PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Phenomenological Philosophy as the Basis for a Human Scientific Psychology

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First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Leswin Laubscher, the current Chair of the Psychology Department at Duquesne University, for inviting me to speak to the department more than half a century after I started my career here as a phenomenological psychologist. It is also my first visit to the department in more than a quarter of a century, so you must forgive me if certain nostalgic feelings come through. However, it is good to see that there is still a phenomenological presence in the department because the development of a phenomenological psychology was the very raison d'être of the department. In my talk today, I shall try to indicate how we believed that the application of phenomenological philosophical thought to psychology would be helpful to a psychology that wanted to understand human persons in an adequate way.

If in the 1950s some of us found psychology to be lacking, what was wrong with it and how would one go about correcting it? What was holding back its vigorous development? Why was our understanding of the human person not advancing the way that our knowledge of nature was progressing? Well, for one thing, the human person was not so much the theme of the research psychologists of that era as an animal was, and if a human was thematized, it was not the essential human that was studied so much as human phenomena with primarily sensorial and physiological manifestations. Why did this state of affairs exist? Because psychology strove to become a natural science and the phenomena that were studied had to show characteristics that were similar to nature and they had to have an empirical basis. In that era, whether or not such an approach clarified human phenomena was not as important as psychology’s scientific status. More important than the clarification of human phenomena was psychology’s determination to be a natural science, although mainstream psychologists honestly believed they were doing both.

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A critical question that was rarely raised is: Did psychology have to be a natural science? Even in those days, there was awareness of the Geisteswissenschaft tradition in Germany, which actually had a certain dominance during the years of the Weimar Republic, but the American intellectual scientific culture did not look upon that tradition with favor. The other rarely raised question that had to be considered was: Should psychology leave the realm of science altogether? Somehow, that did not seem right either. Psychology could be a Wissenschaft, which meant an organized body of knowledge in the sense of the German tradition and not a commitment to the methods and procedures of the physical or natural sciences. Moreover, if one concentrated on specifically human characteristics, one could have a human science. Logically, such a decision made sense, but sociologically and politically it would be a challenge to implement. One would be swimming against the scientific tide of the times. However, I’m sure that the implementation would be even more difficult today with APA’s [American Psychological Association’s] attempt to make psychology a STEM [science, technology, engineering, mathematics] science, i.e., a science that emphasizes natural science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

But what difference could the idea of a human science make for psychology? It would prioritize the philosophical anthropology of being human in a distinctively personal sense and not human’s commonalities with nature. But of course, in the psychological world, differences existed here as well. For many psychologists, the study of humans did not mean that one had to leave the realm of nature. Humans were more complex perhaps, but just as natural as a thing. So they adopted the philosophical view known as naturalism. Here’s what Runes (1958, p. 205) dictionary of philosophy says about naturalism. It is a long entry, so I’ll give a few excerpts:

Naturalism, challenging the cogency of cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments, holds that the universe requires no supernatural cause and government, but is self-existent, self-explanatory, self-operating, and self-directing; that the world process is not teleological and anthropocentric, but purposeless, deterministic, . . . and only incidentally productive of man; that human life, physical, moral, mental and spiritual, is an ordinary natural event attributable in all respects to the ordinary operations of nature; . . . naturalism means to assert that there is but one system or level of reality; that this system is the totality of objects and events in space and time; and that the behavior of this system is determined only by its own character and is reducible to a set of causal laws.

Consequently, if one followed naturalistic assumptions, no change in perspective was required to study humans, and that is the path that mainstream psychology followed.

However, in the world at large, other views and other philosophies existed. For those of us for whom the naturalistic perspective was not convincing, a different perspective was needed and that is where existential phenomenological philosophy, thriving in post-World War II Europe of that time, came in. We turned to it because we recognized that what was required was a nonnaturalistic philosophical anthropology. We needed a philosophy that would explicitly acknowledge uniquely human characteristics and methods for exploring those characteristics. We interpreted our task to be one in which we were to be as faithful to persons or humans as natural science was to nature. Natural scientific psychology was more interested in being scientific in the natural science sense and so it imitated the methods and procedures of the natural sciences even though it meant a reductionistic understanding of what it meant to be human. In other words, it was more interested in being natural scientific than in being faithful to human persons. Mainstream psychology found the methods and perspective they wanted to use to be already in existence.
and all they had to do was to adopt them or else modify them slightly to fit human phenomena, but it also meant that they chose phenomena that could fit into the pre-existing methods. Nobody said this more precisely than Sigmund Koch (1959, p. 783) when he stated that “at the time of its inception, psychology was unique in the extent to which its institutionalization preceded its content and its methods preceded its problems” (italics in original). Thus, despite psychology’s belief that it was empirical, its ambition to be a natural science was an ideological commitment that was forced upon its subject matter. Its desire to be a natural science actually preceded an examination of its subject matter and by adopting and imitating the preexisting natural scientific methods and criteria, its methods preceded its problems.

Those seeking a different psychology posited the reverse of the mainstream goal. We desired, first, to remain faithful to human reality in all its complexity and our task was to invent concepts, procedures and research methods that would not reduce our understanding of what it meant to be human. So here was the contrast we faced in the beginning of the 1960s when the doctoral program was established. Mainstream psychology believed that it had a clear conception of the kind of science that psychology should be and it was armed with methods and criteria concerning the sense of a good natural science, so when it approached its subject matter, consciousness, behavior, or experience, it made sure that it met the preexisting criteria of science. Most practitioners did not, at least initially, realize the distorting effect that such an approach had on its subject matter. For example, behaviorists studied animals under conditions so restrictive that their normal behavior in an actual friendly environment was never observed. Of course, many traditional psychologists did not believe that there was a distorting effect. We, on the other hand, wanted to function within the context of a human science and our goal was to be faithful to a robust understanding of being human and we realized that we would have to invent methods, procedures, and criteria that would satisfy our goals. We realized that the kind of science we were seeking did not as yet exist—at least not completely—so we tried to bring it into existence. In creating this new mode of being scientific, a certain equality had to be posited between the researcher and the research participant, the only difference being the role that each played. Whatever one wanted to say about the researcher as a human being had to be said about the participant in terms of human characteristics and possibilities. We were too conscious of the behaviorists who ignored the consciousness of its participants even while they used their own consciousness to study the behavior of others.

In our view, existential-phenomenological philosophy offered us such an option and so we proceeded to work out that project: psychology as a human science based on existential-phenomenological philosophy! Neither humanness nor science should be distorted in such a program, but a clear sense of humanness or personhood was not there at the beginning, nor was a thorough understanding of human science initially present. To be sure, there were guiding ideas, but these were meant to be developed and clarified as we progressed. We were to discover our science as we conducted concrete studies on specific human phenomena.

Now I would like to indicate the difference that a phenomenologically based human science of psychology can make by taking on one of the most difficult issues for empiricists: the givenness of irreal phenomena. I shall use Husserl to demonstrate this point, but I could have used any one of the Big Four. When Heidegger (1927/1962) distinguished between Being (capital B) from beings (small b), he was introducing the irreal. As we know, Sartre (1943/1956) distinguished between being and nothingness and for him consciousness is a nothingness but it is also precisely nothingness which reveals being, and for Merleau-Ponty (1964/1968) the visible is dependent...
upon and supported by the invisible. In encountering phenomena, phenomenologists always find
some sense of the irreal and that dimension is always important for understanding the phenomena
as experienced by humans. But I use Husserl because he confronts the issue directly and he
contrasts his position with that of the empiricists.

THE PRESENCE OF A NONNATURALISTIC PHENOMENON: THE IRREAL

So if we want to uphold the philosophical perspective that humans, while partially natural, also
have dimensions that are nonnatural, where do we turn? I want to turn to the most obvious, and
yet the most difficult phenomenon for nonsupporters of our approach to embrace; the presence
of irreal phenomena or irreal dimensions of phenomena. Until psychology tackles this issue, it
will not make significant headway in understanding human psychological phenomena. Before
pointing to examples of such phenomena, I want to speak to the biggest stumbling block to
the acknowledgment of the irreal: empiricism. In the west, there is only one philosophy of
science that is taken seriously: empiricism. Sometimes it is presented as a kind of liberal logical
empiricism and sometimes it is presented as a stricter positivism, but always, some form of
empiricism is the basis of science. If you have been trained in psychology in the 20th or early
part of the 21st century, whether you know it or not, you are an empiricist.

Now, empiricism is not all bad, but it is more limited than many empiricists are willing to
acknowledge. And it is not so much that phenomenological philosophy is against empiricism,
but it is more comprehensive than it. In fact, Husserl, in Ideas I, praises empiricism. He (Husserl,
1913/1983, p. 35) wrote:

As we must acknowledge, empiricistic naturalism springs from the most praiseworthy motives.
In contrast to all “idols,” to the powers of tradition and superstition, of crude and refined prejudices
of every sort, it is a radicalism of cognitive practice that aims at enforcing the right of autonomous
reasoning as the sole authority on questions of truth.

So far, Husserl has no quarrel with empiricism. He agrees with its goals. But he questions
whether empiricism has carried out its project sufficiently accurately. He (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. 35) continued as follows:

But to judge rationally or scientifically about things signifies to conform to the things themselves or
to go from words and opinions back to the things themselves, to consult them in their self-givenness
and to set aside all prejudices alien to them. Only another mode of expression for just this—so the
empiricist believes—is that all science must proceed from experience, must ground its mediate
cognition on immediate experience. The empiricist therefore takes genuine science and experiential
science to be identical. (Italics in original.)

For Husserl, it is that identification that limits empiricism. He (Husserl, 1913/1983, pp. 35–36)
went on to show just how empiricism was limited. He continued as follows:

The essential fault in empiricistic argumentation consists of identifying or confusing the fundamental
demand for a return to the “things themselves” with the demand for legitimation of all cognition by
experience. With his comprehensible naturalistic constricting of the limits bounding cognizable
“things,” the empiricist simply takes experience to be the only act that is presentive of things themselves. But things are not simply mere things belonging to Nature, nor is actuality in the usual sense simply all of actuality; and that originarily presentive act which we call experience (in the natural sciences) relates only to actuality in Nature. To make identification here and treat them as supposed truisms is blindly to push aside difference which can be given in the clearest insight. (Italics in original.)

So what are other types of givens that might not fall under the empiricist claims? Husserl (1913/1983, pp. 36–37) spoke more positively about the phenomenological perspective when he wrote:

*Immediate ‘seeing,’* not merely sensuous, experiential seeing, but seeing in the universal sense as an originally presentive consciousness of any kind whatever, is the ultimate legitimizing source of all rational assertions. This source has its legitimizing function only because, and to the extent that, it is an originally presentive source.” (Italics in original.)

Of course, what I just quoted is a paraphrase of Husserl’s “Principle of all principles.” Husserl’s point is that there can be nonphysical objects that can be given to consciousness. Because he admitted that such acts were possible, Husserl, ironically, stated that he was the true positivist. He (Husserl, 1913/1983) admitted that this was a new mode of seeing but maintained that it was as legitimate as experiential seeing. He then wrote the sentence that is absolutely essential for being able to found psychology as a human science. He (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. 37) said “For experience, we, therefore, substitute something more universal: ‘intuition’; and by so doing we reject the identification of science taken universally with experiential science.” In other words, the true function of consciousness is to intuit, i.e., to make things, events or phenomena, present. Experience is a subcategory of intuiting. Experience presents us with real things, and for Husserl the real is anything that exists in space and time and is regulated by causality. But the real does not exhaust the types of presences that can be given to consciousness. Irreal objects, like ideas and numbers, and even quasi-real objects, like certain imaginary figures, can become present to consciousness. And if such objects can present themselves to a human consciousness and psychology is the science of consciousness, isn’t it incumbent upon psychology to comprehend how they are encountered and what role they play in a person’s life?

As a matter of fact, I will go out on a limb and declare that the irreal and the quasi-real are far more interesting for psychology than the real. After all, what are the phenomena that incite psychological interest? A quick scanning of such topics reveals phenomena such as illusions, delusions, false memories, pathologies—which mostly confuse the irreal with the real (paranoids posit irreal enemies; schizophrenics hear irreal voices, etc.)—imaginary objects, fantasies, motives, dreams, phantom limbs, and so on. All these phenomena contain irreal or quasi-real characteristics. Perhaps the real objects are the norms against which these phenomena are to be judged, but still we have to understand why consciousness can intuit irreal or quasi-real phenomena or irreal dimensions of real phenomena. But empiricists do not accept that these irreal phenomena are directly intuited.

Rather, empiricists often claim that the irreal objects are created by consciousness. For years psychologists have made that claim because a type of real object is not present to anchor the experience, but since something is experienced, then it must have been produced by consciousness itself. In other words, the default position is that since no sensorial presence is given, the
experienced object must have been produced by consciousness. But not for Husserl. An irreal object is given just as much as a sensorial object is given and it can be intuited and described. I can reflect on and think about the idea of justice without any sensorial presence whatsoever necessarily being there. For phenomenologists, there is direct evidence for such presentations but empiricists always come up with some kind of theory to try to prove that the irreal is somehow the result of earlier real encounters, or in some other way are dependent upon the real. What phenomenologists call direct evidence in the case of irreal objects is not accepted by empiricists.

But we must be careful here. So far, I have been speaking from the perspective of the natural attitude and so the distinction between the real and the irreal holds. If we recall that phenomenologists must function within the perspective of the phenomenological reduction, then the existential positing of the given is withheld and so whatever is given is considered to be a presence rather than an existing entity. With irreal givens, we have the seemingly paradoxical situation where lack of realness is nevertheless considered to be a given but in this case the positing of its irreality is withheld. But we still have a meaningful object to be analyzed. In a sense, the reduction is a great equalizer: we analyze presences regardless of their existential status. Thus, we can analyze a veridical perception and an illusion and see what meanings emerge from such analyses insofar as they are positive presences. This approach is different from a reality based one where illusions are understood to be negative and thus usually analyzed pejoratively.

However, within the perspective of the natural attitude the classic instance of a dispute between real and irreal dimensions was the result of the Wurzburg school wherein imageless thoughts were discovered (see Humphrey, 1963; Kusch, 1999; Mandler, 2007; and Ogden, 1911; for history of the school and the nature of the controversy). The Wurzburg school stands out in the history of psychology because its results were controversial and never resolved. Between 1900 and about 1910, the psychologists at Wurzburg University studied the processes of thinking by means of experiments that involved introspections concerning the solution of problems with which the participants were presented. During the course of the descriptions of how the problems were solved some participants described the appearance of imageless thoughts. Sometimes images were also present but they avowed that some nonsensory content was also present. This triggered off some two dozen experiments trying to replicate the findings up until about the 1920s and their results were also contradictory: some supported imageless thought and some did not find it. The functional psychologist Angell (1906, p. 641) was against the notion and called it a “logical abstraction” and Titchener was against it because he thought that images were carriers of meaning and so no new element had to be posited to account for meanings. Titchener also complained that the observers were not careful enough in their observations and descriptions. Wundt chimed in and criticized the very nature of the experiments, saying that truly rigorous introspective procedures were not followed. Still, some dozen others did find that their participants reported imageless contents while solving problems. Throughout this controversy, no one mentioned the Husserlian conviction that the intuition of nonsensorial objects was possible. One could almost see the positive results of the Wurzburg school as a confirmation of Husserl’s idea. Yet, I have never seen that idea expressed in any literature on this topic, but it seems to me to be an obvious conclusion. But I still do not see today’s empiricists any more convinced than those who objected to the finding in the early part of the 20th century. The major stance is: there cannot be a direct intuition of a non-sensorial given.

My contention is that in order for psychology to develop into a mature science of humans, it must break away from empirical philosophy and naturalism as the basis for its science.
reason is because empiricism’s mode of dealing with the irreal is inadequate. In my view, phenomenological philosophy comprehends such phenomena in a better way. Note, I am not saying that empiricists do not deal with such irreal phenomena. They do, indeed, recognize them but they do not admit that they can be directly intuited and substitute for the lack of direct intuition various cumbersome theories to account for their presence. These alternative theoretical explanations hinder a proper understanding of the irreal phenomena and how to cope with them.

But will such an argument convince empiricists? I doubt it, because empiricists do not trust subjectivity. They seem to believe that objectivity means the removal of subjectivity from an encounter in order to perceive something as it really is. But if all subjectivity is removed, how can anyone know what the objective thing is? It would require at least an observer to become aware of the given. In contrast, phenomenologists argue that objectivity is an achievement of subjectivity, not a removal of it. The differences between phenomenologists and empiricists regarding the irreal are a stumbling block to a unitary perspective in psychology. If psychology is to become a coherent science this difference has to be made explicit and be thoroughly debated.

REAL OBJECTS AND THE IRREAL

One may concede that perhaps empiricism misses irreal objects, but when it comes to dealing with real objects and their perception, surely empiricism is on the right track. However, before we make that assertion, we have to look at the whole context. As we know, Husserl (1954/1970a) introduced the notion of the Lifeworld and he pointed out its irrevocable foundational role for all of humankind’s subsequent activities. He was especially concerned with the meaning of modern science and how the objects of modern science were constructed on the basis of everyday phenomena, but also transformative of them, and then he noted that the transformed objects were substituted for the phenomena of everyday life. He (Husserl, 1954/1970a, pp. 49–50) stated, ‘‘Immediately with Galileo, then, begins the surreptitious substitution of idealized nature for prescientifically intuited nature.’’ The substitution results in a more quantified and abstract object than what is prescientifically experienced. The transformations are the result of methodic demands so that we are no longer dealing with objects as directly experienced. Have you noticed how rarely real objects are used in perceptual experiments? Usually one finds geometric figures, or figures composed of dots and dashes, or pictures, or computer generated designs. Have you noticed how abstract our terms are? We study consciousness, or behavior, and we deal with organisms, and stimuli, and responses. The specificities of concrete experiences are gone. But if we return to the life-world, we often find that the most basic encounter with objects and events is in terms of their expressiveness or physiognomy. So the most primordial experiential structure in the Life-world is the impression-expression structure, and the term physiognomy covers both sides of the structure. Long ago, the Hungarian, but French-trained, philosopher, Georges Politzer (1928/1968), argued that psychology should be a concrete science and I think that we could use phenomenological philosophy to advance that idea.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/1962) picks up this Husserlian theme and vividly demonstrates the difference between the Life-world terms and the terms that science uses. It is a long quotation, but it is so pertinent to my second point that I believe most of it deserves to be quoted. He (1945/1962, pp. 23–24) writes:
By way of guarding against myths it is, then, desirable to point out everything that is made incomprehensible by empiricist constructions and all the basic phenomena they conceal. They hide from us in the first place "the cultural world" or "human world" in which nevertheless almost our whole life is led. . . . Now, for empiricism, "cultural" objects and faces owe their distinctive form, their magic power, to transference and projection of memory, so that only by accident has the human world any meaning. There is nothing in the appearance of a landscape, an object or a body whereby it is predestined to look "gay" or "sad," "lively" or "dreary," "elegant" or "coarse." Once more seeking a definition of what we perceive through the physical and chemical properties of the stimuli which may act upon our sensory apparatus, empiricism excludes from perception the anger or the pain which I nevertheless read in a face, the religion whose essence I seize in some hesitation or reticence, the city whose temper I recognize in the attitude of a policeman or the style of a public building. . . . Perception thus impoverished becomes purely a matter of knowledge, a progressive noting down of qualities and of their most habitual distribution, and the perceiving subject approaches the world as the scientist approaches his experiments. If on the other hand we admit that all these "projections," all these "associations," all these "transferences" are based on some intrinsic characteristics of the object, the human world ceases to be a metaphor and becomes once more what it really is, the seat and as it were the homeland of our thoughts. The perceiving subject ceases to be an "acosmic" thinking subject, and action, feeling and will remain to be explored as original ways of positing an object, since "an object looks attractive or repulsive before it looks black or blue, circular or square." (Italics in original.)

In this quotation Merleau-Ponty is elaborating the insight first announced by the Gestalt psychologists that expressiveness or physiognomy is a perceptual datum. We noted that Husserl stated that certain methodical idealities transformed the Life-world givens and Merleau-Ponty called the results of the scientific perspective "empiricist constructions" and he argued that when such constructions replace the everyday terms of the Life-world, they conceal the human and cultural worlds. Merleau-Ponty wants to affirm that when one experiences a landscape as "lively" or an object as "elegant" it is because the scene or the object have intrinsic characteristics that make such experiences possible. The world is richer than what we can comprehend cognitively and Merleau-Ponty raises the question, also raised by Husserl, of whether feelings or desires cannot also be originary ways of positing objects. It seems that the Life-world offers more possibilities than the scientific perspective utilizes. We need to correct that discrepancy.

Now of course, projections, associations, inferences, and so forth can still happen. But even if they do, one has to ask why a specific projection or inference took place. What was it about the scene or situation that motivated the specific projection that took place? These are not random projections. Something in the scene motivates a specific projection. One does not project sadness onto a joyous scene or anger onto a pleasant situation unless there was a perceptual misunderstanding or a pathology is involved.

The aforementioned tension between Life-world originality and scientific constructionism raises a question: Is it possible to remain more faithful to the original phenomena and still come up with an idea of science that has different advantages for gaining useful knowledge from those produced by the established modern scientific perspective? Husserl's insistence on the Life-world as the fundamental basis for all knowledge is a motivating force for seeking such a science.

I would like to provide an example of how physiognomies can show themselves in data and how they can be understood. I was reading the data of one of my students, who was working on the experience of jealousy. I came across several instances of clear physiognomic perceptions...
and so I decided to analyze them and I will give you one example. The context here is that the person describing the experience of jealousy helps out at the local high school and he volunteers to do all sorts of odd jobs in order to keep the school functioning as efficiently as possible. The participant states that while doing some of these chores, a female student offered to assist him and because she was helping she had access to the teachers’ lounge. In the lounge there was another male teacher who, according to the participant, kept telling bad jokes and puns. On a specific occasion the participant had to leave the lounge and his female student helper remained there listening to the male teacher. When he returned to the lounge, this is what he said:

When I returned, I looked at my student, in rapt attention to this bore and realized that she really had a crush on him! She was simply totally enamored of him, hanging on his every word. At first I thought it was cute. Then I thought, “Wait a minute. I am being used! She is not coming in to help with the project; she is coming into the lounge to be close with this blowhard. I have been taken advantage of.”

So, what did the participant see? Was he projecting into the situation? Was he jealously projecting feelings into the young woman because he wanted to be the object of such a desire? Was he transferring, associating, or inferring something or other? Or was he actually perceiving that she had a crush on the male teacher? Is it possible for a person to see that someone else has a crush on another person? If so, what is being perceived? Or, how does such an awareness come to the observer?

When one asks the question, “What is the object when there is a physiognomic perception or the perception of expressiveness?” one is trying to ascertain the quality or nature of the given. For natural scientific psychology the object of a perceptual act had to be palpable. That is, it had to be tangible; easily perceptible; which meant that it had to have some kind of sensory content. But is the object of expressive perception sensorial? Sensory givens are included of course, but are they the essence of expressiveness or a physiognomic perception? Or are they subsidiary?

SOME PHENOMENOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

If the subject matter of psychology has difficulty in meeting one of the criteria of the natural sciences—sensorial palpability—perhaps it should seek elsewhere for relevant criteria. Phenomenological philosophy as the basis of psychological science can be helpful here because of certain discoveries concerning conscious acts and their objects as well as attitudes that are acceptable.

What has to be considered is the notion of a categorial object because I claim that physiognomic objects are categorial objects, which implies that irreal dimensions contribute to the perception of the object. The meaning of the categorial attitude and the categorial object is thoroughly discussed in the sixth investigation of Husserl’s (1900/1970b) *Logical Investigations*. Here we can only cover the points related to the issue of irreal objects. The idea of intentionality includes the idea that acts of intentionality can find fulfillment when they land on a proper object. But of course, it is not at all guaranteed that intentional acts will find fulfillment. But Husserl was persistent in trying to find proper objects for intentional acts even when it seemed unlikely. The question is particularly important when complex patterns of experience that include structured or
articulated linguistic expressions are involved. Sokolowski (1981, p. 127), in elaborating Husserl’s idea of categorial intuition, uses a simple example, the sentence, “The house is green.” A question is then put to the sentence: Is there a “given” to all parts of that sentence? Sokolowski (1981, p. 127), paraphrasing Husserl, answers, “It seems clear, he (Husserl) says, that there is something in what we perceive that corresponds to the word ‘house’ and that there is something that corresponds to the word ‘green.’ . . . But is there anything corresponding to the word ‘is?’ ” In the empirical tradition, what is correlated with the word is is due to psychological activity and internal perceptions. But Husserl rejects that answer and as Sokolowski (1981, pp. 127–128) states it, “The being of the house is not a predicate of the house, but it is also not a predicate of the psychological activity that goes on when we see that the house is green.” In general, Husserl argues against the notion that being is given in sense perception, whether the perception is internal (i.e., produced by consciousness) or external. What then is specific to categorial intuition?

The answer to that question will initially require some examples. The is in the sentence refers to the being of the object perceived, not the object as such. To account for the being, or the is’ Husserl (1900/1970a, pp. 780–781) writes:

I can see colour, but not being-coloured. I can feel smoothness but not being-smooth. I can hear a sound, but not that something is sounding. Being is nothing in the object, no part of it, no moment tenanting it, no quality or intensity of it or no internal form whatsoever, no constitutive feature of it however conceived. But being is also nothing attaching to an object; as it is no real (reales) internal feature, so also it is no real external feature, and therefore not, in the real sense, a ‘feature’ at all. For it has nothing to do with the real forms of unity which bind objects into more comprehensive objects, tones into harmonies, things into more comprehensive things or arrangement of things.

In general, two things happen with categorial objects: (a) is that one perceives the belongingness of a feature to an object; (b) a distinction is being drawn between the object and the presencing of the object. Sokolowski (1981, p. 129) describes Husserl’s distinction as follows:

Not only do we have a thing and its feature presented to us, but we also have the presencing of the thing in its feature presented to us. Presencing is also presented, as well as that which is presented. It is this presencing that responds, in what we experience, to the word “is” when we state about something before us that it is such and such.

However, Sokolowski (1981) points out that Husserl makes clear that it is not sufficient to simply experience or live through the perception of belongingness of a feature, but it must be made explicit, and that requires another act.

Husserl distinguishes between straightforward and founded acts. A straightforward act of perception is a simple, uncomplicated act directed toward a simple object: For example, I perceive a house. The majority of mainstream psychological research deals with this type of object. A founded act is a complex act based upon other acts and includes connections, or conjunctions, or disjunctions, or other types of relationships; e.g., I perceive a stucco house painted two tones of green and with a roof of red Spanish tiles. Husserl (1900/1970b) thus makes a distinction between sensuous and categorial perceptions. Even though categorial perceptions are based upon sensuous perceptions, the object that emerges is genuinely transformative of what was given in
the straightforward perception that serves as a basis of the categorial act. Husserl (1900/1970b, pp. 787–788) writes:

What we have are acts which, as we said, set up new objects, acts in which something appears as actual and self-given, which was not given, and could not have been given, as what it now appears to be, in these foundational acts alone. On the other hand, the new objects are based on the older ones, they are related to what appears in the basic acts. Their manner of appearance is essentially determined by this relation. We are here dealing with a sphere of objects, which can only show themselves ‘in person’ in such founded acts. [Italics in original.]

Moreover, Husserl (1900/1970b, p. 780) states that ‘‘The objective correlates of categorial forms are not ‘real’ (realen) moments.’’ He also characterizes sensuous objects as objects of the lowest possible order and categorial objects as objects of a higher order.

Finally, Husserl adds an important note on the noetic aspect of founded acts. He (1900/1970b, p. 792) writes:

It is clear . . . that the apprehension of a moment and of a part generally as a part of the whole in question, and, in particular, the apprehension of a sensuous feature as a feature, or of a sensuous form as a form, point to acts which are all founded: these acts are in our case of a relational kind. This means that the sphere of ‘sensibility’ has been left, and that of ‘understanding’ entered. (Italics in original.)

Let me summarize the phenomenological contributions mentioned in this section. Husserl demonstrates that intentional acts can find fulfillment with irreal objects. Thus, it is not necessary for objects to have sensoriality or similar data in order to function as phenomenological objects. When seeking the objects that could fulfill relational terms in linguistic expressions Husserl found it necessary to distinguish between the presencing of an object and the object that was presented. The presencing relates to the being of the object, which can never be given perceptually. Recognizing presencing also requires categorial or founded acts that are founded on straightforward perceptual acts but transcend them, and because they are new acts, they transform the previously straightforward sensuous object into a new, complicated object that is now understood to be categorial. The categorial object requires that a dimension of non-sensuous understanding be part of the noetic act that apprehends it.

EXPRESSIVE PHENOMENA AS PRIMARY DATA

So do the phenomenological contributions enumerated herein help clarify the phenomena of expressiveness or the experience of a physiognomic object? Let’s turn to the key question. What is given when a physiognomic object or situation is perceived? The first thing that could be said is that the object could easily be classified as categorial. In our example, the man said that he saw his female aide listening with ‘‘rapt attention’’ to his colleague and that she was ‘‘totally enamored of him’’ and that she was ‘‘hanging on his every word.’’ That is an articulated linguistic expression depicting what the person saw. Are these physiognomic features projections, associations, transformations, or are they actually perceived as belonging to the female aide in that situation? If we limited ourselves to objective behavioral descriptions we might have gotten as data something like, ‘‘the aide and the professor were standing there talking to each other.’’ The objective
description motivated by a natural scientific perspective is cautious and so it reflects a fear that saying that the aide had a “crush” on the colleague may have been a subjective intrusion on the part of the describer. It flows from the assumption that physiognomic characteristics are imposed upon a neutral reality rather than the view that such characteristics belong to the objects or situations themselves. Clearly, the objective description would have missed the essence of what actually took place. Psychology has to start its analyses from a perspective that is much closer to that of the Life-world. Ignoring physiognomy is basically ignoring psychology’s data base.

But there is another complicating issue. Instead of a simple act being directed toward an object, when categorial acts are enacted, Husserl noted that one could distinguish between the presencing of an object and the object that was presented. In other words, rather than a simple act–object relationship we have an act—presencing—object relationship. Because of the complication, the implication on the noetic side is that a purely sensory level of functioning is transcended and a certain type of understanding is involved. So to understand our example correctly, perhaps we would have to say something like: The female aide’s mode of presenting herself to the worker’s colleague was to emotionally, or romantically interact with him and that mode of engagement was judged to be happening by the worker. When I say judged, it’s because another act is required that responds to the fulfillment of what was given, and since fulfilled, i.e., actually in person there, one can say it is seen. It is precisely because these situations involve modes of relating, as do most expressive situations involving humans, that we are dealing with states of affairs and therefore categorial perceptions. But categorial perceptions are not straightforward perceptions. In each case it is always how the person acted that is the basis of physiognomic perceptions and not the persons as such, because it is the mode of presencing that supports the (presumably) correct judgments about what is being seen and not the object as such. Thus, presencing is always categorial and as such that mode is not given merely sensorially. As Husserl (1900/1970b, pp. 781–782) has explicitly stated, “being is absolutely imperceptible” and that “the origin of the concept of being and of the remaining categories does not lie in the realm of sense-perception.” If one follows Husserl, it has to be acknowledged that certain kinds of psychological phenomena have to include more than real givens even if real parts are also present.

Of course, within the reduction, one would speak of sensuous and nonsensuous aspects of the categorial object instead of real and irreal parts. This means that the understanding of perception has to be expanded, and Husserl does sometimes speak that way, or we have to say that a spontaneous understanding is accomplished in some as yet undetermined way to bring about the awareness of the whole categorial object. Let’s recall the last sentence of Merleau-Ponty’s quotation: “an object looks attractive or repulsive before it looks black or blue, circular or square.” We apprehend these meanings in some spontaneous and non-elaborate way. How? I’m not sure. It requires further study.

Again, I have to raise the question: Will these arguments and examples convince empiricists? I doubt it. There is a very special problem here, which is: how to get intersubjective agreement on a nonsensorial given. Normally, empiricists will gather and present an empirical object and come to a consensus about what is given. But how does one do that with an irreal given? It’s not a matter of logical argumentation; it’s, as Husserl says, a matter of “seeing.” This seems to be another stumbling block to a unitary psychology, or perhaps it’s the same one in a more complicated way. There seems to be an ontological shifting going on that seems to call for an analogous shift in psychological terminology, unless we have transcended the psychological level itself. However, I must confess that I have not worked all that out as yet.
When I was invited to come teach at Duquesne by van Kaam, the pressing issue for him was the question of method. Because I was a methodologist, he wondered if I could come up with a method of data analysis that would be more sympathetic to the overall existential-phenomenological approach of the department. I told him at the time that I knew too little about phenomenology, but that I would certainly try. He felt that the standard quantitative methods were not appropriate and he kept mentioning that in Europe researchers were using a phenomenological method. During the early years, I kept trying to find out what that method was that the Europeans were using but no one could explain it to me. Van Kaam himself, not being a researcher, could not articulate it to me in a detailed and usable way.

Finally, my sabbatical year arrived and I spent it in Denmark because there were still members of the Copenhagen school of phenomenology to speak to and I used the occasion to visit every phenomenological psychologist in Western Europe to whom anyone could refer me. The Copenhagen school was not really Husserl based, but they followed the phenomenal analyses that the color theorist Ewald Hering employed. One reason the term *phenomenology* gets so misunderstood is that it is applied to more than one tradition. One tradition began with Goethe and it was continued by the Czech physiologist Purkinje, who was at Prague, and Hering, who also taught at Prague, was influenced by Purkinje. The other tradition was initiated by Brentano, who was the teacher of both Carl Stumpf and Husserl and Stumpf is the key integrator of the two traditions because he also spent some years at Prague while Hering was there and he was a colleague of Husserl’s at Halle. It’s also important to note that Stumpf moved on to the Psychological Institute at Berlin and Koffka and Kohler earned their degrees under him. So some sense of phenomenology must have influenced those two Gestaltists as well. In any case, the Rubin students whom I met in Copenhagen followed more in the tradition of Goethe and Hering, rather than Husserl, so I didn’t learn any specific method from them except for the importance of description.

I also visited all the living members of the Utrecht school—Buytendijk, Linschoten, Langeveld, and I already knew van den Berg—but they did not follow a specific method. They all described the phenomenal worlds of others but did not say how they accomplished their tasks. All the other places I visited also neglected to mention anything about a method for phenomenological psychological investigations, including Louvain and the German centers I visited. The most I gathered from that year was that phenomenological psychology meant a theoretical critique of mainstream psychology but a constructive alternative method for collecting and analyzing data based upon phenomenological insights and criteria simply did not exist. So when I returned home, I decided that I would have to do something myself in order to respond to the challenge that van Kaam gave me. But I did gain confidence from the simple fact that no one else seemed to have developed a method.

I was aware that Husserl had developed a philosophical method, but as psychologists we couldn’t follow that method because we would end up doing philosophical analyses. But I thought that we could modify his method so that psychological analyses could be done. Husserl’s method was rather straightforward: (a) You assume the posture of the transcendental phenomenological reduction, (b) you describe a phenomenon, and (c) you determine its essence with the help of free imaginative variation and you describe it. However, to have that method acceptable to scientists in general, and especially to empirical scientists, certain transformations had to take place, including a change in the order of the steps. I foresaw a problem with self-description. Within philosophical
In scholarly contexts, descriptions of phenomena by philosophers themselves is perfectly acceptable. They do it all the time. But if I were to engage empirical psychologists, I could not describe the phenomenon myself because I was convinced that I would get a question right away that is theoretically possible to answer from a phenomenological perspective, but difficult, and it would become a major distraction and the method would never get off the ground. The question I was sure that I would get from my empirical colleagues is: “How do I know that your description is not unconsciously in the service of your theory or viewpoint? If you write the description and then you analyze it, isn’t the chance of a prejudice highly likely?” As I said, it is answerable, but its very presence would mean that I wouldn’t get past the first step. So even before worrying about the assumption of the reduction, I had to resolve the problem of descriptions.

I decided, therefore, that the first step had to be descriptions of phenomena by others, from a natural attitude perspective. Ordinary persons in the everyday world know nothing about phenomenology, but they certainly can describe all sorts of experiences. Thus, such descriptions would become the raw data. This also would mean that the data would be Life-world based and it would include physiognomic expressions and other features of everyday modes of speaking. The second step requires the researcher to adopt the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, but of course, not the transcendental reduction but what Husserl called the phenomenological psychological reduction and I prefer to call the scientific phenomenological reduction. Here the objects of experience are reduced but not the acts: because we do want to make assertions about phenomena as experienced by humans. In the scientific reduction, our assertions are meant to refer to modes of consciousness and not to consciousness as such, which the transcendental reduction would bring forth. Merleau-Ponty says somewhere that the phenomenological attitude understands the natural attitude better than the natural attitude can understand itself. So the modification in this step is that the researcher must assume the attitude of the phenomenological reduction, but the participant does not. This also saves the researcher from having the headache of trying to explain what phenomenology is to every possible Life-world participant. Finally, although imaginative variation is still used and we seek an essence of sorts, it is a psychological essence, or the most invariant meaning to depict highly varied concrete meanings that appear in the raw data, rather than a philosophical essence. Philosophers, as a rule, always seek findings that are universal, necessary, and absolute where possible. Scientific findings are more limited and more contextual because if they are brought to the highest eidetic level, the scientific interest is usually transcended. Our findings are closer to Weber’s ideal types, but of course they are phenomenologically established. For example, if I told you that learning is the ability to do or experience something new, it would be true but psychologically ineffective. It is expressed at too high a level. That is the level at which philosophical essences are usually expressed. But if I said that a type of learning is one in which a person was able to clarify a situation that was rendered ambiguous because a false assumption applied to it did not enable the person to see the same situation in terms of different perspectives, psychological questions immediately arise. Here there is more to chew on. What was the false assumption? How did the person clarify it? What was the nature of the ambiguity? Why did assuming different perspectives help? We need eidetic generalizations of the middle range, not those at the highest level. Much psychological work has been done with the application of this method.

All sciences have to have a method, and so it was critical that the phenomenological psychological perspective develop a method, or else it would never take hold within a psychology that wanted to be scientific. By the way, I never said that the method that was developed on the basis
of Husserl’s philosophical method was the only method that a phenomenological approach could generate. It was simply easier, under pressure, to adapt that method than to think through the whole issue of method from scratch.

So far, I think that I have provided some motivation for phenomenological philosophy to become the basis for a wholly different kind of science—one that would do justice to humans, rather than to nature. I’ve pointed out how phenomenological philosophy, in my opinion, treats irreal phenomena and the irreal dimensions of real entities in a better way. I also pointed out how its values could generate a method that did not favor quantification and that was more sympathetic to concrete descriptions. Moreover, the method meets the general criteria for science, even though it is qualitative, in that it can be critically evaluated and it can be replicated.

The phenomenological perspective in psychology is still very much a minority movement in psychology, especially when continental philosophical criteria are used. The term is bandied about quite a bit in psychology and the social sciences in general and very often it is used as a synonym for experiential and I noted how Husserl commented that that was only half right. Still, there is a presence there that I don’t think will disappear but I think that it is important that we understand its contributions correctly, which means, as difficult as it is, that we really understand the philosophers correctly. In a certain sense, I see a parallel with the empirical tradition. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote the New Organon in 1620, and then there followed almost 2 1/2 centuries of philosophical reflections on mental phenomena by Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Hartley, James Mill and John Stuart Mill, and, finally, Alexander Bain, who died in 1903. But before they died, Sir Francis Galton in the 1860s and Wilhelm Wundt in the 1870s had turned to phenomena in the world rather than contributing more personal reflections. They were scientific researchers rather than philosophers. Now there is nothing wrong with philosophers! Without Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty and others, there would be no phenomenology today. But as psychologists, we are scientific researchers rather than interpreters of texts although without interpretation of texts, again, there would be no phenomenological psychology. I am not denigrating philosophical work—I’m too philosophical to intend that; I would be condemning myself—I’m simply trying to differentiate tasks. The phenomenological philosophers have spent over 100 years interpreting and clarifying phenomenological texts, but now it is up to us psychologists to draw from all that work and armed with their insights, do phenomenological psychological scientific work by investigating the phenomena of the human world.

I have two conclusions: (a) We have to develop a human scientific psychology based on phenomenological philosophy and that project is distinctly possible, and (b) we have to acknowledge irreal phenomena and the irreal dimensions of real phenomena in order to be faithful to human presentive acts and consciousness’s modes of presencing.

REFERENCES


**AUTHOR NOTE**

Amedeo Giorgi was a member of the Psychology Department at Duquesne University for 25 years (1962–1986) and then went on to become Professor of Psychology at Saybrook University. He specializes in the application of phenomenological concepts to psychological issues.