

A Phenomenological Approach Towards the Analysis of Politics

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to develop a consistent framework for a phenomenological discourse analysis of political debates. The political sphere arises through the questioning of taken-for-granted definitions of reality: a crisis. During a crisis meaning has to be restored, and different interest groups will try to push their definition of reality, which is advantageous for them. For the analysis of such a political discourse phenomenology provides several tools that can help us to understand the background of the discourse, the severity of the crisis, the level of expertise of the participants, the source of the information, discourse strategies and what arguments the audience accepts. These tools allow a unique phenomenological approach towards political discourse analysis.

Key words: Phenomenology, Crisis, Discourse Analysis, Alfred Schutz, Thomas Luckmann

As a phenomenological sociologist¹, who is also interested in the analysis of political processes, I have struggled a long time to combine my theoretical

¹ I am using the term “phenomenological sociology” for the phenomenological tradition inside sociology originally based on the works of Alfred Schutz, which would include Harold Garfinkel’s ethnomethodology but not symbolic interactionism. I prefer this term over “phenomenology,” because I want to separate the ideas of Alfred Schutz from other phenomenological traditions, such as Edmund Husserl’s, Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutics, or the French existentialists. The reason for this preference is that I am not an expert of all phenomenological traditions, and therefore cannot make statements about phenomenology in general. However, I do *not* want to imply with the term “phenomenological sociology” that Schutz’s work should be exclusively interpreted as a sociology that limits itself to its own theory. In fact, I do agree

(phenomenological) with my empirical (political) work. The announcement of the the Third Conference of the International Alfred Schutz Circle for Phenomenology and Interpretative Social Science in Tokyo in May 2016 changed this. The topic of the conference was “The Symbolic Construction of Reality” and I wanted to make a presentation about “The Propagandistic (Mis-) Construction of Reality.” But how should propaganda be approached from a phenomenological point of view? This problem forced me to go through the phenomenological literature in order to find concepts, which could help me to describe political discourses. This paper is the result of this process.

I will start with a critique of phenomenological sociology for its inability to explain politics from an economic point of view. I will argue that this critique is not justified and that phenomenological sociology can deal with political problems. A discussion of previous phenomenological attempts will reveal the concept of crisis as a starting point for the analysis of the political sphere. And finally, I will discuss concrete concepts, which could be regarded as the tools for a phenomenological discourse analysis. This paper does not present any new concepts. The novelty of this paper lies in combining existing phenomenological concepts into a consistent framework, which allows a unique phenomenological approach towards the explanation of politics.

1. The Phenomenological Method and the Analysis of Politics

The phenomenological method is based on the insight that social actions can only be meaningfully understood by the actors themselves, whereas the observed social acts of other actors have to be interpreted by referring to course of action types that the observer has constructed out of his/her past experiences for this type of social actions (Hitzler 2005: 234). This is usually not a problem, since we naively live in our social world and automatically assume that the observed actors have similar motives and made similar experiences and therefore have constructed similar course of action types (cf. Schutz 1964: 13). For example, if a person is born in Japan, he/she will have experienced many times that people are greeting each other by bowing. The result will be that he/she will construct a course of action type for “greeting each other,” which is very similar to the constructions of the course of action type “greeting each other” of other people in Japan, who have made similar experiences.

These course of action types, which describe the typical actions, are connected to because and in-order-to motives. The because motive explains why

with Lester Embree’s reading of Schutz’s ideas as a philosophical science theory, which “seeks to spell out foundational basic concepts and methodologies for several sciences (e.g. the cultural sciences)” (Barber 2017: 104).

an actor is doing something based on past experiences. Economists would use the term preference instead of because motive. For example, an economist would say that an actor prefers good A over good B for the same price, because the actor experienced in the past that good A produced a higher utility than good B (and economists usually assume that preferences are stable). However, the concept of because motives covers more than just the preferences. Because motives provide the explanation, why somebody prefers something beyond utility. For example, I am bowing, because I have experienced thousand times that this is the polite way of greeting somebody in Japan. The in-order-to motive on the other hand is based on the desired expected outcome of an action in the future, and can without any problems described in economic terms as expected utility. For example, I am bowing very deep towards my supervisor, in order to receive a favorable evaluation from him/her. As a member of the Austrian school of Economics (Machlup 1979: 275), Schutz develops his motive types along the line of the marginal utility theory of his teachers von Mises and von Hayek (Etzrodt 2004: 68). However, in contrast to his economics teachers, Alfred Schutz (1943: 142) does not believe that every action is rational and therefore based on both because and in-order-to motive. Only the because motive is required, because it contains the meaningful experiences and is therefore a fundamental part of the course of action type.²

The phenomenological argument so far can now also be applied to social scientists. A social scientist should be able to routinely interpret the social acts of the observed actors most of the time to an adequate degree, as long as the social scientist is familiar with the social world of the observed actors and has made similar experiences, which led to the construction of similar scientific course of action types with the adequate because and in-order-to motives. In this sense, the phenomenological method is an empirical method, which

² According to Alfred Schutz (1943: 140), rationality in economics presupposes “a choice between two or more means toward the same end or even between two different ends, and a selection of the most appropriate.” The “ends” in this statement are his in-order-to motives. In other words, rational explanations in economics focuses on the in-order-to motive.

In contrast to the concept of rationality in economics, Schutz (1953: 25) develops a different kind of intersubjective “rationality.” “We may explain the rationality of human interaction by the fact that both actors orient their actions on certain standards which are socially approved as rules of conduct by the in-group to which they belong: norms, mores of good behavior, manners, the organizational framework provided for this particular form of division of labor, the rules of the chess game etc. But neither the origin nor the import of socially approved standards is ‘rationally’ understood. Such standards might be traditionally or habitually accepted as just being taken for granted, and, within the meaning of our previous definitions, behavior of this kind will be sensible or even reasonable but not necessarily rational.” Norms, mores, manners, rules, traditions, and habits—once they are established—rest all on the because motive, but they do not necessarily require a rational calculation of in-order-to motives.

however starts with the subjective experiences of the social scientist him/herself (Hitzler 2005: 234).

But although the subjective experiences of social interactions are the starting point of a phenomenological analysis, this does not exclude more abstract concepts of higher aggregate levels – as for example the state – from a phenomenological investigation. However, those concepts have to be constructed in a way that allows a translation into subjective course of action types (Hitzler 2005: 236).

Alfred Schutz described according to these principles the state as “an abbreviation for a highly complex network of interdependent ideal types” of social actions of the state’s functionaries (Schutz 1967: 199; Embree 2015: 34). “The state can be interpreted as the totality of acts of those who are oriented to the political order, that is, of its citizens.” (Schutz 1967: 136; cf. Schutz 1962: 354). Schutz goes on to explain that the world of politics is a subuniverse that transcends the finite province of meaning of everyday life (Schutz 1962: 329, cf. 353; Embree 2015: 35). This implies that the content of the world of politics is not necessarily anymore naively taken-for-granted, and he recognizes that these social interactions are influenced by “political power relationships” (Schutz 1964: 249; Embree 2015: 35). But instead of exploring these power relationships in problematic topics further, Schutz’s analysis stays on the surface of political discourses.

If in a face-to-face relationship with a friend I discuss a magazine article dealing with the attitude of the President and the Congress toward admission of China to the United Nations, I am in a relationship not only to the perhaps anonymous contemporary writer of the article but also with the contemporary individual or collective actors on the social scene designated by the terms ‘President,’ ‘Congress,’ ‘China,’ ‘United Nations’; and as my friend and I discussed this topic as citizens of the United States of 1954, we do so in an historical situation which is at least codetermined by the performances of our predecessors. And we have also in mind the impact which the decisions now to be taken might have on our successors, the future generations. (Schutz 1962: 352)

Lester Embree stated accurately that Alfred Schutz never developed a systematic phenomenological theory of political activities (Embree 2015: 33). In my opinion, Schutz did not develop these thoughts further, because he was focusing too much on the because motives of the actors and the taken-for-granted structures of the lifeworld in contrast to a focus on conflicting in-order-to motives and the discourse about what our lifeworld should be. This led critics to the conclusion that the phenomenological approach has little to contribute to the analysis of political processes. Weihrich (2005: 245), for

example, claims that phenomenological sociology with the focus on the because motives can be used to explain coordination problems. The because motive, which refers to the past meaningful experience, allows a standardization and creates common knowledge, which could be regarded as the Schelling-points in coordination problems in game theory (cf. Etzrodt 2001: 191; 2004: 70). No actor would have an incentive to deviate from the course of action types, because they guarantee a successful interaction.

Weihrich (2005: 248) continues to argue that, however, political debates are best described as cooperation (e.g. Thomas Hobbes's social order problem) and distribution problems (e.g. questions of taxation) rather than coordination problems. For the analysis of cooperation and distribution problems the focus of analysis would have to shift from the because motive to the in-order-to motive. Additionally, the phenomenological approach has no tools to analyse aggregation processes as for example the price mechanism in economics. The conclusion of this argument is that phenomenological sociology would have serious shortcomings to explain political decision processes and that game theory and/or rational choice theory would be much more appropriate analytical approaches towards political debates (Weihrich 2005: 248).

2. Is Politics Really Out of Reach of Phenomenological Analysis?

Weihrich's line of argument is in my opinion a fair evaluation of what is usually done in phenomenological sociology. The weakness of the argument is however that Weihrich implies that because something was not done, it cannot be done. This part seems to be clearly incorrect. Weihrich also ignores Alfred Schutz's analysis of rational actions (in which in-order-to motives are relevant), which can be interpreted as a critique of economics and rational choice theory. Schutz's argument starts as follows:

The complication increases considerably if the actor's project of a rational action involves the rational action or reaction of a fellowman, say of a consociate. Projecting rationally such a kind of action involves sufficiently clear and distinct knowledge of the situation of departure not only as defined by me but also as defined by the other. Moreover there has to be sufficient likelihood that the other will be tuned in upon me and consider my action as relevant enough to be motivated in the way of because by my in-order-to motive. If this is the case, then there has to be a sufficient chance that the other will understand me, and this means in the case of a rational interrelationship, that he will interpret my action rationally as being rational one and that he will react in a rational way. (Schutz 1962: 31)

In contrast to the economic or rational choice description of human action, which relies entirely on the in-order-to motive (the real preferences of the actors are de facto irrelevant for the interpretation), Schutz insists that the connection between the because and the in-order-to motive is of central importance for an adequate interpretation of social action. Furthermore, he insists that not only the *subjective* connection between the because and in-order-to motive (e.g. the connection of because motive₁ and in-order-to motive₁ inside Actor B in Figure 1), but also the *intersubjective* motive connection between in-order-to motive of one actor and the because motive of another actor has to be taken into consideration (e.g. the connection between the in-order-to motive₁ of Actor A and the because motive₂ of Actor B; Etzrodt 2004: 68-70). For example, Actor A wants to eat bread (his/her in-order-to motive), because he/she is hungry (his/her because motive). Actor A knows out of the past experience that he/she can buy bread in a bakery. He/she goes into a bakery and orders the bread, which he/she wants to eat (the in-order-to motive of Actor A), in a *common language* and pays in a *commonly accepted currency*, because only if Actor B understands the order and recognizes the currency, he/she would be motivated to sell Actor A the bread in exchange for the money (the intersubjective because motive of Actor B).

Figure 1: Reciprocity of motives between actors A and B

Actor A		Actor B	
Past	Future	Past	Future
because motive ₁ ↳	in-order-to motive ₁	⇒	because motive ₂ ↻
because motive ₃ ↳	in-order-to motive ₃	⇒	because motive ₄ ↻
etc.	↻	in-order-to motive ₄	

Source: Weigert 1975: 89.

Alfred Schutz (1962: 32) realized that the inclusion of because motives makes not only the analysis of rational social action by the social scientist very complex, it also makes it very difficult for the actors to coordinate their behavior in everyday life. Rational social action becomes therefore possible “by the fact that both actors orient their actions on certain standards which are socially approved as rules of conduct by the in-group to which they belong.” Those standards are traditionally accepted and taken for granted, without knowledge about the origins of those rules. If an actor would not follow these standards, then his rational action would appear as “irrational” to others, and the interaction would fail (Schutz 1989: 229).

We come, therefore, to the conclusion that »rational action« on the common-sense level is always action within an unquestioned and undetermined frame of constructs of typicalities of the setting, the motives, the means and ends, the courses of action and personalities involved and taken for granted. (Schutz 1962: 33)

The result is that our behavior in social interactions is much more influenced by the taken-for-granted meaningful courses of action, which are often not apparent to the actor in everyday life, rather than the problematic and open aspects of the interaction, which require a careful evaluation of alternatives (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 220). And consistently most phenomenologists have focused on the analysis of the unquestioned standards and left the analysis of the problematic aspects to the economists. In other words, phenomenologists usually investigate the hidden shared structures of the lifeworld (based on the because motives), whereas economists specialized in studying situations, in which actors are confronted with choices (based on conflicting in-order-to motives). This is by the way consistent with Alfred Schutz own understanding of the differences between sociology and economics.

[...] Pareto was, I think, right in so far as he made a distinction between rational and non-rational actions, in stating that the former constitutes the realm of economics and that part of jurisprudence which deals with contracts, whereas the latter constitutes the domain of sociology. (Schutz 1955: 5)

However, as an economist, Alfred Schutz was fully aware that the “intermeshing of motives does not, of course, necessarily mean agreement of interests and goals” (Schutz/Luckmann 1989: 86), and therefore started to include game theory in his analysis of social action in order to deal with the problematic and open aspects (Schutz/Luckmann 1989: 205).

Unfortunately, Schutz’s early death made it impossible for him to develop this argument further. Also, the next generations of phenomenological sociologists did not pick up his late ideas, because most of them lacked a background in economics. The implications of Alfred Schutz’s argument are, however, far-reaching and should not be overlooked. He proposed phenomenological sociology as a more general science than economics. Economics would become a special case of phenomenological sociology, in which the taken-for-granted courses of action are ignored and only the open possibilities (price and budget changes) are analyzed. In this sense, it seems that the success of economics and rational choice theory is the result of an oversimplification of the problem, which could lead to serious misinterpretations of *social* actions, if those unquestioned standards were not analyzed by the phenomenological method.

The conclusion of this argument is that phenomenological sociology can not only deal with social interactions, in which in-order-to motives are important as in cooperation and distribution problems. It also shows that the phenomenological approach is superior to economics and rational choice theory, because it takes several relevant aspects of social actions serious, which are ignored in economic approaches. In fact, economic approaches can be regarded as a simplified version of Alfred Schutz's analysis of rational social action, which might deliver reasonable result, *if specific conditions are given*. The meaning structure and the habitual interaction patterns must be taken for granted by all involved actors.

3. Previous Attempts to Approach Politics in Phenomenological Sociology

As the previous discussion showed, the phenomenological method is not limited to coordination problems, but has in principle all the tools to analyze also distribution and cooperation problems. It is therefore worth looking at some attempts to approach political issues in the phenomenological tradition. The first proposal by Fred Kersten (1999: 211) tries to understand Polity as a *form of life* of society. Polity would be society's *paramount reality*, which includes "moral taste and sentiment, form of government, and the spirit of laws, its power and authority." He defines life as "an activity directed toward a goal," and social life as society's activity toward a common goal. In order to achieve the common goal, society must be "organized, ordered, constructed," which is achieved by the Polity. Kersten's proposal has two major shortcomings. The first problem is that Kersten fails to translate the abstract concepts of society and polity into subjective course of action types as was demanded by Schutz. The second problem is that he is not able to go beyond Schutz's analysis of the polity. He has actually nothing of substance to say about specific political issues or discourses.

The second proposal by Daniel Cefaï (1999: 138) presents polity as a process, in which the ordinary citizens are trying to overcome cooperation and distribution problems by aligning their schemes of interpretation. By making their schemes compatible, the citizens' motives would become organized through common values and objectives. Cefaï's argument is in several aspects superior to Kersten's. First of all, his reasoning does not contradict the Schutzian approach. Political processes are broken down to subjective course of action types, and it reflects Schutz's emphasis on the importance of the taken-for-granted standards. Furthermore, it is possible to observe such a phenomenon in politics. For example, some workers might be willing to give up their fight for higher wages in a time of a national crisis, because they see themselves as patriots rather than workers. This gives us also an insight in the foundation

of domination and exploitation, without referring to ideological alienation (Cefaï 1999: 148). Domination and exploitation are often accepted, because “power and law have to be taken for granted, if they are to be obeyed.” Only if authority and legitimacy break down, domination and exploitation can be perceived by the actors (Cefaï 1999: 149). The main problem of Cefaï’s proposal is, however, that his argument excludes the analysis of cooperation and distribution problems, because those problems would be “solved” through coordination. But since *not all* political debates are solved through an alignment of schemes of interpretation, his proposal can therefore not be satisfactory.

The third and final proposal, which I am going to discuss, was made by Ilja Srubar, who argues that the political cannot be interpreted as a distinct component of the lifeworld, because “the lifeworld derives its critical and substantiating intention by setting the pre-political ‘natural’ order of the lifeworld in opposition to all other orders” (Srubar 1999: 29). What Srubar implies here is that the “natural” order of the lifeworld is unquestioned and excludes politics, since the “natural” order is pre-political. The Polity would start where the social conditions of intersubjectivity, which are usually taken for granted, become the object of the discussion (Srubar 1999: 41). Whenever the taken-for-granted standards are questioned,

the problem arises of establishing and legitimizing a new definition. The defining power no longer belongs to the scheme of interpretation that is taken for granted, but rather results from the conflict between competing groups. Its establishment requires often a non-symmetrical social relationship between the actors involved. (Srubar 1999: 42)

Srubar’s argument is very similar to Cefaï’s remark that the taken-for-granted authority and legitimacy could break down. However, the questioning of the taken-for-granted would fall outside of the analysis of the political in Cefaï’s proposal, whereas it is the political for Srubar. I agree with Srubar’s definition as the most suitable starting point for a phenomenological approach towards the political. I will call the break down of the taken-for-granted meaning structure in the tradition of Alfred Schutz and more famously Harold Garfinkel a *crisis*.

4. Crisis as the Beginning of Political Discourses

Alfred Schutz defined the situation, in which the taken-for-granted lifeworld is questioned and therefore becomes problematic, as a crisis.

[W]hat has been beyond question so far and remained unquestioned up to now may always be put in question; things taken for granted then become

problematical. This will be the case, for example, if there occurs in the individual or social life an event or situation which cannot be met by applying the traditional and habitual patterns of behaviour or interpretation. We call such a situation a crisis—a partial one if it makes only some elements of the world taken for granted questionable, a total one if it invalidates the whole system of reference, the scheme of interpretation itself. (Schutz 1964: 231)

A crisis is characterized by several aspects. First, something unexpected needs to break the natural attitude. With the annulation of the naturalness of the natural attitude, the actors will suspend the validity-claims, which are usually taken for granted in the lifeworld. This does not necessarily imply that the reality-accent of the lifeworld is immediately renounced. Rather the actors will distance themselves from it for the time being (Schutz/Luckmann 1989: 128). And by stepping outside of this reality of the lifeworld, the actors are able “to ask [themselves] and the world questions that [they] would never think of in the natural attitude” (Schutz/Luckmann 1989: 129). Therefore, in a crisis a shared meaning is not anymore guaranteed. This allows interest groups to push for new (or old) definitions of reality, which are favorable for them. This is what Srubar defined as the political.

It is worth mentioning that this kind of crisis does not need to be a “real” crisis (for example, the outbreak of a war). Nor do all “real” crises automatically question the taken-for-granted lifeworld (for example, global warming happens too slowly in order for us to experience it immediately). A crisis appears, when some members of a social group start to discuss publicly previously taken-for-granted elements of the lifeworld.

The breakdown of the taken-for-granted structure of the lifeworld leads to three problems. The first problem is according to Schutz the question of *how a citizen can form a responsible opinion*. Schutz emphasized that he uses the term “responsible” here not in the sense of policy making, but rather in the context of a layman citizen, who tries to achieve wisdom through evaluation of the reliability of the information at his/her hand (Schutz cited in Embree 1999: 259). In other words, responsibility requires from the citizen a judgement of the truthfulness of the available information. And in order to make such a judgement the citizen would have to actively seek and compare information. Schutz (1999: 291) goes even so far to state that it is a civic duty to refrain from uninformed judgment.

The second problem is for Schutz the question *how the individual citizens’ opinion can be transformed into public opinion*. It is interesting that Schutz contrasts this formulation of the question to the more “common” version of how to manipulate the people (Schutz cited in Embree 1999: 270). He insists that this transformation should be based on a debate-style conversation (Schutz

1999: 294) of individuals in small circles rather than through opinion polls (Schutz cited in Embree 1999: 271; Schutz 1999: 291).

And finally, the third problem was added by Ilja Srubar. He emphasized the question of *how the new opinion can be legitimized*. Since the new opinion is not anymore based on the previous taken-for-grantedness, a legitimation is required, which is going beyond the everyday attitudes (Srubar 1999: 42). Srubar goes here beyond Schutz's second problem, because it is not enough to form a public opinion. The new public opinion needs to get also stabilized. And if the new public opinion would not be challenged, it would become again a taken-for-granted part of the pre-political lifeworld.

Srubar (1999: 43f.) concludes his argument by stating that this phenomenological approach towards politics based on the concept of a crisis offers us the *tools* for "the analysis of political semantics and [...] its discursive genesis." Unfortunately, Srubar does not develop this argument any further. He does not discuss the phenomenological concepts that could be used as the tools for an analysis of political discourses. I will try to do this in the following section.

5. Dimensions of a Phenomenological Analysis of Political Discourses

5.1. Background of the Discourse

The first step in a phenomenological analysis of a political discourse is the analysis of the background of the discourse or the taken-for-granted lifeworld of the actors. A political community can be understood as a "cosmion" that is based on a *central myth* (Embree 2015: 36). The central myth is a scheme of self-interpretation, which defines how the members are seeing themselves in their natural attitude (Schutz 1964: 245). For example, the central myth could contain ideas that characterizes the community as equal in opportunities, as the land of the free, or as racially homogeneous. Furthermore, the background of the discourse is defined by the *cultural patterns of group life*, which include the appropriate rules of the discourse (such as the folkways, mores, laws, habits, customs, etiquette, fashions) and constitute the social group (Schutz 1964: 92). The taken-for-granted cultural patterns usually also include rules for determining political representation (as for example elections) and motivate habitual obedience to the ruler's commands (Embree 2015: 36). The analysis of the background of the discourse is important, because it defines the context. Without this background analysis it would not be possible to understand the part of the taken-for-granted lifeworld, which was made questionable through the crisis.

5.2. Severity of the Crisis

In order to investigate the crisis in the next step I would like to introduce the concept of the severity of the crisis. The severity of the crisis can be analyzed based on four different factors: the cause of the crisis, the directness of the experience, and the extent to which our lifeworld is questioned, and the familiarity with the situation. Let us start with the *cause of the crisis*. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann (1973: 202) state that a crisis could be caused in two different ways. First, a crisis can occur, when an experience does not match any existing type in the stock of knowledge. However, a crisis could also appear, when the experience would match the elements in the stock of knowledge, but the actors lack a sufficient mastery of the situation. An example for the second cause is the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March 2011. The people in Northern Japan had knowledge about earthquakes and tsunamis, but the magnitude of the earthquake was so high that they were vulnerable. However, for the people in Fukushima prefecture the experience of this earthquake might have been even worse, because they had no previous experiences and therefore no course of action types for nuclear power plant meltdowns. I would therefore argue that *the severity of the crisis increases, if the crisis is caused not only by a lack of mastery but also by a lack of a matching course of action type*. I am assuming here that in the case of a lack of a matching course of action type also strategies for solving the situation are not available.

Regarding the *directness of the experience*, the second factor, Alfred Schutz (1967) made an important distinction between *Umwelt* (face-to-face relationship) and *Mitwelt* (world of contemporaries). In the *Umwelt*, I can directly interact with an alter ego in space and time. We can grow older together. The experience is obviously very intense. On the other hand, I can also interact with people in the *Mitwelt*. The *Mitwelt* is characterized by a reduction of the amount of information available in the interaction. For example, the amount of information decreases from a face-to-face conversation, a telephone call, an exchange of letters, to a message through a third person (Schutz 1967: 177). I would expect *the crisis to be more severe, the more direct the situation was, in which the experience was made*.

The third factor is the *extent to which our lifeworld is questioned*. According to Schutz a crisis, which challenged only some elements of the taken-for-granted stock of knowledge, is called a partial crisis. On the other hand, a total crisis would invalidate the whole system of reference (Schutz 1964: 231). The central myths of the group and the cultural patterns of group life would become questionable. A total crisis threatens the ability of the members of the group to interact with each other, because the taken-for-granted elements of the lifeworld are the necessary foundation for a meaningful communication.

Obviously, *the more elements of the lifeworld are questioned, the more severe the crisis will be.*

The last factor refers to the *familiarity with the situation*. Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann (1973: 191) stated that actors in familiar situations will be less attentive to the situation, because they will assume that everything will be as usual. Not all elements of the situation are investigated. Instead most of the elements will be routinely interpreted.

If the man enters a ship's cabin, the type 'cabin' is completely compatible with the type 'coiled rope.' The experience 'object-in-this-cabin's corner' can with high credibility be interpreted as a 'coiled rope,' namely, as a 'coiled-rope-in-the-cabin.' The man in the example often may have had such experiences and may be quite familiar with them. In this case it is even very probable that the object in the corner, even if it could not be unequivocally determined in the first perception (as was also the case for the other objects in the room), would be experienced through routine coincidence. (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 203f.)

On the other hand, actors, who are unfamiliar with a situation, are from the beginning more willing to investigate the different elements of the situation. And because of their explorative attitude, they will be less likely shocked, if an element turns out to be different to their expectation. Therefore, I argue that *the more familiar a situation is, the more severe the crisis will be.* This statement allows us some interesting conclusions. A crisis will have a bigger impact on people, who are most familiar with or better who are the experts in a specific situation. And since the experts are more affected by a crisis, they actually have a stronger interest in preserving the taken-for-granted views. In other words, we can expect experts to be more conservative.

Furthermore, I believe that the *severity of the crisis will have an impact on our motivation to deal with the new situation.* It might be possible to ignore a small partial crisis, but a larger crisis will force us to adjust our scheme of interpretation. This can be done either by adjusting the existing course of action type for the situation or by creating a new course of action type for this new (exceptional) experience, which would leave the old course of action type for the (standard) situation intact. Obviously, a severe total crisis, which cannot be ignored, would require from us a massive reconstruction of our system of relevance.

5.3. Level of Expertise of the Participants in the Discourse

The next element in the phenomenological tool box is Alfred Schutz's classification of the level of the participants' expertise. He distinguishes three types of participants: the man in the street, the well-informed citizen, and the expert (Schutz 1999: 291f.). The *(wo)man in the street* is only concerned about

those things, which have a direct impact on him/her. He/she knows where to find experts as for example doctors or teachers, whenever he/she requires the help of those experts. But he/she has no interest in acquiring any further knowledge about how those things, which affect him, work. Instead he/she feels comfortable to live in the taken-for-granted lifeworld as long as possible.

The *well-informed citizen*, on the other hand, understands that his/her life could be affected by events, which are not directly related to him as for example a change of the interest rate by the Federal Reserve or a war in the Middle East. He/she might not have any personal interest in following the news about those events. But he/she rather wants to be sufficiently informed about those developments, because the consequences of those events could be relevant for him/her. And the possibility to influence the course of events, motivates the citizen to stay informed.

Finally, the *expert* is a person, who is trained in a particular discipline or field. He/she interprets things and events based on this knowledge. However, he/she disregards those aspects, which are not relevant in his/her specialty's scheme of interpretation. Despite our expectation that the expert knows everything, he/she has actually a quite limited perception of the problem, *because* he/she was trained in a particular discipline or field (Schutz 1999: 291f.). But although they do not know everything, they still "claim to know the ultimate significance of what everybody knows and does" (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 117). Experts from different areas compete with each other for the right to determine this ultimate significance. Furthermore, successful communications between competing experts can be rarely achieved, because their schemes of relevance exclude each other.

I would like to add another dimension to this classification, which was not mentioned by Alfred Schutz, but which becomes important in our digital age, where many interactions happen in the anonymity of the Internet: the distinction between an *authentic* and a *fake person*. The fake person is a participant in a discourse, who pretends to be somebody, who he/she is not. For example, an expert pretends to be a (wo)man in the street in order to influence the audience. This person might have extensive knowledge of a problem, but plays to be ignorant, because he/she wants to manipulate the other participants. Fake personalities can be identified, if the person in question has knowledge, which he/she should not have, or does not have knowledge, which he/she should have. On the other hand, an authentic person, would be an actor, who does not pretend to be somebody else.

5.4. Source of the Information

The investigation of the source of the information in a discourse can be approached in two fundamentally different ways, which in my opinion

complement each other well. The first approach goes back to Alfred Schutz's classification of *five sources of information and their distortions*: the eye witness, the insider, the reporter, the analyst, and the commentator. Even if all of these actors would be completely honest, they would still produce a limited account of the reality. The information provided by the *eye witness* has the advantage that it is a report of immediate experiences. However, the disadvantage is that he/she perceived the situation through his/her scheme of relevance, which might have been one-sided and inadequate for an understanding of the problem, and highlights only specific aspects of the total situation (Schutz 1999: 293). The quality of the information would depend on the level of expertise of the eye witness.

In contrast, the *insider* – as an expert – has a much better understanding of the relevant aspects of the total situation. But he/she might censor the information, which he/she reveals to the public. The insider might only provide the information, which his/her organization wants the public to know. He/she will usually exclude classified information or business secrets (Schutz 1999: 293; cf. Embree 1999: 268). If he/she would leak those secret and potentially damaging information of his/her organization, he/she would be a *whistleblower*.

On the other hand, the *reporter* does normally not rely on his/her personal experiences. His/her second-hand knowledge is derived either from the eye witness or the insider. It is only derived, because the reporter will select only those aspects of their reports, which he/she regards as newsworthy, and ignores other aspects with less value for the customers (Schutz 1999: 293; cf. Embree 1999: 268). It is important to realize here that the consumers of the news are not the only customers nor are they the most important customers. Most media companies receive more money from advertisers than from their readers. The consumers of the news are only insofar relevant as more readers will attract more advertisers. As a result, reporters will avoid controversial or nonconformist opinions, because they could alienate the advertisers (Lasswell/Schutz 1999: 306).

The *analyst* relies on the information provided by the eye witness, the insider, and the reporter. He/she selects and emphasizes those elements, which are based on his scheme of relevance important. The problem is that his/her scheme of relevance “does not necessarily coincide with that of the information seeking citizen” (Schutz 1999: 293), especially if he/she is a trained expert in a particular discipline or field.

Finally, the *commentator*, which could be for example an editorialist or a columnist, tries to see the big picture by connecting the information at hand to other facts or events and to predict possible consequences. He/she is the expert prophet, who possesses “knowledge of otherwise unknown facts (‘behind the news’)” (Schutz 1999: 293).

The second approach to an investigation of the source of information is based on Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's (1966: 116) statement that

reality is socially defined by concrete individuals or groups of individuals, and therefore an analysis of the socially constructed universe should not stop with the question "What?" but should always include the question "*Says who?*" Thus far, we assumed that the providers of the information would be honest, but we have no guarantee for this. By identifying the source of the information, it becomes possible to reconstruct the motives of this particular person or interest group. The motives can help us to understand why the information was framed in a specific way. The reliability of the information or the sincerity of the sources can be questioned, if conflicts of interests were present. For example, should we believe an eye witness, who accuses somebody of a crime, but who also would gain significantly, if the accused would be found guilty? Berger and Luckmann (1966: 123) called such information, which are based on concrete interests, ideological.

Berger and Luckmann argue further that most of the information available is distorted consciously by the people in power. "Those who occupy the decisive power positions are ready to use their power to impose the traditional definitions of reality on the population under their authority" (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 121). But since we are not anymore aware of the original reasons for creating specific institutions in the past, the people in power need to legitimize the traditional world view through other means (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 61f.). These other means are usually the central myth and the cultural patterns of group life.

The same story, so to speak, must be told to all the children. It follows that the expanding canopy of legitimation, stretching over it a protective cover of both cognitive and normative interpretation. (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 62)

The central myth and the cultural patterns of group life are

socially objectivated *as* knowledge, that is, as a body of generally valid truths about reality, any radical deviance from the institutional order appears as a departure from reality. Such deviance may be designated as moral depravity, mental disease, or just plain ignorance. (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 65f.)

The concrete content of this socially objectivated knowledge does not need to be functionally appropriate. There is no reason to believe that institutional settings, which are meaningful in a hunting society, could not be a relevant part of a central myth of an agricultural society (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 71). But, of course, since the central myth is an invented tradition, it could also completely break with the original reasoning *without* changing the institutional setting itself (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 69).

5.5. Discourse Strategies of the Informants and Participants

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann also developed a typology of discourse strategies that can be applied by both informants and participants. The aim of these strategies is to challenge deviant or opposing definitions of reality. They call the first strategy *therapy*. Therapy describes an attempt to force deviants to stay inside the taken-for-granted and approved lifeworld (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 112f.). For example, somebody who questioned the commonly accepted reality can be put in his/her place again by calling him/her a conspiracy theorist. The threat is neutralized by accusing the opponent to be crazy. He/she would require a therapy (he/she needs to admit that the taken-for-granted lifeworld is in fact real) in order to get healthy again and to be released. Therapy mainly targets the actual or potential deviant. The deviant cannot be left alone, because his/her behavior challenges the societal reality of the other members of the group (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 113).

The second strategy is *nihilation*. The aim of nihilation is not to keep everybody inside the taken-for-granted lifeworld as it was the case with therapy, but to deny everything outside of the socially accepted lifeworld. Nihilation negates definitions of reality, which do not match the own scheme of interpretation (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 114). This is achieved by claiming that the deviant ideas have an inferior ontological status, and therefore do not need to be taken seriously. For example, we should ignore what our neighbors are doing, because they are only an uncivilized tribe of barbarians (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 115). In contrast to therapy, nihilation targets the conforming members and not the deviants. The goal is to make sure that the conformists stay unaffected by the questioning of their lifeworld.

The last strategy is *apologetics*. Instead of liquidating the heresy directly as in previous strategy, apologetics tries to incorporate the deviant definition of reality into one own's scheme of interpretation, and thereby negating them ultimately (Berger/Luckmann 1966: 115). For example, neo-classical economics reacted to the Marxist criticism that capitalism lacks freedom with a redefinition of the term freedom. The freedom to do whatever somebody wants to do (which obviously requires enough money and time for everybody) became the freedom to make contracts. Equality was a prerequisite for freedom in the Marxist definition. Now equality turns into a threat to freedom, because people would not anymore be allowed to make unequal contracts.

All three strategies can be applied in situations where the taken-for-granted lifeworld is questioned by somebody. Here the aim is to prevent a crisis from happening or from escalating. But those strategies can also be used in situations where the taken-for-granted scheme of interpretation has collapsed as a result of a severe crisis. In this case, the goal would become to legitimize one of the competing new definitions of reality.

5.6. Credibility of Arguments

The last phenomenological tool for a discourse analysis is the concept of credibility of arguments. This concept helps us to understand which definitions of reality the participants (or the audience) in the discourse are accepting as truth. And it might come as a shock for some people, but the credibility of an argument has nothing to do with the strength of the argument in itself. The credibility of an argument depends on how much it matches someone's knowledge and the credibility of this knowledge. And the credibility of the knowledge depends on how it was acquired (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 163). The problem of credibility therefore refers to the past experiences rather than the actual experiences.

The problem here differs from the previously discussed 5.4. Source of the Information, in which I have discussed questions of reliability and sincerity, insofar as I have focused in 5.4. on the researcher's analysis of the available information, whereas the topic here shifts to the researcher's analysis of the everyday actor's judgment of the information.

Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann argue that the credibility of an element in our stock of knowledge increases with the extent of our conscious focus on this element in the moment it was experienced. The lowest credibility has an un-explicated experience, which was taken for granted without further questioning (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 159). The credibility increases, if an experienced element would provisionally match other elements of the stock of knowledge, but would not be brought into question. For example, I hear thunder on a sunny day, but I do not investigate this phenomenon any further, because I am too busy with other things (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 160). The credibility would increase again, if the element was brought into question, but no alternatives were formed (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 161). For example, I might have been concerned about a thunder storm, but my attention wanders off before I could determine alternatives. The next level of credibility would be achieved, if alternatives were formed, but no decision was made, because of a lack of experience (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 162). For example, I could have considered the sound that I have heard to be caused by a coming thunder storm or by a barrel rolling down a street. And finally, the highest credibility would have an element, which was the result of a choice between different alternatives (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 162).

This concept of the credibility of arguments explains why therapy, nihilism and apologetics are such important discourse strategies. All three strategies bring deviant ideas into question. But they do it in a biased way, so that the audience has no problem to choose between one favorable and one unfavorable alternative even with very limited experience with the issue at hand. Do you want to be crazy, or do you want to be healed? Do you want to be a barbarian,

or do you want to be civilized? Do you want to destroy freedom through equality, or do you want to be free (to sign unequal contracts)? All three strategies lead to simple choices, which become highly credible elements of our stock of knowledge, because a decision was made between alternatives. We will in the future judge any claims in a discourse against our credible stock of knowledge. We become vaccinated against future deviant attempts to question our taken-for-granted lifeworld. These strategies program us to be immune against an outbreak of a crisis. But if we do not react anymore to a crisis, we lose our ability to participate in politics, since the crisis is the political. As a result, we turn into the apolitical (wo)man in the street.

6. Conclusion

The argument started with a critique of phenomenological sociology that it can explain coordination problems, but fails to add anything to the much more sophisticated explanation of distribution and cooperation problems in economics and rational choice theory. And since political problems are mostly about distribution and cooperation problems, phenomenological sociology would not be able to describe political processes. However, I have shown that this critique is not justified. Alfred Schutz developed a deep theoretical framework with a motive analysis, which does not exclude in-order-to motives. As a result, phenomenological sociology can in principle as well as economics and rational choice theory explain distribution and cooperation problems, although this was not done in the past by phenomenologists.

A discussion of previous phenomenological attempts to deal with politics identified in the concept of crisis as an appropriate starting point for the explanation of political problems. The last part provided a list of tools, which could constitute a unique phenomenological approach towards a political discourse analysis. The tools themselves were not invented by me. They were taken from previous phenomenological works or the related sociology of knowledge (Berger and Luckmann). New is only that they were brought the first time together into a coherent way for the purpose of dealing with political debates in a phenomenological framework. And in my opinion, the discussion of these tools has shown that this phenomenological discourse analysis can provide insights, which cannot be achieved with other approaches.

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