

Can Analytic Philosophy and Phenomenology Have a Dialogue with Each Other?

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Abstract

The study explores whether analytic philosophy and phenomenology, traditionally seen as separate, can come together to form a common perspective. It focuses on mental content as a promising area for this collaboration. The article argues that neither analytic philosophers nor continental philosophers can fully address the issues alone. Instead, a mutual exchange of ideas between both groups is necessary. Through our participation in such a realm we come to know something of how others feel, of what they believe, desire and hope, of who and what they are, along with what we are, what our beliefs, desires, pains, pleasures, fear, disappointment are. Yet within modern philosophy, in particular, our access to such a realm, and so our access to the feelings, beliefs, desires, hopes and identities of others, have been viewed as questionable. The so-called “problem of other minds” is just a problem of whether we do indeed have access to such inter subjectivity and, with it, to the subjectivity of others, as well as of the nature of that access. The article aims to dispel the misconception that these two disciplines are entirely separate and incompatible.

Keywords: analytic philosophy, phenomenology, consciousness, intersubjectivity, mental content

Introduction:

Before we discuss why a dialogical process between the analytical philosophy and the phenomenological tradition is needed, let us try to understand what this analytical methods. Wright states on analytical method as, the logical positivism of the 1920's and the 1930's was a main, though by no means the sole, tributary out of which grew the broader current of philosophical thought, nowadays commonly known as analytical philosophy. Wright is quick to add that it would be quite wrong to label analytical philosophy as a whole brand of positivism. To clarify the position of analytical philosophy, Wright holds that in spite of the many tributaries which have, in the course of the years, emptied their waters into this river, I think it is right and illuminating to call analytical philosophy the mainstream of philosophic thinking in this century. In all its heterogeneity it retains the two features which I already mentioned as typical of its origin: the emphasis on logic and the alignment with science.

It is, in short, the philosophy most characteristic of a culture dominated by scientific rationality. For analytical philosophy now the problem that draws attention is the hard problem of consciousness and this is where another possible meeting point between analytical philosophy and phenomenology will be fruitful (Wright, 1994).

This issue of explanatory gap, Chalmers applies to the hard problem of consciousness as he comes up with the distinction between the easy and the hard problems of consciousness. For the easy problems of consciousness, once the relevant mechanisms are well understood, there is little or no explanatory work left to do. Experience however does not fit this explanatory model. Though experience is associated with a variety of functions, explaining how those functions are performed leaves important questions unanswered. We would still want to know why their performance is accompanied by experience, and why we have this kind of experience rather than another kind. So, for example, even when we find something that plays the causal role in triggering a sensation of pain, we can still ask why the particular experience of pain is associated with that triggering. So, Chalmers states, it is undeniable that some organisms are subjects of experience. But the question of how it is that these systems are subjects of experience is perplexing. Why is it that when our cognitive systems engage in visual and auditory information-processing, we have visual or auditory experience: the quality of deep blue? It is widely agreed that experience arises from a physical basis but we have no good explanation of why and how it arises. Why should physical processing give rise to a richer inner life at all? (Chalmers, 1996).

So, the hard problem of consciousness is the problem of explaining the relationship between physical phenomena such as brain processes and experience. The unanswered questions that come up in this explanatory gap of hard problem of consciousness are the questions like why are physical processes ever accompanied by experience? Why does a given physical process physical truth, even though phenomenal truths cannot be deduced from micro-physical truths. Thus, the hard problem relates closely to the problem of the qualia or the phenomenal content of the mental. The qualia as we have discussed refers to the intrinsic, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives. Chalmers has shown that qualia can not be reduced to any physical states as this issue is an issue of hard problem of consciousness. In contrast, the easy problems are concerned with the objective mechanisms of the cognitive system. The problem of the qualia or the hard problem of consciousness deals with the issue of subjective experience that involves the inner aspect of thought or perception. Thus, subjective experience is unique to the subject and can not be expressed in propositional terms. The experience remains unique, ineffable and mysterious. The explanatory gap as we have already pointed out, tries to study if the gap, between the subjective (the phenomenal aspect of the mental) and the objective (the intentional aspect of the mental) can be bridged. Consciousness is indeed what makes the mind-body problem difficult; it is also what makes life worth living and philosophy, Descartes, Kant and Husserl so exciting. In order to “understand” consciousness we will have to see how it fits into the structure of the world, the world that is already defined by quantum physics, evolutionary biology, cultural history, cosmology and so on. But our understanding of consciousness takes us back to Descartes again: It begins with our own experience of consciousness. The

following passage accounts the emergence of the phenomenological school of thought:

At roughly the same time that analytic philosophy was emerging, Edmund Husserl was developing his “phenomenological” approach to philosophy. He too emphasized high standards of clarity and precision, and had some fruitful engagements with analytic philosophers such as Frege. Husserl, however, sought clarity and precision more in the rigorous description of our immediate experience (the phenomena) than in the logical analysis of concepts or language. He saw his phenomenology as operating at the fundamental level of knowledge on which any truths of conceptual or linguistic analysis would have to be based. In “*Being and Time*” Husserl’s student, Heidegger, turned phenomenology toward “existential” questions about freedom, anguish and death. Later, French thinkers influenced by Husserl and Heidegger, especially Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, developed their own versions of phenomenologically based existentialism. . . . These analytic philosophers (Gilbert Ryle was a leading figure) regarded the continental appeal to immediate experience as a source of subjectivity and obscurity that was counter to their own ideals of logical objectivity and clarity. The analytic continental division was institutionalized in 1962, when American proponents of continental philosophy set up their own professional organization, The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), as an alternative to the predominantly (but by no means exclusively) Analytic American Philosophical Association (APA).

Phenomenology or phenomenological method, founded by Husserl focuses on the contents of the human mind and how phenomenological processes shape our experiences. Nagel’s *The View from Nowhere* proposed a new philosophical or, for that matter, scientific discipline, which should stand in opposition to the paradigm of modern science, though he himself belongs to the analytical tradition. Modern science, he argued, stood under the assumption, or the ideal, of a truly objective science, a science, in other words, that increasingly eliminates the subjective, human standpoint in order to strive towards a “view from nowhere” (Nagel, 1986). While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such an approach, it leaves something missing. Hence, opposed to this ideal he proposed a science of the first-person perspective. Only in this manner of consideration will one be able to ascertain “*what it is like*” to be a subject with a certain view point on the world. This science of the subjective was accepted by phenomenologists and in general continental philosophers and in Nagel we immediately see a meeting point of phenomenology with analytical philosophy. However, such a science is, especially to Husserl, nothing new at all. It was precisely what Husserl had in mind all along. Husserlean phenomenology is a rigorous (eidetic) science of the first-person perspective; it is decidedly a discipline that takes its starting point from this first-person perspective and, while it strives for general results, never abandons this perspective. As Smith defines phenomenology as, Phenomenology is a philosophical discipline alongside ontology, epistemology, logic, ethics, and the like. Yet phenomenology is still not so well understood as these other disciplines. Some philosophers have defined phenomenology as a movement, a historical tradition including the work of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and more recently Gurwitsch, Mohanty, Føllesdal, and many others. Other philosophers have defined phenomenology as a practice of a particular philosophical

methodology: transcendental reflection on the meaning of our experience, proponents of continental philosophy set up their own professional organization, The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP), as an alternative to the predominantly (but by no means exclusively) analytic American Philosophical Association (APA) (Smith, 2007). Zahavi calls the phenomenological self as that where the investigations or analysis of the self and the experiences involved have to be intertwined (Smith, 2007).

Cavell notes that recognizing someone to have an authority is recognizing her as a being or a creature with whom we can enter into a dialogical process. Cavell thus states... our account of self-knowledge must recognize the ways in which the external world, including relationships with others, is part of the fabric of the inner world, as one's first-person experience provides the only approach to one's knowledge of the external world (Cavell, 1993).

Cavell points out that we human beings are thus those creatures who possess both an "inside" world and an "outside" world. However, these two possessions are not antagonistic of each other. Both these two worlds are mediated through the external world i.e. the way in which we experience our self viz., memory, discipline, language and interplay between organism and the body, or what may be called the "body subject." Cavell's idea of the mind-world relationship can be grasped when she says that the "(subject) is embedded in, and fabricated from, interactions between world and mind". cognitive account of first-person authority, according to Cavell, is that which "ignores the fact that the first-person perspective of any one person is part of what constitutes that person" (Cavell, 1993).

Thus, for Cavell the notion of "intersubjective" is an essentially relational realm: it is the realm that lies between the subjects and ourselves (for we, of course, are among the subjects to whom the term refers). As it lies between, so it also represents the realm that is common to all, the realm of what is essentially public and open, the realm of communication and active engagement with others.

Thus, the robust distinction of the "subject centric" or the "object centric" dichotomy will be eliminated only when we bring in the concept of subjectivity and inturn, inter subjectivity which ushers in both the subject and object in its framework. As a concluding note, the proposal subjectivity of experience without the subject of experience has been floated. The idea of inter subjectivity too has been discussed at length and this work has tried to show how this idea of intersubjectivity can be put into practice. Thus, this work demonstrates how the analytical and the phenomenological traditions have merged together in recent times, in various issues. If a phenomenological method is needed for a proper understanding of the mental content, the analytical approach too cannot be left behind. Both the movements play significant roles in problematizing the issues of the mind and the mental content.

Phenomenology and analytic philosophy are the two most influential philosophical movements of the twentieth century. Thus, subjectivity turns out to be an important requisite for objectivity and the pursuit of scientific knowledge, than say microscopes or scanners which are of no use unless the scientist is an experiencing

subject. Thus, a realization has dawned in both the analytical and the phenomenological traditions that a mutual exchange of ideas will not only benefit each other but will also help them and if possible, to work together. The domain in which this interaction can be most fruitful is to find a way out of the traditional mind-body and other related problems.

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