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Alfred Schutz  
ON PHENOMENOLOGY  
AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

THE HERITAGE OF SOCIOLOGY  
A Series Edited by Morris Janowitz

Selected Writings

Edited and with an Introduction by

HELMUT R. WAGNER



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS  
CHICAGO AND LONDON

myths have the particular function of justifying and vouching for the truth and validity of the order established by the other symbolic systems (Malinowski).<sup>7</sup>

At this level the world of the sacred and that of the profane are closely interrelated.

### Provinces of Meaning

In a famous chapter of his *Principles of Psychology*<sup>8</sup> William James shows that there are several, probably an infinite number of orders of realities, each with its special and separate style of existence. James calls them "subuniverses," and mentions as examples the world of senses or physical things (as the paramount reality), the world of science, the world of ideal relations, the worlds of mythology and religion, the world of "idols of the tribe," the various worlds of individual opinions, and the world of sheer madness and vagary. "Each world *whilst it is attended to* is real after its own fashion; only the reality lapses with the attention." Reality means simply relation to our emotional and active life; whatever excites and stimulates our interest is real. Our primitive impulse is to affirm immediately the reality of all that is conceived, as long as it remains uncontradicted. "... All propositions, whether attributive or existential, are believed through the very fact of being conceived, unless they clash with other propositions believed at the same time, by affirming that their terms are the same with the terms of these other propositions."<sup>9</sup>

The ingenious theory of William James has, of course, to be detached from its psychological setting and analyzed for its many implications. . . . We prefer to speak of finite provinces of meaning upon which we bestow the accent of reality, instead of subuniverses as does William James. By this change of terminology we emphasize that it is the meaning of our experiences, and not the ontological structure of the objects, which constitutes reality. Each

<sup>7</sup> Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion* (New York, 1954), pp. 100 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Vol. 2, chap. 21.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 293, 290.

province of meaning—the paramount world of real objects and events into which we can gear by our actions, the world of imaginings and fantasies, such as the play world of the child, the world of the insane, but also the world of art, the world of dreams, the world of scientific contemplation—has its particular cognitive style. It is this particular style of a set of our experiences which constitutes them as a finite province of meaning. All experiences within each of these worlds are, with respect to this cognitive style, consistent in themselves and compatible with one another (although not compatible with the meaning of everyday life). Moreover, each of these finite provinces of meaning is, among other things, characterized by a specific tension of consciousness (from full awakeness in the reality of everyday life to sleep in the world of dreams), by a specific time-perspective, by a specific form of experiencing oneself, and, finally, by a specific form of sociality.

### Paramount Reality

William James rightly calls the subuniverse of senses, of physical things, the paramount reality. But we prefer to take as a paramount reality the finite province of meaning which we have called the reality of our everyday life. . . . The reality of our everyday life which our commonsense thinking takes for granted includes not only the physical objects, facts, and events within our actual and potential reach perceived as such in the mere apperceptual scheme, but also apperceptual references of a lower order by which the physical objects of nature are transformed into sociocultural objects. But since these representations of a lower order also have objects, facts, or events of the outer world as their appercepting member, we believe that our definition is compatible with that of James.

### The Cognitive Style of the Paramount Reality

(1) A specific tension of consciousness, namely wide-awakeness, originating in full attention to life;

- (2) A specific *epoché*, namely suspension of doubt;  
 (3) A prevalent form of spontaneity, namely working (a meaningful spontaneity based upon a project and characterized by the intention bring about the projected state of affairs by bodily movements gearing into the outer world);  
 (4) A specific form of experiencing one's self (the working self as the total self);  
 (5) A specific form of sociality (the common intersubjective world of communication and social action);  
 (6) A specific time-perspective (the standard time originating in an intersection between *durée* and cosmic time as the universal temporal structure of the intersubjective world).

These are at least some of the features of the cognitive style belonging to this particular province of meaning. As long as our experiences of this world—the valid as well as the invalidated ones—partake of this style we may consider this province of meaning as real, we may bestow upon it the accent of reality. And with respect to the paramount reality of everyday life we, with the natural attitude, are induced to do so because our practical experiences prove the unity and congruity of the world of working as valid and the hypothesis of its reality as irrefutable. Even more, this reality seems to us to be the natural one, and we are not ready to abandon our attitude toward it without having experienced a specific *shock* which compels us to break through the limits of this "finite" province of meaning and to shift the accent of reality to another one

### Transitions

To be sure those experiences of shock befall me frequently amidst my daily life; they themselves pertain to its reality. They show me that the world of working in standard time is not the sole finite province of meaning but only one of many others accessible to my intentional life.

There are as many innumerable kinds of different shock experiences as there are different finite provinces of meaning upon which I may bestow the accent of reality. Some instances are: the shock of falling asleep as the leap into the world of dreams; the inner

transformation we endure if the curtain in the theater rises as the transition into the world of the stage-play; the radical change in our attitude if, before a painting, we permit our visual field to be limited by what is within the frame as the passage into the pictorial world; our quandary, relaxing into laughter, if, in listening to a joke, we are for a short time ready to accept the fictitious world of the jest as a reality in relation to which the world of our daily life takes on the character of foolishness; the child's turning toward his toy as the transition into the play-world; and so on. But also the religious experiences in all their varieties—for instance, Kierkegaard's experience of the "instant" as the leap into the religious sphere—is such a shock as well as the decision of the scientist to replace all passionate participation in the affairs of "this world" by a disinterested contemplative attitude.

### Nonparamount Realities

(1) All these worlds—the world of dreams, of imageries and phantasms, especially the world of art, the world of religious experience, the world of scientific contemplation, the play world of the child, and the world of the insane—are finite provinces of meaning. This means that (a) all of them have a peculiar cognitive style (although not that of the world of working with the natural attitude); (b) all experiences within each of these worlds are, with respect to this cognitive style, consistent in themselves and compatible with one another (although not compatible with the meaning of everyday life); (c) each of these finite provinces of meaning may receive a specific accent of reality (although not the reality accent of the world of working).

(2) Consistency and compatibility of experiences with respect to their peculiar cognitive style subsists merely *within* the borders of the particular province of meaning to which those experiences belong. By no means will that which is compatible within the province of meaning P be also compatible within the province of meaning Q. On the contrary, seen from P, supposed to be real, Q and all the experiences belonging to it would appear as merely fictitious, inconsistent and incompatible and vice versa.

(3) For this very reason we are entitled to talk of *finite* provinces of meaning. This finiteness implies that there is no possibility of referring one of these provinces to the other by introducing a formula of transformation. The passing from one to the other can only be performed by a "leap," as Kierkegaard calls it, which manifests itself in the subjective experience of a shock.

(4) What has just been called a "leap" or a "shock" is nothing else than a radical modification in the tension of our consciousness, founded in a different *attention à la vie*.

(5) To the cognitive style peculiar to each of these different provinces of meaning belongs, thus, a specific tension of consciousness and, consequently, also a specific *epoché*, a prevalent form of spontaneity, a specific form of self experience, a specific form of sociality, and a specific time perspective.

(6) The world of working in daily life is the archetype of our experience of reality. All the other provinces of meaning may be considered as its modifications.<sup>10</sup>

### *Worlds of Phantasy*

Under this heading we shall discuss some general characteristics of the cognitive style peculiar to a group of otherwise most heterogeneous finite provinces of meaning, none of them reducible to the other. This group is commonly known as that of fancies or

<sup>10</sup> A word of caution seems to be needed here. The concept of finite provinces of meaning does not involve any static connotation such as if we had to select one of these provinces as our home to live in, to start from or to return to. That is by no means the case. Within a single day, even within a single hour our consciousness may run through most different tensions and adopt most different attentional attitudes to life. There is, furthermore, the problem of "enclaves," that is of regions belonging to one province of meaning enclosed by another, a problem which, important as it is, cannot be handled within the frame of the present paper, which admittedly restricts itself to the outlining of a few principles of analysis. To give an example of this disregarded group of problems: Any projecting within the world of working is itself, as we have seen, a phantasying and involves in addition a kind of theoretical contemplation, although not necessarily that of the scientific attitude.

imagines and embraces among many others the realms of day-dreams, of play, of fiction, of fairy-tales, of myths, of jokes. So far philosophy has not worked upon the problem of the specific constitution of each of these innumerable provinces of our imaginative life. Each of them originates in a specific modification, which the paramount reality of our daily life undergoes, because our mind, turning away in decreasing tensions of consciousness from the world of working and its tasks, withdraws from certain of its layers the accent of reality in order to replace it by a context of supposedly quasi-real phantasms. For the problem in hand a fugitive survey of what all these worlds have in common has to be sufficient.

Living in one of the many worlds of phantasy we have no longer to master the outer world and to overcome the resistance of its objects. We are free from the pragmatic motive which governs our natural attitude toward the world of daily life, free also from the bondage of "interobjective" space and intersubjective standard time. No longer are we confined within the limits of our actual, restorable, or attainable reach. What occurs in the outer world no longer imposes upon us issues between which we have to choose nor does it put a limit on our possible accomplishments.

However, there are no "possible accomplishments" in the world of phantasms if we take this term as a synonym of "performable." The imagining self neither works nor performs within the meaning of the aforementioned definitions. Imagining may be projected inasmuch as it may be conceived in advance and may be included in a hierarchy of plans. But this meaning of the term "project" is not exactly the same in which we used it when we defined action as projected conduct. Strictly speaking the opposite holds good, namely, that the projected action is always the imagined performed act, imagined in the future-perfect tense. Here we are not particularly interested in investigating whether all or merely some or no form of our imaginative life may be qualified as "action" or whether fancying belongs exclusively to the category of mere thinking. Yet it is of highest importance to understand that imagining as such always lacks the intention to realize the phantasm; it lacks in other words the purposive "fiat." Using the

language of Husserl's *Ideas* we may say that all imagining is "neutral," it lacks the specific positionality of the thetic consciousness.

However we have to distinguish sharply between imagining as a manifestation of our spontaneous life and the imageries imagined. Acting may be imagined as a true acting and even working within the meaning of our previous definitions; it may be imagined as referring to a preconceived project; as having its specific in-order-to and because motives; as originating in choice and decision; as having its place within a hierarchy of plans. Even more: it may be imagined as endowed with an intention to realize the project, to carry it through, and may be fancied as gearing into the outer world. All this, however, belongs to the imageries produced in and by the imagining act. The "performances" and "working acts" are merely imagined *as* performances and working acts, and they and the correlated categories bear, to borrow Husserl's term, "quotation-marks." Imagining itself is, however, necessarily inefficient and stays under all circumstances outside the hierarchies of plans and purposes valid within the world of working. The imagining self does not transform the outer world.

### *Province of Scientific Reasoning*

Scientific theorizing—and in the following the terms theory, theorizing, etc., shall be exclusively used in this restricted sense—does not serve any practical purpose. Its aim is not to master the world but to observe and possibly to understand it. . . .

All theoretical cogitations are "actions" and even "performances" within the meaning of the definitions given hereinbefore. They are actions, because they are emanations of our spontaneous life carried out according to a project and they are performances because the intention to carry through the project, to bring about the projected result supervenes. Thus, scientific theorizing has its own in-order-to and because motives, it is planned, and planned within a hierarchy of plans established by the decision to pursue and carry on scientific activities. (This "action-character" of theorizing alone would suffice to distinguish it from dreaming.) It is, furthermore, purposive thinking (and this purposiveness alone

would suffice to distinguish it from mere fancying!) the purpose being the intention to realize the solution of the problem at hand. Yet, theoretical cogitations are not acts of working, that is they do not gear into the outer world. To be sure, they are based upon working acts (such as measuring, handling instruments, making experiments); they can be communicated only by working acts (such as writing a paper, delivering a lecture); and so on. All these activities performed within and pertaining to the world of working are either conditions or consequences of the theorizing but do not belong to the theoretical attitude itself, from which they can be easily separated. Likewise we have to distinguish between the scientist *qua* human being who acts and lives among his fellow-men his everyday life and the theoretical thinker who is, we repeat it, not interested in the mastery of the world but in obtaining knowledge by observing it.

This attitude of the "disinterested observer" is based upon a peculiar *attention à la vie* as the prerequisite of all theorizing. It consists in the abandoning of the system of relevances which prevails within the practical sphere of the natural attitude. The whole universe of life, that which Husserl calls the *Lebenswelt*, is pre-given to both the man in the world of working and to the theorizing thinker. But to the former other sections and other elements of this world are more relevant than to the latter.

The theoretical thinker . . . has anticipations which, on the one hand, refer back to his stock of sedimented experiences and, on the other hand, to its special system of relevances. . . . However, unlike man in daily life, he is not passionately interested in the question, whether his anticipations, if fulfilled, will prove helpful for the solution of his practical problems, but merely whether or not they will stand the test of verification by supervening experiences. This involves—in the well-understood meaning of the foregoing definition—a certain detachment of interest in life and a turning away from what we called the state of wide-awakeness.

Since theoretical thought does not gear into the outer world it is revocable within the meaning of this term defined hereinbefore. That means it is subject to permanent revision, it can be undone, "struck out," "cancelled," modified, and so on, without creating

any change in the outer world. In the process of theoretical thinking I may come back again and again to my premises, revoke my conclusions, annihilate my judgments, enlarge or restrict the scope of the problem under scrutiny, etc.

... The theoretical thinker is interested in problems and solutions valid in their own right for everyone, at any place, and at any time, wherever and whenever certain conditions, from the assumption of which he starts, prevail. The "leap" into the province of theoretical thought involves the resolution of the individual to suspend his subjective point of view. And this fact alone shows that not the undivided self but only a partial self, a taker of a rôle, a "Me," namely, the theoretician, "acts" within the province of scientific thought. This partial self lacks all "essentially actual" experiences connected with his own body, its movements, and its limits.

We may now sum up some of the features of the *epoché* peculiar to the scientific attitude. In this *epoché* there is "bracketed" (suspended): (1) the subjectivity of the thinker as man among fellow-men, including his bodily existence as psychophysical human being within the world;<sup>11</sup> (2) the system of orientation by which the world of everyday life is grouped in zones within actual, restorable, attainable reach etc.; (3) the fundamental anxiety and the system of pragmatic relevances originating therein. But within this modified sphere the life-world of all of us continues to subsist as reality, namely as the reality of theoretical contemplation, although not as one of practical interest. With the shift of the system of relevances from the practical to the theoretical field all terms referring to action and performance within the world of working, such as "plan," "motive," "projects" change their meaning and receive "quotation marks."

We have now to characterize with a few words the system of

11 Needless to say, this form of *epoché* must not be confused with the *epoché* leading to the phenomenological reduction by which not only the subjectivity of the thinker but the whole world is bracketed. The theoretical thinking has to be characterized as belonging to the "natural attitude," this term *here* (otherwise than in the text) being used in contrast to "phenomenological reduction."

relevances prevailing within the province of scientific contemplation. This system originates in a voluntary act of the scientist by which he selects the object of his further inquiry, in other words, by the *stating of the problem at hand*. Therewith the more or less empty anticipated solution of this problem becomes the supreme goal of the scientific activity. On the other hand by the mere stating of the problem the sections or elements of the world which actually are or potentially may become related to it as relevant, as bearing upon the matter in hand, are at once defined. Henceforth, this circumscription of the relevant field will guide the process of inquiry. It determines, first of all, the so-called "level" of the research. As a matter of fact the term level is just another expression for the demarcation line between all that does and does not pertain to the problem under consideration, the former being the topics to be investigated, explicated, clarified; the latter the other elements of the scientist's knowledge which, because they are irrelevant to his problem, he decides to accept in their givenness without questioning as mere "data." In other words, the demarcation line is the locus of the points actually interesting the scientist and at which he has decided to stop further research and analysis. Secondly, the stating of the problem at once reveals its open horizons, the outer horizon of connected problems which will have to be stated afterwards, as well as the inner horizon of all the implications hidden within the problem itself which have to be made visible and explicated in order to solve it.

All this, however, does not mean that the decision of the scientist in stating the problem is an arbitrary one or that he has the same "freedom of discretion" in choosing and solving his problems which the phantasying self has in filling out its anticipations. This is by no means the case. Of course, the theoretical thinker may choose at his discretion, only determined by his inclination, which is rooted in his intimate personality, the scientific field in which he wants to take interest and possibly also the level (in general) upon which he wants to carry on his investigations. But as soon as he has made up his mind in this respect, the scientist enters a preconstituted world of scientific contemplation handed down to him by the historical tradition of his science. Henceforth he will partici-

pate in a universe of discourse embracing the results obtained by others, problems stated by others, solutions suggested by others, methods worked out by others. This theoretical universe of the special science is itself a finite province of meaning, having its peculiar cognitive style with peculiar implications of problems and horizons to be explicated. The regulative principle of constitution of such a province of meaning, called a special branch of science, can be formulated as follows: Any problem emerging within the scientific field has to partake of the universal style of this field and has to be compatible with the preconstituted problems and their solution by either accepting or refuting them. Thus, the latitude for the discretion of the scientist in stating the problem is in fact a very small one.

## VI. The Province of Sociology