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ON PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY *

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The works of Tiryakian, Bruyn and Douglas are examined as representative of "phenomenological sociology." Radical problems are discovered in their use of key concepts in phenomenology: intention, reduction, phenomenon and essence. These problems are shown to arise out of a failure to grasp the nature of the phenomenological enterprise and its relationship to sociology. Turning back to the original formulation of this relationship by Husserl, we discover problems of transcendental intersubjectivity, of type and essence, and of objectivism. We then point out the existence of sociologies which do not share the shortcomings of what is called phenomenological sociology, yet which make use of the perspective and approach of phenomenology. We then focus on one of these sociologies, ethnomethodology in its relation to phenomenology. We find parallels in their methodology and domains of inquiry, and divergencies in their approaches to intersubjectivity.

There is increasing interest in something called "phenomenological sociology." If this interest is to be sustained, indeed if this sub-discipline is to contribute to our knowledge of the social world, we must become clear on what phenomenological sociology is and can become. At present serious problems exist in the writings of many sociologists who have contributed to, and implicitly defined, this approach to sociology. In general, they display only a metaphorical understanding of phenomenology as a philosophy and as a set of methods. In addition, and partly as a result, they fail to understand the relationship between sociology and phenomenology. However, if we go back to Edmund Husserl's original formulation of the relationship, we once again face serious problems. Our purpose in this essay is to explicate these problems and point out the existence of sociologies which do not share the shortcomings of what is called "phenomenological sociology," yet which make use of its perspective and approach. One of these sociologies, ethnomethodology as developed by Harold Garfinkel, will be briefly treated in our final section.

From the few authors who have contributed to phenomenological sociology we have selected the work of Tiryakian (1965), Bruyn (1966), and Douglas (1970) as representative. Tiryakian's study in the ASR of the affinity between phenomenology and the mainstream of sociological tradition is one of the earliest and most often quoted. Bruyn's discussion of social phenomenology appears in his book The Human Perspective in Sociology. Douglas' discussion of various phenomenological sociologies appears in one of the most important edited volumes in the field of ethnomethodology. In view of the availability of these statements, we take them to be important for how phenomeno-

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logical sociology is understood and defined by sociologists.

THE PROBLEM OF METAPHOR

The one problem Tiryakian, Bruyn, and Douglas have in common is that they use the concepts of phenomenology "metaphorically." That is, they use the terms as understood in everyday conversation rather than as they are meant in phenomenology. They fail to recognize these terms' intended domain of reference and thus to recognize the transformation of meaning they undergo when used to refer to an utterly different domain. In the instances of conceptual confusion to be discussed, all three authors make claims which they present as consistent with the philosophy or methods of Husserl (1962). Our criticisms have therefore been formulated solely along Husserlian lines.

Intention

The concept of intention is greatly misunderstood and misrepresented by Tiryakian. He quotes W. I. Thomas as defining attention as ""the mental attitude which takes note of the outside world and manipulates it"" (Tiryakian, 1965:682). Then we are told that the notion of attention "is equivalent to the phenomenological notion of 'intention'" (1965:682). In order to see how far afield Tiryakian is, it is worthwhile to cite what Thomas had to say about attention after he had defined it:

... attention does not operate alone; it is associated with habit on the one hand and crisis on the other. When the habits are running smoothly the attention is relaxed; it is not at work. But when something happens to disturb the run of habit the attention is called into play and devises a new mode of behaviour which will meet the crisis (Thomas, 1951: 218).

Phenomenologically, intention is not something that at one point is "not at work" and at another point "called into play." As Husserl said "all experiences in one way or another participate in intentionality" (1962: 222). Consciousness is fundamentally intentional: it is always consciousness of something, "consciousness of an object whether real or ideal, whether existent or imaginary" (Gurwitsch, 1966:124). One of the main points of Husserl's program was that Descartes' formulation was incomplete: *ego cogito* must be expanded to *ego cogito cogitatum* (Husserl, 1962:105). The relationship between *cogito* and *cogitatum* was worked out in terms of Husserl's theory of intentionality which transcends the objectivist and subjectivist positions by dealing with the object as perceived (the *noema*) and the perception of the object (the *noesis*), or better yet, "the intended object" and the act of consciousness which intends that object, "the intentional act." Thus the concept of intention must not be confused with Thomas' attention; for intention is an essential feature of consciousness prior to the operation of attention.¹

The phenomenological concept of intention is also misunderstood by Douglas, although to a lesser degree, when he equates it with the concept of purpose. In his paper entitled "Understanding Everyday Life" he declares that

... as Schutz, following Husserl and other phenomenologists, has argued so well, it is primarily intentions at any time—our purposes at hand—that order human thought, that determine the relevance of information and ideas about the world and ourselves (1970:26).²

While it is true that intentionality can be equated with purpose, this is so only at the predicative level of experience, the level of judgment, of action in Weber's sense. However, Husserl's theory of intentionality refers also, and most significantly, to the pre-predicative level. This is the level of immediate

¹ Berger (1966) caught this misuse of "intention" but in doing so called into question whether Thomas in fact ever used a concept called "attention." Tiryakian (1966:262) responded that Thomas had used the concept of "attention" and said that it certainly does "imply intentional direction of consciousness to the outside on the part of the subject." True, but not in a phenomenological sense: consciousness isn't "intentionally" directed—consciousness is intentional.

² Parenthetically he adds that "John Heeran in Chapter 2 has provided the best analysis of this intentional theory of consciousness." Examining Heeran's article (in Douglas, 1970:45-6) we find no discussion of the "intentional theory of consciousness." Rather we find a discussion of the actor's purposes at hand, his pragmatic interest in the world of daily life.

Reduction

Husserl’s concept of reduction is used only metaphorically by Tiryakian and Douglas. In demonstrating that “Durkheim’s sociological analysis is really phenomenological” Tiryakian discusses the “implicitly phenomenological approach” taken by Durkheim in his study of suicide.

The “surface” manifestations of suicide establish its presence as a social phenomenon; these objective quantitative factors are then “reduced” phenomenologically to underlying layers of the social structure in which the act of suicide occurs . . . (1965: 681).

We are told, however, that “Durkheim stops short of a ‘transcendental reduction’” (1965: 681). Tiryakian also takes the position that Simmel, “although he diverged from Husserl in some respects . . . sought to reduce manifestly different concrete forms of social phenomena to their underlying characteristics (‘forms’)” (1965: 680).

The reduction is misunderstood here as operating in the empirical realm. While there are at least three types of reduction—eidetic, psychological, and transcendental—all treat intended objects or intentional acts within the a priori realm of possibilities. In this realm, through a method of imaginative variation, the phenomenologist can freely vary the objects or acts of consciousness. He does so to discover what is a priori, i.e., essential to every possible appearance of the object or act within the empirical world, the realm of actualities. To secure the a priori realm the empirical world must be “bracketed.” In that Tiryakian footnotes Schutz’ first volume of Collected Papers, it is surprising that he had not grasped the radical nature of the reduction, of “putting the world in brackets,” as discussed by Schutz.

The phenomenologist does not deny the existence of the outer world, but for his analytical purpose he makes up his mind to suspend belief in its existence—that is, to refrain intentionally and systematically from all judgments related directly or indirectly to the existence of the outer world. . . . What we have to put into brackets is not only the existence of the outer world, along with all the things in it, inanimate and animate, including fellow-men, cultural objects, society and its institutions . . . but also the propositions of all the sciences (1962: 104–5).

What is left after the initial reduction, is the intended object and the intentional act. While the transcendental reduction is more complex in that it requires bracketing one’s own mundane existence as a human being within the world, we shall not take our explication further; for by now it is clear that Durkheim and Simmel were hardly engaged in phenomenological reductions. One does not reduce quantitative factors “down” to “underlying layers of social structure,” for social structure itself must be bracketed. The common nuclear meanings which Simmel induced from the repetitive aspects of social life could not have been grasped via reduction, for these meanings themselves have to be bracketed.

Besides those like Tiryakian who argue that the reduction has been used unknowingly by sociologists, there are others who suggest it as a research method. Douglas declares that

5 Husserl uses reduction and epoché interchangeably, but some phenomenologists treat the two as different sides of the same coin (Natanson, 1962: 14). The epoché is negative in that it brackets reality; whereas the reduction is positive, having to do with the character of the phenomena obtained through bracketing (Lauer, 1958: 50). For simplicity we shall not distinguish between the two.

6 George Psathas (1971: 6) is quite explicit in making such a recommendation.
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... accepting presuppositions as necessary, there obviously remains that vast realm of common sense, of everyday experience that can be phenomenologically bracketed, that is, towards which one can take a theoretic stance and reflect upon until the basic elements and relations of the phenomenal experience are discovered (1970:22).

Not only does Douglas assume that his "theoretic stance" is a phenomenological reduction, but he also claims that "phenomenological interactionists," such as Blumer and Becker, as well as ethnomethodologists use the theoretic stance, i.e., phenomenological reduction (1970:19, 16). No sociologist brackets the existence of the world. Sociology's interests, problems, and solutions are not to be found in the realm of possibilities. While some ethnomethodologists do employ a transformed version of the reduction, they make it quite clear that theirs is not to be confused with phenomenological reduction. In the very volume which Douglas edited and within which his article appears, Zimmerman and Pollner (1970:98) state:

The term reduction is borrowed from Husserl (1962). While the notion of an occasioned corpus partakes of Husserl's program, the order of phenomena revealed by its use is by no means offered as equivalent to that which appears by virtue of the use of the phenomenological reduction.

In our final section we shall discuss the similarities and differences between phenomenological and ethnomethodological reduction. Suffice it to say that neither should be confused with methods used by symbolic interactionists.

Phenomenon

The concept of phenomenon is highly problematic. Would-be phenomenological sociologists (Psathas, 1971:2) seem drawn to Husserl's dictum "to the things themselves," by which Husserl meant a return to the phenomena as given in immediate consciousness. By phenomenon Husserl meant that "which, having been subjected to the phenomenological reduction, is purified from the reality attributed to it by naive consciousness" (Spiegelberg, 1971:722). A phenomenon qua phenomenon only becomes available when we cease to treat an object as real, and begin to treat the object as meant, as intended, as it appears.

Sociologists (Schur, 1971:124), however, understand "things" and phenomena in a strictly mundane, and therefore metaphorical manner. Arguing that Durkheim's methodology is not antithetical to an existential-phenomenological viewpoint, Tiryakian (1965:680) declares that "On the contrary, 'consider social facts as things,' has for Durkheim the same import and meaning as Husserl's dictum 'to the things themselves'!" Furthermore, we are told that Durkheim's approach "is grounded in accepting social facts as sui generis phenomena of intersubjective consciousness, as products of social interaction" (1965:680). Social facts are hardly phenomena, for they are theoretic abstractions from what is given in experience within the empirical realm. They are not "prior to all 'theory,'" as Husserl (1962:95) required. They are not arrived at through phenomenological reduction.

Bruyn (1966:94–5) shares a similar problem when he suggests "phenomenological inquiry into the nature of social phenomena." By the latter he understands the referents of such sociological concepts as primary groups, social institutions, religion, society, etc. (1966:94). Since his discussion draws upon Husserl we feel warranted in inquiring how the referents of these concepts are to be phenomenologically reduced and examined. These referents transcend the immediate experience of any observer and furthermore would seem to have their existence through theoretical abstraction from immediate experience. Thus it is difficult to see how Bruyn can treat these referents as phenomena in Husserl's sense. That is not to say that it cannot be done, for Husserl (1962) held that all objects of consciousness can be reduced to phenomena. However it is no simple matter. Unless this point is made and understood it is almost inevitable that sociologists will read "phenomenon" in Durkheim's mundane sense of social fact (1938:14). Bruyn seems unaware of this point. Thereby he perpetuates the metaphorical misunderstandings he himself is involved in.

7 "Object" is to be understood in the widest sense, as any object of consciousness, including thought objects.
While Douglas takes his theoretical stance to be a phenomenological reduction, he does not seem to realize that phenomena are made available only through reduction. For Douglas (1970:15) the reduction is simply another (though preferred) stance toward the everyday world as a phenomenon. Other stances are the absolutist and the natural (1970:13-14). All stances however are presented as sharing phenomena: the "phenomena of everyday life," which Douglas (1970:4) argues to be social action, in Weber's sense (1968:4). Social actions "must be studied and explained in terms of their situations and their meanings to the actors themselves" (1970:4).

The problems involved are multiple. First, Douglas fails to recognize the radical difference between ethnomethodology's and conventional sociology's so-called phenomena. This is the same mistake which Denzin (1970) makes and to which Zimmerman and Wieder (1970) respond in articles appearing in the very book which Douglas edited and in which his article appears. Drawing from another article in that book we can say that whereas interpretive sociology seeks to interpret social action, ethnomethodology treats "the interpretive process itself as a phenomenon for investigation" (Wilson, 1970:78).

Secondly, from within the reduction how are we as observers able to grasp the subjective meanings of the acts of others? Douglas fails to mention or recognize this problem of intersubjectivity within the reduced sphere. For Husserl this problem required a transcendental solution, which he attempted, but failed (Schutz, 1966:51-91). Douglas does not even offer a solution at the mundane level. Without explicating intersubjectivity, it is difficult to understand how, from within the reduction, we are to study and explain observed social action as phenomenon. The difficulty lies in the fact that in order to treat social action as a phenomenon we have to bracket the existence of actors qua fellow-men. The difficulty subsides, however, if we understand phenomenon and reduction metaphorically.

Essence

Finally we come to the troublesome concept of essence. After discussing the work of the early phenomenological sociologists (cf. Martindale, 1960:267-82), Bruyn (1966:44) declares that "A conceptual contribution which European phenomenology may make to American field studies lies in the term essence...the work of the social phenomenologist becomes one of interpreting anew the meaning of essence in social theory." Thus he suggests that the term essence "may be applied to such concepts as primary group, social institutions, values, society, religion, beauty, morality, or whatever sociological phenomenon might be studied" (1966:94).

The questionable utility of the concept of essence for the sociologist will be clearer if the concept is clarified. Essence may be taken to be that intuited invariant quality without which the intended object, the phenomena, would not be what it is (Husserl, 1962:45-51). This is not to be confused with any notion of the "defining characteristics" or "necessary features" of objects in the empirical factual world. Essence has as its reference the a priori realm of possibilities which precedes that of actualities (Husserl, 1962:213). As such, it is intuited from the intended object, the object as experienced, as perceived, the object as noema.\(^8\) It is arrived at through the method of reduction and imaginative variation discussed above. Defining characteristics, on the other hand, are arrived at a posteriori, through logical operations (deduction, induction) based on factual knowledge about actual objects in the taken-to-be real world. Only the latter are the concern of empirical sociology, for it is in the real world that sociological problems and their solutions are to be found.

While it is not clear that Bruyn under-

\(^8\) As Gruwitsch (1966:112), following Husserl, has explained, "The noema is to be distinguished from the real object...the 'perceived tree as such' [the noema] varies according to the standpoint, the orientation, the attitude, etc., of the perceiving subject, as when for instance he looks at the tree from above, or at another time perceives it while in the garden." Whereas the real object, the tree, is known to be an oak, to have a root system, to have a more or less round trunk, to be losing its leaves, etc., the "perceived tree as such" consists of only that which I perceive, of that which is immediately given to me in my experiencing act (cf. Husserl, 1962:240-5).
stands phenomenon in a phenomenological sense, it is quite clear that he misconceives the concept of essence. After having discussed Husserl, he distinguishes between seeking the essence of a construct and the essence of a social belief: "If it is a social belief, it should not be determined by the scientist's own theoretical musings, but rather by what is inherent in the minds of those who hold it" (1966:95). Nowhere does he discuss how this is to be done phenomenologically. No theory of intersubjectivity is provided nor is any mention made of reduction or imaginative variation.

While contrasting essences with ideal types he states that "Max Weber was uneasy about essences in ideal types and feared the value judgments implied in them" (1966:95). Bruyn makes no distinction, however, between Weber’s and Husserl’s use of essence. Later, in discussing Weber and essences, Bruyn (1966:117–18) quotes Weber: "All expositions, for example, of the ‘essence’ of Christianity are ideal types enjoying only a necessarily very relative and problematic validity, when they are intended to be regarded as the historical portrayal of empirically existing facts" (Weber, 1949:97). Essences in Husserl’s sense are a priori, formal, invariant, not relative and of problematic validity. They exist and are to be discovered within the realm of possibilities, not within the empirical realm. Bruyn does not recognize the domain of reference of the concept essence. Hence his use of that concept is metaphorical.

Given the misuse of the major concepts in phenomenology, i.e., intention, reduction, phenomenon and essence, by Tiryakian, Douglas and Bruyn, we must conclude that Tiryakian’s thesis of the affinity between phenomenology and leading figures in the sociological tradition, Douglas’ discussion of various phenomenological sociologies ⁹

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⁹ Douglas (1970:32) treats Sacks and his followers as “linguistic phenomenological sociologists.” This is unfortunate: (1) the compatibility of linguistic analysis and phenomenology is highly controversial (cf. Natanson, 1962:34–43; TeHeNepe, 1965:133–46), (2) Sacks does not define his work as phenomenological, but instead (3) states in his dissertation that some of his work “may be viewed as somewhat analogous to the analysis of syntactic structures in formal linguistics, or componential

and Bruyn’s suggestions for a social phenomenology, are fundamentally flawed and misleading. The problem of metaphor, however, is not simply lexical. It betrays a thoroughgoing failure to recognize and grasp the radical nature of Husserl's enterprise. Any attempt to graft phenomenological concepts onto a sociology which has not been fundamentally reconstituted can only lead to a distortion, if not perversion, of both phenomenology and sociology.

THE PROBLEM OF EIDETIC SOCIOLOGY

Sociology’s realm is the empirical world. Husserl, however, held the position that parallel and prior to every empirical science there could and should be an eidetic science, e.g., an essential sociology within the realm of possibilities (1962:55–7). This essential sociology would provide a rigorous foundation for empirical study, in line with the belief that the relation of phenomenology to the social sciences is foundational.

Through the methods of reduction and imaginative variation, the essence and essential relationships of such objects of empirical sociology as society and the family, would be clarified. This essential sociology itself, however, would presuppose and be founded on an eidetic science of the structures of the life-world (cf. Kockelmans, 1967:104), the world within which empirical sociology finds its subject matter. Each and every eidetic science then would be ultimately founded on transcendental phenomenology, for only within the transcendental realm can the constitution of the world be clarified. Since all eidetic sciences would presuppose the world, this clarification is necessary. Only radical "presuppositionless," a priori knowledge could serve as an adequate foundation for science. Until such knowledge is attained the sciences would continue to have foundation problems ¹⁰ (Husserl, 1962:19). They

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¹⁰ In sociology, the abiding problem has been the appropriate model of science. For a discussion of foundational problems in sociology see Wilson (1970).
would continue to be confused as to the human meaning and significance of their findings (cf. Husserl, 1970a).

Setting aside the program of transcendental phenomenology for a moment, we can ask whether an eidetic sociology is possible. In recommending the incorporation of essence into the corpus of sociological concepts, Bruyn presupposes this possibility. In fact, such a science was attempted by students and contemporaries of Husserl, most notably Max Scheler. In terms of strict Husserlian phenomenology though, they were unsuccessful (cf. Schutz, 1962:140–2, 150–79; Neisser, 1959:210–11; Spiegelberg, 1971:266–7). They often provided a wealth of insights (cf. Scheler, 1954), but their findings were not essential, not a priori. Scheler in fact was forced to reverse his position on findings he once held essential (Spiegelberg, 1971:266).

The question of an eidetic sociology is complex. This complexity follows from Husserl’s theory of essence (1962:45–71; Levinas, 1967; Kockelmanns, 1967:77–105), the changes it underwent (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a:43–95) and the cogency of the criticisms leveled at it (Dufrenne, 1966: 75–84; Merleau-Ponty, 1969:105–29; Neisser, 1959; Schutz, 1966:92–115). Space does not permit a detailed discussion, nor is it our purpose to render a final judgment. Instead we wish to point to the thorny problems sociologists must face if they wish to do an eidetic sociology.

If we wished to describe the essence of a psychological phenomenon which did not imply the existence of others, e.g., action as experienced, it would be possible. Of course, such a description would be of our own experience of action within the reduced sphere. Indeed, Schutz (1967:45–96) provided such a description. Sociology’s objects, however, are social. The existence of others are presupposed. If we wish to do an eidetic description of social action, even our own, we run into Douglas’ problem, discussed above. A theory of intersubjectivity is required and implied.11 By definition, social action takes account of, and is oriented to the behavior of others (Weber, 1968:4).

Within the empirical, mundane realm a theory of intersubjectivity seems possible (cf. Zaner, 1961). Husserl’s approach (1970b: 89–151), unfortunately, led him into the transcendental realm, where the problem of intersubjectivity seems insoluble (Lauer, 1965:148–62; Ricoeur, 1967a:115–42). Through the use of the phenomenological-psychological reduction Husserl (1970a: 238) held that it is possible for the social scientist to understand and describe the intentional acts of his subjects. By extension, it would seem that the meaningful action of others can be grasped.

However, social scientists who wish to follow Husserl at this point are led into the problem of transcendental intersubjectivity. The social scientist must first perform the reduction on himself (1970a:253), which reveals the social scientist as the “absolutely single ego” (1970a:256), the transcendental Ego. In so doing, his subjects are transformed into a phenomenon. In order to account for the existence of others and a world in common, “there necessarily occurs a transformation of the phenomenological-psychological epoché and reduction into the transcendental” (1970a:256). The knotty problem must then be faced of how others are constituted in the social scientist (qua transcendental Ego) through his own intentional acts. As Schutz (1966:51–91) has skillfully argued, Husserl’s theory of transcendental intersubjectivity not only fails, but is addressed to a pseudo-problem. Intersubjectivity “is not a problem of constitution which can be solved within the transcendental sphere, but is rather a datum (Gegebenheit) of the life-world” (Schutz, 1966:82).

If we withdraw from the transcendental sphere and treat the world and intersubjectivity as ontologically given, as do Schutz (1966:89) and Merleau-Ponty (1964b:151–81), we can still inquire as to the possibility of a strict eidetic sociology. A theory of intersubjectivity is still required, but only at the mundane level. Presupposing such a theory (cf. Schutz, 1967:97–138; Merleau-Ponty, 1962:346–65), a problem still remains.

An essence is always intuited from an “example,” a phenomenon which corresponds to

11 That Scheler’s findings were not a priori may be traceable partly to his defective theory of intersubjectivity (Scheler, 1954:213–64; Schutz, 1962:150–79) on which he based his search for essences. That theory involved the positing of a highly questionable supra-individual consciousness.
a factual or imaginary object. Husserl has said that immediately given phenomena are grasped and explicated according to types (1970a:220). That is, the life-world and all objects in it are experienced in their typicity, e.g., a typical house, a typical concert, a typical day, an atypical child (cf. Schutz, 1962:7–27). Natanson (1970:5) has called ours a “typifying consciousness.” This leads to the question, though, of whether or not the essence is preconstituted by the type in terms of which we have experienced the object in the mundane world. Schutz (1966:115) argues that this is in fact the case, and that “there is indeed merely a difference of degree between type and eidos” (essence).

Since types are “vaccillating approximations” generated in terms of actors’ pragmatic purposes (cf. Schutz, 1970:63–4), they are not vehicles to be driven beyond their own pragmatic destination. Descriptions of the essence of typified social phenomena may very well go beyond how those phenomena are seen, experienced and accomplished by the actors themselves. Furthermore, since types are contingent and somewhat arbitrary, there is no guarantee that the typified object with which one begins will bear any determinate and unequivocal relationship to the phenomena being sought.

Systematic sampling offers a solution, but to opt for that solution is to vitiate the search for eidetic knowledge. Reasoning from samples leads to a posteriori knowledge. If the promise of a strict eidetic sociology is to be fulfilled only the methods of phenomenology may be used, e.g., reduction and imaginative variation. If only these methods are used, though, it is difficult to see how we can ever arrive at a priori knowledge of the essential structure of social phenomena. On the other hand, if these are our sole methods, our approach begins to take on features of the very objectivism (cf. Schutz, 1964:4) which would-be phenomenological sociologists have opposed. We may be led to make claims about “what social phenomena really are” which run counter to claims put forward by actors.12

Clearly, the search for an eidetic sociology faces many seemingly insurmountable problems. The social presupposes a theory of intersubjectivity. Husserl required and formulated such a theory at the transcendental level, but was unsuccessful. Even if we refuse his transcendental invitation and remain on mundane ground, we find that the search for eidos is circumscribed and prejudiced by its origin: the typified life-world. To seek for the essence beyond the type is to risk forsaking interpretative understanding with little assurance of finding a priori knowledge. In the end, even if we put aside these problems, we might well ask whether it is even wise to assume that social phenomena have a Husserlian a priori.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGIES

The foregoing would seem to suggest that even properly understood, the possibility of a phenomenological sociology in the sense envisioned by Husserl is highly questionable. However, we should realize that Husserl actually knew little of the concrete problems of the social sciences (cf. Schutz, 1962:140). In fact some sociologies which have been called phenomenological are closer to the spirit, if not the letter of phenomenology than the pertinent statements of its founder. What distinguishes these sociologies from those we have criticized is that the following involve and invoke no claim that what is done actually is, or is the same as, Husserlian phenomenology.

Here we wish to discuss briefly three of these sociologies in terms of their phenomenological features. A fourth type, ethnomethodology, will be elaborated in our final section. These types are neither exhaustive nor strictly drawn. Rather, they are somewhat arbitrarily drawn analytical devices offered simply to point out and distinguish between different programs in what can be called phenomenological sociology.

Hopefully, in noting and distinguishing between types of phenomenological sociologies we may prevent further confusion among critics (Schur, 1971; Neisser, 1959; Goldstein, 1963; Pivcevic, 1972). So far, they have sought to question the possibility and utility of something they have called phenomenological sociology, usually without realiz-

12 Köstenbaum’s suggested use of phenomenology in the study of status (1966:336) seems to us, in fact, to suggest a type of result incompatible with Schutz’ Weberian postulate of adequacy (1962:44).
ing their arguments are only aimed at one type. Or, worse yet, they are aimed unknowingly and indiscriminately at different types. Finally, and unfortunately, their arguments reveal a failure to understand completely any of the types they have addressed.13

Type I can be called phenomenological in a loose sense because, whether it is realized or not, it makes use of a phenomenological philosophical perspective. This perspective is one which stresses “the primacy of consciousness and subjective meaning in the interpretation of social action” (Natanson, 1962:157). Natanson (1962:165) has identified W. I. Thomas, Cooley, Mead, and Weber with this approach; but it would not be out of order to identify this as the perspective of those working within what Wilson (1970) has called the interpretive paradigm (cf. Shearing and Petrunik, 1972). Natanson (1962:157) cautions, however, that “Obviously the label ‘phenomenological’ is less than satisfactory for this total approach, since it neither derives directly from the philosophy of Edmund Husserl nor is always philosophically compatible with principles of Husserlian phenomenology.” Neither intersubjectivity nor the natural attitude are thematized in Type I.

Type II adopts an explicit and clarified phenomenological philosophical perspective as its foundation. This phenomenologically founded sociology follows from the studies of Alfred Schutz (1967) in which the latter clarified Weber’s concept of action and his method of ideal type construction. In his studies Schutz revealed the invariant formal structures of the life-world (cf. 1966:116):

the realms of manipulation (1962:306) and of others (1962:15), and the systems of relevance and typification (1970).

This “ontology of the life-world,” which Husserl had called for (1970a:173), provides a true a priori framework within which, and with reference to, sociologists necessarily discover and resolve their problematic. Though Schutz did an eidetic science, his was not an eidetic sociology, for he did not seek the essence of discipline-defined “social phenomena.” Rather, he sought to elucidate the a priori structure of the world in which sociological phenomena are apprehended. Rather than seeking the essence, e.g., of corporations, the state or society, Schutz turned to the structures of the life-world which those phenomena presuppose, e.g., a world of contemporaries beyond our reach grasped through socially distributed and pragmatically generated typifications, etc.

For Schutz these structures included mundane intersubjectivity as an ontological given. He began, but never completed, a theory of intersubjectivity (1967:97–138; Zaner, 1961). The life-world, intersubjectivity, and the natural attitude (cf. Husserl, 1962:91), that is, the attitude of naïve belief in the existence of the world, were examined by Schutz through the eidetic science which he called the “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” (1962:132). The type of sociology founded on Schutz’s phenomenology is continued most notably by Berger and Luckman (1966) and Holzner (1968).

Type III also is phenomenologically founded on the structures of the life-world, but it uses what may be called a phenomenological approach. Traveling under the banner of reflexive sociology, Type III can be understood as a philosophically radicalized version of the type of sociology Goulde (1970) called for (cf. Zaner, 1971). Drawing upon Husserl, Schutz, Merleau-Ponty (1964b:98–113; cf. O’Neill, 1970) and Garfinkel (1967), this first person approach is predicated on the recognition that sociology is in and about the very life-world that it studies. This leads to a rejection of the ideal of an absolute observer and requires that research be carried out in a manner which preserves the presence of the observer (cf. Darville, 1972). In so doing, this ap-

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13 Schur (1971:115–36) fails to distinguish and understand the differences between Types I, II, and IV. He misunderstands the latter in a rather common fashion (cf. Denzin, 1970; Zimmerman and Wieder, 1970). Neisser (1959) criticizes the major figure of Type II (Schutz) in terms of the inappropriate criteria of strict eidetic sociology. Goldstein (1963) misconceives phenomenological sociology as being solely a first person enterprise. In so doing he confuses features of Type III with Type II, and fails to grasp how the latter develops an observer’s account of social action. Pivecic (1972) confuses Type I, II, and III. He rejects rather than disproves Type II because he uses an objectivist notion of what is social (cf Schutz, 1964:5–6). Thus he fails to grasp the meaning of social (action) within Weber’s framework.
approach seeks to warrant its claims of knowledge through explicating the grounds for those claims.

This Type is phenomenological in the sense that it . . . purports nothing less than accounting for the world, its objectivity, and the unquestioned certainty of its existence in subjective terms, or to put it differently, revealing the world as a correlate and product of subjective functions, activities and operations (Gurwitsch, 1966:416).

Understood as critical in a phenomenological sense (cf. Zaner, 1970), reflexive sociology seeks "to make explicit those structures that remain merely implicit and taken for granted" (Zaner, 1970:82). It does so in the belief that "Unless the respondent's and researcher's decoding and encoding procedures are basic elements of the research enterprise, we cannot make sense of either the phenomena being studied or the materials labeled 'findings'" (Cicourel, 1968:3). Intersubjectivity and the natural attitude do become thematicized in this approach. While there are wide differences in their work, O'Neill (1972), Smith (1972a, 1972b) and Cicourel (1968) can be identified with this approach.

PHENOMENOLOGY AND ETHNOMETHODOLOGY

Type IV, ethnomethodology, has a distinctive relationship to both sociology and phenomenology. It is a program of inquiry which combines certain phenomenological and sociological concerns while transforming them in such a way as to do violence to neither but, rather, to constitute for itself a unique and independent domain of study. Note, however, that the following exposition by no means deals with all of what currently travels under the rubric of ethnomethodology. Rather, our attention is restricted to explicating the ethnomethodological program of Harold Garfinkel (1967) as found in the writings of Pollner, Wieder, and Zimmerman (in Douglas, 1970). Using their formulations as a resource, we will now sketch some of the affinities of the ethnomethodological program with phenomenological concerns and the ways in which it transforms those concerns to establish its own distinctive domain of investigation.

To begin with, the attitude which constitutes the ethnomethodological domain differs from the "attitude of everyday life" (the natural attitude) which constitutes the domain common both to lay members and conventional sociological analysts in a manner akin to the way that the phenomenological attitude differs from the natural attitude. Under the natural attitude, the objects of the domain of everyday life are believed to exist independently of the mode of inquiry addressed to them. Both phenomenology and ethnomethodology suspend or "bracket" the belief that such objects are independent of the mode of inquiry used to make the objects observable. The phenomena thus made available for phenomenological and ethnomethodological inquiry differ in their constitution from the phenomenon of the natural attitude. They also differ from each other by virtue of the particular form of reduction used by each (cf. Zimmerman and Pollner, 1970:98). For phenomenology, objects in the "real" world are reduced to objects of immediate consciousness and are seen as constituted in and through intentional acts of consciousness. For ethnomethodology, the "objective" features of the social world are reduced to the interpretative procedures by which that world is assembled and accomplished in concrete, ongoing, social situations. For phenomenology, the foundational nexus of meaning in the world is immediate consciousness; for ethno-

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14 A distinction must be made here regarding the attitude assumed by the ethnomethodologist. That attitude brackets the ontological status of any social world "external" to the directly observed social situation, but takes as given the objective reality of the observed "situated practices." To the degree that it gives the latter ontological status, it parallels the natural attitude in having a mundane, objective, intersubjectively verifiable domain. As Pollner (1970) pointed out, however, it is a precondition of all forms of inquiry, including the phenomenological variety, to have an "objective" domain. Phenomenological inquiry differs from the other two which concern us in that its domain is intersubjectively verifiable, but no claim is made for the objective reality of that domain. The very question of "reality" is bracketed, but the resulting phenomena are treated as unquestionably given. Thus, naively speaking, the domain is "objective."

15 It is perhaps useful to observe that the term "reduction" derives from the Latin compound "reducere," which means "to lead back to origins."
methodology, the foundational nexus of meaning in the social world is the immediately present, directly observed social situation. For both, anything transcending this nexus ("real" objects "outside" of consciousness; "objective" features of society "outside" of situations wherein their sense is recognized by members) is bracketed or "put out of play" with regard to the task of describing or accounting for the features of their respective domains. The domain of phenomenological inquiry, then, consists solely of the recognizable structures of immediate consciousness; while the domain of ethnomethodological inquiry consists solely of members' situated practices which produce for themselves and for observers the sense of objective social structures.

Note also that the fundamental notion of intersubjectivity receives a characteristically different placement in these domains. In the phenomenology of Schutz, intersubjectivity is viewed as an ontologically given feature of the social world, and analysis is directed toward the constitutive attitudes and beliefs that make such a viewpoint possible for members of the social world. In contrast, intersubjectivity enters the ethnomethodological domain as the sense of intersubjectivity contingently accomplished by members' situated practices. The transformation here involves a shift from the realm of the a priori to that of the contingently actual—the a priori becomes a problematic feature of actual accomplishment. In contradistinction to both these conceptions, however, the question of intersubjectivity never enters the domain of the natural attitude in a thematized form as a topic or object of study in its own right. Rather, intersubjectivity resides at its foundation as an unexamined but essential presupposition.

Perhaps enough has been said to display yet another similarity between phenomenology and ethnomethodology: the structurally similar character of the misunderstandings to which both are often subject. These misunderstandings typically fail to recognize that the domains of reference and the language used to describe the objects of those domains are radically different in constitution (and, hence, meaning) from the domain of reference constituted by the natural attitude, i.e., the taken-for-granted reality of the commonsense world. The radical character of this difference may be indicated by the fact, paradoxical as it may seem, that the "same" question cannot be addressed to problems within these domains. This is so simply because the terms of any question (and, hence, the terms of any possible answer) undergo a thorough transformation of meaning as they pass from one domain to another. For example, under the auspices of the natural attitude a question may be asked about the manifest or latent function of some transsituational phenomena (phenomena whose existence is taken to reside outside any particular situation, i.e., objective phenomena). Under the auspices of the ethnomethodological attitude and its attendant reduction, however, a question about transsituational phenomena automatically becomes a question about the phenomenon of transsituationality (i.e., how members produce and sustain the sense of objective phenomena taken to exist outside the occasion where that sense is made collectively available).

Clearly the actual practitioners of the ethnomethodological program are explicitly aware of the radical character of their domain assumptions and that the order of phenomena which concerns them is entirely incommensurable with what it is usually taken to be. Thus, Zimmerman and Pollner state that "The reduction does not generate research that may be regarded as an extension, refinement, or correction of extant sociological inquiry. . . . The [ethnomethodological] reduction constitutes as its phenomenon an order of affairs that has no

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It should be apparent that phenomenology, properly understood, can contribute to the sociological enterprises, properly understood. For this contribution to come about, and to save ourselves from the radical problems of what is called phenomenological sociology, we must make a systematic and disciplined inquiry into Husserlian phenomenologies and their derivatives (transcendental, psychological, hermeneutical and existential phenomenologies). This alone, however, is not enough; for any contribution phenomenology can make presupposes and depends on a clear understanding of what sociology is and can become. Since there are many sociologies, the task is complex. The resolution, however, is an individual problem (cf. Gouldner, 1970) not only compatible with, but complementary to, phenomenological inquiry (cf. Zaner, 1971).

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SOCIAL PROBLEMS, PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS, AND QUASI-THEORIES

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This paper explores the structure, circumstances, and consequences of the use of quasi-theories in talk about socially problematic situations. Impelled by a situation within their view which they perceive as disorderly, people attempt to construct its reality by talking about it. In the course of talk, participants tentatively indicate that they are about to pursue a given line of analysis. Such moves take the form of stylized verbal expressions. If the others respond by accepting the indication as a fruitful line to pursue, agreement on a cure for the problematic situation will be forthcoming. They will then draw an inference from the cure to the basic nature of the problem; a specification of the core problem will be constructed. Participants will then build around this specification and its cure a more elaborate causal analysis containing the following elements (a) a distinction between the core problem and essentially illusory aspects of it; (b) causal generalizations that support the analysis; (c) illustrations, examples, and biographical reconstructions; and (d) widespread values and beliefs that support the analysis.

REALITY CONSTRUCTION IN PROBLEMATIC SITUATIONS

Any collectively defined contemporary social problem represents a set of conditions regarded as both undesirable and avoidable. But the grounds on which conditions are so defined and the process of definition itself are not well understood. This essay seeks to advance that understanding by focusing on the social construction of the reality of social problems.1 We will examine

1 The concept of the quasi-theory comes from previous work by the authors which explored the political uses of a quasi-theory of communication (Hall and Hewitt, 1970). Our work is linked to several strands of research and theory. The analysis builds generally on the image of man as a "reality constructionist" drawing on a social stock of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The emphasis on social order as an accomplishment of everyday conduct derives primarily from Garfinkel (1967) and McHugh (1968). Our view of social problems closely parallels that of Herbert Blumer (1971: 398) who views problems as "fundamentally products of a process of collective definition instead of existing independently as a set of objective social arrangements with an intrinsic makeup." This view of problems is also grounded in Hall's (1973) symbolic interactionist analysis of politics. The felt need to explain problematic situations and thus to restore order is related to the process in which accounts are rendered and received in the event of normative failures (Scott and Lyman, 1968). This conception also draws from Mills' (1940) conception of vocabularies of motives. The general approach to social problems we develop here can be viewed as an effort to apply aspects of the labeling perspective more generally to the analysis of social problems (cf. Becker, 1963; Schur, 1971).