

Phenomenalism and Counterspace

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Philosophers have never been able to agree that either realism or idealism is correct. No philosophical consensus exists that there is a real world "out there". Besides, there are other philosophies which also have merit. Bertrand Russell, for example, was a dualist who accepted Plato's world of ideas - or world of universals as it expressed now - and also a real world corresponding to our experience. He accepted the latter on common sense grounds rather than for unassailable philosophical reasons (Ref. 1). Phenomenalism is another standpoint which is very appealing and is generally that most suited to Goetheanism.

Consider a rainbow. For this phenomenon to appear certain conditions are necessary: that it is raining, that the Sun is shining, and that observers view the sky where it is raining with their backs to the Sun. These contingencies do not "make" a rainbow, but they are essential if it is to manifest. The resulting phenomenon may appear given suitable conditions, and perhaps the rainbow is an archetypal example of a phenomenon. We could say too that the colours come into existence in the world of appearance when the conditions are right, and indeed we can say this generally of colour. Thus the conditions set up by a prism, a diffraction grating or a thin film of oil all enable colours to manifest. The essential point lies in the repeated use of the words "manifest" and "appear", suggesting deliberately that colour, or a rainbow, are not created by their contingencies but manifest through them. Materialism imagines that the contingencies are all there is, whereas phenomenalism leaves open the possibility that something other than matter manifests within the material (or other) conditions.

In a similar way we may regard a plant as a phenomenon that manifests within certain conditions provided by soil, air, light, DNA and so on. Just as the drops of water and sunlight are not the rainbow, so the materials of the plant are not the plant: it manifests through them. It is the artist that "paints" with these materials. An animal also manifests through its contingencies. Carbon, hydrogen, silicon and all the other elements may be regarded as phenomena that manifest through more fundamental conditions. Such an approach to phenomenalism is very attractive, embracing all the world of appearance, and is no less consistent than realism. Materialistic realism usually supposes that the world of appearance is nothing but combinations of substances, without being able to explain what those substances are, while spiritual realism supposes the actions of real external beings explain the world of appearance, but without being able to explain what "being" is. Phenomenalism is in a sense more fundamental as it stays grounded in the world of experience without necessarily invoking anything behind the phenomena.

However, to stay with phenomena alone and evade the question as to what manifests in them is too simplistic: what we might term "naïve phenomenism". Also, we must reckon with the contingencies, and much detailed and often highly mathematical work is involved in their elucidation, particularly with regard to the chemical elements. Thus phenomenism cannot afford to bury its head in the sand of phenomena alone, but must needs reckon with a context or paradigm within which they manifest. How do we think about that paradigm without abandoning phenomenism? In Goethean science primal phenomena are sought and Goethe regarded this approach as mathematical, in the analogous sense that mathematicians seek axioms that play for them the same role as primal phenomena play for goetheanists. The transition to spiritual science lies in seeing the primal phenomena as archetypal, as expressions of archetypes that are essentially beings. This leads to spiritual realism. Thus in a very aphoristic way we see Goetheanism as a bridge to spiritual science, which does in fact go beyond naïve phenomenism. However, to avoid the charge that "being", like matter, is not explicable it is necessary to be able observe beings directly.

Short of this much useful science is possible within the bounds of pure phenomenism, as demonstrated by many workers in the field. However, more is possible even without the direct perception of spiritual beings, namely a detailed study of the contingencies necessary for phenomena to appear. The danger then arises that materialistic realism is assumed, or mathematicism, in the elaboration of the contingencies. How, then, should the contingencies be thought about? Within what paradigm? Often observations are branded as "unscientific" if they do not fit within a theoretical framework. While this may rightly be criticised as placing undue weight on speculation and formalism, there is a grain of justification in it. Theories enable our observations to be ordered and evaluated, and they enable the design of fruitful experiments. Good ones can even take on the powerful qualities of Imaginations, but abstract ones can act as over-restrictive "blinkers". The essential value they have is to provide a "thought context" within which to place the observations. A mechanistic theory that seeks to reduce everything to a few rules which automatically give rise to all that we can observe (a "theory of everything") usually strays very far from phenomenism, but a paradigm in Thomas Kuhn's sense is unavoidable and provides the context within which phenomena may be just that. In short, no paradigm, no phenomena.

This may seem over-stated, but a very real problem arises for phenomenism, and that is to have a pure percept without allowing any prior concepts to intervene i.e. to experience a completely new percept. In the jargon of this century, observations are theory-laden. A phenomenon is not simply a percept or an item of sense-data; it is a phenomenon precisely because it is experienced within a paradigm. We are taking the term "paradigm" in the deepest sense used by Kuhn (Ref 4)(Margaret Masterman (Ref 3) identified 21 different ways in which he used the term!). Paul Feyerabend (Ref 3) tended to identify it with a theory, but here we take it to be the very thought context within which

we operate, usually of so fundamental a nature that we are not conscious of all its ramifications. Kant thought we are stuck in it and thus cannot ever know the "thing-in-itself", but he overlooked the fact that new paradigms (a term not coined in his day) have arisen, albeit with great difficulty. That implies the possibility of novel experience outside the paradigm.

The grain of justification in the demand for an observation to relate to a theory lies in dropping the word "theory" and replacing it by "paradigm", in the sense of a thought context. For example, to describe a spiritual experience which has no paradigm is to be misunderstood. So the question about the contingencies of a phenomenon is a question about the paradigm. The work of the author on counterspace (Ref. 2) concerns just this (there are other workers in the field but they may not identify with this view).

Part of our paradigm is the concept of space. This has evolved and exotic kinds of space are now thinkable which was not true 200 years ago, but most of us live in a Euclidean world just as most of us are in practice naive realists most of the time. George Adams (Ref 5) applied the new approaches to geometry opened up in the 19th Century to give an exact description of negative space, or counterspace. This has an infinite inwardness characterised by an infinitely inward point rather than an infinitely outward plane as in Euclidean geometry. At a stroke our paradigm is greatly enriched, and such a direction was encouraged by Rudolf Steiner.

The author asked himself the question: what happens to a body existing in both spaces at once? The exploration of this question proved more rewarding than expected. It is based on the idea that such a body experiences strain when it moves as it cannot necessarily obey the laws of both spaces simultaneously, and thus becomes distorted in one or other space. This is purely geometric: a change of size or shape. If space "wins" then it will be strained in counterspace, or *vice versa*. The conventional concept of strain is illustrated by an elastic band which is strained by 100% in ordinary space if it is extended to double its natural length. It responds with an internal stress giving rise to a force which opposes that used to extend it. This goes beyond geometry to physics proper, as stress is not a geometric concept. The second part of the thesis is that when strain arises between space and counterspace there is an answering stress. Even if the strain is entirely in counterspace the stress will manifest also in space, giving rise to a force that is not easily explained conventionally. The first test of the idea was to see if gravity could be explained in these terms, and was successful. Newton's law arises. The kinds of stress studied became more sophisticated, affording a non-materialistic approach to gases, liquids and solids, as well as to the ethers for an even more sophisticated approach. This is developed in technical detail in Ref. 2.

The author does not seek by these means to give rise to a mechanistic approach to phenomena that happens to embrace the ethers, an obvious danger of such an enterprise. Rather, the interworkings of space and counterspace provide more appropriate ways of describing the conditions required for phenomena to manifest. In the example given of gravity we see the contingencies for its manifestation prescribed in the way space and counterspace are related. In the case of colour we do not try to answer the question "what is colour" but rather "under what conditions does it manifest"?. There is no question of identifying colour with its contingencies, as is done conventionally where red is often identified with electromagnetic radiation within a certain range of frequency. Its dependence upon context is notorious e.g. coloured shadow experiments, but that does not make it "subjective". Rather those conditions may be seen as an important part of the contingencies which are not exhausted by physical factors alone. In quantum physics photons of light are supposed to have a definite colour, and the counterspace work gives a detailed alternative approach to photons that sees them neither as waves nor particles. Their relation to colour is, however, rather that of strict contingencies limiting which colours may manifest through them. The whole "counterspace enterprise" is viewed in such a way, so that for example the ethers can in no way be identified with counterspace. In Ref. 2 the nature of "ether" and "matter" is not defined for the very reason that geometry cannot be expected to explain the content of our experience, only some of its contingencies.

However, knowledge of contingencies can be very powerful, as witnessed by modern technology, but phenomenalism is in no way weakened by such knowledge. Only naive phenomenalism suffers from that. The paradigm of materialism is either dualistic, making the world of universals virtually impotent, or else monistic and thus requiring matter to "explain" everything. When counterspace is added to our paradigm we do not have dualism because the whole idea is that the two spaces do actually interact, and equally we do not have a monism demanding reductionism, but rather a two-foldness that becomes threefold through the appearance of phenomena. The two spaces and the stresses arising between them are a generalisation of Goethe's "deeds and sufferings of light", carried beyond light and colour into all phenomena that manifest through such deeds and sufferings.

References:

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4. "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions", Thomas S. Kuhn, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1962.
5. "The Plant Between Sun and Earth", Adams and Whicher, Rudolf Steiner Press, London 1980.