

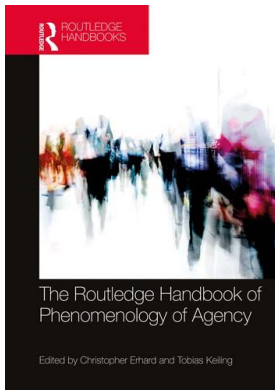
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Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Agency

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Action in the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315104249-12>

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Published online on: 30 Oct 2020

How to cite :- Michael Barber. 30 Oct 2020, *Action in the phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, from: The Routledge Handbook of Phenomenology of Agency* Routledge

Accessed on: 20 Mar 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315104249-12>

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10

ACTION IN THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF ALFRED SCHÜTZ

Michael Barber

Levels of human activity, action, and motives

Alfred Schütz (1899–1959) studied law and the social sciences in Vienna, and, using the work of Edmund Husserl, sought to provide a philosophical account of the social life-world to support the *verstehende* sociology of Max Weber. Schütz wrote his *The Phenomenology of the Social World* in Vienna, before fleeing Hitler’s *Anschluss* and coming to the United States in 1939, where he spent the next twenty years extending his philosophical work into such areas as semiotics, multiple realities, and assorted philosophical questions.

Schütz’s theory of action stood in contrast to the behaviorism of his time by its typical phenomenological focus on how action and other forms of spontaneity are “experienced by the mind in which they originate” (Schütz 1962d: 209), that is, by a subject whose action is not to be studied merely as that of a physical object as one might do in the natural sciences (Schütz 2013: 217). Faced with the Cartesian alternative of mysterious inner processes pertaining to a non-observable “soul,” behaviorism opted instead for a methodology based on sensory observation that would avoid unverifiable “purposes” or motives and that instead reduced action to mere bodily responses to stimuli – more in accord with the procedures of the natural sciences. Schütz, however, argued that behaviorism operated with the unexamined prejudice of Cartesian dualism (choosing the body instead of the soul, though, as its investigative focus) rather than consider the object that the social sciences study, namely human beings in their everyday, social life-world, who understand each other quite well, encountering each other as fellow human beings rather than as “organisms” (Schütz 1962c: 55), without limiting themselves to either physically observable bodily actions or introspection into a mysterious inner sanctum of the other. One ought first to clarify what the object of the social sciences is, namely, the social world of everyday life, and then consider which methodologies are appropriate for studying that object. Having clarified the everyday life basis of the social science through *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, Schütz argued that that a more appropriate methodology than sensory observation of responses to stimuli would be ideal-type construction ala Max Weber that takes account of the meaning actions have to their actors – interpretations that are verifiable or falsifiable by the community of social scientists assessing such types’ accuracy. Schütz’s theory of action depends on breaking free from behaviorism and the dualism that spawned it to concentrate on a phenomenological

description of the action that everyday actors regularly engage in and that this handbook entry will present more fully (Schütz 1962c: 52–63).

In his *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, he initially employs the phenomenological reduction to become clear about internal time-consciousness of any actor, even though he dispenses with the reduction as he proceeds to examine social interaction and its structures (Schütz 1967: 43–44, 2013: 217, 252).

Schütz (1967: 45, 51) portrays the inner stream of consciousness in terms of Bergsonian *durée*, understood as “a continuous coming-to-be and passing-away of heterogeneous qualities,” as undifferentiated experiences melting into one another. Although one lives in these experiences, one can cease immersing oneself in the flow and reflect on them, with the result that these experiences undergo modification and are apprehended and distinguished, brought into relief, and marked out from each other as discrete. Insofar as reflection succeeds upon and supplants the experience just preceding it, it presupposes that the experience on which it reflects is already past and elapsed. Furthermore, following Husserl, Schütz (1967: 48–50) explains how reflection has access to such just past experiences by pointing to a succession of “primary remembrances” or “retentions” that involve a being-still-conscious of the just-having-been and that build a bridge to the later reflection from the original now apprehension or impression, to which such retentions attach like a comet’s tail streaming behind its nucleus. Despite this connection, the reflective act, an act of “secondary remembrance” or “reproduction,” introduces a sharp discontinuity between itself and the experiences it grasps. Only when the reflective act falls upon streaming inner-time and grasps its experiences as well-circumscribed, past experiences, do those experiences become “meaningful” (Schütz 1962d: 210).

Not all experiences are rendered meaningful so easily, since some experiences lie close to the private core of the person, and they cannot be grasped at all or can be apprehended only vaguely, and they are to a degree ineffable. These experiences, of which one can remember “that” they occurred and reconstruct only vaguely the “how” of their being experienced, are categorized as “essentially actual experiences” (Schütz 1967: 52). These include corporeal experiences, muscular tensions, physical pain, sexual sensations, and moods like joy, sorrow, or disgust. In addition, one is assailed by a “surf of indiscernible and confused small perceptions” (Schütz 1962d: 210) that provoke passive reactions, and one selects from this confused whole for pragmatic purposes some specific perceptions (such as some of the distinctive noises that emerge from the sea when one listens to it) and makes them clear, converting perceptions into apperceptions. Such small perceptions, which correspond to the “unconscious” of psychoanalysis, often determine without one’s knowing it many of one’s activities. For instance, if one is walking and talking with a friend and turns to the right rather than the left, such a movement might be prompted by a state of uneasiness about what is on one’s left. This unease, of which one may be barely aware, if at all, and which originates in small solicitations deriving from confused small perceptions, results in a movement that does not depend on entertaining any alternatives or making any choices (Schütz 1962d: 210–211, 1964a: 78, 1967: 52–53, 2011: 82; , 2013: 237, 269–270, 285–286, 292).

However, beyond these experiences that are undergone or suffered, subjectively meaningful experiences arise insofar as one spontaneously takes up an attitude toward them, as when one fights against, suppresses, or yields to the pain one finds oneself beset with (Schütz 1967: 54). This type of “meaning-endowing experience of consciousness,” as Husserl (1983: 129) describes it, which becomes meaningful by being singled out from *durée*, also introduces a new level of meaning insofar as, for example, the pain now has the sense “something to be fought against.” One can find such meaning-conferring experiences in the automatic

activities – habitual, traditional, and affectual – which Leibniz denotes as “empirical behavior” (Schütz 1962d: 211). This kind of spontaneous Ego-act, one species of spontaneous activity (or “conduct” (*Verhalten*) in Schütz’s terms), does not take place with the kind of intent typical of the other species, namely, “action.” When such unplanned spontaneous activity occurs overtly, through a bodily intervention, it is known as “mere doing,” and when covertly, “mere thinking” – either of which can be evoked by small perceptions (Schütz 1962d: 211, 1967: 55–56, 2011: 82).

Another kind of conduct is “action” (*Handeln*), which is based on a project devised in advance, whether overt or covert (Schütz 1962d: 211). Should one covertly entertain a project with no intention to realize it, one engages in mere phantasying or daydreaming. But when an intention to realize supervenes, one converts the project into a purpose, as when one sets about solving a scientific problem mentally, and such a covert (i.e., without physical expression) purposive action becomes a “performance” (Schütz 1962d: 211). Purposive overt actions are known as “working,” that is, a bodily engagement with the world to bring about a projected state of affairs (Schütz 1962d: 211–212).

These levels of personal activity underpin distinctions made in Schütz’s 1937 manuscript “The Problem of Personality in the Social World,” in which he distinguishes four types of “pragma,” or activities: pragma without a project or its conversion into a purpose to be realized, such as unconscious reactions evoked by stimuli (such as the knee-jerks, blinking, facial expressions, or gait that would fall under the essentially actual experiences described earlier); pragma with purpose but without project such as spontaneous habitual, traditional, or affective activity; pragma with both purpose and project, which is action in the full sense; and pragma with project but no purpose to realize it, that is, mere phantasying (Schütz 2013: 278).

Moreover, Schütz shifts the Husserlian distinctions between types of knowing, such as memory or anticipating the future, in the direction of his own theory of action. Thus, in discussing the past-directed intentional orientations of memory, Husserl separates immediate retention (*primären Erinnerung*) and reflective reproduction or recollection (*Wiedererinnerung*), which, as mentioned, transforms undifferentiated experiences into discrete, elapsed experiences (Schütz 1967: 45–52, 2004: 141–142). These past-oriented intentional structures have their future oriented correlates: protentions (*Protentionen*), which intercept what is immediately coming, and the more reflective, reproductive-like, long-range, foreseeing expectations (*Vorerinnerungen*) (Schütz 1967:57–58, 2004: 153). It is the reflectively shaped project, known in advance by such future, long-range expectations, which, converted into a purpose by the intention to realize it, constitutes the goal that guides the actions and sub-actions taken to realize it.

Schütz elaborates on the shaping of this project in imagination and its role in motivating action. Distinguishing the “action (*Handeln*),” that is, the ongoing activity, from the completed “act (*Handlung*),” Schütz states that one begins by phantasying the completed act as the goal toward which one’s action will lead. One imagines that act as completed, but in the future, focusing on what *will have resulted* because of one’s action – thinking, in other words, in the future perfect tense. This pre-phantasied state of affairs to be brought about by an action yet to come constitutes the “in-order-to” motive of the action. This future-directed motive motivates the voluntative *fiat!*, the decision to transform one’s phantasied act into covert performing or into an action gearing into the outer world. As a result, the project guiding the action-steps taken to realize it serves as the “primary and fundamental meaning of the action” (Schütz 1964b: 11, 1967: 88–89, 2011: 78–79).

Of course, one usually already has had past experience of the act that one phantasies and the means leading to it insofar as one has already executed such a project oneself or seen

others doing so, and consequently one has the same sense about one's phantasied project that one has about most pragmatic behavior patterns that one has mastered in everyday life, namely that one "could do it again" (Schütz 1962d: 224, 1967: 90). In addition, there can be differences between the perspectives of an actor, who knows the in-order-to motive of her working act, and of an observer who may have access only to a limited temporal segment of such an action. The observer might see an actor complete the writing of a letter without knowing that finishing that letter was only a sub-act in pursuit of the more extended in-order-to motive of applying for a fellowship. In such a case, the observer, from an objective standpoint, would see only the product of the actor's bodily engagement (the letter) without understanding the full subjective meaning of the actor in producing it. Further, sometimes the product-outcome may turn out differently than the actor intended or fall short of what was intended, but an observer unacquainted with the subjective meaning of the actor may not be able to appreciate such discrepancies (Schütz 2011: 85–86).

There is another type of motive, however, to be found when one looks backward to past events that may have influenced one's adoption of the in-order-to motive that guides one's action toward the future. Hence while the bank-robber may be focused on realizing the act of robbing the bank that he phantasied in future perfect tense and decided to pursue, after the bank robbery (or during a pause in its execution), he might pause to reflect on what events in his past might have influenced his decision to rob the bank. He might, for instance, consider the violence of his upbringing as having motivated that decision, as, therefore, the "because motive" of his deciding to rob the bank. Insofar as his upbringing lies in a past more past than the past of his decision to rob the bank, looking for because motives requires one to think in "pluperfect tense" (Schütz 1967: 91–96, 2011: 79–80).

Relying on this distinction between motives, Schütz opposes the utilitarian assumption that economic preferences derive from feelings of unease that require one to act in such a way as to satisfy them. On the contrary, Leibniz's small perceptions, un-apperceived, unattended to, and unreflected upon, produce the unease prompting one to turn to the right in the garden rather than left and thereby provide a disposition to act, out of which all actions without deliberation originate. To the extent that these influences on action are recoverable by a retrospectively directed reflection, they would be grasped as because motives, but they cannot provide the final explanations of what determines activities, in particular, of a particular future-directed actor who rationally evaluates several projects, decides upon one, and commences to act on the basis of a supervening volition – all of which can be located in the domain of "in-order-to" motives. Schütz's distinctions make possible rational action, which is taken as archetypal for all economic acts (Schütz 2011: 81–84).

In addition, Schütz's two types of motives interlock with each other in the idealization of the "reciprocity of motives." When one requests information from interlocutor, the in-order-to motive of one's request is to obtain information, and one assumes that one's interlocutor will understand one's action and be led to act in such a way (to find the information) that one will understand the interlocutor's consequent behavior as a response to one's query. In effect, one's in-order-to motive will, in turn, serve as the because motive (discoverable in retrospective reflection) launching the interlocutor's action whose in-order-to motive will be to secure for one the information requested. Many additional assumptions accompany this "idealization of the reciprocity of motives," namely that one's in-order-to motives will become the because motives of another, such as that the other's motives will be like one's own and those of others, according to one's typical experience of how such motivations work in typical circumstances (Schütz 1962b: 23). In fact, Schütz (1964b: 14) affirms, "The prototype of all social relationship is an intersubjective connection of motives."

Essential features of action: typifications, relevances, and temporality

The essential features of action, as this section will explain, consist in typifications (shaped by the past, oriented toward the future, automatized, and socially interrelated), relevances (of various types such as topical, motivational, interpretive, intrinsic, and imposed), motivations (“in-order-to” and “because”), and temporality.

Typifications are a central constituent of Schütz’s conception of action. Whenever one experiences any object, such as the child experiencing a scissors for the first time, as Husserl has shown (Husserl 1960: 111), one transfers the meaning “scissors” and their power to cut to the next object encountered that resembles the first scissors. One acquires such a typification not only by repeating one’s experience, but cultures bequeath to their members whole sets of typifications, especially through language vocabularies, by which one knows “mountains,” “trees,” “salespersons,” and knows what to typically expect when one encounters such typified objects. Such typifications are taken for granted by “everyone” in one’s culture and have an objective, anonymous character, as if they are applicable regardless of one’s personal biography. Whole trains of action and routine behaviors, too, are typified, such as “going to the post office to mail a letter” or “brushing one’s teeth,” and are contained within the stock of knowledge that one possesses as part of the “biographical situation” that one brings to new experiences. One assimilates these new experiences under the typifications one already has acquired, interpreting something that looks like a dog to one’s previously formed typifications of a dog, including one’s typifications that if one mistreats this animal, it might respond by biting one, as previous dogs have behaved. Because of the typifications in one’s stock of knowledge, one operates with the idealization, that “I can do it again” as one classifies and acts in regard to new experiences (similar to past ones) or undertakes new projects of action (similar to a degree to those executed before). This idealization is basic to all pragmatic mastery of the conditions of everyday life. In sum, one phantasies one’s future project of the same type as previously performed acts that were effectively executed in response to circumstances similar in type to those one encounters in the present (Schütz 1962a: 69, 74–75, 2011: 126).

This typical structure of projected acts enables Schütz to distinguish mere fancying from the projection of performances or overt actions. In pure phantasy, one is not impeded by the limits imposed by reality, and one can imagine oneself freely flying through the air or outrunning a speeding automobile – one thinks “in the optative mode” (Schütz 1962a: 73). However when one phantasies a typical project to be implemented in real life, the ability to achieve such a project, or its “practicability,” is “a condition of all projecting which could be translated into a purpose” (Schütz 1962a: 73). One thinks in a “potential mode” (Schütz 1962a: 73), that is, one seeks to be as sure as possible that the means and ends necessary are within one’s reach, and one recognizes that one cannot count on support from situational elements beyond one’s control and that the project itself would have been feasible and its means and ends available if the action had occurred in the past. One’s knowledge of all these factors depends upon one’s past experiences of typically similar projects and the means and ends involved in realizing them. As a result, it is practicability that distinguishes projects phantasied without regard for their implementation from projects phantasied with the intention of enacting them in the real world, and one determines what is practicable on the grounds of one’s past experience of accomplishing typically similar projects. The typicality of projects and the means and ends connected to them is, then, the key to whether similar projects and means and ends are considered practicable (Schütz 1962a: 73).

While typifications are formed by past experience, they also anticipate the future. Operating with a typified project as the in-order-to motive of one’s action, one anticipates that

the project will unfold in the future as it has in the past, unless counter-evidence surfaces. At the same time, however, the protentions and anticipations of what will be happening in the course of an action “are essentially empty references to the open horizons that may be fulfilled by the future occurrences or may . . . ‘explode’” (Schütz 1964c: 286). Consequently, while one’s present project is similar to previous projects, any project, including its circumstances and the course of its unfolding, will never be exactly like another (Schütz 1962a: 73, 1964c: 285–287, 293). There is, then, a horizon of indeterminacy that accompanies any action projected according to its type. On the one hand, it is likely or presumable that a project of this or that type will go through, and its typicality makes it somewhat predictable. On the other hand, whatever the final outcome of a project may be, it itself will be unique, different in the details of its progressing and results from every project similar to it. As Schütz asserts paradoxically, “in common sense thinking of everyday life whatever occurs could not have been expected precisely as it occurs, and . . . whatever has been expected to occur will never occur as it has been expected” (Schütz, 1964c: 287). This openness to novelty that lies at the core of any typification counterbalances the stabilizing tendency of typifications insofar as they function as valid until counter-evidence appears and tend to support predictability at the expense of flexibility and spontaneity – a concern that Jan Strassheim (2016: 494, 496, 500–503, 506–507) has voiced.

Moreover, typified patterns of behavior can become automatized in such a way that they can act as a supportive substructure for higher level acts. Hence one can deploy language almost automatically, without giving it a second thought, as one pursues a higher level project such as requesting another to write a letter of recommendation for one’s fellowship proposal. Likewise, one can walk, eat, or smoke while one’s focus is on thinking through higher level practical or theoretical problems. In addition one can interpret automatically standardized signs, such as the gestures of a traffic officer, though Schütz cautions that it is possible to fail to understand others whether their actions conform or not to the assumed, standardized course of action. Finally, the typified routines underpinning higher level actions can experience interruption, as when, for instance, the pen with which one automatically writes runs out of ink, distracting one from the higher level thinking one might have been doing while writing and compelling one to attend to a new focus, namely filling one’s pen with ink (Schütz 1996: 126, 2011: 97–99, 173–175).

While the idealization of the reciprocity of motives serves as a prototype of all social relationships, typifications, central to Schütz’s theory of action, also make it clear how social relationships pervade action. Insofar as the recognition of the other as an alter ego requires that one imputes to another, whose organism resembles one’s own, a life of consciousness similar to one’s own, this idealization of the general positing of the Thou amounts to a kind of typification of the other that one makes use of every time one encounters another like oneself and that is continually confirmed when interacting partners regularly conform with each other’s expectations, as happens almost without flaw, for instance, when the reciprocity of motives is implemented. Furthermore, many of the typical projects motivating one’s actions are acquired by watching others, by being trained by them, or by drawing on the project types deposited in the *social* stock of knowledge that social groups throughout history have built up and conferred approval upon. The elements within a social stock of knowledge are “taken for granted not only by *me* but by *us*, by ‘*everyone*’” (Schütz 1962a: 75), independently of one’s personal biography. Moreover, the typified projects and motives guiding one’s actions in everyday life belong to wider networks of socially constructed, maintained, and approved typifications that are shared by those who occupy socially maintained, typified roles such as those of doctors, priests, soldiers, and farmers everywhere, to

name a few. Finally, there is a reasonableness to social relationships insofar as both parties to an interaction orient their actions in accord with certain socially approved, typified standards to which members of in-groups conform, including traditionally and habitually accepted and taken for granted norms, mores of good behavior, manners, organizational frameworks, or game rules. In other words, the very presence of typifications in projects, motives, and actions reflects the social groups that originate and transmit such typifications and that constrain and define the human actions taking place within their boundaries (Schütz 1962b: 32, 1964b: 13, 2013: 260).

Action depends essentially not only on typifications but also on the interests at hand that shape thinking, projecting, and acting, and in particular the goals one seeks to attain. Certainly the in-order-to motive for the sake of which one acts constitutes an interest, or, as Schütz puts it, it is of relevance, or is a “relevance,” to the actor. The in-order-to motive, the final state of affairs to be brought about, understood as the paramount project, becomes then the ultimate motivational relevance for all the single steps and sub-acts that aim at realizing it. Likewise the in-order-to motive to realize each sub-act becomes the guiding purpose or relevance of each of the sub-sub-acts directed at realizing these sub-acts. Once the actor decides upon the governing in-order-to motive as an ultimate relevance, it diffuses value and relevance throughout a whole system of means, ends, and acts; and suddenly possibilities that had not existed before spring into existence or that previously had no relevance now become valuable (Schütz 1964d: 124).

Since the in-order-to motivational relevance of any action is of such significance for it, it also becomes of pressing relevance to know whether it is practicable, even before one commits oneself to realizing it, at the least to avoid expending energy futilely. As Schütz remarks, “The practicability of carrying out the projected action within the imposed frame of reality of the *Lebenswelt* is an essential characteristic of the project” (Schütz 1964c: 289), and “The performability of the project . . . is the condition of all projecting” (Schütz 2011: 89). The judgment of whether an action is practicable, as a condition of projecting it, also relies on one’s typifications of similar past projects, their successfulness, and the resources required for their realization. If it is of relevance to seek to realize the project, then it is also of relevance to know if it is realizable at all. This concern for practicability, which as mentioned earlier, distinguishes phantasying in the optative mode from acting in the real world, is linked to the principle of scarcity in economic theory, which “establishes the limits, the frame within which the individual economic subject can draft his performable project. (Otherwise my fancy of a million dollars to spend daily would be economic projecting.)” (Schütz 2011: 89)

The interconnection of projects and sub-projects, each as relevant to each other, suggests that there is no such thing as an isolated relevance, and, further any interest at hand belongs to a system of relevances that are part of a more or less structured hierarchy of relevances or even a plurality of systems that form an actor’s life-plans. To fully understand an action, one might inquire regressively into the ascending motivational relevances, the series of in-order-to motives, which would ultimately explain why one undertakes an action. Hence, for example, one might want to have ink to fill out an application to apply for a fellowship to allow one to complete a degree to find employment to support one’s family. Furthermore, one’s system of relevances continually undergoes modifications depending on the changing features of the action’s context, such that if a donor stepped forward and promised complete funding, the system of the actor’s relevances would be reconfigured, and the weight the author placed on certain motivations would be redistributed. Finding funding would then become irrelevant and preparing for the upcoming semester’s classes might emerge as one’s most pressing concern (Schütz 1964d: 125).

Not only would preparing for classes become the preeminent in-order-to motive, but suddenly that project, which may have lain on the horizon of one's attention when one was focused on finding funding, would become prominent as a new topic of attention, thereby assuming what Schütz would call "topic relevance." Furthermore, when preparation for classes becomes the foremost topical and motivational relevance of the actor, she must also resort to a set of typifications that she may or may not have (and so have to acquire) in her stock of knowledge in order to carry out the project of preparing for classes such as typifications about what "credit hours," "registration," and "degree requirements" are. These typifications, now relevant for interpreting all that is involved in the new project, constitute "interpretative relevances," which would differ from the interpretative relevances of securing funding, which might include finding and filling out sets of distinctive forms and meeting applications deadlines. One can see how Schütz's three types of relevances, i.e. motivational, topical, and interpretative, might all be involved in elucidating an action (Schütz 2011: 107–123, 156–157).

Moreover, the various social roles one occupies carry with them systems of relevances that are disparate and possibly even conflicting. For example, one's relevance to support one's family as the ultimate motivational relevance behind one's applying for a fellowship coincides with relevances springing from one's role as a parent and a spouse. In addition, though, one could further imagine how those relevances might conflict with the relevances attached to one's role as a student, which might require spending large amounts of time in study that might subtract from the time available for one's family. The relevances shaping an action are not necessarily homogeneous. As Schütz observes, the realms of relevances motivating actions are "intermingled, showing the most manifold interpenetrations and enclaves, sending their fringes into neighbor provinces and thus creating twilight zones of sliding transitions (1964d: 126)." Also, the socially defined roles and the relevances that are correlative to them and that motivate action reveal another way in which social relationships permeate action. Similarly, the typifications that become interpretatively relevant for carrying out in-order-motives (themselves often socially transmitted), such as the types of forms to be filled out and deadlines to be met for a fellowship, pertain to the social stock of knowledge of communities or institutions such as universities or funding agencies (Schütz 1964d: 125, 2011: 135).

Furthermore, a dialectic between intrinsic and imposed relevances plays a key role in Schütz's account of action. Intrinsic relevances are those that one has chosen or that one's biographical situation outfits one with as one faces the potentiality of acting, and imposed relevances are those that are not connected with one's chosen or biographically acquired interests, that do not originate in one's decisions, and that one is unable to avoid, although one might be able to give a new meaning to imposed relevances that would accommodate them within one's system of intrinsic relevances (Schütz 1964d: 126–127). For instance, running one's business successfully depends upon the whole set of topical, motivational, and interpretative relevances that one has in hand, but when a major earthquake strikes one's city, demolishing major parts of the building in which one conducts business, one finds oneself faced with new imposed relevances with which one must come to terms. Though at first one might interpret the earthquake as "utterly devastating leaving one hopeless," one might be able to integrate the effects of the earthquake by cordoning off destroyed sections of the building, operating the business in intact sections, and applying for government assistance to rebuild – thereby revising the initial meaning one had given to the earthquake's impact.

Imposed relevances can be understood in *two ways*. They can be relevances of a second order, supervening upon intrinsic relevances already in place, as the example of the earthquake impacting one's business shows. One can imagine other examples of second-order imposed

relevances: terrorist attacks from a foreign power, the other person who is needed to bring one's action to completion but whose relevances may not coincide with one's own, the sudden onset of an illness or disability, the changing of one's plans and the correlative discovery that one must now acquire additional knowledge for a new end, or the unanticipated outbreak of an airline employees' strike just after one has agreed to deliver a paper in a distant country. Such imposed relevances interrupt the intrinsic relevances already guiding one's action.

Another type of imposed relevances precedes and sets the stage for whatever intrinsic relevances – whether they be topical, interpretational, or motivational – one will subsequently build up. These latter imposed relevances often appear as biographical or ontological conditions such as the situation and circumstances of one's birth, including one's parents, or the fact that once born one is destined to age and die. With regard to such relevances, intrinsic relevances appear secondary and derivative, supervening upon the base of imposed relevances already in place. Further examples of this second type of imposed relevances might include such things as the kind of body one was born with, its strengths or impairments (e.g. if one is color-blind), or one's being taught a single language early in life without being exposed to other languages until later in life when one's capacity to learn a new language is diminished. Such limits might impede or facilitate the kinds of projects and actions one might be able to adopt later. While imposed relevances can either interrupt intrinsic relevances or pre-exist them, one can also classify relevances as produced either by natural and ontological factors or by the free choices of oneself or others. Whatever action one undertakes, one will often encounter imposed relevances with which one must come to terms either by removing them, working around them, compensating for them, integrating them with one's life-plans and/or revising, limiting, or even abandoning one's intrinsic relevances in their face of such impositions (Schütz 1964c: 288, 1964d: 127, 1967: 128, 2011: 130, 193–194, 195, 196–199; Schütz and Luckmann 1973: 102–103, 114, 165).

To understand action, it is also essential to take account of *temporality*. When Husserl (1960: 39–53; 1983: 9) describes intentionality, often with reference to the experience of perception, he describes continually unfolding internal time-processes in which one focuses on an object, whose horizons indicate indeterminate, but determinable horizons that one can proceed to explore, in a continual process that confirms or undermines one's expectations. Similarly, as one sets about carrying out a phantasied project, the in-order-to motive and intentional object of one's action, the sub-acts, also intentionally oriented, taken to see that project through to fulfillment, resemble the temporal continuity of perceptual intendings with reference to an object, insofar as these sub-acts are successful or thwarted over time. The interplay between intrinsic and imposed relevances often drives this ongoing intentional progression. One continually adjusts one's action or recalibrates one's projects in the face of relevances imposed by such factors as the “nature of things”; the sudden realization that one must wait to realize an act; the surprising discovery that an action might have unexpected, unwanted consequences; the vagueness of the guiding typifications that might not accommodate smoothly the unique circumstances encountered; or the emergence of a whole new project that might seem more appropriate. In this process, new topical relevances may emerge, motivational relevances can be altered or be modified, and new typifications may become interpretatively relevant for dealing with imposed relevances. Consequently, in the course of an action, it is usually the case, even if only in small details, that the typifications in one's stock of knowledge and one's system of relevances are constantly undergoing modification (Schütz 1964c: 286–287, 293, 2011: 156–160).

In addition, in this temporal unrolling of an action, its series of sub-acts are experienced as “polythetically articulated syntheses of a higher order” (Schütz 1996: 85), that is, as

stages toward one's overarching action-project. However, after one has executed the action through its polythetic series of sub-actions, one can view the completed act retrospectively as a monothetic unitary act, as, for example, the completion of "one's weekly shopping."

Furthermore, past, present, and future time segments are brought into interesting relationships with each other through action, with, for instance, the realized typified projects of the past affording a potential to which the agent in the present can always turn in order to project similar projects in the future. But given how one's projected action faces imposed relevances and unexpected consequences, one's knowledge at the time of projecting will be different after having performed the projected act insofar as an actor rarely escapes such impositions and surprising consequences and insofar as, at the least, one has grown older and acquired a raft of new experiences that one did not have in embarking upon the project. When one couples such unanticipated occurrences, along with the inherent vagueness of any typification of the project to be achieved, it is not surprising that, as mentioned previously, no outcome can be precisely foreseen and the outcome expected will never happen exactly as expected. Moreover, in the present when one faces the future, one operates with open and undetermined protentions and expectations; but, when looking back on the past, completed project, one surveys a field of fulfilled and completed anticipations, and the potestativity experienced prior to acting has disappeared. Hindsight is considerably clearer than foresight. In fact, one can mistakenly overlook the difference in such temporal perspectives when, for example, one considers the outcome of action as economically irrational but forgets that, given the information available at the time of projecting and commencing the action, the decision to act may have been the best option available. These temporal modifications converge with Schütz's distinction between the subjective point of view of an actor, such as that of the person planning a course of action, and the objective point of view of an observer who may have access to the outcome of the action without having understood the information available to the actor at the time of deciding to act (Schütz 1962a: 69, 1962b: 20, 30, 1964c: 286, 293, 2013: 226, 271).

Having presented the essential features of Schütz's theory of action, it might be instructive to consider his theory in relation to Donald Davidson's more contemporary account of action within the tradition of analytic philosophy. Indeed, Davidson posits that a primary reason can be the cause of an action, with the primary reason being defined as a pro-attitude toward an action with a property that the action possesses under a description in which the action is typified as being able to lead typically to a certain, typified result – all within a broader context of typified goals, ends, practices, and conventions. Clearly, the pro-attitude and Davidson's recognition of the importance of typifications suggest extensive convergence with Schütz's notions of relevances and typifications so basic to his action theory. Likewise, Davidson's recognition that it is not the agent's desire for the result but rather the state of affairs that (in Schütz's terms) will have been realized that provides guidance for the unfolding action and that non-teleological causal explanations of action are possible indicates a linkage with Schütz's concepts of "in-order-to" and "because motivations." Although Davidson admirably struggles against tendencies from natural scientific quarters to deny the causal force of reasons that can "make persons voluntary agents" (Davidson 1963: 700), his conflation of reasons with causes leaves him vulnerable to natural scientific incursions on his theoretical turf. It is just such incursions that Schütz resists by insisting on a theory not of causation but of "motivation," developed by careful phenomenological analyses of how everyday actors perform in the life-world that precedes the adoption of natural or social scientific investigative attitudes. In addition, Schütz's rich discussion of the intricate temporal frameworks within which in-order-to and because motives operate and are apprehended demonstrates the further benefits that a phenomenological approach can provide (Davidson 1963: 685–700).

Ancillary considerations: choosing projects of action and rational action

Striving to take account of the comprehensive context of action, Schütz investigates how one goes about choosing a project of action in the first place. Doubting or questioning about which of two or more projects to pursue arises because of conflicts within one's system of relevances and, consequently, one is led to deliberate. Following Husserl's account of how one might grow doubtful about what one once took to be a typical object given in perception (e.g. a human being) because of a succession of disappointed anticipations about how that object should have been given (which lead one to realize that it was really a scarecrow), Schütz discusses how projects of action approached as open possibilities can be converted into problematic ones. In the former, no one possibility has any weight over another and all possible courses of action seem equally open, with nothing speaking for one possibility over another. These open possibilities become problematic, however, when something speaks for one project over another and the projects appear competitive with each other, each with a different weight (Schütz 1962a: 77–78, 79–82; Husserl 1983: 250).

While concurring with Husserl's account of the ego's oscillation between problematic understandings of an object, Schütz, applying the idea of problematic possibilities to choices between projects of action, insists that projects of action differ from objects since objects are ready-made and beyond one's control, existing in simultaneity in outer time. Projections of alternative actions, however, are of one's own making; one can control the constitution of one's project; and projects do not yet exist at the time of one's projecting them. Instead, the mind runs through a series of phantasying acts in inner time, passing from one problematic possibility to another, and returning to the first possibility with one's consciousness altered by having run through the other possibilities that might suggest ways to modify that first possibility from which one began. The conflicting relevances of one's biographical situation are at play in this transition from one version of a project to others insofar as any one version may result in different benefits and disadvantages than any other, with each version appealing to or posing problems to the assorted values in one's relevance configuration. The ego, its motives, and the problematic possibilities compared are in a "continuous stage of becoming" (Schütz 1962a: 86) until the voluntary *fiat!* intervenes. This free decision, which Schütz (1962a: 79–92) describes in terms of Leibniz's "let us start," occurs at the end of a complex process that depends upon previous activities, such as constituting what Husserl calls "problematic possibilities" in which something speaks for one's side or other of a decision; Bergson's view on the oscillation over time over the choices to be made, moving from one choice to a series of overlapping combinations gradually transitioning from one to another (which do not appear at first as two clear options); and finally Leibniz's movement from soliciting inclinations to the counterbalancing of such inclinations to the final "in-order-to" motive that prevails when one chooses the project that motive governs. In this progression, the project becomes a purpose, and the free action detaches itself from the deliberative process like an overripe fruit from a tree. Only in retrospect does one often imagine the final choice as taking place between two distinct, clearly defined project choices, but if one reflectively transposes oneself back into the process occurring before the decision, one would appreciate the ongoing mixture, modification, and overlapping of a whole variety of projects, passing from one to another. The retrospective simplification of the preceding, messy flux as a choice between two well-delineated choices represents another version of how hindsight fails to do justice to the nebulous, indefinite character of what goes on prior to one's decision. Schütz recapitulates this discussion in terms of Leibniz's theory of volition in which one begins with inclinations

to bring about a positively weighted project in the “antecedent will,” faces counterarguments emerging in the “intermediate will,” and arrives at the “final will,” in which the in-order-to motive of the prevailing project leads to the voluntative *fiat* of a will that can be characterized as “consequent, decretory, and definitive” (Schütz 1962a: 84–87, 88–91).

To prepare for his discussion of rational action in economics, Schütz examines “rational action,” which differs from a “sensible action,” that is, one understandable to one’s partners, and “reasonable action,” which springs from a judicious choice among alternative courses of action. Rational action, by contrast, requires an actor to have clear and distinct insight into: the alternative means to an end, the relation of ends to other ends and means, the desirable and undesirable consequences of one’s action, and the relative importance of different possible ends. Rational action becomes even more complicated if one’s project of action involves another of whom one ought to know: her definition of her situation, her likelihood of understanding and cooperating with oneself, her knowledge of one’s project and its importance, her familiarity with one’s relevances, and her grasp of the interrelationship between one’s means and ends and one’s ends among themselves. Schütz recognized that such rational action represents an ideal that contrasts with what Max Weber called traditional or habitual acts and that is seldom to be found in a pure form in everyday life. However, social scientists and economists make use of this ideal of “purely rational action” as “archetypal of all economic acts” (Schütz 2011: 84), as mentioned earlier. Economists, as disinterested observers, construct models, economic “homunculi,” and fit them out with a stock of knowledge so that they could be construed to act as a human being would if the achievement of economic goals by economic means based on economic motives formed the exclusive content of her stream of consciousness. The scientist can then experimentally design how such ideal types would interact with others under different conditions such as those of unregulated competition or cartel restrictions (Schütz 1962b: 27–28, 30–32, 41, 1962d: 235, 1964a: 79, 2011: 84).

Although Schütz’s general account of action is most applicable for everyday life, there are other types of action that can be found within what he calls various “provinces of meaning.” Hence, within the province of theoretical sciences, in disciplines such as economics or sociology, rational action becomes of particular importance. Likewise, there can be unique types of action, for example, in the religious or dramatic provinces of meaning, and within the province of phantasy, there are projects and actions that lack any purposive *fiat*.

Related topics

Chapter 2 (on Pfänder and Husserl).

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