

Summary of excerpt of Alfred Schutz's "Common-Sense and Scientific Interpretation of Human Action"

Common-sense thinking

Common-sense thinking consists of a system of constructs or meanings for organizing the world and acting in it. Although each of our total set of constructs is unique (originating in our biographical situation), most of our common-sense constructs are socially derived. This shared intersubjective stock of knowledge and assumptions we develop through interactions allows us to engage in joint projects with other people.

The more anonymous our partners in action are, the more we rely on standardized recipes of action. We may understand consociates in face-to-face relationships as unique individuals, but only as "partial selves."

We act by attempting to bring about a future state of affairs—an "in-order-to-motive." When observing himself, an actor can also determine "because-motives," which determined him to act as he did. People interact by taking each others' in-order-to-motives as because-motives.

The meaning of an action is different for an actor (who understands how any given in-order-to-motive fits into larger projects), the actor's partner in action (who adopts the actor's in-order-to-motives as because-motives) and a disinterested observer (whose motives are not interlocked with the actor's).

Rational interaction (involving shared understandings of end, means and secondary results) seems impractical. But "rational action" really involves action within a shared set of constructs.

Social science thinking

In order to understand human behavior, social scientists, like anyone else, need to understand it from the point of view of the actor (with his constructs, motives and projects). But social scientists are disinterested observers.

Most social science constructs are constructs of common-sense constructs and are meant to supercede them. But the scientific model of the social world uses models of actors that "are not human beings living within their biographical situation in the social world of everyday life." Their situation is defined by the social scientist, not themselves.

Alfred Schutz (1899-1959)

Student of Edmund Husserl, founder of phenomenological philosophy

Husserl's other students included existentialists Heidegger and Sartre

The Phenomenology of the Social World (1932)

Fled Austria in 1939. Took position at New School for Social Research.

Students there included Berger, Luckmann and Garfinkel

Founded phenomenological sociology: Attempt to understand the world from the perspective of the ordinary person

1966-67: Invasion of the sociology of everyday life with publication of:

English translation of *The Phenomenology of the Social World*

Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*

Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology*

All based in second emphasis of the sociology of knowledge:

Proposition #2: Reality is socially constructed by knowledges

This proposition asserts that social reality is not a social fact in its own right, but is something produced and communicated, its meaning derived in and through these systems of communication.

Key Ideas of Phenomenological Sociology

Everyday life is interpreted through a stock of knowledge (meanings, categories, constructs).

The dialectical nature of everyday life

Consists of meanings derived from personal experience

Consists of meanings handed down from our predecessors

Constructed by us

Preexisting and constraining

Unique, based in our biographical situation

Consists of shared (intersubjective) meanings and recipes for action

We cannot gain access to another person's lifeworld; the other appears at best as a "partial self"

Shared constructs and assumptions (reciprocity of perspectives) allow people to interact and engage in joint projects

Face-to-face relations ("we-relations" with "consociates"), especially ongoing ones, allow us to understand others as unique individuals (although their biographical situation is revealed only "fragmentarily")

Relationships with distant and/or anonymous others ("they relations") rely on standardized recipes for action ("course-of-action" types)

Some assumptions that allow people to interact (reciprocity of perspectives)

Objects of the world are accessible to other people, but they may mean something different to other people because:

- a. They can perceive things I can't and vice versa
- b. We have different biographically determined situations and purposes

This problem is overcome by two idealizations:

- a. The interchangeability of standpoints: if you were where I am, you would see what I see and vice versa
- b. The congruency of the system of relevances: for all practical purposes, our unique biographical situations are irrelevant for the purposes at hand

Phenomenological Criminology: Katz's (1988) *Seductions of Crime*

Three stages of “doing stickup”

1. Subjective moral advantage: the would-be robber attains a private sense of moral competence to control the situation, often through some “angle.”
2. Declaration: the robber must commit himself wholeheartedly—he must announce publicly and clearly that he is trying to commit a crime
3. Sticking beyond reason with stickup: “Whether it fails or is successful, a stickup has the potential for transcendent significance for the offender.... If they are to persist, stickup men must adopt a characteristic hardness of will and insist on being criminal, regardless of the dictates of moral reason or instrumental considerations for disciplining their violence. In a phrase, they must become fascinated with the project of being a ‘hardman.’”

Three stages of the sneaky thrills

1. Tacitly generating the experience of being seduced to deviance
Objective is to become taken with object (which may lose charm once taken)
2. Reconquering emotions in a concentration dedicated to the production of normal appearances
Thief must attempt a sociological analysis and focus on normal interactional tasks
3. Appreciating the reverberating significance of accomplishment in a euphoric thrill
Thrill may be described with ludic (game), religious and sexual metaphors