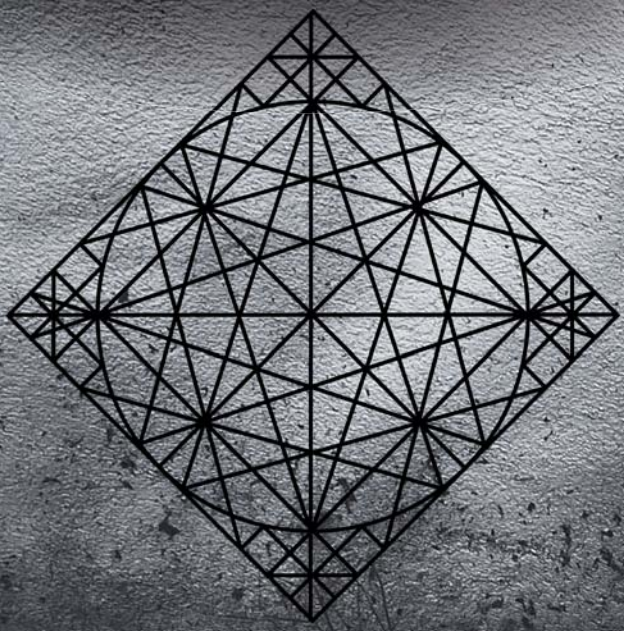
Anna Michalska



FACTS NORMS IDEALS

IDEALIZATION AND SELF-REGULATION IN HUMAN INTERACTIONS

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Cover image: Destreza diagram, taken from Jerónimo Carranza 1582 treatise (public domain), symbolizes reason and geometry in European martial arts, incorporating philosophical moral ideals based on Aristotle, Euclide and Plato.

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INTRODUCTION

The book discusses the role of idealization in the process of intersubjective understanding and social interaction and, by extension, in social scientific explanation. The concept of idealization with which I operate refers to something much more basic than that which is usually discussed under this heading. More specifically, what I have in mind when speaking of idealization is not so much the process of the construction of semi-isolated systems that can be manipulated by the theorist or the experimenter but rather our ability to generate counterfactual, "as-if" spaces that mediate our contact with the world around us and provide the means of bootstrapping in the process of learning and development.[1] Idealizations as I understand them are made possible by internal working models[2] that can be accessed in the process of self-reflection, as a result of which they become part of our self-understanding as always-already agents in the natural world and social actors. In other words, I take it that the rudimentary ability to attend to implicit models upon which our actions and thinking processes are based underlie our capacity for abstraction and idealization in the sense advanced in philosophy of science, but in no way do the latter exhaust the scope of counterfactuality we engage.[3] Nor do I limit my treatment of idealizations to arbitrary contrivances of the human mind, although they, too, spring from the same fundamental source. What this means is that the ability to perceive, grasp or more generally, enter a relationship with – that which is not directly in front of

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[1] The concept of "as-if" systems dates back to Vaihinger's neokantian philosophy of culture: Hans Vaihinger, *The Philosophy of "As If": A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*, trans. C.K. Ogden (Random Shack, 2015). At difference with Vaihinger, however, I am not willing to consider these systems to be fictions.

[2] John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, Volume 1, second edition (New York: Basic Books, 1982).

[3] By the same token, the use of conditional counterfactuals ("if-then" clauses) cannot be properly understood unless the "as-if" mode of functioning is explained.

us is a basic "fact" about human transactions with the world that must be taken into account.

One of the most critical features of idealization is that it is inevitably self-referential (or "reflexive"). When constructing theories or designing experiments, we do the best we can to take the agent out of the equation, to make their presence "infinitesimal." Although the striving to bring order to the external world is the main motivation behind idealization, it is often forgotten that idealization is also a means of self-ordering thanks to which cognitive efforts can be properly directed and applied. That is to say that every design presupposes a certain model of the designer. While focusing on the "objective" part of idealization may be, at least to some extent, excused in the natural sciences, this form of lop-sided approach to idealization becomes hugely problematic when it comes the issues of social understanding and interaction. As the interminable debates in philosophy of science have shown, this form of neglect eventually backfires in that department as well insofar as it makes difficult to account for the process of intersubjective validation of scientific findings and to explain collaborative research activities.[4]

All in all, in this book, I will examine ideals understood as patterns of organization, which, if not entirely effable, can nonetheless be accessed via self-reflection, and thereupon consciously developed and modified. As I shall try to show, idealization is essentially an instrument for self-regulation and learning. It follows from this that the more self-aware we are, the more we are capable of self-regulation. What it also entails is that the more counterfactuality we are able to create and manage, the better we are equipped to coordinate our actions with others. The main challenge, however, is to approach the relationship between counterfactuality and self-regulation and mutual regulation without committing the fallacy of monologicality. It is against this background that I will be dealing with the problem of normativity.

Differently put, the greatest challenge as far as the problematic of social interaction and normativity are concerned is to do with

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[4] Harry Collins, *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010); Collins, Robert Evans, *Rethinking Expertise* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007).