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The Oblivion of the Life-World The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons¹

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 1940s in the United States, an exchange of correspondence took place between two of the great thinkers in Sociology, Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons. This correspondence dealt with matters which many deemed to be “the greatest central problems in the social sciences.” The reading of these letters leads one to assume that the focus of both authors was on answering how sociology could be appropriately based on the revision of Max Weber’s classical contribution. However, this interpretation has served as the basis to affirm that Schutz and Parsons revisited Weber’s project from opposing sides by detaching the elements from its main corpus. This leads to not only opposite but antithetical points of view. From this perspective, Schutz is labeled as a subjectivist whereas Parsons is labeled as an objectivist. Strikingly, even Schutz himself dismisses the idea of presenting both authors as antagonists. What’s more, he underlines his purpose as that of complementarity. Here arises an obvious question. If Schutz from the very beginning underlined the idea of complementarity, why then does contemporary sociological theory present Schutz and Parsons’ contributions as antithetical? Taking this question as the starting point, our enquiry allows us to expose the existence of an interpretive scheme in Sociological Theory that introduces the dualistic dilemma in the analysis of Schutz and Parsons’ epistolary exchange. We will analyze this interpretive scheme’s main features by using the hermeneutical analysis. Then, in order to critically revisit the debate, our research unveils the prejudices involved in this interpretive tradition, highlighting the misunderstandings regarding the

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the Founding Meeting of *The International Alfred Schutz Circle for Phenomenology and Interpretive Social Science* held at The New School for Social Research of New York in May 2012.

dualistic interpretation of Schutz's work and his links with Parsons. By doing this it makes clear the way in which these interpretations have veiled the original sense of Schutz's epistolary exchange with Parsons. Thus our paper, being directly opposed to the dominant reading, aims to propose that the debate shouldn't be seen as a confrontation between subjectivism and objectivism, but as part of Schutz's project to go beyond the dualism, starting with a phenomenological approach that recovers the life-world as the forgotten foundation of the social sciences.

Keywords: Alfred Schutz, Talcott Parsons, Phenomenology, Life-World.

Introduction

In this paper we aim to interpret the correspondence between Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons from a different standpoint, recovering the dualistic dilemma from the perspective of conceptual history (*Begriffsgeschichte*) as proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics.²

The program of conceptual or philosophical history argues that the history of a concept follows a movement that always goes beyond ordinary linguistic use and separates the semantic direction of the words from its original field of use, extending and specifying, comparing and distinguishing. From this perspective, "there is an extremely changing relationship between coining of concepts and linguistic use."³ Thus, it is not only aims at illustrating some concepts historically but also aims to link the concepts with the humus of language in act and use. The history of a concept would be the history of the impurities that this concept has been collecting throughout its use in the process of coming into contact with "the mud of daily life."⁴ Amid a sea of words, the concepts are like "chameleons, which are colored by their ecological environment." For the linguistic orientation in the world, the words and their meanings are relevant, thus, only when they appear "melted in the movement of their mutual understanding." Thus, Gadamer links this view of conceptual history with his hermeneutical thesis. The concepts of philosophy cannot survive without the protection of a tradition that, as a set of discursive practices, fertilize and protect them.

Following this perspective, in the first part of this paper, we present the correspondence carried out between the authors in the forties with reference to the critical study written by Schutz about the first book of Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action*⁵ (hereinafter *SSA*), as well as the interpretations triggered

² Hans-Georg Gadamer, "La historia del concepto como filosofía," in *Verdad y Método II* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1998), pp. 81-93. (*Truth and Method II*); Hans-Georg Gadamer & Reinhart Koselleck, *Historia y Hermenéutica* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1997). (*History and Hermeneutics*).

³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, "La historia del concepto como filosofía," p. 92.

⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer & Reinhart Koselleck, *Historia y Hermenéutica*, p. 5.

⁵ Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action. A Study in Social Theory with Special*

by that correspondence, emphasizing the dualistic dilemma. We will show the existence of an interpretive tradition in sociological thought which introduces the dualistic dilemma and the conceptual distinction of subjectivism-objectivism in the analysis of Schutz's work and in the interpretation of its links with the work of Parsons.

The second part reconstructs a genealogy of the dualistic dilemma in the early work of Schutz. It will be demonstrated that the discussion around dualism is of major concern at the beginning of his reflections and that it is from this place that Schutz approaches the correspondence. This is in clear contrast to the dominant interpretive tradition, which has veiled that original meaning.

1. The Correspondence and its Interpretations

1.1. The Schutz-Parsons Correspondence and Schutzian Intention of Complementarity

Our reading of the critical study of *SSA* illuminates a distinctive point of analysis: the excessive emphasis placed by Parsons on the study of the field of theory and the "evolution" of theoretical systems. Parsons' interest is focused on the analysis of scientific theory and its evolution towards a normative orientation. Schutzian criticism stresses two central elements. Firstly, he emphasizes the danger involved in replacing social reality with the abstractions created by science and, secondly, he emphasizes the need to understand that reality as a result of human activity. It is in connection with these aspects that Schutz articulates his critical study, highlighting in particular the need to study in depth the subjective point of view:

"Professor Parsons has the right insight that a theory of action would be meaningless without the application of the subjective point of view. But he does not follow this principle to its roots. He replaces subjective events in the mind of the actor by a scheme of interpretation for such events, accessible only to the observer, thus confusing objective schemes for interpreting subjective phenomena with these subjective phenomena themselves."⁶

The relationship between common sense and scientific knowledge and the concept of normative values alongside the concept of "unit act" (with all its outstanding features) present the difficulty of replacing the subjective point of view.

Reference to a Group of Recent European Writers (New York and London: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1937, First Edition. *Alfred Schütz Handbuch Bibliothek, Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv Konstanz. Alfred Schütz Gedächtnisarchiv*).

⁶ Alfred Schutz & Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons*. Edited by Richard Grathoff (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 36.

According to Schutz, Parsons formulates this question: “What does this social world mean for me, the observer?”⁷ This formulation “intentionally eliminates the actor in the social world, with all his [*or her*] subjective points of view.”⁸ This type of social science does not deal directly and immediately with the world of everyday life, but with “skillfully and expediently chosen idealizations and formalizations of the social world.” However, that question should be replaced with another: “What does this social world mean for the observed actor within this world, and what did he [*or she*] mean by his [*or her*] acting within it?”⁹ Schutz stresses the necessity to “go back to that ‘forgotten man’ of the social sciences, to the actor in the social world whose doing and feeling lies at the bottom of the whole system”:

“Why always address ourselves to this mysterious and not too interesting tyrant of the social sciences called the subjectivity of the actor? Why not honestly describe in honestly objective terms what really happens, and that means speaking our own language, the language of qualified and scientifically trained observers of the social world? [...] scientific propositions do not refer to my private world but to the one and unitary *life-world* common to us all.”¹⁰

Schutz’s comments focus on the importance of clarifying the subjective meaning, so as to avoid the “oblivion” and the substitution of the social life-world. That reflection, according to Schutz, can only be carried out taking philosophical understanding as the starting point. In this context (and against Parsons’ interpretation which considers the Schutzian perspective as antagonist) the letters show Schutz’s interest to base philosophically, to “expand”, “deepen”¹¹ and “complement” in his own words Parsons’ frame of reference in order to regain that “forgotten” *basis of meaning*¹². That intention is evident in some excerpts from the correspondence:

“You impute to me throughout, therefore, an antagonistic attitude toward your position, which I have not had at all. To be sure, there *are* criticisms of some

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44. Emphasis added.

¹¹ “I would like to suggest that only a theory of motives can deepen the analysis of social action, provided that the subjective point of view is maintained in its strictest and unmodified sense” in Alfred Schutz & Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons*, p. 32.

¹² In a text from 1940 (the same year in which Schutz’s critical study is written) Schutz states that according to Husserl “the basis of meaning (*Sinnfundament*) in every science is the pre-scientific life-world (*Lebenswelt*) which is the one and unitary life-world of myself, of you, and of us all” in Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), p. 120.

of your theories in this paper, and I have never hesitated to make clear where I have to disagree with you. But it seems to me that the bulk of my paper shows where and in how far our theories coalesce.”¹³

And also in the following quotation: “[Regarding SSA] I realized immediately the importance and the value of your system and also the fact that *it starts exactly where my own book ends.*”¹⁴

1.2. The Interpretation of their Correspondence

In spite of this intention of complementarity, interpreters and commentators have understood the critical study and the correspondence in a different way. Fundamentally, interpreters introduce the dualistic dilemma, firstly, in the analysis of Schutz’s work and, secondly, in the interpretation of his exchanges with Parsons. From this hermeneutical framework, both contributions are seen as antithetical and contrasting projects. The “alleged antithesis” is based on an analysis of Weber’s work and on the possibility of splitting his theoretical perspective.¹⁵ Interpreters provide a dualistic reading of the work of Schutz, by assuming that he splits the subjective and the objective meaning both at the level of the description of the features of the life-world, –the antithesis is interpreted in terms of subjective action vs. social order–, and at the level of the social science reflection, –the contrast is made between subjectivist vs. objectivist perspective. It is also assumed that Schutz “gives special advantages to the subjective part

¹³ Alfred Schutz & Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons*, p. 95. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97. Emphasis added. In a text from 1944, “Some Leading Concepts of Phenomenology”, we found a similar expression: “Phenomenology, searching for a real beginning of all philosophical thinking, hopes when fully developed *to end where all the traditional philosophies start.* Its place is beyond—or better, before—all distinctions between realism and idealism” in Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*, p. 101. Emphasis added.

¹⁵ Richard Grathoff, “Introduction,” in *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1978a), pp. xvii-xxvi; Richard Grathoff, “How long a Schutz-Parsons Divide?” in *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1978b), pp. 125-130; Helmut R. Wagner, “Review: Theory of Action and Sociology of the Life-World,” *Contemporary Sociology*, 8:5 (1979), pp. 685-687; David Zaret, “From Weber to Parsons and Schutz: The Eclipse of History in Modern Social Theory,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, 5 (1980), pp. 1180-1201; Roy Fitzhenry, “Parsons, Schutz and the problem of Verstehen,” in *Talcott Parsons on Economy and Society*. Edited by Robert Holton & Bryan Turner (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), pp. 145-178; Thomas Schwinn, *Jenseits von Subjektivismus und Objektivismus: Max Weber, Alfred Schütz und Talcott Parsons* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993); Martin Endress, “Two Directions of Continuing the Weberian Project: Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons,” in *Alfred Schutz and his Intellectual Partners*. Edited by NASU Hisashi; Lester Embree; Psathas George; Ilja Srubar (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2009), pp. 377-400.

of the type.”¹⁶ From this point of view, Schutz is described as a subjectivist and Parsons as an objectivist.

Although references about this area abound, here we will mention only a few of them. In *Beyond Subjectivism and Objectivism*¹⁷ by Thomas Schwinn, the aforementioned analysis becomes clearly visible. Here, the author argues that what in Weber is integrally linked i.e. subjective action and social order, then appears split in the works of Schutz and Parsons. While Schutz radicalizes the subjective perspective, Parsons mainly highlights the objective perspective. Consequently, “the difficulties of these theories are complementary: Schutz fails to master the problem of social order, whereas Parsons lacks an adequate and rich concept of subjective action.”¹⁸ In this context, the author attributes to Parsons and Schutz the “fatherhood” of the micro-macro division that, from his point of view, is present today in the current theoretical discussion.

Referring to the “Weberian Suggestion,”¹⁹ Richard Grathoff states that “Parsons and Schutz pursued this suggestion in different directions.”²⁰ The same idea is developed in a text by Helmut Wagner: “Schutz had started from Weber and found that the latter’s idea of subjective approach had to be radicalized with the help of phenomenology. Parsons had bypassed the crucial part of Weber’s definition of subjective meaning as the ‘meaning meant by the actor’, explaining that subjective phenomena have meaning *only* as described and analyzed by the observer [...]. Both, then, moved from Weber in quite opposite directions.”²¹

Similarly, interpreters²² consider that a dualism between the life-world and science is present in the Schutzian perspective. An example of this is the recent interpretation of HO Wing-Chung:

¹⁶ Alfred Schutz & Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons*, p. 118.

¹⁷ *Jenseits von Subjektivismus und Objektivismus*—originally written in German—is one of the few systematic works that have been written about the correspondence between the authors. The other important work belongs to Elizabeth Kassab, *The Theory of Social Action in Schutz-Parsons Debate. Social action, social personality and social reality in the early works of Schutz and Parsons: a critical study of Schutz-Parsons correspondence* (Fribourg Suisse: Éditions Universitaires, 1991).

¹⁸ Thomas Schwinn, *Jenseits von Subjektivismus und Objektivismus: Max Weber, Alfred Schütz und Talcott Parsons*, p. 12.

¹⁹ “A study of social action [...] has to relate that subjective meaning to the various historical objectifications in a social situation, say to a science or some tradition [...]. This is the problem: would it not be possible, Weber suggests, to give sociology a solid foundation starting from some methodology that could grasp this texture of social action?” in Richard Grathoff, “Introduction,” p. xx.

²⁰ Richard Grathoff, “How long a Schutz-Parsons Divide?” p. 128.

²¹ Helmut R. Wagner, “Review: Theory of Action and Sociology of the Life-World,” p. 686. Emphasis in original.

²² James J. Valone, “Parsons’ Contributions to Sociological Theory: Reflections on the Schutz-Parsons Correspondence,” *Human Studies*, 3: 4 (1980), pp. 375-386; HO, Wing-Chung, “Understanding the Subjective Point of View: Methodological Implications of the Schutz-Parsons Debate,” *Human Studies*, 31 (2008), pp. 383-397.

“The bone of contention that divides Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons in their debate is that Schutz acknowledges an ontological break between the commonsense and scientific worlds whereas Parsons only considers it ‘a matter of refinement.’”²³

“Apparently, Schutz suggests a fundamental rupture between two worlds: the experiential and the scientific.”²⁴

From these and other interpretations an obvious question arises. Why does contemporary sociological theory present the contributions of Schutz and Parsons as antithetical considering that from the beginning, Schutz intended to give his work and its connection to Parsons’ a sense of complementarity?

1.3. Parsons and the Dualistic Interpretive Tradition

In order to answer this question, we show the existence of an interpretive scheme in sociological thought which introduces the dualistic dilemma in the analysis of Schutz’s work and in the interpretation of its links with the work of Parsons. Making use of the hermeneutical analysis, we recover a historical-conceptual genealogy of the dualistic analysis and of the conceptual distinction of subjectivism-objectivism; and we trace its antecedent in Parsons’ retrospective interpretation of the correspondence. This is an interpretation that has managed to impose itself as the dominant reading. With this we attempt to show that Parsons’ retrospective analysis of his letters with Schutz has managed to impose itself as the dominant interpretive framework for the correspondence.

Parsons focuses on “Descartes’ famous dichotomy of knowing subject and object known” and its generalization “the actor-situation or actor-object distinction”²⁵ and says:

“The phenomenological point of view, particularly in the version represented by Schutz, seems to me a relatively modest attempt to give special advantages to the subjective part of the type or if one will one horn of the Cartesian dilemma. In doing so, however, it seems to me to have leaned too far in the direction of attributing a quasimetaphysical status to immediate knowledge of the subjective and a corresponding derogation of the importance and certain special roles of objectification.”²⁶

Moreover, he states that: “It seems to me that Dr. Schutz poses an altogether unrealistically sharp contrast between the point of view of the actor and the

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 383.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

²⁵ Talcott Parsons, “A 1974 Retrospective Perspective”, in *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons* (Bloomington/London: Indiana University Press, 1978), pp. 117.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

point of view of the scientific observer and analyst, virtually dissociating them from each other.”²⁷

According to Parsons, this point of view is part of a puzzling contention of the phenomenological school which is prominent in Schutz’s work and has been carried on by followers of his such as Harold Garfinkel. This is the special emphasis on phenomenological access to what is called “everyday life” and the insistence that everyday life in this sense is radically distinct from any perspective of the scientific observer.” From Parsons’ point of view, “It seems to me to be an unreal dichotomy. There is not a radical break between everyday life and the behavior of scientifically trained people, but science constitutes an accentuation and special clarification of certain components which are present in all human action.”²⁸

The characterization of phenomenology as “subjectivist” is also present in the works of Pierre Bourdieu²⁹ and Jürgen Habermas.³⁰ Bourdieu holds that social science oscillates between objectivism and subjectivism, two apparently incompatible points of view or perspectives. On the one hand the Durkheimian maxim appears stating: “treat social phenomena as things.” On the other hand, Bourdieu presents the Schutzian perspective, which in his opinion reduces the objective world to the representations that agents make of it. In the same mode, Habermas classifies Schutzian phenomenology as subjectivist. According to him, Schutz and Luckmann (following the model of a generative subjectivity) constitute the life-world as the transcendental frame of possible everyday experience. However, they do not understand the structures of the life-world by grasping the structures of intersubjectivity, but rather “in the mirror of the isolated actor’s subjective experience.” That is the reason why, according to Habermas, the “experiencing subject” remains the court of last appeal for analysis.³¹

This classification, as well as the previous, has a dualistic ground. Habermas defines subjectivism as a theoretical program which conceives society as a network structured in terms of meaning, a network of symbolic structures constantly being generated according to underlying abstract laws. This theory formulates the task of reconstruction of the generative process from which social reality emerged as structured in terms of meaning. On the other hand, he refers to objectivism as a theoretical program which conceives society not from the inside, as a process

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

²⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, “Social Space and Symbolic Power,” in *In Other Words. Essay Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 123-139.

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action; Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987 [1981]); Jürgen Habermas, *Teoría de la acción comunicativa: complementos y estudios previos* (Madrid: Cátedra, 1989). (*The theory of Communicative Action: complements and previous studies*).

³¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action; Vol. 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason*, p. 130.

of construction, that is to say, a process of generation of meaning structures, but from the outside as a natural process, which can be observed in its empirical regularities and can be explained with the help of nomological hypothesis.³²

Based on the analysis of this dualistic interpretive tradition and encouraged by the “mission” assigned by Gadamer to conceptual reflection of both questioning the obviousness of our concepts (which may lead to error) and also promoting “a critical consciousness of the historical tradition,” we face the task of exposing the “prejudices that guide the dominant interpretation.” We carry out this task through those interpreters who have pointed out the ambiguities in the dualistic reading of Schutz’s work. Thus, we begin the process of making visible these dualistic prejudices in order to make a critical analysis of that interpretive tradition and to expose the mistakes that have veiled the original meaning attributed by Schutz to the correspondence.

From this point of view, we recover the views of authors like Wagner³³ and Srubar³⁴ who have pointed out the ambiguities in the Parsonian dualistic reading of Schutz’s work. According to Wagner,

“in view of Schutz’s extensive methodological writings, the reproach that he gave ‘special advantages to the subjective part’ does not concur with his actual position. For him, the matter was that of the relationship between the ordinary substratum of human experiences and the attempts to come to terms with it cognitively and theoretically. He paid equal attention to both sides of these concerns.”³⁵

This makes clear that “Parsons retrospectively polarized the issue clearly, but failed to do justice to its complexity.”³⁶ As Srubar states, “the differences between both approaches cannot be understood in the light of the contrast between subjective and objective points of view.”³⁷

Another commentator who has pointed out the misinterpretation of Schutz’s phenomenological thought is Martin Endress.³⁸ He is one of the authors who

³² Cf. Jürgen Habermas, *Teoría de la acción comunicativa: complementos y estudios previos*.

³³ Helmut R. Wagner, “Reflections on Parsons’ ‘1974 Retrospective Perspective’ on Alfred Schutz,” *Human Studies*, 3: 4 (1980), pp. 387-402.

³⁴ Ija Srubar, *Kosmion: Die Genese der pragmatischen Lebenswelttheorie von Alfred Schütz und ihr anthropologischer Hintergrund* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1988).

³⁵ Helmut R. Wagner, “Reflections on Parsons’ ‘1974 Retrospective Perspective’ on Alfred Schutz,” p. 391.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

³⁷ Ija Srubar, *Kosmion: Die Genese der pragmatischen Lebenswelttheorie von Alfred Schütz und ihr anthropologischer Hintergrund*, p. 201.

³⁸ Martin Endress, “Reflexivity, Reality, and Relationality. The Inadequacy of Bourdieu’s Critique of the Phenomenological Tradition in Sociology,” in *Explorations of the Life-World: Continuing Dialogues with Alfred Schutz*. Edited by Martin Endress; George Psathas; NASU Hisashi (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), pp. 51-74.

have defended phenomenology against the accusation (especially by Bourdieu) of subjectivism.³⁹ He points out that Bourdieu's writing is concerned with the overall subjectivism-objectivism dichotomy with extensive *misunderstandings* of those theoretical traditions most important to his own "theory of theories."

1.4. The Schutz-Garfinkel Correspondence

Similarly, Garfinkel's doctoral thesis,⁴⁰ as well as the unpublished exchanges between Schutz and Garfinkel regarding the Schutz-Parsons correspondence⁴¹, makes evident those misunderstandings contained within the dualistic interpretation of Schutz's work and its links with Parsons'.

With regard to the first element of analysis (the presentation of Schutz's work as dualist), we can see that while the dualistic interpretations maintain that Schutz does not analyze the problem of social order, according to Garfinkel, it is possible to reconstruct this problem in the context of Schutzian work. Fundamentally, when speaking of social order in Schutz, Garfinkel refers to the notion of "orders of reality" or "finite provinces of meaning." In this context, when considering a particular order of reality, for instance, the world of dreams or the world of scientific contemplation or that of the everyday life-world, the question that Schutz poses, according to Garfinkel, refers to the basic traits or conditions, which remain and maintain that particular order, and which constitute its "specific cognitive style."⁴² As stated by George Psathas,⁴³ "Garfinkel's analysis has led him to formulate the relationship between six characteristics (as defined by Schutz) as forming the 'systemic character of cognitive style' [...] The social order which he was involved in studying therefore was equivalent to a finite province of meaning."⁴⁴

³⁹ Christian Greiffenhagen & Wes Sharrock, "Where do the limits of experience lie? Abandoning the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity," *History of the Human Sciences*, 21: 3 (2008), p. 71.

⁴⁰ Harold Garfinkel, *The Perception of the Other: A Study in Social Order* (Ph.D. unpublished Thesis, Harvard University, June 1952).

⁴¹ Harold Garfinkel, "Letter to Alfred Schutz on October 8, 1953" (*Schütz's Papers, Alfred Schütz Gedächtnis Archiv, Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv*, Universität Konstanz, Germany, 1953a); Harold Garfinkel, "Notes on the Sociological Attitude. Unpublished, 1-19" (*Schütz's Papers, Alfred Schütz Gedächtnis Archiv, Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv*, Universität Konstanz, Germany, 1953b); Harold Garfinkel, "A Comparison of Decisions made of four 'Pre-Theoretical' problems by Talcott Parsons and Alfred Schutz. Unpublished, 1-29" (*Schütz's Papers, Alfred Schütz Gedächtnis Archiv, Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv*, Universität Konstanz, Germany, 1953c); Alfred Schutz, "Letter to Harold Garfinkel on January 19, 1954" (*Schütz's Papers, Alfred Schütz Gedächtnis Archiv, Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv*, Universität Konstanz, Germany, 1954).

⁴² Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I. The Problem of Social Reality*, p. 230.

⁴³ George Psathas, "The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Harold Garfinkel: What was the 'Terra Incognita' and the 'Treasure Island,'" in *Alfred Schutz and his Intellectual Partners*. Edited by NASU Hisashi; Lester Embree; Psathas George; Ilja Srubar (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2009), pp. 401-433.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

Indeed, Garfinkel's thesis itself is oriented towards transforming Schutz's analysis of multiple realities into a possible program for empirical research. Garfinkel takes Schutzian formulations as his starting point, according to Psathas, "even to the point of wanting to attempt an operationalizing of the six features of a finite province of meaning and held that their empirical manifestations could be studied experimentally."⁴⁵ He decides to use "an experimental format to test certain hypotheses, loosely formulated, with regard to the consequences of the removal or inoperability of any of the six characteristics of the finite province of meaning."⁴⁶

With respect to the second element, that of the Schutz-Parsons antagonism, the unpublished correspondence held between Schutz and Garfinkel regarding the Schutz-Parsons' exchange, sheds light on the prejudice contained in the interpretation of the work of both authors as antithetical. The Schutz-Garfinkel correspondence allows us to recover Schutz's own interpretation on its links with Parsons and his intention of complementarity with the work of the latter:

"Reading your interpretation of Parsons' and my theory, I am not so sure whether there are really such fundamental differences between our 'decisions' as you assume to prevail [...] Could the difference between Parsons and me rather be interpreted as a difference on the level of research? Parsons thinks that empirical investigations, if carried on far enough and grouped in accordance with a conceptual scheme, will lead by necessity into the insight into problems which could only be handled on a purely theoretical level [...] I, in turn, try to start with an application of Husserl's analysis of the structure of conscious life to the problem of the social world which is to me basically the world of intersubjectivity as experienced in the natural attitude. From here I try to explain and elucidate the concrete phenomena of the social world, defining the subject matter of the social sciences as the endeavor to explain the phenomena of the social world in terms of the experiences which people living their daily life within the social world have in their natural attitude and in terms of the meaning these experiences have for them. In one word, *my ideal would be to end where Parsons starts.*"⁴⁷

At this point Schutz directs the reader to the analysis of his first work *The Phenomenology of the Social World*⁴⁸ (hereinafter *PSW*). The project contained in that book would reveal the Schutzian intention of complementarity with Parsons' work. Thus, we emphasize the importance of rebuilding the project and the questions which that text answers, for it is that text which operates as the background of the critical study of Schutz to SSA.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

⁴⁷ Alfred Schutz, "Letter to Harold Garfinkel on January 19, 1954," pp. 1-2. Emphasis added.

⁴⁸ Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1967 [1932]).

Following Greiffenhagen & Sharrock's interpretation,⁴⁹ we sustain that the characterization of phenomenology as 'subjectivist' presupposes an underlying subjective–objective dualism, which phenomenology explicitly aims to overcome. In the following we emphasize this argument by tracing a genealogy of the dualistic issue in the early work of Schutz in order to show that the overcoming of dualism was a project in which Schutz was already immersed in his early work.

2. A Genealogy of the Dualistic Dilemma in the Early Work of Schutz

As a second stage of our work, we radicalize the evident misunderstandings and prejudices of the interpretive framework pointed out by the authors and *we seek our own systematic response to the dominant interpretation*. In order to do this, we trace a genealogy of the dualistic dilemma in the early work of Schutz. Taking this genealogy as a starting point, we show that the overcoming of dualism was a project in which Schutz was already immersed in his early years in the context of the reflections of the *Austrian School of Economics*.

2.1. Schutzian Project and the Dualistic Dilemma

In order to recover the original meaning of the Schutzian critical study, we move back to the historical conceptual genealogy and recover the questions and discussions which appeared as the background of his first book, *PSW*. The context of that work is that of the discussion held within the *Austrian School of Economics*.

Schutz's membership of the Austrian School of Economics is a relatively unexplored context of the author's work. However, it is essential to discuss his first period. Fundamentally, we want to review the epistemological problems of the Austrian School regarding concept formation in the social sciences.⁵⁰

The epistemological crisis goes back to the beginning of the school. According to Wilson, this has its origins in the works of Carl Menger.⁵¹ Menger begins what is called the "subjectivist revolution" in economics. The subjective revolution replaces the classical theory of value of Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Karl Marx with a theory of value understood "in a subjective sense." According to the Austrian School, the value of goods and services cannot be defined by an

⁴⁹ Christian Greiffenhagen & Wes Sharrock, "Where do the limits of experience lie? Abandoning the dualism of objectivity and subjectivity," p. 72.

⁵⁰ Christopher Prendergast, "Alfred Schutz and the Austrian School of Economics," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 92: 1(1986), pp. 1-26; Thomas Wilson, "The Problem of Subjectivity in Schutz and Parsons," in *Explorations of the Life-World: Continuing Dialogues with Alfred Schutz*. Edited by Martin Endress; George Psathas; NASU Hisashi (Netherlands: Springer, 2005), pp. 19-50.

⁵¹ Carl Menger, *Principles of Economics* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2007 [1871]), Carl Menger, *Investigations into the Method of the Social Sciences with special reference to Economics* (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2009 [1882]).

objective standard such as the quantity of labor embodied in the product but subjectively by the utility that consumers assign to them.⁵²

The consequence of this “subjectivist revolution” in value theory shakes the foundations of epistemological and methodological reflection.⁵³ The problems of foundation regarding scientific concepts become apparent in the discussions held with the German Historical School, particularly with its representative Gustav Schmoller, who holds up the rigours of historical research, and sees economy as a history of economic facts. According to Menger, it is necessary to guard against the representatives of the Historical School as they deny the regularity of economic phenomena and place the free will of individuals at the center. In contrast, the political economy theory proposed by Menger was independent of the practical activity of economic agents. *With this assertion it is possible to emphasize the separation that, according to Menger, exists between economic theory and social life as a whole.* That problem was repeatedly pointed out by Schmoller: “Menger – says Schmoller – ‘abstracts’ or ‘isolates’ the economic aspect of social life, working on the assumption that he had defined the simple elements of this economic aspect.”⁵⁴

The Austrian School holds a distinctive conception of theory, not as a body of ideas that can in principle be corroborated empirically, but rather as an *a priori* scheme for the elaboration of concepts in which terms the empirical material can be interpreted.⁵⁵ What is of interest to theoretical economists are the *types* (or *typical forms*) of economic phenomena. The study of *types* and *typical relationships*, according to Menger, is essential. Research should construct unfalsifiable typical-ideal models of the behavior of economic facts. Such principles should be generated by direct intuition and not by observation. Moreover, these principles are conceived as logically necessary and unalterable, prior to all experience. Those types and typical relationships are held *a priori* and are disconnected from the concrete practice of economic agents. These comments make clear the sharp dualism between economic theory and social life held by the representatives of the Austrian School.

The third generation of the Austrian School centered on Ludwig von Mises, Alfred Schutz, Felix Kaufmann, Fritz Machlup, and Friedrich von Hayek, will inherit these problems⁵⁶. The first task proposed within Mises’ seminar

⁵² Cf. Christopher Prendergast, “Alfred Schutz and the Austrian School of Economics.”

⁵³ Cf. Michael Barber, *The Participating Citizen. A Biography of Alfred Schutz* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004).

⁵⁴ Darío Antiseri, “Estudio Introductorio,” in *El Método de las Ciencias Sociales*. Edited by Darío Antiseri; Juan Marcos De La Fuente (Madrid: Unión Editorial, 2006), p. 47. (*The Method of the Social Sciences*).

⁵⁵ Cf. Thomas Wilson, “The Problem of Subjectivity in Schutz and Parsons,” p. 22.

⁵⁶ Schutz studied at the University of Vienna; Hans Kelsen was his law tutor and Ludwig von Mises taught him economics. He met the latter in 1920. That same year, he joined a private seminar given by von Mises.

(*Miseskreis*) is to investigate and discuss the methodology of Max Weber. The reflection on Weber's texts is not capricious, given that his interpretive sociology takes as its starting point the subjective meaning and the notion of the ideal type as a methodological tool. These issues have been developed by Menger but, as shown, are facing a crisis – that is, the *a priori* character of the categories provided by economic theory has been criticized. In this way, Weber's work emerges as a pathway to solving these problems.

Whilst the continuity of Mises' thinking with Menger's apriorism is clear, by the late 20s, these notions were being challenged by logical empiricism. Critics pointed to the same foundation of the objective categories. On the one hand, logical empiricism held that the conceptual foundation based on intellectual intuition was unreliable; on the other hand, the possibility of reasoning through historical trends or cases had been denied by Menger in his discussion with historical economists.

The root of the problems of foundation resided in the dualistic view of reality held by the Austrian School. This School founded the objective *a priori* knowledge by introspection, which means leaving aside the subjective activities of specific actors. While the object of inquiry was subjective actions, the methodology of the formation of objective categories, according to that object, consisted in an intellectual intuition which involved "oblivion" or a disconnection of the acting subject, i.e. the subject being understood as a real person. Thus, the concrete subject was replaced (and with that, the life-world, which is a subjective formation resulting from the activities of the subjective pre-scientific experience) with *a priori* idealities created by science.

The need to radicalize the reflection on the subjective point of view and thus to radicalize the "subjectivist revolution" was pointed out by Schutz in the discussions within Mises' seminar. In a manuscript from 1936⁵⁷, Schutz pointed out that although the "Copernican turn" of the theory of marginal utility results in a more radical comprehension of economic life; economists consider that subjects of economic life are not humans in the fullness of their existence: "Here a fictive world comes into existence alongside the actual world."⁵⁸ These reflections show the danger involved in taking the idealities of science for reality itself, leaving aside the life-world. This results in the inability to account for subjective experience, which is replaced by the scientific idealities and abstractions. In this context, Schutz directed his major work *PSW*, based on Weber's interpretive sociology, to solve these problems⁵⁹. In this work, Schutz took the works of Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl to rethink Weber's concept of action and subjective meaning.

⁵⁷ "Political Economy: Human Conduct in Social Life" in Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers IV* (The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1996). The essay was occasioned by Friedrich von Hayek's visit to Vienna in 1936, where he gave a lecture to the Viennese *Gesellschaft für Wirtschaftswissenschaft*. The topic was "*Wissen und Wirtschaft*" (*Knowledge and Economics*).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁹ Cf. Christopher Prendergast, "Alfred Schutz and the Austrian School of Economics" and Thomas Wilson, "The Problem of Subjectivity in Schutz and Parsons."

2.2. The Philosophical Foundation of Weber's Interpretive Sociology and the Overcoming of Dualism

In order to explain the problem of subjective meaning (the basis for solving the problem related to concept formation in the social sciences) Schutz takes as a starting point the clarification of Weber's distinction between subjective and objective meaning.

However, Schutz finds in Weber's work a similar dualism to the one found in the Austrian School framework. As regards this dualism, Schutz's critique of Weberian concepts of motivational and observational understanding is well known: "Indeed, Weber's distinction between observational and motivational understanding is arbitrary and without any logical basis in his theory. Both types of understanding start out from an objective meaning-context. The understanding of subjective meaning has no place in either."⁶⁰

Weber could not give an adequate account of the subjective context of meaning, posing a dilemma between the description of the subjectivity from the actor's standpoint and the observation from the sociologist's standpoint. This shows a dualism in the Weberian scheme amongst the world of scientific reflection, the objective context of meaning, on the one hand; and the subjective context of meaning which cannot be accounted for, on the other:

"My analysis shows that the Weberian conceptual pairs a) actual and motivational understanding, and b) subjective and objective meaning can be transposed into each other. A sufficiently precise investigation will demonstrate that these pairs under no circumstances yield sufficiently sharp and useful distinctions. The reason for this confusion of concepts chiefly is a disregard for the set of problems pertaining to intersubjectivity and time."⁶¹

In order to overcome the Weberian dualism, Schutz takes as his starting point Bergson's distinction between inner experience (*durée*) and empirical space and time. Schutz makes the transition from subjective to objective meaning by tracing the path from the inner experience of pure duration to the concept of space⁶² and proposes an analysis of the structure of the life forms.

The overall purpose of the structure of life forms is to provide a bridge between the "inner" levels of the *I*, determined by the duration, and the "outer", spatiotemporally-determined levels which are Weber's starting point. However, Schutz found a limitation and a dualism in Bergson's scheme. Both levels are intrinsically divided. As a consequence and as stated by Lenore Langsdorf, he

⁶⁰ Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, p. 29.

⁶¹ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers IV*, p. 84.

⁶² In his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (1889), Bergson proceeded from space-time conceptions to inner duration. Schutz reversed the procedure and began with pure duration, see Helmut R. Wagner, "The Bergsonian Period of Alfred Schutz," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 39: 2 (1977), pp. 187-199.

maintained a strict dichotomy between experience (duration; flux; continuum) and language (conception; discrete units; spatiotemporal entities), “Seen from a philosophy of science context, that dichotomy is the subject-object division – a useful theoretical position, perhaps, but one with dubious philosophical justification and problematic empirical validation.”⁶³ However, the limitations of the Bergsonian analysis did not affect the theoretical development of Schutz, “Not abandoning but restricting Bergson, he decided, with the help of Felix Kaufmann, to penetrate deeply into Husserl’s phenomenology.”⁶⁴

Taking as a starting point Bergson’s distinction between stream of duration (*durée*) and empirical space and time, Schutz redefines both poles *via* Husserl’s reflections on the double intentionality of the stream of consciousness and the Husserlian distinction between “static analysis” and “genetic intentional analysis” – among others.

Schutz proposes at that level an articulation between subjectivism and objectivism. The analysis of the structure of the life-world as a structure of meaning, (which is gradually arranged from the lower layers of meaning, closer to the *durée*, to the higher contexts of meaning no longer penetrated by rays of attention), allows Schutz to account for the transition from the subjective to the objective⁶⁵. This articulation is the key to overcoming Weber’s and Bergson’s dualism between subjective and objective meaning. This is the dualism that constitutes the starting point of the Schutzian analysis. Thus, one can begin to expose the prejudice of the dominant sociological interpretation regarding Schutz’s reformulation of Weberian interpretive sociology. Therefore it is possible to argue that Schutz is not a dualist who splits the element of the Weberian corpus but, on the contrary, he takes Weber’s dualism as his starting point in order to overcome it. This argument also wrecks the alleged Schutzian radicalization of the subjective pole.

2.3. Life-World and Science. The Epistemic Claim

Schutz in his first book similarly demonstrates the necessary articulation between the social life-world and scientific reflection, taking the notion of ideal type as a starting point. The fact that the world of contemporaries and of predecessors can only be grasped in an ideal typical way, anticipates the ideal types of social scientists. Also, the fact that subjective meaning contexts can be comprehended in objectivating and anonymizing constructions with the help of the personal ideal types in the naive natural point of view of everyday life, anticipates scientific social types. Since every social science starts out by taking for

⁶³ Lenore Langsdorf, “Schutz’s bergsonian analysis of the structure of consciousness,” *Human Studies*, 8 (1985), p. 321.

⁶⁴ Cf. Helmut R. Wagner, *Alfred Schutz: An Intellectual Biography* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983).

⁶⁵ Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, p. 74ff.

granted a social world which it sees as either a world of mere contemporaries or a world of predecessors, it can comprehend this world only by the method of ideal types, whether course-of-action types or personal types. Now, since it is typifying experience, social science is an objective meaning-context the object of which, however, is subjective meaning-contexts (to be precise, the typical subjective processes of personal ideal types).

Thus the social world is only pregiven to each social science in an indirect way and never with the immediacy of living intentionality:

“Since what is thematically pregiven to sociology and every other social science is the social reality which is indirectly experienced (never immediate social reality) – a social reality which can only be comprehended in the They-relationship and therefore typically – it follows that *even when social science is dealing with the action of a single individual, it must do so in terms of types.*”⁶⁶

Furthermore, given the danger of confusing the ideal types of specific actors with the ideal types of social scientists, Schutz argues that social observation should be developed as an ideal-typical construction of second order. Comprehensive sociology must build personal ideal types for social actors that are compatible with those built by the latter. This should be its basic premise. The same is significant from the point of view of any empirical social science that includes the indirect observation. His ideal types must not only be compatible with the established conclusions of all sciences, but also must explain in terms of motivations the very subjective experiences which they cover: “Each term used in a scientific system referring to human action must be so constructed that a human act performed within the *life-world* by an individual actor (in the way indicated by the typical construction) would be reasonable and understandable for the actor himself as well as for his fellow-man.”⁶⁷

This argument regarding any scientific thought that can be called an “epistemic claim”⁶⁸ (of the life-world in general and of everyday life in particular) is latently present in the early work of Schutz and is structured in a more consistent manner in the correspondence held with Parsons. As stated by the editor of the correspondence, Richard Grathoff: “The major issues of the Schutz/Parsons debate illuminate this epistemic claim of sociology to the world of everyday life. Schutz had this claim in mind when he insisted that Parsons needed only ‘to go a few steps further in radicalizing’ his theory.”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, p. 227. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁷ Alfred Schutz & Talcott Parsons, *The Theory of Social Action: The Correspondence of Alfred Schutz and Talcott Parsons*, p. 60. Emphasis added.

⁶⁸ See as well, Richard Zaner, *The Way of Phenomenology* (New York: Pegasus Books, 1970) and Aron Gurwitsch, *Phenomenology and the Theory of Science* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

⁶⁹ Richard Grathoff, “How long a Schutz-Parsons Divide?” p. 127.

This claim is also important for our argumentation because it exposes the unfounded rupture of the life-world and science which has been attributed to Schutz by the dominant interpretation.

3. Concluding Considerations

With these reflections we aim to illuminate the background of Schutzian thought along with the original sense and his initial intention as he begins his correspondence with Parsons. The historical-conceptual genealogy regarding the dualistic dilemma in the early work of Schutz, allows us to recover the questions and the problems that the author had in mind when writing the critical study on *SSA*. The discussion around the dualisms is the main concern at the beginning of his reflection and it is from this place that Schutz faces the correspondence. This is in clear contrast to the dominant interpretive tradition initiated by Parsons, which has veiled that original meaning. The opening of this new hermeneutic horizon to understanding the correspondence, which unveils the Schutzian original intention of overcoming dualisms, allows us to sustain our own interpretation of the letter exchanges. Opposed to the dominant reading and far from being interpreted as a confrontation between subjectivism and objectivism, the correspondence must be understood in the context of the Schutzian project of overcoming all dualisms, starting from a phenomenological foundation that recovers the life-world as the forgotten basis of meaning of the social sciences.

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