



Alfred Schütz (13 April 1899, Vienna - 20 May 1959, New York City) was an Austrian social scientist, whose work bridged **sociological and phenomenological traditions** to form a **social phenomenology**

, and who is 'gradually achieving recognition as one of the foremost philosophers of social science of the [twentieth] century'.

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Life

Schütz was born in Austria, studied law in Vienna, worked as an international lawyer for Reitler and Company, and moved to the United States in 1939, where he became a member of the faculty of The New School. He worked on phenomenology, social science methodology and the philosophy of [Edmund Husserl](#), William James and others.

Work

Schutz's principal task was to create a philosophical foundation for the social sciences. He was strongly influenced by Ludwig von Mises, Henri Bergson, William James, and Edmund Husserl. Contrary to common belief, George Herbert Mead - whose 'concern with the analysis of meaning in social interaction paralleled that of Schutz, although it had been arrived at by a completely different road' [2] - was of little importance for Schutz, who was very critical of his behavioristic approach and his inadequate treatment of the problem of social action. Although Schütz was never a student of Husserl, he, together with a colleague, Felix Kaufmann, studied Husserl's work intensively in seeking a basis for interpretive sociology derived from the work of Max Weber. This work and its continuation resulted in 1932 in his first book,

Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt

(literally,

The meaningful construction of the social world

, but published in English as

The phenomenology of the social world

). The publication brought him to the attention of Husserl, whom he 'frequently thereafter visited'; but 'although he corresponded with Husserl until the latter's death [in 1938], he was unable for personal reasons to accept the offer to become his assistant'

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at Freiburg University.

Schütz's writings had a lasting impact on sociology, both on phenomenological approaches to sociology (especially through the work of Thomas Luckmann and Peter L. Berger) and in ethnomethodology through the writings of Harold Garfinkel.

Schütz is probably unique as a scholar of the social sciences in that he pursued a career as a lawyer for an Austrian banking firm for almost his entire life, teaching part-time at the New School for Social Research in New York and producing key papers in phenomenological sociology that fill three volumes (published by Nijhoff, The Hague).

The four divisions of the lifeworld

'Schutz is, according to Natanson, "phenomenology's spokesman of the *Lebenswelt*"...the mundane lifeworld',

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which he divided into four distinct subworlds in what has been called 'the crux of Schutz's theoretical contribution. He believes that our social experience makes up a vast world...distinguish[d] between directly experienced social reality and a social reality lying beyond the horizon of direct experience'.

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The former consisted of the

Umwelt

of what Schutz termed "consociates" or "fellow-men" - of the man who 'shares with me a community of space and a community of time'.

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By contrast, 'those who I am not directly perceiving fall into three classes. First comes the world of my contemporaries (*Mitwelt*), then the world of my predecessors (*Vorwelt*), and finally the world of my successors ('

Folgewelt

)'.

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The last two represent the past and the future, whereas one's contemporaries share a community of time, if not space, and 'are distinguished from the other two by the fact that it is in principle possible for them to become my consociates'.

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Schutz was interested in mapping 'the transition from direct to indirect experience...as two poles between which stretches a continuous series of experiences', [6] as well as in what he called the progressive anonymisation of the

Mitwelt

: a 'scale of increasing anonymity. There is, for instance, my absent friend, his brother whom he has described to me, the professor whose books I have read, the postal clerk, the Canadian Parliament, abstract entities like Canada herself, the rules of English grammar, or the basic principles of jurisprudence'.

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For Schutz, 'the further out we go into the world of contemporaries, the more anonymous its inhabitants become', ending with the most anonymous of all - 'artifacts of any kind which bear witness to the subjective meaning-context of some unknown person',

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but nothing more.

In his later writings, Schutz explored the way that 'in social situations of everyday life relations pertaining to all these dimensions are frequently intertwined...in various degrees of anonymity'. [

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Thus for instance, 'if in a face-to-face relationship with a friend I discuss a magazine article dealing with the attitude of the President and Congress toward...China...I am in a relationship not only with the perhaps anonymous contemporary writer of the article but also with the contemporary individual or collective actors on the social scene designated by the terms "President", "Congress", "China"'. [

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References

1. [^](#) George Walsh, "Introduction", Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Illinois 1997) p. xv
2. [^](#) [a](#) [b](#) Walsh, p. xviii
3. [^](#) Lester E. Embree, *Schutzian Social Science* (1999) p. 91
4. [^](#) [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) Walsh, p. xxvii
5. [^](#) Schutz, *Phenomenology* p. 163
6. [^](#) Schutz, *Phenomenology* p. 177
7. [^](#) Walsh, p. xxviii
8. [^](#) Schutz, *Phenomenology* p. 181
9. [^](#) Alfred Schutz, *The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague 1973) p. 352
10. [^](#) Schutz, *Social Reality* p. 352

Biographies

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External links

- [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#) , "Alfred Schütz," by Michael Barber
- [Alfred Schutz Papers](#) . General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.
- [Schutzian Research - A Yearbook of Mundane Phenomenology and Qualitative Social Science.](#)
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