

Collective Cognitive Processes around 1930. Edgar Zilsel's Epistemology of Mass Phenomena

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Abstract

In the first decades of the 20th century politics, economy and the emerging social sciences were not the only realms engaged in understanding social questions and organizing society by means of statistical inquiries and probability calculation. At the same time, social methods and collective conditions of scientific rationality were emerging in contemporary epistemological writings. However, adopting social conditions of scientific reasoning and activity in this period does not mean a renunciation of exact scientific methods. On the contrary, the emergence of social foundations for scientific activity and reasoning can be understood as a scientific conception aiming at objectivity. This paper traces the emergence of collective conceptions and methods in Edgar Zilsel's statistical and inductive epistemology that established the production of knowledge as an infinite and procedural enterprise.

Keywords: social epistemology, statistics, probability theory, induction, irreversibility, statistical mechanics, gas theory, collective production of knowledge

Subjects: [General Issues: Confirmation/Induction](#)
[Specific Sciences: Probability/Statistics](#)

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