

SCHUTZ'S PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY: A SYNTHESIS OF
AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIOLOGY

BY

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Alfred Schutz* continued his interest in bridging the gap between sociology and philosophy after his arrival in the United States from his native Austria in 1939. For the next two decades, he carefully wove into his basic thesis inputs from American intellectuals. However, the elasticity of his premise allowed him to refine, expand and adjust his theory without basically disturbing the foundation of his interpretive sociology articulated in his 1932 publication of Der sinnhafte aufbau der sozialen Welt. In this paper the author will examine the phenomenological thesis before and after the American synthesis.

Overview of the Schutzian Thesis

Schutz chose for himself a lifelong academic pursuit of synthesizing and harmonizing the teachings of Husserl, Bergson and Weber. Along with immersing himself in the works of these giants, Schutz enriched his basic ideas with fresh inputs from other European and American philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. His phenomenological baseline was provided by Husserl, his sociological baseline by Weber, and his philosophical and psychological baseline was primarily provided by Bergson, James and Mead.

Schutz is a significant pioneer on the frontier between philosophy and the social sciences. His principal philosophical work consists of applying Husserl's phenomenology to the problem of social reality, and methodologically relating phenomenological concepts to the sociology of Weber. He positions himself at the opposite end of the Durkheim-Sumner deterministic, cultural superstructure, and in opposition to their coercive mechanism, Schutz looks to the inner-subjective everyday life-world (lebenswelt) of the actors themselves,

*Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) was born and educated in Austria, but because of the political turmoil in Europe, he migrated to the U.S. in 1939. For the next twenty years of his life he divided his time between the business and academic worlds. The majority of his writings were published posthumously.

the "forgotten men" who define their own place from within their groups and culture. Most social scientists, especially the positivists, view their subjects as puppets endowed with characteristics which the scientists choose to classify and typify within their own preconceived constructions. Thus, behaviorists generally describe a fictional world of social reality evolving from a procrustean bed akin to the approach used in the natural sciences. Schutz carefully distinguished between the methods used in human sciences (geisteswissen-shaften) and the natural sciences (naturwissenschaften). Verstehen (understanding) and Erlebnisse (experience), the fundamental subject of social reality, are not explained by the natural science model which addresses itself to the relationship of events in accordance with natural law.

"Second order constructs" have consumed too much of the time of social scientists, while the "first order types" (existential) have either purposely been omitted, or taken for granted as if they are of little importance in the understanding of the social world. The antecedents to the explicit behavior of the actors, is the frontier pioneered by Schutz. The intersubjective, biographical world of the actors, contrasted to the "tip of the iceberg" construction by "objective" observers should, according to Schutz, be the real subject matter of the social sciences.

Schutz labored in developing a theory of social action by learning from the actors themselves who were creating their own social construction of reality. In this construction, the consciousness of the actors is stirred by "in-order-to" and "because" motives. The actors' attention a la vie is a multiple of realities related to, among other stimuli, the actors' predecessors consociates and successors.

In his attempt to humanize the social sciences by underpinning them with a phenomenological base, Schutz addresses himself to the difficult problem of obtaining objective, verifiable knowledge extracted from the intersubjective meaning of persons interacting in their everyday life-world. Real meaning grows out of the biographical expression of persons intermixing their individual consciousnesses within a "clock-time world" and the inner (duree) time world they are experiencing together. Inner time, quickened by one's elan vital, is connected to the actor's past by recollection and to his future by anticipation. Consequently, reality is more of the mind than matter; it is understood more in the context of time than space.

The European Schutz

Schutz received his Doctorate of Law at the University of Vienna where he studied with Hans Kelson, Ludwig von Mises, and Othmar Spaun. Following his graduation from the university, he immersed himself in the writings of Husserl and Weber, especially Husserl's phenomenology and Weber's interpretive sociology.

By employing content analysis of Schutz's writings, the author, in this section as well as the following one, will allow him to inform us of his most significant intellectual predecessors and contemporaries.

Table 1 reflects the almost total absence of American influence on Schutz. Of the 135 references in The Phenomenology of the Social World, Schutz only refers once to an American scholar. With this one exception to William James, all his intellectual roots are European. No mention of Marx or Durkheim demonstrates his lack of appreciation for revolutionary theorists, or the structural, deterministic sociology of his day. Among the leading existentialists, Schutz only briefly acknowledges the writings of Heidegger. Years later in his collected papers, he cross-breeds some of

Table 1: Intellectual Roots of Schutz' Phenomenological Sociology

Intellectual Predecessors and Contemporaries	Schutz' Work		Total
	<u>The Phenomenology of the Social World (1932)</u>	<u>Collected Papers I - III (1940-1959)</u>	
Europeans			
Husserl	41	59	100
Weber	41	35	76
Bergson	8	32	40
Scheler	12	22	34
Simmel	4	13	17
Merleau-Ponty	0	9	9
Sanders	8	0	8
Heidegger	3	5	8
Von Mises	6	1	7
Von Wiese	5	1	6
Freyer	6	0	6
Sartre	0	5	5
Durkheim	0	4	4
Freud	0	3	3
Marx	0	2	2
Americans			
James	1	44	45
Mead	0	22	22
Dewey	0	19	19
Parsons	0	13	13
Cobley	0	11	11
Thomas	0	7	7
Sumner	0	7	7
Total Number of References	135	314	449

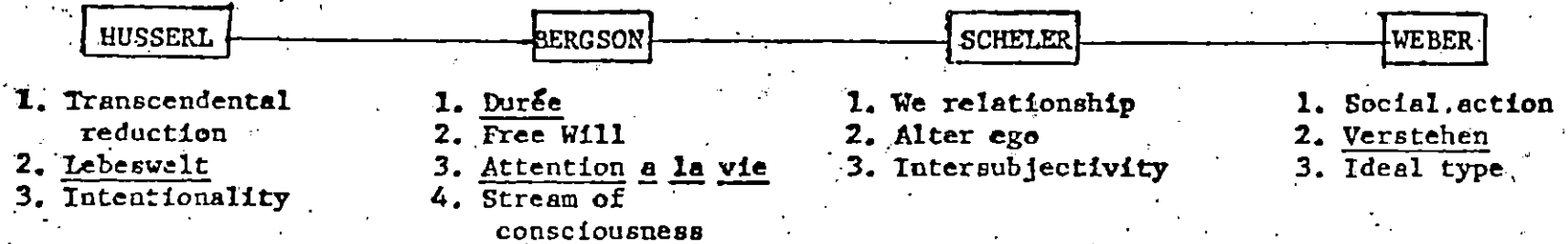
the ideas of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty into his social phenomenology. In doing so, he keeps himself at a safe distance from their existential foundations as he does with Freudian psychology, behaviorism, pragmatism and structural functionalism.

Von Mises, one of his former teachers, continues to influence Schutz as is reflected in his 1932 publication. While acknowledging some contributions to his thought by way of Simmel, Sanders and Von Wiese, Schutz leans heavily on the German philosophers Husserl and Scheler, the French philosopher Bergson, and the German sociologist, Weber. Eighty-two of his 135 references came from Husserl and Weber. The content analysis examination of his 1932 work and the three volumes of Collected Papers, shows that fifty-five percent (n = 449) of all his acknowledgements are credited in rank order to Husserl, Weber, Bergson and Scheler. The European intellectual roots (Figure 1) includes Husserl's Lebenswelt, transcendental reduction and intentionality; Bergson's duree, free will, stream of consciousness, and attention a la vie; Scheler's alter ego, we relationship, and intersubjectivity; and Weber's ideal types, verstehen, and social action. From Leibniz he borrows the "because of" motives, and from Sartre, he reinterprets the philosopher's "alter ego."

His American Synthesis

Being the inclusivist he was, Schutz broadens his intellectual base after his European exit. In his Collected Papers, an addendum of his writings from 1940-1959, Schutz shows his acquaintance with and appreciation of a selected number of American sociologists and philosophers (Table 1). Thirty-nine percent (n = 314) of the persons quoted or referred to in these volumes are American scholars. The philosophers James, Mead and Dewey lead the list,

A. European Intellectual Roots



B. American Intellectual Roots

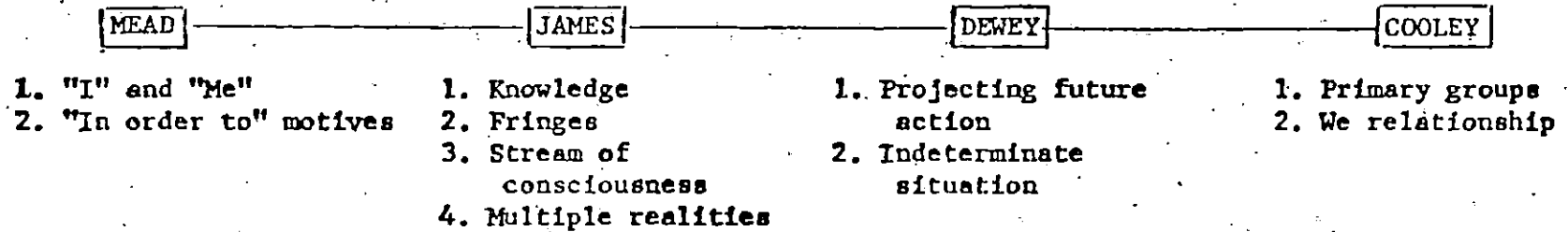


Figure 1: Schutz's Phenomenological Sociology

NOTE: Intellectual source of other concepts explored by Schutz: (1) Thomas' definition of the situation (2) Sartre's Alter ego and (3) Leibniz's "because of motive".

Table 2. Intellectual Roots of Schutz' Phenomenological Sociology: Top Ten

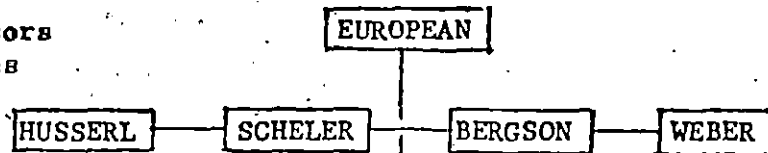
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Bergson	8	32	40
Scheler	12	22	34
Mead	0	22	22
Dewey	0	19	19
Simmel	4	13	17
Parsons	0	13	13
Cooley	0	11	11
Total Number of References	107	210	317

followed by the sociologists Parsons, Cooley, Thomas and Sumner. His mention of Parsons appears to be more from deference and critique than from any positive contribution to his phenomenological approach. In combining the totality of his intellectual roots, it becomes apparent that he was influenced by both American and European philosophy and sociology (Table 2). Of the top ten contributors to Schutz's thesis, five are Europeans (Husserl, Weber, Bergson, Scheler and Simmel), and five are Americans (James, Mead, Dewey, Parsons and Cooley). Their rank order is given in Table 2.

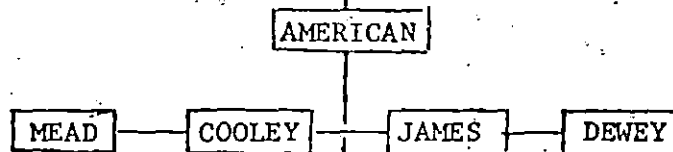
Schutz's American intellectual roots include Mead's "I" and "me" and the "in order to motive;" James' fringes, knowledge, stream of consciousness and multiple realities; Dewey's projecting of future action and the indeterminate situation; and Cooley's primary group and we relationship (Figure 1). Schutz also utilizes Thomas' "definition of the situation."

Figure 2 diagrammatically shows Schutz's European and American intellectual roots as well as some of his followers, both contemporaries and successors. Among his successors are Berger, Garfinkel and Natanson. They and others are carrying on the Schutzian tradition in philosophy and sociology.

A. European Predecessors
and Contemporaries



B. American Predecessors
and Contemporaries



C. Contemporaries and
Successors

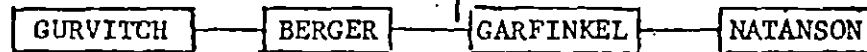


Figure 2: Schutz' Predecessors and Successors

NOTE: Other intellectuals in each of the above categories (A) Simmel, Leibniz and Dilthey; (B) Thomas, Whitehead and Sumner; and (C) McHugh, Cicourel, Douglas, Zaner, Tiryakian and Wagner.

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