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Some reflections on the phenomenological method

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There is no unique and definitive definition of phenomenology. It is rather a method and an experience always open and always renewing itself. Phenomenology involves a change in the "sense of the world": everything acquires its sense and value only when it becomes the content of the lived experience of the subject correlated to his intentional acts. This is the main thesis of the phenomenological method aiming at overcoming the traditional opposition between rationalism and empiricism. Starting from Husserl, the father of this approach, the history of phenomenology undertook different and unexpected developments which in some cases were rather far away from Husserl's original thought. In the U.K. attention has been given to an analytical-epistemological phenomenology focused on the relationship between intentionality and logical semantics. In France it is mainly an anthropological-existential phenomenology. In Germany an hermeneutic phenomenology was developed, mainly by Heidegger and Gadamer.

Regardless of these raw distinctions, a big question is so far unresolved: how to reconcile the phenomenological/existential stance claiming for the irreducibility of each lived experience and the scientific paradigm? Is it possible to imagine brain mechanisms and physiological systems explaining the endless mysteries and manifold paradoxes of the human being?

Phenomenology claims that a human being can never be considered as an object, as if he was a natural thing; rather the task is to understand him as the focus of a relationship linking subjective attitudes to the objects showed by the experience. In this sense, an important contribution was Merleau-Ponty's view that man is not something psychic joined to an organism, but a sort of fluctuation of the existence that sometimes is a bodily one, sometimes refers to personal acts. Consequently, he proposes to reinstate in the existence both its "physiological" and "psychic" sides both being intentionally oriented towards a world.

Keywords: intentionality, lived experience, lifeworld, opacity of the sensible world, bodily perception.

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What is phenomenology? A unique and final definition of phenomenology is dangerous and perhaps even paradoxical as it lacks a thematic focus. In fact, it is not a doctrine, nor a philosophical school, but rather a style of thought, a method, an open and ever-renewed experience having different results, and this may disorient anyone wishing to define the meaning of phenomenology. It seems that asking this question ends up betraying its unquestionable innovative capacity, because in a question like "what is phenomenology?" it is implicitly assumed the existence of a judging subject remaining outside and separated from the object of investigation. On the opposite one of the first assumptions of phenomenology is that subject and object are linked by an inseparable and original relationship, in the sense that there can be no world without a subject, nor the subject without world. In phenomenology the term "subject" is not intended as a category of thought, as the Cartesian *Cogito*, but as a person living in an inseparable relationship with the world, the body and other real people.

Phenomenology implies a parallel reflection on the meaning of things and of human life. It involves a change in the "sense of the world": everything, even if it preserves objectivity, acquires meaning and value only when it becomes the content of the lived experience of the subject in the correlation of its intentional acts.

It is a complex program excluding answers pretending to be univocal in principle; a program influencing many fields of knowledge, from epistemology to ethics, aesthetics, anthropology, religion and psychiatry/psychology.

Perhaps for this reason, the term has now entered the common language, everybody talks about phenomenology, but excludes the fact that there are as many phenomenologies as authors

confronting with it; even Husserl conceived different phases of his thought giving birth to different traditions of researches, depending on the themes discussed and the period of Husserl's thought to which they refer.

All this constitutes a hard problem in defining phenomenology; Husserl himself found difficult to recognize himself in a finished and printed work because his thought developed as a work in progress during all his life, through writing, research and description. Hence the difficulty for students, because Husserl's focusing on phenomenological themes cannot be reduced to single writings and does not follow a strict chronological order.

It is well known that the first period of study of Husserl was characterized by a strong interest in mathematics and by the attempt to give a psychological foundation to the eternal truth of the numbers.

Then his interest turns to philosophical studies and takes decisive impetus from the descriptive psychology by Brentano (1874/2009) and from his research about psychic origins of logical processes.[a] Following rational criteria, Brentano's intent was to draw a classification of psychic phenomena, a kind of pure morphology of the experiences and of their forms of relationship. Having recognized the intentional arc in referring to objects, Brentano distinguished between the perceived object and the object as it is perceived by us; it follows that subjectivity can take on different attitudes regarding the same object.

Brentano had much influence on Husserl's thought, who was looking for a "subjective" foundation of knowledge. The same important role had the works by Bernhard Bolzano especially talking about his intuition to distinguish the ideal character of the meanings from the nature of psychological and actual experiences in which they become accessible to each of us. The work by Bolzano cannot be considered as completed or final. In the *Logical Investigations* (1900/2001) Husserl argues that in Bolzano's research there is a lack of a philosophical evaluation of the logical discipline itself. Bolzano correctly traces the distinction between propositions/assertions and judgments: judgments are psychological events always referring to a subjectivity, while propositions are logical entities not implying a subjectivity thinking about them. There is therefore a different ontological status between object and meaning. However, Bolzano leaves unsolved some questions Husserl will attempt to answer in the *Logical Investigations*:

> "How are we to understand the fact that the intrinsic being of objectivity becomes 'presented', 'apprehended' in knowledge, and so ends up by becoming subjective? What does it mean to say that the object has 'being-in-itself', and is 'given' in knowledge? How can the ideality of the universal […] enter the flux of real mental states and becoming an epistemic possession of the thinking person?" (Husserl, 1900/2001, p.169)

Starting from the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl wants to bring the concepts to the insights from which they originated in order to restore the relationship between symbol (the conceptual level) on one side, and the world of intuition on the other. The way science itself proceeds becomes enigmatic if bounds linking concept and intuition are lost. However, the reference to the experience does not mean a return to introspective research, but to the way the thing itself is given.

In this perspective Husserl goes beyond Brentano's position, whose schema was act → object, and introduces the notion of noema (sense, meaning), and consequently the pattern becomes:
act→noema (sense, meaning) → object.

This means that every intentional act is related to a sense (noema) through which we go toward the object. Noema is not the object itself, but rather the way in which the object is experienced and in which is manifested in the experience.

The two volumes of the *Logical Investigations* (Husserl, 1900/2001, 1901/2001) are the real foundation stone of the new phenomenological program that was supposed to transform the philosophy into a "rigorous science" and, at the same time, bring the positive sciences out from the crisis in which they found themselves.

Husserl's phenomenology is a return to the original sources of intuition and the discovery of the essences; its aim is to establish the possibility of rigorous scientific researches. Husserl tries to free propositions and logical laws from the relativistic and conventionalist interpretation

of natural laws. The phenomenological inquiry aims to be a theory of knowledge based on intuition, and intuition is not only intuition of the object as it is concretely given in perception, but also of abstract "general objects".

For Husserl an inquiry only makes sense as it has an intentional basis, and the intentional analysis begins with phenomenology which relates to the experience.

The subjective premise of the theory of knowledge of logical truths is the intuitive act; while the objective premise is the essence intended as the content of intuition. This pure phenomenology, on the one hand, is useful to psychology as an empirical science because it studies in terms of general essences those experiences that psychology investigates empirically; on the other hand, phenomenology as a theory of knowledge reveals the sources from which the fundamental concepts and ideal laws of pure logic derive.

Facing the limits of scientific knowledge, viewed from a naturalistic and objective point of view, Husserl claims the idea of a rigorous science that allows to understand the cognitive phenomenon in all its complexity, bringing it back to its subjective sources. The intent of Husserl was to recover the original and "pre-reflective" sphere from which scientific knowledge derives; he wanted to rediscover which was the origin of those concepts and categories that science uses without questioning them and without subjecting them to critical analysis; his intent was to free knowledge from false problems created by our habits of thought and language.

This is the meaning of the famous motto *we must go back to the 'things themselves'* (Husserl, 1900/2001, p.168) from which the phenomenological program starts.

Husserl wanted to free philosophy from those (empiricists, positivists, subjectivists, psychologists) who more or less consciously based knowledge in the relationship between the ego and an external and transcendent reality. The phenomenology, based on the intentional point of view, considers an absurdity the theoretical assumption that the self and the objective world should enter into a relationship only in the cognitive act.

They are already existing as ego and as objective reality even before entering into this relationship. The concept of *Erlebnis* - lived experience - becomes central: it is only within this lived experience that the distinction between consciousness and its object arises.

In Volume II of the *Logical Investigations* Husserl aims to lay the foundations for the knowledge of ideal objectivities and to rebuild psychology on different bases. This is the transcendental turning point that many suspicions aroused in his closest collaborators: Heidegger, Scheler, and Patocka were critical of a phenomenology transforming itself from descriptive psychology to "transcendental" phenomenology. Merleau-Ponty had a different view of this turning point:

> "we must - precisely in order to see the world and grasp it as a paradox - rupture our familiarity with it, and this rupture can teach us nothing except the unmotivated springing forth of the world. The most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction. This is why Husserl always wonders anew about the possibility of the reduction. [It is such because he understands that] philosophy itself must not take itself as established in the truths it has managed to utter, that philosophy is an ever-renewed experiment of its own beginning, that it consists entirely in describing this beginning, and finally, that radical reflection is conscious of its own dependence on an unreflected life that is its initial, constant, and final situation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013, pp.lxxvii-lxxviii)

A significant encounter is that between Husserl and Heidegger, who will be his assistant and friend until the advent of Nazism, when their paths definitely diverged.[b] In this period Husserl's phenomenological ideas fully developed, and some of his most important works were published: *Philosophy as rigorous science* (Husserl, 1910/1965), *Ideas for a pure phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy* (1913/2014), and *Cartesian meditations* (1931/1982). This period ends with the writing on *Formal and transcendental logic* (Husserl, 1929/1977).

A third period is marked by the publication of *The crisis of European sciences*, written between 1935-1937, but published posthumously in 1954 (Husserl, 1954/1970); this work has been a source of great interest in psychoanalysis. In this work Husserl clarifies the meaning of his research that oscillates between two poles: a negative and critical moment considering that

science has no sense for human existence as it is animated only by a naturalistic attitude focused only on factual data without meaning; and a positive moment which coincides with the phenomenological method designed to recover the idea of a more authentic philosophy looking for a fundamental basis.

The crisis, denounced by Husserl, becomes more serious in relation to the sciences of the spirit and *in primis* to the psychology that borrowing the same method from natural sciences reduces man to an object of experimentation and scientific analysis. The paradox lies in wanting to treat the human being along the lines of things, ignoring the reality of the experience.

There is no space to analyze in detail the various evolutionary stages of Husserl's thought, so we limit ourselves to point out some basic ideas of the phenomenological method proposed by Husserl: epochè, intentionality, phenomenon, experience, noema, noesis, the lifeworld, eidetic reduction, the transcendental ego.

EPOCHÈ AND INTENTIONALITY

From the etymological point of view, phenomenology is the study of phenomena that present themselves to consciousness, or as Husserl himself confirms, it is a "philosophy based on experience", understood as the manifestation of the things themselves in their full evidence. It aims to explore the way phenomena appear and therefore the relations between what appears and the one to whom something appears, abstracting from any form of acquired knowledge.

The phenomena dealt with by the phenomenology are not data, they are not facts, they are not mere abstractions, but they always have their reference to a subjective pole and that is why they are always significant.

A phenomenology of perception must therefore put in brackets scientific, cultural and philosophical prejudices burdened with historically constructed conceptions (causalism, physiology, mind/body dualism) and try first to simply describe the lived experience (*Erlebnis*) of perception. Hence Husserl's appeal to go back to reality purified of all conceptual superstructure. However, this return to the things themselves, to the way they concretely give themselves, is not to be intended as a return to empiricism, to Hume's principle *esse est percipi*; in Husserl's opinion this was a failed attempt. Even today we still wonder if the world really is as we directly experience it; it is on such a skeptical outcome that the phenomenologist needs to reflect.

On the other hand the very fact that phenomenology criticizes empiricism does not allow to conclude that it shall be considered as a repetition in new clothes of the philosophy of Descartes or Kant. Husserl declares great admiration for the radical approach followed by Descartes with his methodical doubt; in fact, by suspending the obviousness of the world as we already know it, Descartes seemed to anticipate the phenomenological description. However, Husserl reproaches Descartes for the final outcome of his philosophy: the certainty of the cogito and consequently of the deductive procedure.

Even Kant, the philosopher of subjectivity, has not been able to conceive as a consequence of his theory a descriptive philosophy able to show how to form a world from the experience we have. The philosophical design of Kant is reduced to a mere indication of those a-priori categories assumed in the intellect and applied to the experience.

The phenomenological method of Husserl intends to overcome both positions and to free itself from the traditional opposition between empiricism and rationalism. In Husserl's opinion, phenomenology is a descriptive science of intentional phenomena based on an inseparable relationship between subjective and objective poles. The object of the intentional act is not separable from the act that establishes it.

In other words, a sound which is heard always presupposes an act of hearing, and the latter is ignored if the analysis focuses only on the heard sound.

This method requires a preliminary act of epochè, conceived as the suspension of the trust placed in naturalistic beliefs regarding both the certainty of science and the objectivity of the world; for Husserl such beliefs are prejudices that distort the true understanding of the world.

With the *epochè* Husserl poses his work in the horizon of critical philosophy; in this context the phenomenon is no more an individual

and contingent fact, either historical or empirical, but it is observed, looked at and described in its essential sense.

The *epochè* is a methodic premise and a programmatic meta-discourse on phenomenology; it is a sort of operation through which you cannot see the world as an independent entity (cfr. Costa et al., 2002, p.127).

After having suspended his belief in the certainty of science and objectivity of the world, the phenomenologist manages to discover phenomena in their pure givenness to consciousness and in their absolute evidence; from here he goes back to the pre-categorical and pre-reflexive experience conceived as the original dimension in which the world, in the way it gives itself, "appears" to the consciousness.

The *epochè* is never completed; it is a tool starting to work whenever new thematic horizons are disclosed to the intentional constitution.

What remains after applying the *epochè* is not a metaphysical and "productive" subject from which the existence of things would depend, but a consciousness understood as a "relationship", the inseparable connection between subject and object.

It is good to clarify that for "consciousness" Husserl means an operating principle, a set of acts directed to the object. The object gradually shows itself, with all its different levels of meaning. Husserl calls this feature of consciousness "intentionality": it is the most original and innovative concept of the phenomenological method. The intentionality allows to overcome the rational model which gives primacy to abstract and calculating reason, with its mathematical and classifying stance, hence excluding the subjective dimension from scientific knowledge. On the opposite phenomenological intentionality gives priority to the relationship between man and his world; it works on the relation of phenomena to humans based on the assumption that the world is meaningful for human beings, and this cannot be dealt with by reductionist studies. The reading of intentionality proposed by Husserl is both "a means to give back to the experience in general an objective meaning and to the experiencing an authentic subjectivity" (cfr. Costa et al., 2002, p.105).

Husserl's theory of intentionality is a conceptual tool to conceal the language of a philosophy of experience and the everyday language. This allows us to say that we see the very same object that we are touching, that is an identical object that at the same time we see and someone else talks about.

The intentionality, according to which consciousness is always consciousness of something, does not exclude the objective dimension, but we can talk of objectivity only within the limits of our experience.

Husserl speaks of noema and this term refers neither to a mental object (a psychological experience among others) nor to a real object. Husserl means instead the intentional object as such: the object intended exactly as it is intended, and within the limits of such intention.

The intentional consciousness is a stream of lived experiences in which there is always a correlation between a subjective polarity and an objective one. The former, referring to the acts of consciousness, is called "noesis", while the latter, the "noema", refers to the various modalities things present themselves in relation to the intentional acts of the subject.

The natural attitude and the common sense forgot that if there are objects to be known and loved, it is because there is a person who knows and loves. The real problem of Husserl is the living sense of things, existing for man as they "appear".

Intentionality is a pre-categorical dimension, prior to each abstract separation of subject and object; it only allows us to understand the process by which meanings and values, normally assumed naively and uncritically, are formed. These sense and significance are never completed, because there are infinite intentional modalities by which the subject relates to objects. Husserl speaks of a progressive appearance of objects, the origin being the lived experience (i.e. the intentional modality) and not the separated existence of two opposing entities. Starting from perception, the phenomenologist describes multiple layers and directions of meaning.

In *Ideas II* (Husserl, 1952/1989) and *Ideas III* (Husserl, 1952/1980) Husserl analyses "logics" understood as a theory of science; a phe-

nomenological analysis of logics, traditionally considered as formal logics, necessarily refers to the transcendental logics. The first is the foundation or the method of other sciences, but this foundation in the phenomenological perspective demands in turn to be established: this is the task of transcendental logics that wants to be the ultimate foundation, a new ground science that does not allow anything else as its premise, as something previously valid. Formal logics was wrongly presented as something pre-established and accepted without discussion and without justification. The phenomenology with his critical and transcendental analysis rejects this prejudice: logics requires a foundation and justification too.

The naivety of formal logics, unable to make a final understanding and justification of itself, is reflected in the sciences that draw from it the formal principles and therefore do not know how to grasp the real significance of their field of study and key concepts. Husserl takes position concerning the dispute between logicism and psychologism: on the one hand, we find Mill's and others' psychologism, according to which the rules of logics stem from psychological processes; on the other hand we find the logicism by Frege and Russell. They claim the absolute autonomy of logic from psychology and the human experience in general. Rejecting both positions Husserl outlines a completely new point of view: logical laws have their basis in experience, but in the experience under investigation by the transcendental phenomenology and not from empirical psychology.

Also the subject is something that requires a process of constitution: from the mere logical function of the ego - the pure ego – to the understanding of the subject as "psychological and bodily ego" in relation to other bodily egos similar to it.

Husserl thus comes to define phenomenology as an "eidetic" science in the sense of a descriptive science of essences. It starts with the experience of things, which are "at hand", here and now for me; the considered world is that constantly available, to which I belong and in which things present themselves as objects of use. But when they bring to my consciousness, when I put in brackets the usual and pre-established meaning, i.e. when I use the phenomenological *epochè* and operate the "eidetic reduction" of the world, here I can grasp the essence of things: that is I replace the perception of the particular facts with the vision or intuition of general forms. For example, listening to the sounds of different instruments, my consciousness captures at the same time the sound of an instrument and also its "essence of sound".

This knowledge of the essence of things is what Husserl calls "eidetic intuition", which takes place not by abstraction or comparison of similar things, as erroneously believed the empiricists, but by a direct intuition of what is universal.

This is the real project of re-foundation of knowledge and culture sponsored by the phenomenology of Husserl: the key point is to highlight a level of "original evidence", universal and valid for all, which is the basis of any further scientific construction.

The phenomenology offers the opportunity to begin again, to "go and see" how things in the world are in their multiple levels of existence and of showing their essential structures. This process rediscovers the subjective roots offering to western man the opportunity to regain a sense that he had lost, because the calculating, naturalistic and objectivist reason had totally neglected it.

The first result of the phenomenological method is therefore to restore the foundation of knowledge to man and to his knowledge.

The next step will lead Husserl to the discovery of the "lifeworld" (Lebenswelt), the world that we experience before and independently from the categories and concepts of science.

THE LIFEWORLD

The lifeworld is a concept that Husserl introduces in the last years, also to escape the criticism about the transcendental subject, aroused especially by his closest collaborators.

Husserl makes it clear that the subject reveals itself originally as a "concrete subject" which is constituted in the intentional relationship as "own body", always in relation to other bodies that he feels as similar.

The lifeworld coincides with the intersubjective dimension as it gives itself in its "pre- and extra-scientific" immediacy. It is the central theme of the last work by Husserl: *The Crisis of European Sciences,* which is a complex work containing a number of conferences that Husserl held in Vienna and Prague in 1935 (three years before his death in 1938). Published posthumously by Eugen Fink, according to some critics was written as Husserl's "answer" to Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

The *Crisis*, one of the most interesting works of the entire philosophical landscape of the twentieth century, is a fierce critic to the irrationalism and the philosophical relativism, as well as a critique to scientific rationality.

This is not a dogmatic rejection of science, but rather a way to take away from the idea of science advocated by positivism.

The crisis denounced by Husserl is not about the practical outcomes of science, since their success is undeniable, but rather about its meaning for human existence: science, making a reduction of reality to the physical-mathematical parameters only, forgot the "lifeworld", i.e. the needs, emotions and purposes of the people. This is also, paradoxically, for those sciences such as psychology, anthropology, history that reduce man to an "object" of investigation in order to study him in a neutral manner and from the outside, making it an object of experimentation and analysis.

The scientific stance privileged the physical-mathematical disciplines and ruled out all the aspects that were not covered by formal and rigid structures; in doing so, it determined the separation between "physical" and "mental" and helped to superimpose a world of abstract idealizations to the concrete reality of the lived experience.

The *Crisis* is an essential document for understanding the complete meaning of the research made by Husserl and his desire to rediscover the lost sense of things related to subjectivity. His rigorous method aims to analyze the fundamental premises of any knowledge, rooted in the lived experience, which is where any meaning and any verification of existence and reality take place.

The relationship ego - world is here at stake.

Husserl claims that all these problems derive from the ingenuity of science considering the objective world as what is real, while it neglects that is the subjectivity that makes science possible.

The lifeworld is clearly distinct from the natural world.

The phenomenology proceeds by clarifying in order to enter the realm of "pure and direct givenness". Husserl taught us to work critically on the thought to indicate with the greatest clarity some ideas able to unravel the processes of knowledge.

In Husserl's opinion it is only phenomenology that can consider the reciprocal implication of the streams of life of individual subjects. What is considered external in the ingenuous positivity or in the objectification becomes an intentional implication if seen from within.

The lifeworld is a motivational horizon for all subjects in their active-passive "wholeness". In other words, the lifeworld is a natural world that becomes motivational horizon for us, the intersubjective horizon where any sense is conferred. This lifeworld is accessed through a process that goes through the constitution of intersubjectivity. Even in this case would be limiting to "define" the lifeworld because it is a "horizon of thematization" in active and passive action; it is the clarification of the role of pre-categorical and passive synthesis. The lifeworld is a meaning that is given, which always acts; and this disclosure of meaning is an intentional process in which this world is *for me*.

Starting from the question of intersubjectivity, Husserl discovers that the world surrounding me, the world-for-us, is not an abstract philosophical problem. Rather, it is a web of structures of meaning that is grasped by the experience.

The subject can be motivated only by what he 'lives', by what is present in his consciousness, by what is given to him as real, certain, valid, good, etc. (cfr. Costa et al., 2002, p.207)

The *Crisis* is Husserl's final effort to include his work in a historical, theoretical and teleological project in which the lifeworld is a ground search for "intentional a-priori and pure psychology", able to study the basic problems of

knowledge.

In fact for Husserl intentional psychology, intersubjectivity, transcendental and constitutive phenomenology are not separate horizons, but parts of the same research of the original, of the pre-categorical lifeworld in which the operations of meaning are rooted.

Husserl's phenomenology is properly a theory, that is a "vision" which means, in the first instance, to gain awareness, to make understandable and evident what are, in their general essence, thought and knowledge" (cfr. Costa et al., 2002, p.131).

In rejecting a psychologistic conception of the experience, Husserl took distance from the empiricist language in order: a) to give back to perception its direct and immediate access to the world of objects, and b) to distinguish more clearly what depends on attitudes and orientations of the knowing subject and what instead on the objects that present themselves in the experience.

The task of phenomenology is to scientifically investigate the way in which the lifeworld serves as a foundation of the scientific logical and theoretical truths. In other words, the world of science is a logical/theoretical construction which is based on the lifeworld as its premise. The lifeworld, which is constantly "already given" and originally evident, is the basis from where the logical/objective evidence of mathematics can arise.

This science of the lifeworld is the recovery of the original meaning of the intentionality, subjective and intersubjective. It represents an effort by Husserl, sometimes desperate, to understand once again the general meaning of his work. This always tries to find, in the description of the lifeworld, the foundation of the "vital" root of all our knowledge.

One thing whatsoever, even if it occurs unchanged in perception, it is always something extremely multi-faceted, which refers to the multiplicity of different points of view of the ego and its related operations.

Therefore, next to the ingenious and methodical work of the special sciences, it is necessary to Husserl a continuous critical reflection about knowledge; and this solely pertains to the phenomenologist who must grasp the essential meaning of the general categories under which proceeds scientific research. He must also describe the relationship between these essences and the acts of knowledge: everything in order to understand what the "science theory" is and what makes it possible.

The history of phenomenology is far from being over: it continues to ask questions about "how things and the world are given".

To summarize briefly, we can say that Husserl assigns a new task to phenomenology that is to awaken in the individual and the humanity a sense of the regained centrality of human subjectivity as source of all value and meaning. Before and beyond the scientific categories there is the lifeworld, the world as we experience it before and independently from the categories and concepts of science. The physical and formal sciences distanced themselves from the horizon of human and subjective experience, they superimposed a grid of concepts and formal structures to the true essence of the world and experience, they lost the sense of their origin, their role, their limits.

MULTIDIRECTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Starting with the phenomenology of Husserl several researches developed, offering a new way of dealing with the problems that equally involve science and philosophy, this is a new way to rethink the foundations, the basic questions directly concerning the nature of their methods and objects. The phenomenological method issued metaphysics, referential logics, epistemology, philosophy of mind, philosophical anthropology and psychoanalysis.

There is thus an analytical-epistemological phenomenology which explores the intellectual experience in relationships to the lived experiences in which our thoughts are constituted; it works on the relationship between intentionality and logical semantics.

In an opposite direction works the anthropological-existential phenomenology, spreading mainly in French culture and having its greatest exponents in the early Heidegger, Levinas, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. The role played by her-

meneutic phenomenology is no less interesting; it was drew mainly by Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur. The phenomenological method found many application fields: theology, thanks to works by Edith Stein who, among other things, worked on empathy as an intentional form of "perception by analogy"; ethics, aesthetics, psychiatry and psychoanalysis. It also generated a huge interest in brilliant thinkers from USA and Japan.

The original receiving of phenomenology by the French culture is still very much alive: it is indicated as anthropological-existential phenomenology, which moves within a phenomenology of facticity oriented in the existential sense.

French people read Husserl together with the work by Heidegger *Sein und Zeit* (1927). Such phenomenological influences arrive in a theoretical landscape dominated by metaphysical tendencies and also open to Freudian and Lacanian suggestions.

French scholars take from Heidegger his attention to man considered as existence, being in the world, *Da-sein*. In Heidegger's philosophy man is thrown into the world in a given situation, but he is also a project towards the future, possibility, freedom, wait, hope, anguish. While the existence of things is mechanical and automatic, man's existence is not pre-determined, he is a being-in the world, understood as existential (and not cognitive as in Husserl) relationship between two concrete realities: a situated and bodily subject and the world of things and of men. This world is not a simple presence, but what has meaning in relation to man.

The phenomenology by Heidegger has shown that consciousness is not in the head, but the intersection of the body, the world and the others; this is a complex and dynamic relationship that cannot be reduced to a purely materialistic explanation in terms of neuronal functions.

It remains an open question which is still at the center of many debates on the possibility of opening a dialogue between phenomenology and science: how to reconcile the existentialist and phenomenological approach, claiming the irreducibility of every experience, with the scientific paradigm?

In addition to the influence of Heidegger, at the beginning of the twentieth century we can see in France a close relationship between philosophy and medical psychopathology. As pointed out by Elisabeth Roudinesco (1986), there are many students of the École Normale who specialize in psychopathology, following the teachings of G. Dumas, P. Janet, H. Wallon, D. Lagache, J. Laplanche.

In 1915 E. Minkowski, the famous Russian psychiatrist, took French citizenship and started his research on a structural model of the psyche both normal and pathological based on Husserl's phenomenology and on the bergsonian distinction between spatialized time and experienced duration. Such research found great acceptance in French culture and anticipated studies about the *Daseinsanalyse* made by Binswanger.

Sartre was also particularly sensitive to these interests towards psychopathology: when he was still a young student at the Sainte-Anne he followed on Sundays morning together with Aron, Nizan and many of his fellow students the brilliant displays of clinical psychopathology of G. Dumas. Perhaps inspired by these thoughts, he chose to write his diploma of Higher Studies about Delacroix, a psychologist specialized in the study of mystical delirium and as an argument to be treated, "imagination", one of the most difficult psychological and debated issues. Later, as a research topic for a scholarship at the French Institute in Berlin, he proposed *Relations between the psychic and the physiological in general*.

Mental illness runs like a red thread many stories of *The Wall* (Sartre, 1939/2010) whose titles are based on the clinical observations compiled by Dumas in his *Nouveau Traité* (1923-1924); the most peculiar of all is the story entitled *The Room* in which Sartre describes a case of hallucinatory psychosis.

The novel *Nausea* (Sartre, 1938/2013) aroused great interest for the study of psychopathology; here the character Roquentin feels an obscure change in his habits and familiar things. As observed by E. De Martino (1997, p.133) in his review of the *Nausea* by Sartre, "the objects manifest themselves to Roquentin suffering from an internal weakness that will dissolve them in a fictitious, artificial and unreal scenario,

overflowing with terrifying possibility to further shipwrecks".

This analysis is deeply influenced by the concept of "primary delusional experiences" introduced in psychopathology by Jaspers. These are delusional experiences no further derivable through (un-understandable), announcing the arising psychosis. The crisis has a sudden onset in which the everyday world of usual habits, the obvious and the familiar become problematic, highlighting an obscure change of meaning that arises in a non-avoidable way and yet remains seamless (De Martino, 1997, p.141).

De Martino argues that Sartre himself used his knowledge of the *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (Jaspers, 1913) which - starting a phenomenological psychopathology - established the fundamental distinction between explaining something from the outside and understanding something from the inside.

De Martino identified *Nausea* as a specimen starting point and, at the same time, a guide and a reference point for further analysis. He looks at the way the entire diary variously reweaves the issue of the collapse of the intraworldly entities, the loss of their everyday obviousness; consequently, in its episodes is experienced an existential disorientation from what should be familiar, although Roquentin still tries to mask his "small crisis of madness" by appealing to the regular and the household of his daily life (De Martino, 1997, p.132).

In Roquentin's experience the relationship with reality is characterized by the fact that objects become strange, bizarre, weak, free, uncertain, undecided, artificial, arbitrary, unnecessary, absurd. They are in the act of separating themselves from their names and their meaning so as to fall within the opaque thickness of a "naked" existence without memory of human domestication. (De Martino, 1997, p.137)

The resistance to face such an existential position conceals the underlying fear to recognize that madness is a permanent possibility against which the healthy mind is called again and again to fight (De Martino, 1997, p.140).

Inspired by Jaspers (1913) numerous studies aimed at renewing the status of traditional psychiatry going through a period of crisis.

The proposal of the psychopathology of the understanding (*verstehende Psychopathologie*) was to understand from the inside how a psychic phenomenon derives from another one; for example: the humiliation that produces anger; the offense that leads to aggression; the expectation that triggers anxiety; a loss that generates depression. These types of understanding postulate the refusal to resort to causal explanations that may work for other cases. For example in the case of the relationship between alcohol intoxication and impaired consciousness; here the causal explanation can be used because the toxic action of alcohol on the brain is not a psychic event.

Another great contribution came from Binswanger[c] who went towards a phenomenological or anthropo-analytical psychiatry; combining psychiatry and philosophy he elaborated his *Daseinsanalyse* inspired by Jaspers' *General psychopathology* and Heidegger's *Being and Time*.

Binswanger leads a scientific investigation of anthropological nature having as its object the essence of being human. In this perspective, the mentally ill is a human being in his full dignity, having his own coherent and comprehensible plans even if the character of freedom lacks; the mentally ill can no longer be regarded as a mere object of scientific inquiry because such an investigation seems to ignore the intentionality characterizing psychic phenomena.

For an authentic renewal of psychiatry the focus should be put on man and not on the physiology of the brain.

Certainly the phenomenologist needs a rigorous description of the characteristics and properties of individual mental disorders that only psychiatry can provide but, unlike the psychiatrist, he does not use the description itself to construct abstract nosographical concepts, pursuing a mechanistic obstinate and classificatory stance. Phenomenology can be of help to psychiatry, because it offers the possibility of broader and more fruitful research than the strict objectifying one.

According to Binswanger the psychopathological symptom presents itself as a kind of existential failure, or as a failure to realize the possibilities of freedom that characterize all human

existence.

The attitude of the phenomenologically oriented psychopathologist is to describe the world that the patient considers as real, trying to understand things so as the patient sees and lives them; hence, he avoids premature judgment.

Sartre approaches phenomenology under the influence of Jaspers' ideas; he spent 1933 and part of the 1934 in Berlin where he was able to get hold of the key concepts of Husserl's philosophy; the first of all is the idea of intentionality interpreted in a personal way, and that he uses to deconstruct the substantiality of consciousness and to free it from any form of interiority. Without intentionality consciousness would have no world, but only a disconnected series of sensations. Sartre (1939/2002, p.383) writes:

> "Husserl has restored to things their horror and their charm. He has restored to us the world of artists and prophets: frightening, hostile, dangerous, with its havens of mercy and love. He has cleared the way for a new treatise on the passions which would be inspired by this simple truth, so utterly ignored by the refined among us: if we love a woman, it is because she is loveable"

However, it is good to point out that, although influenced by Husserl, Sartre has never been neither a disciple nor an orthodox reader of him.

Many critics and scholars of his thought, as V. De Coorebyter (2000), consider that he approached phenomenology to progress in his research, to find material to serve as a starting point for his studies, but also that he twisted continuously phenomenology enough to achieve unexpected results, perhaps, even away from Husserl's thought. However, it is noteworthy that something similar happened to all those thinkers who faced the phenomenological method starting from Husserl.

Sartre thinks that the consciousness exists as something other than itself, and that the conscious awareness of things is not limited to their knowledge: for Sartre intentionality applies to the emotions as well as to cognitions, to desires as well as to perceptions. The primacy of the *logos*, of the objective-scientific knowledge that pretends to judge, classify, measure, and compare everything, is no longer valid. In fact, before the *logos* there is life, there are gestures, emotions, immediate perceptions, the multiple forms of spontaneous life.

The most important work, still today a reference point for many scholars, it is certainly that one dedicated to the imaginary (Sartre, 1940/2004). Sartre introduces an original idea which exceeds and disrupts all the pre-phenomenological writings on the image, from Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza to Bergson. For Sartre, the image has nothing to do with perception as it refers to the unreal: it is an act and not a thing, it has no sensitive content borrowed from the outside world and is produced by the free activity of consciousness. In his words: "consciousness is always 'in situation' because it is always free, there is always and at every moment the concrete possibility for it to produce the irreal" (Sartre, 1940/2004, p.186).

Through the study on the imaginary Sartre identifies the direct link between phenomenology and aesthetics, because the imaginary is an act of reality denial, just as the work of art where what is beautiful cannot be given by perception.

Unlike Sartre who follows Husserl's ideas about the intentionality of consciousness, Merleau-Ponty (1942, 1945/2013) highlights the role of perceptual processes and of the relationship between corporeality and lifeworld, thus recognizing the priority of the perceiving body, of his concrete being in the world independently from any abstract bracketing.

Considering the Husserl's distinction between *Körper* (physical body) and *Leib* understood as a lived body, Merleau-Ponty discovers that there is a hidden logos revealed by the perception when my body's intentionality is directed to things. It is necessary to reinstate the distinction between "physiological" and "psychological" of the existence because they are both oriented either toward an intentional pole or a world.

As emphasized by Merleau-Ponty in Phenomenology of perception:

> "Taken concretely, man is not a psyche joined to an organism, but rather this back-and-forth of existence that sometimes allows itself to exist as a body and sometimes carries itself into personal acts. Psychological motives and bodily events can overlap because there is no single movement in a living body that is an absolute accident with regard to psychical intentions and no single psychical act that has not found at least its germ or its general outline in physiological dispositions. It is never a question of the

> incomprehensible encounter of two causalities, nor a collision between the order of causes and the order of ends" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2013, p.90)

Beginning once again the study of perception is motivated and justified by different strands in Merleau-Ponty's opinion: the development of physiology of the nervous system; the development of mental pathology and psychology of the child and, especially in Germany, the progress of the *Gestaltpsychologie*.

It is a vast and complex program that cannot be analyzed in detail in this work. For this reason few general remarks will follow: first of all, that of having laid the foundations for a concrete understanding of human subjectivity, such that body and mind, nature and consciousness are understood in an integrated way to overcome their division. The adoption of the phenomenological method leads Merleau-Ponty to regain the sensitive and earthly sphere of "facticity" as the basis of science. So to grasp the behavior of the patient it is necessary a drastic change of perspective that leads outside of the mere physiology. In order to recover the qualitative dimension and the overall significance of the illness, it has to be considered as a behavior to understand and not just to be explained.

For Merleau-Ponty the bodily perception is the core of all knowledge and all relations with the surrounding world; in the bodily perception the thing is evident to me because I am an *embodied* consciousness. It is a vital relationship with a world environment that does not have the crystal clarity of the conceptual meaning, but the opacity and ambiguity of the sensible world.

Such emphasis on embodiment leads Merleau-Ponty to consider very significant the themes of sexuality and disease.

Eye and mind, Merleau-Ponty's (1960) last work published before his sudden death is a description, full of metaphorical references to the dynamics of perception, of a being who has his roots in the deep common pre-categorical origins of the body and the world.

In this work, the emphasis is shifted from the situated bodily subjectivity as a source of all meaning to the "human" being in which the subject is involved.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, I would like to discuss the question that originally oriented my reflections on phenomenological experiences, i.e. how to bring together both the phenomenological and existential stance at one side and the scientific paradigm at the other side, considering that the former claims that any lived experience, with its failures and faulty actions, is irreducible. How is it possible to explain the infinite mystery and the paradoxes of human being through brain mechanisms and physiological systems?

The focus here is on man, on his finite and historical existence, on the sense of existing in his own singularity with his angst, suffering and needs. This hurdle makes difficult and complex any dialogue.

In the name of a scientific optimism, the beginning of the XXI century sees a naturalistic program prevailing and trying to reduce the human being either to an animal on top of the evolutionary scale or to a complex machine. In this context, the recall of the phenomenological method may appear paradoxical. However, it opens the discussion on an ineludible question: converting the human being into a mere object of study do we risk neglecting his most proper features?

Husserl's warning is still valid: subjectivity produces science and it cannot be known by any objective science.

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Endnotes

a: Brentano is guided by the awareness that our experiences are not objects amid others and therefore cannot be found into the soul as things are found in their surrounding space. This because consciousness is not the place where the experienced contents stand, it is firstly "relationship". The critique to the classical theory of introspection had to end in the formulation of a theory of experience based on the concept of intentionality (cfr, Costa et al., 2002, pp.14-17).

b: A rigorous analysis of the changes occurred to the term "phenomenology" in Husserl and Heidegger can be found in Volpi (1984).

c: Ludwig Binswanger (1881-1966) was interested in medicine, psychiatry, psychoanalysis, philosophy and anthropology. He had fruitful discussions with some of the greatest figures of the time, including Bleuler, Jung, Freud, Pfänder, Scheler, Husserl, Ortega y Gasset and Heidegger. He directed the Sanatorium Bellevue from 1911 to 1956. A collection of writings dated 1920-1936, which is deeply influenced by these cultural encounters, can be found in *Per un'antropologia fenomenologica* (Binswanger, 1970). Binwanger's analysis starts from the human presence as "Being-in-the-world", without any prior distinction between "healthiness" and "madness". The alien person is not one who lives "out of this world" but that human being who has found in alienation his only possible way to inhabit the world.

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