

terms. From the outset, we, the actors on the social scene, experience the world we live in as a world both of nature and of culture, not as a private but as an intersubjective one, that is, a world common to all of us, either actually given or potentially accessible to everyone; and this involves intercommunication and language. (Schütz 1963a: 236)

This is a world of taken-for-granted meanings and interpretations which both facilitate and structure social relationships.

A consequence of holding this view of social reality is that Interpretive social science requires a very different approach to that of the natural sciences.

It is up to the natural scientist to determine which sector of the universe of nature, which facts and events therein, and which aspects of such facts and events are . . . relevant to their specific purpose . . . Relevance is not inherent in nature as such, it is the result of the selective and interpretive activity of man [sic] within nature or observing nature. The facts, the data, and events with which the natural scientist has to deal are just facts, data, and events within his [sic] observational field but this field does not 'mean' anything to the molecules, atoms, and electrons therein . . . But the facts, events, and data before the social scientist are an entirely different structure. His [sic] observational field, the social world, is not essentially structureless. It has a particular meaning and relevance structure for the human beings living, thinking, and acting therein. They have preselected and preinterpreted this world by a series of common-sense constructs of the reality of daily life, and it is these thought objects which determine their behavior, define the goal of their action, the means available for attaining them – in brief, which help them to find their bearings within their natural and socio-cultural environment and to come to terms with it. (Schütz 1963b: 305)

From the outset, Schütz's aim was to put Weber's sociology on a firm foundation. In pursuing this task, he not only elaborated the concept of action, but also offered a methodology of ideal types (1963a,b). He argued that, in assuming that the concept of the meaningful act is the basic and irreducible component of social phenomena, Weber failed, among other things, to distinguish between the meaning the social actor *works with* while action is taking place, the meaning the social actor *attributes to* a completed act or to some future act, and the meaning the sociologist *attributes to* the action. In the first case, the meaning worked with during the act itself, and the context in which it occurs, is usually taken for granted. In the second case, the meaning attributed will be in terms of the social actor's goals. In the third case, the context of meaning will be that of the observer, not the social actor. Weber appeared to assume that the latter is an adequate basis for arriving at the social actor's attributed meaning and that there will be no disputes between actors, or between actors and observers, about the meaning of a completed or future act.

Schütz has provided the foundation for a methodological bridge between the meaning social actors attribute and the meaning the social

scientists must attribute in order to produce an adequate theory. According to Schütz, social life is possible, in both face-to-face and more anonymous situations, to the extent that social actors use typifications of both persons and courses of action. The particular typifications used by social actors will be related to their biographically and situationally determined system of interests and relevances, and are socially transmitted, constructed and refined by a process of trial and error (1963a: 243).

In intimate face-to-face situations it may be possible for social actors to grasp fragments of the subjective meaning that other actors bestow on their actions. However, according to Schütz, in these situations, and more particularly in anonymous situations, subjective meanings – motives, goals, choices, plans – can only be experienced in their typicality (1963a: 244). It is from these typifications that social theories must be constructed.

Now, this same social world which we immediately experience as meaningful is also meaningful from the standpoint of the social scientist. But the context of meaning in which he [sic] interprets this world is that of systematizing scrutiny rather than that of living experience. His data, however, are the already constituted meanings of active participants in the social world. It is to these already meaningful data that his scientific concepts must ultimately refer: to the meaningful acts of individual men and women, to their everyday experiences of one another, to their understanding of one another's meanings, and to their initiation of new meaningful behavior of their own. He will be concerned, furthermore, with the concepts people have of the meaning of their own and other's behavior and the concepts they have of the meaning of artefacts of all kinds. (Schütz 1976: 10)

Schütz has added to the discussion of the role of *verstehen* in the social sciences by distinguishing three uses of the concept. First, it refers to the epistemological problem of how understanding is possible (Gadamer's problem); second, it refers to a method peculiar to the social sciences (Dilthey's problem); but, thirdly, it refers to the experiential form in which social actors deal with the social world (Heidegger's problem). In this latter sense, it is the process by which people negotiate their way in their everyday social situations, how they discover the taken-for-granted meanings that are operating.

Verstehen is, thus, primarily not a method used by the social scientist, but the particular experiential form in which common-sense thinking takes cognizance of the social cultural world. It has nothing to do with introspection; it is a result of processes of learning or acculturation in the same way as the common-sense experience of the so-called natural world. *Verstehen* is, moreover, by no means a private affair of the observer which cannot be controlled by the experiences of other observers . . . Moreover, predictions based on *Verstehen* are continuously made in common-sense thinking with high success. (Schütz 1963a: 239)

Schütz argued that *verstehen* is not 'subjective' in the sense that understanding the motives of another person's action 'depends upon the private, uncontrollable, and unverifiable intuition of the observer or refers to his [sic] private value system' (1963a: 240). Rather, it is 'subjective' because its aim is to discover what a social actor 'means' by his/her actions in contrast to the meaning this action has for other social actors in the situation or for an outside observer.

Another tradition of Interpretive social science was developed in Britain by Winch (1958) under the influence of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein. Winch wanted to draw a clear distinction between the natural and social sciences while at the same time arguing for an essential identity between the social sciences and philosophy. He was one of the first to draw on British ordinary language philosophy as a basis for explicating what is meant by 'social' and, in the process, his arguments drew heavily on Wittgenstein's concepts of 'language-game' and 'form of life'.

At a time when Positivism and Critical Rationalism ruled supreme in the social sciences in the English-speaking world, Winch argued that basing social science on natural science was a mistake because understanding society is both conceptually and logically different from understanding nature (Winch 1958: 72, 94, 119). The difference between society and nature is not just that the former is more complicated than the latter, as was claimed by Mill (1879).

Now though human reactions are very much more complex than those of other beings, they are not *just* very much more complex. For what is, from one point of view, a change in the degree of complexity is, from another point of view, a difference in kind: the concepts which apply to the more complex behaviour are logically different from those we apply to the less complex. (Winch 1958: 72)

He rejected attempts to understand human activity based on physiological states, general dispositions or causal explanations, in favour of 'reasons' for acting in a particular way.⁸

While there is some debate about whether Winch accepted a Positivist view of the natural sciences (see, for example, Keat 1971; Stockman 1983), he certainly claimed that there is a radical difference between the natural and social sciences. Following Wittgenstein's view of language as rule-following within a 'form of life' or culture, Winch argued that social behaviour is to be understood as rule-following behaviour and not as causally regular behaviour. Whereas the natural sciences are concerned with establishing causal sequences, the social sciences are concerned with understanding the meaning of human conduct in terms of rule-following. To understand what someone is doing it is necessary to grasp the rule being followed. These rules are not private; they are shared and maintained by

⁸ See Turner (1980) for a useful review and critique of Winch's position.

people in a social context and are embodied in the behaviour of other people. A person's actions are intelligible to others to the extent that they are following accepted standards of what is appropriate in that social context. The presence of social regularities is used as evidence that some rule is operating, whether or not people are consciously aware of it. Hence, Winch linked the notion of meaningful action to rule-following. '[A]ll behaviour which is meaningful (therefore, all specifically human behaviour) is *ipso facto* rule-governed' (1958: 52). Rules therefore provide both the reasons and the motives for the behaviour, and learning these rules 'belongs to the process of learning to live as a social being' (1958: 83).

Winch was critical of Weber's distinction between 'action' and 'social action', between action which is merely meaningful and that which is both meaningful and social. He regarded this distinction as being incompatible with his position; 'all meaningful behaviour must be social, since it can be meaningful only if governed by rules, and rules presuppose a social setting' (1958: 116). Winch took Weber's notion of meaningful social action and translated it into Wittgenstein's notion of rule-following against a background of interpersonal agreements on criteria.

Winch posed, and endeavoured to answer, a fundamental epistemological question. What is the relationship between 'the world' and the language in which we try to describe 'the world'? (1958: 120). He argued that language determines what will count as 'the world'.

Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world . . . [However] when we speak of the world we are speaking of what we in fact mean by the expression 'the world': there is no way of getting outside the concepts in terms of which we think of the world . . . The world *is* for us what is presented through those concepts. That is not to say that our concepts may not change; but when they do, that means that our concept of the world has changed too. (Winch 1958: 15)

This position led Winch to argue that language and social activity are inextricably bound together. '[O]ur language and our social relations are just two different sides of the same coin. To give an account of the meaning of a word is to describe how it is used; and to describe how it is used is to describe the social intercourse into which it enters' (1958: 123). Further, he argued that 'the social relations between men [sic] and the ideas which men's actions embody are really the same thing considered from different points of view' (1958: 121). In other words, the 'social reality' of social relationships is embedded in the concepts that are used by participants in social contexts to talk about their 'world'. He was determined to show 'that social relations really exist only in and through the ideas which are current in society; or alternatively, that social relations fall in the same logical category as do relations between ideas' (1958: 133).