

**CRITICISM OF PHRENOLOGY
FROM THE VIEW-POINT OF
PSYCHOLOGY**

Phenomenology insists on an experimentum crucis for judgements on objects, or rather, for the experience of the generalities. In this regard, phenomenology is akin to nativism. According to the nativists, "perceived spatial relations are given immediately in experience. The empiricists [on the other hand] said that the pattern of space [for example] has to be learned" (1). The philosopher Kant and the psychologists Hering and Stumpf were nativists, while Helmholtz were staunch empiricists. Helmholtz attacked the nativism of Kant who like Fichte used geometrical axioms as instances of a priori intuitions. Naturally, Helmholtz took the instance of geometry to task. "He raised the question as to what geometry would be developed by beings who lived in another kind of space than ours. There might, for example, be 'space-dwellers', who lived entirely in a spherical surface; for then the axiom of parallels would not hold, for any two straight lines, if sufficiently produced, would intersect in two points. So too we can conceive, though not imagine, hyper-spaces of four or more dimensions — space, for example, where there are forms that bear the same relation to the sphere as the sphere does to the circle" (2). Thus Helmholtz criticized the nativist theory and said that "it was no theory at all" (3). He believed that even the perception of space had to be learned.

There is certainly an antagonism, as we see, between Helmholtz's empirical theory and Husserl's phenomenology. For

one thing, Helmholtz believed in the existence of the object, but Husserl kept silent about it. According to Husserl, we accost only the phenomena and not the objects. Secondly, while Helmholtz believed that Anschauung or Wahrnehmung (Wahr = 'true') is constituted when Perzeption is somehow organized by the unconscious of the subject, Husserl said that the intentional inexistence of the object was the perception. He believed that the objective world is constituted by the transcendental subjectivity. We have already seen Husserl's standpoint. Now let us see what Helmholtz had to say on this score : "Helmholtz's fundamental theory of perception is very simple. The bare sensory pattern, as directly dependent upon the stimulus-object, he called a Perzeption. A pure Perzeption is, however, comparatively rare; it is nearly always supplemented and modified by an imaginal increment, dependent upon memory and induced by unconscious inference, which makes it over into what may be called an Anschauung, which is also literally the Wahrnehmung, since it is by Anschauungen that objects are correctly perceived and truly identified (Wahr = 'true'). If the sense impressions are entirely lacking and we have only the imaginal equivalent of the Anschauung, then the experience may be called a Vorstellung, a use of this German word more nearly like the English idea than is usually the case. Perzeptionen are rare. Vorstellungen lie outside the universe of discourse. The key to perception lies in the Anschauungen, which involve both sensation and imagery, both stimulation and unconscious inference" (4).

Obviously, therefore, Helmholtz is critical about Husserl's theory of perception.

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It is true that phenomenological thinking has begun to invade the region of psychology. William James' psychology of the 'stream of consciousness' is in keeping with the phenomenological theory and methodology. The subject, in his 'inner self', feels this 'stream of consciousness' of which there may not be any objective validity. The phenomenon is purely subjective. Norman L. Munn et al gave an instance of the phenomenological thinking available in the discipline of psychology, or to be precise of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud's concept of neurotic anxiety, according to them, is an instance of phenomenological thinking or experience. The neurotic anxiety has no objective validity or justification. It is the primal anxiety which, presumably, occurs as a result of separation of a child from its mother (5). We may quote at some length what Freud wrote about this kind of anxiety in his General Introduction to Psychoanalysis : "Now let us turn to neurotic anxiety; what are the special manifestations and conditions found in the anxiety of nervous persons? There is a great deal to be described here. First of all, we find a general apprehensiveness in them, a 'free-floating' anxiety, as we call it, ready to attach itself to any thought which is at all appropriate, affecting judgements, inducing expectations, lying in wait for any opportunity to find a

justification for itself, we call this condition 'expectant dread' or 'anxiety expectation'. People who are tormented with this kind of anxiety always anticipate the worst of all possible outcomes, interpret every chance happening as an evil omen, and exploit every uncertainty to mean the worst. The tendency to this kind of expectation of evil is found as a character-trait in many people who cannot be described ill in any other way, and we call them 'over-anxious' or pessimistic; but a marked degree of expectant dread is an invariable accompaniment of the nervous disorder which I have called anxiety-neurosis and include among the actual neuroses" (6).

Now, this concept of anxiety neurosis may be of some moment in psychoanalysis, because it rightly distinguishes between the normal and the abnormal nature of perception. But, nonetheless, it does not help us even in psychoanalysis because the real nature of the individual's 'inner perception' cannot be communicated by the patient. It is the individual's 'private' phenomenon that cannot be 'publicly' known. Yes, the individual can express his experience through language, but that language can be variously interpreted. Language is a medium with the help of which we can only come to an approximation about the actuality regarding intrapersonal phenomena. This same point is alluded to by Kuhn in very clear terms : "Human beings can tell us what they experience, but the accuracy of their description is difficult to ascertain. Words have different meanings for different people. Moreover, in order to describe his experiences an informant must attend to them,

and in this process the experience may be thereby altered. For example, one's anger tends to disappear or change during the attempt to describe it" (7). Phenomenological experiences, like those in anxiety neuroses, etc. or for that matter the stream of consciousness, therefore, cannot be communicated or reported.

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Husserl wanted to establish a rigorous science that phenomenology was to be. His phenomenology is a descriptive science which endeavours to describe the idealistic experience without the natural attitudes or biases. Husserl called phenomenology a science, but some "epistemologizing psychologists regard it not as a Wissenschaft (science, 'ology') but as a Vorwissenschaft (discipline propaedeutic to science)" (8). "If all science, the argument runs, deals with experience, then the description of experience must be ancillary to every science" (9). Therefore, phenomenology whose one and only aim is to describe the experience must not be regarded as an independent science, but as an ancillary discipline. (Vorwissenschaft).

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Another argument against phenomenology's claim to be a specialist of science, put forward by some psychologists, runs thus : the "description of phenomenal experience is too basic

readily to yield the large inductions" (10). Generalization or induction is the main objective of science. How then can phenomenology be called a science? Moreover, consciousness, the subject of study in phenomenology in the ultimate analysis, is totally an intractable phenomenon. Only the method of introspection is available for an investigation of such an illusive phenomenon. But, even then, introspective method is of no good. "Since it is mainly a matter of introspection, the study of consciousness can easily lead to fallacies and equivocation, the most common of which is the postulation of consciousness as an irreducible and unknown datum of subjective experience" (11).

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Husserl spoke of consciousness and of pure consciousness, but he forgot altogether that there are different kinds as well degrees of consciousness : "phenomenologists and in their wake Schilder, realized that consciousness of the self, consciousness of the psychological act, and consciousness of cognition as one of unreality, reality, supposition, perception, memory, etc., are all form-variants of consciousness, clinicians, particularly Silberer, Sidis and others realized that the normal waking state, hypnosis, dream, reverie, daydream, delirium, somnambulism, fugue, mondelism, epileptic thought, stupor, confessional and perplexity states, are all form-variants of consciousness differing from each other at least in the form of prevailing thought-organization, in the extent and quality of voluntary thought or

action present, and in the kinds and qualities of reflection feasible. In addition, partial deviations from the usual state of consciousness were also noted, such as those present in automatisms, compulsions, isolated delusions, illusions, states in which post-hypnotic suggestions are carried out, etc." (12).

Sidis, for example, in his Psychology of Suggestion classified consciousness into:

"I. Resultory consciousness. In this type of consciousness there is no connection, no association, between one moment of consciousness and another; there is certainly no synthesis of moments, and consequently no memory, no recognition, no self-consciousness, no personality. This type of consciousness may have its representatives in the psychic life of the lowest invertebrates.

II. Synthetic consciousness. In this type of consciousness there is synthesis of the preceding moments in each passing moment, but there is no recognition. Former experiences are reinstated in consciousness, but they are not recognized as such. Instinctive consciousness falls naturally under this type of mental activity. Memory is certainly present, but it is objective in its nature; it exists only for the observer, not for the individual consciousness itself. The objective side of memory, the projection of the present experience into the subjective past of the present moment consciousness, is wanting; and, of course, it goes without saying that the synthetic consciousness has no self-consciousness, no personality.

III. Recognitive consciousness. In this type of consciousness there is not only an objective synthesis of the preceding moments in each moment of consciousness, but there is also present a subjective synthesis. Former experiences are not only simply reinstated in consciousness, but they are also recognized as such. This type of mental activity may be represented by the consciousness of the higher vertebrate animals. There is here memory, there is the projection of the present into the subjective past, there is recognition, but there is no self-consciousness, no personality.

IV. Resultory self-consciousness. This type of self-consciousness has no synthesis in each present moment of the preceding past moments of self-consciousness. Such a form of consciousness may be regarded as a series of independent, instable personalities coming like bubbles to the surface of consciousness and bursting without leaving any marked trace behind them. It is evident that this type of personality, although it has a series of moments, has no memory of that series, nor has it any personal identity.

V. Synthetic self-consciousness. This form of self-consciousness has a series of moments, and all the moments in the series can be included in and owned by each present moment of self-consciousness. The moments in the series are intimately linked and intertwined. Each moment synthesizes, owns, knows, and controls the preceding ones. This type of consciousness possesses synthesis, reproduction, recognition, personality, personal identity, and is represented by man's mental activity" (13).

Husserl, in his studies on phenomenology, has never discussed the nature of consciousness in detail and in definite terms. The concept of consciousness is very vital in phenomenology. Therefore, if consciousness remains undefined and vague, phenomenology of necessity cannot proceed any further.

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If we look at the Darwinian theory of evolution, we find that consciousness is no god-send or wind-fall, but that it arises out of simple reflex action. Sigmund Freud's theory of the tripartite region of the mind has some affinity with the Darwinian theory of mind. Both the Darwinian biologist and the psychologist have one thing in common in their contention that consciousness develops out of unconsciousness. In the case of Darwin, it is the simple reflex action out of which consciousness develops and in the case of Freud, it is the unconscious region of the mind out of which the conscious region comes as a result of the interaction of the unconscious or a portion of it with the reality. Mental processes are fundamentally unconscious. Freud wrote : "The first of these displeasing propositions of psychoanalysis is this : that mental processes are essentially unconscious, and that those which are conscious are merely isolated acts and parts of the whole psychic activity" (14).

Moreover, there may be contact between the unconscious and the conscious, as Freud taught. The conscious is always

imperceptibly being influenced by the unconscious. In psychoanalysis the unconscious materials are brought to the fore in the conscious, thus relieving the patient of his unconscious mind's pressure on the conscious mind: "A vehement effort must have been exercised to prevent the mental process in question from penetrating into consciousness and as a result it has remained unconscious; being unconscious it had the power to construct a symptom. The same vehement effort is again at work during analytic treatment, opposing the attempt to bring the unconscious into consciousness" (15). Therefore we can guess that consciousness, if it is defined at all by phenomenology, is inadequately done so.

Behaviorism has no sympathy for phenomenology. The behavioristic school of psychology developed as a reaction against the structuralistic school which has some kind of affinity with phenomenology. Like phenomenology, the structuralistic school is also concerned with consciousness — its contents and all that. In structuralism "conscious experience was analyzed and described; its structural elements — sensations, images, and feelings — were differentiated, much as the basic elements of matter are analyzed and described" (16). But phenomenology is more fundamental than structuralism in that it, for one thing, chums off the natural attitude that is present in structuralism. Nevertheless, the two disciplines have the same objective — investigation of the nature of consciousness.

Wundt's structuralism was soon confronted by J.B. Watson's behaviorism. Watson altogether rejected the methodology of structuralism. The reason he put forward was that structuralism was subjective in approach : "He contended that psychology should give up studying conscious experience, both its contents and its functions. He stressed the point that introspective data are subjective, evident only to the experiencing individual. He did not deny that conscious experience exists; he merely argued that since consciousness is private, it cannot be studied scientifically"(17). Watson did not contend with the phenomenologists, but if he had to, he could have employed the same argument against the phenomenologists.

Phenomenology unmittingly takes for granted that intentionality is an essential quality of consciousness. We can go further back and ask : why is it so that consciousness intends? Phenomenology cannot answer this question in any other way than saying that the act of intending is simply an inalienable act of consciousness. Further, intention may be explained in terms of expectation. When some one is conscious, he must intend certain thing or object (object). These objects he comes to learn about during his long period of learning in the family circle, for example. William James conceived of the first-ever-in-life sensation of the neonate as a buzzing, booming, amorphous experience.

The new-born is certainly conscious. But does it intend anything? No. But the adult does. This is so because the adult has learnt to expect certain objects. Intentionality is, therefore, no inherited or inborn quality. It is an accretion to the individual as a result of his long period of learning. Stimuli are bombarded ceaselessly upon the receptors or analysers (I.P. Pavlov) of the organism, and as such sensation grows. This sensation is equivalent to consciousness. Therefore, the thing goes to the consciousness, as the psychologists teach, and not the other way round, and so Husserl's advice to go back to the thing only leads to fallacy.

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Husserl has spoken of pure consciousness, or pure awareness but C.G. Jung evidently denied the existence of any such phenomenon : "... pure awareness (which) Jung expressly declared to be non-existent" (18). Further "Jung's thesis is that the 'One Mind' is to be equated with the collective unconscious" (19). Husserl's pure consciousness, therefore, can be explained away with the help of Jung's Unconscious.

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I.N. Richard, the philosopher-critic, was not a psychologist in the academic sense of the word, yet his essay 'A Sketch for Psychology' bespeaks of his worth as a psychologist. Richard

believed that "The threefold division between the causes, character and consequences of a mental event, conscious or unconscious, corresponds, with certain qualifications, to the usual division in traditional psychology of thought (or cognition), feeling, and will (or conation). To be cognisant of anything, to know it, to will anything is to act towards it. In between these two are the conscious accompaniments, if any, of the whole process. These last, the conscious characters of the mental event, include evidently both sensations and feelings" (20). (italics mine). But Husserl did not admit this.

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William James did not believe that pure phenomenological description was possible. William James Morie, wrote about William James in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy : "He was convinced that pure description in the manner of phenomenology is impossible. Description cannot be other than conceptual; concepts, in turn, are tools of classification that have inextinguishable conventional and theoretical elements. Concepts do not passively mirror; they select according to human interests and purposes. Assumptions, James maintained, have a way of establishing themselves 'in our very descriptions of the phenomenal facts' (Principles, Vol. I, p. 145). Naive phenomenology attempts to eliminate assumptions from descriptive statements. This is an impossible task ^{for} ~~is~~ no other reason than that every allegedly assumption-free phenomenology

must itself make doubtful assumptions, including the assumption that there can be description without classification" (21).

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