

***PHENOMONOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY  
ON WAGNER'S REFLECTIONS ON SCHUTZ.***



# PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY : ON WAGNER'S REFLECTIONS ON SCHUTZ

Dr Abderrahmane AZZI  
Professor at the University  
of Algiers.

This paper is an attempt to identify, document, and clarify when possible current basic concepts and principles of phenomenological sociology. I relied, in doing so, on my notes of Wagner's lectures that the author gave in a seminar entitled, "the field of phenomenological sociology" during summer session at Texas Woman's University in 1982 and also on my discussions with Wagner following that session until 1985.

I have also used, whenever necessary, a number of important sources on the field. The limitations of this paper permit only to treat basic tenets of phenomenological sociology briefly, for anyone of these themes is alone enough for many papers. I have finally suggested cross-cultural comparisons which can open the way for more depth and support in theory building on one hand and outline the limitations inherent in such a theoretical perspective on the other hand.

Phenomenology, as a field of inquiry, encompasses a variety of theoretical and methodological orientations, e.g. ontological and or existential phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology, phenomenological Marxism,<sup>(1)</sup> experimental<sup>(2)</sup> phenomenology, etc. Phenomenology, rooted in philosophy, is now exerting influence on a number of disciplines, e.g. mathematics, physics, art, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. The work of Schutz in the field of sociology constitutes the frame work of a sociology based on phenomenological considerations. Psathas argues, "the contribution of Schutz remains distinctive and monumental, and no modern scholar can ignore his work and consider himself conversant with phenomenological social science."<sup>(4)</sup> Indeed, Schutz's work probably was the first

---

1) Smart, Barry, **Sociology, Phenomenology and Marxian Analysis**, Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston, Mass, 1976, p. 115.

2) Inde, Don, **Experimental Phenomenology**, G.P Putnam's Sons, N.Y., 1977.

3) Schutz, Alfred, **On Phenomenology and Social Relations**, edited by Wagner, Hulmut, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1970, p.1

4) Psathas, George, **Phenomenological Sociology, Issues and Applications**, John Wiley, Sons, N.Y. 1973, p.7.

attempt to synthesize sociology and phenomenology. By virtue of his knowledge of philosophy and his acquaintance with the sociological tradition, Schutz was able to provide a clear interpretation of the significance of phenomenological philosophy for sociology. Having lived in the Vienna "milieu" he was able to benefit from the work of Husserl, Weber, Scheler, and others. In America, he brought to light the works of early American sociologists, e.g James, Mead, Cooley, Thomas, and others.

Nonetheless, Schutz, at the time of his death in 1959, was still unknown in America and almost forgotten in Europe.(5) Schutz's humanistic sociology, at first, attracted little attention in America. Its main themes seemed to contradict those of a mechanized society like American society. During the 1960's, however, students of sociology started to raise questions about the conventional approaches in sociology.

To them, these approaches have reached a dead end. They were unconvinced with what they were taught in class, e.g. functionalism, and wanted something that made sense to them. In their search for a new approach, they discovered Schutz.(6)

Schutz's work stimulated a number of research in phenomenology. His place, as a major figure in current sociological theory, is unquestionable.(7) Nonetheless, Schutz's work still lacks wide recognition in American sociology. He states that phenomenology is still "a minority voice" of current American philosophy. In addition,(8) it was asserted that in any case phenomenology is not sociology and that therefore criticisms emerging from such a source are irrelevant to the discipline.(9)

The emergence of phenomenological sociology, as was mentioned, has been a product of the declining credibility of conventional sociological approaches. Phenomenological sociology provides in particular a critic of the positivistic sociology's naive acceptance of the natural sciences as a model for social sciences.

To phenomenologists, social and natural phenomena possess qualitatively distinctive characteristics. In most cases, sociological research has tended to be conducted as though for all practical purposes basic methodological problems and questions have been satisfactorily resolved. To phenomenologists, however, methodology can only be treated as problematical.

Coldthorp and Strasser state that phenomenological sociology represents an alternative to positivistic and empiricist sociologies.

---

5) Personal notes on Wagner's lectures given at Texas Woman's University 1982.

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid.

8) *Ihde*, p.17

9) *Smart*, p.91

However, the aim of phenomenological sociology is not to do away with results of empirical approaches, but rather to draw attention to the limitations involved, namely that experience and evidence are not infallible and indeed should be considered problematical.(10)

The field of sociology has frequently been regarded as in a state of crisis,(11) criticisms of the field have come from different circles (inside and outside the discipline). From outside, critics questioned the relevance of sociology which tells people what they already know, e.g sociology was not always able to provide adequate knowledge which may help policy makers in dealing with social issues. From inside, sociologists probably are less confident about their field than their counterparts in other social sciences.(12) Hence, reexamination of theoretical and methodological foundations of sociology seems to be indispensable. Phenomenology probably is a start in the right direction. Schutz has once declared, "I'm not certain that I provided the right answers, but I'm certain that I raised the right questions".(13)

### The Difficulty of Defining Phenomenology

Phenomenology, however, has its own obscurities and contradictions, part of the problem probably is inherent in the field of phenomenology itself, and the other part is a result of superficial criticisms based on insufficient insight and understanding. The type of obscurity in phenomenology comes with any genuinely new mode of inquiry. As Kuhn puts it, revolutions in science have been characterized by "paradigm shifts". Until the view is resettled, until the basis for the new perspective is solidified, there remains an area of misunderstanding between those holding to the new paradigm and those holding to the old one.(14) Heidegger once confessed that although he had thoroughly read the main works of Husserl, he was not able to understand the full sense of phenomenology until he learned to "see phenomenologically"(15)

Phenomenologists suggest that defining phenomenology probably is not the best way to go about describing phenomenology. Ihde, for example, claims that "without doing phenomenology, it may be practically impossible to understand phenomenology : without entering into the doing, the basic thrust and import of phenomenology is likely to be misunderstood at the least or missed at most.(16)

---

10) Ibid.

11) Gouldner, Alvin, *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, Basic Books, Inc, N.Y. 1970.

12) Personal notes

13) Ibid.

14) Ihde, p.18

15) Ibid, p.17.

16) Ibid. p.14

" On the other hand, different definitions have been suggested by different phenomenologists. Husserl regarded phenomenology as a method which is " presuppositionless ", and self contained. By presuppositionless, he meant that a researcher must suspend all beliefs (including history) in order to study a phenomenon " as it is." The suspension of all beliefs creates a " transcendental ego", which is a state in which the individual sees a phenomenon or an object as it is ( the concept of transcendental refers to the extent to which the individual can rise above his presuppositions). By returning to the " things themselves, "Husserl hoped to creat" rigorous science". By self contained, he meant to emphasize the anti-metaphysical character of his method. In other words, such method does not need a metaphysical interpretation of the phenomena.(19)

Schutz, following Husserl's formulation, suggested that phenomenology is concerned with the study of life-world. To Schutz the "mundane ego" rests on the given existential ground of the life-world. In addition to Husserl, Schutz's thinking was influenced by many other sociologists and philosophers. Weber, for example, provided an additional insight to Schutz's understanding of sociology of life-world. To Schutz and Weber, sociology must be oriented toward studying social action as it is experienced by the individual(the subjective meaning of the individual). To do otherwise, researchers can only create something from nothing (20).

### **Some Theoretical Backgrounds on Phenomenological Sociology**

Phenomenologists recognize the fact that "when we theorize, we step out of reality" .(21) The theorist, by theorizing, creates new reality. He puts concepts in a structure (language) which gives them new reality (the concept of poverty means one thing to the theorist and another thing to the individual who experiences poverty). Nonetheless, phenomenologists also recognize the need for a theory.Theory, says Weber, is indispensable : it provides a coherent framework of propositions which are used to explain and intergrate what exist in the real world.(22)

Theory, however, has its limitations .It can only explain some parts (or aspects) of the phenomenon. There is no theory which can explain all (infinite) parts of the phenomenon. Weber suggested that it is nonsense to think that a theory can explain the whole system. The subject matter of sociology, he argues, is inexhaustible. Wagner(24) stated that the concept of " an approach " ( meaning we are approaching to something) expresses well such limitations.(25)

---

17) Personal notes.

18) Ibid

19) Ibid

20) Ibid.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid.

23) Wagner defines sociology as " an undertaking concerned with the rational and systematic study of social life in all its manifestations."

24) Personal notes.

25) Ibid.

The researcher needs to start " somewhere " to describe and explain the life world. The concept of " society ", " social forces ", " social class ", " social structure ", etc. are abstract concepts. they do not explain " reality " of every day life. In some classes, they can acquire " supernatural " power, e.g. society is out there.

Phenomenologists argue that society is not out there : rather, it is in here as experienced by the individual. Weber demanded a reduction of social abstraction to their concrete social core. In sociology, concepts like "state", "cooperative", "feudalism", and similar ones, in general designate categorie of specific kinds of human interaction; thus, it is its task to reduce them to understandable action, and this means without exception : to the actions of specific single individuals.(26)

Conventional sociology, as perceived by Comte and Spencer, was based on a presupposition that emphasized the autonomy of society and the individual's subordination to it. The theme of individual social action was thereby expelled from the focus of attention in research.(27)

Durkheim and Marx did not leave any room for the individual. To them, man is determined. In Durkheim, he is determined by social forces. In Marx, he is determined by social class. Weber recognized the "problem" and tried to shift the attention to studying the subjective meaning of the individual.(28) This new way of thinking was reflected in a statement by Schafer (one of the leading historians of his time ); "to put society in the place of state and church as a proper authority for human social life is, in my opinion, a fateful error."(29)

The result of this new approach was that the entire structure of society and its characteristics were no longer the object of inquiry in sociology; rather, social action itself. In Surbor's terms, "objectified institutions result from the reciprocal relationships of social action and serve to regulate them" .(30)

Simmel thought that social interaction (31) (or reciprocalrelationships) were demarcated as the real social element in society. Hence, sociology must concern itself with the problem of understanding the way in which reality is interpreted by acting individuals. Weber expressed the new view in his definition of sociology; "a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences. (32)

---

26) Smart, pp. 87 – 88.

27) Srubor, Ilija, " On the Origin of phenomenological Sociology", World Congress of Sociology, Mexico City, 1982, p.4

28) Personal notes

29) Srubor, p.5.

30) Ibid, p.7

31) Contemporary phenomenologists treat social interaction as problematical.

32) Srubor, p.8

Surbor states that the following point was agreed upon : a science that makes social historical reality in any of its forms as its object, cannot work toward general laws alone like the natural sciences. Rather, if it wants to deal with its object adequately, it must recognize that social reality is produced by individuals experiencing, interpreting, understanding and acting in a meaningful way.

For positivists, the subjective meanings of the individual are inaccessible, and thus, they should be disregarded. For (35) phenomenologists, sociology must develop a logically controlled method of interpretation which will provide access to individual action and allow generalization. (36) To do so, Weber tried to develop the method of ideal type, (37) and Simmel constructed his method of form and content of social action.

Husserl's ultimate goal was to create " "a presuppositionless philosophy " or a rigorous science which provides a foundation for all individual sciences. Its starting point "is given in the experiences of the conscious human being who lives and acts in a world which he apperceives and interprets, and which makes sense to him." (38) To Husserl, the forms of consciousness are tied to the content of experience : experiences are attention directed upon objects, whether real or imagined, material or ideal, and all such objects are intended. Hence, there is no phase (or aspect) of human consciousness which appears in and by itself: consciousness is always consciousness of something(39). To study a phenomenon as it appears to the consciousness, all preconceived beliefs must be suspended. To Husserl, it is only by this process that one can find the essence of the phenomenon itself.

For Weber, phenomena are social actions (40). To study social action, the emphasis should be directed to the actor who produces the action. Nonetheless, action is considered social only in so far as it is oriented in its course toward others. Wagner argues that social action is " incomplete " in Weber's sociology because it does not include the aspect of " intentionality " (41). To Schutz, actions are actions only if the actor attaches meanings to them.

---

33) Husserl calls this the genetic fallacy while Dilthey argues that a phenomenon must be treated in the historical context.

34) Srubor, p.7

35) The controversy and the intensive philosophical discussions of the relation ship of the natural sciences to the humanities can be traced back to the late 19 th century in the work of Windelband, Rickert and Dilthey ( Windelband and Rickert are considered as neokantians and Dilthey as objective realist).

36) Srubor, p.10

37) The concept of ideal type was first used by Montesquieu.

38) Schutz, p.5

39) Personal notes.

40) Social action is not synonymous to behavior (exp : thinking is an action) refraining from action is action, exp : not trying to save a person who in danger. In other words, refraining from action has consequences.

41) Personal notes.



Schutz recognizes the difficulty of analyzing the subjective meanings of the individual from "inside" and not from "outside." The question can be raised as to how can one tell whether a person is telling "the truth" or "lying." Goffman's sociology of manipulation demonstrated that what an individual says is not necessarily what he thinks. To remedy this, Wolf suggested that the researcher should not take seriously nor dismiss what the individual says. Instead, the researcher should try to live experience of the individual (42) (the subject of study), e.g. the anthropologist who lives in the community under study.

Nonetheless, this process of analysis is not without difficulty. On one hand, the outcome of a research depends on the researcher's own equipment ; some researchers are more equipped to analyze a particular phenomenon than others. On the other hand, there is no way in which the researcher can understand the individual fully; the only way to understand an individual fully is to be that individual himself (that is impossible). Hence, the researcher can describe his data only in terms of probabilities .(43)

Schutz was probably the single theorist who "made good use" of early American sociology.(44) James "state of consciousness" provides an insight on how consciousness perceives an object or a phenomenon ; a state of "mind" is always a state of now : a state once is gone, it cannot reoccur again. When I see an object, I see it in a particular way. I will not see the same object in the same particular way again.

In James's terms, there is a stream of consciousness and one can never step twice into the same stream(45). When I see the object in a second time, I am a new person. This allows for a dynamic relationship between the consciousness and the phenomenon; the phenomenon is there, but the consciousness of that phenomenon changes. The dynamic relationship between consciousness and phenomenon fits Mead's concepts of I and Me. In Wagner terms, the I and Me reflect "the continuity of self (1) in the discontinuity of experience (Me) (46).

Most theories of the self agree that part of self is constructed through personal experiences (that explains why we experience the world differently) and part of self is constructed by society (that explains why we can communicate or conform). Thomas tried to analyze how individuals conduct themselves in situations. Culture defines situations, e.g. Durkheim's collective representation or Samner's folkways. In a classroom situation, they are norms which tell the individuals how to conduct themselves, when and what questions to ask, in what manner, etc. Nonetheless, situations have deviations from the scheme. For, once a situation is gone, it will never reoccur again. For example, each class session is unique and each person in a class is in a particular state of mind. By the time the class meets for a second time, each person acquires a different state of mind (or each person becomes a new person).

---

43) Personal notes.

44) Ibid.

45) Ibid.

46) Ibid.

For furthermore, the individual may apply a wrong definition to a particular situation. For example, a student may ask the wrong question. For that reason cultural definition is not the only determinant factor of a situation; rather it is determined by the dynamic relationship between cultural and personal interpretations. (47)

Cooley's "vantage point" provides an insight of how the individual perceives the world around him. Each individual experiences the world from his own vantage point. To use Cooley's example, when an individual stands in the middle of a garden, he sees the world around him from his vantage view; the individual sees things which are close to his vantage point better than things which are far away. Wagner elaborates on that and says that Americans are more aware of their vantage point than Germans are; (for example, the phrase "from where I stand" is frequently used in English). (48)

Husserl, Weber, and early American sociologists are some of theorists who shaped Schutz's thinking. Schutz was able, not only to benefit from the work of these major figures, but also to integrate their work in order to develop a comprehensive approach to study human experiences.

### Schutz's Phenomenological Sociology

Schutz's primary orientation was towards the study of the life-world. To him, the reality of everyday life is the "paramount" reality. Hence, the subject matter of sociology must be the study of "life-world" or reality of everyday life; Drawing upon accounts and analyses of Husserl's call for return to "things as they are", (49) Schutz's sociology was a call for a return to the individual. (50) The reality of life-world is not a private place "in the mind", as some theorists have implied, but rather it is in the experience of the individual in everyday life. As Santayana puts it, "the mind never has ideas, much less ideas which it can communicate, without a material means and material occasion, e.g., (51) the hands holding tools or plans must intervene in order to carry out the project (52)."

Schutz, following Husserl's notion of suspension of beliefs, argued that all values must be put into "brackets." By doing so, the researcher can come close to the "essence" of the phenomenon. Wagner suggested that the term "value free" probably was taken out of the context of Weber's sociology. To Wagner, the term "value neutral" expresses better Weber's intentions than the term "value free" (53). Value free sociology implies that sociologists do not hold values while value

---

47) Ibid

48) Ibid

In view of the limitations of this paper, it is impossible to provide a systematic treatment of Schutz. My knowledge of Schutz comes primarily from these sources.

49) Knowledge comes from interpretation based on interpretation etc. To have a rigorous science, we must return to the experience of the individual in the real world.

50) Personal notes.

51) This is similar to Marx's notion of the dynamic relationship between the mind and the material.

52) Smart, p. 97

53) Personal notes.

neutral sociology implies sociologists, as humans, have values : these values, however, must be put into brackets.

Schutz's sociology is aimed at understanding the subjective meaning of the individual . The individual usually does not take cultural definitions as a blueprint (or a recipe) for his actions ; rather, he modifies cultural norms and values in such a way that they fit his experiences. In other words, culture may mean different things to different individuals. Nonetheless, the individual experiences each situation in which he finds himself as only to a small extent his own creation. As Schutz puts it.

Every man stands in mutual relations to other man. He is a member of a social structure into which he is born or which he has joined, and which existed before him and will exist after him. Every total social system has structure of familial relationships, age groups, and generations : it has division of labor and differentiation according to occupations : it has balances of power and dominion, leaders and (54) those led : and it has these with all the associated hierarchies.

Schutz thought that there is a dynamic relationship between the individual and society . Society is created by individuals interacting with one another. On the other hand, the individual does not exist in a vacuum. Smart argues that phenomenological sociology sometimes is perceived merely to call for descriptions of social settings or situations as they appear to those involved. For Smart, this is a result of misunderstanding. Bittner prefers to call such phenomenology " abortive phenomenology. " (55)

The concept of intersubjectivity is significant in Schutz's thinking. For Schutz, social world is experienced as intersubjective. As an actor in the social scene, I can recognize my fellow man not as a " something " but as a " someone like me " I am already " thou oriented " from the moment I recognize an entity which I directly experience as a fellow man (as a Thou) attributing life and consciousness to him (56). When the " Thou orientation " is reciprocal, that is, each actor is " thou – oriented " toward the other, there is " relationship of consociate " . In such relationship, partners are aware of each other (57) and sympathetically (58) participate in each other's lives for however short time. However, there is another type of relationship in which I recognize my fellow man not as a " someone " but as a " something " In such relationship, the partner is apprehended only by forming a construct of a typical way of behavior, a typical of motives, and of attitudes of personality type. For example, the course of action type the director of a hospital has of a nurse may be so anonymous that it refers only to the behavior of " whoever " is acting in the way defined as a typical by the construct. That is, the nurse is not perceived as a unique individual. But only an abstract of whoever is acting like her.(59)

---

55) Smart, p. 85.

56) Personal notes

57) Schutz call this " we – relationship "

58) That is, individuals are treated as unique individuals

59) Personal notes

In modern society, however, most of the people with whom I relate are not my consociates, but my " contemporaries " : I am not involved in face to face relationships with them ; I do not grasp them as unique individuals.

To Schutz, relationships involve typification. Typification, a scheme which is derived from firsthand experience of a fellow man, consists of " the equalization of traits relevant to the particular purpose at hand for the sake of which the type has been formed ; any individual differences not relevant to this purpose are disregarded " (60). Nonetheless, the process of typification depends on the type of relationships. With contemporaries, all social relationships are with typified individuals to whom a certain role is assigned. The more anonymous the type, the more these individuals appear exclusively in the light of the functions they are expected to perform in typical ways. For example, the professor may regard a student only as a student like others who come to class, take notes, ask questions and take exams. The more anonymous the relationship between the two (professor and student), the more the student appears in the light of the function he is expected to perform in a typical way.(61)

In face to face relationships with consociate, the individual is also apprehended by means of typifying schemes. I apprehend him as a " man", a " christian ", a " sociologist ", and so on. However, the types used in face – to –face relationships are confronted with the other's subjectivity and tested. If they fail the test, that is, if the types are contradicted by the immediate experience, then they have to be modified. To use Johansen's example. I approach a senior psychiatrist with the type of an " austere, aloof scholar ". After our face – to –face interaction, I leave him with type of a " truly human person. " (62)

Schutz, following Weber's method of ideal type, tried to construct his types of human action. To Schutz, human are motivated in their action : motives, not only give the individual an impulse " or a " cause " to do something, but also they lead impulse to consequences. Nonetheless, motives usually are hidden : " I do not know why I did it. " As a result, Schutz outlined two types of human motives : " because – of – motives " and " in – order – to motives ". For example, " she did it because she loved him " (because – of – motives); and " he read Weber to inform himself and give directions to his life ( in – order – to – motives)(63).

Schutz, drawing upon James multiple realities, suggests that there are different orders of reality. What is real is what stands in some relation to one's self ; or self what is real to me is what is relevant to me. Hence, I act according to what I define as real. In Thomas' terms, when a situation is defined as real, it is real in its consequences.(64)

---

60) Johansen, Roger in Psathas, p. 222.

61) Personal notes

62) Johansen, p. 223

63) Personal notes

64) Ibid.

What is real involves attention ; I consider something as real because I give attention to it. As Bergson puts it, " attention à la vie " (attention to life ) is necessary. When attention lapses, reality lapses. When the individual ceases to pay attention to what he is doing, he enters the field of daily dreams (65).

Schutz calls multiple realities " provinces of meanings ". To Schutz, there are many provinces of meanings : the world of science, the world of dream, the world of phantasy, the world of insane or drug situation, the world of art in any form, the world of play or sports, the world of children, the worlds of primitive cultures or universal projection, the world of different cultures, the world of religious experience, the world of possible experiences with its own cognitive style, (66). When one moves from one province of meaning to another, he goes through a process of " transformation " . Schutz argues that our lives are lived in fractions (education is a fraction) : I am a Christian on Sunday and a businessman on Monday. Schutz refers to such " phenomenon as " "the fragmentation of modern Life " life is experienced as fractions 67 and the consciousness tends to manifest itself in many modes.(67)

Schutz recognizes that different province of meanings ( or knowledge) may coexist in a particular social – historical context, perhaps eventually being adopted by particular social groups or classes in the form of ideologies. If the differences between the versions become too great ( polarization ), communication between the groups becomes difficult and the unity of society comes to depend more upon the distribution of power than upon common knowledge of relevances. Smart argues that " reconciliation of different currents of philosophical and social thought exemplified the extend of Shutz's contribution to sociological discourse " .(69)

Schutz asserts that scientific knowledge is merely one of many provinces of meaning within the total social reality ; his discussion and methodological postulates of phenomenology and the social world are oriented towards sensitizing the social scientist to recognize his own assumption of the natural attitude, (70) and further to then offer guidance as to how the scientist might proceed to the study of social reality (71). Schutz asserts : The main problem of the social sciences is to develop a method in order to deal in an objective way with subjective meaning of human action and that the thought objects of commonsense, formed by men in everyday life in order to come to terms with social reality.(72)

---

65) Ibid.

66) Yatani, Yoshikuni, " The concept of life world in Schutzean Theory : Its Relation to Multiple Realities ", 10 th World Congress Of Sociology, Mexico City, p.4  
67) personal notes.

69) Smart, p. 103

70) Natural attitude refers to that which is taken for granted

71) Smart, p. 99

72) Ibid, p. 100

In Schutz's time, there were two schools of analyses; one approaches the analysis of social reality in the same way in which the natural sciences analyze their phenomena : the other argues that there is a basic difference in the structure of the social and natural worlds. For Schutz, both positions are inadequate. The former approach neglects the understanding of the individual in the reality of daily life. The latter approach disregards entirely the fact that certain procedural rules relating to valid thought are common to all empirical science.(73)

### The Method of Verstehen

For phenomenologists, method is not a technique, but an orientation (a survey is a technique). Without such an orientation, a particular analysis will be meaningless. For example, Weber used the method of ideal type in his study of bureaucracy and the method of Verstehen in his study of Protestant Ethics.

Dilthey probably was the first theorist to treat the method of Verstehen systematically. In his chapter *The Crisis of European Thought and Culture*, he describes the crisis of consciousness as "a ship on the high seas moving in the storm that rages all around us." For Dilthey, human sciences could fulfill their potential only if they were placed in "a secure theoretical foundation rooted in experience avoiding both the Scylla of metaphysical speculation and the Charybdis of naturalistic positivism" (74). Dilthey asserts that Verstehen constitutes (75) the sole and exclusive method of the human sciences, (76) he traces the method of Verstehen to the development of hermeneutics : a methodological principle of interpretation which evinced a shift from sacred, classic, or otherwise privileged texts to human expression in general. For Dilthey, hermeneutics was recast in the "spirit of the transcendental turn, emphasizing the creative powers of human consciousness." In that context, meanings were not viewed in an "ideal" textual isolation but in the concrete context of reciprocal historical relations (77). Unlike Husserl who dismisses history, Dilthey (and also Marx) argues that a phenomenon can be understood only in terms of its relation to history.

As a result history must not be accepted uncritically as unchanging, self evident, objective and external".(81) It is through the dialectical method the real existence (82) can be revealed ; the "essence of reality can emerge from behind the veil of appearance."

---

73) Personal notes.

74) Ermarth, Michel, *Wilhelm Dilthey the Critique of Historical Reason*, the University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1978, p. 19.

75) Ermarth argues that versten is the most misunderstood concept in the theory of knowledge. Dilthey defines versten as " the knowledge of that which is already known."

76) Ermarth , p. 241

77) *Ibid*, p. 244

81) Smart, pp. 116 – 118

82) For Lukacs, the alternative method ( exemplified by what Lukacs alludes to as bourgeois science ) is to treat the various elements in reality as independant and autonomous, than is to accept the form of division of labor in society as a valid basis for scientific conceptualization.

Phenomenological sociologists are critical of functional sociology.(83) Lyman and Scott in *A Sociology of the Absurd* list five criticisms of functional theory ; First, it treats human action in terms of forces unperceived by the actor. For phenomenologists, there is an existential continuum between freedom and determinism constructed and reconstructed by the social actors individually or in concert. Second, functionalism asserts that various parts of society are "non-arbitrary "since they contribute to the integration of the whole. For phenomenologists, such elements "have no fixed, stable, and irreducible meaning" . Third, functionalism views social order as rooted in a basic interdependence and cooperation. For phenomenologists, modern society "is better described as a collection of conflicting subcultures, which in their relations manage to maintain some pattern of stability by the employment of social mechanisms as yet imperfectly understood by sociologists". By assuming cooperation and interdependence a "priori", functionalism cannot make social order problematical. Fourth, functionalism opts to study man from the point of view of the observer ; it regards actor's perceptions as founded on ignorance of the real forces that shape his action. For phenomenologists, man, as an actor, builds up his actions on the basis of his goals and of his continuing attempts to define and redefine the situation. Hence, the social world can only be studied from the viewpoint of the actor. Fifth, functionalism asserts that there is a common value system in society. For phenomenologists, values and norms are pluralistically applicable on the basis of situations, persons, and times.(84)

---

83) Parsons is usually criticized for his inadequate interpretation of Weber.

84) Warren, Carol, *Sociology : Change and continuity*, The Dorsey Press, Illinois, 1977, PP. 373 – 374.

**TABLE ONE**  
**STRUCTURALISM AND THE DIFFERENT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES IN**  
**SOCIOLOGY.**

(**)			
Ans	STRUCTURALISM	FUNCTIONALISM	MARXISM
	Cultural phenomena (CP) are systems of language, language is an independent entity and is studied as such.	Language is an element of social action and a facilitating mechanism for "real" structures of society.	Language is necessary for both class and false consciousness, but not an independent structure.
II	CP are systems of signs, a sign is a unit of a signified.	CP are products of social interaction in complex settings encompassing personality, system, and culture.	CP are closely related to the economic base of society.
III	CP are manifestations of structures, a structure, a structure is characterized by totality, transformation, and self regulation.	CP are structures in themselves and are studied as such.	CP often are reflections of the relations and contradictions that exist in the economic realm.
IV	The underlying structures of CP are unconscious however, is accessible through linguistically mediated form.	The perspective does not provide an explanation for the unconscious.	The closest concept which may relate to the unconscious is "false consciousness" or "alienation" which results from manipulation of power.
V.	Structural analysis emphasizes the synchronical aspects of CP.	The perspective emphasizes the interdependence of the different parts of the systems, but disregards history.	The synchronical and the historical analyses are equally important.
VI.	Historical transformations reflects shifts and discontinuities.	The perspective subscribes to an orderly process of evolution. i.e., from mechanically structured to organically structured society	The perspective advocates social change. The question, however, remains as to whether radical change is a logical process of development or a rupture with previous stages of development.
VII.	The object of study is not man the possessor of meaning, but structures of which man is the fabricator.	The objects of study are social institutions which mold and determine individual behavior	The objects of study are dialectical processes between groups and other Cultural elements
VIII.	CP are closely related to power.	Coercion is generally viewed as necessary	CP are closely related to power
IX.	The criteria underlying the study and the structure of CP are Universal	CP are relative.	CP are both relative and universal
X.	Empirical observations are only a necessary bridge to the unconscious structures of CP.	Empirical observations often are studies in and for themselves for the other of generalization.	Empirical observations are studied to account for the underlying relations that pertain to the economic realm.

\*Abderrahmane AZZI, Structuralism and Its Contribution to Sociological Theory, Unpublished Ph.D, Dissertation, NTSU, USA, 1985, P.21

\* Assumptions.



## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE IN SOCIOLOGY

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM	PHENOMENOLOGY
language is a system of symbols through which people construct social structures and social reality, but not a system of its own.	Language and speech in part explain intersubjective communication, but language is not a system of its own.
CP are meaningful entities resulting from patterned symbolic interaction.	CP are typification resulting from the construction of meaning in every day life.
CP are dynamic process whose content depends on a give – and – take relations between the individual	CP are essential structures which are dependent on activities and meanings in the life world.
Unconscious aspects of interactions are viewed only tangentially as the absence of reflecting.	The perspective does not provide an explanation for the unconscious.
The process of social change takes place through social interaction between individuals in relation to institutions.	Social change results from changes in consciousness which in turn brings about change in social typification.
The object of study is social interaction of which unique individuals construct their institutions.	The object is the world of experience , constituted by consciousness.
The position of the perspective in relation to Power is not clearly delineated, although the Perspective often exhibits sensitivity to power.	Power is treated tangentially as effect of reification.
CP are relative.	CP are both relative and universal.
The empirical observation of symbolic communication is both the data and the end of the analyse	Empirical observation can only occur aspects of the consciousness of individuals, that is, from "inside " rather than "outside " the observed experience.

The attempt to advance a comparison between phenomenology and the different approaches in sociology is not an easy task. These approaches not only pertain to a variety of intellectual origins and traditions, but also are less unified approaches incorporating subapproaches that often deviates from the path of the approach in question. I have in my work (85) made an attempt to present the position of phenomenology in relation to other approaches (structuralism, functionalism, Marxism, and symbolic interactionism) on the basis of ten essential assumptions that I have formulated for that purpose. ( See table 1). The aspect of generalization often is made at the expense of detail and carefully delineated accounts. This generalization, however, is necessary, the more detail one seeks to acquire, the more it is difficult to compare and generalize.

I have also suggested the possible use of phenomenological method in studying cultural phenomena and communication system in the so – called traditional societies. The phenomenological approach can very much document and analyze life experience and meaning structures in such societies that are characterized by the erosions of the system of values and the search for another mode of social structures and meanings.(86)

---

85) AZZI Abderrahmane “, Structuralism and its Contribution to Sociological theory, ” Unpublished dissertation, North Texas State University, USA; 1985, pp. 209 – 215.

86) AZZI Abderrahmane, “ Current Sociological Schools and Some Reflections on Ibn Khaldun’s Approach, ” in *Al Mustaqbal Al Arabi*, n.90, Beirut, Lebanon, May 1987, p. 153.