

Phaenomenologica 205

Alfred Schutz

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Lester Embree *Editor*

# Collected Papers V. Phenomenology and the Social Sciences

 Springer

Collected Papers V. Phenomenology  
and the Social Sciences

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205

ALFRED SCHUTZ

COLLECTED PAPERS V. PHENOMENOLOGY  
AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Alfred Schutz

Collected Papers V.  
Phenomenology  
and the Social Sciences

Edited by Lester Embree

 Springer

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## Editor's Note

The Collected Papers contained in this fifth volume, *Phenomenology and the Social Sciences*, were previously published between 1940 and 1998 or, in one case, not previously published. The Introduction and the abstracts have been written by me.

I wish to express my deep indebtedness and warm thanks Michael Barber for his help in selecting especially the inedita on relevance from the *Alfred Schütz Werkausgabe* and also some of the letters and for help finding translators for various parts of this volume.

The papers collected here and their original sources are “Husserl and His Influence on Me,” *Annals of Phenomenological Sociology* (1977): 40–44 and *Crosscurrents in Phenomenology*, edited by Ronald Bruzina and Bruce Wilshire (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978); *The Theory of Social Action: Correspondence between Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons*, ed. Richard Grathoff, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1979); “Choice and the Social Sciences,” in *Life-World and Consciousness: Essays for Aron Gurwitsch*, ed. Lester Embree (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1972); *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, ed. Richard M. Zaner (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1970); “Outlines on Relevance and Action,” a translation of “Wiener Exzerpte” by Michael Walter, from *Relevanz und Handeln I: Zur Phänomenologie des Alltagswissens*, ed. Elisabeth List, *Alfred Schütz Werkausgabe*, Volume VI.1, edited by Richard Grathoff, Hans-Georg Soeffner, and Ilja Srubar (Konstanz: UVK, 2004), pp.45-54.; “Letters of Alfred Schutz to Felix Kaufmann” Alfred Schutz Papers, General Manuscripts 129, Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, General Collection of Rare Books and Manuscripts, Series 3, Box 27, Folder 631 (rights by permission of the Schutz Family), translated by Michael Walter; “Letters of Alfred Schutz to Eric Voegelin” (rights by permission of the Schutz Family), translated by Michael Walter from *Eine Freundschaft, die ein Leben ausgehalten hat: Briefwechsel 1938–1959*, ed. Gerhard Wagner and Gilbert Weiss (Konstanz: UVK, 2004), pp. 70–71, 280–285, 383–389, 417–420; “Letters of Alfred Schutz to Aron Gurwitsch,” *Philosophers in Exile: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Aron Gurwitsch, 1939–1959*, ed. Richard Grathoff and trans. J. Claude Evans (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989); and “T. S. Eliot’s Theory of Culture”

(rights thanks to the Schutz Family). It was unfortunately impossible to include the best presentation by Schutz in the philosophy of the social sciences, namely "Positivistic Philosophy and the Actual Approach of Interpretive Social Science: An Ineditum from Spring 1953," but this important text is available at <http://www.springerlink.com/content/t52u22v305u28g04/>

And it needs to be mentioned that the out-of-print volumes I to IV of the *Collected Papers* will soon be available as e-books from Springer.

I wish finally to add a special word of thanks to Dr. Daniel Marcelle, my research assistant at Florida Atlantic University, for help in ways too numerous to list.

August 2011

Lester Embree  
Delray Beach

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# Introduction

This is the fifth volume of the six volume *Collected Papers* of Alfred Schutz. The other five volumes and how they will be referred to hereafter in this volume are as follows.

*Collected Papers*, vol. I, *The Problem of Social Reality*, edited and introduced by Maurice Natanson (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), hereafter: “CP I”;

*Collected Papers*, vol. II, *Studies in Social Theory*, edited and introduced by Arvid Brodersen (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), hereafter: “CP II”;

*Collected Papers*, vol. III, *Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*, edited by I. Schutz with an introduction by Aron Gurwitsch (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), hereafter: “CP III”;

*Collected Papers*, vol. IV, edited with preface and notes by Helmut Wagner and George Psathas in collaboration with Fred Kersten (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996), hereafter: “CP IV.”

*Collected Papers*, vol. VI, *Literary Reality and Relationships*, is currently being edited by Michael Barber and should appear at the same time as the present volume, hereafter: “CP VI.”

The present introduction offers some comments in relation to the title of this volume about how that which is fundamental to Schutz’s thought is best characterized and then offers some remarks about the contents of this volume.

## I. Schutz’s Project

The words “phenomenology” and “the social sciences” chosen for the title of this volume appear the terms most immediately and naturally associated with the rich and complex thought of Alfred Schutz (1899–1959) today. There are then two expressions in effect derived from them that have been widely used to characterize this thought overall, namely “philosophy of social science” and “phenomenological sociology.” But there actually are problems with both of these characterizations.

It is true that before he immigrated to the USA in 1939, Schutz emphasized “*Soziologie*” as the name for the science of how individual humans understand and influence others directly and indirectly as well as unilaterally and reciprocally and offered little about collectivities or groups. But a few years after beginning his life in his new country he published “The Stranger” (1944) and “The Homecomer” (1944), which are contributions to just such a science but characterized as by him in American terms as “social psychology.” Only his “Equality and the Meaning Structure of the Social World” (1955) is arguably sociological in the American signification that he seems to have accepted from Talcott Parsons.<sup>1</sup> More significantly, while “On Multiple Realities” (1945)<sup>2</sup> and *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance* (1947 & 1951)<sup>3</sup> are contributions to what can be called “phenomenological psychology,” (CP IV, p. 26) which differs from social psychology in analyzing individual human life without emphasizing relations with others, and also several writings about economics in CP IV, the remainder of his some three dozen publications are in or on philosophy. Hence, Schutz himself is only to a quite limited extent a sociologist qua social psychologist, which is nowise to deny that there are at least scores of phenomenological sociologists still legitimately taking inspiration from his thought.

As for the characterization of his thought as “philosophy of social science,” Schutz does not use this title, which seems not yet coined in his time, and both components in it are problematic. Neither substantive is well rendered in the opening two sentences of *The Phenomenology of the Social World*,<sup>4</sup> which is the English translation of Schutz’s masterpiece, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt* (1932):

The present study is based on an intensive concern of many year’s duration with the theoretical [*wissenschaftstheoretischen*] writings of Max Weber. During this time I became convinced that while Weber’s approach was correct and that he had determined conclusively the proper starting point for the philosophy of the social sciences [*Theorie der Sozialwissenschaften*], nevertheless his analyses did not go deeply enough to lay the foundations on which alone many important problems of the human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] could be solved (Original expressions added).

The *Geisteswissenschaften* for Schutz are more extensive than the “social sciences” as currently comprehended in the USA because they include not only the social sciences as usually comprehended, but also the historical sciences, archaeology included, history being usually comprehended there as a discipline in the humanities. Indeed, while he does not devote as many pages to the latter as to the former, he

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<sup>1</sup> These three texts are reprinted in CP II, as is “The Well-Informed Citizen: An Essay on the Social Distribution of Knowledge” (1946). Parson’s usage is referred to in CP II, pp. 231–232 and p. 16 below. The difference can be said to be between beginning with so-called “methodological individualism” and eventually reaching collectivities and beginning with so-called “methodological collectivism” and eventually reaching individuals.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in CP I.

<sup>3</sup> Reprinted in the present volume.

<sup>4</sup> Trans. George Walsh and Frederick Lehnert (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1967). German words added.

does mention by name as many disciplines in the species of the historical as in that of the social sciences. (If one wishes to include scientific investigations of the so-called higher nonhuman animals—which Schutz did not—then “cultural sciences” might be preferred to “human sciences” to denote the genus of science of interest to Schutz.<sup>5</sup>) And by the above passage, it seems that “*Sozialwissenschaften*” can have this generic signification as well.

As for “*Theorie der Sozialwissenschaften*,” Schutz uses “theory of the social sciences” in the present volume, pp. 64, 75, 91, but, again, never uses “philosophy of the social sciences.” “Theory of economics” (88, 91), “theory of sociology” (65), and “theory of law” (64, 149) also occur in this volume. This is because careful study shows that he recognizes two forms of *Wissenschaftstheorie*, also called *Wissenschaftslehre* (this volume, pp. 63f.), an expression equivalent to that of “methodology” in the time before that term came to be focused on statistical techniques. Scientists such as Max Weber and Talcott Parsons reflect on the disciplinary definitions, basic concepts, and distinctive methods of their own sciences, while philosophers such as Alfred Schutz reflect on the same things for the various species and genera of science as well as for particular sciences. Schutz is greatly interested in the scientific as well as the philosophical theories of the cultural sciences, his theory of economics being arguably more complete than his theory of social psychology, but subjective meaning and its interpretation and the use of ideal types are, for example, claimed by him for all of the cultural sciences. He also believed his theory of science applied to cultural anthropology, religious studies, jurisprudence, political science, *etc.*

About *Wissenschaftslehre*, which can be rendered as “theory of science” and even “science theory,” it was of course the project of Edmund Husserl. In the review of the *Méditations Cartésiennes* (1931) that Husserl asked him to write, Schutz urged the expansion of the scope of his master’s phenomenological theory of science:

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 analyses, and such an interpretation would accordingly 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 also for all human sciences [*Geisteswissenschaften*] and especially for the social sciences. (CP IV, p. 164)

It might be mentioned here that Schutz takes not what can be called the “missionary approach” but rather the “ethnographic approach” to the cultural sciences. This is to say that he does not preach the great truths of naturalistic science to the benighted social studies, but rather assumes that cultural scientists know what they are doing and hence he seeks to learn from them about their science and hopes at most to help clarify some foundational difficulties that they have perchance overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> “Cultural science” (*Kulturwissenschaft*) is also used in the original of first essay of Schutz published in English, (CP IV, p. 106) but not thereafter.

<sup>6</sup> Lester Embree, “Methodology Is Where Human Scientists and Philosophers Can Meet: Reflections on the Schutz-Parsons Exchange.” *Human Studies* 3 (1980): 367–73.

If enough has now been said about the “social sciences” in the title selected for this volume, what about the signification of “phenomenology” there? Schutz was involved in this tradition since the late 1920s. Along with others, such as Jean-Paul Sartre (1948, collected in CP I) and of course Aron Gurwitsch (this volume), he appreciated the work of Max Scheler and even accepted a commission from Maurice Merleau-Ponty to write extensively about that work late in the 1950s (see the two essays in CP III). Nevertheless, Husserl’s phenomenology was always the most important for him (see “Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology” (1945, reprinted in CP I). All Husserlians appear to have substantial misgivings about one or another aspect of their master’s thought. Schutz had them regarding intersubjectivity and, indeed, did not see the need to follow Husserl into transcendental philosophy.

What Schutz accepted from beginning to end is what Husserl called in his “Nachwort zu meinen ‘Ideen’” (1930) “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” or “phenomenological psychology.” As indicated above, Schutz made substantial contributions to such a psychology (Part II of his *Aufbau* may be added to the list), but, interestingly, he does not include psychology in his taxonomy of the cultural sciences (for what there is of Schutz’s theory of psychology, see the essay on William James in CP III). He does, however, accord phenomenological psychology a foundational role for the cultural sciences vaguely analogous to the role of physics in relation to the other naturalistic sciences for most thinkers in the positivistic tradition.

In sum, Alfred Schutz, who is hardly a phenomenological sociologist, is fundamentally concerned with the phenomenological theory of the cultural sciences, a form of *Wissenschaftslehre*, in ways that are not clear in the usual signification of the phrase “philosophy of the social sciences.”

## II. The Contents of this Volume

This volume of the *Collected Papers* contains nine texts. The previous introductions, dated bibliographical notes, *etc.*, have been omitted here, but some might have significance for the history of Schutz studies. Some editorial notes are by me and marked as “LEE.” Those marked “RG” are by Richard Grathoff and those by Richard Zaner are marked “RMZ.” Otherwise, footnotes are by Schutz.

Some remarks about each of the papers might be of introductory use.

- (1) “Husserl and his Influence on Me” tells much about Schutz’s personal as well as intellectual relationship with the only man he came to call his master.
- (2) “*The Theory of Social Action* and Letters with Talcott Parsons” was previously published as a short book and shows not only a deep appreciation of the thought of arguably the leading sociologist in the USA at the time but also the failure of an attempt at intellectual dialog. The original edition is out of print.

- (3) “Choice and the Social Sciences” is chiefly devoted to the theory of economics and had originally to be excised for reasons of space limitation from “Choosing among Projects of Action” (1951), which is reprinted in CP I.
- (4) *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance* is another short book the original edition of which is out of print. It was edited from several substantial manuscripts and is arguably a contribution to phenomenological psychology.
- (5) “Outlines on Relevance and Action” are translated from the *Alfred Schütz Werkausgabe* and complement the previous texts.

The selected letters to (6) Felix Kaufmann, (7) Eric Voegelin, and (8) with Aron Gurwitsch show Schutz in dialog with friends. (It needs to be remembered that in his life Schutz had extremely few with whom he could discuss his work and he expressed much of his important thinking in his correspondence.)

Finally, (9) “T.S. Eliot’s Theory of Culture” is a previously unpublished essay composed in 1953 and ultimately intended for, but mistakenly omitted from, CP II that not only enhances understanding of what culture is for Schutz, but has more to say about social class than is expressed in the rest of his oeuvre.

My hope is that the initial or restored availability of these nine texts will foster not only more study of Schutz’s thought but also increase his influence on phenomenology in and of the cultural sciences.





## Husserl and His Influence on Me\*

The editors of this volume invited former students of Husserl to give not only an account of the influence of the thought of this great philosopher had upon their own development and work but also to report their recollections of his ways of teaching and the philosophical contacts they had with him. I should like to follow the editors' suggestions and re-evolve my fond memories of my meetings with Husserl during the last years of his life, although I am not sure whether I am entitled to call myself his personal student. I met the great thinker for the first time in 1932 when he had long ago ceased to deliver courses at the university and 12 years after I had finished my studies at the University of Vienna.

My way to Husserl's philosophy was—as he himself stated once—a highly unusual one. Since my early student days, my foremost interest was in the philosophical foundations of the social sciences, especially of sociology. At that time I was under the spell of Max Weber's work, especially of his methodological writings. I recognized, however, very soon that Max Weber had forged the tools he needed for his concrete research but that his main problem—understanding the subjective meaning a social action has for the actor—needed further philosophical foundation.

My teacher in philosophy of law, Hans Kelson, had tried to find such a philosophical foundation in the teachings of the neo-Kantian school, but neither the works of Cohen, Natorp, nor the earlier writings of Ernst Cassirer opened to me an avenue of approach to the problem I was concerned with. Bergson's philosophy impressed me, however, deeply.<sup>1</sup> I was convinced that his analysis of the structure

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\*This fragment is transcribed from an audiotape left by Alfred Schutz. It is a longer and presumably earlier version of the remarks he prefixed to his contribution to *Edmund Husserl 1859–1959* (Nijhoff, The Hague, 1959), but not reprinted in the *Collected Papers*. I have added the title, the notes, and slightly altered the punctuation and wording. LEE

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Alfred Schutz, *Life Forms and Meaning Structures*, trans. Helmut Wagner, *Collected Papers*, vol. 6.

of consciousness and especially of inner time could be used as a starting point for an interpretation of the unclarified basic notions of the social sciences, such as meaning, action, expectation, and first of all intersubjectivity.

At that time I was closely connected with the late Felix Kaufmann, who was working on his first book, *Logik und Rechtswissenschaft*, in which he successfully attempted to found Kelson's pure theory of law upon Husserl's logical and epistemological discoveries. He encouraged me to study the *Logische Untersuchungen* and the first volume of the *Ideen*, the only one then published. This I did with the greatest care, but in spite of my great admiration I could not find in these books the bridge to the problems with which I was concerned. Then, in 1928, the *Vorlesungen zur des inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, edited by Heidegger, were published. Prepared by my study of Bergson's philosophy, I found immediately Husserl's thought and language understandable and when in 1929 the *Formale und transzendente Logik* appeared and placed the problem of intersubjectivity in the focus, I recognized the importance of Husserl's thought for all the questions which preoccupied me. I immediately started to re-study the *Ideen* and the *Logische Untersuchungen* and thus working back to Husserl's earlier works recognized how many of the important themes of his later philosophy were already touched upon in his earlier writings and of the greatest importance for the foundation of the social sciences. In this way my unusual approach to Husserl brought me an immediate contact with his later philosophy from which I discovered his earlier one.

I may be forgiven for dwelling at length on this rather autobiographical account. It is however of a certain importance for the following analysis of the relationship between phenomenology and the social sciences. My encounter with Husserl's philosophy was highly influenced on the one hand by the fact that I had my scientific training in the social sciences and on the other hand by my unorthodox approach to phenomenology: From the outset I was more interested in what Husserl called later on in the "*Nachwort zu meinen 'Ideen'*" "phenomenology of the natural attitude" than in the problems of "transcendental phenomenology." Although I grasped clearly the importance of the phenomenological and the eidetic reductions for the foundation of a presuppositionless philosophy, I felt that the main importance of phenomenology for any attempt at exploring social reality consisted in the fact also established by Husserl that all knowledge achieved by analysis of the reduced transcendental sphere remained valid within the natural attitude.

In a book published in 1932<sup>2</sup> I tried to use Husserl's phenomenology as I understood it and Weber's methodology as a starting point for the analysis of the meaning-structure of the social world. Encouraged by some friends, I sent the philosopher a copy and received from him a letter with highly gratifying comments and the invitation to visit him in Freiburg. At that time Husserl's warm approval was a happy surprise to me. Only many years later when the second volume of the *Ideen* was

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<sup>2</sup> *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, 2nd ed. (Vienna: Springer, 1960).

published by the Archives-Husserl I discovered that some of my findings correspond closely to Husserl's systematic statements which, antedating my own work by many years, were entirely unknown to me.

I hurried to see the philosopher in Freiburg and was received in the friendliest way. From this time on up to Christmas 1937 I managed to see Husserl every year three or four times in Freiburg, Vienna, and Prague for shorter or longer periods. During my stays in Freiburg I had the ever-memorable experiences of accompanying him on his "philosophical walks," which he undertook every day, weather permitting, after his work at his desk for one and a half hours before lunch, accompanied by Fink, sometimes also by Dorion Cairns and Landgrebe. I was also permitted to participate in discussions in his home in the evenings with a few of his intimate friends, such as Jean Hering. On these occasions Husserl frequently invited his interlocutors to ask questions and I availed myself eagerly of such a gracious offer. Husserl started in the friendliest way to answer the question. But after a few sentences he turned to the ideas with which his mind was occupied during his work and explained in a long monologue his latest discoveries. Problems of the constitutive and constructive phenomenology, such as that of the constitution of time (*Zeitigung der Zeit*), of the streaming-standing present (*die stromendstehende Gegenwart*), of the flowing-in (*das Einströmen*), of the phenomenological observer, of the *Lebenswelt*, and of birth and death occupied him in the first years. Later on, the themes of his Viennese and Prague Lectures, which led to "Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die Phänomenologie," stood in the center of his interests. He had hoped to sum up his life work in six or seven continuations of the articles published in *Philosophia*.

At my last unforgettable visit with him shortly after Christmas 1937 he expressed the confident hope that his book, should it ever be finished, would be the coronation of his life work. Husserl was bed-ridden and suffered already from the disease which led a few months later to his death. I was merely permitted to see him for a short time. But he must have had a presentiment of his forthcoming end, for he explained to me that the fully developed transcendental phenomenology makes it indubitable that he, the mundane man, Edmund Husserl, will have to die, but that the transcendental Ego cannot perish. The patient got so deeply moved by this idea that Mrs. Husserl had to make an end to our last meeting.

One single time I had the opportunity to listen to Husserl talk to students. This was in Prague in November 1935. Husserl delivered at the German and the Czech University the lectures from which the essay published in *Philosophia* was developed. Emil Utiz, at that time Professor of Philosophy at the German University, asked Husserl to speak one morning to the students in his seminar and Husserl invited me to accompany him. No topic was arranged beforehand. After some words of introduction, Professor Utiz asked Husserl to speak briefly about the importance of studying philosophy and then to tell his students about the possible contributions of phenomenology to the two subjects of main interest to his seminar, that is aesthetics and characterology. Husserl ignored the latter request completely. But he improvised for more than one hour without any notes on the great event in occidental culture when a few Greek thinkers started to wonder why things are as they are, on

the importance of the theoretical attitude, on the dignity of philosophy, and on its vocation in the time of troubles such we were living in.

I had never heard Husserl talk with such persuasion and deep feeling. His emotions swept over the fascinated young hearers who learned certainly for their whole lives what philosophy means and what a philosopher is. Husserl speaks somewhere in his writings of his endeavor to live a philosophical life in its full earnestness. By this statement he has revealed the innermost kernel of his personality. Everyone who met this astonishing man came immediately to the impression "*Ecce philosophus.*"

# The Theory of Social Action: Text and Letters with Talcott Parsons

Cambridge, MA, October 30, 1940

Dear Dr. Schutz:

I was very sorry to hear from Emil Winternitz, who called me up the other day, that you have been seriously ill. At least I am very glad that you are better now, and I hope that you will soon be fully recovered.

I had wondered a little why I had not heard from you with regard to the manuscript I sent to you, but there has been, of course, no hurry about it. He tells me, however, that you have written a commentary on it, and I shall be greatly interested to see it any time that you are able to send it to me. Perhaps rather than returning the manuscript to me you would be kind enough to send it to Dr. Voegelin at the University of Alabama. I promised that I would send him a copy as soon as one was available, and when you are through with this one it would save trouble all around to have you send it direct to him.

Our group on Rationality is not meeting this fall, but Professor Schumpeter and I are trying to assemble a group of manuscripts so that we can see how close they come to forming a publishable volume. We will let you know as soon as we have enough of them to form any sort of a judgment.<sup>1</sup>

With sincere regards,  
Talcott Parsons

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Alfred Schutz, "The Problem of Rationality in the Social World. A Lecture Delivered at the Faculty Club, Harvard University on April 13, 1940" [reprinted in Alfred Schutz CP IV]. RG

New York, November 15, 1940

Dear Professor Parsons:

Thank you for your kind lines of 30th October. No one regrets more than I that I had to let so much time pass before writing again. Partly responsible was my illness, about which my friend Winternitz informed you. On the other hand, I had hoped to be able to provide you with my position regarding your theories, promised in April, much earlier than is now the case. I can, however, honestly say that, in spite of some serious obstacles and regrettable interruptions, I have devoted the little time that professional demands have left me to a thorough restudying of your book and your short manuscript on rationality.

In scientific matters I am by nature a slow worker who is given to lengthy consideration before putting his thoughts to paper. Moreover, you well know what happens when one becomes involved in reflection on such central problems of the social sciences as those dealt with in your so important investigations. I can only say that it was a very great pleasure to be able, in all these months, to concern myself with your thoughts and to deliberate on them. Even where I differ with your theories I have derived immeasurable profit and stimulation from them.

It must be a misunderstanding or an error on the part of my friend Winternitz, if he told you that my work on your theory concerned the second and larger manuscript. The article which I enclose for your friendly attention is concerned, at least as it now stands, with *The Structure of Social Action*. It had originally been my plan to record my thoughts on this work in the form desired by Mr. Hayek for *Economica* and within the suggested limit of 4,000 words. But it has become apparent that, at least in this first version, I am not able to deal in such brief form with the ideas contained in your work and to state the most important aspects of what I have to say about it.

Your theory deals, indeed, with the most important and central problems of all the social sciences, and such profound matters can not be reproduced in a superficial manner. Therefore, I have refrained in the course of the work from adhering to the limit set by Mr. Hayek. I have rather expressed the most important points which I have to make in a form which remains, in my opinion, concise, and with the omission of an abundance of interesting details which are dealt with in your book and which I would have liked to discuss. The result is a monstrous paper of about 20,000 words and there is probably no hope of publishing it in *Economica* in this form. I have decided, however, to work through the present version three times—it is still unfinished and it is only with some hesitation that I part with it. Yet, I imagine that even in the present form it might be welcomed above all by you, and perhaps also by one or the other critic of your work (I am thinking above all of [Richard] Williams or [Robert] Merton). If I do hear from you that you agree in principle with my presentation of your ideas, and if I have the opportunity to discuss this paper with you, I shall then see if I can use parts of it for an article in *Economica*. Your views on this matter will be most welcome.

As far as your manuscript on rationality is concerned, I have read it thoroughly three times and made myself a list of comments. You will see from the enclosed

paper that I have tried to present your ideas with reference to this as yet unpublished manuscript of yours. The further development of your ideas to be found there has contributed a great deal to my clearer understanding of your published work. I find it, however, impossible to formulate my comments on the second and larger manuscript in writing. This shall have to wait for a personal discussion, which I am very much looking forward to.

Hence, I would like to make you the following suggestion. When your time permits, I would ask you to read and consider the enclosed article and then to grant me an opportunity for a discussion. Should your path lead you to New York and should you be able to set aside one Sunday for me—on weekdays professional demands on my time are very great—so that we can discuss at length the contents of this article and also of both your manuscripts, I would be most grateful. Otherwise, I would be most willing to come to Cambridge for a weekend, this with the main purpose of seeing and talking to you, much as I would like also to take this opportunity to greet my other friends. I would be pleased if this meeting could take place during November or in early December. At Christmas I shall not be in Chicago, as I have been invited to read a paper at the Philadelphia meeting of the American Philosophical Association.<sup>2</sup> I would very much like to keep your larger manuscript until we meet, as my comments make reference to page numbers and I would like to go through them once more before our discussion, and then to have it at hand. I shall, however, inform Prof. Voegelin, who, as you may well know, has been my close friend for 20 years, that I shall send him that manuscript as soon as I no longer have need of it.

It is too bad that your group's so excellent discussions on rationality will not be taking place this semester. I was very interested to learn that you and Prof. Schumpeter are planning to publish a collection of papers. It would, of course, be delightful if this idea were to be realized and I would be very willing, if this appears desirable to you, to expand my own paper or to revise it for such a publication. Should this project not be accomplished, I would like to consider your earlier advice and submit my manuscript [elsewhere]. I did, of course, send you a typed copy of this essay together with the one on rationality, unfortunately without receiving any response from you. Nevertheless, I would also like you to have the printed version in your hands. Should you be interested in my paper accepted by the American Philosophical Association for its December meeting I would be glad to send you a copy. With kindest regards,

Sincerely yours,  
Alfred Schutz

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alfred Schutz, "William James's Concept of the Stream of Thought Phenomenologically Interpreted," reprinted CP III. RG



## 1 Parsons' Theory of Social Action

The subtitle of Professor Parsons' important book, *The Structure of Social Action*, is "A Study in Social Theory with special reference to a group of recent European writers."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the book contains far more than this modest subtitle indicates. In fact, the abstracts of and critical remarks on the sociological theories of Marshall, Pareto, Durkheim, and Max Weber, which fill the greater part of the volume, are, in the opinion of the present writer, among the most valuable interpretations of these great masters of European sociology anywhere published on the subject. In the English language, at any rate, they are undoubtedly the best available. Most of Professor Parsons' careful and subtle analyses are certainly worth thorough discussion. Nevertheless, it is not the object of the following pages to deal with this part of Professor Parsons' work, but to reproduce and to discuss his own theory of social action, a theory which not only sums up the ideas of the above-named sociologists, but represents real progress in the evolution of the methodology of the social sciences.

As a matter of fact, Professor Parsons did not intend to write merely a secondary study. His purpose is to demonstrate that the four men in question, though of different nationality, different social origin, different education, and different attitudes toward their science, nevertheless converge, in all essentials, upon certain fundamental postulates of the methodology and epistemology of the social sciences. These points of view, common to all the writers under consideration, are:

1. their general conception of the relationship between the theory of the social sciences and the empirical facts of social life.
2. their basic conceptual scheme of the theory of the social sciences as a theory of social action.
3. the principles of this theory of social action itself, called by Professor Parsons, "the voluntaristic theory of action."

Following Professor Parsons, the views of the authors concerning the essential features of the relation between empirical social facts and social theories may be condensed as follows. Within the scientific field there are no purely empirical phenomena which are not referred to and modified by an analytical theory. The facts do not tell their own story; they must be cross-examined, analyzed, systematized, compared, and interpreted (SSA 698). The facts science deals with and is interested in must be important for or relevant to the theoretical problem under investigation; moreover, these facts are subject to verification, and for this purpose must be formed by the logical structure of the theoretical system, which itself must be logically closed. All empirically verifiable knowledge, therefore, involves implicitly, if not explicitly, systematic theory. Not only correct observation, but also correct interpretation of the facts is the goal of scientific activity, and interpretation already presupposes reference to a theoretical scheme. Borrowing a not too fortunate definition

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<sup>3</sup>(New York: McGraw Hill, 1937) (Hereafter: "SSA.")

from Professor Henderson, Professor Parsons defines a fact as an “empirically verifiable *statement* about phenomena in terms of a conceptual scheme.”<sup>4</sup> Even if this definition could be accepted within the framework of Professor Parsons’ study, it seems to me not only unusual, but rather dangerous. To be sure, Professor Parsons himself does make a clear distinction between pure phenomena and statements *about* phenomena, qualifying only the latter as “facts.” Nevertheless, it is obvious that the definition advocated by Professor Parsons makes possible a confusion among three essential categories of the epistemology of sciences: *First*: facts and phenomena as they are given to the human mind. *Secondly*: interpretation of these facts and phenomena within the framework of a conceptual scheme. *Thirdly*: statements about the facts and their interpretation.

For example, the statements of physics, too, deal only with phenomena of the natural world referred to a conceptual scheme, but no physicist would agree to substitute the statements about these phenomena for the facts themselves which he observes and which are the object of his experiments. Now, the structure of a social fact is far more complicated than that of a fact in the world of physics. Whereas in the natural sciences facts can be completely described and truly classified without recourse to their “genealogy,” social facts have to be *understood*, and that means they have to be interpreted as results of human activity and within the conceptual scheme of motives and goals which had led the actor to act as he did. Not only scientific theory but even everyday common sense must apply this technique of interpretation to social facts. But, if Professor Parsons’ definition of facts is accepted as a starting point, it becomes rather difficult to determine the demarcation line between simple commonsense interpretation of social facts and scientific statements about social facts. I fear, therefore, that the preceding discussion concerns a principle of the structure of social facts rather than a purely terminological difference. This leads to certain consequences which will later be shown.

This critical observation does not alter my full agreement with Professor Parsons’ statement that all scientific concepts of social facts already presuppose a conscious or unconscious theory of the structure of the social world, and that this theory determines the choice of problems as well as the direction of interest inherent in the selection of facts. Furthermore, I agree with Professor Parsons that, in all essentials, this point of view constitutes the common basis of the methodology of the above-named four men, regardless of differences in terminology, in where their attention is empirically focused and in their various theoretical approaches. (SSA 719 ff.)

Thus every scientific observation of facts must be performed within a conceptual scheme which serves as a general frame of reference. For the social sciences this general frame of reference is, according to the convergent opinion of the great Western European sociologists, the theory of action. (SSA 43) This means that any phenomenon pertaining to the realm of the social sciences may be described as a system of human actions which is always capable of being broken down into ultimate “unit acts,” whatever level of analysis is employed. (SSA 731 and 739)

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<sup>4</sup>SSA, p. 41 (emphasis added by Schutz).

Now, it must be stressed that the description of even the concrete components of action systems and unit acts does not comprise all the possible facts that can be known about the phenomenon in question, but only those which are relevant within the action frame of reference. To be sure, social sciences applying, concretely, the scheme of the theory of action deal also with constant data that are capable of description but not of analytic explanation within the action frame of reference. (SSA 757) As Professor Parsons says, “physical” phenomena as well as “ideas” are such data.

For instance, in dealing with a case of suicide by jumping from a bridge, the social scientist will describe it as an “act,” the physical scientist as an “event.” The former is interested in the motive of the actor and accepts as given that the man, if he jumps, will fall. The latter, on the other hand, is interested in the event of the fall and for him it is a given fact that the man jumps—he does not inquire why. (SSA 734 f.) It can be stated, therefore, that the action frame of reference is not the only one in which the facts of human action can be adequately described. But, the action frame is for certain purposes, namely for the purposes of the social sciences, more adequate than the natural science scheme of space-time or any other scheme. (SSA 756)

This system of generalized social theory of action, common to the writers under consideration, is taken as a total system, a new theoretical development (SSA 735) and as being as radically different from the older utilitarian social theory as from the naive positivistic theory of action. Professor Parsons calls this theory the voluntaristic theory of action.

What are its outstanding features and its elements? As we have already pointed out, all scientific conceptualization of concrete social phenomena, of concrete action systems, can always be divided into those units or parts which Parsons calls unit acts. Such unit acts involve logically the following minimum number of descriptive terms (SSA 44):

- (a) The act implies an agent, an “actor.”
- (b) The act must have an “end”: a future state of affairs to which the process of action is oriented.
- (c) The act must be initiated in a “situation” which in turn is “analyzable” into two elements: “conditions” of action over which the actor has no control, and “means” over which he has control.
- (d) The act involves a certain mode of relationship between these elements, a “normative orientation” of action.

“Within the area of control of the actor,” says Parsons, “the means employed cannot, in general, be conceived either as chosen at random or as dependent exclusively on the conditions of action, but must in some sense be subject to the influence of an independent, determinate selective factor, a knowledge of which is necessary to the understanding of the concrete course of action.” (SSA 44) To avoid any misunderstanding it must be kept in mind that Parsons defines the term “normative” with the purpose of eliminating legal and ethical connotations: “A norm is a *verbal description* of the concrete course of action thus regarded as desirable, combined with an

injunction to make certain future actions conform to this course.” (SSA, p. 75, Schutz’s emphasis) The critical remarks made in discussing the definition of the fact as a *statement about* phenomena within a conceptual scheme may be fully applied to the definition of the norm as a *verbal description* of a course of action. Professor Parsons’ tendency to substitute statements for the phenomena they deal with is certainly taken over from Pareto’s theory of the role of linguistic expressions. Though from a methodological point of view Pareto’s conception seems to be open to serious criticism, we shall not expand on this point. Further argumentation would not lead to greater consequences for those parts of Professor Parsons’ work under consideration.

An actor, an end, a situation analyzable in turn into means and conditions, at least one selective standard in terms of which the end is related to the situation: that is the basic conceptual scheme of the unit act. (SSA 77) It has several implications. From the most important of those pointed out by Professor Parsons, we note only the following:

- (a) An act is always a process in time. The time category is, therefore, basic to the scheme, and the concept of “end” already implies “attainment,” “realization,” “achievement,” briefly a reference to a state not yet in existence, but to be brought into existence by the actor. “The end must in the mind of the actor be contemporaneous with the situation and precede the ‘employment of means.’ And the latter must, in turn, precede the outcome.” (SSA 733 and 45) Physical time is a mode of relationship of events in space, action time a mode of relation of means and ends and other action elements.<sup>5</sup>
- (b) There is a range of choice open to the actor with reference both to ends and means which implies the possibility of “error,” of the failure to attain ends or to make the right choice of means. (SSA 45 and 47)
- (c) The frame of reference of the scheme is *subjective*, that is, it deals with phenomena as they appear from the point of view of the actor. (By “objective point of view” we are to understand “from the point of view of the scientific observer of action.”) The unit of reference which we are considering as the actor is not his physical organism but his “ego” or “self.” The actor’s body, therefore, is part of the situation of action as is the external environment. This use of the subjective point of view is more than a methodological device. (SSA 82) Certain of the fundamental elements in human behavior in society are not capable of systematic theoretical formulation without reference to subjective categories. “This is most clearly indicated by the fact that the normative elements can be conceived of as existing only in the mind of the actor.” (SSA 733) “Without the subjective point of view the theory of action becomes meaningless.” (SSA 634 and 728) It is the realm of applicability of the subjective point of view alone which constitutes the frame of reference called the theory of action.

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<sup>5</sup> The problem of the time element in action will not be developed in this study. See Mead, G.H., *The Philosophy of the Act* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938), and *The Philosophy of the Present* (La Salle: Open Court, 1932). I have developed my own point of view in extended analyses in my book, *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*.

The preceding features are common to every action scheme of thought. There are several possible subsystems which have been historically realized in the evolution of the social sciences since the nineteenth century. Parsons starts their description with the utilitarian system. Its outstanding features are:

1. A certain “atomism,” i.e., a strong tendency to consider mainly the properties of conceptually isolated unit acts and to infer from them the properties of systems of action only by a process of “direct” generalizations. (SA 52)
2. The means-end relationship as the normative element in the unit act, especially in the particular form called by Parsons “rational norm of efficiency.” The very important term “rationality” is defined by Professor Parsons as follows: “Action is rational in so far as it pursues ends possible within the conditions of the situation, and by means which, among those available to the actor, are intrinsically best adapted to the end for reasons *understandable and verifiable by positive empirical science.*”<sup>6</sup>
3. Empiricism: The actor is considered to be guided by scientific or at least scientifically sound knowledge of the circumstances of his situation.
4. Randomness of ends: Utilitarian theory restricting itself to the means-end relationship, says nothing about the relations of ends to one another, nothing at least about ultimate ends.

If the active role of the actor in a utilitarian system (and, generally, in every positivistic system) is limited to the understanding of his situation and the forecasting of its future, and if in such a system ends, relative to the means-end relationship and the actor’s knowledge are taken as given, then positivistic thought is caught in the “utilitarian dilemma”:

Either the active agency of the actor in the choice of ends is an independent factor in action, and the end element must be random; or the objectionable implication of the randomness of ends is denied, but then their independence disappears and they are assimilated to the condition of the situation, that is to elements analyzable in terms of non-subjective categories, principally heredity and environment, in the analytical sense of biological theory. (SSA 64)

How does the “voluntaristic theory of action” overcome this dilemma? It proves the incompatibility of the action scheme with positivism and leaves room for an epistemology of a genuinely realist nature, but one involving non-empirical elements which are also non-sociological. (SSA 69 and 448)

*Marshall* breaks down the positivistic theory of action and the utilitarian picture of society by his refusal to accept “wants” as given data for economics and by

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<sup>6</sup>SSA, p. 58 (italics mine). For our critical examination of Parsons’ theory the role attributed to *scientific* knowledge within the frame of reference of the unit act will be of the greatest importance. Obviously Parsons is influenced by Pareto’s theory of logical and non-logical actions. Pareto, too, defined logical actions as “those operations which are logically united to their end, *not only from the point of view of the subject who performs the operations, but also for those who have a more extended knowledge.*” Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, 1935), §50.

introducing his concept of “free enterprise” which involves as a basic element certain common values, among them freedom as an end in itself and as a condition of the expression of ethical qualities.<sup>7</sup> Economics, as the “study of man in the everyday business of life” brings the importance of “common values” in direct connection with economic activities themselves.

*Pareto* overcomes the narrowness of positivistic theory by starting from the concepts of non-logical action, of residues and derivations, which lead in the interpretation of Professor Parsons to the conception of chains of intrinsic means-end relationships involving a differentiation into three sectors: ultimate ends, ultimate means and conditions, and an “intermediate sector” containing means and ends interpretable from “below” or “above.” (SSA 457–59) This, in turn, leads to a new concept of choice: the action is oriented not only to the immediate end, but simultaneously to a plurality of different alternative ends within an integrated system of ultimate values that are either individual values or part of the “utility of the collectivity.” He introduces, then, the normative or value aspect not only in concrete systems of action but in the ultimate value attitudes. Furthermore, he overcomes the individualistic “atomism” by introducing the concept of “common ends” and even of “the end, which a society should pursue.”

*Durkheim*, though starting from a purely positivistic point of view arrives—by introducing the concepts of “non-contractual element in contract,” (SSA 461) of “anomie,” of “constraint” as sanction, of the social element as consisting essentially in a common system of rules and obligations—at a “sociologism,” which has eliminated its positivistic basis and is very close to the attitude of Pareto. Finally, by interpreting the symbolic form of ritual as an expression of ultimate-value attitudes, by introducing elements of action existing only in the minds of individuals, he added a whole new normative category to the structure of action.<sup>8</sup>

If the aforementioned three men have broken down the positivistic scheme of the theory of action in favor of the voluntaristic theory, *Max Weber* has overcome the limitations of the idealistic tradition which formed his intellectual background. The greater part of his work is devoted to the study of the social role of religious ideas and ultimate values. These elements, however, do not stand alone but in complex interrelation with other independent factors, such as ideas, attitudes and norms of a different kind. (SSA 683) In his methodological work Weber has demonstrated that the conception of objective scientific knowledge of any empirical subject matter is intrinsically bound up with the reality both of the normative aspect of action and of obstacles to the realization of norms, i.e., of “*Wertbeziehung*,” which alone determines the relevant data. Furthermore, the types called “*zweckrational*” and “*wertrational*” are the theoretical equivalents of this general Weberian attitude. (SSA 717 and 718–19)

<sup>7</sup> SSA, p. 453. See Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 8th ed. (London: Macmillan, 1925), 781.

<sup>8</sup> SSA, p. 467. Parsons calls Durkheim’s thesis that society is a reality *sui generis* the “sociologistic theorem.” (SSA, 248)