

A Comparative study of Phenomenology and Sāṅkhya

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This comparative study comprises four papers preceded by prolegomena. Its presentation calls for a series of five lectures of two hours duration each. My attempt here is to share with you the flavor of my findings.

I. Consciousness

The central concept in phenomenology is ‘intentionality’. What is ‘of’ or ‘about’ something other than itself is said to be ‘intentional’. Consciousness is intentional because it is ‘of’ something. What a consciousness posits as its object is said to be its ‘intentional object’.

“Consciousness and physicalness”, Husserl points out, “are a combined whole, combined into psychophysical unities which we call animalia and at the highest level into the real unity of the whole world”. Intentionality distinguishes consciousness from physicalness. ‘Consciousness’ is the theme of phenomenology. It is the theme also of my first paper.

While the world as a whole must include consciousness consciousness of the world, assumes the world to be complete without it. Therefore, what such a combined whole makes, in Russell’s words, is a ‘pseudo-totality’ and it involves set-theoretical paradox. Berkley’s idealism, physicalism, as well as Husserl’s phenomenology, I argue, are attempts different to circumvent the paradox. Phenomenology reduces the physical to its consciousness, that is, it practices ‘phenomenological epoche’. I argue that empirical sciences practice the same method, though in a complimentary sense. Sāṅkhya, I argue, is a post-epoche discourse.

It is ‘mental acts’ or ‘mental processes’ are conscious, hence intentional. Yoga exhaustively enumerates the five kinds of *cittavṛtti*. I demonstrate that all of them are ‘intentional’ and conclude that the concept of *cittavṛtti* is equivalent to ‘intentional mental processes’. I identify *viśaya*, with ‘intentional object’ and argue that all objects of consciousness, even as per yoga, are ‘intentional correlates’ of some or the other of *cittavṛtti*. I identify the *viśaya* of *pratyakṣa pramāṇa vṛtti* which is called ‘*dr̥ṣṭa*’ with ‘empirical essence’, that is, the essence of an individual object and *viśaya* of *pūrvavat* kind of *anumāna pramāṇa vṛtti*, which is called ‘*dr̥ṣṭasvalakṣaṇa sāmānya*’ with ‘pure essences’ or ‘*eidōs*’.

II. ‘Nature’

The term ‘nature’, as ‘nature of a thing’ is used in the Aristotelian sense, which I identify also with ‘*prakṛti*’ of sāṅkhya.

The psychophysical world, as per phenomenology, is but what is constituted by its consciousness. I, therefore, argue that the same is the nature of the world. ‘Phenomenological reduction’, then becomes *laya* of the psychophysical world to pure consciousness. I identify consciousness with what sāṅkhya calls *buddhi* or *mahat*.

Husserl talks of the ‘ground’ of consciousness. He calls it ‘absolute mental processes’. I identify it with what sāṅkhya calls *mūla prakṛti*.

Mūla prakṛti, along with its proliferations, as per sāṅkhya, is *triguṇātma*, that is, in the nature of the three *guṇa*. Husserl analyses intentional mental processes into what he calls ‘stuff’ and ‘form’. We may call three *guṇa* and ‘stuff’ and ‘form’ the ‘basic kinds of nature’ in the respective disciplines.

I evaluate these ‘basic kinds of nature’ on two criteria. In order to be ‘basic’, they must be ‘purely’ themselves. Husserl rightly demands ‘stuff’ be ‘formless’. But ‘sense-data’, which he himself projects as stuff, I argue, fails to be ‘formless’. Husserl, I show, subscribes to *satkāryavāda*, the causal theory of sāṅkhya, which, I argue, requires that all the four Aristotelian causes of mental processes, namely, the material, the formal, the efficient and the teleological, as well as the moods of mental processes have to be traceable to their basic kinds of nature. I find that while the three *guṇa* fully satisfy this criterion ‘stuff’ and ‘form’ do not.

III. ‘Structures’

‘Intentional mental process’ (or mental act) and its ‘intentional object’ may primarily be taken as the ‘structures’ in phenomenology. I have already identified ‘intentional mental process’ with *cittavṛtti* and its ‘intentional object’ with its *viśaya*.

I identify what Husserl calls ‘noesis in its concrete completeness’ with ‘intentional mental processes’ (*cittavṛtti*). According to Husserl, to everything noetic, there corresponds a noematic and vice versa. I now suggest ‘noema’, the correlate of ‘noesis in its concrete completeness’ may be identified with its ‘intentional object’ (*viśaya*).

Husserl, in his *Logical investigations*, had proposed ‘quality’ and ‘matter’ as the two constituents of consciousness-objectivities. ‘Quality’ is the ‘general act-character, which stamps an act as merely presentative, judgmental, emotional, desiderative etc. The characteristics make up the ‘quality’. They are posited on ‘matter’, the ‘content’ of which stamps the act as presenting *this*, as judging *that* etc.etc.

A physical thing, according to Husserl is given in mere modes of appearances. What of a physical object is perceived merely by sense organs is called ‘*sammugdha vastu*’ and described as *nirvikalpita pratyakṣa*. The same, I suggest, may be identified with ‘matter’.

Sense organs, as per sāṅkhya, can function only in association with ‘*manas*’, an internal organ. This, I argue, adequately explains the unity-formation of the perceptions by different sense organs. But how was Husserl to combine all the modes of appearances of a particular physical object? I suspect this is issue which made him propose the concept of the ‘determinable X’, which alone does the experienced physical thing proper provide. It is described as the ‘empty X’, the ‘central point of unity’, the ‘bearer’ of its predicates. The modes of appearances, I suggest are to be taken as ‘material determinations’ predicating the ‘determinable X’. I suggest the ‘predicatively formed complex’ of all these material determinations is what Husserl calls ‘predicatively formed affair-complex’ and this affair-complex together with the ‘determinable X’, I suggest, can be identified with ‘matter’ as well as ‘central noematic core’ in noematic context.

Sāṅkhya conceives of *tanmātra* as an object of one single sense organ. Thus there are five of their kind corresponding to the five sense organs. ‘*Nirvikalpita pratyakṣa*’ is a combination *tanmātra* corresponding to precisely of those sense organs of which a physical thing were to be an object. These combinations as objects are called *bhūta* or *mahābhūta*,

Husserl uses the term ‘noesis’ also in the sense of a faculty performing the constitution. I divide the faculty into parts. I call the part that unites the modes of appearances to form the ‘central core’ as the ‘uniting noesis’. For sāṅkhya, the uniting corresponds to combining

tanmātra to form *mahābhūta*. I call the other kind of noesis as ‘layer positing noesis’. I divide it into three components. The one that intuites the essence of the object as to what the object is, I call ‘essence-bestowing noesis’. I identify the component that makes the object an ‘object for an animal’ with what Husserl calls ‘animating noesis’. I identify the component, which judges the object on the grounds of reason, legitimacy, reality, value etc. with what Husserl calls ‘judgemental noesis’. I parallel the three components respectively with *manas*, *ahārikāra*, *buddhi* and all the three together with *antaḥkaraṇa*. I identify the positings by all the layer-positing noeses on the ‘central core’ with what Husserl now calls ‘predicatively formed value-complex’ and the same again with ‘quality’ and, on the part of sāṅkhya with *prakāra*.

We may understand the ‘affair-complex’ together with the ‘value-complex’ as what Husserl calls ‘sense’. The ‘determinable X’ and ‘sense’ together form, in noematic context, the ‘full noema’. We may parallel ‘full noema’ with what sāṅkhya calls *savikalpa pratyakṣa* or *viśaya* of *pratyakṣa pramāṇa vṛtti*.

IV. ‘Terminal Transcendental Teleological Cause’

‘Teleological cause’, as one of the four causes of a thing, as propounded by Aristotle, is its ‘formal nature’. ‘Nature’ being immanent to a thing, this cause may be described as ‘immanent teleological cause’. But Aristotle admits of two kinds of teleological causes. He illustrates the other kind with ‘we’ as the teleological cause of things of art. The other kind, obviously may be described as the ‘transcendental’ teleological cause.

I argue that only a living thing can qualify as a transcendental teleological cause.

I argue for a chain in which a term next is the ‘transcendental teleological cause’. The chain starts with non-living products like things of art or things like webs of spiders, nests of swallows etc. It is followed by corporeal bodies of the living things, followed by streams of their mental processes and finally their ‘pure ego’.

As against Aristotle’s expositions on teleological cause of things, my argument in the case of sāṅkhya is based upon its assertion of ‘*saṅghātaparārthatva*’, according to which, ‘*saṅghāta*’, that is, composite, is ‘*parārtha*’, that is, has its ‘transcendental teleological cause’. Sāṅkhya also constructs a parallel the same chain of transcendental teleological causes, ending in ‘*puruṣa*’.

I then compare the concept of pure ego with that of *puruṣa* and finally show that the chain of the transcendental teleological causes in the case of sāṅkhya ‘terminates’ with ‘*puruṣa*’.