



Editorial

by **Christopher R. Stones**

Editor-in-Chief

Despite significant advances in our understanding of human behaviour and experience, there nonetheless remain widespread controversies in contemporary psychology regarding the appropriate best-practice methods and approaches for observing consciousness and the role that inner experience should play in psychological theorizing. To a significant extent, these differing - some might argue conflicting - orientations reflect methodological differences between natural science and human science approaches to the understanding of lived phenomena. In a recent article in *American Psychologist*, Howard Kendler (2005) argues that while philosophical phenomenology inter alia employs a human science approach to interpreting psychological and existential material (in other words, it seeks to understand human behaviour in terms of subjective existence), the natural sciences by contrast have adopted a methodological approach that is concerned primarily with cause-effect relationships as a mode of explanation.

Kendler opens his paper entitled "Psychology and Phenomenology: A Clarification" with the bold statement that "Human existence is dominated by conscious experience" (p. 318) and then proceeds to argue that the science of understanding mind and behaviour must, by necessity, deal with consciousness and conscious experience. He argues that in this regard phenomenology focuses essentially on revealing the subjective aspects of consciousness and strives "...to reveal the core nature of conscious experience free of any scientific consideration or interpretation" (p. 318).

Wilhem Wundt (1832-1920) devoted much of his intellectual life to the consideration that conscious experience is indeed proper subject material for Psychology and, moreover, he gave considerable attention to the issue of how best to understand the functioning - as well as subtle nuances - of consciousness itself. Wundt distinguished between immediate and mediate experience, the former being purely subjective and unmodified by preconceptions or past experience, while he considered mediate experience to be the result of one's conceptualisation within a social context and influenced by one's own life-history. By contrast, William James (1842-1910), simply but elegantly, accepted consciousness as it appears: "Introspective observation is what we have to rely on first and foremost and always" argued James (1890, p. 185). Although both agreed that conscious experience is in a constant state of flux they nevertheless were unable to arrive at consensus regarding the content of consciousness. While Wundt found that consciousness consisted of basic mental elements such as sensations, images and affects, James' "stream of consciousness" consisted of high-level integrated activities such as feelings, cognitions and desires.

While these early psychologists were starting to observe consciousness in an objective (unbiased) fashion, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was similarly seeking to describe consciousness in a manner that was free of preconceptions. He proposed a theory of subjectivity that aimed to reveal conscious experience that would be a reflection of one's inner experiences or what came to be known as one's "life-world". Consequently, while early psychologists were attempting to observe conscious experience as it

appears in a reductionist fashion, Husserl was striving to observe consciousness from the perspective of human existence. Although this difference might appear facile, it nevertheless led to the fundamental distinction between a “natural science” approach and a “human science” approach to the understanding of consciousness and human existence.¹ The comprehension of human action requires an ability to share a person’s conscious experience, and even though this might not be possible in an absolute purist fashion, it still is possible to achieve an understanding of human action without necessarily having to make use of a cause-effect paradigm. In this regard, Polkinghorne (1983) suggested that while

the natural sciences investigate phenomena from the outside with the aim of identifying their causes, [the] human sciences study human phenomena from the inside with the goal of revealing their subjective meaning. (Kendler, 2005, p. 319)

Of course, it should never be forgotten that because a person’s conscious experience is never completely accessible to any other person, the debate over trustworthy representations of consciousness will continue while, by contrast, natural science disagreements can be resolved by direct “public observations” of, for example, the effect of one body or agent upon another (Kendler, 2005, p. 319).

A casual perusal of the literature indicates that there has tended to be a constant shift from, on the one hand, the goal of formulating behavioural theory through to, on the other hand, the goal of interpreting consciousness. Each of these has differing methodological approaches to theory construction: the one goal is that of interpreting human existence while the other aims to explain behaviour. The question obviously arises as to whether there truly is an “unbridgeable gap” (Kendler, 2005, p. 320) between a natural science and a human science approach to the understanding of cognitive behaviour and the mirroring of consciousness. Saul Bellow (1975), a noble Laureate, describes in one of his novels the inability of a character to know the desires of others:

What did I really know of anyone? The only desires I knew were my own and those of nonexistent people like Macbeth or Prospero.

¹ While natural science methodology is appropriate for procedures in chemistry, biology, physics and so on, the human science approach argues that human being is fundamentally different from inanimate objects in that there is the presence of consciousness.

These I knew because the insight and language genius made them clear. (p. 416)

In summing up the main thrust of his paper, Kendler has the following to say regarding phenomenological investigations:

In sum, an intuitively valid description of another person’s conscious experience is akin to a form of artistry. Whether there is any basis to the presumed equivalence is immeasurable. The important point is that a phenomenological conviction is sufficient to justify the conclusion. Phenomenological conclusions, by themselves, can become convictions without additional support. Phenomenological convictions, in an epistemological sense, can be distinguished from scientific conclusions. (p. 320)

Perhaps the difference between a human science approach and that of the natural sciences is best exemplified by considering the conflicting views of Goethe (1749-1832) and Newton (1642-1727) regarding the nature of light and its essence. Goethe argued that white light is a simple and pure experience. On the other hand, Newton was able to demonstrate that white light is a blend of hues that are revealed when light is passed through a prism resulting in a spectrum of colours. Although these fundamental notions of light would thus appear to be radically different, Kendler reminds us that, in a sense, both are correct: White light is simple and pure as it is ordinarily experienced but it can also be blended through a range of hues depending upon one’s methodology. Newton’s empirical approach represents the natural science methodology while Goethe’s is a phenomenological conviction. White light, then, is white-light in our conscious experience even though at a radically different level - that of physics - white light is anything but how it is ordinarily experienced.

In this last edition of the *IPJP* for 2005, the papers presented arise from a firm human science perspective in which “phenomenological conviction” is the driving force leading to appropriate “phenomenological conclusions”.

The opening piece “Dreams and Medicines: The Perspective of Xhosa Diviners and Novices”, written by Manton Hirst, deals with dreams and medicines arising from his work with Xhosa diviners in the Eastern Cape in South Africa. A fully initiated diviner, Dr Hirst has an active indigenous practise and is fluent in the home language (Xhosa) of the Eastern Cape. His paper is based on extensive anthropological

fieldwork that explores the interconnections between ancestors, who purportedly influence the lives of their descendents and communicate with them through dreams, and traditional medicines. His paper argues that the special aptitude or skill of the Xhosa diviner lies not simply in the ability to forecast or dream, but to grasp and articulate the significance underlying or hidden by appearances, whether of the ancestors in dreams or people in divination. To help readers better understand the intricacies of the relationship between ancestors, dreams and medicines, Dr Hirst provides a relatively extensive background to the notion of patrilineal clans, divination and religious beliefs within the local East Cape environment. The paper shows how communicating with ancestors through dreams, for instance, is a central facet of the diviner's intuition and professional activity. Hirst proceeds to present analyses of ancestor dreams within the context of indigenous healing and the use of medicinal plants. In particular, the paper explores the ritual significance of dreams and distinguishes between diviners and herbalists as well as between medicines and charms. Manton Hirst's paper concludes with an examination of traditional Xhosa ideology within contemporary society.

The second paper entitled "The Experience of Male Rape in Non-institutionalized Settings" by Gertie Pretorius and Richard Hull aims to describe the phenomenon of male rape from the victim's perspective. This research relies heavily on transcendental phenomenology methodology (which is clearly described in a step-by-step fashion thus providing a methodological guide for the research novice) in order to create rich descriptions of the lived-experiences of three male survivors of rape. The paper proceeds to argue that the phenomenon of male rape has a dominant structure that is related to the destruction - and then re-construction - of the masculine self. Additionally, it explores several themes that include the characteristics of the assault itself, perceptions and feelings about the treatment and support that the victims received as well as the effects of the assault on the sense of self. Their paper also explores the victims' willingness for future interpersonal disclosure and the significant life changes brought about as a direct consequence of the assault. Pretorius and Hull's paper describes the phenomenon of male rape from a holistic perspective and aims to facilitate further descriptive case law in the hope that this will contribute significantly to a broader knowledge base of male rape and thus assist with its prevention and the subsequent healing process.

The third paper from South Africa in this edition deals with the deeply traumatic experience of parental

bereavement. "Give Sorrow Words: The Meaning of Parental Bereavement" (by Ann-Marie Lydall, Gertie Pretorius and Anita Stuart) embraces the theoretical tenet of hermeneutic phenomenology which is that people seek to create meaning of their experiences. In this regard, the paper outlines several aspects crucial to any hermeneutic phenomenological enquiry (helpful to any methodological novice). Their study is based on lived-experience as interpreted by the research participants themselves through recollections accessed by means of interviews. The authors emphasize the sensitive nature of the research, which was engaging with participants whose adult-child had died as a result of an AIDS-related illness. Using standard interview-recording and transcription processes to derive data, the analyses of the reported lived-experiences of bereavement were interwoven in an attempt to understand how the various experiences related to parental loss. The authors point to common themes that included parent reactions to first learning of the illness of their adult-children through to the experience of being with their dying child, and having to cope with the pain of loss and the concomitant spiritual and existential concerns. Themes of perceived divine retribution and punishment were also common and this placed a particularly heavy burden of sorrow on the grieving parents themselves. Lydall et al's., phenomenological inquiry into the lived-experience of parental bereavement, especially after the death of an adult child as a result of HIV/AIDS provides useful insights into the lived-experience of parental bereavement and the forging of new meaning structures that assist with accommodation to the experienced loss.

Remaining within the Southern Hemisphere, Gabriel Rossouw and David Russell (New Zealand Psychologists), in a paper entitled "Death Mirrors the Spirit of Life", aim to further understand how a soul comes to despair and how the spirit of life is wounded. This question is approached from a Jungian and existential-phenomenological perspective, and from the perspective of death enacted in the form of death-defying acts as a dialectical aspect of being and non-being. Rossouw and Russell argue that death can serve as a reflection of the life lived and the experience of who an individual is. Moreover, the relationship between ego and Self, it is argued, is critical in determining experiential identity. The paper proceeds to argue that when the relationship between ego and Self is fragmented there can arise a sense of omnipotence as the ego identifies with the Self but also, conversely, there can be a profound sense of alienation as the ego renounces itself thereby establishing an "intellectual vacuum" which becomes a substitute for lived-experience. Rossouw and Russell argue that whether there is a sense of

omnipotence or alienation, in both instances there is a growing despair and inauthenticity and the experience of non-being, which death-defying acts attempt to put an end to. This existential dilemma of meaningless and despair is brought into sharp focus by Kierkegaard's (1983) notion of "despair to will to be rid of oneself." The paper concludes that it is only when there is a conscious dialectic between ego and Self that an authentic existence becomes possible and that this represents the ongoing commitment to incarnate the human reality that exists between the world of imagination and the world as it appears to our senses.

The last three articles in the current edition of the journal emanate from authors in the Northern Hemisphere and thus lie beyond the immediate mission of the *IPJP* which is to disseminate research amongst scholars in the Southern Hemisphere. However, it was considered appropriate for the journal to publish these papers since each falls within the broad project of phenomenology and each provides specific insights thus ensuring the journal remain inclusive and faithful to its phenomenological mandate.

The philosophical treatment of friendship has enjoyed a revival in continental philosophy largely due to the influence of Emmanuel Levinas who argued that ethics is *the* proper topic of philosophy - as "first philosophy". Noting this, Jack Marsh in his paper entitled "Friendship Otherwise - Toward a Levinasian Description of Personal Friendship" sets about to deal with the notion of personal friendship, 'otherwise than political.' He argues that a Levinasian reading of intimate and personal friendship suggests that it can be understood as a certain 'fraternity' and thus be legitimately employed in discussing justice and politics although such usage nonetheless trades on a certain equivocation. In constructing an ethics of 'reciprocity', of shared community, where friendship occurs as the mutual striving for the 'good life', for a certain virtue, real community occurs as equal exchange - as a 'fragile balance in which giving and receiving are equal, hypothetically.' Marsh argues that one's ethical intention conditions moral sociality in the communal founding and maintenance of just institutions. In this regard, hermeneutics seeks to make the alien familiar, and deconstruction seeks to show how the familiar is always already alien. Marsh strives to describe personal friendship within both of these movements, that is, Hermeneutics on the one hand and Deconstruction on the other. The paper proceeds by sketching the broad contours of Levinas's thought before offering a phenomenology of personal friendship in the wake of the limits that Levinas thematizes in his own analysis of the ethical

relation. Readings and analyses presented suggest that personal friendship appears as an irreducible excess, reducible to neither ethics nor enjoyment, but nonetheless passing through ethics and enjoyment. Friendship thus marks a space of non-violent familiarity as a site of solidarity between identity and difference.

The next paper ("Higher than Actuality - The Possibility of Phenomenology in Heidegger" by Michael Marder) deals with a schematic analysis of Heidegger's notion of 'possibility' and considers the methodological significance held in Heidegger's conception of what is essential in phenomenology as inhering not in its actuality as a philosophical movement but rather in the understanding of phenomenology as a possibility. Furthermore, the argument is put that the existential possibilities of *Dasein* and of phenomenological research are never distilled in a pure form from the impossible; only in and as the impossible does something like the (always impure) possibility of possibility arise. Moreover, argues Marder, that which is not 'merely possible', that which is other than actuality-in-waiting is, at the same time, possible and impossible. In concluding, the paper points to the efficacy of possibility and its mode of fulfilment as radically different from the actualization of latent potentiality.

The final philosophical treatise in the current edition is that by Steven Segal which deals with "Narcissism, Nationalism and Philosophy in Heidegger". Using the language of Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology as developed in "Being and Time" (1962), Segal's aim is to deconstruct the differences (unpack the dimensions) between Heidegger's political text ("Self Assertion of the German University") and the notion of "willing", and Heidegger's philosophical text ("What is Metaphysics?") with the notion of "dawning". Within the context of these two writings Segal argues that the difference between "willing" and "dawning" provides a basis for conceptualising a difference between Heidegger's politics and his philosophy. In effect, Segal argues that within Heidegger's political text, the attunement of *Dasein* centres on the notion of "willing" what-is, while in his philosophical text it is embedded in the notion of what-is "dawning" on *Dasein*. Defining narcissism as a preoccupation, under conditions of estrangement, with the mirrored self or nation, Segal's paper seeks to understand Heidegger's commitment to the notion of destiny associated with Greek and German philosophical traditions and how this encouraged him to associate with the Nazi socio-political movement (Polt, 1999) during its darkest days and at a time when Heidegger's political text revealed an unwavering commitment to the destiny of the German

people regardless of the imperative of national socialism as espoused by the Nazi movement. In concluding his paper, Segal asserts that the difference between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics revolves around the different ways in which he employs the notion of resoluteness. His philosophy is characterised by a resolved deconstruction of "what-is" while his politics is characterized by a territorialization of "what-is": In his philosophy what-is is said to "dawn" on *Dasein* while in his politics there is a willing of a relationship to what-is.

In drawing this editorial to a close, readers are urged to take seriously the underlying assumption of the *IPJP* that phenomenology provides researchers with a unique research philosophy that allows them to

explore issues central to the question of being human and thus enables the richness of human experience to be explicated. Moreover, it allows researchers to explore topics whose import lies beyond the reach of measurement and calibration, and in areas such as human meaning, values and truthfulness, as well as social relationships, bodily experience, emotional sentiment, mental states, and the contemporary contexts in which these take place.

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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