

Alfred Schutz

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German philosopher Edmund Husserl is considered to be the father of phenomenology. It was German social thinker Alfred Schutz who took Husserl's concepts and transforms them into an interactionist analysis. Schutz was influenced by Husserl's phenomenology. He departs from Husserl's strategy of holding the individual in radical abstraction and of searching for pure mind or the abstract laws of consciousness. He accepts Husserl's notion that humans hold a natural attitude and life world that is taken for granted and that shapes who they are and what they will do. He also accepts Husserl's notion that people perceive that they share the same life world and acts as if they lived in a common world of experiences and sensation.

Schutz criticizes Weber for his failure to use Verstehen method and to explore why and through what processes actors come to share common meanings. According to Schutz, Weber simply assumes that actors share subjective meanings. Schutz asks, "Why and how do actors come to acquire common subjective states in a situation? How do they create a common view of the world?" This problem of 'intersubjectivity' is central to Schutz's intellectual scheme. Schutz considers the most important social reality is the creation and maintenance of 'intersubjectivity', that is a common subjective world among pluralities of interacting individuals.

All humans, Schutz asserted, carry in their mind rules, social recipes, conceptions of appropriate conduct, and other information that allows them to act in their social world. Extending Husserl's concept of life world, Schutz views, the sum of these rules, recipes, conceptions and information as the individuals 'stock knowledge at hand'. Such stock knowledge gives people a frame of reference or orientation with which they can interpret events as they pragmatically act on the world around them.

Schutz has given, several features of this stock knowledge:

1. People's reality is their stock knowledge. For the members of a society, stock knowledge constitutes a 'paramount reality' – a sense of an absolute reality that shapes and guides all social events.
2. Stock knowledge bestows a sense of reality on events. It is rarely an object of conscious reflection but rather an implicit set of assumptions and procedures that are silently used by individuals as they interact.
3. Stock knowledge is learned. It is acquired through socialization within a common social and cultural world but it becomes the reality for actors in this world.

4. People operate under a number of assumptions that allow them to create a sense of 'reciprocity of perspectives'. That is, others with whom an actor must deal are considered to share an actor's stock knowledge at hand.
5. The existence of stock knowledge, its acquisition through socialization and its capacity to promote reciprocity of perspectives all operate to give actors in a situation a sense or presumption that the world is same for all and that it reveals identical properties for all.
6. The presumption of a common world allows actors to engage in the process of 'typification'. With typification actors can effectively deal with their world. Typification facilitates entrance into the social world. It simplifies adjustment because it allows for humans to treat each other as categories, or as 'typical' objects of particular kind.

Schulz in his 'The Phenomenology of the Social World' was focally concerned with the way in which people grasp the consciousness of others while they live within their own stream of consciousness. Much of his work focuses on an aspect of social world that is called life world or the world of everyday life. This is an intersubjective world in which people both create social reality and are constrained by the preexisting social and cultural structures created by their predecessors. Although much of the life world is shared there are also private aspects of the world. Within the life world he differentiated between intimate face to face relationship (we relations) and distant and impersonal relationships (they relations). While face to face relations are of great importance in the life world, it is far easier for the sociologists to study more impersonal relations scientifically.

Reference:

Sociological Theory, By George Ritzer, Jeffrey Stepnisky, 10th edition. 2018.