CHAPTER I

SYMBOL AND LANGUAGE

INTRODUCTION

The task of this chapter is to construct a theory of language in which it will be possible to place the symbol. The symbol requires a context and it is precisely this context that language provides. Because the study of language can avoid neither the problematic of intended meanings implicit in the usage of language, nor the issue of the concretization of language articulated by a human subject, we shall examine the manner in which a phenomenological theory of consciousness may influence a theory of language. Finally, as we have already pointed out, the symbol ought to be considered as a distinctive phenomenon with its own rubrics and properties, but within a linguistic context.

ON MULTIPLE REALITIES

Potentiality, Givenness, Heritage, Memory

Whether one chooses to speak of language, the social world, consciousness or action, one must face the problem of the origin of these phenomena if one is to come to terms with the way in which meaning is constituted. Because of this one is driven back to describe the pre-reflexive lived world of meaning. This is the world of potentiality inasmuch as it provides the foundation for any actual achievement of meaning in any present context. An inquiry into this dimension of

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1 This discussion draws upon the work of Alfred Schutz whose contribution to the discussion and interpretation of the symbol is threefold. First, he conceived of the social world as one which was differentiated into multiple levels of reality, each level being distinguished as a constitutive realm of meaning. Second, he conceived of language as the key factor in ordering the social world. And third, for Schutz the symbol was fundamental for the grounding of the social order.

Although the conclusions regarding the relationship of the symbol to language are my own, I believe Schutz has made a lasting and creative contribution to the discussion of symbol and language.

experience will account for its unity and also its possible differentiations. This investigation will provide the basis for the kind of theory of language in which one can begin to account for the symbol.

The social world in which we live is a world of potential meanings, most of which we are not aware of at any particular "present," but whose function is to carry on the process of daily life. One of the curious facts of social existence is that most of the meanings we have are unexamined, part of the heritage of each person within that social world. Most of the meanings given are pre-reflexive; meanings are habitual structures of action of which we are not conscious. Equally, the social world is a world of given relationships, relationships characterized primarily as associations with other people and only secondarily as relationships with objects. When any one of us relates to other people emotionally in terms of love or hate, intellectually in terms of discussion or debate, or actively in terms of common achievement we simply assume that the other person's experience is like our own, that his experience is indubitably real, and that he will behave in a way similar to the manner in which we expect him to behave.

To be sure, much of human behavior is determined by the set of inherited social roles assumed by each of us. If the "other" person happens to be a parent we communicate in a way considerably different than if that person happens to be a friend. Similarly, we expect that "other" to behave in a manner in accord with the particular role which he assumes for us. For example, it would be expected that the attempt to communicate the meaning of a drug experience would be considerably different in the case of communication with a friend and then with a parent. In the first instance one might expect a sympathetic ear while in the second, stern disapproval. Equally, the role of the "other" would be determined in the sense that the friend may consider his role to be that of one who is to empathize with the experience, while the parent, even if he has experienced drugs himself, would probably feel that it was necessary to act with disapproval. The latter may wish he could dispense with the issue altogether, but he is aware that is impossible inasmuch as he is expected to fulfill his "biographically determined" role. The role that one is given to play in the particular contexts of social experience determines the manner in which that experience will be interpreted. For instance, let us assume that our individual's drug experience was not only communicated to friend and parent but was also discovered by the police, becoming thereby a matter for legal prosecution. The function of the