

*Phenomenological Analysis of Symbol in Alfred Schutz's
Views¹*

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Abstract

Symbol is one of the terms that has been translated into different words in the humanities field. Nöth (1990) divides the topics related to the symbol into two groups. In the first group, symbol is used in the general sense, and there is essentially no distinction between symbol and sign. But in the second group, symbol is used in its specific sense and consists of three different views (see Nöth, 1990; 115).

It is interesting to note that, despite the fact that there are independent studies that have examined symbol from the perspective of different approaches; however, symbol has not been examined from the phenomenological perspective.

Accordingly, the present study is designed to analyze the phenomenological foundations of the symbol. For this reason, we examine the phenomenological foundations of the symbol from the perspective of Alfred Schutz. In this research, it is determined whether it is possible to state that there is no clear distinction between the sign and the symbol in

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the phenomenological view of phenomenologists like Jaspers. In response to this question, the primary hypothesis of this study is that Schutz's phenomenological study of symbol is of particular importance and deserves to be examined independently, and that Schutz's analysis does not support this claim. From the perspective of phenomenology, symbol is considered in its general sense, and in fact phenomenology has its own specific theoretical assumptions and consequences regarding the concept of symbol.

Before scrutinizing symbol, it is important to remember that phenomenology has a particular view in respect of intersubjective relationship, and its significance in establishing human understanding. Indeed, man's presence in the universe and also his social status is considered to be a definite and pre-fabricated position in phenomenology. Therefore, one may wonder whether a human being is completely passive in confronting the world or not? In response to this question, Schutz emphasizes that a person as a social human being faces *the other* through two different existential levels. In fact, "*the other is from the outset given to me as both a material object with its position in space and a subject with its psychological life*" (Schutz, 1962; 314). Obviously, when one's consciousness focuses on a material object, the explanation of the understanding or the interpretation of the object is not a difficult issue. But how does this object along with its mental life enter into one's consciousness? Answering this question, Schutz resorted to Husserl's discussion of representation. Husserl believes that representation is the "fundamental consciousness process" through which a man shapes his understanding of the world (Herder, 2014; 245).

Schutz (year?) tries to find on what level the knowledge experience is in general represented. Therefore, focusing on the formation of sign in its subjective level and also its intersubjective nature, Schutz (year?) in his semiotic contemplations generally talks about four different types of signs: signal, marker, sign and symbol. Schutz's phenomenological

viewpoint about symbol indicates that symbol is not at all a general term that is equivalent to sign, but essentially differs from it. In fact, based on the analysis given by Schutz (1962), symbol is one of the forms of representation that has its own particular characteristics. In this way, Schutz (1962) defines symbol as:

- 1- The symbol is basically formed when the represented item is of a superior position in comparison with common objects.
- 2- A phenomenon which, according to Schutz, goes beyond usual experience, eventually finds material indication through incarnation and objectification.
- 3- From the point of view of Schutz, the embodiment of a phenomenon in the form of a symbol shows that there is no other way to represent that phenomenon except for representation through a symbol.
- 4- The semiotic principles governing sign are all applied to the symbol, and therefore the interpretation of symbol entails change, difficulty and ambiguity.

Thus, according to the arguments discussed in this study, it is indicated that the proposed hypothesis of the study is finally confirmed, and Schutz has a special theoretical framework in this regard. It is concluded that Schutz's theory entails that symbol should be fundamentally distinctive from sign.

Keywords

Symbol, Phenomenological Analysis, Alfred Schutz, Consciousness, Inter-subjectivity, Appresentation