

*A conference was held in Prague, Czech Republic, in November 2002 that was entitled “Issues Confronting the Post-European World” and that was dedicated to Jan Patočka (1907-1977). The Organization of Phenomenological Organizations was founded on that occasion. The following essay is published in celebration of that event.*

## Essay 10

# Reflective Analysis in and of Social Psychology A Model for Interdisciplinary Phenomenology



© Lester Embree

Department of Philosophy, Florida Atlantic University

embree@fau.edu

The Organization of Phenomenological Organizations.

[www.o-p-o.net](http://www.o-p-o.net)

## Abstract

It is shown, first, how “phenomenology” can be defined as reflective analysis. Then it is shown how science theory (Wissenschaftslehre) is concerned with the definitions, basic concepts, and methodological postulates and one way in which philosophical science theory and scientific science theory are different. Next, Alfred Schutz’s description of the stranger is summarized to show how it is a reflective analysis within social psychology and, finally, how social psychology can be reflectively analyzed in science theory is also shown.

## Introduction

Social psychology is a cultural science: a science because in contrast to science-based practical techniques, such as psychotherapy, its immediate interest is in knowledge, and a cultural science because its subject matter is part of the sociocultural world. The present essay will first attempt to show that social psychology can be done phenomenologically and then to show that the methodology or, better, theory of this science can also be done phenomenologically.

Phenomenologists are regularly asked what “phenomenology” signifies. They can answer “reflective analysis.” This answer can be followed up with two

The copyright on this text belongs to the author. The work is published here by permission of the author and can be cited as “Essays in Celebration of the Founding of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations. Ed. CHEUNG, Chan-Fai, Ivan Chvatik, Ion Copoeru, Lester Embree, Julia Iribarne, & Hans Rainer Sepp. Web- Published at [www.o-p-o.net](http://www.o-p-o.net), 2003.”

explications, one for “analysis,” and the other for “reflection,” which can be contrasted with “straightforward” investigation. “Reflection” can then be said positively to signify that the concern is with objects-as-encountered as well as with the encountering of them, i.e., with both noema and noesis. Besides sometimes including thinking, encounterings always include components of—in broad significations—willing, valuing, believing, and experiencing and have manners of givenness as well as belief characteristics, values, and uses in their objects-as-encountered. And an “analysis” consists in a series of distinctions clarified with examples and not arguments for or against theses—but perhaps the partisans of what is better called “argumentative” philosophy and science cannot comprehend this. For them, all accounts must have a deductive form, which most phenomenology does not have.

About how phenomenology can be specifically social-psychological and, in a different way, specifically philosophical, it might be remarked initially that many in phenomenological philosophy have devoted much energy to the metaphysical question of being qua being, but the original perspective *Wissenschaftslehre*, theory of science, or, best, science theory, which is where the two questions of the present essay arise, has been continued in the United States through the work of Aron Gurwitsch, Alfred Schutz, and some of their students.<sup>1</sup>

In the work of Schutz, science theory is about the actual practice of the scientists of a discipline or kinds of disciplines in order to define that discipline, to clarify its basic concepts, and to explicate the scientific procedures relevant to it. There is a natural tendency in the cultural sciences themselves to reflect upon these same matters, i.e., for members of a scientific discipline to practice science theory upon what they do. This tendency makes significant communication between philosophers and scientists possible. Yet, there is an important difference between philosophical science theory and science theory as done in non-philosophical disciplines. In the latter case, the concern also tends to be with

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Aron Gurwitsch, *Phenomenology and the Theory of Science*, ed. Lester Embree (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974) and Alfred Schutz, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt. Eine Einleitung in die verstehende Soziologie* (Vienna: Springer Verlag, 1932), Eng. trans.: *Phenomenology of the Social World*, trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967); *Collected Papers I: The Problem of Social Reality*, ed. Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962); *Collected Papers II: Studies in Social Theory*, ed. Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964); *Collected Papers III: Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*, ed. Ilse Schutz (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966); *Collected papers IV*, ed. Helmut Wagner and George Psathas with Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996). Schutz’s *Collected Papers* will be cited textually by volume number and pagination.

the matters of definition, basic concepts, and procedures, but solely as they pertain to the particular discipline in question, while philosophers are interested in them as pertaining to kinds of science.

In other words, the philosophical interest is general while the scientific interest is particular. The immediate difference between general and particular interests can suffice to differentiate roles in discussions between philosophers and scientists. Such discussions are to the benefit of both, the philosophers better learning how research is actually done in the disciplines they want to philosophize about and the scientists becoming better in their science as they come to understand more clearly what they are already skilled at doing. This distinction does not preclude other and “deeper” differentiations of the philosophical from the generic phenomenological approach.

## I. Reflective Analysis in Social Psychology

It is appropriate to reflect on actual work in a particular discipline. Accordingly, Alfred Schutz’s essay, “The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology” (1944), will be referred to in the following analysis. This essay was written soon after Schutz had immigrated to the United States and soon afterwards he went on to write “The Homecomer” (1945), which is similar and which was also published in a sociological journal. Presumably he was concerned to establish his credentials in a time before his position teaching sociology was secure. With the possible exception of “The Well-Informed Citizen: An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge” (1946), however, the rest of Schutz’s work is philosophical. When Leo Strauss commended him as a philosophically sophisticated sociologist for writing “Equality and the Meaning-Structure of the Social World” (1955), Schutz replied that he would prefer to be considered a sociologically sophisticated philosopher.<sup>2</sup>

How is reflective analysis relied on in Schutz’s essay? An expression equivalent to reflective analysis but emphasizing the primary articulation of what is reflected upon, rather than the approach by which it is reflected upon, is Edmund Husserl’s phrase “noetico-noematic analysis.” Schutz’s emphasis in “The Stranger” is on the way the cultural pattern of a group is interpreted by a stranger as she approaches and attempts to orient herself within it. He defines the stranger as an adult human of contemporary civilization “who tries to be permanently accepted or at least tolerated by the group which he approaches.”

---

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Professor Michael Barber for this information from the Schutz Nachlass.

(II 91). An immigrant like Schutz himself is a paradigmatic example of such a stranger. Because of the amount of qualification that would be required, he excludes from consideration, e.g., “the visitor or guest who intends to establish a merely transitory contact with the group” (idem).

Schutz takes as his starting point “how the cultural pattern of group life presents itself to the common sense of a man who lives his everyday life within the group among his fellow-men” (II 92). He thus begins his account in noetico-noematic—or at least noematic—terms. Then he distinguishes a second way in which such a pattern can present itself: “This cultural pattern, like any phenomenon of the social world, has a different aspect for the sociologist and for the man who acts and thinks within it” (idem).

The sociologist (as sociologist, not as a man among fellow-men which he remains in his private life) is the disinterested scientific onlooker of the social world. He is disinterested in that he intentionally refrains from participating in the network of plans, means-and-ends relations, motives and chances, hopes and fears, which the actor within the social world uses for interpreting his experiences of it; as scientist he tries to observe, describe, and classify the social world as clearly as possible in well-ordered terms in accordance with the scientific ideals of coherence, consistency, and analytical consequence. The actor within the social world, however, experiences it primarily as a field of his actual and possible acts and only secondarily as an object of his thinking. In so far as he is interested in knowledge of his social world, he organizes this knowledge not in terms of a scientific system but in terms of relevance to his actions. He groups the world around himself (as the center) as a field of domination and is therefore especially interested in that segment which is within his actual or potential reach. (II 92-93; paragraphing modified)

Schutz goes on to distinguish two situations within everyday life. First he points out that for those already in the group the social world is sufficiently coherent, clear, and consistent “to give anybody a reasonable chance of understanding and of being understood” (II 95). “The knowledge correlated to the cultural pattern carries its evidence in itself—or, rather, it is taken for granted in the absence of evidence to the contrary. It is a knowledge of trustworthy recipes for interpreting the social world and for handling things and men in order to obtain the best results in every situation with a minimum of effort by avoiding undesirable consequences” (idem).

To the stranger, however, things present themselves differently:

To him the cultural pattern of the approached group does not have the authority of a tested system of recipes, and this, if for no other reason, because he does not partake in the vivid historical tradition by which it has been formed. To be sure, from the stranger's point of view, too, the culture of the approached group has its peculiar history, and this history is even accessible to him. But it has never become an integral part of his biography, as did the history of his home group. Only the ways in which his fathers and grandfathers lived become for everyone elements of his own way of life. Graves and reminiscences can neither be transferred nor conquered. The stranger, therefore, approaches the other group as a newcomer in the true meaning of the term. At best he may be willing and able to share the present and the future with the approached group in vivid and immediate experience; under all circumstances, however, he remains excluded from such experiences of its past. Seen from the point of view of the approached group, he is a man without a history. (II 96-97)

Schutz then describes how the stranger's attitude changes from an unconcerned onlooker into that of a would-be member; correlatively, the cultural pattern becomes for her something to be mastered. The remoteness of the pattern becomes proximity, its vacancies come to be filled with vivid experiences, and stereotypes about it disintegrate. The image formed from outside turns out to be inadequate precisely because it was not formed in order to provoke a response by members of the in-group. The others in the approached group are merely objects of observation and interpretation and not of interaction and participation. Once in the group, however, the stranger can be shocked to find that things look different and that there is no easy transformation from his former interpretation to what the new situation requires. He needs status in the new group so that he can "get a starting-point to take his bearings" (II 99).

Furthermore, "the cultural pattern and its recipes represent only for members of the in-group a unit of coinciding schemes of interpretation as well as expression" (idem). For the stranger there is no such unity. Not only is language central here, but also the difference in the way the stranger and the member experience the cultural pattern mirrors the difference between learning a new language and expressing oneself with the habitual mastery of the native. As Schutz points out, "In order to command a language freely as a scheme of expression, one must have written love letters in it; one has to know how to pray

and curse in it and how to say things with every shade appropriate to the addressee and to the situation” (II 101). Similarly, regarding the whole cultural pattern—which includes action as well as expression and comprehension—“we may say that the member of the in-group looks in a single glance through the normal social situations occurring to him and that he catches immediately the ready-made recipe appropriate to its solution” (idem).

Finally, it may be mentioned that the stranger lacks a feeling for social distance and thus oscillates between remoteness and intimacy. Thus for the stranger, the cultural pattern is not a shelter but an adventure, while for the approached group the stranger has doubtful loyalty as well as a type of objectivity. “But very frequently the reproach of doubtful loyalty originates in the astonishment of the members of the in-group that the stranger does not accept the total of its cultural pattern as the natural and appropriate way of life and as the best of all possible solutions of any problem” (II 104-105).

The stranger’s objectivity cannot be sufficiently explained by his critical attitude. To be sure, he is not bound to worship the “idols of the tribe” and has a vivid feeling for the incoherence and inconsistency of the approached cultural pattern. But this attitude originates far less in his propensity to judge the newly approached group by the standards brought from home than in his need to acquire full knowledge of the elements of the approached cultural pattern and to examine for this purpose with care and precision what seems self-explanatory to the in-group. The deeper reason for his objectivity, however, lies in his own bitter experience of the limits of the “thinking as usual,” which has taught him that a man may lose his status, his rules of guidance, and even his history and that the normal way of life is always far less guaranteed than it seems. (II 104)

There is much more to this essay in social psychology, but perhaps enough has been related to show the concern with how the social world presents itself differently to different standpoints, i.e., what reflective analysis can accomplish in social psychology. Except in distinguishing the social psychologist from those she investigates, however, the standpoint of the science theorist has not itself been indicated or described. It can be turned to now.

## II. Some Reflective Analysis performed on Social Psychology

What of Schutz's more usual standpoint, namely that of the philosophical science theory? This is a standpoint from which social psychology, for example, is not engaged in, but rather reflected upon. There are three main tasks for this theory, i.e., (a) the definition of the discipline, (b) the clarification of its basic concepts, and (c) the articulation of relevant methodological postulates.

A. What is Social Psychology? Schutz does not offer a definition of social psychology, but part of one can be offered. To begin with, social psychology is a science because it is conducted in a detached and contemplative attitude. Second, social psychology is not like logic and mathematics because it focuses on content rather than merely forms. Third, it is not a naturalistic science because it does not abstract from but rather emphatically focuses on the common-sense interpretations that occur within the sociocultural world. Fourth, social psychology belongs to the genus of social science rather than to that of historical science because it focuses on contemporaries, who are others alive at the same time as a self, whereas the historical sciences also include predecessors in their subject matter.<sup>3</sup> The focus of Schutz's philosophical reflections is on the genus of social science, and what he has to say about specific disciplines such as marginal utility economics is illustrative of that genus.

Schutz actually says little about what might specify the various social sciences and seems little concerned by this.<sup>4</sup> Regarding social psychology he merely mentions that "Because experiments are hardly possible in economics and sociology proper, it was disregarded that psychologists and social psychologists can arrange for laboratory experiments at least to a certain extent."<sup>5</sup> This does not seem a defining characteristic. The present writer suggests that social psychology differs from other social sciences by its emphasis on the typical individual rather than on the groups of which she is a

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Lester Embree, "A Problem in Schutz's Theory of the Historical Sciences with an Illustration from the Women's Liberation Movement," *Human Studies*, forthcoming.

<sup>4</sup> "[W]e have a series of well-advanced sciences which nevertheless cannot adequately define their subject matter. Biology cannot explain what life really is; medicine has no satisfactory definition of health and disease ..." Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, ed. Richard M. Zaner (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 99.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Schutz, "Positivistic Philosophy and the Actual Approach of Interpretative Social Science: An Ineditum from Spring 1953," ed. Lester Embree, *Husserl Studies*, 14 (1998), 127.; hereafter cited as PP.

member. Perhaps the other social sciences have the opposite emphasis. The parallel to social psychology in the historical sciences would then be biography. The correctness of this suggestion may be assessed by consulting social psychologists who reflect on their own discipline, i.e., are interested in scientific science theory. Here the first question of Schutzian science theory has at least been raised for social psychology.

B. Basic Concepts. If it is not well recognized that Schutz's science theory explicitly includes the clarification of basic concepts (*Grundbegriffe*), it is probably because, while clear in writings from the 1930s, this theme is only once mentioned in his American writings. Yet an impressive set of "basic concepts" is listed on the very first page of the *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932): "Among these concepts are those of the interpretation of one's own and other's experiences, meaning-establishment and meaning-interpretation, symbol and symptom, motive and project, meaning-adequacy and causal adequacy, and, above all, the nature of ideal-typical concept formation ..." (English trans., p. xxxi). These basic concepts are plainly relevant for social psychology and need no further discussion here except to say that this is nowise a complete list.

C. Methodological Postulates. A full study of Schutz's methodological postulates has yet to be published, perhaps because they seem difficult to systematize. He offers different lists of postulates—e.g., logical consistency, subjective interpretation, and adequacy (I 43-44), or relevance, adequacy, logical consistency, and compatibility (II 18-19)—and several are combined into the postulate of rationality (II 86). Then again, he makes passing comments, e.g., "As it is the basic methodological postulate of the natural sciences to investigate events within nature independently of any human factors involved, so it is the basic postulate of the social sciences to investigate what occurs on the social scene in terms of the human factor" (PP 135). Moreover, while Schutz clearly holds that the theoretical attitude must be adopted for science to be done, he nowhere calls this a postulate, but it can be explicated as such. And where social psychology is concerned, if this discipline is specified by its emphasis on the individual in relation to her contemporaries, another postulate requiring needs explication.

What can be said finally about the standpoint of science theory itself for Schutz? A phenomenologist somehow unfamiliar with Schutz might immediately think of the project of grounding the worldly sciences in transcendental intersubjectivity. He knew of this project, but considered phenomenological psychology, i.e., what Husserl also called "the constitutive

phenomenology of the natural attitude,”<sup>6</sup> sufficient for this science-theoretical task. (I 136-37; IV 108) Not only is the intramundane status of the conscious lives of individuals relating to living others not suspended by the social psychologist and the being-in-the-world of the practice of social psychology not suspended by the science theorist, be she scientist or philosopher, but even philosophical science theory itself is practiced by Schutz in the natural attitude. Hence, the general concern about the definitions, the basic concepts, and the methods of the species and genera of science in contrast with limited concerns of scientists with their particular disciplines mentioned at the outset of this essay becomes crucial for differentiating philosophical science theory from scientific science theory, a differentiation that would not seem to impede but rather to foster interdisciplinary communication and mutual benefits.

---

---

<sup>6</sup>The expression “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” comes from Husserl, “Nachwort zu meinen ‘Ideen...,” translated in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 426.