

DEPERSONALIZATION: A BASIS FOR
THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

BY

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ABSTRACT

What follows is an inquiry into science via an analysis of certain concrete occurrences, situated in both a medical and academic setting. The analysis allows me to explore the distinction between individual experience and collective experience or unified experience. And more specifically, it allows me to inquire into science as grounded in the ideal of unified experience.

The concrete happenings cover-over necessary conventions, conventions which can be detected via a consideration of such themes as: The Subjectivity-Objectivity Distinction: A Call for Unified Experience; Authority: A Function of Group Membership; Criticism: A Function of Group Membership; and Research Requirements: A Call for Unified Experience. To organize discussion about the occurrences in this way, allows me to reveal the achieved character of the occurrences; it makes thematic what is assumed concretely.

Chapter One focuses on the inattentiveness of a nurse as an occasion to recognize the subjectivity-objectivity distinction. The distinction reflects the separation of adequate from inadequate speech. Adequate speech is within the legitimate frame of scientific speech and requires the unification of the structure of experience.

Chapter Two focuses on an instance of layman speech which

is couched in the scientific mode but dismissed as invalid. Authoritative speech within medicine is a function of the speaker rather than the nature of the speech. We see that membership within the medical community is important in how statements are perceived and in whether speech is considered authoritative.

Chapter Three further considers the importance of membership as a basis for "serious" speech. The possibility of distinguishing serious from non-serious speech introduces the possibility of criticism. We see that criticism becomes restricted to members, and functions in preserving community. It is a method of making reference to the authority of the community.

The final chapter deals with research requirements as another instance in which the unification of the structure of experience is required. Reviewing the literature is considered as a research requirement which preserves the relevance of problems for community members. So the very existence of a literature review serves to remind us that our problematic must be communally problematic.

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INTRODUCTION

It is when we find ourselves facing a group or community that we become aware of the existence of a larger concern than that of one individual for another. It is when we hear such remarks as: "That's the way the system works", "I don't make the rules", "That's not sociology", "You're not a doctor", that we become aware of a concern for the very preservation of community. It is through such remarks that we hear the voice of a particular vision of reality; a voice which informs us as to the way things 'really' are, and hence a voice suggesting law. It is a voice responsible for a history of heresies, as it bears witness to our intolerance of different fundamental structures of experience. It is the voice of consensus, and concern for community; a voice which makes certain claims to what 'is' and what 'is not'.

It has been noticed by many social theorists that the accent of reality (social reality) are given to those experiences which are beyond the individual, i.e., general, collective experiences.¹ But as reality is attributed to aspects of experience which are collective, this occurs at the expense of other aspects: those which are individual. By pointing to the distinction between individual

¹Among those who have suggested this, are such writers as: E. Durkheim, T. Kuhn, A. Schutz, P. Berger, and S. Freud.

experience and collective experience, we establish domains where the different versions of reality can be addressed. But what of the tension between these domains? Simmel (1950) has suggested that the essential feature of human life is precisely this tension between the individual and the group. The distinction between individual experience and collective experience can be localized in terms of their prominence in different situations. For example, the condition of being a hospital patient is one which represents individual experience. The patient is concerned for his personal recovery, and not for the preservation of a community. On the other hand, the scientist, as an ideal type construct, is involved in a practice which is said to exclude personal interest. The priority of individual lived experience is relegated to the background. Science stresses the significance of de-personalized or collective experience. In science general or law-like experience takes on the force of reality, and is perceived as 'real' while those of other kinds are seen as 'unreal'. The concern of one individual for another becomes overshadowed by a concern for membership within a community, as well as one's faithfulness to it. This replacement can be a source of anxiety for the individual. Every actual "fulfillment of relation between men means acceptance of others" (Buber, 1970:69). What happens to the status of a person when one's concern is for preserving the unity of community? The personal becomes uninteresting. It is relevant only in so far as it secures community. If what guides one's attention is a

concern for membership, then the individual as individual becomes overshadowed. Personal qualities become a burden in dealing with others. The life between person and person appears to be retreating in the face of the collective. This is nowhere better manifested than in the tension between an individual who cares for the other as a person, and the collective which is indifferent to everything personal. This conflict is a source of anxiety, the appeasement of which serves to produce the relevance of this discussion.

What follows is an analysis of certain tension laden situations;² situations which relate to the tension between the individual and the group and more particularly, the tension between the individual and the scientific community. I wish to suggest that a community such as the scientific community, values a certain way of relating, which in turn, presumes a certain relationship to our experiences. By focusing on those situations in which individual concerns conflict with a collective's conception of reality, I hope to expose their respective "forms of life".³

In this inquiry I will explore the distinction between individual experience and general experience or experience-under-law, by examining examples of it. This distinction can be stated

²According to Kierkegaard, a 'situation' has to do with a certain stage in a life-journey, filled with circumstance and other people, which is brought to the focus of that person's care and concern.

³My reference "form of life" relies upon Ludwig Wittgenstein's similar usage. For clarification see his Philosophical Investigation, trans. G.F.M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1968), p.8 and p.11.

as a distinction between those experiences which are externalized by science (collective experience), and those which orient directly toward the continuous awareness of one's own existence (individual experience). This thesis treats individual experience and collective experience as a topic of empirical inquiry by analyzing actual concrete happenings. Hence it is tied to the author's personal experiences of life, and is not removed from human concerns.⁴

This inquiry reflects the author's personal experiences with the scientific community. And these experiences occur within both, an academic and medical setting. Experiences in a hospital and university, provide me with the opportunity to address the analytic features of scientific practice. It provides a way of exploring the social character of scientific practice. This inquiry can be seen as an exploration into science as it is encountered in a hospital and university. Through an analysis of actual occurrences, the social character of this scientific world can be addressed. I hope to display its visibility via a consideration of such themes as:

- I The Subjectivity-Objectivity Distinction: A Call for Unified Experience
- II Authority: A Function of Group Membership
- III Criticism: A Function of Group Membership
- IV Research Requirements: A Call for Unified Experience

⁴Here, personal experiences have unity with the experiences of others in so far as we feel the tension between the individual and the group.

Each theme is a way of talking about the concrete occurrences such that the reader can see those occurrences in some grounded way. To locate each theme, is not to find anything but to reveal the necessary conventions prefigured by the concrete occurrences.⁵ We will see that each actual occurrence represents an occasion of collectibility, and unity; how human beings show themselves and at the same time conceal themselves. Each, is a way of talking about the problem of reality. And each serves to emphasize that reality is brought into being by human activity, and hence stands in vivid contrast to the belief that reality is 'there' to begin with. Each theme shows that 'reality', that which exists or simply 'is', is a matter of convention. The rules are more or less arbitrary, and have been collectively agreed upon.

To suggest that reality is socially organized, introduces the idea of competing versions of reality. It introduces the awareness that things could be otherwise; that our view of the world is actually one among many. Yet the possibility of legitimating one distinctive view of the world over another has appeared, so as to allow us to act 'as if' things were real. The selection process is invested with an air of mystification, to use Berger's terms. "Let the institutional order be so interpreted as to hide,

⁵In the language of Goffman, each theme is a way of seeing the "frame" of each actual occurrence. "Frames" refer to the belief that "definitions of situations are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events and our subjective involvement in them" (1974:10).

as much as possible, its constructed character" (Berger, 1967:33). The one selected view of the world is seen, in practice, as the only possible view of the world; and hence is identified with the 'real' world. It seems that our sense of reality rests on the absence of alternatives. Other competing views are therefore discredited, and invalidated.

Nothing has greater discrediting power today, than the demonstration that a given assertion has been scientifically disproven. By showing that an assertion is scientifically disproven, we show that it is unreliable, since reliable knowledge is associated with scientific knowledge. As Roszak (1968:208) says:

... reliable knowledge is knowledge that is scientifically sound, since science is that to which modern man refers for the definitive explication of reality ... Scientific knowledge is not just feeling or speculation or subjective ruminating. It is a verifiable description of reality that exists independent of any personal considerations.

A scientist, or expert, is one who 'really' knows what is what, because of his specific way of knowing, since whatever flows from this way of knowing qualifies as knowledge, and nothing else.

It seems that in our present historical period, society has invested a sense of meaningfulness and value into the scientific way of knowing. Today, all areas of specialization strive to become scientific. And because the 'experts' know and we, as laymen, do not, we seek their guidance. Science insists that it alone has a monopoly on the methods of finding out what is true and what is false;

what is real and what illusory.

Scientists try to mask the nature of their decisions with an air of legitimacy and validity. But science's rules, concerning what is 'real' and what is not, what is 'true' and what is 'false', are matters of human decisions.⁶ These decisions reveal much about a certain tradition or form of life. What's 'real' depends on the lives we lead. However, within this scientific tradition lies a particular ontological stance. Roszak (1968:222-23) expresses it well in the following passage:

I can perceive no more than your behavioral facade. I can grant you no more reality or psychic coherence than this perception allows. I shall observe this behavior of yours and record it. I shall not enter into your life, your task, your condition of existence. Do not turn to me or appeal to me or ask me to become involved with you. I am here only as a temporary observer ... I assume that I can adequately understand what you are doing or intending without entering wholly into your life. I am not particularly interested in what you uniquely are; I am interested only in the general pattern to which you conform.

This stance places the accent of reality not on individual experience, but on law-like experience or unified experience; and holds unified experience as the standard of intelligibility. The inquirer is not an

⁶Although scientists may be aware of the arbitrary nature of their conceptual framework, as Feysabend suggests in his article "Against Method: An Outline of an Anarchistic Theory of Knowledge", the doing of science still requires an unquestioned conceptual framework. That is, in order to engage in the practice of solving scientific problems, scientists behave as if their theoretical framework was non-arbitrary.

author but a messenger of nature. He is not responsible for originating the word but only for transmitting it. An adequate messenger reports or passes on nature's speech without altering it. Scientific speech, then, is speech which issues from nature, from that which is independent and external to the inquirer. This inquiry attempts to formulate the social character of this tradition via an analysis of certain tension laden occurrences.

Treatment of the Topic

Treatment of the topic reflects the belief that living and learning are inseparable activities. The topic becomes formulated via an inquiry into actual concrete occurrences, which are situated in a hospital and university setting. It is only upon finding myself within tension laden situations, does the problem of rendering intelligible that which is taken for real, become pressing. We must experience social reality as a problem before we can formulate it. Only upon feeling anxious while involved in particular happenings in the hospital and university, is there a need for attention. Attending to problems stem from individual lived experiences. We come to understand our predicament in the mood that Heidegger calls 'anxiety', which presupposes involvement. What one understands (formulates) then becomes a matter of reflective inquiry, or regression.

Therefore it must be mentioned at the outset, that while this discussion is an inquiry into science, it is not a scientific inquiry.

Scientific work does not require individual anxiety or personal (personalized) involvement but quite the contrary. Science operates with anonymity as a standard. That is, scientific inquiry requires that we be detached from personal experience, so as to share in the externalized collectivity. This discussion then, is unscientific, in so far as science suggests a mode of existence devoid of personal involvement and human anxiety.

Scientific inquiry requires we move forward, not backward. We must progress, not regress. This is made possible given our methodological security. So long as we feel secure in our ways of establishing 'sight', in our activities of proving, then we have some standard for the recognition of knowledge. This concern is expressed in the separation of theory and methods, which reflects the conventional and authoritative belief in a distinction between our activities of speculating and our activities of proving. Conventional usage considers theory as mere speculation; theory must be either verified or refuted via some testing procedure. The testing procedures or methods are our activities of proving which allow us to accumulate knowledge. This presumes security in our methods which is absent in our theories. And the security is possible so long as we selectively forget that proof itself depends upon theories of how to prove things. Our activities of proving becomes the consensually validated route to knowledge, and the possibility of consensually validating knowledge gives us confidence in our activities of proving.

The history of sociology clearly preserves different conceptions of the social world, each with its own methodological implications. For example, compare the Durkheimian tradition with the Weberian. Durkheim suggested that social facts can be viewed as things for the purpose of sociological analysis, and the investigator should examine them from the perspective of an investigator of nature. Weber suggested that the social world is 'meaningful', and that the researcher should examine it from the perspective of those being studied. In both cases verifiable knowledge has to do with knowledge which others can independently arrive at. And one's perception of verifiable knowledge depends upon one's security in the activities of proving. It depends upon equalized experience.

Although we are encouraged to believe that there are different ways of proceeding, as is seen in the possibility of utilizing a variety of research techniques, proceeding means moving forward. Our community believes it is important to encourage an appreciation, in the graduate student, of the greatest possible range of research techniques (Kaplan, 1964). This suggestion would appear to encourage differences. That is, we are sometimes told that as investigators we can use qualitative methodology or quantitative methodology depending upon our conception of social reality (Filstead, 1970). But in both cases, our methodology allows us to move forward or proceed via an accumulation of knowledge. And the accumulation of information must always presume unquestioned methods of accumulation. Our methods of accumulation (research techniques)

result in verified knowledge, which serve as building blocks for science's progressive movement forward. A movement forward is a movement ahead, a progression. Says Blum (1974:247):

Positivism is the decisive moving forward of a discipline march, it neither moves backward nor circles repetitively around its origin, but moves ahead. The positivity of positivism lies in its ability and in its desire to move ahead and it moves ahead by laying down a path for itself.

And no matter whether we use quantitative or qualitative methodology, we require a secure starting point from which to proceed, or move. Our community provides this security in establishing, in advance, what knowledge looks like. We feel secure in our activities of proving. By establishing a beginning from which direction will follow we negate alternative beginnings.

A direction is an authorial conception of what needs to be seen as 'fact'. But how does this direction come to be established? The direction points to a collective who decides to limit their speech. To set a direction is a recognition that our work can never start unless we limit our concern to what is at hand; unless we agree to begin within limits. Blum (1974:248) writes:

Without a positive spirit towards one's speech, there is wavering and delay; nothing moves ahead, no work gets done. It is only by the positive acceptance of the authority of the beginning that one moves ahead, that work gets done, that results appear.

And a recognition of limits is observable in one's faithfully

following the route layed out in advance. To establish, in advance a way of 'searching' is to reconstruct the many ways (beliefs) into the way of finding (knowledge). It is to establish authority for oneself, and silence the visibility of alternative possibilities.

Science seems to be concerned with making the world intelligible, and secures this project by pre-establishing categories of intelligibility. Investigation of the world remains unproblematic so long as our methods remain unquestioned. We feel methodologically aware as we have pre-established a path in advance. By establishing a path or method we guarantee scientific knowledge. In stipulating the criteria and following them, we achieve our end. But knowledge of what? If we set up a way of knowing which gives us certain knowledge, then it becomes a matter of mechanically following the rules we've constructed. What we've done, is to stipulate how the phenomenon will appear for others in the community, so that together, we can have 'knowledge' of it. We predetermine boundaries, to tell us what we see. We set out, in advance, a route which we go about following; we set out a way of seeing so we'll know what we see.

To set a method in advance is like categorizing the world in advance. To categorize helps us to know, and once we have knowledge we needn't take a second look; we needn't re-search. Perhaps we should be suspicious of 'knowing' too quickly.

An alternative to this form of inquiry is an inquiry in which we become methodologically aware as the result of a backward gaze. Instead of pre-establishing in advance our way of rendering something

intelligible (method) we discover it by looking back. We first feel confident in the intelligibility of something, and only then reflect on how we got there.

One who sets a path in advance and then proceeds to follow it seems to be involved in another question than the one who finds his path after reaching his destination. The first can be heard as saying: "I want to go there, and this is the way to go." The other says: "I'm here," and asks, "How did I get here?" They seem to be in different worlds. The difference can be observed in the consideration given Georg Simmel by the sociological community.⁷ The sociological community viewed Simmel's work as contemptible in so far as it lacked a methodological system. The doing of science as seen by the sociological community required a 'disciplined' form of inquiry; hence Simmel fails to be seen as scientific. The community has epistemological certainty given a pre-established way of knowing (method). Scientific knowledge is obtainable by virtue of following the scientific method. We can recognize 'knowledge' as we have pre-determined its nature. Against this background Simmel appears 'undisciplined', as he isn't ruled by a concern for method. His methods of investigation are not imposed beforehand. He grasps the intelligibility of a situation and, via reflection, becomes conscious of his method of rendering it intelligible. In other

⁷For further details as to Simmel's position in relation to the sociological community, consult C.D. Axelrod, "Toward an Appreciation of Simmel's Fragmentary Style", The Sociological Quarterly, 1977, pp. 185-196.

words, he recognizes that he is already somewhere, but how he got there is uncertain, and therefore, of analytic concern.

The process of this inquiry is not guided by a concern for method, but by a concern for understanding what is actually experienced. Method would not rule the work, but the work would rule one's method. Husserl (1965:102) says: "True method follows the nature of the things to be investigated and not our prejudices and preconceptions." He criticizes psychology for having adopted the methods of natural science, for in doing so it has given a "content that is not simply taken from what is actually given in experience but is applied to the latter" (Husserl, 1965:101). "It (psychology) has not considered what lies in the 'sense' of psychological experience and what 'demands' (in the sense of the psychical) of itself makes on method" (Husserl, 1965:102). What is suggested is that inquiry is not imposed from without but is derived from and grounded in the things themselves to be studied.

The determination of evidence requires us to go to the thing about which a claim is made. To check the evidence is to turn to the things themselves. If evidence is a matter of turning to the affairs in question regarding a specific claim, then it will differ with each particular kind of affair. What we count as evidence is not pre-determined before approaching the thing to be studied. Husserl's dictum "back-to-the-things-themselves" suggests we focus on our immediate experience as we live it. It calls us to return to the phenomenon as given in immediate experience.