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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are now bringing to the public the fourth volume of papers from the Third World Congress of Phenomenology, "Phenomenology World-Wide: Phenomenology of the Logos and the Logos of Phenomenology," held in Oxford, August 15–21, 2004.

I want to thank all those who helped to prepare and to carry out this marvelous Conference. First of all it is the initiative of William J. Smith who brought us to Oxford, who with his wife Jadwiga and Gary Backhaus have also performed with expertise the task of making the local arrangements: their efforts merit our appreciation. Professor Grahame Lock of Queen's College and Matt Landrus from Wolfson College must be thanked for their valuable contribution to the local organization. Tadeusz Czarnik, my personal helper, cannot be forgotten.

I wish to express special thanks to Jeff Hurlburt, our secretary, for his assiduous and dedicated work in preparing this gathering. The enthusiasm and expertise of the authors who joined us from the entire world – forty countries – made this Congress an epoch-making phenomenology event.

A-T.T.

community's usages into a common program of life we call a community's culture. The particular contexts of action belonging to a community are correlated with the particular culture of that community.

Besides the preceding elaborations upon the characteristics of contexts of action, our attention has been drawn to places as contexted landscapes of great importance, and in particular to the common place I have called our living space or home ground. This latter, in relation to all other landscapes has the distinction of being the basic, the primary and most intimate context of action.

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NOTE

- ¹ I have not been able to identify the source of this quote.

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SCHUTZ'S CONCEPTION OF RELEVANCES AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

In contemporary European culture human beings find themselves in postmodern condition. Postmodernism manifests itself by the "decline of the major narratives" (J. F. Lyotard) and the far-ranging cultural incompatibility. Furthermore, we are facing the process of widening an unbridgeable gap between different cultural communities within the same society. Human reason seems to have fallen into an anemic syndrome of resigned weakness, and *Homo sapiens* is rapidly transforming into *Homo ludens*. A game (or gamble) becomes a key metaphor of contemporary culture. It leads not only to the impoverishment of thought and soul, but also threatens to make meaningless both human life and contemporary culture in general. Moreover, it threatens the very essence of humanity due to the fact that it challenges the most significant human values, which constitute human beings as such. It implies that when dealing with social and human problems, it seems reasonable to pay due attention to the discourse of social thinking, which focuses on the meaningful structure of the social universe. It acquires crucial significance for social theory which seeks to find out how people act, think and understand each other in everyday life. This is the question pertaining to all social sciences to which each of them has to contribute.

A. Schutz's conception of the life-world is just the case in point. His papers, taken together, create a new paradigm in social thinking aimed at the study of the meaning sedimentation process, which constitutes the framework of human thought and activity, and eventually the meaningful structure of the social world. It therefore lays the deepest foundation for human understanding in social life.

The works of A. Schutz have become increasingly known since the publication of his *Collected Papers* in the Netherlands. Its first volume, entitled "The Problem of Social Reality" appeared in 1962.¹ The paper "Reflections on the Problem of Relevance", on which we will focus our attention in this paper, was not published during his lifetime. Its handwritten version was discovered among his manuscripts only after the author's death. Written between August 1947 and August 1951, it is supposed to be (according to R. Zaner) the first part of his five-part study, preliminarily entitled "The World as Taken for Granted: Toward a Phenomenology of

the Natural Attitude". Part 1 bore the title "Preliminary Notes on the Problem of Relevance". Although A. Schutz did not intend to publish this separate portion of his study as significant in its own right (but only as a part of a wider context), Prof. R. Zaner brought this piece of the study, left in a very rough form, into linguistically acceptable shape. Thus, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, edited, annotated and with an introduction of R. Zaner, successfully appeared in 1970. A few months ago it became available to Russian-language readers. In the year 2004 it was published together with the other selected papers and my concluding remarks in the huge volume of the Russian edition of A. Schutz's Selected Papers.² This Russian edition of the book bears a subtitle "The world luminous by meaning" (which originates from M. Natanson's work). As the editor, I have divided the whole text into 6 parts: "Methodology of the Social Sciences", "Phenomenology and the Social Sciences", "Reflections on the Problem of Relevance", "The Problems of Social Reality", "Applied Theory" and "The Meaning Structure of the Social World". Since then A. Schutz's studies, including his *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, became available not only to the narrow range of professionals, but also to a wider Russian audience.

The growing interest in A. Schutz's social philosophy in Russia originated from his first publications in Russian, which rapidly attracted sober attention of the social theorists. His "Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences" appeared in Russian as early as 1962 (transl. by S. Shorohova), "The Homecomer" (1997, transl. by N. Smirnova), "The Stranger" (1998, transl. by Nikolaev), "Mozart and Philosophers" (2002, transl. by N. Smirnova) which appeared (as can be clearly seen from the dates) before the fundamental Russian edition of his 1050-paged *Selected Papers*. Now let me briefly outline the context of the study.

Inspired by unceasing passion to understand what human being is, A. Schutz refers to (and subsequently adhered to) the phenomenological tradition in philosophy which takes its clues from E. Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. According to E. Husserl, philosophy is essentially a strict science. Investigation of the deepest presuppositions of human reason, he believes, should be the main thematic concern of transcendental phenomenology. But in contrast to E. Husserl, who brackets (or suspends of) the natural attitude in the process of the so-called phenomenologically transcendental reduction, A. Schutz, facing the problems of the social world (rather than the problems of epistemology or the methodology of pure science) makes the word as it is given in its natural sense the main subject of his research.

In respect of the social world it turns out to be the question of the constitutive phenomenology of the social world, that is, the study of the meaningful structure of the social world, which is the only one able to throw light on the question of what allows people to understand each other, or simply "what makes the social world tick".

The attack on this problem is based upon two presuppositions, derived from the phenomenology of natural attitude. They imply that:

- our commonsense knowledge of everyday life consists of the system of constructs in its typicality, which form the life-world accepted beyond doubts;
- life-world is shared with the other individuals, living and acting in mutually interlocking activities.

The above-mentioned system of typical constructs is largely *taken for granted* without questions (although they may be brought into question under certain circumstances). Nevertheless, it implies that "taken-for-grantedness" remains out of question ("unthematized") within the framework of our "natural attitude". In order to put them into questions we have to make this natural attitude itself thematic. Only in this way are we able to make explicit what is initially implicit (or taken for granted) - the foundations of social reality. This is a particular phenomenological perspective of studying the question of what it means to be "social" and what it means to be "a world". In this sense A. Schutz's project is at the same time an effort to discover the deepest presuppositions of empirical social sciences. "The foundational analysis and explanations of the "social", "behavior" and the "human", states R. Zaner, is necessarily fundamental to the determination of which methods and concepts are appropriate and justifiable".³ It implies that the phenomenology of the social world is the phenomenology of the social sciences at the same time.

A. Schutz's study of relevance partly follows the mainstream of his daily life structure investigations. His conception of relevance refers to the concept of so-called multiple realities, derived from W. James' work as it has been presented in chapter 21 of his well-known *Principles of Psychology*.⁴ Accordingly, *multiple realities* turns out to be the key notion and the basic principle of the life-world stratification.

The term "reality", W. James insists, could hardly refer to the objective world as it exists beyond our consciousness, experienced and conceived. It rather designates our *meaning of reality*. He maintains that reality is nothing but the set of our sensual, emotional, life and activity. Whatever attracts our *interest* becomes real: W. James bestows upon it "the accent of reality". To call something real means to assert that it captures our

interest in this or that way. There are an infinite number of reality strata, each of them having its own particular style of existence, way of presentation and degree of *attention to life*. In other words, they are all real in their own fashion. W. James calls them "sub-universes". These sub-universes embrace the meanings of physical things, scientific ideal types and their relationships, religion, madness, the realm of dreams, fantasy and so on. Living in one of them, we tend to obscure or even forget the others, so there is no smooth traffic between the sub-worlds. And precisely because of their relative autonomy and discrete existence E. Husserl designates them as "the units of sense".⁵

W. James consciously restricted his analysis only to psychological aspects of "multiple realities", investigating them in terms of beliefs and disbeliefs (in his *The Fixation of Belief*.) Nevertheless the father-founder of phenomenology E. Husserl highly appreciated W. James' idea of multiple realities, because it paved the way to further investigations of the structure of human consciousness. But in contrast to W. James' approach, he frees them from psychological implications. E. Husserl tries to contemplate the question not in terms of beliefs and disbeliefs, but rather in a transcendently phenomenological way, i.e. in terms of pure consciousness structure. He uses it as a means for further elaboration of the concept of the field of consciousness itself, i.e. relationship between the theme and horizon, that is its thematic kernel and its surrounding horizon as it is given at any moment of our inner time.

A. Schutz goes far beyond both W. James' psychological approach ("orders of reality", "sub-universes") and even E. Husserl's pure constitutive phenomenology ("sense-units"). But following Husserlian tradition to explore the ultimate presuppositions of each mental insight, he recognizes it as one of the most important philosophical questions. He also releases the concept "sub-universe" from its psychological implications as well as bestows upon them the accent of reality by the name of "the finite provinces of meaning". He prefers to speak about *meanings* rather than *sub-universes* in order to stress that what he actually has in his mind is not the *ontological* structure of the objects of outer space but rather the *meaningful* structure of the social world. The latter is essentially pluralistic, constituted by different kinds of human experiences. A. Schutz ascribes each of them its particular cognitive style, which has its specific degree of *awakeness*, tension of consciousness or attention to life, each of them being the highest in the province of everyday life. There is no paved way between the meaning provinces; the shift from one to another is subjectively experienced as a shock or a leap. It is produced by the radical

change of the way in which each of them presents itself in inner time consciousness. It was precisely that point of view he adhered to in *On Multiple Realities*.

In his further consideration the problem of multiple realities A. Schutz finds himself facing the following problems:

- cognitive borders of the finite provinces of meaning;
- interrelations among the different provinces;
- which of them can be considered as "paramount" reality?

All these questions he inherited from W. James. But here are some new questions he raises:

- the type of constitutive activity which brings them about;
- the typical way in which they maintain themselves;
- what gives them the accent of reality or what makes them "real" at any particular moment.

While the former three questions he scrutinizes in his daily life investigations, the latter turn out to be the subject of his *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*. It is this study which will be the focus of my further reflections.

In his previous works A. Schutz concentrated his major attention upon the "province of working", which he declared to be "the paramount reality". Using E. Husserl's terms, it is this particular realm of reality, which becomes *thematic* for the whole study. Thus, the structurization of multiple realities that is putting forward the world of working and ascribing it its privileged position among the others, has been substantiated by the references to the basic structure of human consciousness. The study on the world of working as governed by the system of relevance allows him not only to shed important light on the essence of theme-horizon relationship in general, but also on the structure of human actions in the social world. These actions are supposed to have the center of space-temporal continuum, namely, my actual "Here" and "Now", which compose my field of actions. The latter appears hierarchically organized in zones of actual, potential and restorable reach, the so-called "manipulatory sphere" being the center. Each zone has its own spatial and temporal horizons and structures, typically conceived. These interrelated zones of actual, potential and restorable experience form an unquestioned but always questionable "world taken for granted". It may also be seen as a cultural matrix of the world of working. Its initial presuppositions are: "I can do it again" as well as "And so forth and so on".

The second basic assumption of A. Schutz's conception of relevance is that at any moment I find myself in a *biographically determined situation*.

It is only partly defined by my actual experience. A. Schutz insists that my biographically determined situation is necessarily historical, due to the fact that it has to a large extent been formed by my previous *sedimented* experiences which I preserved in my memory. It is the outcome of my personal history. They constitute my “*stock of knowledge at hand*” on which I rely at any moment in my acts and thoughts. At the same time it is socially derived knowledge, which necessarily refers to the experience of others.

A. Schutz agrees with W. James, that we are never equally interested in all strata of the world of working at the same time. It is just my pragmatic interest, which organizes and structures the world we live in, into the different spheres of importance. In other words, “the selective power of our interest” defines the spheres of major or minor intimacy and anonymity within my world of working. How I define the situation to which I pay attention, depends on my pragmatic interest, which guides man within his natural attitude in daily life. It constitutes my “plan of action” or “project at hand”, prevailing on my “life plan” at any particular moment. And each project he stresses is determined by my pragmatic interest.

A. Schutz highly appreciated W. James’ idea of the human mind’s selectivity, which guides man within his natural attitude in daily life. But in contrast to the author of *Principles of Psychology* he does not tend to root the selective function of the human mind exclusively in pragmatic motives. The concept “selective function of our interest” used by H. Bergson and W. James seems too ambiguous to designate the main idea that A. Schutz actually has in his mind. Being derived from the psychology of individuals, it is unable to describe the life-world which is essentially intersubjective. Trying to release the notion “interest” from its psychological implications, he changes it to *relevance* – just as he changed James’ “sub-world” to the “province of meaning”. Moreover, he takes into account James’ idea of pragmatic justification with reference to his particular philosophical background, namely, to the philosophy of pragmatism. According to its basic assumptions, practical ratification of thought by events in the outer world should be regarded as the only criterion of truth. Accordingly, our physiological states are taken as explaining our feelings, and even the question legitimately arises, whether consciousness exists at all. But within the framework of phenomenology the various provinces of meaning or realms of reality are interconnected by the unity of our consciousness. Closer inspection reveals, however, that although being is a psychological unity, I live in several of these realms *simulta-*

neously. Thus, when writing this text, I am involved at least in three different activities at the same time, namely, in thinking about A. Schutz’s contemplation on the problem of relevance, in using my PC program and in typing the text. Moreover, I am trying to put my thoughts in a language which is obviously foreign to me, namely English. Taken together, all these activities (theoretical contemplation, writing in a foreign language, typing, using PC) are subjectively experienced as a single complex activity undivided into the parts of different attention to life. But although experienced as a unity of actions, my present doing is not a single activity. To put it phenomenologically, I am actually involved in at least two meaning provinces simultaneously, that is in the world of working (pressing the buttons of my PC keyboard, looking through a Russian-English dictionary, etc.) and in the world of theoretical contemplation, each with its own attention to life, dimension of time and particular articulation into its thematic kernel and horizontal surrounding.

This is precisely the point where A. Schutz deviates from W. James’ view, taking a step further in *Reflections*. He insists, that “the theory concerning the mind’s selective activity is simply the title for a set of problems more complicated even than those of field, theme and horizon – namely, a title for the basic phenomenon we suggest calling *relevance*”.⁶ To think that living in one province of meaning we may at any time change it for another (and its selection defines what is thematic in the field of consciousness) leads to oversimplification of the real state of affairs. It is very important to realize, he suggests in *Reflections*, that the levels of my personality are involved in several realms of reality simultaneously and to select one of them can merely mean that we are making it our system of reference, the prevailing theme. In the example given, the simultaneously performed activities are of different degrees of intimacy in respect to nearness or distance of my personality. This heterogeneous set of activities is also structured into its own theme and horizon. Typing the text and looking through the dictionary are to a great extent automatized. But making up the text by putting down my thoughts in words is much closer to the kernel of my personality. Thus, only superficial levels of my personality are involved in such performances as habitual, routine and even quasi-automatic typing, while the deeper levels of my personality are involved in theoretical contemplation. In other words my paper preparation is certainly thematic, while the other activities, also important, seem to have turned away to the horizon.

But actually all these activities have never been “released from my grip”. A. Schutz insists that two different levels of our personality (both

the superficial and the deeper) are simultaneously involved, the theme of the activity of one of them being reciprocally the horizon of the other; so the actualized theme receives the specific tinge from the other, which remains the hidden ground of the former. A. Schutz illustrates the point by a comparison to the structure of music. Imagine two independent themes which are simultaneously going on in the flux of music. We may pursue one of them, taking it as the main theme, and the other as the subordinate one, or vice versa: one theme is leading the other which has never been released from our grip. And our consciousness, A. Schutz insists, is just the same. In the light of this study, it essentially acquires contrapuntal structure, which manifests the artificial split of our personality. It also implies that theme, field, horizon and relevance are different when viewed subjectively (i.e. from the subject's point of view) and objectively, that is from the observer's point of view. Putting into play different levels of our personality (different tensions of consciousness and modes of attention to life, dimensions of time, degrees of anonymity and intimacy) "the contrapuntal articulation of the themes and horizons pertaining to each of such levels (including finally the schizophrenic patterns of the ego) are all *expressions of the single basic phenomenon: the interplay of relevance structures*".⁷

Hence, it is just *the system of relevance* that turns out to be one of the most significant of A. Schutz's concepts in his highly sophisticated theory of the life-world.

Now let me briefly outline the basic system of relevance, used in *Reflections*. There are three basic kinds of relevance he described in *Reflections*: topical, imposed/intrinsic and interpretative relevance. Topical relevance seems to be the most important for the whole theory. By virtue of this relevance something is constituted as problematic in the unstructured field of unproblematic familiarity. It organizes the field into theme and horizon and segregates the former from its unquestionable background which is simply taken for granted. Even though topical relevance is closely connected with the so-called "actual interest", they must not be confused: while actual interest presupposes existence of the problem, topical relevance constitutes the problem itself. As far as unfamiliar experiences are concerned, A. Schutz suggests that we should distinguish imposed relevance from intrinsic relevance. If we do not thematize unfamiliar experience by means of the will (a voluntary act), we call this kind of relevance "imposed relevance". For example, you find an unfamiliar object in the middle of your room. You have no intention to study it, but the object attracts your attention by its very unfamiliarity. There are

many other kinds of imposed topical relevance. The experience of shock, which is peculiar to any shift of attention from one province of meaning to another imposes new topical relevance; any nonvolitional change in the level of our personality, any change of relative intimacy to relative anonymity; any change in time-dimensions in which we live simultaneously imposes another topical relevance. In general, any interruption in the smooth running of the basic life-world idealizations of "and so forth, and so on" and "I can do it again" creates imposed topical relevance. As usual topical relevance is imposed in the course of social interaction.

But there exists some topical relevance which appears entirely different from those which are imposed. If we voluntarily structure a field of perception into thematic kernel and horizon, we put into play intrinsic relevance. It has two subdivisions: the first one consists in enlarging or deepening the prevailing theme. The second implies the voluntary shifting of attention from one topic to another, both of them being separate, i.e. without any connection between them. In the first case the original theme has been retained, and the original thematic kernel remains more or less related to the changed one. As E. Husserl reveals, each theme may be viewed as an unlimited field for further thematizations. It is the locus of an infinite number of topical relevances which may be developed by further thematization of the intrinsic content. Closer inspection reveals, however, that we put into play another level of our personality or change the interplay of time-dimensions in which we live simultaneously. Concerning the given example of nonimposed relevance, it means that what was previously horizontal has become thematic, but the new theme has not been created. Rather, the original theme has been modified in such a way that previously horizontal and now thematic elements have become intrinsic to the theme. In the second case, i.e. in shifting to a completely different theme, the original theme has been abandoned. It is the case when I have completed my work or temporarily put it off till next time; in such a case the original theme is no longer in my grip. Turning back to the first case, we may see that the original theme remains constant as a determining factor of all further subthematizations. For this reason we may call it the *paramount theme* (by analogy with paramount reality as the world of daily life). Thus we may say that topical relevance is intrinsic to the paramount theme. The paramount theme is maintained as the home base, and all the referential structures of topical relevance derive their meaning from the intrinsic meaning of the maintained paramount theme. A. Schutz calls this particular system the intrinsic topical relevance in contrast to the imposed topical relevance. As we have seen

ous shortcomings of his theory of relevances. Thus he acknowledged that he did not pay due attention to the problem concerning the *emergent novel experience*, i.e. the experience of the absolutely unknown, which could not be grasped in its typicality. It is just the kind of experience which can become known only by radical modification of the whole system of relevances prevailing for the time being. However, it is always the meaning-context that has been taken for granted which constitutes the framework of all possible future questions which might be interpretatively relevant to the topic and which becomes motivationally relevant for looking at the situation hitherto taken for granted.¹²

The novel experience, he suggests, has to fill a *vacancy* in our stock of knowledge at hand. The unfinished analysis of the problem of vacancies or enclaves (*Leerstelle*)¹³ seems to be through breaking, which leads to new dimensions in the theory of knowledge, or rather the *theory of the unknown*. Schutz intended to develop a systematic theory of the vacancy and conceive the unknown by means of typicality of the vacancies.¹⁴ It was thought to be phenomenological epistemology in the proper sense of the word. Is not the concept of vacancy and contour connected with the structurization of the theme and horizon? It may be supposed that the shifting ray of attention is directed through the contours of the vacancies. Turning again to the example of the hesitation between two possible interpretations (snake or pile of rope?), he raises the question: when are the given elements sufficient for interpretation? Or, using the newly introduced term: to what extent do the given elements predelineate the *vacancies* which remain undefined? Is there a kind of typicality which can be fitted to these vacancies? In this respect the process of knowledge can be conceived as filling-in vacancies of what is still not known, but these vacancies themselves are already typically predelineated through the contour-lines of what is already known. This is possibly a definition of the meaning-context which is the clue to the study of the social world phenomenologically interpreted. But *hic egregie progressum sum*.

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NOTES

¹ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff. Vol. 1, 1962: *The Problem of Social Reality*; Vol. 2, 1964: *Studies in Social Theory*; Vol. 3, 1966: *Studies in Phenomenological Philosophy*.

- ² Russian translation: А. Шюц, *Размышления о проблеме релеванности* (пер. Н. М. Смирновой). В кн.: Альфред Шюц: мир, светящийся смыслом. Москва, Росспэн, 2004, С. 235–398.
- ³ Richard M. Zaner. Editor's introduction to: Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1970, p. XIII.
- ⁴ W. James. *Principles of Psychology*. New York, 1890. Vol. 2. Ch. 21, pp. 283–322.
- ⁵ See: *Husserliana*. New York, Macmillan, 1931. Sec. 55.
- ⁶ Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1970, p. 13.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁸ Following E. Husserl, A. Schutz uses the terms "noema" and "noesis", which refer to "object-as-experienced" (noema) and the process of "experiencing-of-the-object" (noesis).
- ⁹ Alfred Schutz. *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, p. 41.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 157.
- ¹³ This piece of the original manuscript concerning the brief sketch of a theory of "vacancy" was written in German and entitled "Philosophie der Leerstelle".
- ¹⁴ The term "knowledge" has to be conceived in the broadest possible sense: not only in the sense of clarified and distinct knowledge, but as including all kinds of beliefs, from unfounded blind beliefs to well-founded convictions.