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Religion and Humor as Emancipating Provinces of Meaning

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For I, except You enthrall me, never shall be free

John Donne, *Holy Sonnets 14*
For Lester Embree and Ollie and Shiloh Roundtree

Preface

To suggest that one can find in Alfred Schutz's philosophical writings a concern for human emancipation might strike one as an unconventional claim. For many of his best readers, he was up to other tasks, more fittingly described as epistemological in a very broad sense: demarcating the place of the sciences with reference to each other within the scaffolding of a complex *Wissenschaftslehre*, providing a philosophical foundation for the social sciences, or making available useful tools for the analysis of art, literature, politics, human creativity, semiotics, symbol theory, communication, economics, the information society, or whatever topic might serve as an intersection point in which one's expertise, intellectual interests, and Schutz's writings converge. In addition, to claim that Schutz was interested in such a value--directed ideal as human emancipation seems to run contrary to the Schutz known especially through interchanges with his intellectual associates. After all, how should we envision Schutz as interested in human emancipation when he seemed to share the conviction of many in the Austrian Economic School that reason should be understood as instrumental, explaining means to ends, without entering into normative debates about what ends one ought to adopt? In addition, Eric Voegelin thought that Schutz was entirely too reticent about his ultimate values, relying on his description of a generalized relevance scheme that could accommodate a wide diversity of possible relevance rankings without committing himself to what he took to be the *right* relevance ranking or the *right* ethical standpoint. Finally, Aron Gurwitsch, at least indirectly, challenged Schutz's treatment of the stranger as too focused on trivial recipes for action that help individuals adapt to society instead of on the nobler Husserlian project of being accountable to rational standards and challenging contemporary nihilism. Indeed, Gurwitsch insisted on holding human society responsible to such standards so that the massive catastrophe that was taking place in Europe and that had made Schutz, him, and their friends strangers might never happen again. This book will try to illustrate the potential for human emancipation that can be discerned in Schutz's works, but it will no doubt also be elucidating, on the basis of Schutz's writings, an understanding of emancipation that Schutz himself might not have shared if it were proposed to him. Consequently, the

development of the position that religion and humor can emancipate us from the imperatives of pragmatic everyday life represents the position of the author of this book.

The place in which I will locate this view of human emancipation lies in his theory of multiple realities that afford us relief from the pragmatic interests through which objects become "relevant to us" and by which our everyday engagement with objects and persons, called the "world of working," is governed. These relevances, or interests, become particularly visible when we must deal with events and circumstances that are imposed upon us and that we need to adapt to and come to terms with through our systems of intrinsic relevances, that is, our already established scheme of relevances. Such pragmatic relevances are in themselves morally neutral since to fail to attend to such relevances would be to jeopardize our survival and that of others. Of course, the pragmatic relevances that we pursue necessarily confine to the margins of our awareness of other values, such as aesthetic ones, or other aspects of our existence, such as the uniqueness of our experience, which is not nearly as useful to us as the repeated experiences which we are familiar with and which appear as typical to us.

But I will tell a larger story about everyday life pragmatic relevances whose projects normally engender a tension of consciousness from which we need respite. In addition, such relevances can generate, on a meta-level, efforts to defend our lower-level projects, and these meta-level efforts can expand into a hydra-headed monster defending against all intruders and generating personal anxiety and societal pathology, from which other non-pragmatic "realities" (such as literature, dreaming, scientific contemplation) can rescue us. In addition, I will demonstrate that since the non-pragmatic realities, or "provinces of meaning," can themselves be subordinated to the very pragmatic purposes of everyday life from which they were meant to free us, more is needed than simply to enter those provinces of meaning. That "more" is the perspective of someone else whose point of view exceeds our own and who can complete the emancipation begun when we entered such non--pragmatic provinces of meaning as religion and humor.

Consequently, this book is much more than an effort to interpret Schutz in a novel way. Taking as a starting point Schutz's understanding of the pragmatic dimensions of everyday life and the interpretation I will make of them, particularly the world of working, and his view of the non-pragmatic finite provinces of meaning, which, I will argue, afford a liberating potential, I will discuss in depth two of the finite provinces of meaning to which Schutz made reference but never developed: the provinces of religious experience and humor. In a single paragraph in "On Multiple Realities," on the shock experiences through which we enter various finite provinces of meaning, Schutz mentions Kierkegaard's leap into the religious sphere, and he alludes to the joke as pertaining to a fictitious world. Although there are certainly elements of phantasy in the humorous sphere, I will argue for a broader understanding of humor that encompasses jokes but includes much more insofar as interlocutors leap together into the humorous sphere and "make humor together," in such a way that the many dimensions of their relationships and the comments they make are all part of the humorous sphere. Following Schutz's account of the six

features of the cognitive style of the world of working, I will show how the provinces of religion and humor modify and exhibit these six features in innovative ways. I will also demonstrate how these provinces free us from the pressures of the world of working and hence need to be seen as part of an emancipative undertaking.

I have chosen to concentrate on the provinces of religion and humor, not only because they were suggested but never developed by Schutz but also because they exemplify the potential for emancipation sketched above. Both religion and humor are significant areas of life-world human activity often neglected by philosophy and deserving of philosophical discussion. Furthermore, this book will illustrate how, considering both through the Schutzian prism of finite, emancipating provinces of meaning, we will be able to understand their mutual connections and the way in which each illuminates the other.

This project began with my editing of Schutz's writings on literature with Dr. Jochen Dreher, director of the Sozialwissenschaftliches Archiv Konstanz, which appeared as Volume 8 of the *Alfred Schütz Werkausgabe: Schriften zur Literatur* (Schutz 2013c) and some of which appeared in English translation in Volume 6 of Schutz's *Collected Papers: Literary Reality and Relationships* (Schutz 2013a), particularly Schutz's unpublished manuscripts on Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*) and *Zu Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahren* (*Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*), which I translated (Schutz 2013b). In the latter manuscript, Schutz defends von Goethe against critics who charged that his later 1829 revision of the *Wanderjahren* novel showed signs of senility insofar as characters within a novella within Goethe's novel suddenly appear in the main action of the novel itself. Further, these characters seem able to navigate the world of the novel without many details being provided by Goethe about how these characters would have known how to do this navigating. At a decisive point in Schutz's argumentation, he makes it clear that this critique of Goethe seems to require that he should have provided the quantity of details that one would need in the sphere of everyday life and that his novel should have complied with the metaphysical constraints of everyday life, in which characters in a novel never appear outside the novel. However, Schutz (2013b, 357) argues, there is a "logic of the poetic event" that does not follow the logic of everyday life or the logic of rational theorizing. Because Goethe's novel dispenses to a degree with the restraints of everyday life, the critics accuse him of succumbing to a carelessness reflecting senescence. For me, it was marvelous to see Schutz defend Goethe by wielding his notion of multiple realities through which he was able to delineate the imaginative, dreamlike character of another whole reality, literature, in which characters would not have to master carefully all the details needed to travel to a destination.

In addition, the 2009 Conference on *Phenomenology, Social Sciences and the Arts* held at the University of Konstanz and issuing in the publication *The Interrelation of Phenomenology, Social Sciences and the Arts* (Barber and Dreher 2014), also edited with Dreher, illustrated how the idea of multiple realities can illuminate the arts. Particularly useful essays in this regard are Martin Endress's "The Man Without Qualities and the Problem of Multiple Realities" (Endress 2014),

Thomas Eberle's "The Art of Making Photos: Some Phenomenological Reflections" (Eberle 2014), and Gerd Sebald's "Crossing the Finite Provinces of Meaning: Experience and Metaphorizing of Literature and Arts" (Sebald 2014). These essays limit themselves to constructing intriguing interplays between the idea of multiple realities and particular works of art, artistic practices, or literature, in which each clarifies the other. Over the years, various Schutz scholars have drawn out interesting implications from Schutz's theory of multiple realities, such as Hisashi Nasu (1999), who has shown how conceiving the world of the child as a multiple reality might lead to a richer sociological investigation of parent-child relations than if one attributes to the parent and child the standard roles taken up in everyday life. Likewise, Fred Kersten (1998) carefully distinguishes the everyday sphere, which is presentive of its objects, as opposed to literary reality, which is non-presentive but in which I feign characters who perceive a presentive world. Endress's introduction to Alfred Schutz and his works, *Alfred Schütz*, offers helpful suggestions for understanding how the non-pragmatic finite provinces of meaning are differentiated from everyday life (understood narrowly as the world of working, itself a finite province of meaning) and pertain to the life-world in its broadest understanding, as encompassing the intentionality and attitudes (of all the provinces of meaning, pragmatic and non-pragmatic) that one lives in prior to the phenomenological reduction (Endress 2006).

I know of no published work that has dedicated itself specifically to analyzing the notion of provinces of meaning or to explaining the relationship of the finite provinces of meaning to the world of working in terms of the project of human emancipation as this work does.

At the prodding of my recently deceased friend, Lester Embree, over many years, I presented a paper on religion as a province of meaning at the conference entitled "Phenomenology as a Bridge Between Asia and the West" in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. At that conference, I emphasized the opposition religion offers to pragmatic tendencies. Participants in the conference rightly raised the question as to whether religion does not also need to insert itself into the world of working; to make use of physical symbols, signs, and communication, which presuppose bodily gearing into the world; to institutionalize itself to some degree; and even to seek to develop virtues in its members so that they can embody religious values in the world of working. These very helpful comments led me to the discovery of a dialectic between the non-pragmatic finite provinces of meaning and pragmatic everyday life, in which the non-pragmatic provinces represent alternative ways of inhabiting everyday life than that which is exemplified in everyday life bound to working and the pursuit of pragmatic goals. While offering alternative relevance rankings to those prioritizing mastery of the world, these non-pragmatic provinces, however, must continually revert to the working acts of communication to sustain themselves and convey their benefits to others.

Part I, the first three chapters, will present the pragmatic world of working that the non-pragmatic provinces of meaning resist, the communicative processes in which those provinces embody themselves, and the expansion of pragmatic relevances in the direction of hyper-mastery that can result in increased personal anxiety

and social pathologies. Part II, Chaps. 4 and 5, will discuss the finite province of religious meaning, and Part III, Chaps. 6, 7, and 8, will take up the humorous province of meaning. I will show how both the religious and humorous provinces can provide relief from the anxieties and pathologies that can be generated in the pragmatic world of everyday life. A final conclusion will suggest linkages between the religious and humorous spheres.

I would like to express my gratitude to Eleonore Stump for her continued interest in this project and to Lester Embree for his constant encouragement to venture into concrete phenomenology. I wish to thank the members of the 2014 conference "Phenomenology as a Bridge Between Asia and the West: Ethics, Reason, and Culture," of the Society for Phenomenology and the Human Sciences, of the Interdisciplinary Coalition of North American Phenomenologists, and of the International Alfred Schutz Circle for Phenomenology and Interpretive Social Science—all of whom have heard presentations relevant to this book and offered valuable suggestions for improvement. I also wish to thank Ollie and Shiloh Roundtree, Timothy and Terrance Barber, Larry Barmann, Tom Kelly, Mary Commerford, Steven Spector, Steve Schoenig, the Sacred Heart Jesuit Community, Paul Vu, Fran and Fred Pestello, Don Stump, and Ted Vitali, for their interest and ongoing support. Gratitude is due to Ms. Rachel Martens for her expert copy-editing and to Mr. Haicheng Zhao for his editorial assistance also.

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