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THE IMPORTANCE AND LIMITS OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

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The importance of *The Phenomenological Mind* cannot easily be overstated. Philosophy of mind is a predominantly analytical affair and up till now there has been relatively little recognition by analytical philosophers of the relevance of phenomenology as a philosophical discipline. This lack of recognition is sometimes explained in terms of hostility or presumed incommensurability. In all likelihood, ignorance is a better explanation and one couldn't wish for a better remedy against that than this book. Phenomenology does have a lot to contribute to philosophy of mind, as Gallagher and Zahavi show. This book, being the first systematic overview of philosophy of mind from a phenomenological angle, may change what is generally perceived to be the standard range of problems and options in the philosophy of mind. The fact that it is a textbook—influencing future generations of philosophers—is strategically a very wise choice in this respect.

The book covers a large number of topics, most of which are familiar from analytical philosophy of mind and some of which are not. It starts with an excellent and very useful introduction into the phenomenological methodology, including a fairly detailed discussion of the various currently fashionable but, as it turns out, rather diverging forms of neurophenomenology. In general the book is written in a very clear and accessible style, despite the huge amount of information it contains. No specific advanced knowledge is required, although at times it is clear that the authors suppose their readers to be familiar with standard analytical philosophy of mind, e.g. when terms such as 'zombie' or 'view from nowhere' are used without further explanation. Most of the text either introduces a specific problem area or outlines the various phenomenological views on it. When appropriate, the tone is exegetical.

Sometimes there is a polemical undercurrent directed against analytical views. And sometimes there is plain rejection of such views when they are taken to be either too scientistic or to involve a neo-Cartesian or neo-Lockean view of the mind as an inner realm. Even though I often concur with this criticism, this does not imply, I

believe, that we should give up the analytical approach to the philosophy of mind in favour of a purely phenomenological one. Analytical and phenomenological philosophy of mind can best be considered complementary approaches, not rivals. In the next section I will try to substantiate this claim. In the section following the next, I shall indicate where, given the relation between analytical and phenomenological mind sketched so far, I think the limits of phenomenology lie.

1. Phenomenological versus Analytical Philosophy of Mind

One of the main differences between phenomenological and analytical philosophy of mind is the fact that whereas phenomenology is first and foremost descriptive, current analytical philosophy tends to be explanatory and much more directed to ontological issues. This is partly, but not entirely, due to the commitment of many analytical philosophers to a scientific outlook on the world, often expressed by a pledge of allegiance to physicalism, that is sometimes taken to be overly scientistic by phenomenologists. By contrast, there is no discussion of the relation between the mental and the physical to be found in *The Phenomenological Mind*, no exposition on (non)reductivism or supervenience and no debate on causal influence of the mental on the physical. This does not mean that the book expresses any hostility to science or to the idea that the mind must somehow be part of the natural world (although there may be some scepticism or indifference about how and whether this fact can actually be explained). Rather, the emphasis is on a very detailed account of the explanandum ‘mind’ and on the various problems and paradoxes that may arise in describing it. This is one of the reasons why it is important for analytical philosophers to read this book, as details of the explanandum ‘mind’ are often downplayed in analytical philosophy in order not to complicate explanations too much.

Compare, for instance, Chapter 3 on consciousness and self-consciousness with influential analytical books such as Chalmers’ *The Conscious Mind* (1996) or Bermúdez’ *The Paradox of Self-Consciousness* (1998). These analytical books do introduce their topics carefully and in some detail. Chalmers takes some time to distinguish phenomenal consciousness from access consciousness, or, in general, the functionalisable from the allegedly nonfunctionalisable aspects of consciousness.

Bermúdez uses a fair number of pages to distinguish self-consciousness as the capacity to think I-thoughts from non-conceptual, bodily self-consciousness. But they both introduce these details in order to unearth a theoretical, explanatory problem—the hard problem of consciousness and the paradox of self-consciousness, respectively—that the rest of the book is devoted to solving. Gallagher and Zahavi, by contrast, devote the entire chapter to detailed descriptions of reflective and non-reflective forms of self-consciousness, all sorts of variations that can be found in the literature in ways in which self-consciousness is described, the 'mineness' of self-consciousness and how that relates to the 'what it is likeness' of consciousness, different ways in which the distinction between first- and higher-order consciousness can be conceived of, etc. Instead of unearthing theoretical problems of how these various modes of consciousness can be explained, their focus is on how they can best be best described and charted. Instead of ending up with an explanatory problem, as Chalmers and Bermúdez do by the end of their first chapters, they end up with a list of further descriptive problems: whether consciousness should be conceived of in ecological or non-ecological terms, how to understand the temporality of our stream of consciousness, whether non-conceptual consciousness is structured, whether self-consciousness is necessarily embodied, what the influence of social interaction is, etc.

The same detailed, predominantly descriptive approach can be found in the other chapters. Gallagher and Zahavi's discussions of the experience of time, of perception, the intentionality of consciousness, the embodiment of the mind, action and agency, knowledge of other minds, the self and the notion of a person, all introduce details in the descriptions of the phenomena under discussion that seem to get lost in analytical attempts at explaining them.

A related difference between the phenomenological approach to the philosophy of mind and the analytical one is the way in which the two approaches see their connection with science. Analytical philosophy of mind tends to see itself as the natural ally of the scientific outlook. What this boils down to, in effect, is that analytical theories aim at accounting for aspects of the mind such as consciousness, content, free will, or mental causation, such that these will fit into what is taken to be the ontological picture of the world as presented by science. This is a largely theoretical enterprise where very little reference is being made to actual scientific experiments. It may be

doubted, indeed, that scientists are that much concerned with ontology. It may even be doubted whether the ontological picture of the world with which philosophers are trying to reconcile the existence of minds (the world as it is described by microphysics, as it is often put) resembles e.g. the quantum mechanical 'picture'. But it may also be doubted whether this is required, for there *is* a point to analysing concepts related to the mind in such a way that we can explain why they do not imply the existence of supernatural entities.

Whereas analytical philosophy is concerned with the ontological, theoretical aspect of science, phenomenological philosophy of mind connects well with all sorts of scientific, i.e. psychological and neuroscientific, experiments. Gallagher and Zahavi's claim that their rejection of scientism in no way implies an anti-scientific stance is indeed substantiated by the fact that much of what is said in the book is illustrated or explained by means of reference to actual experimental science. Methodological issues concerning the relation between neuroscience and phenomenology are discussed in the large section on neurophenomenology in Chapter 2. And every now and then, issues are illuminated by making reference to actual scientific studies, be they about blindsight in relation to consciousness, dynamical systems theory in relation to awareness of time, embodiment and robots, or neuroscientific experimenting with our sense of agency. The background assumption seems to be that the mind somehow is a part of the natural world. But how that fact can be explained, whether it *has* to be explained or what form such an explanation should have are issues that are left untouched.

A third big difference between philosophy of mind as it is known from the analytical literature and phenomenological philosophy of mind as Gallagher and Zahavi put it in the spotlights is in the topics discussed. Whereas the former appears dominated by the notion of folk-psychology—what it is, whether we need it and how we can account for it—the latter does not mention it at all. On the other hand, Gallagher and Zahavi introduce issues such as time-consciousness that are rarely discussed in analytical philosophy.

The fact that beliefs, desires, reasons for action, motives, thoughts, deliberations etc., which occupy centre-stage in the analytical literature, are virtually absent in *The Phenomenological Mind* is, in my view, something of an omission. This omission can largely be explained by the fact that beliefs, desires and the rest of our folk-

psychological furniture of the mind do not play a dominant role in the traditional phenomenological literature. And it is the phenomenological *tradition* that forms the backbone of this book. Though reference is made to an impressive amount of authors, very many of which from the analytical tradition (speaking to the credit of this book) the discussion is usually dominated by the views of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Sartre and other phenomenologists.

Indeed, there may seem little to say about folk-psychology from a phenomenological perspective. For one thing, much of it is about standing states, not occurrent ones. But still, the phenomenology of thought and deliberation or the phenomenology of conversing with others seems to me to be incredibly important issues (in general people are embodied, living, acting beings in *The Phenomenological Mind*, but they hardly think or talk). Compare the study of the phenomenology of agency and intentional action to which Gallagher and Zahavi *do* devote attention. This study plays a crucially important role in current discussions about mental causation and conscious will (e.g. the debate that followed Wegner's *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (2002)). I can imagine that phenomenological studies of thinking and deliberating can also play a role in criticizing certain internalistic views of folk-psychology in favour of more externalistic ones.

2. The Malleability of Phenomenological Descriptions

In many respects, there is a division of labour between phenomenological and analytical philosophy of mind, as the above remarks are intended to show (and with respect to issues where there is no division of labour, I take it that many non-scientistic anti-Cartesian analytic philosophers see phenomenology as an ally in their battles against reductionist or internalistic views of the mind). The fact that phenomenology is more descriptive and analytical philosophy more explanatory, though, may seem to imply that phenomenology defines the explanandum in such a way that it has the last word on whether a given explanation of some aspect of the mind succeeds. This, however, is not necessarily the case in my view. Let me try to explain why I believe phenomenological descriptions of experiences to be malleable under the influence of available explanations to a degree that is not acknowledged by Gallagher and Zahavi.

I will start with a problem concerning the givenness of experience. The *Phenomenological Mind* is about how we experience the world and ourselves in it as minded beings. It describes how this experience is given to us. Gallagher and Zahavi briefly mention Sellars' *myth of the given* (on p. 24) and claim that phenomenology does not succumb to it. But they take Sellars' point to be about the idea that experience is pure reception of the world. I do agree that if this is all there is to the idea of the myth of the given, no such myth is present in phenomenology as presented by the authors. They do not treat the mind as a mirror of nature and do not claim that the world is exactly as we experience it. Their focus is simply experience itself.

But there may be another reading of the myth of the given, a Rorty-style or perhaps Wittgensteinian reading that focuses on the intractable relation between language and experience. When experience is described in language, concepts and words are used. However, their correspondence to actual experience can only be substantiated by further use of language and concepts. Descriptions of experience—such as Gallagher and Zahavi and the phenomenological tradition they cite provide—are infused with concepts. And many of these cannot be traced directly to experience itself.

Take, for instance, Chapter 4 on the experience of time. Many of the problems and paradoxes we encounter in describing this are connected to the notion of a 'time slice'. Conscious experience is supposed to take place at one point in time only, yet we are aware of the relations between this time slice and what went on before as well as what is to follow. A large part of the chapter is devoted to answering the question how we should describe the given impact of the past and the future on our experiences *now*. The problem Gallagher and Zahavi aim to solve is squaring the fact that we *know* our conscious experiences to occur at one point in time with the fact that we do seem to experience time e.g. by being aware of change. This knowledge infuses the description of our experience of time without being itself the result of pure experience. For do we ever really *experience* a time-slice? I doubt whether even trained Zen monks are able to experience the pure *now*.

Thus, there is an element of conceptual reconstruction present in the phenomenological description of experience. This observation is not meant to be criticism. But its implication is, I think, that phenomenological descriptions of

experiences should not automatically be taken as measure against which to gauge the merits of certain explanations of our cognitive capacities: when a given theory of some cognitive ability does not entirely fit phenomenological descriptions of the ways in which we experience our exercising these capabilities, this need not automatically be a reason to discard the theory, for there may be room to manoeuvre in the description. Why not allow for the possibility of acquiring new insights into our own experiences when explanations focus our attention on hitherto overlooked aspects? Gallagher and Zahavi appear not to allow for this. In my opinion that is a mistake that may stand in the way of fruitful interaction between phenomenology, science and analytical philosophy. Let me illustrate this with an example.

In Chapter 9, Gallagher and Zahavi discuss our knowledge of other minds. They distance themselves from the tradition in analytical philosophy that describes our ability to acquire knowledge of other minds either in terms of our using a theory of mind or in terms of our simulating the other's motivations in our own mind. This tradition, they claim, is an heir of the argument from analogy according to which (roughly) we postulate minds 'behind' the behaviour of others as a consequence of induction from our perceiving our own behaviour to be caused by our own minds. The obvious Cartesian overtones in this argument make it hard to square with the phenomenological outlook. Whereas phenomenology teaches that we *directly* perceive joy, anger etc. in the facial expressions of others, for instance, theory theory and simulation theory appear to contend that we can at most *infer* such mental states from observed behaviour. In the case of simulation theory, there is an additional clash with phenomenology: the difference between first-person experience of emotions, say, and the second- or third-person experience thereof which is salient in experience is lost when ascribing emotions to others proceeds by evoking such states in ourselves.

Many philosophers and neuroscientists, however, consider there to be neurological evidence for the thesis that the ascription of primitive intentions or basic emotions proceeds by some form of implicit simulation. Gallagher and Zahavi discuss some of those who base this claim on the discovery of mirror neuron and mechanisms of motor resonance (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008, pp. 177-81). What these discoveries show is that when perceiving basic intentional actions, there are firing patterns in our premotor cortex that are similar to the patterns that would occur should we execute the

perceived actions ourselves. Following Gallese and Goldman (1998), many researchers take this as amounting to a form of implicit (i.e. sub-personal, automatic, non-conscious) simulation that grounds our understanding the goal or aim of the perceived action.

Gallagher and Zahavi, however, argue that rather than as simulation, we should view such motor resonance as part of an enactivist perception of intentions *in* the action of others. This is in line with the traditional phenomenological view on the ascription of intentions and the implied opposition to simulation theory. Strictly speaking, there is no need for this alternative reading of mirror neuron activity, since the claim of the philosophers and neuroscientists they cite is not that the neural mirroring process extends to the phenomenological level. However, others do take such mirroring to initiate a type of simulation that may be half conscious. Especially when it comes to perceived expressions of emotions, motor resonance is contended to lead to a re-enactment of these emotions by the resonator (Goldman and Sripada 2005, Iacoboni 2003, Carr 2003). So, there seem to be reasons for Gallagher and Zahavi to defend the phenomenological take.

But now the question arises whether phenomenology should determine the interpretation of neurological data, or whether neurological data should induce us to reconsider the descriptions we give of our experience. It does seems apt to say that we perceive joy in a smiling face. And I agree completely that it would be bizarre to say we infer there to be joy causing the perceived expression. But when we learn that in perceiving such an expression we tend to mimic that expression at some neurological level, and when we know that mimicking an expression may cause us to experience the connected emotion, albeit half-consciously at most (James 1890), I think this is reason to re-examine our experiences of perceiving joy in someone's smile. And when it turns out that people who are not able to experience emotions such as fear themselves due to lesions in the brain are not able to perceive these emotions in the facial expressions of others, as Goldman and Sripada (2005) show citing massive amounts of evidence, such re-examining becomes imperative, in my opinion. [1]

[1] The paper by Goldman and Sripada is not mentioned by Gallagher and Zahavi and neither is Chapter 6 on low-level mindreading in Goldman's (2006), which contains more data pointing to an automatic form of simulation. I am very curious about a reading of these data that will fit the traditional phenomenological take.

And there *is* room for such re-examination. For we should keep the intractable relation between language and experience in mind and acknowledge that concepts such as ‘perceiving’ and ‘simulating’ are not *given* by experience but are our attempts to capture experience as accurately as possible. Since reading the literature on motor resonance and implicit or low-level (Goldman’s term) simulation, I am aware of the fact that my perceiving joy in the smile of another person *is* connected to my half-conscious re-enactment of that emotion. This procedure—that may well be described as ‘simulation’ despite Gallagher and Zahavi’s grammatical objections to the use of this word—is part of what it is to perceive joy in someone’s smile, I would say. This need not be an objection to Gallagher and Zahavi’s enactivist perception reading of motor resonance. It is merely drawing attention to the observation that it is actually *re*-enacting that takes place in such perception. If this burdens us with having to explain how re-enactment or simulation contributes to the perception of emotions without succumbing to ideas about inference or step-wise procedures (Jeannerod and Pacherie 2004) that are *not* found in experience, then we should simply try to provide such explanations. The fact that it provides us with more philosophical work to do is no reason to reject a change of description of our experience on the basis of scientific insights.

There is one loose end to this appeal for allowing scientific insights to let us reconsider what we think is the best description of our experiences: doesn’t allowing for a form of implicit or half-conscious simulation ignore the obvious phenomenological distinction between the first, second and third-person perspective? I think not. For one thing, the emotion that results from resonating will in all likelihood not be as strong or as salient in consciousness as the original emotion that gave rise to this resonance process. For another, the emotion fits into entirely different psychological contexts in the case of the smiling person and the resonator. The smiling person will probably have some reason to be happy, the resonator in all likelihood not. This will make for a different total experience in the resonator, an experience that can probably best be described as ‘partial empathy’.

This is one example of where I believe phenomenological descriptions of experiences are more malleable than Gallagher and Zahavi acknowledge. In general, it demonstrates, I believe, that there is room for the influx of data from science and ideas from analytical philosophy in phenomenological philosophy of mind. Just like

Gallagher and Zahavi have made it more than clear that there should be much more influx of insights from phenomenology in neuroscience and analytical philosophy of mind.

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