

THE 'PHENOMENOLOGICAL FALLACY'— A REPLY TO J. R. SMYTHIES

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In attempting to demonstrate the fallaciousness of my account of what I have called (Place, 1956) the 'phenomenological fallacy', Smythies (1957) appears to have misunderstood what I meant by that term. He seems to think that on my view to come out with a statement like 'there is a green image in *O*'s mind' is to commit a logical fallacy. Statements by themselves can be true or false, meaningful or meaningless, but only arguments and inferences can be valid or fallacious. To commit a logical fallacy is to draw a conclusion which is not justified or demanded by the premisses of the argument. To say that an inference is fallacious is not to imply that the conclusion is necessarily false, merely that it does not follow from the premisses.

The phenomenological fallacy in my sense is the fallacy of supposing, for example, that the statement '*X* looks green to *O*' commits us logically and inescapably to the conclusion 'there is a green image in *O*'s mind'. This is not to say that the statement 'there is a green image in *O*'s mind' is logically untenable. It may be possible, as Smythies points out, to develop a sort of sense-datum language in which the statement 'there is a green image in *O*'s mind' is used where we should normally say 'so and so looks green to *O*'.

If such a language were generally adopted, there is a sense in which anyone who said '*X* looks green to *O*' would be committed on switching to the sense-datum language to the statement 'there is a green image in *O*'s mind', just as anyone who said 'the sky is blue' would be committed on translating his remarks into French to the statement 'le ciel est bleu'. But it would still be fallacious to deduce from the premisses 'images in the mind are sometimes green', 'brain processes cannot be green' the conclusion 'images cannot be brain processes', since words like 'green' in the sense-datum language would not mean what they mean in our ordinary physical object language to which statements about brain processes belong.

Another possibility which Smythies seems to be hinting at in the latter part of his paper is that, although we cannot legitimately infer the real properties of images in the mind from the apparent properties of things in the environment, we might conceivably have other reasons, perhaps of an experimental nature, for adopting the view that there is something literally green, i.e. green in the sense that grass, corroded copper and the 'Go' signal of the traffic light are green, in *O*'s mind whenever something looks green to him. If such a hypothesis were established beyond reasonable doubt on other grounds, the inference from the apparent properties of things to the real properties of images in the mind would no longer be a fallacy, since it would be supported by the major premiss 'whenever something appears to have a certain property, there is an image in the mind which actually has that property'.

While this possibility must undoubtedly be conceded, it is difficult to see any reason

for giving serious consideration to a hypothesis for which there is no empirical evidence, which is inconsistent with the whole trend of scientific thinking and to which no precise meaning has yet been given.

REFERENCES

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SMYTHIES, J. R. (1957). A note on the fallacy of the 'phenomenological fallacy'. *Brit. J. Psychol.* **48**, 141-4.

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