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Excerpt

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I

Introduction

1 Science and man

The human sciences have, in the past decade, become the focus of radical reflection to a hitherto unprecedented degree.¹ Methodological disagreements of the 1940s and 1950s have been replaced by profound and wide-ranging discussions of origins, aims, and ethics in science and of the role of science in a broader societal context. Practitioners of a particular discipline may have the impression that their own disciplinary turmoil is unique among the sounder, bolder, better established social sciences, but this is not the case. Current concern for reflective issues regarding the practice of human science and the need to treat these philosophically is not confined to any one science, nor is it absent from any such science.²

Several issues are fundamental to these reflective concerns. Modern technological science and society raise issues of freedom and control, of individuality and humanity. Corresponding to these concerns is the recognition of political, moral, and ethical dimensions of inquiry and particularly the relationship between science and technology and the politics of control. Recognition of such issues is widespread, and solutions range from advanced cybernetics (Wiener, 1954; Beer, 1974) to anarchy (Feyerabend, 1979). Hannah Arendt (1958, 2–3) views the situation in the following terms:

This future man, whom the scientists tell us they will produce in no more than a hundred years, seems to be possessed by a rebellion against human existence as it has been given, . . . which he wishes to exchange, as it were, for something he has made himself. There is no reason to doubt our abilities to accomplish such an exchange, just as there is no reason to doubt our present ability to destroy all organic life on earth. *The only question is whether we wish to use our new scientific and technical knowledge in this direction, and this question cannot be decided by scientific means; it is a political question of the first order and therefore can hardly be left to the decision of professional scientists or professional politicians.* [italics added]

Certainly there is a sense in which the sciences have lost their relationship to everyday life. Through increasing sophistication and mathematization, coupled with intense specialization, the sciences have become meaningless to the non-specialist. Yet, because of their increasing ties with technology, business, and government, the sciences have begun to influence everything man does (see Kockelmans, 1982).

The crisis of the sciences goes beyond even these claims, however, for the crisis is also an internal one. Questions have arisen about the basic relationship of science to its subject-matter. This relationship has become insecure, leading to reflections on the basic structures of the sciences. Such reflections seek to dispel the insecurity over basic concepts or to secure those foundations anew in a more original understanding of the subject-matter. The clarification of this primary field of subject-matter requires methods different from those of the empirical sciences themselves. Since the empirical sciences are incapable of providing such self-clarification empirically, in crisis scientific research turns to philosophical reflection.³ It is, Heidegger (1927) claims through such reflections that genuine progress in the sciences can be said to occur. Yet such progress differs between the sciences themselves. As concrete possibilities of man speaking about the world in which he exists, the sciences stand in different relations to man. If they are not to be merely conventional enterprises, justified only by the prevailing tradition, then they must constantly seek to bring their subject-matter to an original experience before it is hidden by the essential objectifying and thematizing methods of each particular scientific inquiry (Heidegger, 1927, 10; Kockelmans, 1965, 16).

Whereas any one science may seek to clarify its own original experiences and basic concepts through philosophical reflection, it can hardly turn to the history of philosophy to help clarify its problems, since this history suggests that philosophy's own methods may themselves be unreliable and questionable. In any case, adopting philosophical views uncritically would be to adopt a method a priori. If we are to recapture original experiences, we must let ourselves be guided by the things themselves which appear to us immediately. "Because this procedure is the fundamental principle of phenomenology, we may say that phenomenology can perhaps provide an appropriate method for ontology" (Kockelmans, 1965, 18). Correctly conceived phenomenology does not adopt any particular position, standpoint, or world-view in regard to the state of affairs. It is not, in this sense, a world-view philosophy or an *-ism*. Rather, it is the name for a method which allows *original experiences* to be seen.

2 Science and phenomenology

When we talk about the realms of nature and of man we often take those realms to refer to the domains of objects investigated by the two main groups of empirical sciences, natural and human science. Increasingly we tend to understand nature and man in terms of the scientific claims these sciences make about them. But if this were fully the case, then we would only have access to both nature and man insofar as they are objects thematized in the empirical sciences. But, these sciences, in disclosing a particular field of subject-matter and in objectifying and thematizing, are necessarily limited in their scope. If they perform their proper function as objectifying, thematizing enterprises, something essential always remains closed to them.

What if it were the case that, in separating man from nature, the empirical sciences are unable to comprehend an original and undivided context of subject-matter, which consequently remains hidden? Because these sciences necessarily reduce nature and man to the domain of objects, this hidden subject-matter cannot be brought out by attempts to unify the domains of objective physical and human science (see Kockelmans, 1970b, 48). Something else is needed. Phenomenology seeks precisely to disclose the world as it shows itself *before* scientific inquiry, as that which is pre-given and presupposed by the sciences. It seeks to disclose the original way of being prior to its objectification by the empirical sciences. In this way the basis for a philosophy of the sciences is first created, serving (1) to provide the foundation for the genesis of the empirical sciences from pre-theoretical experience, (2) to elucidate their way of approaching the pre-given reality, and (3) to specify the kind of concept formation which accrues to such research. That is, we can undertake a phenomenology of original experiences in the everyday world, of the human and natural sciences themselves, and of the history and nature of the objects of these sciences and how those objects are constituted.⁴

Phenomenology indicates primarily a principle of method, which can best be formulated in Husserl's phrase: "Back to the things themselves." This expression does not mean that one should return to naive realism; but it indicates that in philosophy one should renounce all principles and ideas that are insufficiently explained or incorrectly founded, all arbitrary ways of thinking and all prejudices, and be guided only by the things themselves. Of course, philosophy does not intend to stop with the description of what immediately manifests itself to us. It intends to penetrate, by way of what shows itself immediately, to that which at first is still hidden and which constitutes the meaning and ground of what is immediately manifest. This is in the last instance the being of be-ings. (Kockelmans, 1965, 18)

It is from this philosophical background that the present work develops its major themes. On the one hand, the issue of science and its over-reaching nature in modern society is to be brought into question. The self-grounding claims of empiricism are challenged, and the physicalist and objectivist prejudices of positivism overcome. On the other hand, this is not to be construed as a rejection of science and the scientific method. Instead, through phenomenology we seek to ground the empirical sciences in such a way that they are no longer merely instrumental procedures, increasingly meaningless to or divorced from everyday life. Furthermore, we seek to show that the human sciences are not merely conventional enterprises, nor are they to be situated automatically within a 'meta-physics' as such, but rather they are to be grounded within a meta-theory appropriate to the domain of the phenomena with which each science is concerned. This is to be achieved, not by the a priori adoption of one more perspective on science, but by a thorough attempt to understand the nature of science as such. Here the limits and possibilities of science are constantly to be kept in view, and philosophy is to be given its proper place, not as hand-maiden to scientific knowledge, but, in the context of reflections on science, as meta-reflections on the sciences and their ground.

3 The plan of this work

Specifically, this work asks several basic questions concerning the nature of science and of geographical inquiry. In a preliminary fashion it asks: How can we have a truly human science? How can we have a truly human science of geography? And, how can we understand the nature of geography and its central problematics, particularly its concern with space and place, in this regard? The work is divided into *four* parts.

Part I, Geography and Traditional Meta-physics, shows how geographical inquiry is founded on an unexamined ontology of physical nature and a positivistic objectivism. The resultant objectivism and epistemological subjectivism have distorted the discipline's own conception of its subject-matter and its basic concepts. In particular, they have resulted in the unquestioned adoption of a conception of spatiality most appropriate for the physical sciences, but one which is of little value in describing the spatiality characteristic of man.

Part II, Geography and Phenomenology, shows how this underlying metaphysical position and fundamental ontology of physical nature has influenced the approaches to and interpretations of phenom-

‘Geographical phenomenology’

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ology in geography. ‘Geographical phenomenology’ is distinguished from *phenomenology* and *phenomenological geography*, and the claims that have been made regarding ‘geographical phenomenology’ are explicated.

Part III, Phenomenology and the Question of Human Science, seeks to retrieve phenomenology in order to counter positivist claims concerning science and to deny the objectivism and subjectivism of contemporary human science. We also show the essential relationships between positive empirical science and descriptive phenomenological science, and use phenomenology to ground the sciences, (i) in original experience, (ii) through clarification of their basic concepts, and (iii) by the delimitation of the regions of the phenomena with which the sciences deal. Finally, this section shows how the character of science is essentially abstractive, reductive, objectifying, and thematizing. The final chapter of Part III seeks to ground science in human experience in such a way that Part IV can retrieve spatiality as an appropriate and necessary conception for geography as *human science*.

Part IV, Human Science, Worldhood and Spatiality, clarifies the nature of human science and provides a more balanced view of science than the overly empiricist one with which we now deal. Here we also determine the realm of concern for a geographic science and retrieve the genuine experience of, the basic concepts for, and the constitution of a science of human spatiality.

4 *‘Geographical phenomenology’*

In the process of its adoption, interpretation, and critique in the geographical context, phenomenology has been radically *adapted* from the perspective of traditional geographical concepts and frameworks of meaning. At the same time this ‘phenomenology’ – as presented in the early writings of Relph, Tuan, Mercer and Powell, and Buttner – has often become the *only* phenomenology to which subsequent writers turn.⁵ As a result we need to ask if this ‘phenomenology’ is a sound and viable interpretation of phenomenological principles as such. We need to reconsider the precise and original meaning of phenomenology, and to distinguish this from what has been called ‘phenomenology’ or what I will refer to as ‘geographical phenomenology’. The former refers to the project of Edmund Husserl and its subsequent development. The latter refers to the interpretations and adaptations of this project as they have entered the geographic literature.⁶ To clarify the manner in which they *do not overlap* is central to this work.

The ground thus laid, we will proceed to an investigation of phenomenology and its relation to science. We will suggest ways in which a phenomenological geography may be possible and whether and in what way it can be like Husserl's phenomenological psychology, or whether the relationship between phenomenology and geography must be thought in a different way. At this stage phenomenological geography will have gone far beyond 'geographical phenomenology', and will have dealt with many of the major problems which have presented themselves in superficial analyses.

The clarification of these geographical interpretations will be important, particularly if the distinction between 'geographical phenomenology' and *phenomenology* as such can be reasonably substantiated, for three principal reasons:

(a) The justification for, and predominant philosophy of, 'humanistic geography' is claimed to be phenomenology and existentialism. I shall argue that if, from this perspective, phenomenology, and thus the relationship between scientific and extra-scientific ways of being-in-the-world, are misunderstood, and consequently if Husserl's claims about the lifeworld are misinterpreted (taken one-sidedly to be the content domain or subject-matter of phenomenology and a phenomenological geography), then serious questions arise about the claims of the humanist enterprise itself. If the seminal papers introducing phenomenology to the discipline distorted its nature, and subsequent discourse developed *in terms* of these claims, then the project itself, even where it goes beyond phenomenology, must be questioned.

(b) On the other hand, the rather easy manner in which opponents have criticized *phenomenology* will also have to be re-examined. This re-examination will be particularly important where criticism is based largely on the claims geographers have made about phenomenology, and where the *delimitation* of phenomenology has been used as a means to justify another viewpoint or perspective. For example, its alleged subjectivism is used to justify idealism (Guelke, 1978) and positivism (Hay, 1979); it is seen to be limited to concern for the lifeworld and social meaning and is used to justify critical theory (Gregory, 1978a) and structural marxism (Smith, 1979); and most recently its supposed individualism is claimed to justify the 'complementarity' of other 'non-phenomenological' approaches, such as a Durkheimian perspective (Jackson, 1981).

(c) If claims (a) and (b) can be substantiated, and if the actual claims of phenomenology can be presented, then many of the arguments currently seen to be problematic within the discipline can be re-thought. Some will – as Martin Heidegger suggested in a broader

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context – be seen as quasi-problems. Other issues which are now unquestioned and taken for granted will become questionable. We might then be able to see the possibilities for phenomenology and its relevance to a science of geography, including an empirical science of geographical relationships.

What is at stake here, to paraphrase Kockelmans (1971, 142), is the question whether or not phenomenological geography will be able to make an important contribution to empirical research in the realm of geography. Will phenomenology assist in explicating geography's basic assumptions and, in that sense, secure geography's very foundations by carefully analysing the invariable structures and interpretatively clarifying the essential characteristics of our various modes of orientation towards the world on the basis of the phenomena immediately given in experience?

The task before us is not to re-think what others have previously thought, but to think through and about what they have taken as given and to think that which they have failed to think. The important problem is not the collecting and posing of ideas already seen, but the laying out of what, in these attempts, was not seen.⁷

The 'critical' remarks made in this work should be seen in this context. The arguments do not seek to show what is 'wrong' with contemporary branches of geography, or to take a stand for or against particular approaches to them. The main concern of this work is to articulate what has remained unsaid in what has been said, and to do this from the point of view of the question of how and in what ways *human* science is possible, and how such a science might take the spatiality characteristic of man as its object of concern. The remarks made regarding particular approaches and branches or sub-fields of the discipline do not seek to criticize the positions developed, but, through critical reflections, to determine whether and in what ways their aims have or have not been achieved.

5 The disciplinary context

Methodological debates in geography have seldom enthralled me because, with few exceptions, they persist outside the context of philosophical currents of thought and in ignorance of the personal biases of the contestants. The high level of the debate is largely shadow play. In childhood, one boy is good at sums, another likes to write letters home. As professional geographers, these differences in talent and temperament are elevated to the Olympian level of methodological controversy. (Tuan, 1974, 55)

Phenomenology . . . offers ambiguity rather than clarity of several fundamental issues. (Buttimer, 1976, 291)

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How is the phenomenologist to develop an ontologically and epistemologically sound foundation for a science of geographical phenomena within the horizon of a tradition where the meaning of phenomenology has been pre-judged, and its essential characteristics assumed beforehand? In particular, how is discourse to begin where all is not what it seems? Not only do we have a pre-established horizon of meaning within the discipline, but those discussing phenomenology have themselves denied beforehand the importance of a careful laying out of the actual claims of the position. Argument has sought to emphasize the 'spirit' of the enterprise (Buttimer, 1977, 181) in the context of substantive applications (Tuan, 1977a, 180), rather than emphasize the ontological coherence and unity of each position, many of whose detailed requirements are relaxed in the substantive work offered to us (Relph, 1973, 234). Underlying this situation are two important features.

First, empirical science is distrusted or rejected because the claims of positivism and the properties of positive science are confused. Second, the intimate relationship between phenomenology and science has not been understood. As a result Husserl's entire project has been treated only in caricature form and thus to the empiricist seems to make no sense: the phenomenological method seems to be unfounded in any purposeful aim; philosophy, phenomenological science and empirical science cannot be clearly understood in their necessary inter-connections or distinguished in their essential differences; lifeworld is unrelated to the project for which it was the culmination and ultimate, if problematical, ground. Consequently the theoretical development of this perspective has from the very beginning been restricted to a criticism of scientism, positivism, or naturalistic empiricism (for example, Entrikin, 1976); no scientific alternative to reductionistic science has been sought (Gregory, 1978a; 1978b). Only by emphasizing the humanities and by understanding lifeworld in a naive fashion can any formal inquiry continue as such.

The consequences of misunderstanding Husserlian phenomenology, and thus of the misinterpretation of subsequent phenomenologies, such as those of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Schütz, have been severe. For example, such misunderstanding results in the virtually complete rejection of Husserlian phenomenology in Ley's evaluation of epistemological options for social geography (Ley, 1978, 44). Here, despite the actually rather tenuous links of 'phenomenology' in humanistic geography with the Husserlian project, Ley argues that humanists have:

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inappropriately overassociated phenomenology with Husserl's transcendental idealism, not recognizing that contemporary phenomenologists in the social sciences draw their inspiration not from Husserl but rather from philosophers with an eye to social science such as Schütz and Merleau-Ponty, who were not prepared to sacrifice existence for essence, for whom perceptions were always considered in context, in the concrete world of everyday life. (Ley, 1978, 44)

In this way Husserl's gradual move towards a position of transcendental idealism in order fully to ground his earlier, more realistic phenomenology is taken to be the necessary reason for the rejection of his particular and founding approach to phenomenology. Yet this rejection ignores the very great importance of Husserl's early phenomenology on subsequent phenomenological perspectives, including that of Schütz. In these earlier works, especially in *Ideas*, Husserl lays out the fundamental structure of phenomenology as method, and its relationship to the sciences and empirical sciences. In *Phenomenological psychology* he tries to show how mundane phenomenology is to be seen as different from his developing transcendental philosophy with which he sought to ground it. We, like Heidegger, may choose to reject this move to transcendental phenomenology as leading to emphasis on a transcendental subject who, in the final analysis, is wordless. But also like Heidegger we cannot reject Husserl's descriptive phenomenology underpinning every empirical science of relations. If we seek to question the accuracy of his account of the nature of science we must at least answer his claims for phenomenology as method with a thorough-going critique of phenomenology, rather than with its superficial and unexamined dismissal. This has not been attempted by geographers, and yet it is crucial to an understanding of descriptive, eidetic phenomenology.

However, my concern here is not to prefigure Chapters 3 to 6, but to hint sufficiently at the position towards which this argument is working, such that partial claims made in this introduction can be clarified initially in terms of the geographic literature from which they arise and which they will reflect back upon to inform the practice of geographic inquiry. Thus in what follows I shall seek *first* to lay out how geographers have conceived of phenomenology as well as to clarify the a priori categories through which they have interpreted it. In other words, I am interested here in what has been said of phenomenology and how what has been said itself points to something more fundamental (Chapter 3). *Second*, I shall move to investigate how 'geographical phenomenology' has been broadly accepted and how a critique of it has taken shape. This too will direct us towards important

taken-for-granted principles and judgements which are to be made explicit *and* problematic (Chapter 4). *Third*, I shall retrieve the phenomenological project from ‘geographical phenomenology’, showing how it is fundamentally linked to science, and is tied necessarily to empirical science. This will entail a retrieval of Husserlian and Heideggerian conceptions of phenomenology, and will provide a foundation for science and allow phenomenology to be seen as a *method* of a particular kind (Chapters 5 and 6).

In spite of the breadth of these claims, however, we must agree with Paul Ricoeur that “[there] can be no question of viewing the whole of Husserlian phenomenology within this limited space” (1967, 13). Indeed, for the geographer interested in questions of science and its grounding, such a purview is here unnecessary and is, in any case, impossible given Husserl’s explicit and constantly repeated claim that phenomenology is an on-going research programme with different forms and paths to be taken depending upon the circumstances and the phenomena under consideration.⁸ Because Husserlian phenomenology is motivated throughout by the necessity to overcome modern irrationalism and scepticism, the project seeks, in principle, to be a complete one and is not easily severed into distinct parts. As phenomenological, Husserl’s works must be taken as a whole, paraphrase is difficult, and summaries must themselves be phenomenological – not a simple task for an expository treatise. In Husserl’s own terms, severing the carefully constructed arguments with which he formulates the pathways through the project requires phenomenological justification. Without it we fall into the irrationality of relativism and scepticism.

In the present context we shall, in fact, now follow Husserl into transcendental phenomenology, where he seeks to provide a fully apodictic grounding for philosophy. We shall remain within the mundane realm of descriptive, eidetic phenomenology, where Husserl seeks to ground the sciences of formal and material regions in their formal and eidetic ontologies. Questions of the viability of the project of transcendental phenomenology, whether or not this implies a transcendental idealism, and whether, as a consequence, it nullifies Husserl’s claims for descriptive phenomenology are complex, and are not easily resolved. There is a good deal of philosophical discussion concerning these matters, and they require something more than the eclectic borrowing and relativism of philosophical views that the human sciences have generally brought to the argument. For the purposes of this work the question will be bracketed as a philosophical, rather than a scientific concern. That the question regarding the