

Critique of phenomenology

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As with many other notes and comments, this should be read in conjunction with other papers, and in most instances this note merely draws together thinking from other papers and gives it the particular focus the topic of this comment.

There is a long history to questions of mind; it could begin perhaps with Socrates, who focused on the spirit as the only real object. Husserl explored intentionality, while Descartes tipped the issues into a cauldron of doubt culminating perhaps with Bishop Berkeley arguing it is all illusion corrected by some wag who said but God is always about so the world always is.

Frankly, I regard all this as just so much imaginative poppy cock.

The rule of strategic thinking in science says that topics must be considered only within the framework of their ground, and only then in relation to the understanding as it exists of the issues of ground and that discussions of any topic if it is to remain intellectually rational must not go beyond the bounds dictated by the available answers to the issues of ground.

What does that mean for phenomenology? That any and all discussions of phenomenology relate to human psychology, and any and all discussion of phenomenology not related to a general theory of psychology, that identifies the causal issues underlying our psychic processes and the sum total of our psychic existence, must be regarded as nothing more than speculation; not science, not even effective rational intellectual effort. Real intellectual effort must be bounded by what we know and work to the edge of what we do not and need to find out, beyond that it is imaginative fiction.

The serious starting questions

We do need a place to start, it is exactly the same as building a house, without solid foundations...well, I am sure you know the rest. The serious starting questions are as follows.

1. If we had a complete and thorough general theory of epistemology, what would be its structure and what would it tell of actual knowledge and its relation to the objects of that knowledge?
2. If we had a complete and thorough general theory of psychology what would be its structure and what would it tell us of causality behind actual mood and conduct in actual situations?
3. If we had a complete and thorough general theory of society what would be its structure and what would it tell us of causality behind actual societies in actual situations?
4. If we had a complete and thorough general theory of cause, what would it tell us of causality in all the above situations and theories?
5. What is the relationship between all answers to the above questions?

The answers to questions 1, 2, 3, and 5 are all at this web site. The theory of society is drafted, but not yet available. Taking this platform, I will now offer the summary answers to the above questions of phenomenology.

Science and living experience

One of the greatest failings of virtually all phenomenology is the failure to distinguish between a variable and its values. The classic example is the issue of the so called hard and easy problems of consciousness. Consider a pendulum; it is described by

time being equal to a constant multiplied by the square root of the length over the gravitational constant (which is not quite constant). Now, what is the period of the pendulum in Timbuktu? Well, you ought to say, how can I know that without going to Timbuktu and measuring the length? Exactly! Length is the variable describing the system, for any actual example the value relative to the situation must be measured and then inserted into the theory to calculate that which the theory is able to describe.

Now imagine a complete and accurate general theory of psychology: what will it tell us of two people conversing in Rio or Rangiputa? The issue is exactly the same; the theory can only describe and direct attention to the variables that are operational in describing the system under study, in this situation two people conversing, to describe the system it is necessary to go the place to measure values of the variables and insert them in the theory to gain that which the theory is able to describe.

All science is constrained, consisting of only variables and their relationships. Once the values of variables are selected it is no longer science; rather it is descriptive (normative) of actual situations. The easy problem of consciousness is fully solved with a theory of variables and the relations between them that describe the system under study. The hard problem of consciousness...what is it like to be?...has to do with the values of the variables, not the variables or their relationship. For human kind, the so called hard problem of consciousness is fully resolved in literature, poetry, and song since these literary activities all largely seek to describe living experience: But, this is not science, and should science try to go there it need don the cloak of writer and poet, not scientist.

Meaning, choice and free will

How ideas exist is the topic of a paper, and I will not review the theory here, merely stress that ideas are accepted as existing, and as being causal in the theory of human mood and conduct. That does mean you need review the theory of cause so that the sentence has the precision the theory affords it. Meaning lies in our world view and the attachment of feelings to ideas in our world view. Any discussion of meaning immediately goes beyond science; it has fully to do with values of variables not the variables themselves or the relationship between those variables.

The model has it that ideas exist in mind rather like on a scratch pad, further that we have the ability to know how to move our body, a learned set of skills nested into any action we take. So, when we see an idea we like, we are largely able to enact it if it is within the scope of what we can do, we are unable to do what we cannot do, as silly and obvious as that sounds, it is important, since it implies judgement of our abilities and skills in any circumstances, and how often have we bitten of more than we could chew? With that structure we have choice, intent and freewill. Moving much beyond the structural aspects we become entangled in values of variables that is not science, a classic example here is in political choice, when it is argued that some set of political values are better than some other, and in some way this is sociological science when it is obviously values of variables and is no more science than Homers Iliad.

Free will, choice, intent and goals are all founded on the ability to select and implement one idea over another. A theory of psychology has to do with how these processes work, not which processes are operative in any person, nor which choices should be or are preferred by any person.

How do I know an object?

Immediate perception is the interaction between the perceptual structures on an observer and the perceptual field of the environment; it is mediated by neurology and

dependent on the environment and results in active structures in our physiology that produce the sensory result. The sensory result is then linked with our psychology that is our views and feelings about the result, our knowledge of it and understanding of it, etc. Interpretation is secondary to the immediacy of the physiological perception.

We perceive via events, an event defined as changes in Reality producing changes in the perceptual field, producing changes in our physiology (assuming our physiology is not defective): The object of all this processing stands in our minds in relation to the outside systems that contributed to the object in mind with the key issues of epistemology being the link between the object in mind (reality) and the object of Reality.

Note, as well, that objects are defined very precisely in terms of events, and are events with a rate of change slow in relation to the perceiving systems. So in effect, the idea of a static object is rejected in favour of the idea that everything is changing but some of that change is slow in relation to time scales relevant to some observers. Finally note that time is not seen as an aspect of the universe, but is only introduced by consciousness that note the period between events and so uses time to measure that period.

What do I experience when I experience an object?

Depends entirely on the meaning of the events for you (see the general theory of psychology). This immediately extends beyond science and into poetry and literature.

How do I know what is 'real'?

In a nutshell, you don't. To verify is to first seek out multiple inputs, such as sight, smell, sound, touch: so if it looks like a duck, sounds like a duck, smells like a duck, feels like a duck and is where you might sensibly expect to find a duck you got pretty good chance it's a duck! Modern virtual reality is clear testimony to fact that without other inputs any one perceptual systems can be deceived (even if the technology not very good yet, it will get better!)

How do I know what is true?

In a nutshell, you don't. Again the only out is multiple inputs to the decision. Truth is not measured by any rule, but solely arises as an act of judgement. Modern legal proceedings proceed largely on basis of multiple inputs, each side, any other sound opinion, etc...Verisimilitude as argued by Popper I relate to the extent the topic is explored, and extent there are clearly many facets bough to account and all well argued, researched and reasoned. So physical science in general has high verisimilitude, whereas much social science does not, and modern phenomenology has very little indeed and is largely very confused.

How do we distinguish the 'truth' of a mad person over a sane person? Not always easy, take the impact of Hitler on a whole generation in Germany. I do not think Hitler mad, but the point still remains, very bad ideas accepted and acted out by a very large number of people who now look back with horror. Distinguishing bad ideas from good can only come from balance, the multiple inputs including trail and error that lead to a balanced view and balanced actions. Balance is not easy to maintain, emotions are often not balanced, and an important function of emotional intelligence is maintaining balance.

How do I know the outside world exists?

In a nutshell, you don't. The first issue is perceptual: An act of judgement, is it 'real', or is it virtual reality and not real...I introduced the terms 'Reality', capital 'R', to refer to the Reality beyond the perceptual field (so it could be a virtual reality field generator); and 'reality' little 'r', to refer to the unique interpretation we each make of

circumstances. Big Reality is not psychological, little reality is; science aims to map big Reality.

The second factor is structural and involves the rule of relations which states that for there to be a relation between two objects each object must be independently discernable. Where this rule is not effective, then it is not possible to establish the relationship between the two objects. Imagine some object in mind, in reality, and one in Reality – say a tree or horse -how can you possibly separate the object in reality from the one in Reality? You cannot, they interpose to the degree that the rule of relations is broken, hence who is surprised Bishop Berkeley questioned as he did.

It is not possible as a matter of principle for an individual to establish the existence of an external world on their own. Modern CAT scans linking events in the brain to events outside the person offer some technology for relating events in reality with events in Reality, however, there is still the issue of meaning which no CAT scan can provide insight into, and the theory states that there never will be any such technology since no two people have necessarily have the same neural events linked to the same meaning, and even if so, there is still the issue of the exact nature of the meaning for one person over another, nuance can completely alter meaning, and nuance could involve a small handful of neurons that barely register on a CAT scan.

How do I know me, or self? And what is 'I'?

The general theory of psychology has considerable amount to say on these issues, and I will not repeat it here. Suffice to say that 'self' and 'I' are constructed objects and can be fully discussed and accounted for within the framework of the theory. We can come to know 'I', 'self' and 'me' exactly as we can come to know and understand better any part of our psyche we select to conceptualise.

How do I know I exist?

Are you just some disembodied brain locked away in some preserving jar...? I think therefore I am, yes, well, maybe. Same problem as knowing the truth or knowing what is real or knowing the outside world exists?

What is mind?

Within the theory 'mind' is accepted as a useful term to describe operation of the causal model of our psyche, and while our neurological processes are the mechanism of mind, so all neurological processes hold a correspondence with events in mind, because of largely the complexity, plasticity and the variability with which ideas and feelings etc, are generated by our physiology mind is not simply reducible to underlying neurological events. Edward de Bono offered one helpful analogy as a jelly on which hot water is poured; each pouring deepens rivulets, so the structure evolves. So our physiology evolves in use and events in mind alter accordingly and unpredictably since much of the operation of mind involves meaning.

Also, in considering issue of mind and physiology it is very important to consider general epistemological issues of reductionism and the relation one domain of science relates to the underlying domain that 'causes' the first domain. Consideration of domains of science also must involve review of definition of how domains are formed in our knowledge (all these issues considered in depth in the papers). So if mind is a major aspect of the domain of science called psychology, then these general principles of epistemology will bear significantly on the relation between psychology and the mechanisms of psychology namely the domain of science dealing with the brain and nervous system.

What is attention, how is it directed and how does it impact us?

See the papers on the general theory for full account of these issues.

Conclusion: Should you care I would be pleased to apply the base platform of models, theory and thought to any variation of these issues or questions. It is the platform that affords the answers, and in the absence of a sound platform all is speculation built on sand; and so far phenomenology has seen little else.

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