

Phenomenology, Symbolic Interactionism and Research: From Hegel to Dreyfus

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Received: 29-11-2018. Accepted: 29-12-2018. Published: 31-12-2018

doi: 10.23756/sp.v6i2.438

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Abstract

The journey of phenomenology apparently is not so extensive, because it was the first half of the twentieth century when Edmund Husserl appeared as the founder of phenomenology. But, it has its very roots in the works of ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Various other philosophers have also contributed to develop this field like Hegel's 'constructivism', Brentano's 'intentionality', Heidegger's concept of 'being and time', Schutz's 'sociological phenomenology', Ponty's 'body and mind', Dreyfus' 'artificial intelligence' are the respective notions which provided the very fundamentals of phenomenology. This journey did not stopped here, as various phenomenologists have also been contributing in this field and establishing the linkage between phenomenology and symbolic interactionism as well as its very relation to research.

Keywords: Milestones, Phenomenology, Relational Analysis, Symbolic Interactionism, Research.

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1. Introduction

Phenomenology is the philosophical study of the structures of experience and consciousness (Zahavi, 2003). While, phenomenology provides us with paradigms to construct reality and in this process symbolic interactionism plays a compulsive role. In inductive as well as qualitative method, phenomenology is used as a powerful tool by researchers to find out facts or reality. Phenomenology as a discipline is distinct from, but related to other key disciplines in philosophy, such as ontology, epistemology, logic, and ethics.

Phenomenology has been practiced in various guises for centuries, but it came into its own form in the early 20th century in the works of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, etc. Phenomenological issues of intentionality, consciousness, qualia, and first-person perspective have been prominent in recent philosophy of mind. Phenomenology is also sometimes considered as a philosophical perspective of approach to qualitative methodology. It has a long history in various disciplines of social research, including psychology, sociology, and social work.

2. Hegel's Constructivism

George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), a German philosopher is one of the famous thinkers of late enlightenment. He elaborated Kant's view in his epistemological constructivism which is purely phenomenological. According to his 'constructive epistemology', a person knows what he wants to know. If a person only knows about himself, he cannot understand what the phenomenon is actually and if he only knows about the phenomenon, then he is unable to understand himself.

Through 'consciousness' we are able to obtain knowledge of both, i.e. subject and an object. Because, the subject experiences the objective world and both are not only affected by each other. But, the reality can be extracted by understanding both, i.e. the self-position within the phenomenon and the phenomenon position within the self.

It is not wrong to say that it is basically a 'classical phenomenology' (Rockmore, 2011) in which a person draws reality by using his deep intellectual capabilities and this reality can be the opposite of his interests (Stern, 2013).

He also focused 'symbolic interactionism' and explained that man has a desire to be recognized. To fulfill this desire, he follows universally accepted laws to become as worthy as his universe requires. For the fulfillment of this desire of recognition, there is a necessity to know the self properly. A person has consciousness of his self and the self is fully understood by him. He will not only be recognized, but will also confirm it by others. This development of consciousness is considered as logical. Hegel named it as 'sensuous certainty'.

At the initial level of consciousness, a person is able to understand things as they are present. But, after involving sensuous consciousness this understanding becomes far more complex. At this juncture, a logical view takes place which leads self-consciousness. This consciousness refers not only to the knowledge of self, but also to the relationship of the subject to the respective object (Houlgate, 2013).

3. Brentano's Intentionality

Franz Brentano (1838-1917) was also a German philosopher who added to the very concept of 'intentionality'. He was the first theorist who emphasized on intentional consciousness which refers to the internal experiences of a person that develops conscious thinking of an object which is being directed and different from the things as they apparently seems (Groenewald, 2004).

As he presented in his theory of 'time consciousness' which states that there is no time limit of mental acts. It is an ongoing process where acts or ideas are shifted from one to another. But, it remains present with alteration or modification and a link between these changing ideas persists. This link between ideas are like a pair of fetters which are connected through a chain which he called 'original association' (Polkinghorne, 1983).

Husserl, who is known as the father of phenomenology, was greatly inspired by his concept of an original association (Huemer, 2004) and presented the concept of 'retention' which refers that the consciousness maintains the link between the act of perception or we can say it is the extension of ideas (Lohmar & Yamaguchi, 2010).

4. Husserl's Consciousness

Edmund Gustav Albrecht Husserl (1859-1938) was a German philosopher. Edmund Husserl is known as the founder of phenomenology. He

was a mathematician and his prior philosophical approaches were linked with mathematics. He wrote *Philosophy of Arithmetic* in 1891, in it, he focused on finding the essence of things and finding the core meaning of consciousness (Kockelmans, 1994).

In *Philosophy of Arithmetic*, he intended to lay the scientific basis for the future system by means of a series of psychological and logical investigation (ibid.). It was his first published book, in it he looked for the content and origin of the concept of numbers. He also defined the concepts of plurality and unit (Husserl, 2012).

The major goal was to develop the fundamental concepts of mathematics from certain psychological acts. He defined the awareness of 'natural attitude' and 'phenomenological attitude'. By 'natural attitude' he meant the world which is out there and which is relative to human experiences. By 'phenomenological attitude' he meant for bracketing the natural attitude. By bracketing it is meant that any concept or awareness is a kind of belief.

He named this bracketing process 'epoche', which allows to turn attention regarding the ongoing activity of consciousness. This process is called 'phenomenological reduction'. In the 'phenomenological reduction' individuals start to notice how they are actually experiencing things and that things can be seen very differently as it is solely dependent on their perception.

In this context, Husserl also propounded the term 'essence'; which is the feature of experiences that are both necessary and invariant. 'Essence' actually make human experiences what they are. The basic assumption in Husserl's phenomenology is 'intentionality', which means that every act of consciousness is directed towards an object of some kind and every act of consciousness and experience is intentional. In phenomenology, intention is mental and cognitive; meaning, intention is the theory of knowledge, not the theory of human action.

Husserl was greatly inspired by Brentano's concept of 'original association' and presented the concept of 'retention' which refers that consciousness maintains the link between the acts of perception or we can say it is the extension of ideas.

In 1928, Husserl in his lecture at Amsterdam declared that at first he did not realize the difference between psychological and philosophical sciences, aimed with regards to the phenomenological method. He also clarified that his phenomenological ideas are not taken from Hegel, but rather his work is influenced by ideas of Ernst Mach, Ewald Hering, and Franz Brentano (Kockelmans, 1994).

5. Heidegger's Concept of Being and Time

Like Husserl, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was also a German philosopher. According to the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, he is to a great extent acknowledged as being one of the most important as well as an original philosopher of the 20th century. In his early life he was influenced by Franz Brentano and has remained a student and assistant of Martin Husserl.

According to Heidegger, the basic purpose of phenomenology is to answer the question of 'being' and the fundamental relationship between 'man' and 'being'. Heidegger focused on the basic problems, not with phenomenology, but with what phenomenology itself deals with. Because, according to him, an introduction to the basic problem could lead to solutions (Heidegger, 1988).

He emphasized that 'forgetfulness of being' is the major problem in history of philosophy. He has criticized traditional thinkers and gave a number of reasons to think that "the traditional view is a mistake" (Guignon, 1993, p. 129).

He also argued that metaphysics has misunderstood the nature of 'being' by understanding it as things. But, the fundamental question of metaphysics should have been regarding the ultimate nature of things. Hence, metaphysics had ignored this approach and focused on the 'being of things' and 'things in this world'.

He claimed that 'being' has to be distinguished from 'thing-in-being'. To overcome this 'forgetfulness' a phenomenological project was initiated by the name 'phenomenological ontology'. This approach is ontological, because it tries to ontologically describe the difference between 'being' from 'things-in-being', because it tries to capture the most directly given things or primordial data (Heinamaa, 2003). According to many, phenomenological ontology recaptures the real essence of meaning.

6. Schutz's Sociological Phenomenology

Alfred Schutz (1899-1959) was an Austrian social scientist and had a strong link with sociology. He has also criticized Max Weber's 'interpretative sociology'. According to him, Weber's concept of 'social action' is very limited and that Weber has pictured social world as a place of isolated individuals; where every individual produces the subjective meaning of actions (Weber, 2009).

Schutz has also claimed that Weber has not given any clue about how their subjective isolated meanings form a common social world. Schutz proposed that individual consciousness does not make the social world private, rather than common and shared.

He added that the objective of everyday life is something which is taken granted by individuals in society. This is the way social actors view the everyday world using their commonsense knowledge. He also claimed that all socialized human beings possess commonsense knowledge. It refers to the knowledge of the everyday world (Cuff & Payne, 1979).

According to Schutz, the social world is organized, independent, orderly and preexists of any particular individual. At the same time, this world has to be interpreted and make sense of by each individual through their particular experiences. Concepts which comprise commonsense knowledge are called 'typifications'. These typifications are not personal inventions, but are embodied in the language people share with each other.

7. Ponty's Concept of Body and Mind

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was a French philosopher. He claimed that Heidegger has explained 'dasein' (i.e. man) in an abstract form and did not discussed about the 'dasein' experience of the body and how the human body facilitates experience of being in the world. Ponty has based his entire phenomenological project on account of 'body-intentionality' and the challenge it poses to any adequate concept of mind.

He never denied the existence of mental phenomena, but he insisted that any thought or idea occur only against a background of perceptual activity that the human being already understands in bodily terms by engaging in it (Carman, 1999).

For Ponty, the body plays a constitutive role in experience precisely by grounding, making possible and yet remaining peripheral in the horizons of the human's perceptual awareness. To a great extent he emphasized on the concept of the body due to specific reason. As according to him, phenomena which we experience is affected by the body, due to which any change in the body leads to a continuous shifting in senses of the world and self (Gallagher & Meltzoff, 1996).

8. Dreyfus' Concept of Artificial Intelligence

Hubert Dreyfus (1929-2017) is an American philosopher. He received his higher education from Harvard University. He is a well-known and one of the contemporary phenomenologist. He wanted to show that the two important components of intelligent behavior, i.e. learning and skillful action can be described and explained without recourse to mind or brain demonstrations.

To elaborate this, he explained two central concepts in Merleau-Ponty's 'phenomenology of perception', i.e. the 'intentional arc' and 'maximal grip'. The 'intentional arc' is the close connection between the agent and world. As the 'agent' acquires skills, these skills are stored, not as representations in mind, but as dispositions to respond to the solicitations of situations in the world. 'Maximal grip' is the body's tendency to respond to these solicitations in such a way as to bring the current situation closer to the agent's sense of an 'optimal gestalt'. Neither of these abilities requires mental or brain representations (Dreyfus, 1999). Rather, replicated neural networks display critical structural features of the 'intentional arc'.

Moreover, Walter Freeman's account of brain dynamics underlying perception and action is structurally isomorphic with Merleau-Ponty's account of the way, i.e. a skilled agent moves towards attaining a 'maximal grip'. Likewise, his other works were also influenced by Ponty. In his 1986 book, *Mind Over Machine*, he claimed that philosophy was finished for previous thinkers, since it attempts to treat intelligence as rational or at least analytic, on which they had never worked. Since 1960, Hubert Dreyfus has been a critique of artificial intelligence.

Phenomenologists	Concepts	Followers
Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel	<i>Consciousness / Constructivism</i>	Adorno, Marcuse, Beauvior, Sartre, Kierkegaard, Marx, Heidegger, Strauss, Taylor
Franz Brentano	<i>Intentionality</i>	Husserl, Heidegger, Stainer, Freud, Marty
Martin Heidegger	<i>Being</i>	Maurice Merleau- Ponty
	<i>Things-in-Being</i>	Giorgio Agamben
	<i>Phenomenological</i>	Hannah Arendt
		Jean Beaufret

	<i>Ontology</i>	Alain Badiou
Maurice Merleau-Ponty	<i>Body-Intentionality</i>	David Abram
		Hubert Dreyfus
	<i>Intentional Arc</i>	Graham Harman
		Paul Crowther
		Laplanche
Edmund Husserl	<i>Consciousness</i>	Martin Heidegger
	<i>Epoche</i>	Rudolf Carnap
	<i>Essence</i>	Maurice Merleau-Ponty
	<i>Intentionality</i>	Alfred Schutz
	<i>Phenomenological Reduction</i>	Jean-Paul Sartre
Alfred Schutz	<i>Common-sense Knowledge</i>	Peter L. Berger
		Thomas Luckmann
	<i>Typifications</i>	Harold Garfinkel
		David Sudnow
		Dan Zahavi
Hubert Dreyfus	<i>Artificial Intelligence</i>	Richard Rorty
	<i>Intelligent Behavior</i>	Mark Wrathall
	<i>Skillful Action</i>	Sean Dorrance Kelly
	<i>Intentional Arc</i>	Charles Taylor
		John Haugeland

9. Phenomenology and Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a perspective which analyzes the societal behavior on a micro-level (Benford, 1997). It takes a small scale view of society by studying interaction between individuals and through this approach, symbolic interactionism explains social order and changes in society. It is a theoretical approach to understand the relationship between humans and society. The basic notion of symbolic interactionism is that human action and interaction are understandable only through the exchange of meaningful communication or symbols (Turner, 1988).

In this approach, humans are portrayed as acting, as opposed to being acted upon. Phenomenology and symbolic interactionism have many common characteristics (Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Because, people in society change due to their interaction with others and due to the meaning assign to things (Sack, 1986).

Key founders of this merger between phenomenology and symbolic interactionism are George Herbert Mead and Edmund Husserl and the respective argument was further sustained by thinkers like Herbert Blumer, Seeley, Berber, Luckman, as well as Peter Winch. These thinkers referred this approach as 'social idealism'.

George Herbert Mead and Alfred Schutz were also concerned with the question of nature of the social world. They both shared a modest sketch of man in the social world. The modernist image of man is, man in action. It suggests an action paradigm for the study of man in the social world (Swidler, 1986).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has also made his contribution, by brilliantly explaining the criteria which defines the human activity, developed through the realization of activity, in his 1807 work, *Phenomenology of Mind*.

10. Phenomenology and Research

Basically, phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning of things as being conceived by people in society. Phenomenology helps researchers to gain the meaning of a phenomenon which people have given. Phenomenology has overlapped other primary qualitative research approaches like, ethnography, hermeneutics, and symbolic interactionism.

Phenomenological methods are particularly effective in bringing to the fore the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspectives, and therefore at challenging structural or normative assumptions.

Pure phenomenological research seeks essentially to describe rather than explain, and to start from a perspective free from hypotheses or preconceptions. When understanding the human being; a researcher needs to gather more deep information. This deep information can be gathered through the inductive approach and qualitative methods such as an interview, group discussions, and observations (Lester, 1999).

Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, and emphasis the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. They are powerful for understanding the subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations as well as actions.

In the beginning, phenomenology was a philosophical movement, but later phenomenologist like Husserl amended, developed, and introduced phenomenological research in psychology, sociology, social psychology, health education, and various disciplines.

Phenomenology was attractive to psychological investigators in the early part of the 20th century and phenomenological psychology was also called 'existential psychology' or 'existential phenomenological psychology'; where the emphasis is on understanding a person's experience of a problematic situation (Wilson, 2002).

Later, Alfred Schutz attempted to create 'phenomenological sociology' that provides a useful framework to guide social research into people's information, behavior, and to guide individuals towards the very choice of 'appropriate' methods.

11. Analysis

Phenomenological essence is evident in many philosophers' notions as it has been a derivative of philosophy. Phenomenology transformed into 'epistemological constructivism' by Hegel - knowledge of subject and object by using consciousness.

Later, Brentano added the concept of 'time consciousness' - the chain of knowledge or connection between momentary knowledge known as the original association after putting the seed, soil, and fertilizer of philosophical concepts as well as continuous sprinkle of phenomenological water, at last, Husserl produced the plant of phenomenology. But, all previous philosophers who were helter-skelter contributed to this field, often considered as the very roots of phenomenology.

Edmond Husserl's work was inspired by Mach, Hering, and Brentano. His concepts of consciousness became the most prominent. After him many philosophers carried out his work. Martin Heidegger was a student and assistant of Husserl. At the start of his work he carried Husserl's original project of getting back to things together.

But, after writing his first book *Being and Time* in 1924, he deviated and claimed that phenomenology is much older than Husserl and its roots can be found in the Greek way of thinking. He also argued that phenomenology is not merely a study of the intentional structure of consciousness.

Schutz has also analyzed Husserl's thoughts and related them with sociology. His major aim was to apply Husserl's idea's to scientific study. So, he could build the basis for better sociology.

Martin Heidegger was not satisfied with traditional metaphysics' method of analysis. So, he urged that the traditional ways of asking a question have to be discarded, as that presupposed certain assumptions and a total reconstruction are required and he called for radicalization of ontology. By this he meant going back to the origin of concepts. He further added that the phenomena of existence requires interpretation. Thus he named this methodology 'phenomenological hermeneutic'.

Alfred Schutz has played a dynamic role in bridging the gap between sociology and phenomenology and formed 'social phenomenology'. Schutz has operationalized his ideas by producing research to demonstrate how his ideas can be applied to the empirical study of the social world.

Like other phenomenologists, Merleau-Ponty was inspired by the work of Edmand Husserl and Martin Heidegger. Like Heidegger, he claimed that a clear concept of consciousness is necessary to begin with the understanding of human perception. This idea of Merleau-Ponty was published in his 1964 book *Primacy of Perception*. But, he has also made the assertion that Heidegger did not pay attention to the 'body'.

According to Hubert Dreyfus, human intelligence and expertise depends on a human being's unconscious instincts rather than conscious symbolic manipulation. These thoughts of Dreyfus were based on the work of Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger.

12. Conclusions

Phenomenology has had an enormous influence on our everyday lives. The very language we speak uses classifications derived from phenomenology. For example, the classifications of noun and verb involve the philosophic idea that there is a difference between things and actions. If we ask what the difference is, we are starting a 'phenomenological inquiry'.

Every institution of society is based on phenomenological ideas, whether that institution is law, government, religion, family, marriage, industry, business, or education. Phenomenology differences have led to the overthrow of governments, drastic changes in laws, and the transformation of entire economic systems.

Such changes have occurred because the people involved held certain beliefs about what is important, true, real, and about how life should be ordered.

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