Editorial

by **Christopher R. Stones**

Editor-in-Chief

A phenomenological approach to social science research offers a radical alternative to traditional understandings of what we believe we are able to know about the world and being human. A phenomenological approach, as with many other qualitative approaches, but in contrast to a positivist natural science perspective, entails at least the following four elements:[1]

- A focus on human experience as a field within its own right;

- The concern with meaning and the way in which this arises in experience;

- A focus on description and relationships rather than interpretation and causality;

- Recognition of the role played by the researcher in co-constituting the object under investigation, i.e. the researcher is always, by default, part of the research context and can never be completely removed.

A phenomenological approach is constantly sensitive to the context within which it seeks to reveal the structure of experience: The raison d'etre of a phenomenological approach being to obtain rich

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[1]After Darren Langdridge (2007). *Phenomenological Psychology: Theory, research and method.* Essex, UK: Pearson Educational.

descriptions of experience so that we can understand the lived-world in new, subtle and different ways.

Broadly speaking, phenomenology has its beginning with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and owes its further development to Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) and those who followed him, especially Sartre (1905-1980), Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) and de Beauvoir (1908-1986). Over time, phenomenology has had a marked influence on many human science disciplines, especially those that focus on "things in their appearing" as phenomenology is interested in describing the world as it appears to people.

While the focus on experience is core to all phenomenological approaches as is the notion of intentionality and the relationship between the way in which the world appears and our experience of it, not all phenomenological approaches employ the same methodology, e.g., the epoché, phenomenological reduction, or even the notion of imaginative variation. Accordingly, the papers published in this current edition - all phenomenological in their approach - adopt different methodologies but have in common as their motive, the desire to better understand human experience and the world in which we live.

The first paper in this current edition, "The Essentials of Existential Psychoanalysis" by Neil Soggie (Atlantic Baptist University, Canada), discusses the essential requirements for existential therapy, particularly during the initial phase of therapist-patient engagement. Through the purposive sampling of the membership roster of professional existential therapy associations, a small sample of professional therapists was asked to provide a description of what

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they believed were the most important elements to be structured during the initial phase of therapy. Three themes were identified as being of paramount importance in this initial phase of therapist-patient engagement in determining the effectiveness of therapy. These were the need to have an approach that would allow the therapist to reach a rapid understanding of the nature of the client's existential being; familiarity with the heritage and cultural context within which the patient lives and, finally, the use of imaginative techniques rather than traditional psychoanalytic interviews.

The second paper, "On the Phenomenon of Inserted Thoughts: A Critique of Shaun Gallagher's Neurophenomenological Account of Thought Insertion" by Steve Schofield (Murdoch University, Western Australia.) deals with the phenomenon of inserted thoughts[2] and is a critique of Shaun Gallagher's neurophenomenological account of thought insertion. Schofield argues that this typically schizophrenic symptom raises difficult philosophical concerns regarding the agency of our thoughts. While Gallagher argues that protention[3] underlies our sense of agency and that therefore the experience of inserted thoughts may occur as result of an intermittent failure in protentional functioning, this early Husserlian account faces problems on phenomenological grounds in that the absence of protention cannot fully explain the loss of agency for the thinking which characterizes the experience of thought insertion. Schofield contextualizes his neurophenomenological exposition by considering alternative cognitive accounts of thought insertion and asserts that despite their merits, they nonetheless remain unable to account fully for thought insertion phenomena, and that it is perhaps more fruitful to understand thought insertion as being a form of uncontrollable passive thinking.

Moving away from the realm of pathology, Kirsten Erlandsson (Karolinska Institutet, Sweden) and her colleagues explore the meaning of the father's presence in relation to their full-term healthy child in the early neonatal period of existence. In a project entitled "Fatherhood as Taking the Child to Oneself: A Phenomenological Observation Study after Caesarean Birth", Erlandsson's team videotaped father-child interactions at a maternity clinic and conducted a phenomenological analysis of the recorded data. Overall, the outcome of their research points to a specific process-structure as the new fathers experienced being-a-father through their relationship with their newborn child. This paper confirms previous accounts of new fathers' experiences but, additionally, reveals a patterned ebbing and flowing variation in the father's involvement which is not only in-presence but also in-time. Erlandsson's findings, it is suggested, could be useful in guiding the attitudes and expectations of those professionally involved in postnatal care and community health, as well as for parents attending antenatal courses, especially where caesarean births are planned.

The fourth paper entitled "On the Sense of Ownership of a Community Integration Project: Phenomenology as Praxis in the Transfer of Project Ownership from Third-Party Facilitators to a Community after Conflict Resolution" (Maurice Apprey, University of Virginia, USA) explores a conceptualization of the phenomenology of ownership using, as an exemplar, the vehicle of a non-governmental organization to transfer knowledge from practitioners to the indigenous parties to show how a sense of ownership can be progressively developed despite previous antagonism between parties regarding community structures. A phenomenological account of this knowledge transfer is given, showing the contrast between Husserl's transcendental project (which seeks universal and broad essences) and psychology which conversely is highly contextualized. Apprey's paper seeks to consolidate a conflict resolution model using lessons drawn from this study and from the literature to assess where changes in practice and reconceptualization may be required.

In a paper entitled "Language: Functionalism versus Authenticity", Peter McGuire sets out to demonstrate that a phenomenological reflection on language highlights possibilities of authenticity in communication and, as such, provides a complement to the dominant linguistic perspectives which range from the syntactic and grammatical and the systematic functional through to Saussurean linguistics. McGuire's paper argues that while the syntactic and grammatical perspective and Saussurean linguistics are both self-contained, with the former presenting language as institutionalized and authoritarian, and the latter as complex and technical, the phenomenological understandings of language articulated by Merleau-Ponty assist us to formulate understandings of language which are highly significant to our daily experiences of institutions and language. McGuire argues that the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty elucidates the nature of expression,

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[2] An experience frequently reported by schizophrenics that thoughts are being inserted into their minds by other persons or forces.

[3] The equivalent of retention with respect to the future.

and transcends cultural, social and linguistic boundaries. The paper concludes by considering ways to reconcile the impetus in language-teaching towards the language of institutional authority on the one hand and individual self-expression on the other.

Arguing that the core of Husserlian phenomenology is 'evidence', Juha Himanka in his paper "How Does a Dark Room Appear: Husserl's Illumination of the Breakthrough of *Logical Investigations*" - argues that Husserl's notion of 'evidence' as elaborated in his *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) is essentially ontological in contrast to conventional philosophical understandings of truth as being epistemological in nature. Emphasizing that Husserl's main point in the *Sixth Investigation* was that we can 'see' how evidence functions when we compare something in the fullness of its presence with the emptiness of its absence, Himanka's paper considers Husserl's offering of a room where lights go off in order to show the breakthrough for phenomenology achieved by *Logical Investigations* in its move beyond logic and epistemology to the primary level of pre-theoretical experience as being the reality of the real.

The current edition of the *IPJP* concludes with two book reviews. The first by Tere Vadén looks at the work by Gordon Globus *Quantum Closures and Disclosures: Thinking-Together Postphenomenology and Quantum Brain Dynamics* which is part of a series entitled *Advances in Consciousness Research*. The book explores the intersection of two seemingly irreconcilable discourses (quantum brain dynamics and post-phenomenology) and Vadén's view is that its aim is to open up a common space of investigation in view of the resonance - in places - of QBD and post-phenomenology. The second work reviewed (by Penny Bernard) is Hillary Webb's *Companion Guides to Contemporary Shamanism* which incorporates two distinct but related texts that seek to understand the key themes that inform contemporary shamanic practices drawn from an eclectic variety of indigenous earth-based spiritualities.

In concluding that this editorial I wish to thank not only the *IPJP* reviewers and staff, but also the authors for their contributions to this edition of the journal without whom none of this would have been possible. As in the past, we welcome comment for our readers.

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About the Author

Professor Stones has a lengthy academic and research career, having taught in the areas of clinical, social and research psychology. He is the Vice-President of the South African Association for Psychotherapy and past Chairman of the South African Society for Clinical Psychology. He is also an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society and on the editorial panels of two other on-line journals. He has published extensively using both natural science quantitative methodologies as well as phenomenological approaches particularly in the areas of religious experience, identity and change management. Professor Stones has a part-time clinical practice with a focus on adolescents, young adults and families as well as individual long-term psychotherapy. Additionally, he is regularly appointed as an "expert witness" in medico-legal (civil and criminal) court proceedings.

His areas of research interest fall into the field of attitudes and attitude change, phenomenological praxis and methodologies, abnormal psychology and psychotherapy, spirituality and religious experience.

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