



Common Sense and Science: Adversaries or Friends? A Comment on Luckmann

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Professor Luckmann's article introduces us to the complexities in the relationship between common sense and science. What he presents, in my opinion, is an important and intriguing analysis as far as it goes, and before I pick up explicitly on the themes of his paper, I would like to indicate why I think the relationship between common sense and science is indeed worthy of study by referring to how this relationship is understood in my own discipline of psychology.

In the main, there seems to be a dichotomous relationship to common sense within psychology. For some psychologists an adversary relationship exists between common sense and psychology, and for others a criteriological one. That is, for the first group, common sense is an adversary, and for the other group it is a kind of criterion against which to measure the science of psychology. Let's look at the two attitudes a little more closely.

I shall begin with those psychologists or systems of psychology that espoused the adversary relationship, and there is no better example of this attitude than that of E. B. Titchener of Cornell, whose powerful personality and wide reputation dominated the early development of a large segment of American psychology. Titchener's views are depicted exceedingly well, if caustically, by Grace Adams (1931), who, four years after Titchener's death, wrote an intriguing book entitled *Psychology: Science or Superstition* which was essentially an iconoclastic survey of the psychology of that time. She devoted a number of pages to Titchener and his psychological system, and she concluded that Titchener worked extremely hard to keep psychology a disinterested and impersonal science. In part, Adams observed, this was because T.H. Huxley had defined science as "perfected common sense" and upon hearing that remark, Titchener responded by noting that common sense is not science because common sense is the dubious wisdom of everyday life and "ordinary living is not scientific" (cited by Adams, p. 101). Of course, Luckmann made that same point and overall I agree with it. But it is *how* Titchener made his point and the intensity with which he made it that makes his viewpoint so instructive. Adams also states that Titchener had heard H. G. Wells complain that no sick soul could find relief in a modern textbook of psychology. Titchener agreed and wondered why Wells was surprised. For Titchener, "psychology is the science of mind; not the source of mental comfort or improvement. And science deals not with values, but with facts. There is no good or bad, sick or well, useful or useless in science" (cited by Adams, p. 102). Adams observes that for Titchener "these values comprise the business of everyday living where each man is concerned with his own personal interest (p. 102)." However, for Titchener,

Personal interest is irrelevant to science. It is as irrelevant to psychology as to chemistry. The psychologist has a great deal to do with his own mind, but that's because his own mind is the most

easily accessible part of his subject-matter; it is not in the least because the mind happens to be his own. (cited by Adams, p. 102)

Adams then goes on to say the following about the Titchenerian perspective:

So positive was Titchener that value or significance or use had no place in science, that he would not admit to psychology that phase of mental life which to most psychologists is its essence: its meaning. If you were asked to describe the word GAME which you see before you, you might give any number of definitions for it. But if you were the kind of psychologist whom Titchener had trained in his laboratory you would merely report that you saw black figures against a white background. The meaning of this pattern in black and white would not concern you because you would know that it is a part of that superstitious world of values upon which the science of psychology must resolutely turn its back. Titchener would have taught you "that mental processes do not intrinsically mean; meaning is not a constituent part of their nature." (p. 102)

In his talk, Luckmann mentioned the "tightly controlled schizophrenia" necessary to develop a science of human beings. Titchener would hardly have ever used those words, but he recognized the phenomenon. Here's how Adams reports Titchener's views on the same issue:

So Titchener informed his students: "The first thing to get clear about is the nature of the man left in the world, the man whose presence is necessary for psychology and unnecessary for physics. Since we are talking science, this man will be man as science views him and not the man of common sense; he will be, that is, the organism known to biology as *homo sapiens* and not the self-centered person whom we meet in the everyday world of values." (pp. 103-104)

Adams then continues:

Because this *homo sapiens* has of necessity lived in this everyday world of values for a great many years before he decides to dedicate himself to the meaningless observation of scientific psychology, he will, Titchener recognized "*be badly handicapped by common sense.*" His corrective for this unfortunate but unavoidable handicap was "technical training, first and foremost." The psychological novice must be taught to introspect disinterestedly and impersonally and he must "keep practicing his technique until it becomes instinctive." (Italics in original) Indeed, Titchener (1912, p. 178) himself wrote "Logical common sense, *c'est L'ennemi.*" (p. 104, italics in original).

Adams can barely constrain herself after presenting these views. She writes as follows:

Does all this sound fantastic? Is it hard to believe that anyone could expect either himself or another human being to become so completely inhuman even for a moment, let alone for the rest of his life? Does it seem that it must be an intellectual pose? There are today scattered throughout the United States, but concentrated for the most part in its highest colleges and universities, 56 men and women who are living proof that Titchener honestly believed a human being could be taught to regard his mind inhumanly, to see it impersonally, to think of it as a useless, meaningless, valueless mass of simple mental processes. All of these 56 men and women have the privilege of writing after their names, "Ph.D., Cornell." (p. 104)

Not only is this controlled schizophrenia, but also science in the guise of religion that Luckmann mentioned. Ironically, Titchener used the power of his personality and the appeal of personal loyalty to attempt to keep psychology neutral and impersonal!

Of course, one might say that the above pertains to the old structural psychology and Adams was writing in 1931. But I have elaborated this point at length because I think several other systems of psychology including some contemporary ones share the viewpoint with respect to common sense. For example, did not psychoanalysis startle the average person with its insights concerning infantile sexuality and the role of the unconscious? And is not a long didactic training necessary to become an analyst? And are not analyses themselves extremely long if not "interminable"? And has not Lacan (1977) been stressing recently that psychoanalysis has become watered down and tamed by culture and that we have to return to Freud at his literal best—or worst—depending upon your point of view? Could one not say that it is common sense that is the resistance to analysis? Is not common sense the enemy?

And how about behaviorism? Common sense says that we experience certain acts as free, that we are capable of creating meanings in the world, and that we can use language in original ways. Behaviorism (Skinner, 1971) says that all that is illusory and we must get beyond it to discover the true environmental causes controlling all acts, the contingencies responsible for our alleged creations, and the social conditionings that make us speak the way we do. Common sense strenuously resists all of the advances that behavioral technology wants to introduce. Behaviorists are baffled by this. After all, they are only telling us how things are. Common sense seems not to know what is good for it. It is the enemy. Titchener, it seems, was not so isolated as he thought. There is a whole tradition of psychological science that sees common sense as the adversary.

It's no wonder, then, that a humanistic psychology erupted in the late 1950's as a reaction to the dominant academic systems. Undoubtedly, it

brought many excesses with it, as most reactions do, but it declared that humans and the varied activities of everyday life were the measure of psychological science and not the other way around.

Prior to humanistic psychology the major academic psychology on the side of common sense was Gestalt theory. It kept calling us back to the world of everyday experience to show us that we experienced configurations, not elements; that we perceived objects, not stimuli; and that our experiences were spontaneously structured, not chaotic and reconstructed. A colleague of mine has as his goal the task of making psychology as good as common sense. His fundamental principle is:

Try to understand and explain the behavior of others in the same way you judge and explain your own behavior or the behavior of your own family members, etc. If and when this is impossible, make the scientific explanation as similar as you can to the explanation you would use in everyday life. (Osiatynski, 1979, p. 13)

Thus, we see that it would be possible to line up systems of psychology according to how they relate to common sense: either as an enemy or as a standard. They cannot both be right. If science is tested truth, and common sense is its enemy, then how does common sense work at all? Or, if common sense is the measure of science, then why do we need science? How do we resolve this impasse? Let's now turn to Luckmann's paper and see what we learn.

83

In general, I want to say that as a phenomenologist I find little disagreement with what Luckmann has so carefully elaborated. Most of my comments relate to the horizons of his talk—assumptions and implications—which Luckmann did not make explicit although I find the lack of a particular perspective to be significant. But first let's turn to what he has established.

Luckmann's aim was to clarify descriptively the nature of common sense and science as social facts and, as a consequence, to enlighten their relationship to each other. He started by understanding "common sense to be a structured and coherent set of orientations in reality whose main function is to guide human action." Science, on the other hand, is understood by Luckmann to be a "specific, historically limited, and perhaps, unique way of systematizing certain sets of human orientations in reality." Thus, we see that common sense is comprehensive and specifically directed towards guiding human action, whereas science is partial and has systematization as its specific aim.

Then Luckmann moves on to describe the structure of subjective knowledge upon which common sense rests and finds that it is compounded of experience that is neither logical nor necessarily consciously present to the knower, but it functions in such a way that it can reveal itself to phenomenological description. From such descriptions we learn that the subjective stock of knowledge can be tacit, routine, or explicit and that it can be based upon autochthonous

interpretive acts or socially derived ones. With the appearance of the social dimension, Luckmann switches to a sociology of knowledge perspective one aim of which is to "analyze the relation of systems of knowledge in terms of their social structural bases."

From this perspective Luckmann is able to distinguish common knowledge from special knowledge and societies that have a simple social distribution of knowledge from those that have complex distribution systems. In the latter case there is an increase in the specialization and theoretical elaboration of special knowledge which tends to become less practical and less available while it also tends to develop its own internal logic and methodology. It thus becomes relatively autonomous so that the very transmission of the knowledge itself becomes specialized. Because this happens in complex societies, Luckmann is able to track the proportion between common knowledge and special knowledge, and he finds that in complex societies common knowledge shrinks as specialized knowledge increases.

Luckmann then shows that science is an example of specialized knowledge with the complication that it has tended to usurp the central social function of religion or philosophy in the sense that it tends to dominate common sense. Ultimately, Luckmann asserts, science in this role, known as scientism, has failed, and indeed it had to fail because science as specialized knowledge cannot take the place of common knowledge. In other words, scientific rationalization cannot replace common sense because the goal of all science is to understand the world generally, and that implies cognitive distance and existential detachment whereas common knowledge presupposes humans that are cognitively involved and existentially concerned about their ability to cope with the ordinary situations of everyday life. The only solution, Luckmann concludes, to avoid being trapped in romantic intuitions, is to alternate between the naive attitude of everyday life and the theoretical attitude of science.

Thus, from the perspective of the sociology of knowledge, Luckmann also shows that common sense and science are not identical, that they serve different social functions, and that therefore both are needed. But he stops short of telling us just how we are to go back and forth between them. Granted that one cannot say everything in one article, I nevertheless would have liked Luckmann to tackle that question because it is my opinion that he would have had to leave the social perspective and come to grips with the intrinsic meaning of science and common sense. Then, I believe, he could have discovered certain contingent meanings accruing to each term which, once removed, might take the tension away from the two perspectives and allow us a better insight into how to make sense of the necessity for each perspective.

I cannot argue these points here, but allow me to sketch what I mean. With respect to the scientific perspective, I think an intrinsic analysis would find that its meaning is biased in the direction of the natural sciences, and thus it may be loaded down with more formal and abstract connotations than necessary. Formalization is but one way of achieving

generalization, and human sciences will undoubtedly be better off using other procedures. We could make science more faithful to concrete experience by using essential intuitions as guides for descriptive structures that always presuppose some kind of contact with concrete experience (Gurwitsch, 1974).

On the other hand, we shall have to understand common sense better and why it exists at all. Is it there only because science didn't come first, and when the human sciences achieve their apogee, will common sense disappear? What, for example, is the difference between the explicit level of the subjective stock of knowledge and what Luckmann called "scientific rationalization"? How can we ascertain this? I think Husserl provides a perspective on this question. Within a phenomenological perspective Husserl has claimed a certain chronological priority for the everyday world, or lifeworld, since all sciences are derived from it, but, on the other hand, he reserves epistemological priority for sciences that are phenomenologically grounded. Now, one of the tasks that Husserl has set for phenomenologists is a science of the lifeworld itself—that is, an attempt to bring to systematic clarity the actual living of everyday life in order to discover principles for guiding a more adequate living. Among the many phenomena that make their appearance in the lifeworld are science and common sense.

In the *Crisis*, when Husserl (1970) is first introducing the idea of the science of the lifeworld, he describes it as a "peculiar science, to be sure, since it concerns the disparaged *doxa* which now suddenly claims the dignity of a foundation for science" (p. 155). One has to know the sombre Husserl well to appreciate the ironic gratification it must have given him to pen those words; in an age when science was king and dictating to common sense and philosophy alike, he reminded it that it has humble beginnings in *doxa* or common sense. Further on in the *Crisis*, in elaborating this notion, Husserl says

85

Even without any transcendental interest—that is, within the natural attitude—the lifeworld could have become the subject matter of a science of its own, an ontology of the lifeworld purely as experiential world—i.e., as the world which is coherently, consistently, harmoniously intuitable in actual and possible experiencing intuition. (1970, p. 173)

Now, my claim is that this perspective can help us clarify the respective meanings of science and common sense since they both emerge as themes for a more foundational science. They cannot really judge each other because they are both parts of a larger context.

This is the task that, in my view, Luckmann began from a social perspective but which needs at least the complementary analysis of the intrinsic meanings of the two terms. While this has not been achieved as yet, my hunch is that neither common sense nor science can be reduced to each other and also that their relationship is neither an adversary one nor a criteriological one. As Luckmann noted, both have been disparaged and both have been praised. What the science of the

lifeworld would have to do then is investigate just when science was being maligned and when praised; the same to be done with common sense. One then could come up with the structures of the lived correlates of those terms, and the two could be compared as to relative strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, a clarified understanding of this relationship would even help us integrate the two terms. And the key to that integration is given by Husserl when he said that a science of the lifeworld should be based upon actual and possible experiencing intuition. This means a science that is neither constructive nor explanatory but descriptive and clarifying. It is a science that begins with common sense experience, distances itself from it precisely in order to see that experience better, and then comes back to it in an enlightened way. It seems to me that the study of childhood could hardly ask for anything better.

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