context is Studies in Ethnomethodology (1967). These will be dealt with below.

Alfred Schutz contribution

Alfred Schutz is often referred to as the founder of phenomenological sociology. Schutz originally studied law and obtained his PhD from Vienna in 1921. Subsequently, he worked in a bank, however, and it was not until 1943, after his emigration to the USA, that Schutz obtained a part-time position at a university, namely New School for Social Research in New York. In 1952 he became professor at the same institution. Schutz was initially inspired by Max Weber's interpretive sociology. However, although Weber regarded meaningful action as the central topic of the social sciences, and although he emphasized the importance of an explicit thematization of the meaning that the individual actor attributes to her own action, he did not examine the constitution of social meaning as such, and was generally uninterested in fundamental questions in epistemology and the theory of meaning. It is precisely this gap that Schutz attempts to fill by combining Weber's sociology with Husserl's phenomenological methodology (Schutz, 1956).

Schutz phenomenology

Schutz attempted to integrate Husserl's philosophical concepts into sociology, incorporating Weber's idea of verstehen, or subjective understanding. Schutz emphasized the significance of the meanings individuals assign to their everyday situations, focusing on how individuals interpret their circumstances. According to Schutz, individuals rely on a shared "stock of knowledge," which includes societal norms and expectations, allowing them to categorize the world into "types" of objects such as books, cars, houses, and clothing. This concept is akin to Mead's "generalized other." Schutz posits that individuals construct their world using these typifications or ideal types inherited from their social group. Schutz exemplifies this process of typification by discussing the assumptions involved in mailing a letter. He suggests that individuals inherently assume that certain types of people, such as postal workers, will handle the letter. Despite not knowing these individuals personally, people perceive themselves as collaborating with them through a process of self-typification. By employing

these societal “recipes,” individuals perceive their everyday world as orderly and predictable.

Furthermore, Schutz proposes that the meanings one assigns to an interaction may be shared with the other person involved in the interaction, a concept he refers to as the “reciprocity of perspectives.” For instance, musicians in an orchestra could swap places with the conductor and perceive the situation from the conductor’s viewpoint because they share a common understanding of the situation. In Schutz’s framework, these shared meanings can be both presupposed and experienced in an interaction. In such situations, according to Schutz, individuals act based on assumptions about reality that they take for granted. They set aside any doubts about alternative realities, and interactions proceed based on the assumption of shared perspectives. This concept bears resemblance to Mead’s idea of “taking the role of the other,” which Schutz also incorporated into his theoretical framework. Therefore, while Schutz’s philosophy was heavily influenced by Husserl, he also integrated ideas from Weber and Mead into phenomenological sociology (Husserl, Edmund 1970).

Meaning and Motives

Schutz, instead of adhering to the idea of a uniform social reality, advocates for the concept of multiple realities. These realities, potentially infinite in number, each possess their unique and distinct existence. We encounter various types of realities, including the physical world, the scientific realm, the domain of ideal relations, the supernatural sphere, and the religious world. Each of these realms is distinct, and transitioning from one to another can be a jarring experience. Schutz emphasizes the need to differentiate between meanings and motives. He further subdivides both meanings and motives into two categories. For Schutz, meanings pertain to how individuals determine what aspects of the social world matter to them, while motives concern why individuals act as they do. In terms of meaning, Schutz identifies subjective meaning context and objective meaning context. The former refers to our personal interpretation of reality, defining certain elements as meaningful. However, Schutz did not consider this process suitable for scientific study due to its idiosyncratic nature. The objective meaning context, on the other hand, refers to shared meanings within a culture that can be scientifically studied by sociologists. Schutz criticized Weber for not distinguishing between these two types of meanings and for not clarifying that objective meaning contexts are more amenable to scientific sociology (Schutz, 1956).

“In-order-to” motives and “because” motives

Schutz also distinguishes between two types of motives: “in-order-to” motives and “because” motives. “In-order-to” motives are subjective and exist only during action; they are the reasons why an individual undertakes certain actions with a future goal in mind. These motives can only be understood retrospectively by the actor once the action is completed. On the other hand, “because” motives refer to past factors that influenced an individual’s actions. These motives are objective and can be scientifically studied since they are accessible to both the actor and the social scientist after the action has occurred. Despite their accessibility, Schutz was less inclined to study “because” motives than “in-order-to” motives as they represented a return to consciousness. Schutz was more interested in exploring the intersubjective world. However, he believed that all social interactions were based on a reciprocity of motives: an actor’s “in-order-to” motives become their partner’s “because” motives and vice versa.

Stock Knowledge and Recipes

Alfred Schutz’s concept of stock knowledge refers to the structured, systemic, and contextual information that one has already learned and internalized. This preexisting knowledge is known as stock knowledge. Schutz also introduced the concept of recipes in the context of social interactions. Recipes are typifications that actors use to guide their actions in social situations. They are based on the actor’s past experiences and are used to predict the behavior of others ². In other words, recipes are a way for actors to make sense of their social world. Schutz believed that recipes are a fundamental tool for social science because they allow us to understand how people interact with each other in different social contexts. Schutz’s concept of stock knowledge is closely related to his idea of typifications. Typifications are cognitive constructs that allow actors to make sense of their social world by categorizing people, objects, and events into meaningful groups. Stock knowledge is the accumulation of these typifications over time. Schutz believed that stock knowledge is essential for understanding how people interact with each other in everyday life. Recipes are a specific type of typification that actors use to guide their actions in social situations. Recipes are based on past experiences and are used to predict the behavior of others. For example, if an actor has had a positive experience with a particular type of person in the past, they may use a recipe based on that experience to guide their

interactions with similar people in the future. Similarly, if an actor has had a negative experience with a particular type of person, they may use a recipe based on that experience to avoid similar people in the future. Recipes are an important tool for understanding how people interact with each other because they allow us to predict how people will behave in different social contexts (Husserl, E., 1963).

Typifications

All recurring social situations involve a process known as typification, which categorizes situations and individuals into types or categories based on shared social meanings and definitions. For example, when encountering a dog in my neighborhood, I might perceive it as a stray or a pedigree. I might further classify it as an Alsatian, Spaniel, or Doberman, etc. Each time I categorize the dog, my current interests or relevance system determines the prevailing form of typification. Changes in my interests may lead to changes in typification. Typification specifications also vary over time and space. For instance, cultural items like utensils, tools, and instruments cater to specific human needs and activities. During recent excavations at Khirsara village in Gujarat, India, a variety of pottery and other artifacts were discovered. Initially, their typical purposes and uses were unknown, but we can understand their purpose by categorizing them into a type of vessel. People develop and use typifications in the social world. In any given situation in everyday life, an action is determined by a type formed in earlier experiences. Typifications overlook individual, unique features and focus only on generic and homogeneous characteristics. Typification takes many forms. When we label something (for example, a man, a dog), we are engaging in typification. More generally, any time we use language, we are typifying. Language can be thought of as a repository of typologies that we use to make sense of the social world. The association of typifications with language indicates that typifications exist in broader society and that people acquire and store typifications throughout their lives. The typologies that we use are largely socially derived and socially approved.

Schutz often discusses typifications in the context of recipes, using the terms interchangeably. Like typifications, recipes serve as methods for understanding or managing aspects of experience. However, while recipes typically address situations, typifications are more often associated with people. People use recipes to navigate the multitude of routine situations they encounter daily. For example, when someone asks "How are you," we respond with "Fine, and you?" This is akin to following a recipe. Schutz

suggests that we operate with “cookbook knowledge” or recipes to manage the routine aspects of daily life. Most of our daily activities, from waking up to going to bed, follow these culturally ingrained recipes. However, when we face unusual or challenging situations, we initially try to apply our existing recipes. If it becomes clear that our current recipes are ineffective, we abandon them and seek to mentally devise new ways of handling the situation. Schutz outlines conditions under which situations become problematic and necessitate the creation of new ways of dealing with them (new recipes or typifications). If no existing recipe can handle a novel situation, or if a recipe fails to manage the situation it was designed for, a new one must be created. In other words, when the existing stock of knowledge is insufficient, individuals must augment it by creating new recipes (or typifications). Due to the recurring presence of problematic situations, people cannot rely solely on recipes and typifications. They must be adaptable enough to handle unforeseen circumstances. People require “practical intelligence” to deal with unpredictable situations by evaluating alternative courses of action and devising new ways of managing situations (Schutz, 1956).

Intersubjectivity and Reciprocity of Perspectives

The exploration of intersubjectivity seeks to address questions such as: How do we comprehend other minds or selves? How is the reciprocity of perspectives achieved? How is mutual understanding and communication facilitated? An intersubjective world is not secluded; it is shared by all. It exists because we inhabit it as individuals among others, connected through shared influence and work, comprehending others and being comprehended by them. Intersubjectivity thrives in the “lively present” where we converse and listen to each other. We share the same temporal and spatial dimensions with others. This simultaneity is the crux of intersubjectivity, as it implies that I understand the subjectivity of the other while living in my own stream of consciousness. This mutual understanding enables our coexistence in the world. While phenomenological philosophers primarily focused on consciousness, Schutz shifted this focus outward towards the intersubjective, social world. However, it's important to note that both approaches concentrate on subjectivity, with phenomenological philosophers focusing on consciousness and Schutz on the social world.

Husserl refers to this world as the world of natural attitudes, where we find ourselves at every moment of our lives, accepting it as it is presented to us in our daily lives. This world extends indefinitely in space and time and encompasses both material and

cultural objects. We encounter animals, objects, and have various relationships with fellow human beings. We exist, carry out our activities, pursue goals, and have a certain familiarity with whatever we encounter in it. This is not a scientific world but a world of common sense where all our social relationships occur and actions are carried out.

Schutz's primary focus was on how individuals comprehend the consciousness of others while immersed in their own stream of consciousness. In essence, when two individuals share a single experience, the meaning derived from that activity is termed intersubjective. His exploration of intersubjective understanding primarily aims to elucidate how interactions between individuals in the social world occur at various levels of anonymity. Schutz leverages the differences in levels of anonymity in social experiences to categorize different types of encounters in the social world. He posits that these varying levels of anonymity shape what he refers to as the structure or 'regions' of the social world. To facilitate the analysis of these structures, he utilizes a comprehensive set of conceptual tools, including face-to-face relationships, 'we' and 'they' relationships, and the worlds of predecessors and contemporaries.

Schutz theory of Reciprocity of Perspectives

Schutz's overarching theory of the reciprocity of perspectives encompasses two idealizations:

1. **Standpoint Interchangeability:** This concept suggests that it is assumed that one can place oneself in another person's position and perceive things from their viewpoint, and vice versa. Consequently, objects that are beyond my reach but within my friend's reach can be brought within my 'manipulatory zone' or 'actual reach'.
2. **Congruency of Relevancy Systems:** This leads us to the assumption that we, along with our fellow humans, take for granted that the differences in perspectives arising from biographically determined situations can be eliminated. As a result, different relevancy systems can be made congruent.

Owing to the reciprocity of perspectives, we arrive at a shared world composed of identical objects with identical qualities and properties, uniformly interpreted by all of us.

Life-World (Lebenswelt)

Alfred Schutz's theoretical contribution is centered around the concept of Life-World (Lebenswelt). According to Schutz, our social experience constitutes a vast world that is made up of a complex network of dimensions, relations, and modes of knowledge. Schutz distinguishes between directly experienced

social reality and a social reality that lies beyond the horizon of direct experience. Directly experienced social reality (Umwelt) consists of our immediate consociates, whom we perceive directly. Those whom we do not directly perceive fall into three classes: the world of our contemporaries (Mitwelt), the world of our predecessors (Vorwelt), and the world of our successors (Folgewelt). Our contemporaries are distinguished from the other two by the fact that it is in principle possible for them to become our consociates. Schutz identifies different modes of relatedness to others according to the social realms which they inhabit. For instance, toward a consociate, we have what Schutz calls a "Thou-orientation" (Dueinstellung). If this is reciprocated, a face-to-face situation results, and we have a "We-relationship" (Wirbeziehung). Within the world of directly experienced social reality, there is a unique connection between observation and social relationships. We can observe our consociates in simultaneity, which gives us an advantage over anyone who is conducting merely indirect observations upon them. For instance, being present while a friend talks is very different from reading their letter. We not only can grasp the objective meaning of their words but can also hear the tone of their voice and watch their gestures and other bodily movements. But the difference is not merely that these concrete symptoms are present to us. There is an additional advantage: we can look into their eyes and ask them what they mean. In other words, we can transform direct social observation into a direct social relationship.

Our knowledge of our contemporaries, predecessors, and successors is indirect. As for our contemporaries, they coexist with us in objective time, but we must picture them in a quasi-simultaneity rather than perceive them in real simultaneity. We do not see their actual bodily movements but only their products such as letters etc. We cannot comprehend them with a direct grasp (in Selbsthabe) but at a distance and by means of a peculiar inferential process. We interpret the products as being the result of such and such an inner process, such and such an emotion, such and such an in-order-to motive, and we interpret the contemporaries in question as being persons of such and such a type. In short, when interpreting the behavior of our contemporaries, we are resorting to ideal types either course-of-action types or personal types. The use of ideal types does not enter at the stage when we pass from prescientific to scientific observation. It enters rather when we pass from direct to indirect social experience. Our contemporaries are therefore something less than fully concrete persons for us. Their degree of concreteness may vary.

Alfred Schutz's ideal types can be arranged on a scale of increasing anonymity, ranging from our absent friend to abstract entities like Canada itself. As the types get more and more abstract, we are getting further away from the actual subjective meaning complexes or contexts of individuals. We are making more and more use of objective contexts of meaning. But these refer by their very nature to subjective meaning-contexts of greater or lesser anonymity. Schutz believes that social science is an objective context of meaning constructed out of and referring to subjective contexts of meaning. The fundamental tool of social science is the ideal type, which must be fitted into a whole hierarchy of other objective concepts making up the total complex of scientific knowledge.

Schutz's objective was to develop a sociology based on the interpretations of the social world made by the actors being studied. It is difficult to know the interpretations of predecessors and impossible to understand those of successors. However, it is possible to understand contemporaries (*mitwelt*) and the interpretations of those with whom we are in immediate face-to-face contact (*umwelt*).

Umwelt and We Relations:

Alfred Schutz's concept of We relations is characterized by a relatively high degree of intimacy, which is determined by the extent to which the actors are acquainted with one another's personal biographies. The pure we relation is a face-to-face relationship in which the partners are aware of each other and sympathetically participate in each other's lives for however short a time. The we relation encompasses the consciousness of the participants as well as the patterns of face-to-face interaction. It is characterized by a "thou orientation," which is the universal form in which the other is experienced 'in person' 1. In other words, we relations are highly personal and immediate. The immediacy of interaction has two implications for social relations. First, in a we relation, there are abundant indicators of the other's subjective experience. Immediacy allows each actor to enter into the consciousness of the other. Second, when entering any social relation, an individual has only typical knowledge of the other. However, in the continuing process of a face-to-face interaction, typifications with others necessarily modifies typologies. Alfred Schutz's insights into We relations are not limited to the relationships themselves but also extend to cultural phenomena in the real world. For instance, in we relations, actors learn the typifications and recipes that allow them to survive socially. People not only learn typification and recipes in we relations but also use them there – trying them out, altering them when they

prove ineffective or inappropriate. Schutz was aware that there is considerable give and take among actors in we relations. People try out different courses of action on other people. They may quickly abandon those that elicit hostile reactions and continue to use those that are accepted. People may also find themselves in situations where recipes do not work at all, and they must create appropriate and workable sets of actions. In other words, people constantly adjust their actions with regard to those with whom they interact.

People also adjust their conceptions of others. They enter a given relationship with certain assumptions about what the other actors are thinking. In general, people assume that the thinking of others is of the same order as their own. Sometimes this is confirmed by what they find, but in other circumstances, the facial expressions, movements, words, and actions of others must revise their view of others' thought processes and then adjust their responses on the basis of this new image of what others are thinking. This is an indirect process because people cannot actually know what others are thinking. Thus, they may tentatively change their actions in the hope that this will elicit responses consistent with what they now think is going on in others' minds.

Alfred Schutz suggests that people may be forced to revise their conception of others' thought processes and their actions a number of times before they are able to understand why others are acting in a particular way. In some instances, people may not be able to make an adequate number of adjustments, with the result that they are likely to flee the particular interaction, completely confused. In such a case, they may seek more comfortable situations where familiar recipes can be applied. Even within we relations in everyday life, most action is guided by recipes. People do not usually reflect on what they do or on what others do. However, when they encounter problems, inappropriate thoughts and actions, they must abandon their recipes and reflect on what is going on to create an appropriate response. This is psychologically costly because people prefer to act and interact according to recipes. While it is difficult to analyze the *umwelt* scientifically, it is far easier to study the *mitwelt* in this manner. However, although it may be easier to study the *mitwelt*, such study is not likely to be as rewarding as a study of the *umwelt* because of the latter's key role in the creation of typifications and recipes and its central role in the social lives of people in the life-world (Bayne, T., and Montague, M., 2011,)

Mitwelt and They Relations:

Alfred Schutz's Mitwelt is that aspect of the social world in which people deal only with types of people or with larger social structures rather than with actual actors. People do fill these types and these structures, but in this world of "contemporaries," these people are not experienced directly. Because actors are dealing with types rather than with actual people, their knowledge of people is not subject to constant revision on the basis of face-to-face interaction. This relatively constant knowledge of general types of subjective experience can be studied scientifically and can shed light on the general process by which people deal with the social world. A number of specific levels of the mitwelt will be discussed below.

While in the Umwelt, people coexist in the same time and space, in the Mitwelt, spatial distances make it impossible to interact on a face-to-face basis. If the spatial situation changes and the people draw closer to each other, then face-to-face interaction becomes possible, but if it occurs, we have returned to the umwelt. People who were once in our umwelt may draw away from us and ultimately, because of spatial distances, become part of the mitwelt. Thus, there is a gradual transition from umwelt to mitwelt as people grow apart from one another. Here is the way Schutz describes this gradual transition (Sartre, J.-P., 1956).

Now we are face-to-face, saying good-bye, shaking hands; now he is walking away, now he calls back to me; now I see him waving to me; now he has disappeared around the corner. It is impossible to say at which precise moment the face-to-face situation ended and my partner became a mere contemporary of whom I have knowledge (he has, probably, arrived home) but no direct experience. Similarly, there are no clear dividing lines among the various levels of the mitwelt discussed below. The mitwelt is a stratified world with levels arranged by degree of anonymity.

According to Alfred Schutz, the more anonymous the level, the more people's relationships are amenable to scientific study. Some of the major levels within the mitwelt, beginning with the least anonymous, are:

1. Those whom actors encountered face-to-face in the past and could meet again. Actors are likely to have fairly current knowledge of them because they have been met before and could be met again. If these people were to be met personally at a later date, this relationship would become part of the umwelt and no longer be part of the mitwelt.
2. Those once encountered not by us but by people with whom we deal. Because this level is based on second-hand

- knowledge of others, it involves more anonymity than the level of relationship with people we have encountered in the past. If we were ever to meet people at this level, the relationship would become part of the *umwelt*.
3. Those whom we are on the way to meet. As long as we have not yet met them, we relate to them as types, but once we actually meet them, the situation again becomes part of the *umwelt*.
 4. Those whom we know not as concrete individuals but simply as positions and roles. For example, we know that there are people who sort our mail or process our checks, but although we have attitudes about them as types, we never encounter them personally.
 5. Collectivities whose function we may know without knowing any of the individuals who exist within them. For example, we know about the senate, but few people actually know any of the individuals in it, although we do have the possibility of meeting those people.
 6. Collectivities that are so anonymous that we have little chance of ever encountering people in them. For most people, the Mafia would be an example of such a collectivity.
 7. Objective structures of meaning that have been created by contemporaries with whom actors do not have face-to-face interaction. The rules of English grammar would be an example of such a structure of meaning.
 8. Alfred Schutz suggests that physical artifacts produced by a person we have not met and whom we are not likely to meet, such as a museum painting, create a highly anonymous relationship with the *Mitwelt*. As we move further into the *mitwelt* relationships, they become more impersonal and anonymous. People do not have face-to-face interaction with others and thus cannot know what goes on in other's minds. Their knowledge is therefore restricted to "general types of subjective experience".

They relations, which are found in the *mitwelt*, are characterized by interaction with impersonal contemporaries (for example, the unseen postal employee who sorts our mail) rather than consociates (for example, a personal friend). In they relations, the thoughts and actions of people are dominated by anonymous typifications and recipes. In the "pure" they relation, the typical schemes of knowledge used to define other actors are not available for modification. Because we do not interact with actual people but with impersonal contemporaries, information that varies from

our typification is not provided to us. In other words, new experiences are not constituted in their relations. Cultural typifications determine action, and they cannot be altered by the thoughts and actions of actors in the relationship. Thus, whereas we relations are subject to negotiation, they relations are not. Despite the distinction between us and them relations, the typifications used in they relations have their historical roots in we relations: "The first and originally objective solution of a problem was still largely dependent on the subjective relevance awareness of the individual" 1. However, these solutions ultimately become more typified and anonymous – in short, more and more a part of the cultural realm (Merleau-Ponty, M., 2012,).

Criticism of Phenomenological Sociology

Let us briefly consider some of the criticisms that phenomenological sociology has been met with. Nick Crossley (1996:95-98) lists a number of allegedly problematic features of Schutz' work, one of which merits consideration here. According to Crossley, 'Schutz tends to stick to the sorts of relationship which an individual takes to other individuals or groups at the expense of a consideration of relationships, practices and processes viewed from the trans individual position of the systems which they form' (Crossley 1996:98). In other words, Schutz seems to adopt an 'individualist' perspective and thereby loses sight of the way 'the community itself functions as a system, perpetuating itself through space and time' (Crossley 1996:98). A phenomenological reply to this criticism consists of two parts. First, one should not think that Schutz's shortcomings are necessarily the shortcomings of the phenomenological perspective as such. Thus, even if it is correct that Schutz failed to consider the community as a system that perpetuates itself through space and time, this need not be because of his commitment to phenomenology. In fact, Berger and Luckmann, in part two of *The Social Construction of Reality*, give detailed consideration to how society perpetuates itself as an impersonal, 'trans-individual' system. That said, however, Crossley does have a point. As readers of the present chapter may have noticed, some sort of emphasis on the individual person or subject is found in all the phenomenological thinkers we have considered – from Husserl, through Schutz, to Berger and Luckmann and Garfinkel. The phenomenologists, however, would insist that this is ultimately no ground for criticism. A society cannot be reduced to the sum of its individual members; but on the other hand, the phenomenologists maintain that there is no society without individual subjects. To speak of a 'social system' in the absence of a robust notion of individual subjects makes little sense;

for in what sense would the system in question be social? What could make it social except the fact that it involves (which is not the same as: 'can be reduced to') individual subjects standing in various relations to each other? A community of no one is hardly a community. An impersonal 'system' will never yield a society. For that, we need the interpersonal – and without the personal, there is no interpersonal.

As another general criticism of phenomenology, one might maintain that its strengths could easily become its weaknesses. The phenomenological rehabilitation of the life-world, and the insistence on the importance of the everyday human being and its 'common-sense' knowledge, may seem to verge on celebrating the ordinary or mediocre. For example, the idea that common-sense knowledge is as legitimate a sociological theme as is scientific knowledge may seem to imply that these two kinds of knowledge are equally valuable. But, if so, the phenomenological perspective would implicitly legitimize intellectual laziness. Other critics have claimed that phenomenological sociology is conservative, that it implies a defence of the status quo – even when status quo is an unjust social order.

Finally, the phenomenological emphasis on subjectivity as active and creative must not lead to blindness regarding the manifold ways in which individuals can be subjected to, and controlled by, institutions or other individuals. However, phenomenology has largely pre-empted these criticisms. The notion that the phenomenological sociologist must primarily examine the everyday person, and that she must take seriously this person's 'knowledge' and perspective, is fully compatible with maintaining a critical distance. Schutz himself stresses that the sociologist must be an observer of, rather than a participant in, the social phenomena she examines. And he emphasizes the fact that our common-sense knowledge is limited and incomplete. A phenomenologist such as Heidegger couples an examination of the everyday human being and its 'average' understanding with a rather critical perspective on this everyday understanding (allegedly superficial and with a tendency to rely on hearsay) (Heidegger 1927/1962:210-219). Indeed, he emphasizes that the everyday subject may be blinded by habit and convention (Heidegger 1927/1962:149-168). Thus, a phenomenological examination of the everyday subject need not glorify or idealize it. Similarly, a descriptive analysis of social reality as it is need not legitimize it. On the contrary, a sober description is an important element in any rational deliberation on what, precisely, ought to be changed about the status quo. Ultimately, however, the

phenomenologists would insist that it is not an option to devalue entirely – let alone reject – our ordinary everyday knowledge. For even scientists and political revolutionaries must rely on this knowledge in the greater part of their lives. Moreover, in spite of its many imperfections and limitations, this knowledge is usually adequate enough for practical purposes. Nor, as already mentioned, is it an option to ignore completely the individual subject or to insist that it is nothing but a plaything in the hands of society. As individual subjects we are not merely subjected to the social reality in which we live; we also take part in its creation and maintenance. And for that very reason it is possible for us to change it. As Berger and Luckmann write: ‘However objectivated, the social world was made by men – and, therefore, can be remade by them’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966/1991:106).

Conclusion

Let us briefly recapitulate some of the crucial features of phenomenological everyday life sociology. First, all phenomenologists share an insistence on description and a resistance toward theoretical speculation. A second important feature of phenomenological sociology is its emphasis on the need to take everyday life seriously. The ‘naturally attuned’, practically oriented common-sense person and her experienced life-world is the primary object of sociology. Thirdly, phenomenology maintains that an examination of sociality and social reality has to take subjectivity into account. Human subjectivity is not merely moulded and determined by social forces. In interaction with others, subjectivity also shapes social reality. Phenomenological sociologists have consistently issued warnings against the tendency to substantialize and reify social matters and they have offered a corrective to traditional positivistic research methodologies. Societal reality, including institutions, organizations, ethnic groupings, classes, and so on, must be regarded as a product of human activity. The sociological task is to understand the workings of this productive or constitutive process. No account of everyday social life can be complete if it does not take into account the contribution of individual subjectivities. This is the fundamental message of phenomenological sociology (Merleau-Ponty, M., 2012,)

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