

Unexplained Phenomena in Science

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Abstract

While the enterprise of modern science seeks to explain phenomena, its own methodology (viz., the scientific method) tends to blind scientists both to phenomena in their original, pre-scientific context and to the very nature or essential motive of science. In order to explain phenomena as they are we need to see them on their own ground or in their own genesis. This applies to the phenomenon of science, as well. Science itself begs to be explained pre-scientifically, or more precisely it begs for an explanation unfolding out of an exploration of the hiatus between science and its pre-scientific world. Only by standing *phenomenologically* in the interstice between the scientific and the pre-scientific can we truly explain the phenomenon of science, thereby exposing ourselves to an understanding of phenomena as they are and not merely as they are supposed to be relatively to ends alien to them.

Keywords

science, modern reason, phenomenology, platonism, technocracy

Introduction

In his 1954 *Crisis of the European Sciences*, Edmund Husserl drew to public attention the bankruptcy of modern rationalism, exposing modern science's incapacity to account for phenomena *as such*. Modern science fails to *understand* what it sees, what it is *given* to see,

insofar as modern science remains constitutionally blind to all that transcends the logic of integration into a mechanistic universe of science’s own making (Ellul, 2018; Olson, 2015; Robson, 2023; Schaefer, 2022). Modern science or reason *uses* and allows us to use phenomena, *as if* it understood them; as if to understand phenomena were simply to integrate them within science’s own world of mathematical abstractions. Integration at a cost: modern reason meddles in abstractions mistaken for phenomena themselves, these being originally or constitutionally rooted in all that must transcend the grasps of modern science, namely a “fullness of being” (Desmond, 2020; Andreacchio, 2023) irreducible to mere appearances, all the more where these are technologically mediated (as in the case of microscopic vision).

In stark opposition to a classical Platonic tradition of interpretation of phenomena, Niccolò Machiavelli taught the world he inaugurated to treat phenomena or the contents of our ordinary experience in terms of “facts” (Mansfield, 2018, 2023) cut off from any metaphysical dimension; “data” ready for integration in the building of a new world characterized by “new ways and orders” (*modi ed ordini nuovi*):¹ new ways of conceiving human action and new orders or forms of authority into which to fuel and channel our passions, or the earthly contents/motion of our imagination (Strauss, 1957, 2014). Modern man’s “new ways” entail a new sense of right and wrong cut off from metaphysical or theological concerns: a new *morality* proper to a new *anthropology*; a new sense of what man is concretely, autonomously of any transcendent mind. Man as he is *formally* cut off from what man ought to be. “Formally” here signals the symbolic character of the Machiavellian lesson. Modern man is abstracted from transcendent ends only *mathematically*. Why? He is abstracted into what Descartes would introduce as a “thinking thing” (*res cogitans*) for the sake of justifying the project of *building* our ends universally, as opposed to *receiving* them in a theological-political context. The modern universal comes to replace an old nexus between the human and the divine, as the presumed synthesis of human particularity and divine universality. A new “historical” synthesis replacing the Christian promise of a synthesis, or the Christian “good news” that the two—the human and the divine—are bound to each other in an indissoluble, timeless, living or spiritual “ring” (Shakespeare’s term for classical Platonism’s *circulum divinus*)(Claessens, 2014).²

Far from being established as concretely autonomous, the modern “self” is defined by a logic analyzing man in function of a mechanistic universe dominated by mechanical laws that compel all nations to strive for final integration in a thoroughly mechanistic society, a regime mirroring its ontological ground, what the 19th century spoke of as “the Death of God” (Nietzsche’s “abyss”).

Methodology

In order to fairly assess what phenomena remain unexplained by modern science, we need to “bracket” phenomenologically modern “scientific” assumptions concerning method. While Descartes taught us to define a method of inquiry prior to or independently of our embarking in any concrete examination of the phenomenal world—which Descartes notoriously reduces formally or provisionally to the status of inherently meaningless material (*res extensa*)—the call to assess phenomena that modern science might have failed to explain, possibly by having failed to identify them to begin with, demands a direct encounter with phenomena, whereby our very “scientific method” is exposed as a phenomenon among pre-scientific ones begging for explanation. For this reason, the present study adopts as its “methodology” a phenomenological “non-methodology” characteristic of Socratic “zetetic

1 See Machiavelli (2000), Proem to Book 1.

2 Shakespeare addresses the problem of “the ring” most notably throughout his *Romeo and Juliet*.

skepticism” (Gildin 1997, p. 132),³ an investigative stance situated not against, but at the heart of common sense, where phenomena are not encountered yet as abstract “scientific data,” but as pre-scientific problems pertaining to a decisively familiar tension between political immanence and theological transcendence.

Results

Modern science is found to have failed altogether to explain *any* phenomena aside from the practice of accounting for selective ones strictly in function of a “scientific” objective coinciding with the rise of a purely mechanistic Regime beyond the limits of pre-scientific “closed societies”. The theological-political problem that modern science has long tended to obscure resurfaces today under the guise of a technocratic order to which our scientists remain, if only haplessly, subservient. Technocracy reminds us of our pre-scientific theological-political predicament in the very act of pretending to solve theological-political problems. For the technocratic “solution” emerges today, not as eradicating our problems, but as rendering them utterly incomprehensible to us. Technocratic science has alienated us from our concrete problems, no less than from the phenomenal content of our experience unmediated by technology. Our science has thus fostered alienation, rather than understanding; and alienation has bred strife or war, and the rise of an obscurantist mechanistic politics (*realpolitik*), the time-bomb of global “chaos management”. Yet, our very mode of investigation points to a way out of the contemporary crisis of science. Hence the conclusive appeal to a Platonic, poetic-philosophical restoration of science.

Discussion

The contemporary rise of technocracy confirms that liberation from a “medieval” God goes hand in hand with subjection to a modern Machine (See Adams, 1900). Technocracy’s demand is unequivocal: integration in the process of bringing about the virtual apotheosis of a radically mechanistic or essentially godless regime. Whether or not our scientists are aware of it, the technocratic regime that supports their work is the very regime they work to consolidate. Such is the *forma mentis* of our modern sciences, a “boundary of thought” that logically blinds our sciences to all that does not conform to it. It will blind our scientist to *questions* presupposed by the “historical” logic of technocracy; it will consequently blind him to the truth about all phenomena, including that of our science. For the technological imperative distracts our science from its own dawn, compelling us to regard it as a mere “datum” in a mechanically evolutionary context, as opposed to recognizing it in its originally theological-political context, where the *idea* of modern science responds to a *problem* transcending the boundaries of any technological logic. Indeed, our sciences assume that the problem they respond to is originally devoid of any substance; that it is merely “formal,” the way Hegel’s original “God” is a mere or nominal universal to be *realized* throughout “History”.

In sum, what modern science fails to explain is all that does not depend upon its own *nominalistic* premise, as well as the premise itself, which tends to be systematically eclipsed by its operationalizing. We are supposed to be able to explain *everything*, but our explanatory powers presuppose *de facto* the non-existence of anything that cannot be explained by our mechanistic sciences. In this crucial respect, our sciences are tautological: they seek what they need to triumph, or to bring about the triumph of a regime they serve as handmaidens.

3 On classical, Aristotelian phenomenology, see Klein (1964).

Leo Strauss exposed pertinent features of the Machiavellian-Spinozist foundations of modern science. Writing of Spinoza as “hardheaded, not to say hardhearted, pupil of Machiavelli and philological critic of the Bible,” Strauss noted that

“Spinoza restored the dignity of speculation on the basis of modern philosophy or science, of a new understanding of ‘nature’. He thus was the first great thinker who attempted a synthesis of pre-modern (classical-medieval) and of modern philosophy. His speculation resembles neo-Platonism: he understands all things as proceeding from, not made or created by, a single being or origin; the One is the sole ground of the Many. Yet he no longer regards this process as a descent or decay, but as an ascent or unfolding: the end is higher than the origin. According to his last word on the subject, the highest form of knowledge, which he calls intuitive knowledge, is knowledge not of the one substance or God, but of individual things or events: God is fully God, not qua substance or even in His eternal attributes, but in His noneternal modes understood *sub specie aeternitatis*. The knowledge of God as presented in the first part of the *Ethics* is only universal or abstract; only the knowledge of individual things or rather events qua caused by God is concrete” (Strauss, 1997, p. 155).

Modern science inverts ancient monistic Platonism (itself a synthesis of Plato and pre-Socratic “materialism”), converting it into a progressive enterprise that, as Strauss notes further, “prepares German idealism” in the spirit of modern “commercialism” (Strauss, 1997). By the same token, Spinoza comes to replace ends that are both natural and rational with ends that are rational and *historical*, or “ideals” including that of God; whence the rise of a new universal/open society, “a new kind of Church”—“A Christianity without dogmas and sacraments” and incarnating “not only emancipation but secular redemption” in the name of “the True, the God, and the Beautiful” (Strauss, 1997, p. 156).

It is the very progressive character of modern science that blinds it both to itself and to its ground or essential motive, namely a will to resolve the conflict between the present as immanence and its transcendent source—a present order of things (*status quo*) traditionally represented by sacred authorities or priests, and a transcendence traditionally represented by mystics or prophets. In Strauss’s words, Spinoza’s modernity was to resolve “the conflict between prophet and priest, between the inspired and the uninspired, between profound subterranean Judaism and official Judaism [that was] legalistic and hence rationalistic” (Strauss, 1997, p. 157). Legalistic Judaism would be supported by a conventionalist reading of Platonic theology identifying God as a demiurge “looking up to the unchangeable, lifeless ideas” (Strauss, 1997).⁴ A rationalistic conception of nature would then come to support a rationalistic conception of divine transcendence. An old priestly cast would yield to a new cast of *scientific* “priests” (Sorell, 2013)—the heroes of a universal Church or Open Society.

In our Open Society, the conflict between immanence and transcendence (and its respective representatives) is supposed to be resolved *technically* and so in terms of ends that are in principle resolvable in terms of means, or a present unconcerned with any end irreducible to it. Hence Strauss’s indication that “Spinoza lifts Machiavellianism to theological heights” (see Strauss, 1997, p. 155). This “idealization” of a technical or legalistic approach to our everyday theological-political problems comes at a dire price: it blinds us to the proper nature of our problems as they emerge or appear to us, as *phenomena*. What is more, the binding of reason or science to “laws” blinds our scientists to the nature of reason itself, of a reason that is born *naturally* in response to laws and is thus not based on any law. The universalism of modern science is won at the price of relinquishing the freedom of classical (both ancient and medieval) rationalism, a freedom that had made outward concessions so as not to condemn itself

4 On the shortcomings of such a reading of Plato, see Andreacchio (2023).

to betraying its proper cause inwardly.

The 19th century “Romantic” movement reacted to modern rationalism’s blindness by reinventing transcendence, including the “inward” dimension of phenomena, in “subjective” terms and thus in such a way as to complete, rather than counter early-modern science’s formal alienation from all that transcends its mechanistic logic. The Romantic did not return to any divine perfection of reason, but to the irrational exalted for the plain fact of its not conforming to human reason. God becomes a “higher power,” rather than a higher, “perfect reason” (*perfecta ratio*) compatible with a lower, human reason (Wood, 1972). The way to God is no longer natural reason, but natural *sentiment* or *feeling*.

The conversion from premodern theology to a modern theology of sentiment depended on a novel conception of reason as tied to *laws*, a legalistic conception that was as strict as it was unnatural to the common man—to common sense. A reason that sought to overthrow common sense by exposing the mechanisms underlying all spiritual endeavors. Having accepted this *modern* conception of reason, modern theology could not help embracing a Romantic conception of the human-divine nexus whereby reason would be reduced to the status of mere and provisional instrument to justify belief. Classical philosophy, as well as the medieval understanding of philosophy as *ancilla theologiae* would need to be reinvented. Philosophy’s service of theology would come to be defined in merely *technical* terms. Philosophy would not help us understand our divine ends, or the essential content of our faith; it would merely serve us to purge our language of historical incongruities, helping us become historically “critical,” teaching us how to read and speak in a historical context. Philosophy could help us articulate more sophisticated, nuanced, self-consistent, self-conscious, even “scientific” accounts of our beliefs and feelings about transcendence. In short, our new or newly conceived philosophy could help us frame our subjective faith objectively and so relatively to a world of scientifically-defined “objects”.

Our science functions precisely thus: it accounts for the context of our subjectivity in terms of objective fuel for the subjectivity; it analyses the world as sheer material supporting modern man’s self-consciousness, his sense of freedom. Accordingly, we are raised to conceive the world reductionistically, as a machine allowing us to embrace divine transcendence unburdened by old religious limitations or dogmas, but also by a reason conceived, no longer as purely natural, but as historical. As Strauss pointed out in his 1953 *Natural Right and History*, the only politically relevant defense left of natural reason is that of Catholics (especially neo-Thomists) who, however, have come to read nature in terms of laws and so in an impure way with respect to the premodern understanding of nature as properly devoid of laws.

To be sure, medieval Scholasticism had sought in “natural law” a justification for both reason and the revelation of its divine ground, but unlike modern science’s “laws of nature” Aquinas’s *lex naturalis* is not assumed to be independent of man; it is not a mechanically encrypted and decryptable law that we can know independently of our own moral worth. Though medieval defenses of natural freedom cannot avoid lending the impression that philosophy is bound to laws, it is only with modernity that natural reason is denied the capacity to rise beyond natural laws. These being conceived independently of both man and God, human reason finds itself inexplicably or “unconsciously” bound to them (DiClementi & Langiulli, 2008).

To return to Strauss’s reading of Spinoza, the Machiavellian Dutchman’s motives have tended to be interpreted in a peculiarly modern way, whether as objectively deficient or as subjectively deficient (Strauss, 1997, pp. 165-69). The critics Strauss focuses on are the neo-Kantian Harman Cohen and the “existentialist” Franz Rosenzweig. As far as the former was concerned, Spinoza’s reasoning is not objective enough in the respect that it does not present seamless logical consistency; on the other hand, according to Rosenzweig Spinoza’s reasoning is not *subjective* enough in the respect that it does not appreciate the historical

context to which his thought is purportedly bound. In neither case is Spinoza assessed in function of classical natural reason or for having failed to appreciate the reason of prophets as distinguished from the conventional or law-bound one of priests.

With respect to classical natural reason, Spinoza is not at fault for having lacked in logical consistency or for having failed to appreciate the historicity of human freedom and reason; Spinoza is at fault for having laid the foundations for the rise of modern legalism or positivism, on the one hand, and historicism on the other. Spinoza would be at fault for having eclipsed a freedom compatible with law by being rooted in an intelligent standard for all laws, as Cicero's *natura, optima dux*: "nature excellent guide" to be followed and obeyed just as a god (*tamquam deum*). Ultimately, then, Spinoza's fault would pertain to his inadequate understanding of nature *and* to his having sought to solve a theological-political problem on the basis of his inadequate understanding.

In the modern world, nature ceases to be a perfect guide or living standard for legislators (Cicero, 1988; Strauss, 1952). Necessarily, Spinoza's nature will be incapable of providing law with its end(s). By the same token, law will be concerned with *means* that modern men should use to establish their own ends (since what they regard as "nature" fails to provide us with any), or rather to establish their pleasure as highest end, where the highest pleasure is found in the triumph of one's own will (*ibid.*, 167 and 171). Yet, as long as the Spinozist's will remains unorganized in its opposition to traditional priests, it must fail to impose itself—indeed, to save itself from persecution (Bevir, 2007; Clemons, 2023; Oliveira, 2020; Sorrell, 2013; Vaughan, 1982; Voegelin, 1948). The modern "enlightened" will must learn to oppose and *overcome* that of traditional religious orthodoxies by organizing itself in terms of a universal society/Church that uses laws to empower itself, or whose laws are mechanisms or mere means used to consolidate what Nietzsche would herald as our Will to Power (*der Wille zur Macht*). A new universal mechanically-empowered morality would then replace old, traditional, tribal or sectarian morality, in the name of an Epicurean freedom, and so in accordance with a hedonistic principle.

As Strauss noted, the conflict between unbelief and belief characteristic of the modern world is *moral*, rather than theoretical or intellectual (*ibid.* 170). The new morality of the Open Society is at war with the morality of traditional priests *on legal grounds*; the conflict is between one will and another, between the will of a hedonist bound to technocracy or the rise thereof, and a patriarchal will. On the former front, we have a flat denial of any divine justification for the patriarchy. The priestly, patriarchal will must be deluded. Yet the new universal society goes hand in hand with a scientific morality, a morality that is supposed to be "scientifically" or "critically" purged of all delusion (Bultmann, 1962). Inevitably modern rationalism will seek to bring about a radical conversion of all patriarchies, replacing their claims with an "enlightened" one that finds its validation in a universal regime consecrated to its own power, or the affirmation thereof.

In effect, modern rationalism or science imposes itself as enlightened power overcoming the "natural" limitations of old patriarchal reason, or the science characteristic of closed societies, under the assumption that such a science was as mechanistic or superficial, not to say banal, as modern science. The shortcoming of pre-modern science would have pertained to its lack of awareness of its own evolutionary context and the way material forces affect human consciousness. The very possibility that the rationalism characteristic of closed societies takes its bearing above all from divine intelligence, or intelligence "in nature" *and* beyond any laws, is now inconceivable. The tie between Socrates and Athens, or the genuine character of Socratic *pietas* (devotion to his City's fathers/*patres*), must be dismissed. Science belongs originally to the society of the future, the fully scientific society, the society in which all laws, including all moral codes, are value-free means to the triumph of a reason "beyond

good and evil”.⁵ Yet, such a society is not expected to eradicate all evil the way old patriarchs would propose. In the new society, evil is to be integrated. Indeed, the new society must incarnate a full synthesis of good and evil, a “Hegelian” synthesis in which both good and evil are instrumental to the triumph of reason—both *nominal* virtue and *private* vice, both the pretense of kindness and cruelty behind closed doors, “white-collar” cruelty, or war if only by another name (Clausewitz, 2003).⁶

While such and kindred *phenomena* are most evident to the reason characteristic of a closed society, they remain obscure to modern science, whose success depends in great part on people’s capacity to remain willfully blind to any rational context for the genesis of modern reason, and so too for reason’s evolutionist self-justification. The success of our sciences stands or falls on our scientists’ capacity to publicly discredit and distract from any reflection upon a horizon of understanding within which the whole modern project, including our “historical consciousness” arises and vanishes.

The phenomenon of modern science, indeed of any science whatsoever, remains a mystery even where it is assumed to be grounded absurdly in the absence of any divine intelligence. Consciousness itself, of course, remains a mystery, notwithstanding modern science’s efforts to decrypt thought by way of adapting it to a purely technical society, a “laboratory” world in which we may all coexist by reducing all yearnings for life to cravings for raw survival; all aspirations for eternity to lust for a powerful pretense of eternity.

Modern rationalists might not enjoy relinquishing their freedom to “the Machine,” but they have fed the technological Leviathan, much as “the West” has fed technocratic China (Kubek, 2017). Our generations are learning to see that technology is not a mere tool we can master for hedonistic purposes, but a world that forces upon us an ultimate sacrifice through the abolishment of the private life (Andreacchio, 2021): we are either to embrace the Leviathan with all of our heart, mind and soul, *or* we are to fall in a desert outside of “the Matrix,” a wilderness of non-being in which our identity is completely effaced given that all identity is assumed to be produced strictly by and within the Matrix. *Tertium non datur*. The very possibility of a life dedicated to an identity given by nature or God is ignored at best, where it is not dismissed and despised as an “existential threat” to the integration of all pleasure within the Machine-Society (Pelluchon, 2014; Caramani, 2017).

Today, Kant’s “Kingdom of Ends” (*Reich der Zwecke*) reveals itself concretely as the “idealized” or “virtual” guise of a mechanistic regime, a regime of pure means, in which “the end in itself” (that which man is supposed to be treated as) coincides with an “expendable number” given the radical disjunction between name and thing, between universal and particular, between what things are supposed to be and what they are once they are alienated from a non-evolutionary horizon of meaning in which the Omega of life constitutes no improvement over the Alpha (Strauss, 1981).

The Machine that is supposed to guarantee our freedom blinds us both to the phenomenon of freedom and to its ground or proper end. For it feeds us a distorted picture of both: of freedom as a merely “subjective” impulse and of its ground as a merely “objective” boundary of thought. As a result the ancient antagonism addressed by Strauss between the prophet and the priest, or between mysticism and law, is altogether forgotten underneath the antagonists’ historical “sublation” (Hegel’s *Aufhebung*). Even more importantly—for herein we find the key to our present predicament—we remain rather completely alienated from a classical path to transcendence that does not conform to Hegelian expectations, a path by which the prophet projects himself through Socratic irony in the element of public opinion, to serve as *ancilla*

5 “The use of reason in moral actions is, in Hume’s view, confined simply to working out the means by which we may attain the end set by our non-rational drives and desires. Reason of itself is ‘utterly impotent’ to excite a desire or propose an end of action”—p. 32 of O’Connor (1967): Ch. 5 (“Reason, Action and Morality”), 32-45.

6 See Clausewitz (2003), Ch. 1: “What is War?”.

ecclesiae: not as founder of a universal Church, but as mediator/interpreter for closed societies.

This classical poetic-philosophical alternative to modern science exposes us to phenomena hitherto left unexplained by our scientists, phenomena that extend to the very manner of speech of our premodern literary classics. No psychological, social, historical or otherwise physiological reductionism can succeed in accounting for phenomena such as Plato's dialogues, Dante's *Comedy*, or Shakespeare's plays. Such classics invite us to expose ourselves to them, allowing ourselves to be guided by them onto a journey of reflection upon the nature of all phenomena, both human and divine. Yet again, what is reflection outside of the parameters of modern science?

Cartesian modernity has taught us that reflection is first and foremost a turn to one's Self; it has taught us to be "authentic" or honest to *ourselves*.⁷ However, our theocentric premodern classics call us to transcend ourselves through a journey of purgation, of *kenosis* (Nimmo & Johnson, 2022; Guskii, 2022), where reflection consists of exposing or sacrificing the contents of our experience—phenomena insofar as they emerge within the sphere of our ordinary life-experience—to the light of truth or mind. Otherwise put, our Platonic classics call us to purge our imagination by seeking its contents in a purely philosophical context, or on the plane of "intellective intuition" (as pure act of understanding) (Nieuwenhove, 2021)⁸.

What modern science fails to explain, let alone understand, is not only what a phenomenon is in and of itself (the nature of phenomena), but also the unique phenomenon of a poetic-philosophical tradition cutting through modernity's false antagonism between belief and non-belief, by exposing belief to its intelligible ground, a ground that naturally is not limited to or by any beliefs.

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⁷ For a recent attempt to project modern/Cartesian self-reflection onto premodern authors, see Franke (2021).

⁸ See Nieuwenhove, 2021; esp. Ch. 2: "Epistemological Issues: Contemplation, *Intellectus*, and *Intuitus Simplex*," pp. 23-48. See further Roland-Gosselin (1930). For a recent attempt to reconcile Aquinas with Cartesian "self-reflection," see Cory (2014).

96-102.

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Author Biography

Marco Andreacchio awarded a doctorate from the University of Illinois for his interpretation of Sino-Japanese philosophical classics in dialogue with Western counterparts and a doctorate from Cambridge University for his work on Dante's Platonic interpretation of religious authority. Andreacchio has taught at various higher education institutions and published systematically on problems of a political-philosophical nature. Editorial member of *Dogma* journal.

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