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Joaquim Xirau in the journal *Ciència*

The journal *Ciència. Revista Catalana de Ciència i Tecnologia (Catalan Science and Technology Journal)* appeared in 1926 and disappeared in 1933 (after a total of fifty that three issues). It was a journal made it clear that good science could be done in Catalan. It was a model scientific publication begun in one the darkest moments of contemporary Catalan culture: the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Science was one of the key elements for a solid and prestigious culture and there was a generation of authors (from different fields) who made this possible. In addition, the journal echoed the advances from all over Europe and included translations of foreign articles.

The philosophers of the University of Barcelona were quite present in this publication. Tomàs Carreras Artau wrote about the unconscious (1926); Jaume Serra Hunter wrote about Bacon (1929); Alexandre Galí dedicated two articles to preschool education (1929); and Joaquim Xirau, in 1929, wanted to contribute with an article on the latest tendencies in philosophical research, which is reprinted below. A few years earlier he had produced an article about his fellow student, Joan Crexells, who died young¹. Those were the years when Xirau, who had won the Fundamental Logic professorship of the University of Barcelona, was presented by Francesc Mirabent (in the newspaper *La Publicitat*) as the next link in the Catalan philosophical tradition.

The Editors

NOVES ETAPES DE LA INVESTIGACIÓ FILOSÒFICA²

Joaquim Xirau

A characteristic of the last thirty years of European thought is the struggle to free itself from positivist ideas and the affirmation, more and more decidedly, of the need for a strictly philosophical, that is, metaphysical, idea. All sectors of society collaborate in this movement. But the most decisive factor is the acute internal crisis of understanding which is sparked.

1 See this article reprinted in Josep Monserrat Molas, "Joaquim Xirau i Joan Crexells, col·leagues", *Anuari de la Societat Catalana de Filosofia*, XVIII, 2007, pp. 49-69.

2 *Ciència. Revista Catalana de Ciència i Tecnologia*, any IV, núm. 32 (juliol-agost de 1929), pp. 3-8.

Positivism emerges from the lively opposition to the metaphysical constructions of romantic philosophy. But its deeper roots are in the premises of Renaissance philosophy. The ideological structures of metaphysics are opposed to the immediate confirmation of facts. It is necessary to ignore the “ideas” and pay attention to the “things” offered by well controlled experiments. Mathematical physics, the favorite child of modern times, offers an excellent example. The theory, in its short history, is a marvelous story of sure, constant progress without hesitations or detours. In practical culture, the past century has been an apotheosis for physics.

So one must follow the path of physics and apply the powerful efficiency of its methodology: don't accept anything unsupported by experiments; determine carefully the regularity of its legal course. Experiment and mathematics are the alpha and omega of the structure of knowledge.

Pay attention to facts, limit oneself to experiments, ignore “ideas” and deal with “things”. But what are these “things”? Not everything that common sense says is a thing is accepted as one by science. One must distinguish between real and illusory factors. Science is not a simple photograph of reality. Control and selection are necessary. The brute experiment is submitted to methodical elaboration. The only things which can be included in science are those which resist rigorous, methodical analysis. Appearances are sometimes deceiving. One must distinguish appearance from reality. To understand this, the only path is that of implacable analysis of experience, decomposition of reality in its irreducible factors. Only that which resists such analysis can be admitted as true reality.

Here, too, physics serves as a model. The result of its analysis is the reduction of physical reality to atomic corpuscles. But the corpuscles only have a hypothetical reality. Physics exercises its fascination over the whole society. But, in turn, psychological science, reduced to “physics” (Aristotle said that psychology is the physics of the soul), reacts against it and imposes the task of revision on it. The immediate reality of experience must be opposed to the hypothetical “constructs” of physics. Atomic reality is not a given. To be real, it must be perceived. Reality, in the end, is reduced to perception. *Esse est percipi* said Bishop Berkeley. Psychological analysis of perception turns all things to sense content.

All things real or illusory, obvious or hypothetical, rose, centaur, star or atom, are sensations or combinations of sensations. The sensations are the only given. It is therefore the only thing which can be accepted without a doubt.

This conclusion of positivism, reached when it is self-coherent, is the beginning of the end. The Greeks knew it, remember Protagoras and Plato, and modern science has confirmed it. Sensation depends radically on the

sensor, and therefore on the subject that perceives it. A great positivist, Taine, affirms that the world is a “normal hallucination”. Things turn into “contents” of conscience. If the subject disappears, the Cosmos disappears.

And so the physical world is reduced to the multiform flux of sense experiences. “Things” disappear, they are no longer independent units which persist through changes. The only indisputable reality is the reality of change. The old “substance” desegregates into its “accidental” elements. Only phenomena, that is, “appearances”, offer a firm guarantee of reality. Reality, paradoxically, is reduced to immediate experience. The rest are “ideas”, inconsistent fantasies.

There still remains, however, a fixed center of reference. Appearances appear to “someone”. The reality of the subject does not seem to be in doubt. However, rigorous subjective analysis destroys its unity, and thereby, its consistency. The ties of memory: brief, changing and unsure, are the simple result of mechanical associations among sensations. The “subject”, the same as in substantial “things”, never appears. The Cosmos takes on a spectral quality. All points of support disappear. The scurrying kaleidoscope of sensation, dazzling, formless and fluffy, is all that is left.

So positivism, which began with the noble desire for truth and reality, ended up dissolving all truth and reality. The world and science slip through its fingers. We’ve lost all frames of reference. Forms of pragmatism appear as precarious solutions.

At this moment, in connection with the reconstructive efforts of Neokantian idealism, the work of Husserl and his followers appears in the evolutionary curve of western thought. In opposition to sensational positivism, it affirms that the fundamental principles of science, the laws of pure logic and mathematics, if viewed without prejudice, are irreducible for any fact, they are a priori universal, necessary and eternal. Empirical laws are particular and contingent, they depend on the flow of the experiment and depend on its course and are, by definition, apparently true, as apparently as one likes, but no more than apparently, and exact within the limits of actual experience. The laws of logic and mathematics are independent of experience, anterior and posterior to all experience, immediate and evident. They don’t give the appearance of truth, but truth; their validity is for all time and absolute.

But the laws of mathematics and classical logic have no dominion over what is given immediately or a priori. They constitute but a minimum part of ideal reality. Next to them, and above them, there must be a discipline of a priori, which includes all possibilities of thought and being. It is the return of the *mathesis universalis* begun by Leibniz and widely developed by modern mathematical logic.

Notice that the a priori indicated here is not a spiritual function nor an activity to give structure to awareness, in the Kantian sense. It's much more a fundamental structure of the being, irreducible to the chaos of flowing sensations. In this sense it is given to us, it becomes evident to us, it is the object of immediate intuition, parallel to sense intuition.

We have two essential results which set us above the positivist conception of science and the Cosmos: 1st, an objective structure, independent of all spiritual and physical events, which conditions and rules all events; 2nd, the possibility of intuiting non-sensual realities given by their own evidence, with surer evidence, than the contents of sensation.

Without leaving awareness, and one should underline this fine limit, awareness takes on a polar structure. Subject and object are irreducibly opposed. It is essential to the subject the reference to the object. The fact of the reference, directly or by mental intention, constitutes the essence of the phenomenon of awareness.

Observe, however, that neither of the terms of the polar relationship, neither subject nor object, are considered "reality", as empirical or metaphysical existences. In this sense, positivism is taken to its ultimate logical consequences and its most exact realization. Ancient philosophy rushed to consider the object as an indisputable metaphysical reality. Modern philosophy, since Descartes, but especially since Hume, corrects the innocence of that realism but incurs in a new error, and in the end, in a new bit of naivete. From the fact that one can conceive nothing outside of the dominion of awareness, one concludes things are given within awareness, considering this to be the maximum reality, the product of a spiritual substance.

In both cases, the innocence is patent. The truth is that one cannot conceive anything with evidence from outside awareness. But awareness is not a reality, but an ideal state, the ideal place where, by definition, the polar extremes of subjective and objective, together and inseparable, meet. Object without subject is nothing; but the other way around is nothing, either. The only thing which is evident is the fact of the coexistence of all knowledge. The problem of the existence of each is a second order problem.

The partial positivism of modern philosophy is opposed to total positivist phenomenology. Nothing not given to us can be accepted. We must pay attention to appearance, to phenomena³. But whatever is given to the intuition must be taken first hand, without deformation; it must be taken within the limits in which it is given without extending it by better or worse founded hypotheses nor damaging it by the use of our active faculties. In other words: philosophy, in its ultimate foundations, must be pure speculation, as in

speculum, pure observation without the intervention of all that is offered to immediate awareness and within the limits in which it is offered to us. Philosophy must be pure theory. Its attitude, in juxtaposition with the practical attitude, must be strictly descriptive, spectacular.

The world is considered a pure spectacle, and as a show it must be viewed clearly, intact, to see exactly how it appears, that is, how it is.

From this point of view, phenomenological description tries to find the essential structure of awareness, that is, the immediate being, within its guidelines and their fine detail.

Now awareness, the pure appearance of things, the world as it appears, offers, on one hand a fundamental structure derived from the fact of its irreducible polarity. We have, on the one hand, the center of reference, the I, from which infinite rays head out toward things. But this I refers to things by intentional acts which are constituted on their own terms. And the act refer to objects by sensory content, which is their amorphous matter. Dead, insignificant sensations are given life by acts of reference which give them meaning and spiritual content. This insufflation gives the sensations meaning, refers them to something, they have physiognomy and coherence. Therefore they fill with spirituality and are connected to an object, which is their ideal state and ultimate reason for being. Sensitivity is the matter of awareness, blind and formless. The acts which animate it and give it structure constitute its noetic aspect. The objects referred to and their ideal structure are the noema. It is a nomenclature of classical lineage but full of new potential.

So phenomenology, in its infinite task must establish, in each of these aspects, the essential structures which inform it. Next to the noematic structures of pure logic and *mathesis universalis* one must establish the axiological and ethical objects in fine detail, which will form the basis of a formal ontology that can study the fundamental way of being possible in each of these domains.

This task has been most heavily cultivated by Husserl and his immediate disciples. Some of them, for example Max Scheller, have lead the way to a new, realistic metaphysics which lies beyond the intentions and purposes if pure phenomenological research.

Noetic studies have been, so far, less heavily cultivated. Husserl starts with them in his basic work and continues with them in his university classes. He tries to establish the essential structure of acts, by which the subject makes reference to objects. It is through the dynamic aspect of awareness that the vital movement that gives structure and meaning becomes clear. It tries to establish the essential relations between "I" and awareness which develops in time. A new force appears and the classic problems of personality and its development in time, as well as the consideration of time as pure duration in

relation to a cosmic time, are planted in new terms, and through it all, there are new perspectives on the eternal problems of awareness and being.

But that, which has been the object of outstanding work, will be the subject of the next article.

Translation from Catalan by Dan Cohen