

The Typicality and Habituality of Everyday Cognitive Experience in Alfred Schutz's Phenomenology of the Lifeworld

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to systematically analyze Schutz's phenomenological account of the typicality and habituality of everyday cognitive experience, and to identify the Husserlian *leitmotifs* that inform it. In order to do so, I will proceed in three steps. First (1), I will briefly present the main lines of Schutz's theoretical project; second (2), I will scrutinize his Husserlian account of typification as a passive sort of interpretation; and finally (3), I will examine his –also Husserl-inspired– analysis of the structure and genesis of the habitualized stock of knowledge at hand.

Keywords: Alfred Schutz, Social Phenomenology, Phenomenological Sociology, Typicality, Habituality

Introduction¹

The Vienna-born sociologist and philosopher Alfred Schutz develops a phenomenological theory of the lifeworld (Endreß 2006, 338; Eberle 1993, 315). The main aim of this theory is to systematically describe and analyze the way in which the pre-scientific, everyday subject experiences, knows, and interprets his sociocultural and natural environment. Indeed, Schutz's phenomenology of the *Lebenswelt* provides eidetic descriptions of the fundamental features of lived,

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quotidian experience in first-person perspective, namely: temporality, spatiality, corporeality, self-interpretation, empathy, etc.

Within the framework of his analytic of the lifeworld, Schutz makes a thorough phenomenological description of the typicality and habituality of everyday cognition. This description, which mainly draws on late Husserl's insights – namely, his ideas on passive syntheses and phenomenological genesis –, is doubtlessly one of the most well-crafted – and therefore most influential – aspects of Schutzian work. However, it could be argued that Schutz's phenomenological account of typicality and habituality is only superficially treated by the secondary literature on his work (cf. Wagner 1983; Fischer 2012; Barber 2004; Hanke 2002; Endreß 2006; Crossley 1996, among others).

With the aim of repairing this defect in the secondary literature, in this paper I intend to systematically examine Schutz's approach to this matter, identifying the Husserlian *leitmotifs* that inform it. In order to do so, I will proceed in three steps. First (1), I will briefly present the main lines of Schutz's theoretical project; second (2), I will scrutinize his Husserlian account of typification as a passive sort of interpretation; and finally (3), I will examine his –also Husserl-informed– analysis of the structure and genesis of the habitualized stock of knowledge at hand.

1. Alfred Schutz's Theoretical Project: A (Husserlian) Philosophical-Phenomenological Foundation of (Weberian) Interpretive Sociology

Schutz is commonly considered as a “philosopher of the social sciences” (Embree 2016). More precisely, his intellectual project consists in establishing a philosophical-phenomenological foundation for interpretive sociology (Eberle 1993, 66; Endreß 2006, 340). Schutz's thought, in effect, can be described as a theoretical building resting on two columns, namely, a *sociological* one – Max Weber's *verstehende Soziologie* – and a *philosophical* one – Edmund Husserl's phenomenology– (Fischer 2012, 31)².

Schutz is an interpretive sociologist, insofar as he follows Weber's definition of both the object and method of

sociology (Wagner 1983, 123). According to Max Weber, social reality is a “*Zusammenhang*” – *i.e.* a plexus, structure or network – of meaningful (inter)individual actions (Srubar 1988 12). In this view, sociocultural formations –the Nation, the State, the People, etc.– are not hypostasized entities, but precarious configurations, which constitute and re-constitute themselves through the meaningful behavior of social actors (Weber 1984, 30ff).

As opposed to naturalistic behaviorism and mechanistic determinism, Weber claims that individual human action is essentially meaningful (Weber 1984, 30ff). That is to say, it is not mechanically triggered by physicochemical stimuli or objective social structures, but rather it is motivated, regulated, and orientated by the actor’s world and self-interpretation. For this very reason, says Weber (Weber 1984, 19), the main task of interpretive sociology consists in the “understanding” [*verstehen*] of the “subjective meaning” [*subjektiver Sinn*] the everyday subject gives to his behavior.

Although he agrees with Weber’s main tenets, Schutz (1981, 14ff; 1962, 117) criticizes him for not clearly defining the fundamental notions of his sociological account, namely: “subjective meaning”, “understanding”, “motives”, “ends”, among others. For Schutz, this theoretical negligence jeopardizes the strictness and validity of social-scientific empirical research based on the Weberian paradigm.

According to Schutz, Weber’s conceptual ambiguities are due to the fact that he does not operate with a thorough theory of the experiential, cognitive, and interpretative workings of pre-scientific subjectivity. In Schutz’s view (1981, 9; 1962, 117), only a philosophical theory of subjectivity can underpin a “subjective” sociological research program such as the one of Weber. To put it differently, “one cannot speak meaningfully about subjective understanding if one does not know how consciousness works” (Wagner 1983, 20).

Indeed, for Schutz (1981, 9; 1962, 117), interpretive sociology must rest on an exhaustive theory of the way in which pre-scientific subjects experience, know, and interpret *their* lifeworld. The Viennese thinker finds traces of such a theory in Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology; a philosophical account

that, as it is well known, intends to rehabilitate the status of lived experience in first-person perspective, systematically forgotten and neglected in modernity by different sorts of reductionism: naturalism, historicism, and psychologism (Waldenfels 2009, 269).

It should be noted, however, that Schutz is not an orthodox Husserlian, but a “critical phenomenologist”, *i.e.*, a phenomenologist who makes an eclectic and idiosyncratic reading of Husserl (Wagner 1983, 47). The Schutzian reading of Husserl is heterodox, insofar as it is deliberately biased both by Schutz’s sociological interests, and by the influence of thinkers such as Henri Bergson, Max Scheler, William James, George Herbert Mead, and Martin Heidegger, among many others (Belvedere 2011, 28-40; Wagner 1983, 14).

Schutz’s main theoretical aim consists in describing the invariant features of the everyday *praxis* of constitution of meaning taking place in the quotidian lifeworld (Eberle and Srubar 2010, 23). For this reason, he revisits the most concrete kernel of Husserl’s philosophy, namely, his descriptions of the essential features and dimensions of subjective lived experience –intentionality, perception, corporality, spatiality, temporality, attention, habitualities, etc.–, while he distances himself from the metaphysical, idealistic, and solipsistic aspects of the transcendental-phenomenological project launched in *Ideen I* (cf. Husserl 2009a, 139ff).

In this way, Schutz (1962, 149) develops his own account of what Husserl (2009a, 158) calls a “constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” [*konstitutive Phänomenologie der natürlichen Einstellung*]. “We may say that the empirical social sciences will find their true foundation not in transcendental phenomenology, but in the constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude” (Schutz 1962, 149).

2. The Typicality of Everyday Experience: Schutz on the Concept of Appresentation

Schutz and Husserl on Typicality

The late Husserl (1973, 349; 1972, 399) states that “the factual world of experience is experienced as a typified world”. Everyday subjects do not apprehend worldly things as unique

and unrepeatable objectivities, but as *exemplars* of pre-known *types* of objects: “Things are experienced as trees, bushes, animals, snakes, birds; specially, as pine, linden, lilac, dog, viper, swallow, sparrow, and so on” (1973, 349; 1972, 399).

Due to this pre-acquaintanceship with the typical structures of mundane objects, says Husserl (1973, 37; 1972, 33), the pre-scientific individual develops a bond of “familiarity” [*Vertrautheit*] with his life-worldly environment. That is to say, he never experiences *totally* novel and unknown things. “Even the [...] things of this world that are unknown to us are, to speak generally, known in respect of their type. We have already seen like things before, though not precisely this thing here” (Husserl 1977, 111; 1995, 114).

When characterizing cognitive experience on the pre-predicative level, Schutz (2003, 335; cf. 2011, 129; 1962, 59) draws on the latter Husserlian insights. “The world, as has been shown by Husserl, is from the outset experienced in the pre-scientific thinking of everyday life in the mode of typicality” (Schutz 1962, 59).

The expression “*from the outset*” is crucial for properly understanding Schutz’s account of the typicality and familiarity of the lifeworld. If the world appears *from the outset* in the mode of typicality, then there is no need of performing complex cognitive acts –such as deductions, comparisons, or conclusions by analogy– in order to experience it in this manner. Rather, in common-sense thinking, the lifeworld *immediately* shows itself as a structure of pre-known empirical types (Schutz 2003, 335; cf. 2011, 129; 1962, 59).

Arguably, the best way to characterize Schutz’s account of everyday experience is by a negative definition. For him, the lifeworld is *neither* experienced (1) as a “sum of sensation data” *nor* (2) as an “arrangement of individual unique objects” (Schutz 1962, 7).

(1) Arguing against sensory empiricism, Schutz (2011, 129) claims that what we *immediately* perceive in our pre-predicative experience are not meaningless and formless sensorial data, but rather *meaningful* objects: “mountains, trees, animals, birds, dogs, fellow-men, and so on”.

(2) Furthermore, he maintains that worldly objects appear to us “*within a horizon of familiarity and pre-acquaintanceship*”

(Schutz 1962, 7). That is to say, we never experience things as unique and unrepeatable, but as *exemplars* of already known empirical types.

Following Husserl (1972, 399), Schutz (1962, 7) claims that apprehending an object in its typicality implies passively anticipating – or “protentioning” – certain typical features that it will show in the immediate future. To put it differently, the moment we recognize an object as an exemplar of an already known type, we know *what to expect of it*. In this sense, it could be argued that empirical typifications carry along “open horizons of anticipated similar experiences” (Schutz 1962, 7).

For instance, “when we see a dog, we immediately anticipate its additional modes of behavior: its typical way of eating, playing, running, jumping, and so on” (Husserl 1972, 399; 1973, 331). These passive anticipations or “protentions”, however, can be disappointed. That is, they may be not fulfilled by the actual experience of the object.

Schutz (2003, 336; 1962, 8) does not restrict himself to repeating Husserl’s reflections on pre-predicative experience. He also tries to supplement them with his own thoughts on the problem of relevance. Indeed, Schutz (2003, 335) criticizes Husserl for not seeing the fact that “typification takes place [...] according to particular structures of relevance”.

In Schutz’s view, one and the same object can be typified in many different ways. For example, I can see my own dog as “my friend and companion Rover”, as a “mammal”, “an animal”, an “object of the outer world”, etc. (Schutz 1962, 8; 2003, 336). Yet, why do I select *one* of these empirical types over the other possible ones? That is to say, why do I see the dog as “my friend Rover” instead of merely seeing it as “*a* mammal” – or the other way round?

According to Schutz (1962, 9; 2003, 336), the *How* of typification is determined by the “relevance system” of the individual subject, that is, by his personal interests at the moment of perception. It could be argued that every empirical type has a pragmatic connotation, insofar as it carries along an “index” which refers to an actual problem to be practically or theoretically solved (Schutz 2003, 338).

In Schutz’s words: “The system of relevances [...] determines what elements have to be made a substratum of

generalizing typification, what traits of these elements have to be selected as characteristically typical, and what others as unique and individual, that is, how far we have to penetrate into the open horizon of typicality” (Schutz 1962, 10).

Typification as Passive Interpretation: Passive Synthesis and the Process of Appresentation

As mentioned, for Schutz, it is not necessary to perform complex cognitive activities – deductions, comparisons, etc. – in order to apprehend worldly things as meaningful objectivities. Rather, objects are perceived *from the outset* – that is, *at first sight* – as exemplars of general types: We see horses, tables, trees, books, computers, fellow-men, etc.

Prima facie, thus, it seems that for Schutz pre-predicative typification does not entail any sort of interpretative activity by the subject: The object *immediately* appears as such. This, however, is not the case. Drawing on Husserl (1995, § 50), Schutz (1962, 295ff; 2011, 113) conceives of typical apprehension of the life-world as a kind of *passive interpretation*. More precisely, according to Schutz, typification is an *automatic* and *unconscious* sense-giving activity that takes place by means of what Husserl calls “passive synthesis”.

The late Husserl (1995, § 38) distinguishes two modalities of constitutive genesis, *i.e.*, two ways in which consciousness constitutes objectivities, namely: (1) “active genesis” [*aktive Genesis*] – which implies the working of “active synthesis” [*aktive Synthesis*] – and (2) “passive genesis” [*pasive Genesis*] – which entails the operation of “passive synthesis” [*pasive Synthesis*].

(1) In active genesis, says Husserl (1995, 80; 1977, 77), “the Ego functions as productively constitutive, by means of subjective processes that are specifically acts of the Ego”. In other words, the subject *actively* and *explicitly* intervenes, by means of complex cognitive or volitive acts, in the constitution of objects. In Husserl’s view, all operations of practical reason and logical thinking involve the performance of *active* syntheses of this kind.

By means of spontaneous operations of different kinds, the ego articulates, elaborates, or interprets pre-given objects,

and in doing so, he produces objectivities of a new kind, namely, “categorical objects” [*kategoriale Gegenstände*] (cf. Husserl 2009b, § 40-52). “Thus, in collecting, the collection [is constituted]; in counting, the number; in dividing, the part; in predicating, the predicate and the predicational complex of affairs; in inferring, the inference; and so forth” (Husserl 1995, 80; 1977, 77).

According to Husserl (1977, 78. My emphasis), “anything built by activity necessarily *presupposes, as the lowest level, a passivity that gives something beforehand*”. To put it differently, insofar as it consists in the articulation or elaboration of *pre-given* objects, active genesis rests upon an always-already given experiential ground that is constituted by means of *passive* genesis.

(2) On the contrary, passive syntheses do not entail any active or explicit intervention of the ego. Rather, they work *automatically* and *unconsciously*, that is to say, “without any interference of the mind” (Schutz 1962, 297). In Husserl’s view, these mechanisms – which remain totally unnoticed for the subject in natural attitude – are responsible for the constitution of “the ‘ready-made’ object that confronts us in life as an existent mere thing” (Husserl 1995, 81; 1977, 78).

The everyday subject, thus, has an environment of objects only because of the continuous and uninterrupted – although obscure and unnoticed– workings of passive genesis. In spite of its apparent fixity, thus, the pre-predicative lifeworld is always *in status nascendi*: It eternally constitutes and re-constitutes itself by the secret work of passive syntheses. Paradoxically, it could be argued that passivity is also a way of subjective activity, although the lowest one (Gander 2012, 225). Indeed, without the obscure “activity” of passive genesis – *i.e.* without this passive form of spontaneity –, no objectivity could appear as such at first sight.

Now, in more specific terms, how does this “passive interpretation” of the *Lebenswelt* work? That is to say, how do passive syntheses contribute to the constitution of the typicality of pre-predicative experience? In order to answer these questions, Schutz continues drawing on Husserlian reflections.

Following Husserl (1995, § 50-51), Schutz (1962, 295) finds an answer to these issues in the concept of “appresentation”

[*Appräsentation*] or “analogical apperception” [*analogische Apperzeption*], understood as a peculiar modality of the widest phenomenon of “coupling” [*Paarung*] or “coupling association” [*paarende Assoziation*]. In “*Symbol, Reality and Society*”, Schutz (1962, 295) writes: “We restrict ourselves to the discussion of that particular form of pairing or coupling, which Husserl calls ‘appresentation’ or ‘analogical apperception’”.

The passive synthesis of appresentation, as understood by Husserl and Schutz, is a complex phenomenon which cannot be grasped in one stroke. In order to analytically understand its complexity, it is useful to differentiate three “moments” in its working, namely: (i) a moment of “association”, (ii) a moment of “passive interpretation”, and (iii) a moment of “co-presentation”. These three moments, it should be noted, are not clearly separated in our lived experience. This distinction, thus, has merely heuristic value.

(i) In a first moment, the “new” object evokes in the subject “‘obscure’ recollections of the similar” (Husserl 1972, 172; 1973, 140; cf. Schutz 1962, 297). There takes place an automatic association between the actual perception and “similar” typical past experiences. Following Husserl, Schutz (2011, 113) characterizes passive association as a process of – total or partial – “superimposition” [*Deckung*]. In “Reflections on the Problem of Relevance”, Schutz (Ibid.) writes:

by means of what Husserl calls the passive synthesis of recognition, he [the everyday subject] superimposes the actual perception of a corporeal object of such-and-such shape, such-and-such extension, such-and-such color with the recollection of previous perceptions of corporeal objects having typically similar, like, or same, shape, extension, color, and so on.

(ii) According to both Husserl (1995, 113, 116) and Schutz (1962, 166, 297), this passive association acts as a “motivational fundament” [*Motivationsfundament*] to an – also automatic – “meaning transfer” [*Sinnesübertragung*]. Because of the “*Deckung*” between the sedimented experiential type and the “new” object, the meaning of the first is passively “transferred” to the second. “As the result of this overlaying, there takes places in the paired data a mutual transfer of sense, an apperception of each according to the sense of the other”

(Husserl 1995, 116; 1977, 113). Following Husserl, Schutz (1962, 295) emphasizes that this “analogical apperception” should not be confused for a conclusion by analogy. “Apperception is not inference, not a thinking act” (Husserl, 1995, 114; 1977, 111).

In *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*, Schutz (1981, 112; 1967, 84) defines “interpretation” [*Auslegung*] as the “referral of the unknown to the known, of that which is apprehended in the glance of attention to the schemes of experience”. Following this definition, it could be argued that this second “moment” of the appresentational process is an *interpretative* one. It is, in fact, a – passive – sense-giving operation in which the unknown – the “new” object – is subsumed under the known – the sedimented empirical type.

(iii) The third “moment” of this process implies a “co-presentation” [*Mitgegenwärtigung*]. The passive interpretation of an object as an exemplar of an empirical type triggers the “appresentation” of certain features or aspects of it that are not “present” at the moment. The subjective actor – implicitly, non-thematically – “assumes” and “anticipates” that the perceived object has certain sides or aspects, which are absent right now but *waiting to be seen*.

This is so because the subject – passively – presupposes that this holds true *for every object pertaining to the alleged type* (Husserl 1995, §50; Schutz 1962, 295). When observing the front cover of a book, for example, I cannot simultaneously see its back cover; however, I *know* it has one because *every book* does. “The frontside, which is apperceived in immediacy or given to us in presentation, appresents the unseen backside” (Schutz 1962, 295).

In stricter terms, appresenting means “a kind of making ‘co-present’” [*Als-mitgegenwärtig-bewußt-machen*] (Husserl 1995, 112; 1977, 109). It is a passive and mediate modality of intentionality that operates in every perceptive act, apprehending as co-present – that is, as being “co-there” [*Mit-da*] (Husserl 1995, 112) – certain aspects of the thing that are not perceptible at the moment. “An appresentation occurs even in external experience, since the strictly seen front of a physical thing always, and necessarily appresents a rear aspect, and prescribes for it a more or less determinate content” (Husserl 1995, 112; 1977, 108).

In order to properly understand the Husserlian-Schutzian conception of appresentation, one must give account of the particular complexion of external perception. Following Husserl (2009, § 44), Schutz (1962, 295) claims that perception is essentially inadequate and one-sided. It never gives us the object in its wholeness. The onesideness of perceptive acts is due to the perspective character of vision, which, in turn, follows from our corporeal anchorage in space. “Strictly speaking”, writes Schutz (1962, 295. My emphasis), “if we apperceive an object of the outer world, then that which we *really* see in our visual perception is merely the frontside of the object”.

In spite of the unilateral character of perception, in natural attitude we *see the whole* thing. For example, we “perceive” a “house”, although, strictly speaking, we only see its facade. For Husserl (1995, § 55), and also for Schutz (1962, 295), this is possible due to the workings of appresentational mechanisms which, in an automatic and unnoticed way, “complete” our fragmentary experience of the object (cf. Crossley 1996, 5-6).

In virtue of appresentations, the kernel of what is perceived – or presented – gets associated with a “surplus” [*Überschuß*] of co-perception –the appresented. Following this train of thought, an object can only appear as such if the perceived and the co-perceived merge into the “*functional community* [*Funktionsgemeinschaft*] of one perception, which simultaneously presents and appresents, and yet furnishes for the total object a consciousness of its being itself there” (Husserl 1995, 125; 1977, 122).

Following Husserl (1995, 112; 1977, 122), Schutz (1962, 295) claims that the co-presentation of the absent sides of an object is also a “more or less empty anticipation” – *i.e.* a “protention” – of what we might perceive if we turned the object around or if we walked around the object”. This more or less empty prefiguration of the unseen sides of the thing can be verified “by a corresponding fulfilling presentation (the back becomes front)” (Husserl 1995, 112; 1977, 109). However, the anticipation may well be disappointed –for example, if the object does not have a backside. This, in Husserl’s words, causes its “explosion” (Husserl 1977, 90).

3. Typicality and Habituality in Schutz: The “Stock of Knowledge at Hand”, its Structure and Genesis

*Structure of the stock of knowledge at hand*³

Following Husserl, Schutz (2003, 337) claims that “our knowledge of the lifeworld is [...] a knowledge of the typicality [*Typik*] of its objects and processes”. As quotidian subjects, we have a bond of familiarity with our lifeworldly environment because we *know* the typical features of the different types of objects and events that conform it. “To the type ‘dog’, e.g., belongs a stock of typical attributes with an open horizon of anticipation of further such attributes” (Husserl 1973, 401; 1972, 331).

For Schutz (2003, 333; 2011, 169; 1962, 7), the “stock of knowledge at hand” [*Wissensvorrat*] is the sum-total of “available knowledge” that an individual disposes of in a certain moment of his biography. It is, put differently, an inventory of empirical types of objects, events, and situations that emerges as a product of the “sedimentation” of past experiences (Schutz 1964, 283; cf. 2003, 333).

According to Schutz (1981, 103-104; 1967, 77), the elements – or types – that constitute the stock of knowledge at hand are available “in the form of mere passive possession” [*passives Haben*]. That is, they are “stored away” within consciousness, resting in a “dormant” state (Schutz 2011, 175). Every sedimented typification, however, can be “woken up” from its sleep whether by passive associations or explicit activities of the ego. This happens when the type at stake is, in a certain way, “relevant” for the interpretation of the “new” object (2003, 337; 2011, 111).

In this sense, Schutz (1981, 112; 1964, 283) states that the stock of knowledge is a “scheme of interpretation” used by the everyday subject as a means for defining his situation within the lifeworld. Indeed, as above stated, interpretation is nothing but a subsumption of a “new” experience under an already-known empirical type. It could be argued, thus, that “all interpretation of this world is based on a stock of previous experiences of it” (Schutz 1962, 7).

According to Schutz (1962, 74; 1964, 284), the stock of knowledge has a precarious status. That is to say, it is always “in a continual flux”, growing, modifying, and correcting itself with every new experience. The current available knowledge at hand is, thus, only valid “until further notice” (Schutz 1962, 74). In case of not being adequate or pragmatically sufficient to defining the “new” situation, it may be put into question, revised, or modified.

The *Wissensvorrat* is, furthermore, far from being a systematic, ordered, and coherent system of knowledge. This is because it constitutes and upgrades itself following the pragmatic, *naif*, and irreflexive logic of common-sense thinking. To put it differently, the stock of knowledge at hand lacks the clarity and distinction that characterizes scientific theories (Schutz 1962, 74).

Rather than being a monolithic and homogeneous block of knowledge, says Schutz (1962, 284), the *Wissensvorrat* is structured in different “zones of distinctness and vagueness, of clarity and obscurity, of precision and ambiguity”. We possess a detailed and thorough knowledge about certain lifeworldly things, whereas we have a vague and obscure acquaintance with others (Schutz 2011, 169-174). In order to give account of this “differentiation of our knowledge” [*Differenzierung unseres Wissens*], Schutz (2003, 331; cf. 1962, 174) draws on a conceptual distinction developed by William James, namely, the one between: (a) “knowledge of acquaintance” and (b) “knowledge about”.

(a) Most of our stored knowledge is “knowledge of acquaintance”. This kind of knowledge, says Schutz (2003, 331), constitutes a *superficial* acquaintance with some typical features of a phenomenon or event that is sufficient to accomplish pragmatic ends. The everyday subject is a “layman” concerning the majority of mundane phenomena. That is, he knows only their “What” [*Was*], but not their “How” [*Wie*] or “Why” [*Warum*] (Schutz 2003, 331).

An average user of PC's, e.g., knows which button to press in order to turn on and off his PC. However, he does not know much about the myriad of technical processes – both in terms of software and hardware – which are involved in the workings of a computer. These processes are for him not only

unknown and incomprehensible, but also *irrelevant* (Schutz 2003, 331). It is enough for him that the computer turns on and off when he presses certain button.

(b) In contrast, the “knowledge *about*” constitutes a thorough and clear knowledge of a certain type of lifeworldly phenomenon (Schutz 2003, 331). The subject is an “expert” in the object at stake: He does not only know its “What”, but also its “How” and “Why” (Schutz 2003, 331). For example, a computer technician possesses an exhaustive and rigorous knowledge about a PC. He does not only know how to turn it on and off, but also has an acquaintance with the technical processes responsible for its workings.

According to Schutz (1964, 122-123), quotidian actors are normally “experts” in some topics and “laymen” in others. A cook, *e.g.*, possesses knowledge *about* the preparation of certain meals, but only knowledge *of acquaintance* concerning the workings of his oven. Thus, in case the latter stops functioning, he has to resort to a certain specialized technician.

In this sense, says Schutz (1964, 123), the knowledge of the “social distribution of knowledge” constitutes a crucial part of the *Wissensvorrat*. That is to say, the everyday subject knows *whom* to turn to when in need of help in an unfamiliar field of practice. “It is sufficient to know that there are experts available for consultation should he need their advice in achieving his practical purpose at hand. His recipes tell him when to see a doctor or a lawyer, where to get needed information and the like” (Ibid.).

Now, how does Schutz explain the inequality in the social distribution of knowledge? Why are we “experts” in some fields and “laymen” in others? Schutz gives two closely linked answers to these questions: (1) one in terms of a sociology of knowledge, and (2) another in terms of a phenomenology of natural attitude.

(1) Schutz claims that social distribution of knowledge constitutes a “fundamental category of social life” [*Grundkategorie des sozialen Lebens*] (2003, 331). Every society is a structure of roles, occupations, and professions. The individual actor represents one – or many – of these roles and, for this reason,

has a determined field of expertise (Schutz 1962, 330-331; 1964, 123).

For Schutz (1962, 13), most of our everyday knowledge has a “social origin”, that is, it is acquired in primary and secondary socialization. This, however, does not mean that every individual possesses the *same* stock of knowledge. Rather, “knowledge is socially distributed”: Each *type* of social actor receives, during his education, a certain *type* of stock of knowledge (Ibid., 13).

According to Schutz (2003, 331), the study of the “inequality in the distribution of knowledge” [*Ungleichheit der Verteilung des Wissens*] is the main problem of a “sociology of knowledge” [*Wissenssoziologie*]. In other words, “knowledge is socially distributed and the mechanism of this distribution can be made the subject matter of a sociological discipline” (Schutz 1964, 121).

(2) In individual terms, Schutz (2011, 177) considers that the depth and clarity of our knowledge about a phenomenon depends upon our interests or system of relevances. In *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, he states: “it could be said that the difference between the two levels of knowledge – knowledge *of* and *about*– can still be explained by its sufficiency for our purpose at hand, which is determined by the systems of motivational relevances prevailing at the time in any particular situation” (Schutz 2011, 177).

Following pragmatist and proto-pragmatist authors such as James, Bergson, Heidegger, and Scheler, Schutz (2011, 174) argues that our quotidian knowledge of the *Lebenswelt* is always “codetermined by a pragmatic motive”. That is to say, the everyday subject does not aim to know the “true nature” of lifeworldly objects, but merely to know them in a *sufficient* way for attaining his practical aims. In this sense, Schutz claims that “our curiosity is satisfied and our inquiry stops if knowledge is sufficient for our purpose at hand” (2011, 178).

In this perspective, thus, our knowledge *of* only becomes knowledge *about* if this is *necessary* for the fulfillment of our pragmatic ends. For instance, an individual who is willing to become a professional musician needs to possess a thorough and exhaustive knowledge *about* harmony and rhythm, whereas

for a hobby guitarist it is sufficient to have a rudimentary knowledge of musical theory that allows him to play a couple of rock songs.

In order not to misunderstand Schutz's account, it should be emphasized that these two answers to the question about the cause of the unequal distribution of knowledge – (1) and (2) – are closely linked to each other. In fact, there are no pure individual relevance systems. The social distribution of knowledge conditions – but not mechanically determines – the complexion of individual relevances (Schutz 1962, 13).

Genesis and history of the stock of knowledge

Schutz (1964, 283) argues that “the stock of knowledge has its particular history”. Rather than being an inventory of innate ideas such as the one depicted by Descartes, the individual *Wissensvorrat* constitutes a product of a genetic process. In more specific terms, Schutz claims that our stock of knowledge emerges in virtue of the “sedimentation” in consciousness of the “outcome[s]” – or achievements [*Leistungen*] – of past intentional experiences.

The intentional achievements of elapsed lived experiences do not completely disappear of consciousness. They remain stored within it in form of a “habitual possession” (Ibid.). In a 1957 paper, Schutz (2003, 333) writes: “This current stock of knowledge is nothing but the sediment of all our experiences of previous definitions of past situations”.

Schutzian reflections on the “history” of the *Wissensvorrat* draw on the late Husserl's *genetic* phenomenological investigations. In contrast to Kant, Husserl (1995, 68; 1977, 66) does not understand the ego as an “empty pole of identity”. Rather, he conceives of it as a “substrate of habitualities” [*Habitualitäten*] (Husserl 1995, 68; 1977, 67). In texts like the *Cartesianische Meditationen*, Husserl carries out a thorough investigation of the way in which these subjective habitualities emerge and operate.

In his view, it is an essential law of consciousness that “with every act emanating from him and having a new objective sense” the ego “acquires a new abiding property” (1995, 68; 1977, 66). Indeed, from the point of view of a genetic phenomenology,

the subject does not remain equal to himself, but, in virtue of his experiences, he acquires a permanent inventory of objective meanings and “validities” [*Geltungen*] (Gander 2012, 127).

In Husserl’s view, this occurs (a) on the level of practical reason, and (b) on the level of pre-predicative perception.

(a) For example, if I decide something, my act of decision elapses, but my decision remains. “From now on *I am abidingly the Ego who is thus and so decided*, ‘I am of this conviction’” (Husserl 1995, 68; 1977, 66). In this way, my decision becomes an “abiding *habitus*” of my subjectivity.

(b) According to Husserl (1995, 81; 1977, 79), something analogous occurs on the level of pre-predicative perception. The fact that the everyday subject can “at first glance” perceive an object *qua* exemplar of an empirical type is due to “an essentially necessary genesis”. Indeed, for Husserl, in the perceptual field of very young children there are *still* no “things” or “objects”. That is why, during their first years of life, they have to *learn how to see things*. “With good reason it is said that in infancy we had to learn to see physical things, and that such modes of consciousness of them have to precede all others genetically” (Husserl 1995, 81; 1977, 79).

This primitive learning of the typicality of the lifeworld, which takes place in early infancy, *remains* present in adult subjectivity in the form of an abiding *habitus*. It is in virtue of the sedimentation of this “original becoming acquainted” [*ursprüngliches Kennenlernen*] that grown-up individuals are able to *immediately*—that is, *at first sight*—apprehend mundane things as exemplars of general types (Husserl 1995, 82).

In this sense, it could be argued that every immediate apprehension of an object as such “points back to a ‘primal instituting’ [*Urstiftung*]” in which the object was constituted for the very first time (Husserl 1995, 114; 1977, 80). After learning for the first time what “scissors” are, *e.g.*, the child acquires the capacity of perceiving “scissors” at first sight.

Following Husserl, Alfred Schutz (2011, 190) understands the stock of knowledge at hand as a “system of habitualities”. For him, every element of the *Wissensvorrat* points back to a primal or original event of “acquisition of experience” [*Erfahrungserwerb*] (Schutz 2003, 339). “This process of

acquisition of experience”, writes Schutz in “*Strukturen der Lebenswelt*”, “leads to the sedimentation of the stock of knowledge, which is ordered according to types and degrees of familiarity” (2003, 339).

According to Schutz (1962, 13-14; 2003, 348), the acquisition of knowledge takes place in two different ways, namely: (a) and *individual* one, and (b) a *social* one. In this sense, it could be stated that the contents and structuration of the individual stock of knowledge depends upon two main factors: (a) the “biographical situation” [*biographische Situation*] of the individual at stake and (b) the “historical situation” [*historische Situation*] of the social group to which he belongs (Schutz 2003, 331).

(a) Following the genetic Husserl, Schutz (2003, 333) claims that the empirical types that are stored in the stock of knowledge arise as a product of the sedimentation of past definitions of situations. Yet, for Schutz, the *aproblematic* definitions of the environment – *i.e.* the ones which proceed automatically in virtue of passive syntheses of appresentation—do not contribute with novel types to the stock of knowledge at hand (Schütz and Luckmann 2003, 179).

Indeed, new empirical types only emerge in cognitive *activities* aiming to solve interpretative *problems*—that is, in *active* syntheses (Schutz 2003, 337). What we find in our stock of knowledge as “typified experience” [*typisierte Erfahrung*] is nothing but the material that was sufficient in the past for solving practical and theoretical problems (Schutz 2003, 339). In other words, we acquire new knowledge when we find a novel solution to a “problematic” object, *i.e.*, an object that cannot be subsumed under none of our available typifications. For example, the resolution of an interpretative problem can take place by means of the “invention” of a new empirical type.

After its “creation”, the new empirical type becomes a constituent part of the *Wissensvorrat* and can be automatically “applied” – by means of presentations – to the definition of novel situations (Schutz 2003, 337). According to Schutz (1981, 104), this passive application of the new type proceeds *in one stroke*. It does not entail a “step-to-step” [*schrittweise*] reconstruction of the “polythetic” [*polythetisch*] process in which it was created.

In this sense, Schutz (1981, 101) claims that the *Wissensvorrat* consists in *already-made* empirical types that can be grasped in a “uniradial glance” [*einstrahliger Blick*], that is, “monothetically” [*monothetisch*]. “Let us therefore limit the term ‘stock of knowledge at hand’ to the store of already constituted objectivities of experience in the actual Here and Now, in other words, to the passive ‘possession’ of experiences to the exclusion of reconstitution” (Schutz 1967, 78).

(b) According to Schutz (1962, 13) – and this is critical for fully understanding his account –, only a very small part of the knowledge of quotidian subjects originates in individual experience. The most part of it has a “social origin”. It is acquired by the individual in the “long process of education” [*langer Prozess der Erziehung*] through the mediation of parents, teachers, and other figures of authority (Schutz 2003, 330; 1962, 13).

In Schutz’s view, the process of education does not only involve the acquisition of a set of socially approved typifications. It also entails the learning of how to “correctly” apply them to the definition of quotidian situations. “Already as children, we must learn what to attend to and with what to put it in relation with in order to define the world and our situation within it” (Schutz 2003, 339). In this sense, it could be argued that our adult ability to interpret objects and events of the *Lebenswelt* at first sight is, to a great extent, “a result of learning” [*ein Resultat des Lernens*] which has become “habitual possession and routine” [*habituellem Besitz und Routine*] (Schutz 2003, 339).

For Schutz (2011, 288; 1962, 348), the typical knowledge acquired in the process of education is part of the “culture” [*Kultur*] or “relative natural conception of the world” [*relativ natürliche Weltanschauung*] of the group to which the individual actor belongs.

The concepts of “culture” and “relative natural conception of the world” –which are understood by Schutz (2011, 288; 2003, 330; 1962, 348) as synonyms– refer to the “*socially approved knowledge*” of a social group in a certain moment of its collective history. This socially approved knowledge is set of cognitive and practical recipes, which are “taken for granted”

and “accepted as beyond question” by all the members of the in-group (Schutz 2011, 288; 2003, 330). For the Viennese phenomenologist, this *cultural* stock of knowledge plays a crucial role in the everyday life of the group, insofar as it works as a “common scheme of interpretation of the common world” [*gemeinsames Interpretationsschema*] (Schutz 2003, 330; cf. 1962, 14).

4. Conclusion

Although it is one of the fundamental parts of his phenomenology of the lifeworld, Schutz’s account of the typicality and habituality of everyday cognitive experience is only superficially treated by the secondary literature on his work. In order to correct this defect, in this paper I intended to systematically analyze this account, and to identify the Husserlian *leitmotifs* that inform it.

Following the late Husserl, Schutz claims that the *Lebenswelt* is pre-predicatively experienced in a typical manner. Everyday subjects do not perceive worldly things as unique and unrepeatable objects, but as exemplars of types of objectivities already experienced in the past: as dogs, trees, animals, tables, books, etc.

Also drawing on Husserlian insights, Schutz characterizes the typificational apprehension as a sort of *passive interpretation* that takes place by means of appresentations. The passive synthesis of appresentation is a complex process. In order to analytically grasp its complexity, it is useful to differentiate three “moments” in its working: one of association, one of interpretation, and one of co-presentation.

Inspired on Husserl’s reflections on the habituality of experience, the Viennese thinker claims that the passive interpretation of the lifeworld is based on the so-called *Wissensvorrat* or stock of knowledge at hand. This stock is the sum-total of the available knowledge that an individual possess in a certain moment of his biography. More precisely, it is an inventory of sedimented cognitive and practical types which are both acquired in social-educational processes and in personal experience.

NOTES

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² Fischer's characterization of the Schutzian theoretical project is very useful, insofar as it grasps its kernel in a simple and illustrative manner. However, taking this characterization too literally could lead to a dangerous simplification of Schutz's thought. For this reason, it is necessary to complete and nuance this view by means of two explanatory statements. (i) First, Schutz is not an uncritical reader of Husserl and Weber. Rather, he makes a critical and creative appropriation of the work of both thinkers (Wagner 1983, 14). (2) And secondly, Husserl and Weber are not the only theoretical influences of Schutz. He also dialogues with other theoretical perspectives that present affinities with his Weberian-Husserlian point of departure (Belvedere 2012, 28-40). On the *sociological* level, he articulates Weber's *verstehende Soziologie* with the symbolic interactionism of Cooley and Thomas, among others; whereas on the *philosophical* level, he puts in relation Husserl's phenomenology with William James' pragmatism, Henri Bergson's vitalism, Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy and Max Scheler's eclectic phenomenology.

³ Schutz (2011, 172ff) makes an interesting distinction between the stock of knowledge "*at hand*" and the stock of knowledge "*in hand*". The latter consists in "existential knowledge" – knowledge of our ontological situation as human beings existing in the world– and "routine knowledge" – automatized know-how: walking, running, riding bicycle, playing a musical instrument, speaking our mother tongue, etc. (Schutz 2011, 173, 176). In this paper, I will only examine Schutz's account of the knowledge "*at hand*", since I am interested in his approach to the typicality and habituality of everyday *cognitive* experience.

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