

The Inevitability of Phenomenology*

(Translated by Aaron L. Mishara)

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Hans Linschoten

The inevitability of phenomenology is not a psychological theme, but nevertheless a theme for the psychologist who takes the care and nurture of science, or learned pursuits (*Wissenschaft*), seriously. Psychology is the science of human experience and behavior. For the moment, let us now understand phenomenology as the term for systematic description and analysis (in the sense of Husserl) of the world of experience (*Erleben*) and behavior as it is given before all scientific activity as the ground or soil of what is problematic to science. We will call to mind this phenomenology, and not a phenomenological psychology nor the function of phenomenological methods within psychology. Our attempt aims at showing the meaning of phenomenology as fundamental science (*Grundwissenschaft*) with respect to the problems of psychology which deal with the theory of knowledge.

In the dispute over methodologies, it has frequently been called to mind that psychology is forced to make use of the empirical, exact methods and models of natural science. At this point we defer making a judgement about this; we listen and take note that one in so doing appeals to the routine matters and obviousness of everyday life and experience. This state of affairs opens to us our theme or subject matter. Four examples may serve as illustration: Watson's position on the problem of consciousness; J. Müller's doctrine of specific energies of the senses; Bridgman's operationalism; and the physicalist idea of the protocol sentence.

J. B. Watson has discussed repeatedly what he thinks about consciousness.¹ He unambiguously rejected it as an object of psychological research. No one has ever smelt, felt or seen such a thing as consciousness; it is not accessible to any immediate or indirect observation; introspection is a purely verbal matter.

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¹ More explicitly elaborated in my book: *On the Way toward a Phenomenological Psychology*.

Watson then (almost unambiguously) also rejected the existence of consciousness. In the real world there isn't such a thing. 'Consciousness' signified for him only a *fiction*, one of those illusions that Bacon had characterized centuries before as *Idola Theatri* (Idols of the Theater) which are "plainly impressed and received into the mind from the fables of theories and perverted rules of demonstration" (1, I, Nr. LXI).^{*} There exist neither feelings nor representations (*Vorstellungen*), neither decisions nor thoughts as real inner states or acts. In the development of science such superstitious words are disappearing gradually. The behaviorist investigates conduct, bodily reactions, that which is visible and measurable—in short, what is *real*.

It is incontestable that this "standpoint of the behaviorist"[†] has led to many fertile and important enrichments of knowledge. In the history of the sciences an energetic rejection of traditional formulations has more than once had a liberating and inspiring effect. From time to time we need such a catharsis of concepts. There remains the task, however, of asking what Watson's evidence is and by what means he justifies his narrowing of the psychological view. It would be interesting to know, for example, what *are* illusions, fictions, prejudices and so on in the behaviorist apprehension of them. What do these words refer to? What does Watson mean when he pronounces the word "fiction" and uses it as a predicate of consciousness? We may perhaps say, "but everyone knows what is meant." Is one then not compelled to say that Watson, whenever he makes use of everyday language in the defence of his opinion, necessarily also employs prescientific views (*Anschauungen*) for the foundation of a scientific system? Certainly Watson does this. He can not do otherwise. To every beginning scientist the human world is given in advance, preconceived and already enunciated. One doesn't start from nothing. In that case one would have no motivation to start at all. The reasons for scientific activity lie in the prescientific world.

It is still more interesting to learn that Watson in a certain sense justifies consciousness anew. He says that it is *self-evident* in the sense of being obvious that the behaviorist has consciousness just as any other person. Consciousness is the instrument with which all scientists do their work; it is the function through which things are given which are then able to be investigated scientifically. The function itself, however, is no object of scientific research.

The concept of consciousness therefore only has significance or meaning, according to Watson, in the justification of the scientific standpoint. Did not Husserl say, "that fiction is the source from which the recognition of 'eternal verities' draws its nourishment?" In a footnote he adds cautiously that this phrase "would be particularly suited as a quotation for bringing ridicule from the naturalistic side on the eidetic mode of cognition" (Husserl, 1913, p. 132).[‡]

^{*}ex fabulis theararium et perversis legibus demonstrationum plane indita et recepta. (Cf. Fulton H. Anderson's translation.)—Trans.

[†]English in original text.

[‡]Cf. Boyce Gibson's translation which is partly modified, p. 184—Trans.

The hard, naturalistic cognition of the spatiotemporal laws of behavior evidently also feeds on a fiction. Watson as we know never retracted the qualification of consciousness as a fiction.²

In modern psychological textbooks Johannes Müller's doctrine of specific sense energies is mentioned usually only as a historically respectable theory. Unjustly so; because a considerable part of theoretical physiology and psychology of the senses finds precisely there its origin and grounds; yet also understandably, for it is a dangerously ticklish teaching. It compresses so to speak the whole world into the head of man and leaves it to the brain to project again outwards, with the help of experience, the motley aggregate or plenitude. Müller radically separates consciousness from the experienced world, when he formulates the famed fifth theorem: Sensation is not the conduction of a quality or state from outer bodies to consciousness, but rather the conduction of a quality, an excitatory state of a sense nerve to consciousness which is occasioned by an external trigger or cause (*Ursache*) . . . (14, p. 254). In principle one cannot say anything against this doctrine of self-sensing of the nervous system, that is, with the presupposing of some assumptions and some agreements. With strict consistency, the modern comprehension of the brain as a system that processes information is prepared by physiologizing the primary and secondary qualities. Müller was not yet so advanced that he could degrade consciousness to a fiction; in a ghostlike way it still rummages in the lightless caverns of the skull, cut off from an outside world which is never to be perceived immediately but can only be thrown outwards as an hypothesis. This theorem still echoes in a milder form in Reenpää's most recent remarks about the sensually-now-here-existent (*das Jetzt-Hier-Sinnlich-Seiendes*), the object of the sensory manifold, which ultimately lies at the basis of all that is experiencable (Reenpää, 1962, p. 38).

If none of us has the feeling of collapsing under the weight of the world gathered in the head and is also not too afraid that the manifold of his senses could be put together as a jig-saw puzzle (*Mosaikspiel*) of the world sometimes quite wrongly, it is only because the analytical games of science only take place within the assuring structure and texture (*Gefüge*) of the world of experience. One is only able to say that what is sensually-now-here-existent (or the sensations themselves) lie at the basis of all that is experiencable because that which is experienced precedes these concepts. In the fifth theorem the world is indeed interiorized, but under the condition that the external cause of the sensation can be identified in everyday experience. For example, if the psychologist says:

²Cf. Hampel, 1925, p. 31 on mathematical concepts in empirical science: The retort that all those concepts and principles are 'mere fictions to which nothing corresponds in experience' is, in effect, simply a restatement of the fact that theoretical constructs cannot be definitionally eliminated exclusively in favor of observation terms. But it is precisely these 'fictitious' concepts rather than those fully definable by observables which enable science to interpret and organize the data of direct observation by means of a coherent and comprehensive system which permits explanation and prediction.

“This little lamp functions as stimulus for a sensation of light,” he never means this in the sense of: “This sensation functions as stimulus for a sensation.” The external cause is not in itself interpreted as an inner sensation.

Very influential nowadays is operationalism. It is an attempt to define scientific experience unequivocally in the sense that concepts, when related to exactly repeatable experience-situations, derive their validity from the operations that have to be performed in them. When Bridgman coined the concept of operational definition, he was aiming only at methodology, not philosophy. This method is intended to be a practical solution to the terrible confusion of concepts in scientific discussions. The use of the same word by two people does not guarantee a coincidence of the intended meanings. This coincidence or agreement can be reached, however, by an operational definition.

Originally, Bridgman taught that the concept is synonymous with its respective group of operations. For instance, the concept “length” does not signify anything more than the group of operations by which lengths become determined (Bridgman, 1927, p. 5). A later development in Bridgman’s thinking tends toward rejecting the restriction to physical or even purely metric operations. Those which he alternately calls “verbal,” “mental” (*geistige*) or “pencil and paper” operations are also supposed to belong to operations which define legitimate concepts—and one cannot do without these operations, not only in mathematics and logic but also in physics.

The mental operations in the framework of a positivist interpretation of science are strange happenings. How does one proceed with them? I am able to imagine a line; I can also imagine that I lengthen it. This mental operation is so to speak the image or copy of a physical one. It is as if I would extend with a pencil a line that has been printed on paper—yet without pencil and paper (and therefore without line). The problem lies obviously in the “as if.” To define this mode of the “as if” operationally or to reduce it behavioristically without taking recourse to as-if-models, that is a task which I leave to others. Nevertheless, we all understand what is meant.

As Bridgman has acknowledged the irreducibility of mental operations, it brings him near to the positivist Ernst Mach who coined the concept of thought-experiment. The thought-experiment is economical, for as Mach says, “we have our concepts more easily and conveniently ‘at hand’ than the physical data” (Mach, 1905, p. 184). From the manipulation in thought of this mental present-at-hand (*Vorhanden*), the researcher has at times gained insights which no physical manipulation could ever have furnished him. “While thinking of the resistance in the motion of a body which is propelled on a horizontal course, or the delay of a body ascending on a plane which is slightly tilted diagonally, until it decreases to the point of disappearing, one arrives at the idea of a body which moves uniformly without resistance,” so Mach writes. Soberly he adds: “In reality this case can not be presented” (Mach, 1905, p. 189). Classical mechanics firmly rests on this unsolid, chimerical foundation.

The operational tactic therefore presupposes the possibility of this *modus operandi*. Furthermore, it trusts the view of common sense. Common sense

decides where, when and how far operational definitions can be useful for the progress of thinking. A blind application easily leads to the absurd. Just as the length or height of a person, the age is also to be defined operationally. Let us now coin with Benjamin (1955, p. 75) and Hempel (1925, p. 46) the mixed-concept "length-age" (*Lalter*), to which the multiplication of length and age is equivalent. "Length-age-root" (*Wullal*) now unequivocally lets itself be operationally defined as the square root of the logarithm of "length-age." What has now been played into our hands? The operational method does indeed guarantee the univocity of the concept, the meaning of the concept, however, is borrowed from everyday experience.

"For the continuance of science it is essential what kind of reality propositions we acknowledge," says Otto Neurath. As member of the Vienna Circle he knows "no philosophy as a discipline with its own propositions which would be established as the highest authority above the propositions of science . . . (but rather) advocates a monism free from metaphysics and thus creates the unified science of physicalism as a consistent sequence of anti-idealistic *materialism* which has been put down so much" (Neurath, 1933, p. 5). One can be in sympathy with this view insofar as it tries to ground the unity of science as universality of method. The attempt tends to acknowledge scientific statements as legitimate only in the case when and insofar as they are protocol sentences (*Protokollsätze*); propositions which within the systems of propositions are the ultimate onto which one falls back. Only statements of observation can have this character. These are statements or propositions such as the following: "The protocol or written report of Otto at three o'clock and seventeen minutes (3:17) was: Otto's verbalized thought at three o'clock and sixteen minutes (3:16) was: There was in the room at three o'clock and fifteen minutes a man one meter and eighty-seven centimeters tall whom Otto perceived" (Neurath, 1933, p. 6). Who dares smile at the triviality of this example from the text of Neurath? For most of us psychologists who copy down statements, his little book is wholesome reading. What mattered to the author was "the joy in the completed and united edifice of science for which there has been a fight for centuries" (Neurath, 1933, p. 28). In the words of Husserl, we are concerned here with "universal science, a science of the cosmos (*Weltall*), of the all-inclusive unity of all there is" (Husserl, 1954, p. 32);—of even the trivial, the everyday, run of the mill, the common and the frequent in contrast to the unique and singly occurring event. On which soil is the architecture of this universal science to be built? Let us ask about the meaning, directionality and applicability of physicalism. It wants—just as Bridgman—to serve communication and agreement (*Verständigung*). It wishes to replace the manifold speech of scientists by a simple way of speaking through the reduction of language to indication. "The correct protocol consists only of particular indications to what is immediately present," as one may read in the work of von Mises (1939, p. 91). Nevertheless, this statement is no protocol sentence. The uttering *about* protocol sentences at best speaks in meta-protocol sentences and I do not dare to define this concept by indications to what is immediately present. For what other result

could there be than a statement like the following: A protocol of Otto is that Otto's verbalized thinking is that Otto's verbalized thinking about his verbalized thinking takes this or that course? The linguistic foundation of physicalism uses neither a protocol-language nor a metaprotocol-language; it makes use of everyday language and everyday evidences.

Whether the "particular indications" may be linguistic indications or, in the literal sense, pointing with one's finger, doesn't make any difference. The question is in both cases: how do we know what is being indicated? In answering the problem we quote Ludwig Wittgenstein (who has strongly stimulated and engendered the thinking of the Viennese Circle). Something has happened which is (somehow) immediately present. We give it a name while defining at the same time the significance (*Bedeutung*) of the word through pointing: "(This is) Tove." The word is new, but "when the definition explains the significance of a word, it is not essential whether one has heard this word at any time before" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p. 2). But to make things clear, we suppose that in defining the word "Tove" we point to a pencil: (this is) Tove. What is Tove? It can still mean, for example, "pencil," or "round," "wood," "one," "hard" and so on. Could one ever, beginning without language, construct a language in this way? It does not seem to be entirely so simply that one can define verbally what is present with the help of single or particular indications. To put it another way, pointing to something immediately present is not an operation which is so unambiguously fundamental as has been suggested here and there.

It was Wittgenstein who coined the concept of "language-games."* These games, however, form a serious business. They are possible, just as language and playing in general, only under an agreement of the participants in which the partners establish the semantical and syntactical rules by means of their pre-established common world of experience, this multiversum of ambiguity and manifold interpretation.

The theoretical suspension of consciousness in behaviorism presupposes the matter of course obviousness of the conscious living-through of impressions (*die Selbstverständlichkeit des bewussten Erlebens*) in the pretheoretical state of experience (*Erfahrung*). The reduction of sense qualities to processes of the nervous system presupposes these qualities as something lived-through in the mode of the real. The tracing back of scientific definitions to physical operations is itself a mental (*geistig*) operation as we understand it in everyday speech. The everyday mutual understanding (*Verständigung*) precedes the most careful protocol language. The four standpoints which have been discussed have one thing in common. It is summed up by Merleau-Ponty in a sentence: "The whole universe of science is built upon the world as directly experienced, and if we want to subject science itself to rigorous scrutiny . . . we must begin by reawakening the basic experience of the world of which science is the second-order expression" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. II f.). As description and

*English in original.

analysis of this primary living through of experience (*Erleben*) and that which is experienced, phenomenology is inevitable or unavoidable.

In a lecture, Eugen Fink has explained the distinction—as he named it—between thematic and operative concepts in philosophy. This pair of concepts is significant for scientific thinking. Thematic concepts are those in which what is thought becomes fixed and preserved. They are the (not necessarily unambiguous or univocal) explicit concepts in which the theme of the (point-by-point) discussion becomes established. “Behavior,” “psyche,” “organism,” “memory” and so on belong to the scope of psychology; “Operation,” “protocol statement” and so on to the domain of the theory of science where the means are sought to fix thematic concepts more unambiguously, more exactly and more binding of the empirical. Hidden operative concepts, according to Fink, contribute to the formation of thematic concepts. Thematic thought takes place within a conceptual field which withdraws itself from this thinking in its execution.

The four beginning points of science which have been discussed in this treatment oppose the naiveté of a psychology which describes the living through of experiences and behavior in everyday language which is pervaded with mythologies. In the justification of this opposition they employ this very same everyday language pervaded by mythologies. I am not of the opinion that their critical demands therefore become invalid. One must only realize that the most rigorous scientific ideals are not withdrawn from the operative powers of language and everyday experience, and also, that such ideals are not fully able to exist.

The thinking which concerns science shows among other things a great predilection for bodily (*leiblich*) evidence. Watson in his disavowal of consciousness appeals to the senses. Müller persuades us with what are in part drastic examples (to hit someone so that his ears are ringing or that he sees stars with his eyes; Müller, 1938, p. 252). Bridgman feels secure only with manipulation. Von Mises would like to strip away with his fingers the disguised veilings of words from the immediate presence of things. These are not mere verbal habits of an empirical tradition. There is hidden in this tradition the conviction which drives the average human being to reassure himself that he is awake by pinching himself on the arm.

With the thematic fixing of the concept “operational definition,” there becomes effective on the operative level the unexpressed belief that lived-bodily (*leiblich*) experiences—movements, the connections between eye, hand and instrument, and the transindividual ability to imitate actions—determine the original field of truth and certainty. This belief, entitled “Urdoxa,” is a central theme of phenomenology.

The admission of the fact that phenomenology, as we now understand it as a philosophy of the life-world (and precisely for this reason has something fundamental to say about the origin and meaning of the sciences), puts psychology into a peculiar position and with it, by the way, all sciences which deal with the human aspects of the human world. To what extent are the statements of

phenomenology decisive for the way in which living experience and behavior must be comprehended? Are those phenomenologists right who demand that psychology, as all sciences, can only reach its goal through formalization and quantification, through experimental analysis of conditions and the construction of models, and in doing so its formalized technical language must remove itself will for the most part coincide with phenomenology and has no justification of its own. Contrary to what I felt a few years ago, I am of the opinion that psychology; as all sciences, can only reach its goal through formalization and quantification, through experimental analysis of conditions and the construction of models; that in doing so its formalized technical language must remove itself far from everyday usage. I see phenomenology in all instances as an indispensable prerequisite for this.

Psychology has its material object in common with phenomenology and that indeed establishes a closer relationship between them. The problems resulting here have not been clarified by a long shot. In any case, psychology expects from phenomenology a clarification of the what and the how of the originary givenness of its material object.

In this connection we must ask to what extent is phenomenology able to describe the originary givenness. One cannot just sit so easily in an armchair in order to describe the world free from prejudice. Erwin Straus has once remarked, "We see the world through the medium of language" (Straus, 1935, p. 34). Not many have believed him. One faction of the positivists *and* the phenomenologists are of the opinion that the world is a prelinguistic field and is given as such. Husserl at times calls it a passive pre-givenness (e.g. Husserl, 1948, p. 24). Perhaps the linguistic formulation of what is given is not always adequate to it as it still does not penetrate, in changing what is experienced, to the act of experiencing. In contemporary psychology of language, advancements exist which contradict the latter viewpoint. Let us now leave aside the experiments and listen to the words of Friedrich Waismann: "my point is that language, far from serving merely to report facts, is a collective instrument of thought that enters experience itself" (Waismann, 1962, p. 107).* If Freud, for example, does not say, "The patient reminds himself (*erinnert sich*) of the incident," but rather, "The patient recalls the incident (*erinnert den Vorfall*)," then according to Waismann this transitive use† of "to recall" is not only an attempt to describe sensitively what happens when there is a re-remembering of the repressed, but there is even a change in the lived experience itself. The freely ascending presentation (*Vorstellung*) becomes a presentation which is actively raised.‡

Waismann speaks of an eskimo language in which one does not say, "I kill him," or, "I hear," but rather, "he dies to (from) me," or, "it is loud to me." What is active to us is there passive—a happening, or a being-impressed-by,

*English in original.

†In contrast to the reflexive use, "to remind oneself of" immediately above, (*trans. note*).

‡That is, once a repressed incident becomes conscious, it becomes available to consciousness thereafter by means of an "active" memory, (*trans. note*).

which is correlative with a different perception of the world. One may perhaps say in regard to this that such differences of linguistic expression are accidental, that the eskimo when he says, "it is loud to me" means *exactly the same thing* when we say, "I hear." Then (to speak with Freud) I 'recall' the distinction between act and content psychology.

For the act psychologist, perceptions, thoughts and so on are determined according to their essence as assuming an attitude or even as achievements of the ego (*das Ich*). The content psychologist encounters only single or connected representations which are tied together among which, according to Hume, the "I" also has to be counted. Both standpoints claim something given, and not completely wrongly. The only thing is what is given is not in itself a finished, closed structure which is encountered passively. It is permeated by hidden interpretations in language of existing things. With the development of language, there are formed mythologies of existing things in language. Our evidences and things taken for granted are for the most part veiled by these mythologies. In the case of psychological appearances I even believe that the things given more often represents a cloak than substrate. While it may be that Watson has gone too far, the demythologizing attempt remains useful. Precisely in this I see an important task for phenomenology. It should not be satisfied to demonstrate merely the inadequacy of objectivistic attempts. These systems are phenomena as well and are to be interrogated. To doubt them is not enough. In order to demythologize the given, we need phenomenological hypotheses. An example follows.

The relationship of the German words: *Denken* (to think), *Gedanke* (thought), *Dank* (thanks), *Andacht* (devotion), *Gedächtnis*, (memory), and the Dutch *gedachtenis* (equivalent to the German *Andenken*, remembrance), *achterdocht* (equivalent to the German *Argwohn*, suspicion) and *duchten* (equivalent to the German *befürchten*, to fear, be apprehensive), may lead to the hypothesis that the original meaning of this word family (not necessarily etymologically, but experientially) is best expressed in the expression, "*mich dünkt*" ("it seems to me") in the sense of: it appears to me, it gives me the impression, it occurs to me, I mean. This oscillating experience of ambiguous play might have gradually transformed itself in the self-interpretation of common sense in two directions:

1. In the direction of the act (*Akt*): the *I think* is analogous to action (*das Handeln*). Thinking becomes manipulation of thoughts. Eisler defines it as: "that apperceptive activity whereby representations and concepts become analyzed into elements, compared with one another and combined into a unity." (Eisler, 1927, p. 253). The psychologist can then, as it "seems to him" (*wie es ihm dünkt*), emphasize the act or the content as the more essential moment.

2. A second direction of transformation would be the one from experience to happening or event: "it is thinking in me" (*es denkt in mir*). Processes take place in the brain which, eluding the immediate experiencing by the self, constitute the actual "phenomenon" of thought. I know about them, however,

whenever something occurs to me which apparently had been preserved 'some-where' (in memory). Yet, even the conception that the essential phenomena of behavior and experience are non-experiential processes in the organism is itself rooted in experience. One can now decide according to one's inclination (*nach Gutdünken*) in favor of an act psychology, a content psychology or an 'adding-machine' psychology of thinking, and in each case claim its foundations in experience—in order perhaps to disprove other conceptions as insufficient. It is a concern for phenomenology to clarify the possibility and meaning of the most disparate conceptions. In this respect phenomenology is likewise indispensable, as the detours also lead to Rome.

The idea of a "phenomenological hypothesis" is perhaps not fully orthodox. On the other hand, I consider the characterization of the life-world as a passively pre-given condition too dogmatic. Why shouldn't thinking in hypotheses also have a function in phenomenology? Why couldn't its "eternal truths" be understood as *provisionally* eternal? It would facilitate its task as an archaeology of the life-world. It otherwise invites the danger of language becoming entangled in its own webs.

We leave off where a deeper concept of the life-world must begin. In the late work of Husserl and in the 'newer' phenomenology, the life-world becomes seen more clearly than previously as correlate of the body. The analysis of corporeality must provide the guiding principles for the development of phenomenological hypotheses and theses.

Invariances related to bodily experience run throughout all the variations of language in its mythologies. Even if we should feel compelled to say that a fundamental, common life-world cannot unequivocally be expressed free of myth, then at least single hints or indications (to speak with Von Mises) would be possible—an indication, for example, of the possibility and universal comprehensibility precisely of indicating. If one points to a pencil and says, "Tove," then I can be in doubt whether he means "pencil," "wood," "longish" or something else, but not on the significance of the indication as such. The theory of the protocol sentence and with it all theories of meaning and signification, as well as the interpretation of the world by a philosophy of existence as a manifold of reference, have their prototype in man pointing to something.

Concerning the body it is said, "it is for the body that everything that exists defines itself and locates itself"* (Marcel, 1935, p. 10). One cannot go further back than this position, but one can progress from it. If the concept "length" according to Bridgman implies nothing *more* than the group of operations by which lengths become established, then, on the other hand, it implies nothing *less* than the priority of the bodily I (*Ichleib*) over the Cartesian mental I (*Ichgeist*) and its machine-like body (*Körper*).

Neurath declared that he was not prepared to recognize philosophy as a discipline with its own theorems or propositions which would be posited as the

* "c'est par lui que tout existant se définit et se situe."

highest authority over the propositions of science. Can we on that account still not recognize phenomenology as a discipline with its own propositions which are to be posited as the *first* authority so to speak *among* the propositions of science?

The question is in my opinion a rhetorical one. We cannot do otherwise.

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