

Milestones in the Journey of Phenomenology: From Socrates to Kant

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Abstract

Phenomenology is linked to ancient philosophers as its roots can be traced from the Socratic era. Various other philosophers have also contributed to developing this field. As Socrates' 'scepticism', Plato's 'idealism', Aristotle's 'realism', Locke's 'epistemology', Hume's 'positivism', and Kant's 'existentialism' are all of the respective concepts which provided the very fundamentals of phenomenology. After these great philosophers, others have also played their significant role as milestones in this journey. In this work, researchers have reviewed the contributions of prominent phenomenologists in historical order. The respective researchers have analysed the difference and contrast between the approaches of different thinkers. Based on the review of selected thinkers by applying the method of relational analysis, researchers have concluded that with the time phenomenology has also evolved and became more empirical as well as dialectic.

Keywords: milestones; phenomenology; relational analysis; Socrates; Kant.§

1. Introduction

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Society is full of phenomena, and the way of exploring this phenomenon is known as phenomenology. In which, one considers the things like experience or perceive them to be contrary to the facts or reality. The inception of phenomenology can be seen back in the times of three Greek philosophers, who made tremendous history, Socrates, his brilliant student Plato and Plato's best student, Aristotle.

Phenomenology is a school of thought that emphasises a focus on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world. That is, the phenomenologist wants to understand how the world appears to others. The phenomenological inquiry is only concerned with 'possible' human experiences - not with experiences that are presumed to be universal or shared by all humans irrespective of time, culture, gender, or other circumstances. Also, it is important to remember that the phenomenological determination of meaning is itself always indeterminate, tentative, incomplete, inclined to question assumptions by returning again and again to the lived experience.

Phenomenology strives to clarify the abilities of individuals and rediscover the phenomena that exist. In areas like physics and chemistry, it is highly appropriate in a broad variety of circumstances. But, we have tended to apply the phenomenological model also to the social sciences, where it surely fits some phenomena as well as situations and not others. Partly, as a result, have ended up creating a lot of organisational systems that are not very functional in terms of their ability to meet the respective human needs.

The objectives of this paper are: to trace the origin of phenomenology; to examine the basic concepts in phenomenology from Socrates to Kant; and finally, to analyse the theoretical development in phenomenology from Socrates to Kant.

2. Methodology

In this article, researchers have conducted a constructive analysis of the historical literature related to the field of phenomenology which is derived from philosophy by using the technique of relational analysis that refers to go into the past by investigating the association between the thoughts perceived.

It is the type of content analysis which is, "the method of exploration for making replicable and substantial deductions from writings (or other important matter) to the connections of their utilisation" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). The researchers selected the present content from secondary sources.

3. Socratic Skepticism

Socrates (469-399 B.C) was one of the most influential Greek thinkers and is often considered as the father of western philosophy. He focused on how to acquire knowledge, which is the very fundamental of phenomenology. Besides this, ‘Socratic scepticism’ which is considered as a powerful tool to find out the truth by cross-questioning. It is also known as ‘Socratic dialectic’ and ‘Socratic ignorance’ which means that everybody thinks that his point of view is correct and he is the wisest one and extracts the meaning of things that have no reason behind their very existence. This is the attitude that a person learns by the traditional knowledge in which things have been occurring for several times in the same way. There is a dire need to change it, and it is only possible when a person continuously thinks and understands again and again about things that are going on around him. All the events and incidents are like an abstract picture on a canvas that is showing something else, and its meaning is something else. A person has to ponder upon, to understand the real meaning that is hidden in the picture.

In the same manner, when a person experiences something, there might be a chance of having different reality that he cannot see even after having experienced. But, there is a need to understand the real meaning of that event, and it can only be possible by the serious consideration of a person. An individual tries to evaluate the reasoning behind whatever he understood and experienced and he must focus on the common aspects of reasoning. Phenomenology requires to go beyond the perception of people and investigate the reality or truth, which is also known as the meaning behind words (Ballard, 1965).

4. Plato’s Idealism

Plato (427-347 B.C), who was the student of Socrates and founder of the academy in Athens, known as a classical Greek philosopher, introduced the domain of ideas which can also be extracted from Socrates thinking. But, he also presented the contradictory view. Socrates focused the meanings behind the words, while Plato focused on ‘pure meaning’. The meaning behind the words focuses on those meanings that are beyond the perception of an individual and known as reality. Along with it, he also emphasised on universality, which is concerned with collectivity, or we can say the truth for all rather than only for the individual.

According to Thomas Sheehan (2017), who translated Plato’s work, *The Allegory of the Cave*, while, pure meaning have ambiguity because every human has a different ability to perceive things. It usually happens that the same words or the same events are perceived differently by different

people, and every person has its interpretation of the same phenomenon. In fact, everybody has its reasoning regarding the phenomenon as he stated in The Allegory of the Cave which refers that the perception of people can be closer to reality, but the reality is still hidden which is not easy to approach for an individual.

Although, Platonic theory presented the dualistic world's view which pointed out that things, as they appear on the floor, are not to be true and it is merely their momentary appearance. In fact, intuition plays a vital role in phenomenology. It would not be wrong to say that phenomenology is a body and intuition is its soul. Because, intuition is an extrasensory thing or we can say it is the sixth sense of a person which unconsciously provides not only a treasure of knowledge, but a real picture of events and this intuition also comes from Plato's 'schau', i.e. the way of seeing things.

He proposed Platonic idealism, and it is a perfect condition which is unapproachable for a normal human being. But, this perfection is reflected when a person classifies things as good or bad and make an ordered world. That means every human being has some perfection in it, and he can overcome his and others' problems through his positivity and universal reasoning.

5. Aristotle's Realism

Aristotle (384-322 B.C), who was taught by Plato, is also known as a classical Greek philosopher. He argued that there is no other domain, but the only thing is reality as its properties can be seen in real objects that reflect in nature as either good or bad. These abstract truths are known as realism, which refers to the reality surrounding a human being. But, reality has some aspects, which cannot be perceived at once but can be assessed by more and more consideration. To get access to the real phenomenon, he propounded the concept of 'being'. He explained the meaning of being, by explaining the sense of the Greek verb 'to be'. It was also phenomenologically related to different concepts, as he also evaluated the reasons for animal existence (Long, 2007).

6. Locke's Epistemology

John Locke (1632-1704), an English philosopher, is known as the father of liberalism. He emphasised on epistemology, which refers to the theory of knowledge which can justify the objective world and this knowledge is based on probability as well as ideas. Every idea which is perceived by a person reflects the fundamental qualities of a particular object. He propounded that whatever a person understands about an object is known as an idea, and these ideas are a picture of whatever is going on in a person's mind.

These ideas are the construction of its own (related to the idea of Socrates 'learned ignorance') and in beginning human's knowledge revolved around these ideas. The human mind perceives things immediately in the light of preexisting knowledge that the mind already has and starts finding out reasons based on this acquired knowledge. This reasoning is based on the agreement of a preexisting and immediately acquired knowledge (Dunbar, 2011).

If both ideas agree with each other, it develops the perception of a person, and a person does not only gets stuck at this knowledge, he takes it as the truth. But, this reasoning is based on a personal judgment, i.e. unanswered and unsatisfactory. If these ideas do not agree with each other, they have a collision due to the presence of intuition because intuitive knowledge is somehow flawless as it has a satisfying, answerable as well as strong reasoning. Thus, Hume's thinking of knowledge is based on the probability of agreement or disagreement of ideas, but it is conclusive (Schmitt, 2014).

7. Hume's Positivism

David Hume (1711-1776), a Scottish philosopher, best known for the system of radical philosophy, inferred that the human mind is dominated by the imagination which represents the early idea or image about something it reflects. The thought process of a human being is irrational and biased, and this imagination varies from person to person, as every person has its way of thinking and perceiving things.

The important aspects of this imagination are; a human's mind and its social setting. An individual's mind perceives things according to his social setup, but it has the ability of reasoning and also can replace irrational and biased thoughts or imagination by using intuition and universal reasoning. For this purpose, Hume linked objects and ideas like Aristotle. The first one is taken as a cause, and other is taken as an effect to understand the reason (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

He claims that by making the relationship between cause and effect, genuine reasoning can be possible, and this reasoning is a great source of knowledge, and he referred to it as 'epistemology'. This kind of reasoning helps us to understand others' state and feelings in which they perceive something and the situation in which problem would occur. Not only this, the future condition can also be predicted from this acquired knowledge.

The existing perception of the mind is usually traditionally learned (as described above by Socrates and Locke), and it becomes a part of a human's consciousness. It is also known as knowledge acquired by senses that shape a human's actions. But, it may not be a knowledge of truth and

has chances of being wrong, because it is not considered as scientific knowledge and it can also be one's perception. The knowledge acquired by reasoning, i.e. after making the relationship between objects is based on observation, and it is a knowledge that establishes its basis on the very presence of evidence. Thus, it has a probability of being true due to the undeniable facts (Schmitt, 2014).

Hume's belief of 'matter of facts' is also referred to as the 'correct' knowledge that is based on evidence. He just assumed the cause and effect relationship, but he believed that both are separate and without the presence of an evidence a relationship is not possible to prove any phenomenon or experience.

Thus, according to Hume's viewpoint, the 'matter of fact' which refers to the existence of things is based on probability. These all beliefs are irrational, and it is also known as 'scepticism' because here, the confirmation of objects by a person is done by his previous knowledge, but contrary to this view (Fodor, 2005).

8. Kant' Existentialism and Transcendental Idealism

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a German philosopher, is often considered as the central figure of modern philosophy. He suggested that knowledge regarding objects possessed by a person is confirmed by the experience of that particular object. He opposed the views of Hume that existing knowledge of a person confirms this experience of objects. In its simplest sense, Kant rejected the 'scepticism' presented by Hume.

One of the very reasons behind this rejection is to create a distinction between prior knowledge and posteriori knowledge. Prior knowledge refers to the preexisting knowledge of a person that is based on pure reasoning. While, posteriori knowledge refers to the knowledge a person acquires after getting an experience of an object, the knowledge that has empirical evidence.

Kant also amalgamated rational as well as empirical knowledge and raised a question on epistemology, which refers to the probability and justification of objective and provides universal knowledge (Watkins, 2014). He argued how a subject has infinite knowledge of objective, however, the subject is finite itself. The answer to this question can be found in Platonism; the dualistic view of understanding a phenomenon, i.e. one is external - which is full of sensation, while, the other is full of consciousness, i.e. internal.

Both views are contrary to each other, and these are also reciprocal ways to obtain knowledge. A person gets knowledge first whatever he can see apparently. After that, this obtained knowledge clashes with the knowledge a person already possesses. Then, an individual's mind detects this collision

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which resulted due to the clash of knowledge and this sage is actually what scholars state as reasoning. The respective reasoning is based on empirical evidence and scientific knowledge can provide infinite knowledge which is also universal.

He also compared the prehistoric view of objective knowledge with the modern view of epistemology, which is also known as 'new ways of ideas'. It is an assumed statement which shows a causal relationship between things and an individual's knowledge regarding those things. It is also known as 'representationalism', which is not only rational as well as empirical. From this relationship, the subject draws a conclusive statement based on his assumption, but this statement is cognitively justified (Dickerson, 2011).

Kant shifted the paradigm from 'theocentric' which considered God as the main feature of human existence and perceive things from the god's perspective to 'anthropocentric' which refers that god's attributes exist in the actions that are performed by the people and environment. Anthropocentrism is also known as 'existentialism'.

It is impossible for a human being to see things according to God's perspective because a human being has a finite vision of things. Humans could only perceive things as they appear and it is based on the subject's perception and usually, the subject cannot go into the depth of such complex phenomenon. Because, most of the time the reality of the phenomenon is obscure for the subject (Rockmore, 2011).

The perception of a person is based on the intuitive idea that he gets from his experiences. According to his experiences, he develops the reasoning regarding these things and categorize them according to the nature of an intuitive idea. It was actually that 'Copernican turn' for which Kant used the term, 'transcendental idealism', i.e. to perceive things as we understand. But, the probability of something being true is 'priori cognition', and this view of Kant became a primary source of 'constructivism', although he did not use this term himself. But, this is the way to construct things through 'pure reasoning' that is based on personal experiences (Boyle, 2013).

Phenomenologists	Concepts	Followers
Socrates	<i>Socrates Skepticism / Socrates Dialectic / Socrates Ignorance</i>	Pyrrho, Timon, Arcesilaus, Carneades, Aenesidemus, Sextus Empiricus
Plato	<i>Idealism</i>	Kant, Hegel, Fichte, Wilhelm, Schelling, Schopenhauer
Aristotle	<i>Realism</i>	Cicero, Theophrastus, Eudemus, Diodorus, Erymneus, Alexander, Arito, Lyco, Strato, Dicaearchus
John Locke	<i>Epistemology</i>	Hume, Kant, Reid, Stewart
David Hume	<i>Positivism</i>	Simon, Pierre, Laplace, Comte, Husserl, Kuhn, Popper, Quine
Immanuel Kant	<i>Existentialism</i>	Sartre, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Ponty
Immanuel Kant	<i>Transcendental Idealism</i>	Berkeley, Hume, Descartes, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Hegel

9. Analysis

The essence of phenomenology can be seen in many philosophers' views because primarily it is derived from philosophy. It is apparently new, but a longtime is involved behind its very origination. Phenomenology is incepted from Socrates' 'dialectic' - to acquire knowledge by cross-questioning as well as Socrates' 'view of ignorance' that everybody has its perspective to judge things and he considers his judgment as not only the best but true.

The same view is reflected in Plato's 'schau' - the way of judging things, but he added intuition to find out the truth. In platonic theory, where he presented the dualistic world's view that one is 'ideal', which is unapproachable and the other is 'real' that we can see. But, he explained that the ideal one is reflected in the real one.

However, Aristotle argued that there is only one condition which is known as real, but some realities are in an abstract form which can be found in contemplation, the knowledge which we consider as the soul of phenomenology. Locke presented it with the new approach, called 'epistemology' - the theory of knowledge, which reflects the intuition role discussed by Plato.

While, Hume determines the cause and effect relationship in epistemology to find out the truth, named as scepticism. He believed that without evidence relationship between cause and effect could not be proven. But, Kant disagreed on this view and stated that a causal relationship could be proved by the assumed statement which he called 'representationalism' or 'modern epistemology' afterwards.

10. Conclusions

Phenomenology is a production of a long period of reflection which includes several classical and modern philosophers, and this is the very reason that the essence of phenomenology can be found in many philosophers' views because primarily it is derived from philosophy.

It is apparently new, but a longtime is involved behind its very origination. It is noticeable that with time, the concept of phenomenology has been constructively evolving; in a sense that it has become more calculative.

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