Dialogal Phenomenology and the Pursuit of Political Reality

Stuart C. Gilman

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops

Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact commons@coastal.edu.
I leave methods to the botanists and the mathematicians. There is a point at which methods devour themselves.

Frantz Fanon

Perry relates that on his polar trip he traveled one whole day toward the North, making his sleigh dogs run briskly. At night he checked his bearings to determine his latitude and noticed with great surprise that he was much further South than in the morning. He had been toiling all day toward the North on an immense iceberg drawn southward by an ocean current.

Jose Ortega y Gasset

The purpose of this research is to uncover some of the major problems in the ethics of measurement and fact in the social sciences. And, subsequently, to propose some answers. What the next several pages attempt to develop is a pathology of methodology in political science. While this body is "lying" open, we will attempt to expose the foundations of phenomenological research and methods. Again, it must be stressed that this piece is concerned only with methodological questions. By necessity, this demarcation line will be violated at times to deal with crucial epistemological questions; but only as they pertain to methodology. A number of these paradigmatic and, to some degree, epistemological questions, have been dealt with by Professor Hwa Yol Jung. Specifically, the paper will begin by looking at the underpinnings, and subsequent dilemmas, of methodology in behavioralism. Once this "autopsy" is completed a comparison between the empiricism of behavioralism and the radical empiricism of phenomenology will be developed.

This will allow us to uncover the foundations for the use of dialogal phenomenology and to prescribe some of its applications in political science.

Our purpose is not to retrace the more than adequate critiques of behavioralism because of its liberal (Theodore Lowi, *The End of Liberalism*), pluralistic (William Connolly, *The Bias of Pluralism*), ideological (Stanislav Andreski, *Social Science as Sorcery*), and symbolic (Murry Edelman, *Politics as Symbolic Action*) biases. Here the purpose is to show how these biases are reflected in methodological considerations in behavioralism. Behavioralism is being used in its paradigmatic sense, and for our purposes, this also includes most of the recent post-behavioral work. Contrary to possible protestations from post-behavioral theorists, little, if nothing, has been done to change the methodologies employed in their research. They have just succeeded in building one more floor on the same tower of Babel.

Behavioralism, like all philosophies and scientific inquiries, perceives the development of methodology as one of the essential requirements for research. However, methodology is not synonymous with statistics. Statistics is a method. This is a distinction recognized by a number of scholars. Methodology is the precursor of analysis of which statistics can be a part. For social science the unquestioned benefit of the behavioral movements has been the attention given to objective or open methodology. The history of the development of social scientific methodologies has pointed to the difficulties encountered in this area. What methodology allows is a program, sometimes detailed and explicit and other times assumptive and implicit, on how research is to be done. In other words, methodology characterizes, refines and defines the research question. The element which dominates social scientific methodologies is the assumption that an individual has the cognitive ability to know what the right question, the right method is.

Methodology can thus be conceived as the study of ontology. This is a radical departure from contemporary views on this subject. (In fact,  

---

2 Paradigm is being defined in Thomas Kuhn's sense (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970, p. 10): "They [paradigms] were able to do so because they shared two essential characteristics. Their achievement was sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity. Simultaneously, it was sufficiently openended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve."


a colleague mentioned that this was as taboo as calling philosophy of science a modern, philosophy of nature). Perhaps by leaving methodology as sacrosanctly "scientific" instead of ontological, the social sciences have simply left themselves open to naive stands on ethical neutrality.

Some of those who believe that science is or should be ethically neutral have fallen squarely into the naturalistic fallacy by their very efforts to avoid it. Insisting that they only describe and not prescribe, they deny that any consideration of right or wrong applies to their subject matter. Yet, in the social sciences, above all, what is described often does have an ethical aspect. From that point of view the "objective" scientist runs into some danger of condoning what is wrong or rejecting what is right. Or, at least, his attempted withholding of judgment may in itself amount to an ethical judgment.  

In this same sense the social sciences are not "doing" science, but in Hugh Stretton's sense engineering. The distinction is simply lost in the shuffle of inquiry.

Let us make the heretical leap and at least for the time being accept methodology as an extension of ontology, in order to gain the necessary perspective on our subject. Ellen Wood argues that Kant had to do the same thing in order to develop what she calls his "dialectical empiricism." "His attack on the empiricists, therefore, is not simply an epistemological quibble, but a far-reaching argument about the nature of human freedom." In so doing Kant made a critical break with the philosophers who preceded him. Contrary to possible appearances, a-theoretical social science is not being advocated. Simply, distinctions are being drawn between epistemology and ontology. Our emphasis is from an ontological point of view, and nothing in this article should be construed as advocating a doing away with theory. Quite to the con-


6 Hugh Stretton, *The Political Sciences* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 159. "'Scientific' can mean an organizing preference for more general over more local knowledge; 'engineering' represents every sort of political, social or enterprising purpose, and the organization of research to serve such purposes directly."

trary, the argument presented makes a stronger case than ever for understanding, and making explicit, the symbiotic relationships between theory and method. And from this point let us begin our inquiry.

**Why Not Behavioralism?**

There is a preliminary question which must be asked: how do we know anything? The behavioralist believes that for all political activity, such as political thinking, there are certain indicators, grounded in objective measures, which can be used to describe political phenomena. As such, empirical methods rely on theories of correspondence because they rely on frequencies, rather than idiosyncrasies. Because politics, in terms of individual activity or insight, is not measurable, it is assumed that the more comfortable insights afforded by aggregate or survey data tell us more about the political world in which we live. Political thinking and political philosophy, become tangential to political inquiry. “On the one hand, for decades political theory failed to fertilize the other subfields of the discipline with more empirical-instructional or policy concerns,” writes Heinz Eulau,

on the other hand, political theory, as history of political doctrines, become a rather scholastic enterprise unrelated to experiences in the real world of politics. As an even more immediate result, especially germane in this connection, those trained in political theory were altogether incapacitated for having what I can only describe as a feel for the methodological needs and empirical dilemmas of political science.

One feels that although Eulau’s criticism appears to be reasonable his solution to the problem might be worse than the original disease. He is saying that political thought should be correlative to empirical investigation.

But, how does one create an empiricism which does not have some philosophical ground first? Jung argues that phenomenology can resolve this methodological problem. “Phenomenology is a radical empiricism,”

To be rightly called radical, an empiricism must meet two requirements. First, the radicality of an empirical philosophy demands a self-examination and self-clarification of its own theorizing activity.

---

8 Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), especially Ch. 3.

To be radical, then, phenomenology must attempt to question its own presuppositions. Second, to be radical, an empirical philosophy should include no more or less than is directly experienced. Therefore radical empiricism recognizes the dependence of reflection on directly lived experience, that is to say, it accepts the idea that reflection is founded upon lived experience. What is experiential is the primary material for later conceptual activity.¹⁰

For this reason, phenomenology requires the asking of the primary question, how we know, before the second question of what method should we use?

Phenomenologists argue that we know ‘things’ through an intersubjective mood which looks, primarily, at the way in which we exist. For example, we all appreciate trees as a common experience. In other words, the way in which we know is innate in the way we exist. Phenomenology emphasizes that the answer to the research question is secondary to the foundation upon which we base our methodology. The answer the researcher gives to how he wants to approach a study is not only affected, but dominated by methodology; in behavioral literature this process is ex nihilo, in phenomenology it should be essential and explicit.

Simply, the behavioral research agenda demands a question which can be answered in terms of “a” scientific method, which emphasizes not methodization, but standardization.¹¹ If a question can be posed without possibility of falsifying the null hypothesis then it is meaningless. Behavioral methods must limit themselves to objective-knowing analysis, correspondence theory, and therefore the total subjectivity of the individual can tell one nothing. In behavioral terms a case of one, n of one, is never empirically significant. In addition there are characteristics, such as aesthetic, polemic and political elements, which are not statistically measurable and cannot be put in null hypothesis format. These characteristics are abstract and although some behavioralists¹² argue that they should be accounted for, this accountability can only be derived in terms of numeric representations.

These numeric symbols are characterized as “indicators” by modern social science. The recognition of indicators, such as variables, x, y, and

z inferring power, is not empirical or scientific, but rather a subjective leap of faith by the researcher. They preach that abstractions cannot be measured, yet spend most of their energy developing "indicators" which are supposed to describe abstractions. Rather than working within the limits of the behavioral paradigm many scientific researchers go to absurd lengths to prove the universal applicability of their methodology/theory; e.g., measuring existential frustration.13

Behavioral theories rely on representation: i.e., trying to relate individual statistics as representations to language. Essentially behavioral theories create models (or frameworks) and they are then compared with events. Through this "deductive" process events are not described, rather they are ascribed characteristics. For example, functionalism ascribes "functions" to activities.14 Language is the first form of empiricism as hermeneutics, because it expresses the *humanly* perceived dialogue. Thus, we understand that apples fall before we understand Newton's theories of gravity. In this sense scientific inquiry when properly conducted is phenomenological, only it is not consciously so. Perhaps, that is why phenomenology appears to measure, in the sense of pattern, human activity more closely.

**The Fallacies Of Temporality And Homogeniety:**

The application of behavioral theories falls into difficulties on two crucial issues: temporality and homogeniety. The fallacy of temporality is the assumption in behavioral literature that observations can be separated from time, and therefore, can be examined objectively. "All political systems can be compared in terms of the relationship between functions and structures. That is, in a particular political system at a particular interval of time, there is a given probability that function A will be performed by structure X."15 This might also be referred to as the god-like fallacy (*sub specie aeternitatis*), because the Greeks saw their gods as atemporal, that infinity was redundant, and all things were fixed in a single dimension. There was no need to have these "human" attributes affixed to the gods if one could see (understand) all time and all space. In this sense, Almond and Powell are predicting correlations and not predicting events. Fortunately, the Greeks used this conscious myth

---

13 Existential, by definition, is not sensual or measurable. Yet, for example, Bert C. Richmond and Linwood Tisdel, "Existential Frustration of Graduate and Undergraduate Students," *Journal of Human Relations*, 4th Quarter, 1971), completely ignores this as a problem.
structure as only an exemplar of correct action. The myth assumed that the individual would react and not merely accept its assumptions. Unfortunately for modern social science, behaviorism views this as an objective knowledge of reality. The problem with this type of analysis is the assumption of the "fixedness" of man. It is not that those of the behavioral persuasion want to avoid time, but they realize that the form of the scientific enterprise requires theoretical statements to be "timeless." The Greeks, especially Plato, thought that man was continually in motion and a measure of man's political activity had to be in terms of time. Behavioral research in this area must ignore the temporal element because they realize that it is the cost of using "mathematics," which is by definition beyond time.

Even the hard sciences recognize that there are inherent limitations in their research because of time-less analysis. The classic example of this is Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in physics. (Heisenberg argued that if one knows the point occupied by an object one cannot know its speed (time) and if one knows the speed (time) of the object its point cannot be determined.) This has a limited, but interesting, applicability to the social sciences in that the uncertainty problem revolves around human inference. May Broadbeck points out: "If an unbiased coin is tossed a large number of times, then the frequency with which heads will turn up is 50 per cent. This says something about the class of all tosses of a coin, though it says nothing about what will happen in any particular toss." This is the same problem which Heisenberg faces: series of events tell us little about individual events. Nomothetic data cannot be made relevant to ideographic issues.

The apology for this objection has been that social scientists only deal with relational statistics and inference. This ignores the intrinsic relationship between theory and methodology which appears to be critical. If one uses a theory which presupposes a causal relationship (like structural-functional analysis), no matter the methodology, a causal conclusion is entailed. By using implied causal conclusions there is an

18 Abraham Kaplan, Conduct, pp. 322-325.
19 Note: There have been dozens of attempts to develop causal theories in the social sciences. One does not have to go to Hume's fundamental critique of causal analysis to see the absurdity of some of this work. The Blalock-Simon causal analysis has been one of the most widely used causal methods, especially in electoral analyses and congressional behavior. As Hugh Forbes and Edward Tufte point out in their
elementary distortion of the nature and the purpose of methodology and its relationship to theory. Group theories are constant victims of this kind of thinking for when once one posits the group, it is almost impossible to allow for individual freedom or action.20

To understand the philosophical implications of the distinction between time and timelessness the difference between ontology and the ontic level is fundamental. Onticity is the foundation of the positivist argument and has been used as the basis of many other political philosophies; Descartes, Leibnitz and Comte are just a few. Onticity is a belief in certain fixed relationships and is what Michael Polanyi criticizes as ignorance of the “tacit dimension.” He recognizes that there are more than mere cognitive assumptions which shape how we assign meaning (method) to the world. Changes for natural scientists have “been accompanied throughout the centuries by the belief that they offered a deeper understanding of reality. This testifies to a belief in the reality of scientific value.”

Only by holding this belief can the scientist direct his inquiries toward tasks of promising scientific value. And only in this conviction can he inaugurate novel standards with universal intent. He can then also teach his students to respect current values and encourage them perhaps one day to deepen these values in light of their own insights.21

But he goes on to argue that these tacit changes are elicited by a mass of unknowable data. Insights, new dimensions, come from this unknowable mass because all conscious knowledge is grounded in it. However, the belief in a reality is onticity. So for the natural scientist, and the analogy seems to hold for the social scientist, facts can be separated from the human experience—this being universal intent. This is onticity: the foundation of each event in a single milieu.

Understanding the ontological foundations, the source, of a situation is what is essential in social science analysis. The first step in viewing this

December, 1968 American Political Science Review article “A Note of Caution on Causal Modeling,” Blalock-Simon causal analysis must make the initial assumption of a one-way relationship. Unfortunately, no one has demonstrated the existence of any one way relationships in political science.

20 An excellent example of how this problem has been handled previously is Richard Taylor’s (“Arthur F. Bentley’s Political Science,” Western Political Quarterly, V, June, 1952, p. 219) critique of Robert MacIver for misunderstanding Bentley. The misunderstanding revolves around both author’s preconceptions of cause and determinism.

process comes from an understanding of Heidegger's *essence*; the realization that being is the dialexis of thought and action. When this process can be elaborated upon, a foundation for social scientific analysis can be established. This *grund* or foundation is the first step before any analysis, and by making it explicit the research itself should be more meaningful. All actions have reason and this reason allows an explanation or justification of those actions.

It is important to point out that behavioral methodology frustrates any attempt to have an accurate analysis of a political phenomena. When one takes the objective "step back," the behavioralist assumes that the researcher is looking at the same phenomena as he was when he was "in it." Actually, the researcher changes the phenomena to his ontological conceptions (and in some cases political biases (cf. Hugh Stretton: *op. cit.*)). It appears that behavioralism, given its avoidance of ontological status, must destroy any meaningful notion of original human action; that is *freedom* is eliminated as a motivational force.

The other major fallacy inherent in behavioral literature is the fallacy of homogeneity. Basically, the behavioralist must make assumptions about men, as a generic concept; as opposed to man. This presupposes determinism. Kenneth Arrow points out that the behavioralist has to make this assumption because he presupposes determinants (people know what they want) and commensurability (mores act as grounds). Thus, there can be only one motive for acting (one dependent variable) and this has been one of the most criticized and falsified assumptions of elementristic psychology. For this reason, the importance of the notions of mean, median and mode in behavioral work become evident. In effect, all descriptions in behavioralist tracts are based on these three concepts. They are theoretical assumptions which allow behavioral research to create "man" as a manageable concept by generalizing about the majority of men in specific circumstances. Any anomalies, behavior contrary to the average, are interpreted as abnormal.

Thomas Szasz has criticized the entire field of psychiatry for making these kinds of assumptions which, in the psychiatric case, allow the

---


24 Allen Barton discusses the idea of "property space" as a way of developing generic constructs necessary to social science. Implicit in his discussion is that these generic notions are developed by looking at average (mean), median and mode. Delbert Miller (ed.), *Handbook of Research Design and Social Measurement* (New York: David McKay Company, 1970), pp. 127-134.
making of medical judgments to create political-ethical distinctions. He argues that the concept of average, normal, sets up ethical norms from which to judge other men. In the same vein, zealous "attention to their scientific status has led political scientists to a kind of public service" which inevitably supports present institutions. A. R. Louch expands on the problem in political science using Wildavsky and Polsby, *Presidential Elections*:

We are allowed to talk about 'real' politics, the maneuverings designed to achieve concrete political aims, but we are barred from thinking of the party system as having point of justification as a vehicle for bringing to the electorate divergent political opinions. Here it is not statistics that seduce the authors into believing that they have addressed themselves to the real questions of politics, but something equally, if not more naive, that ideas and issues are somehow not as real as 'power' and machinations designed to seize or secure it. But the object of the political scientists as pollster and as power analyst is the same, to substitute facts for values... In a similar way, the definition of a political institution, in terms of power and the strategies designed to achieve it, uses a purposive and thus an evaluative conception of government. Political scientists claim to tell us what the role of an institution is, and not what it ought to be. But to speak of a role at all, is to speak of an end to be achieved. We are led to endorse a certain and spectacularly limited view of the purpose of government in confining our attention to what is in some not too clear sense the tangible element in the political process.

If it is the purpose of the political scientist to substitute facts for values, then it is the behavioral perspective which prejudice social scientific insights in favor of homogeneity.

Phenomenology is a radically individual methodology. It uses the ontological perceptions of the "social actor" to shape analyses. In so doing, the phenomenologist develops, not subjective (for they do not come from him), but inter-subjective categories through which social phenomena can be observed. Thus, phenomenological analysis emphasizes the understanding of thought and action within its own context. In this way the phenomenologist avoids the problem of temporality, for all

---


observations are understood in their own "time." And, the issue of homogeneity also is reconciled within a phenomenological method, because all social instances are radically individual.

It is important to emphasize that no study can use the phenomenological method. Methodology must change with circumstances and the scope of inquiry. This has been a major error of behavioral literature. There are many phenomenologies and a particular form of phenomenology cannot be cannonized. As Stephen Strasser has written:

It is easy to see what the consequences of such an approach [a specific phenomenology] would be. A Husserlian scholasticism would then arise, a scholasticism in the bad sense of the term. Speaking more or less in the spirit of Wilhelm Wundt, we could characterize it as follows. Such a scholasticism would desire to solve the most divergent problems by means of a uniform set of a priori accepted concepts; on the other hand, it would attach so much importance to traditional terms and concepts that it would not even question the basis for those terms and concepts. It is obvious that such an attitude would be in flagrant conflict with the spirit of Edmund Husserl.27

This is similar to distinctions made between statistics, for there are certain "best" methods for analyzing data sets; content analysis, factor analysis, regression, correlation or even simple percentage tables.

Two things are being said here. First, phenomenology, as a methodology, must be modified for the types of analyses for which it is intended. Phenomenology, as such, is a method because it attempts to explain inconsistencies; that is, it moves from greater to lesser ambiguity. Because it is a methodology, phenomenology requires—like behavioralism—a choice of a theory. Many phenomenologists are guilty of an implicit use of theory because it appears to endanger their project: an escape from behavioralism. In any case, theory, (an epistemic construct) must be chosen for its parsimony with the method. Since all theory attempts to be holistic, even though some theorists would deny this, the major question is how discriminating is it; i.e., what can it account for? Phenomenology opens epistemological horizons by presenting the "foreground" and the "background" of language, that is, direct experience and what one believes about that direct experience. C. T. Jones uses this frame of analysis to demonstrate the limitations of empirical methods.28

Only one of these dimensions, (foreground) and sometimes only part of that, is useful from an empirical perspective.

Types of Phenomenology:

Phenomenology has a varied history with many contributors, including such philosophers as Sartre, Schleiermacher Merleau-Ponty, and Teilhard de Chardin. Phenomenology can be viewed in terms of three distinct schools. The first, and most famous, is existential phenomenology. It attempts to understand man's existence and the epistemological questions surrounding that existence. The second school is theistic phenomenology which attempts to answer eschatological questions. The last movement in phenomenology and the one in which we are most interested, will be called proceptive phenomenology. This is being used in Justus Buchler's sense of "proception" as the "moving union of seeking and receiving, of forward propulsion, and patient absorption." Proceptive phenomenology is that school which is interested in looking at human activity in terms of "being" human. A development of dialogal phenomenology must use four major figures in proceptive phenomenology: Edmund Musserl, Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, and Stephen Strasser.

Husserl is generally considered the father of phenomenology. He was attempting to go beyond the psychologism of the early twentieth century and develop a mathematical method beyond objectified consciousness. To his mind, the intention of the individual could be as analytically important as his denotative state. For example, take the case of the political scientist who argues that culture determines forms of governments. Assuming the nominal term culture can be empirically defined through indicators, he proceeds to analyze political institutions through cultural variability. Roy Warner has recently pointed out that culture is a deluding concept which is only "manufactured" in the western mind. The phenomenologist would never accept culture as a tool of analyses because it is a loaded conceptual term and not a common place (bracketed) or essence.

For Husserl the reality of an object, its existence, is not as important as the meaning of that object. His intentional analyses always become

29 This includes Jean Paul Sartre (Being and Nothingness), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Humanism and Terror), and John Wild (Existence and the World of Freedom).
30 e.g. Rudolph Otto (The Idea of the Holy); Friedrich Schleiermacher (The Christian Faith); Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (The Divine Milieu).
constitutive analysis, that is, analysis which does not indicate how meaning is found in the primary world of experiences, but which seek to explain how the meaning of things is primordially constituted in and through consciousness. Thus, the ultimate reality for Husserl is man's existence. All reality is based on man's consciousness which interprets reality and gives it meaning. This is not the harsh ontic concept of existence found in Descartes (Je pense, done je suis), but rather one which places man, not as the center, but as the interpreter of the universe. This idea of interpretation can be explained in terms of the homely philosophical saw of the tree falling in the forest; does it make a sound? Husserl would argue that sound is a human interpretation, and the primordial concept of sound makes no sense without human being. Existence for the phenomenologist has only one and a very particular meaning. “It [existence] serves not to express that something actually belongs to the realm of existing realities, but to indicate that mode of being which is proper to man and precisely constitutes him a human being. In other words, only man exists.”

Phenomenology was not a correspondence theory for Husserl; that is a theory based on correlations. Rather, it was an attempt to bypass the perceptual problems involved in description. It is in description that social scientists run into difficulty, because all description starts with a normative notion of being. The functionalist, for example, attempts to fix being by defining it in a specific way and calling it fact. Con-commitant with this, being (as an assumption) must be assumed to be able to take itself out of being to describe being. Behavioral notions of self appear to be created on a multitude of ad hominem arguments. In dealing with this problem in history, psychology and biology, Berger and Luckman describe the epistemological problems:

The logical structure of this trouble is basically the same in all cases: How can I be sure, say, of my sociological analysis of American middle-class mores in view of the fact that the categories I use for this analysis are conditioned by historically relative forms of thought, that I myself and everything I think is determined by my genes and by my ingrown hostility to my fellowmen, and that, to cap it all, I am myself a member of the American middle class?

34 Almond and Powell, Comparative, pp. 21-22 or Deutsch, Nerves, Ch. 6.
Joseph Kockelmans attempts an answer to this query:

The greatest difficulty encountered in this task lies in the fact that demonstrations are largely useless because being is not something "that can be demonstrated." For being cannot be considered from a standpoint lying outside being itself; moreover, every question regarding being necessarily presupposes that one absolutely exclude any radical distinction between the object investigated and the being which investigates. For this reason an adequate study of the problem of being demands a method of its own. As we have seen, this method is supplied by phenomenology. 36

Phenomenology allows relief from the constraints of "proof" for the social scientist in dealing with those areas in which he is involved. In a sense this exacerbates this problem because it is questionable whether any social phenomena lie outside this area.

An essence, then, is a common human concept which allows us to make theoretical statements about the realities around us. Using the concept of justice, man develops law, government and other political ideas. The essence acts as foundation of an inverted pyramid on which are developed the theoretical relationship through which we understand the world. The problem with Husserl comes from his going beyond phenomenology 37 to idealistic transcendental phenomenology. 38 Husserl later went beyond simple understanding of essence to the linking of all essences to form the composite of human experiences. All things were transcendent in their nature and, much like Kant's Ding an sich (thing in itself), Husserl developed an insight into the interrelationships of man. Because of this both he and the phenomenological movement came under scathing criticism. The critique of this kind of idealism was imminent in terms of its presupposition of a nature of man; which was exactly what using phenomenological analysis as a method was designed to avoid. Husserl had changed phenomenology from a method to a theory.

There were many attempts to deal with his dilemma. The theistic idealists, like Ernst Cassirer 39 and Teilhard de Chardin, 40 attempted to

---

36 Kockelmans, Phenomenology of Physical, p. 50.
39 Ernst Cassirer, Philosophy of Symbolic Form (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 3 VOLS.
use Husserl’s idealistic transcendentalism to justify a belief in the “other.” This existential justification of God tended to distort and lay the groundwork for the major criticisms of phenomenology. It was simply accused of being a moralistic justification for Christianity. The historical realists (existential phenomenologists) like Jose Ortega Y Gasset and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, used existential exegeses to deal with the Husserlian problem of idealism. But both wound up with the very practical problem of what is essence and how can it be used. From this perspective, Paul Ricoeur and Martin Heidegger appear to collectively lay the groundwork for solving Husserl’s idealism-transcendentalism dilemma. Both approached the problem of essence in terms of language. The study of hermeneutics became the key to the phenomenological essence. Both Heidegger and Ricoeur see phenomenology as a method. However, Heidegger views it as a semantic method while Ricoeur understands it in terms of semiotics. Both are similar in that they view the structure of language analytically. Ricoeur believes that phenomenology is articulated through a variety of methods and the best scientific or objectivist inquiries conceal “good implicit phenomenology.”

Both Ricoeur and Heidegger value language, but they see language manifesting itself in different ways. For Ricoeur, the symbolism of language gives it meaning and for Heidegger it is the making (doing) of language. It is not so much that one disagrees with the other but rather that they approach the task from different roads. It can be argued that they are roads to the same place, and that both Ricoeur and Heidegger would agree with J. L. Mehta’s insight as to the goal.

The horizons of language and culture, of period and history, of tradition and race both enable thinking and limit and divide it. And yet there is such a thing as a fusion of horizons in which the past and the present meet, in which what is alien is appropriated and otherness is overcome, though only as a process and a task that never

comes to an end. Such fusion, however, requires labor of the concept to be raised to a philosophical level and indeed constitutes the very care of the philosophical consciousness . . . .

Thus, it is in the attempt to fuse human experience into an understandable ground that the phenomenologists come together.

This is a problem which has worried those who study political thought and activity for centuries: How does one build a method which will at least attempt the fusion of experience? There is a problem of viewing political thinkers as isolated, idiosyncratic “events.” Even with minor exceptions to this rule, like Lenin, political scientists are still forced to segregate the body of the theorist’s works from his activity. Perhaps thinkers would be simply interesting to study in their own right, but this assumes that their insights have no relevance to other phenomena. This is an important point because we are assuming just the opposite; that thinkers are “indicators’ of the phenomena of being. In a real sense they are as important as any other political “variable.” As Robert Heineman has pointed out, this is a major lacuna in political science:

In theory interpretation the tendency is clearly to regard the words of the theorist in and of themselves as objects of analysis when in fact they are projections of an existential being and are essentially clues to his meaning . . . In their reification of words, students of political thought have exacerbated the other—I gulf that Lang sees as the primary obstacle to understanding between persons.

How do we cope with this problem, as those who study political thought? Both Ricoeur and Heidegger have given clues to answers. Stephen Strasser integrates them in his book The Idea of Dialogal Phenomenology in a way useful to the social scientist. Where Heidegger and Ricoeur left the social scientist with teasing tastes of what phenomenology affords, Strasser gives insights which can be digested and used for social scientific investigation.

An Introduction to Metaphysics (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961)
The Essence of Reasons (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969)
Existence and Being (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1949)
Nietzsche I &II (Verlag Gunther Neske Pfullinger, 1961)
Strasser begins with Husserl's insight that our perceptions are not necessarily reality. From this Strasser argues that "if we really desire to proceed in a truly phenomenological-descriptive way, we must hold fast just as much to the plurality and pluriformity of worlds as to the unicity of the world." Indeed, it is only intercourse with other human beings which presents this plurality and pluriformity. And, only in so doing can one surpass the horizon, the "unsurpassable" nature, presented by the world. This "open" horizon makes the empiricist just as valid a contributor in that he provides a facet of this plurality. Therefore, Science is understood as an epistemological exercise rather than an objective one. As such, both phenomenology and science are empirical exercises because they organize data. The phenomenologist begins from that which is perceived "whether it be a thing, a social relationship, or a phenomenon in consciousness." By using the perception, the initial essence, he tries to discover the "rule structure" which the matter in question prescribes to the knower. In other words, by starting with the ontological existenz the phenomenologist can see how the individual places it in the formal world which he perceives. It is through organization that we can understand the individual existence. By using this as a method the phenomenologist lets himself be ruled, as by a norm, by what he perceives, by what he imagines or what he thinks. In this intuitive, empathetic immersion comes insight. Thus, the researcher must 'practically' use the essence and the structure built around the essence to understand the meaning of the experience.

But is is the experience which is most important. In the first instance the phenomenologist must 'perceive' and 'describe' as the individual insight of concrete and individual reality.

Such a perception of reality can easily be changed into an intuition of the nature of the reality in question. What is "perceived" is, for example, a sound I hear or a thing I see. In the second instance the object of intuition is the essence of "sound" in general or the eidos of the "spatially extended thing" in general. It is in this sense that Husserl says: "Immediate seeing, not merely the sensory seeing of experience, but seeing in general as primordial data of consciousness of any kind whatsoever, is the ultimate source of justification for all rational assertions."

49 Ibid., pp. 76-77.
50 Ibid., p. 6.
In a sense we must receive the initial input of the reverberations of that input to understand it in context. For example, the astronomer knows that light moves at specific speeds. When he says that he is looking at a star which is 8 million light years away, he expects us to realize that what he is looking at is a star which existed in the observed circumstance 8 million years ago. It is this contextual understanding which phenomenology hopes to establish. In order to attain this context for human experience we must avoid logically causal assumptions; simply because causality is not a conscious, human action. Rather, it is something attributed to human activity.

Phenomenology is an exercise in the description of commonly human perceptions. It is in the individual's description of circumstance from which we learn. What Strasser argues, and what makes him distinct from other phenomenologists, is that to enter into the "other's" space we must have a dialogue with him. It is in the dialectical relationship with other human beings in which we learn things; and the ambiguity of this relationship substantiates those things. "Thus we see that the dialectic which flows from this most original, most general and necessary ontological situation," writes Strasser

is not an epistemological thought experiment. It is not an arbitrary change of attitude, not an act which I can, at will, accomplish. It has its roots in the things which I had to experience, perceive and undergo in order to become the one who at present I am. The dialogal dialectic, then, arises where freedom and necessity coincide for me; it is a philosophical reflection upon my destiny. 51

It is in the dialogue that phenomenology can have a grasp of ontology, for which all methodologists have been searching. It is a human ontology determined only by the possibility of human experience.

As applied, dialogal phenomenology constitutes the world as it arises between myself and the political actor in the context of our "social and historical" life. Activity and though make no sense as isolated individual acts. "The task of dialogal phenomenology will be to describe how a world arises for us in the dialogue between me and the other,"

It will also examine the turning points of this dialogue and the corresponding changes of worlds. It will not neglect the drama of human existence. Dialogal phenomenology can fulfill this task because it accepts the other as the most original datum of experience

51 Ibid., p. 21.
and draws from it the most important conclusion: it presents itself as a philosophy of finiteness.\(^{52}\)

To view this dialogue the primary step is to establish a “ground” or \textit{essence}. One could suggest the use of the concepts of praxis, alienation, freedom and justice as \textit{essences}. But how could these be used?

Around each “thing” there are consequences—contexts. As Strasser points out:

around the core of actual data there are formed, as it were, concentric centers of possible new explorations which are known only as to their general style. For example, I see a piece of furniture fairly well, but I am unable to discern the particular patterns in the grain of the wood. I know that I must get closer to that object to see the pattern and that, if I wish to see the other side, I must go around that piece of furniture and look again. The term “must” each time indicates a step forward beyond the actual experience. It is this kind of “concentric circles” of possible anticipating intentions related to the same object that Husserl calls an “inner horizon.”\(^{53}\)

Each experience, much like dropping a pebble into a lake, has concentric circles of reaction around it. The original perception is what the phenomenologist calls \textit{noesis} and the concentric circles are what he calls \textit{noema}. The difference becomes clear in the following example “of seeing a house” from Joseph Kockelmans:

\begin{quote}
In this particular act of perception of \textit{noesis} this house effectively manifests itself always in this particular profile when this particular standpoint is assumed; but, nonetheless, each concrete act intends more than this particular profile and aims at the home as a whole. This intended total meaning in every particular act of perception of the house, precisely insofar as it manifests itself in this act, is called noema. This noema explains why every individual act of perceptions refers to other, possible perceptions of this same house. But how do we apply the dialogal method?\(^{54}\)
\end{quote}

\textbf{Noema or Essence:}

The answer to the above questions must first devolve into asking what \textit{essences} will be used and why? The use of \textit{essences} is called eidetics or the tracing of the perception from the cogito to the world.

\(^{52}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
\(^{53}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 28.
\(^{54}\) Kockelmans, \textit{Phenomenology}, p. 43.
In other words, the source of the *essence* is its development or activity. Psychiatrist Abraham Winkler aptly stated the problem of using *essences* in his critique of applied phenomenology:

The eidetic grasp of reality or of the essence of phenomena is strictly private. Therefore, the phenomenologist who does the grasping or intuiting should remain silent because there is no way to convey to anyone else the operations by which he arrives at these insights or even to describe the insights themselves. I am sure that were the phenomenologists of Husserl’s school confronted with this semantic problem, they would have to admit that the moment they make a statement about their direct experience of phenomena, the experience becomes distorted thereby. Some reduction has already occurred, and reduction is a terrible word. And so they would be forced to conclude, I think, that the best thing to do is to contemplate phenomena and remain silent.\(^{56}\)

But Professor Winkler addresses the right problem with the wrong weapon. The *essence* is not a semantic difference or problem, because it is not the structure, but the meaning of language, which is important. It is a problem in communication through language and not in language. The distinction is critical. The construction of grammatical rules does not present difficulties, but rather the willingness to accept the incomprehensibility of language which becomes manifest. Empiricists talk *about* concepts rather than with concepts. Phenomenologists recognize that when you talk about words *out of context* you destroy their meaning. Simply, in a word expressing a concept, or in a series of words forming a phrase of a sentence, there is more than definition; there is idea.

Words are metaphors. There is no pure description for the phenomenologist.\(^{58}\) Therefore, an *essence* is simply a metaphor for a common human idea. An idea is not known through language but understood through being. Being in this sense is the *noema* of the person. Perhaps a parallel example would be beneficial here. All chemists and physicists are familiar with Avogadro’s number \((6.024 \times 10^{23} \text{ gm/mole})\) which is


\(^{58}\) Stephen Pepper, *World Hypothesis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), points out that communication occurs through root metaphors which develop through interpretive theories. See Ch. 5.
a converting factor from grams to moles. Both of these are measures and, much like language, demonstrates meaning only in application. The scientists know that Avogadro's number can be carried out to an infinite number of decimal places. However, in using it they round it off to three places realizing that it is a mathematical relationship, relevant to significant numbers, not fact that they are measuring. The number derived is simply an essence, the most meaningful moment, which can never be accurate. In much the same way language is an inaccurate expression of understanding. Thus Winkler's critique holds for all methods, phenomenological and positivist, because they are intuitive agreements on proximate measures. The essence is the empirical foundation of "idea" investigation and allows inquiry as epistemologically satisfying as positivism.

The Political Essence:

Before getting into the meaning and application of essences, it is incumbent upon us first to distinguish the basic assumptions of phenomenological and behavioral theories. The distinction is remarkably easy to make. The behavioralist founds his assumptions on goal oriented behavior; i.e., all activities of man are purposeful. On the other hand the phenomenologist grounds his assumptions on the notion of being. The behavioralist is externally centered and the phenomenologist is internally centered. A word of explanation is in order here. The behavioralist, because he is goal oriented, believes that man lives and acts to affect the world around him. The phenomenologist sees the world as a simple extension, a penumbra of the cogito. For him, man exists in terms of the development of consciousness. He is conscious in so far as the world is seen as a projection of being. Because the human develops the world through his own personal development, goal oriented behavior appears as a pseudoscientific misperception of the way in which man exists. An example of this is the notion of freedom, which has a very limited meaning for the behavioralist, where the phenomenologist can understand freedom in a multitude of ways. Therefore, freedom has "to be understood within the intentionality of being in the world." Sadler interprets freedom through the idea of play; that is being experimenting with the world. It is important to understand the distinction between these two


61 Sadler, Existence, p. 203.
perspectives. In the current conceptions of analyses behavioralism and phenomenology are paradigms and not theories. That is, they do not constitute the specific project of a description, but project an interpretation of the entire "world" in terms of a certain format.

The phenomenological format requires the development of essences which can be called political. These political essences describe the space in which political activity occurs. Phenomenology attempts to describe that space so that activity can be understood. In so doing it points out the cultural limitations of one's own space. (Culture is being used here subjectively, not empirically.) Political, again, is the authoritative allocation of meaning. So when we talk of political space, it is the space, the dimension, in which definitions of meaning occur. As Sadler points out, every culture, and every segment of culture, defines its space or dimensionality in a way current to its idiosyncratic perspective. He argues that to understand Africans we cannot look at them as nations, in the sense political scientists use the word, but more in the concept of tribes. This is not to say that the unit "tribe" has not been used by social scientists, rather, that the behavioral methodology makes it far more easy to deal with nation. The problem of space and value is an important one and something to which the social scientist constantly fall prey. Values are necessarily included in all cultural research. But, phenomenology allows the inclusion of values without the distortion of inquiry. The idea of essence is to develop organization not creation. What the essence does is allow us to look at data in its most fundamental form—language.

What makes essences political? Simply, it is the interpretation of the world which creates that which we hold in common. Essences are undefinable in that they depend on human interpretation for meaning. Several essences suggest themselves in politics: freedom, justice, action (interpenetration of thought and action), alienation. The use of these would naturally depend on the theoretical framework employed, but in any sense, would be used to organize how these essences were used in a specific context. For example, a radical group would be analyzed in terms

62 Ibid., pp. 262-264.
64 This is argued in many places but perhaps Eldridge Cleaver put it best: Each time he gave a talk, Stokely (Carmichael) would cite Alice in Wonderland. "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."
"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."
of how their thought related to these \textit{essences}—or other, more meaningful essences. These are methodological and not theoretical statements. They represent the foundations of political language, the grammar of that language, which then can be used to examine political ideas.

While phenomenology might appear to take similar ideas out of context, it must be remembered that context is “with interweaving or content.” Thus, in context requires continuity of an entire idea. This is what phenomenology tries to achieve, the weaving together of \textit{essential} ideas to form the ground or basis for understanding. When one looks at a painting, it is not only the totality, but the color, depth, meaning and dimension which is evaluated. The phenomenologist uses ideas to achieve a viewpoint, or methodological framework.

\textit{Conclusion:}

Our purpose has been to open empirical methodology and find out what makes it empirical. If the last several pages have been at all insightful, then it has become evident that empirical methodology does not have to be as structured or mathematically dominated as the behavioralists would lead us to believe. Phenomenology has been presented as an alternative, but in some senses also a supplement. Although I must admit to not having firm convictions on either side, it appears that in many instances phenomenology can be used to complement empirical research. This is, however, a provisional statement and should not be construed as advocacy. In a more specific vein, dialogal phenomenology has opened new areas of research for the social scientist. The inductive emphasis on epistemology and the flexibility of its methodology portent exciting possibilities. Examples of these several areas of inquiries follow.

A singularly fascinating problem in political science has been the difficulty in explaining and understanding ideology. Dialogal phenomenology opens an entirely new realm of investigation for its allows the examination of public attitude and individual writings simultaneously. This paves a new level of empirical content in areas that we previously trapped in history. For example, it offers the methodology to come to grips with such authors as George Mosse, \textit{Nazi Culture}, Mayer's \textit{They Thought They Were Free}, and Wilhelm Reich's \textit{The Mass Psychology of Fascism}. It allows us to look at voting behavior in terms of the dialogue set up between the politician and the voter. This does not deny empirical content, but can truly be a collateral enterprise. This author has actually used dialogal phenomenology in conjunction with Marx's theories of alienation and consciousness to analyze American Black political thought.
The possibilities are indeed infinite, for this type of method appears to open up an entirely new paradigmatic ground work. Certainly this is a pretentious statement, but it is an “audacious” enough proposition to warrant further investigation. Some might argue that our thesis necessarily disavows sciences and thus robs us of its magic cloak. On the contrary, phenomenology does not deny science, because it is vitally concerned with empirical reality. It is also far from any type of mysticism.65 What is is, is yet to be demonstrated in political science.

Our case should not be dismissed because of any qualms about the ontology-methodology question. It is obvious that this is sacreligious in a social science that is so dominated by epistemic questions—both in the normative and empirical areas. But if another expostulation is allowed, perhaps this is exactly what our greatest problem has been.

The sciences have retained one characteristic of philosophy: the illusion of pure theory. This illusion does not determine the practice of scientific research but only its self-understanding. And to the extent that this self-understanding reacts back upon scientific practice, it even has its point.

The glory of the sciences is their unswerving application of their methods without reflecting on knowledge—constitutive interests. From knowing not what they do methodologically, they are that much surer of their discipline, that is of methodical progress within an unproblematic framework. False consciousness has a protective function.66

This is in a real sense “damning with faint praise” for it is the point at which most scientists and philosophers of science have difficulty (Heisenberg, Born, Einstein, Kuhn are but a few). If false consciousness is paraplegic in the natural sciences, then it is catatonic in the social sciences. The social sciences can no longer afford to leave this boulder unturned.

This article has no intention of being “the last word.” It is more likely one of the initial probes into the ontology of social science. The feeling has been stirring throughout the discipline that a new cathartic is needed, especially after the deflation of post-behavioralism. I am not necessarily saying that phenomenology will bring this re-vitalization, but I can think of a lot worse places to start.