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From Common Sense to Cultural Science and Back

ABSTRACT: Schutz advanced beyond Husserl regarding cultural science and common-sense thinking. The cultural sciences are the historical as well as the social sciences. Theoretical and practical attitudes are focused on scientific problems and on practical purposes respectively. Ideal constructs occur on both levels. Unlike in naturalistic science, cultural scientific constructs are about common sense constructs and the postulates of adequacy and subjective interpretation apply. After exposition of his position in these respects, an advance beyond Schutz is ventured whereby cultural science is asserted to be a source of constructs in common sense thinking.

“*Lebenswelt und Wissenschaft*” is of course a pairing of terms in Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology. This pairing was especially important for the phenomenologist’s thinking in his last years, which was when Alfred Schutz was in contact with him. Among other things, the way in which Schutz’s “On Multiple Realities” (1945) resembles Husserl’s Vienna Lecture, namely: “Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophie” (1935), a lecture Schutz heard, supports recognition of him as among the disciples who most closely followed the master regarding lifeworld and science. Schutz had already consciously advanced Husserl’s *Wissenschaftslehre* into a new area¹ and this advance is nowhere clearer than

¹ “To Husserl’s list I would like to add a social science which, while limited to the social sphere, is of an eidetic character. The task <of such a social science> would be the intentional analysis of those manifold forms of higher-level social acts and social formations which are founded on the—already executed—constitution of the *alter ego*. This can be achieved in static and genetic analysis, and such an interpretation would accordingly be have to demonstrate the aprioristic structures of the social sciences.—Of necessity the preceding expositions ... may have conveyed to the reader an idea of the fundamental significance of Husserl’s investigations not only for pure philosophy but for all the human sciences and especially for the social sciences.” Alfred Schutz, “Husserl’s *Méditations Cartésiennes*,” *Deutsche Literaturzeitun*, December 18, 1932, English trans. Helmut Wagner, in Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*, Vol. IV, ed. Helmut Wagner and George Psathas in collaboration with Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), p.164. Hereafter this volume will be referred to with embedded citations of the form “CP IV, 123.”

in his so-called “Princeton essay” of 1952, i.e., “Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action.”²

In the present time, when positivism has led to the comprehension of the unqualified word “science” as signifying solely naturalistic science, it is well not only to include specifying adjectives with the word “science” but also to remember that phenomenology considers the naturalistic sciences derivative and abstract in contrast to the original and concrete cultural sciences.³ Schutz already uses “*die Geisteswissenschaften*” on the first page of *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932) and “*die Sozialwissenschaften*” and “*die Kulturwissenschaften*” occur as a synonyms elsewhere in that work and the latter expression is most prominent in the German original of the pivotal project statement written when he was immigrating to the USA, namely “Phenomenology and the Social Sciences” (1940).

Study of the oeuvre shows that Schutz recognizes the following as *social* sciences in the usual signification he found common in the United States: namely, cultural anthropology, economics, law, linguistics, political science, social psychology, sociology, and the “science of the mythological and religious experiences of man” (CP IV, 131) and that he furthermore recognizes a somewhat similar list of *historical* sciences: namely, archaeology, biography, and the histories of art, economy, law, literature,

² Reprinted in *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, ed. Maurice Natanson (Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), pp. 3-47. Hereafter this volume will be referred to with embedded citations of the form “CP I, 123.”

³ “The concept of Nature ... with which the natural sciences have to deal is, as Husserl has shown, an idealizing abstraction from the *Lebenswelt*, an abstraction which, on principle and of course legitimately, excludes persons with their personal life and all objects of culture which originate as such in practical human activity. Exactly this layer of the *Lebenswelt*, however, from which the natural sciences have to abstract, is the social reality which the social sciences have to investigate.” (CP I, 58)

music, and philosophy.⁴ Schutz does not use “cultural sciences” in his subsequent American writings, but he does sometimes use “social sciences” in a broad signification to cover the historical as well as the strictly social sciences. “Cultural science” is now preferable to the English translation of *Geisteswissenschaft* as “human science” because that translation excludes non-human animals who clearly have culture.⁵

Schutz emphasizes the social sciences in the narrow signification and in particular not sociology, however, so much as Austrian economics.⁶ As for psychology, he referred to William James’s *Principles of Psychology* (1890) and from the beginning in his *Aufbau* to the end of his life (CP I, 149) he derives his own “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude,” which is also called “phenomenological psychology,” from Husserl’s transcendental philosophy. But he does not recognize cultural-scientific psychology as a discipline to reflect on in his theory of science, presumably because it did not exist as such in his time.

Schutz characterizes the lifeworld as “[t]he whole universe of life ... pregiven to both the man in the world of working and to the theoretical thinker.” (CP I, 247) He emphasizes how this is a world of working and, unfortunately, does not appreciate the affective-valuational dimension of the encountering of it. But he does recognize extensive similarities and

⁴ Cf. Lester Embree, “A Problem in Schutz’s Theory of the Historical Sciences with an Illustration from the Women’s Liberation Movement,” *Human Studies*, Vol. XXX (2004), pp. 5-6.

⁵ Lester Embree, “A Beginning for the Phenomenological Theory of Primate Ethology,” Castilian translation, “Un comienzo para la teoría fenomenológica de la etología de los primates,” in *Escritos de Filosofía*, vol. 45, 2005, pp. 145-160 and forthcoming in *Journal of Environmental Philosophy* (Spring 2008).

⁶ “Economics in the Context of Alfred Schutz’s Theory of Science,” Castilian translation, “La economía en el contexto de la teoría de la ciencia de Alfred Schutz,” *Arete: Revista de Filosofía*, vol. XVIII, No. 2, 2006, pp. 309-322, and forthcoming in *Schutzian Research*, Vol. I (2008).

differences between cultural-scientific and common-sense thinking. After a summary of how Schutz compared these types of thinking, something will be said in this essay about an influence of the cultural sciences on common sense. It will be most efficient here to quote more extensively than is usual and it is hoped that the reader/hearer will ponder how well Schutz's description fits the cultural science(s) s/he is most familiar with.

I.

Alfred Schutz begins the Princeton essay with how the cultural sciences differ from the naturalistic sciences.

If ... all scientific constructs are designed to supersede the constructs of common-sense thought, then a principal difference between the natural and the social sciences becomes apparent. It is up to the natural scientists to determine which sector of the universe of nature, which facts and events therein, and which aspects of such facts and events are topically and interpretationally relevant to their specific purpose. These facts and events are neither preselected nor preinterpreted; they do not reveal intrinsic relevance structures. Relevance is not inherent in nature as such; it is the result of the selective and interpretative activity of man within nature or observing nature. The facts, data, and events with which the natural scientist has to deal are just facts, data, and events within his observational field, but this field does not "mean" anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons therein.

But the facts, events, and data before the social scientist are of an entirely different structure. His observational field, the social world, is not essentially structureless. It has a particular meaning

and relevance structure for the human beings living, thinking, and acting therein. They have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life, and it is these thought objects which determine their behavior, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them—in brief, which help them to find their bearings within their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it. (CP I, 5)

The cultural sciences are about aspects of the sociocultural world. This world is *social* because it contains Others:

Only in reference to me does a certain kind of my relations with others obtain the specific meaning which I designate with the word “We”; only with reference to “Us,” whose center I am, do others stand out as “You,” and in reference to “You,” who refer back to me, third parties stand out as “They.” In the dimension of time there are with reference to me in my actual biographical moment “contemporaries,” with whom a mutual interplay of action and reaction can be established; “predecessors,” upon whom I cannot act, but whose past actions and their outcome are open to my interpretation and may influence my own actions; and “successors,” of whom no experience is possible but toward whom I may orient my actions in a more or less empty anticipation. All these relations show the most manifold forms of intimacy and anonymity, of familiarity and strangeness, of intensity and extensity. (CP I, 16)

The lifeworld is also *cultural*:

It is a world of culture because, from the outset, the world of everyday life is a universe of significance to us, that is, a texture of meaning which we have to interpret in order to find our bearings within it and come to terms with it. This texture of meaning, however—and this distinguishes the realm of culture from that of nature—originates in and has been instituted by human actions, our own and our fellow-men's, contemporaries and predecessors. All cultural objects—tools, symbols, language systems, works of art, social institutions, etc.—point back by their very origin and meaning to the activities of human subjects. For this reason we are always conscious of the historicity of culture which we encounter in traditions and customs. This historicity is capable of being examined in its reference to human activities of which it is the sediment.⁷

Science of all sorts is undoubtedly a human activity that observably goes on within the sociocultural world. The scientist is a human being living among other human beings. Like common-sense knowledge, scientific knowledge is socially derived, it is only communicated through social interaction, it depends on cooperation with Others who provide criticism and corroboration, and, as socially founded, it is thus part of the lifeworld. Furthermore, the individual scientist finds him or herself within everyday life in “a biographically determined situation, that is, in a

⁷ CP I, 10-11. While I acknowledge that common-sense constructs are the most accessible component of culture, I do hold that there is more to culture than such constructs. See Lester Embree, “The Constitution of Basic Culture,” translated into Slovenian, *Phainomena*, Vol. 10 (2001), pp. 47-60. Translated into Japanese by Tatsuhiko Sakurai as “Kihon-teki Bunka no Kousei” in *Bunku to Shakai (Culture and Society)*, Vol. 3 (Tokyo, 2002), pp. 75-92. Translated into Czech as “Konstituce zakladni kultury” in *Fenomenologie v pohybu*, ed. Ivan Blecha, 2003, pp. 35-44. Translated into Castilian as “La constitución de la cultura básica” in César Moreno Márquez y Alicia María de Mingo Rodríguez (eds.), *Signo. Intencionalidad. Verdad. Estudios de Fenomenología* (Sevilla: SEFE / Universidad de Sevilla, 2005), pp. 345-355.

physical and socio-cultural environment as defined by him and within which he has his position, not merely his position in terms of physical space and outer time or of his status and role within the social system but also his moral and ideological position.” (CP I, 9) And within this situation there is his or her practical “purpose at hand,” which defines what belongs to that situation and is relevant to it.

When one reflects on science, however, one can find that things are different:

By resolving to adopt the disinterested attitude of a scientific observer—in our language, by establishing the life-plan for scientific work—the social scientist detaches himself from his biographical situation within the social world. What is taken for granted in the biographical situation of daily life may become questionable for the scientist, and vice versa; what seems to be of highest relevance on one level may become entirely irrelevant on the other. The center of orientation has been radically shifted and so has the hierarchy of plans and projects.

By making up his mind to carry out a plan for scientific work governed by the disinterested quest for truth in accordance with preestablished rules, called the scientific method, the scientist has entered a field of pre-organized knowledge, called the corpus of his science. He has either to accept what is considered by his fellow-scientist as established knowledge or to “show cause” why he cannot do so. Merely within this frame may he select his particular scientific problem and make his scientific decisions. This frame constitutes his “being in a scientific situation” which supersedes his

biographical situation as a human being within the world. It is henceforth the scientific problem once established which determines alone what is and what is not relevant to its solution, and thus what has to be investigated and what can be taken for granted as a “datum,” and, finally, the level of research in the broadest sense, that is, the abstractions, generalizations, formalizations, idealizations, briefly, the constructs required and admissible for considering the problem as being solved.⁸

When thus in the scientific attitude specific to his or her discipline, what does a cultural scientist do? Simply put, s/he builds a model of a sector of the sociocultural world in question. To do this, s/he begins by constructing typical “course-of-action” patterns that correspond to behavior that s/he observes. These patterns are then coordinated with “personal types” and also, although Schutz underemphasizes them, “products.”⁹ These constructed persons Schutz characterizes as “puppets.” Carrying the theater metaphor further, he asserts that “It is he, the social scientist, who sets the stage, who distributes the roles, who gives the cues, who defines when an ‘action’ starts and when it ends and who determines, thus, the ‘span of projects’ involved. All standards and

⁸ (CP I, 37-38, paragraphing added) In this connection, Schutz cites Felix Kaufmann, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (1944), which is a somewhat different version of *Die Methodenlehre der Sozialwissenschaften* (1936) that Schutz also knew well. On the philosophical relations of Schutz and Kaufmann, see Helmut Wagner, *Alfred Schutz: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 168-72.

⁹ Alfred Schutz, “Choice and the Social Sciences” in Lester Embree, ed., *Life-World and Consciousness: Essays for Aron Gurwitsch* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 567 f. Schutz also underemphasizes groups in the Princeton essay, but this is also remedied later: “Each of us is a member of the group into which he was born or which he has joined and which continues to exist if some of its members die and others enter into it. Everywhere there will be systems of kinship, age groups and sex groups, differentiations according to occupation, and an organization of power and command which leads to the categories of social status and prestige.” (CP I, 330)

institutions governing the behavioral pattern of the model are supplied from the outset by the constructs of the scientific observer.” (CP I, 42)

The puppets are imagined to be conscious only to the degree relevant for the scientific problem. Typical “in-order-to” and “because motives” corresponding to the courses-of-action are imputed as well:

Motives are never isolated elements but grouped in great and consistent systems of hierarchical order. Having grasped a sufficient number of elements of such a system, *I* have a fair chance of completing the empty positions of the system by correct conjectures. Basing my assumption on the inner logical structure of such a motive system, I am able to make, with great likelihood of proving right, inferences concerning those parts which remain hidden. But, of course, all this presupposes interpretation from the subjective point of view, i.e., answering the question “What does all this mean for the actor?”

Yet these models of actors are not human beings living within their biographical situation in the social world of everyday life. Strictly speaking, they do not have any biography or any history, and the situation into which they are placed is not a situation defined by them but defined by their creator, the social scientist. (CP I, 40)

It is interesting that for Schutz constructs are idealized not only in cultural science but also in common-sense. Thus particular actions as projected in everyday life are always different but nevertheless conceived of as perfectly repeatable. A lesson from Husserl’s *Formale und transzendente Logik* (1929) applies:

... all projecting involves a particular idealization, called by Husserl the idealization of “I-can-do-it-again,” i.e., the assumption that I may under typically similar circumstances act in a way typically similar to that in which I acted before in order to bring about a typically similar state of affairs. It is clear that this idealization involves a construction of a specific kind. My knowledge at hand at the time of projecting must, strictly speaking, be different from my knowledge at hand after having performed the projected act, if for no other reason than because I “grew older” and at least the experiences I had while carrying out my project have modified my biographical circumstances and enlarged my stock of experience. Thus, the “repeated” action will be something else than a mere re-performance. (CP I, 20-21)

Schutz himself goes on originally to describe the idealization of the *reciprocity of standpoints*: “I, being ‘here,’ am at another distance from and experience other aspects as being typical of objects than he, who is ‘there,’” but “I take it for granted—and assume my fellow-man does the same—that if I change places with him so that his ‘here’ becomes mine, I shall be at the same distance from things and see them with the same typicality as he actually does.” (CP I, 11-12)

We have, however, to keep in mind that the common-sense constructs used for the typifications of the Other and of myself are to a considerable extent socially derived and socially approved. Within the in-group the bulk of personal types and course-of-action types are taken for granted (until counter-evidence appears) as a set of rules and recipes which have stood the test so far and are expected to stand it in

the future. Even more, the pattern of typical constructs is frequently institutionalized as a standard of behavior, warranted by traditional and habitual mores and sometimes by specific means of so-called social control, such as the legal order. (CP I, 19)

When Aron Gurwitsch challenged the use of “construct,” Schutz explained that “in the social sciences there is the increasing tendency to replace the concepts of type and ideal type by the concept of ‘construct.’”¹⁰ And he used that expression often in later writings not only with reference to cultural-scientific but also with reference to common-sense thinking. Language is important and an analogous statement about the constructs in specialized scientific language could have been written for the following passage about ordinary language:

The typifying medium *par excellence* by which socially derived knowledge is transmitted is the vocabulary and the syntax of everyday language. The vernacular of everyday life is primarily a language of named things and events, and any name includes typification and generalization referring to the relevance system prevailing in the linguistic in-group which found the named thing

¹⁰ Aron Gurwitsch and Alfred Schutz, *Philosophers in Exile: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch*, ed. Richard Grathoff, trans. J. Claude Evans (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 176. This is not the occasion to study how Schutz modifies Max Weber’s concept of ideal type with Husserl’s account of typicality in *Erfahrung und Urteil* (1939), but one passage deserves quotation: “The unquestioned pre-experiences are, however, also from the outset, at hand as *typical*, that is, as carrying open horizons of anticipated similar experiences. For example, the outer world is not experienced as an arrangement of individual unique objects, dispersed in space and time, but as ‘mountains,’ ‘trees,’ ‘animals,’ ‘fellow-men.’ I may have never seen an Irish setter but if I see one, I know that it is an animal and in particular a dog, showing all the familiar features and the typical behavior of a dog and not, say, of a cat. I may reasonably ask: ‘What kind of dog is this?’ The question presupposes that the dissimilarity of this particular dog from all other kinds of dogs which I know stands out and becomes questionable merely by reference to the similarity it has to my unquestioned experiences of typical dogs. In the more technical language of Husserl, whose analysis of the typicality of the world of daily life we have tried to sum up, what is experienced in the actual perception of an object is apperceptively transferred to any other similar object perceived merely as to its type.” (CP I, 7-8)

significant enough to provide a separate term for it. The pre-scientific vernacular can be interpreted as a treasure house of ready made pre-constituted types and characteristics, all socially derived and carrying along an open horizon of unexplored content. (CP I, 14)

Above all there is the question of what cultural-scientific constructs refer to or are about and in this respect Schutz is quite clear: “The thought objects constructed by the social scientists refer to and are founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thought of man living his everyday life among his fellow-men. Thus, the constructs used by the social scientist are, so to speak, constructs of the second degree, namely constructs of the constructs made by actors on the social scene, whose behavior the scientist observes and tries to explain in accordance with the procedural rules of his science.” (CP I, 5)

Schutz recognizes a considerable number of procedural rules or postulates for the cultural sciences, but those of the “subjective interpretation of meaning” and of “adequacy” are the most important. Again, there are analogs in common-sense thinking.

It is now clear that the meaning of an action is necessarily a different one (a) for the actor; (b) for his partner involved with him in interaction and having, thus, with him a set of relevances and purposes in common; and (c) for the observer not involved in such relationship. This fact leads to two important consequences: First, that in common-sense thinking we have merely a chance to understand the Other’s action sufficiently for our purposes at hand; secondly that to increase this chance we have to search for the

meaning the action has for the actor. Thus, the postulate of the “subjective interpretation of meaning,” as the unfortunate term goes, is not a particularity of Max Weber’s sociology or of the methodology of the social sciences in general but a principle of constructing course-of-action types in common-sense experience. (CP I, 24)

The postulate of adequacy. Each term in a scientific model of human action must be constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the life-world by an individual actor in the way indicated by the typical construct would be understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellow-men in terms of common-sense interpretation of everyday life. (CP I 44)

It deserves comment where the postulate of adequacy is concerned that the actor does not need to agree with the terms of the cultural scientific model but only that the component constructs must be intelligible to him or her.

II.

If the above summary suffices to convey the similarities and differences of cultural-scientific and common-sense thinking for Alfred Schutz, their interaction can now be briefly considered in historical perspective. The sociocultural world is not only overwhelmingly rich in common-sense constructs, but these constructs are often replaced over time. It is certainly not the only one (technology is another), but cultural-scientific thinking is a prominent source of this change in the common sense of modern wealthy societies because its constructs can sediment into

common-sense. Schutz seems not to have recognized this source of common-sense constructs.

For example, at the time of writing, the presidential campaigns in the USA are extensively discussed in the media in terms of what must be considered cultural groups of voters. These cultural groups include *social class* defined in economic terms (e.g., above and below \$50,000 annual income for a family of four), *generation* (youth under 30, middle-aged voters, retirees over 65, etc.), and especially for the Democrats, there is *gender* and *ethnicity*. Fifty years ago, “sex” and “race” might have been mentioned, but would have been understood as essentially biological categories. But Americans have long known that social class is not biological and in the past 50 years Americans have also learned that “gender” and even “ethnicity” are better expressions than “sex” and “race” for matters that involve a great deal of learning and are thus cultural. This change in constructs now widely found at least in American common sense is plainly due to research in the social sciences and history.

Then again, at least for educated common sense, World Wars I and II and indeed the whole the 20th Century are becoming understood, it seems, not as struggles among nation states but as struggles among the British, Chinese, French, Russian, and Turkish *empires* and the German, Italian, and Japanese ambitions for them, with the American empire now prevailing.¹¹ If this change in common-sense occurs, it will be evident in

¹¹ The allusion here is to such works as Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (New York: Random House, 1987), Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004) and *The War of the World* (New York: Penguin, 2007), and Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

the increasing usage in popular media of such words as “empire,” “colony,” “decolonization” and “hegemon.”

Cultural-scientific thinking is a refinement of common-sense thinking and cultural-scientific constructs are about the constructs found in ordinary language. As the latter changes, so must the former and, as just asserted, the contrary is also the case. Both types of thinking are historical or, in less sympathetic terms, relativism looms here. This is not a problem in the cultural sciences since they assume relativism in their various disciplinary ways. But it is a philosophical problem. Is there a solution to be found in Alfred Schutz’s philosophy?

The mentioned contingencies and changes in culture, science included, are empirical or, better, factual. There was a time before cultural science arose and started sedimenting into common-sense and there may come a time when neurophysiology dominates and the influence of today’s cultural science will only continue like the four-humors characterology that comes from Aristotle. But the philosophical ambition of Schutz centrally includes the search for invariant or eidetic structures that are not historical and in this respect he has had considerable success. Thus all sociocultural worlds are articulated into selves, consociates, contemporaries, predecessors, and successors. Thus all sociocultural worlds include groups that are in-groups and out-groups for members within and beyond them. Thus there are always actors, partners, and observers. Thus there are the similarities as well as differences between cultural science and common sense summarized above. And thus cultural science, where it exists, must always be counted among the sources of change in the common-sense constructs in everyday thinking and ordinary language.

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