To aim reality: the language issue in quantum physics, phenomenology and neopatristics

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ANNALS of the University of Bucharest
Philosophy Series

Vol. LXI, no. 1, 2012
pp. 41 – 47.
Abstract

There are some instances when the ways to the reality could be described as ultimate. These kinds of experiences seek to reach a nonmediate and an effective access to reality (no matter how reality is understood are described). They are attempts to overpass the mediation provided by the normal human functions in the act of knowledge (the mediations offered by imagination, by theoretical explanations, by the normal ways of sensing reality) carried on in rather exceptional situations, in exceptional contexts, by exceptional people. Here are not only the mystical experiences (hesychasm), but also some philosophical enterprises (phenomenology), and none less some experiments in sciences (quantum physics). But if these experiences are possible and effective, a very difficult task is to express them, to communicate them to others.

Keywords: reality, phenomenon, language.

Our understanding of what is called ‘reality’ has undergone not only with the evolution of Modern science, but it was always discussed and often questioned. In the European Modernity doubt was not on the question if we really talk about an objective and independent reality (with a few exceptions), but on how we know and represent the reality. This is unlike in the Eastern traditions and philosophies of Oriental origin or inspiration, which tended to deny the existence of something beyond subjective impressions. An investigation on the recent changes in semantic notion of reality can discuss only the first type of reference to reality. These changes are due to the difficulties encountered in signifying reality as well as in the finding of a truthful access to it. In science the paradox is that the refining of experimental strategies of investigating reality has led to questioning the validity of scientifically experiments and the true nature of reality. That happened in quantum physics. But I think that there are two other types of investigation in

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1 Romanian Academy, Iași Branch. Acknowledgement: This paper was made within The Knowledge Based Society Project supported by the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed by the European Social Fund, and by the Romanian Government under the contract no. POSDRU ID 89/1.5/S/56815.
which the nature of reality has been directly or indirectly put under discussion, namely phenomenology and Neopatristics. I consider that these two perspectives offer investigating ways that can be compared with the experiment in science. What appears to be common in these three ways of targeting and investigation reality is the need for major adjustments in underlying semantics of terms used when is described what is beyond the subject’s capacities. And this happened in all three horizons in the Twentieth Century. And this should be seen more than just changes in methodology or conceptual definition of reality, but a major shift in its understanding.

Aiming reality, understood as the result of donation, became a major task once with the philosophical turning made by Phenomenology at the beginning of the last century. And this turn brought exceptional difficulties in naming the intimacy of phenomenon, and especially of the phenomenality of phenomenon. For Edmund Husserl phenomenology seeks a radical approach, beyond all theoretical initiatives. The main question is whether what was designated as the conditions of presence may reach the point where the whole being is accessed, beyond the limits fixed by metaphysics. With other words, in what context the phenomenal act it is fulfilled without any condition or reserve? But the quest for restoring objectivity in the Husserlian phenomenology marks an extreme difficulty, that one to remain faithful to his own attempts. Husserl describes the field presence beyond all limits, bringing the notion itself to dissolution, because it also reproduces the constitutive metaphysical determination of presence, the objectivity. Phenomenology denounces unnatural orientation of thought and intuition, so that its own relation to reality requires reorientation from objects to the underlying acts. We naturally tend to consider things like having actual presence and forming the reality, but in fact should be considered that we omit, the acts. In this way phenomenology takes a radical step to overcoming modern explanatory paradigms: these described reality as the sum of objectual. The return to things involves the turn (re-turn) of thinking to intuition. Returning to things impose that thinking to re-conduct her words to their intuition. The checking of statements requires their resumption starting from the effective realized intuition, given, starting from acts. It is obvious here that there is a method that can be described as radically intuitive, which would be explicitly separate and apart from ontologies outlined in modernity.

Intuition, without reason or condition, precedes the theories of donation as the theory of theories. This approach is an attempt to suspend any mediations in the search for returning to things, is the reorientation of thinking back to intuition.


Here is a strong difficulty in language, because Husserl try to make language proper in describing an access to phenomenality that should suspend any mediation.

This attempt to provide objectivity in the research of the phenomenon’s phenomenality was later criticized by Martin Heidegger. He will notice also that phenomenology’s goal does not coincide with the phenomenality, this being the reason for he parted the Husserlian phenomenological method of investigation. For Heidegger, the discussing on being is nothing else than a way to criticize objectivity pursued by Husserl’s phenomenology. But neither Heidegger never fulfilled what he had proposed in his phenomenology, because the phenomenology of being, even under attenuated figure of ontological difference, it is not shown, it is not never revealed, nor for what he called ‘phenomenology of unapparent’ never exceeded its programmatic status\(^4\). The HeideggerIan need for a more radical ‘reality outlet’ is to be found in the claim that phenomenology can exceed the actual truth, and this principle can be put, ultimately, against phenomenology already made. Actual experience of reality is attributed to intuition, more or less, intuition is only in the presence of world’s objects, in the front of the world itself. The metaphysics of presence is fulfilled in absolute appearance, the world is intuition of a whole. But this last statement takes much further the difficulties in finding appropriate linguistic formulations, that’s why Heidegger will make appeal to the mystical and poetical terminology. On this way can be understood this phenomenological statement of a possible presence without intuition. This understanding will be later developed in the thinking of Jean-Luc Marion. It is a statement of exceptional importance in supporting the existence of a presence here and now that escapes intuition: this possibility was a major topic in quantum physics as well as in Neopatristics. It is important to observe the phenomenological turn that happened beginning with Heidegger: phenomenology no longer deals with the knowledge of phenomena, but with the knowledge of their mode of occurrence; it is no more concerned with the foundations of science, but with the understanding of phenomenality\(^5\). What appears is accepted not because appears, but because it is in a stable instance as original; phenomenality can be always suspected that it can provide only an appearance. The self-donation ‘in person’ is the only correct way to describe the phenomenon, because it only satisfies the requirement of being direct, of permanent presence and of immediate presence, giving to the conscience everything what can appear in its eyes. But the phenomenon can be defined other way than a permanent presence, as Heidegger stressed. The phenomenon donates itself starting from its proper visibility, is not reducible to the presence of a conscience. Possible deviations from phenomenality show, in fact, that

\(^4\) Jean-Luc Marion, R\'eduction et donation, 90.
there is a phenomenon’s initiative on its own to achieve visibility. Visibility is not represented, it appears. After Heidegger, the phenomenon originates itself in reaching to visibility of not-yet-visible, involving the principle of unapparent appearance. The phenomenon doesn’t mean no more a particular object but some game of the unapparent in appearance. Consequently, phenomenology is for bringing into apparition not only the unapparent, but also the game of apparent and unapparent in apparition. Provided that the phenomenon is open in its own mystery, becomes possible to characterize the being with the title of phenomenon. Phenomenology is on the unapparent as the being to appear, it is not perceptible in the horizon of presence as a common sense phenomenon. It is not phenomenal what, being visible, may become visible, thus becoming a being but, paradoxically, is phenomenal what invisible as such, becomes visible in the mode of present being.

When discussing about reality, but mostly when aiming the nature of reality through language, the contemporary physics encountered also a serious difficulty. The reality described by the classical physics is an independent one, that is: the measurements do not interfere with the phenomena. This thesis became the central thesis of any kind of modern science and this was also the meaning of the objectivity. The fundamental assumption is that the world is basically matter, a myriad of simple elements, atoms or particles which are all in a relationship by the means of fields. But certain levels of reality, specifically the quantum levels, cannot be subjected to the classical explanation given by the science founded by logical formalism, so that arose the need to resort to alternative explanatory models. In the third decade of the last century appeared a serious breech in the paradigm of the physical realism. As Bernard d’Espagnat indicates, in quantum physics arises now the question of the real nature, of what is called ‘Something’ in a rather negative language. The role assigned to that ‘something’ suggests the presence of an integrity, of a whole, a thesis totally unknown to the classical physics. The theory of the quantum field refutes the perspective of the classical physics, mainly because the particles no longer play the role of constitutive material of the universe; the only reality which can be conceived that it would constitute the basic reality is the ‘something’. There are concepts such as the non-reparability and the non-localization in indicating this reality model. The theory of non-reparability states that strictly speaking there is no distinct object. Our senses do not reveal the real constituency of the universe. There appear dramatic differences from the classical vision over the world, it is now required a holistic vision, as well as the necessity to renounce to the objectivist language. This major change of vision has multiple consequences, one of the most radical ones being the need to use a different language. It is not just about an adaptation of the concepts by which the physicists work in

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6 Marion, Réduction et donation, 93.
modeling their theories but a change in the overall world vision. The status of what is called ‘phenomenon’ in physics became indeed problematic. The ultimate nature of phenomenon was linked with the concept of *real*. The most radical meaning of the reality notion is called *real*, as it is about the reality independent from mind\(^7\). There has been made another difference between ‘reality’ and ‘real’, taking into consideration the fact that the reality would be what enters the field of our experience and power of actual or virtual investigation, whereas real is what reality would be beyond this possibility of knowledge. In connection with this kind of distinction, the concept of ‘ultimate reality’ was formulated, by which there is designated the limit, the border that our knowledge with all the handy possibilities has over the real at a certain historical moment. The ultimate reality does not have a certain content, but it is always constituted from the stage of human knowledge in a historical time.

The reference made by d’Espagnat about the possibility of some different kinds of human experience to attain a knowledge of the nature of ‘something’ indicates the cognitive and discursive possibilities given by poetics and mystics. This statement can be verified by the openings offered by the spiritual experience as it is described by the Eastern Christian tradition. But the understanding of exceptional value of patristic experiential way of understanding of reality was relatively late, at the mid of Twentieth Century. At that time authors like Dumitru Stănilea or George Florovsky indicated that the authentic dimension of Christian Spirituality cannot be put into the descriptive frames resulted from Modern cultural horizon. But, in the same time, this renewal of the patristic message was accompanied by an opening to the values and the paradigms of the Late Modernity. For example, Dumitru Stănilea quotes often Martin Heidegger in his commentaries to patristic texts. The reference to the most recent philosophy of that time actually means the recognition gave by these representatives of this movement to the change of perspective brought by Phenomenology, Existentialism, and Hermeneutics. These authors mentioned above drew attention on the synthetic and direct patristic understanding which stands under the sign of intuition; giving the consciousness of higher meanings and purposes of nature. Following the Church Fathers, Stănilea affirms that the rationality of the world has multiple virtualities, and it is especially malleable, contingent. Here also lies the essential difference from previous understandings of the world’s rationality, especially because now it’s the wo/man who uses and reveals the world’s rationality.

Dumitru Stănilea talks about a human growth through things, for God’s loving intentions are progressively revealed through things. In this context, one can talk about the progress of both human spirit and of the world via

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relationships among things. These statements by Stăniloae are a very important understanding of what patristic tradition, and particularly the Christian East, proposed on the topic of the world’s rationality. Stăniloae’s texts, just like the patristic writings, must not be made to fit the narrow canons that rationalism imposed to the modern acceptation of theology. Stăniloae explicitly argued for the need to recover an integral way of knowledge, a discourse that would go beyond fragmentariness and be able to meet the recent challenges that research has posed. The rationality described by the Christian East implies a plasticity of existence that must always be considered, yet without omitting the data of the person. What humans do entails consequences such as their ability to better master and manipulate reality, following progress in knowledge; yet the true consequences refer to bringing to existence certain potentialities of the world that otherwise could have never become manifest. This interaction with reality, with its degrees, leads to another type of experience, which can be called interpersonal, or, put it differently, the experience of communion. So, the nature of reality receives a different and very interesting understanding in this vision. The reality description is much more complex, because the world is described as a dynamic place of interaction. The reality has plasticity or capability of a continuous subtle change at its deepest level. The nature of phenomenon is seen as the result of a two instances co-presence, a created one but also a non-created, and here are the most difficult aspects of Eastern Christian understanding of phenomenon. Dumitru Stăniloae understood well the stake of this difficulty, and for this reason promoted, at the middle of the twentieth century, the recovery of the work of Gregory Palamas, a Byzantine theologian and thinker from the fourteenth century. In a famous controversy, Palamas defended a vision of reality that implies the presence of the uncreated in the natural world. Stăniloae insists that for Palamas, the act of knowledge has the dimension of a relationship, is understood as a dynamic process and not as an essential view of a stable nature. In terming his unmediated experience of God a vision of ‘light’, the language is understood as a ‘pointer’, and not descriptive. In the Palamite language the terms ‘light’ and ‘darkness’ as both appropriate; light indicates the supreme positive character of the experience, and darkness indicates it’s radical transcendence vis-à-vis everything else we know. When talking of ultimate personal reality, we cannot speak with exact precision but only by the way of symbol, image and analogy. It is unavoidable an amount of ambiguity. Usual language, while conceptualizing created beings’ experience of God, must also pay attention to its own shortcomings. A decisive term in explaining the non-essentialism of the Palamite doctrine is energieia, which Gregory Palamas takes over from Aristotle.

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In order to create a distinction between essence or nature, and person or hypostasis, Palamas does it cautiously because the vocabulary of that time was too deeply marked by the essentialist categories of the Greek philosophy. When discussing about *energeia*, Palamas states that it is a natural symbol, and not a created one. If *energeia* or the divine light has this meaning, then what we call a natural phenomenality, or reality, has a much enlarged signification. We find in phenomenon the presence and the intentionality of a Person and that as a *natural dimension*. This description the reality is constituted by the experience in the most radical way: the ultimate reality is the human experience of uncreated energies. Any statement that would aim at something beyond the content of this experience, such as the direct knowledge of an essence, is rejected. In the same time the gnoseological pessimism is rejected: the Supreme Personal Reality is not non-cognoscible due to its transcendence, because it makes itself known by these manifestations.

As we can see, there is a serious issue in expressing the nature of reality once there are attained the limit situations in knowledge. I gave here what I consider to be the most relevant examples of such situation, these instance being, maybe, at the same time the three major ways of approaching and understanding reality: mystics, philosophy and science. The question is if we can describe this ‘last instance’ approach as being similar in the three perspectives. I think it is not, because of the very different methodologies and interests. Their closeness is rather asymptotic, but can never be an identical path in the quest for nature of reality. But I think also that a real and effective opening between these kinds of experimental/experiential knowledge can be made by concrete researchers at a certain time, it is not something valid in abstract, gaining a theoretical permanent value. That’s is because there is necessary to find concrete linguistic bridges between different ways of designating a concrete experience/experiment of reality.