



Editorial

by **Christopher R. Stones**
Editor-in-Chief

Three thought-provoking articles I recently came across comment on the way in which the changing nature of academic publishing and bibliographic data bases has impacted on the traditional structure and content of editorials. Traditionally, the editorial in a scholarly journal has been aimed at introducing, and in the process reflecting on, the papers included in the edition for which it is intended, relating the thrust of these to the broader discipline and debate in the field. This type of editorial purportedly remains popular with publishers, given their eye on the impact factor, in that, according to Galbán-Rodríguez and Arencibia-Jorge (2014), “the editorial content attracts considerable attention from readers and authors – potential citers. This is partly due to the readability and ease with which busy authors can ‘catch’ the main points” (p. 34) of the papers presented in gist, commented on and contextualised by the journal editor.

Alternatively, as is reportedly increasingly the trend, an editorial may either be aimed at “a development of existing knowledge, proposing some new perspectives or ideas” (Bawden, 2016, p. 2) or “address an issue of the moment, which may or may not be reflected in the issue’s material” (ibid.). As such, an editorial may take as its theme any topic about which the writer holds an opinion. In this regard, Singh and Singh (2006), in answering the question *What Is A Good Editorial?*, emphasise that – along with being “an opinion maker” and as such not only expressing a both “firm” and analytically “balanced” opinion, but being “crusading in its thrust” – most importantly, “a good editorial should be brief” (p. 17).

While broadly in accord with Singh and Singh’s (2006) analysis of a good editorial, Bawden (2016) nevertheless

cautions that “editorials in academic publications ... are not supposed to be opinion pieces”, although, in addressing “an issue of the moment ... an individual perspective, certainly, and a personal opinion, possibly, may be presented” (p. 2).

While this editorial will therefore aim to be at least as brief as possible, it will take the liberty of presenting a personal opinion about “an issue of the moment”.

As Editor-in-Chief of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* for more than a decade, I have found myself in the privileged position of being able to observe changing trends in the nature of the submitted papers claiming to follow a phenomenological stance. While often perplexing at the time, in due course the basis for the turn suddenly noted in paper after paper would, in retrospect, become apparent.

I am therefore reluctant to adopt a restrictive view in defining the parameters of what a phenomenological approach might or should be vis-a-vis either the focus of the journal or the broad field of phenomenological research and thinking. However, over the past few years, it has been my observation that an increasing number of researchers seem not to be differentiating sufficiently between what is distinctively phenomenological in thrust as opposed to more broadly based qualitative or empirical research. It is therefore necessary to point to the crucial distinction between qualitative research in general and phenomenology as inhering in the latter’s specific focus on interrogating the lived meaning of human experience and identifying its essential structure. Phenomenologically, “experience” can be conceived of as nothing other than the direct experience of some event or phenomenon by someone: thus bringing to

mind the Husserlian imperatives of “intentionality” and “subjectivity”.

Phenomenological research is therefore not simply a reporting of experience, but goes beyond that in seeking to reveal the structure of consciousness as subjectively experienced. As such, the focus of phenomenological research is not so much on the facts of an experience as on the detailed description of the experiential elements recalled to consciousness in the form of the nuanced perceptions, feelings and emotions that are each and all inextricably part of the experience as a whole. In this regard, conscious experiences have a unique feature: we intuitively experience their meaning while living it *in the moment*. The essence of lived experience lies in recalling the minutiae of that moment as lived, every exact nuance of its meaning as experienced *in that moment*, to consciousness. To that extent, then, the nature and focus of phenomenological research may be termed experiential in thrust.

And then there is, on the one hand, what has been referred to as “empirical phenomenology” – different conceptions of which have been presented in earlier editions of this journal by Aspers (2009) and Owen (2015). The debate about whether an empirical approach is reconcilable with phenomenology goes back four decades, however, with Sardello (1978) summing up the indecisiveness in this regard by arguing that, “As long as an empirical orientation is understood as an attitude, a perspective, a way of looking, such an orientation is not antithetical to phenomenology”. And, on the other hand, there is the increasing trend for phenomenological research to be termed “empirical” on the basis that it is based on experience and follows a systematic procedure. Fundamentally, yes, given its traditional reliance on sensory experience and experimentation to obtain the evidence on which it bases its conclusions, empirical research is, procedurally, based on experience. Yet, it cannot thus be argued that a phenomenological approach is nothing other than an empirical approach simply because it has experience as its primary vehicle. While empirical research focused on human experience would therefore be qualitative provided that qualitative procedures were followed in collecting and processing the data – it would still not necessarily be phenomenological praxis.

Max van Manen (1997) sums up the issue succinctly: “Sometimes people interested in doing research approach phenomenological human science as if it merely offers a different tool-kit for dealing with the same kinds of problems and questions that really belong to different research methodologies” (p. 21). As van Manen infers, phenomenology uses different methods for answering different questions from those of, for instance, ethnography. “*Phenomenological questions are meaning questions*. They ask for the meaning and significance of certain phenomena” (p. 23). As such,

they go “beyond an interest in ‘mere’ particularity” (p. 22).

The aim of this editorial is not to begin a theoretical discourse on what ideally should or could be the outer limits of the discipline of phenomenology. Rather, it is merely a brief comment on my personal observation that, within the social and human science research field, the understanding of phenomenology seems to have been moving away, in a conceptually contrary direction, from a clear sense of what makes it distinctive.

Perhaps future submissions might challenge this observation – deliberately or coincidentally – even to the extent that one of the *IPJP* readers might feel galvanized into offering his or her time and expertise to put together a Special Edition dealing with the contemporary perspective and theoretical position on what counts as phenomenology

It must also be emphasised that the gist of the above is not intended as a comment on the quality of the contents of the current edition or, in particular, the five research papers included, each of which has a theory-building focus of both interest and value.

Reporting on a study conducted in the educational context of Hong Kong, the paper by Cheung On Tam rigorously explores visual arts teachers’ perceptions and experience of teaching children with special needs, revealing the centrality of reflection to their attempts to improve the efficacy of their teaching in a particularly challenging context.

Although Maurice Apprey’s research set out to investigate whether the “image” – the perception and conceptual understanding – of psychoanalysis held by a group of medical students changed after a four-week course on psychoanalysis, his paper revolves primarily around systematically testing the limitations of Giorgi’s phenomenological praxis within several continental philosophical paradigms. While perhaps disorienting on first reading, Apprey’s painstakingly considered and innovative elaboration of Giorgi’s essentially Husserlian method is worthy of serious consideration in light of the challenge to even the existence of phenomenology presented by current theoretical developments in both European and American schools of thought such as the New French Philosophy and Speculative Realism.

The paper by Emma Turley, Surya Monro and Nigel King reports on an experiential study conducted by the first author. In her research, Emma Turley adapted the traditional use of imaginative variation as a data-processing step by using it in the interviews to engage the participants in the process of imaginative variation, in this case varying descriptive details given in their written accounts in order to enable them more vividly and precisely to recall, identify and articulate the

nuances of the experiential elements of the moment in focus. Given the focus of the research on the erotic elements of certain sexual encounters and the limited lexicon of sexual experience, the use of imaginative variation in the interviews also facilitated the expression of what had been omitted from the written accounts, and not least so through embodied cues the researcher pursued. The authors suggest that the judicious use of imaginative variation as an interview technique could be of value generally to qualitative researchers as a means of elucidating the nuances of descriptive details, but caution that its effectiveness would largely depend on whether the way in which it is incorporated has been devised in relation to the particular study contemplated.

Phenomenology, in reflecting the nuances of human experience, is well-placed to uncover the structure and dynamics of the impact of both collective and individual traumatisation on not only those directly affected but also succeeding generations. The paper by Cyril Adonis explores the salience of intergenerationally transmitted trauma among children and grandchildren of victims of gross human rights violations during the apartheid era in South Africa, and in the process leads the reader to contemplate the broader issue regarding the perpetuation of trauma historically and its role in the course of the history of humankind.

The phenomenological study reported on by Karen Groven and Kristen Heggen challenges the hegemony of evidence-based practice in the field of physiotherapy and the emphasis of randomised controlled trials and clinical guidelines on therapeutic method rather than on the role of therapists themselves in determining the effect of treatment interventions. Groven's research revealed that experience, whether personal or professional, is relied on by physiotherapists in clinical decision making as more attentive and attuned to individual patients' needs and best interests than the research-based evidence officially sanctioned as "best evidence". The authors thus make a strong case for experience-based knowledge to be acknowledged as paramount in the hierarchy of "best evidence".

Eva Cybulska's focus in recent editions on Nietzsche concludes with her homing in on his preoccupation with religion, and questioning whether, beneath the mask of militant atheism, he remained caught at heart in the Christian piety of his youth. While Cybulska asks whether Nietzsche may thus have been more of a Cordelia rather than "the Antichrist", Christopher Pulte, in his consideration of Nietzsche's will to power in relation to egoism, characterizes the egoism of Nietzsche as "closest to that of Shakespeare's Coriolanus ... a solitary ego" in which there is "a nobility, and at the same time futility". In his exploration of the notion of the ego as "a multi-headed enigma", Pulte delves deep into the domains of ego as thinking/speaking subject, ego as selfhood, ego as social, ego as psychic, ego as being with, and ego identity in relation to the role of myth, imagination and dreams in "making visible that which defies being made transparent in any other way".

The current edition of the *IPJP* concludes with a review by Bruce Bradfield in the form of a personal reflection on the recently published book, *Psychotherapy for the Other: Levinas and the Face-to-Face Relationship*, edited by Kevin Krycka, George Kunz and George Sayre.

As is evident from the overview of the contents of the current edition, the range of topics and contexts deemed appropriate for phenomenological study is vast. The introductory part of this editorial, however, points to the essential thrust of phenomenological research and the priority of its focus on faithfully capturing the lived meaning of the human experience of the particular in its universality. The intent of what was penned was to inspire reflection on where phenomenological research is 'at' more than a century after Husserl framed its methodological parameters. Expanded as these have been by subsequent theoretical developments or "turns", they are seemingly currently unclear, confused by perhaps laxly used terminology, along with uncertainty about where exactly the boundary lies between what constitutes the focus of phenomenological research and what does not. For the thing is still, is "the thing itself" the focal phenomenon – or consciousness of it?

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About the Author



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Professor Christopher Stones, previously Head of the Department of Psychology at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa and former Professor of Psychology at the University of Johannesburg, has enjoyed a lengthy academic and research career, in the course of which he has taught in the areas of physiological, clinical, forensic and social psychology, as well as research methodology. He has served as Vice-President of the South African Association for Psychotherapy since its inception, and as past Chairman of the South African Society for Clinical Psychology. Editor-in-Chief of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* since 2003, he is also on the editorial panels of two other online journals. Professor Stones's research interests are in the areas of identity, attitudes and attitude change, phenomenological praxis and methodologies, abnormal psychology and psychotherapy, spirituality and religious experience, in all of which areas he has published extensively. An Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society, with which he is also registered as a chartered psychologist, Professor Stones is registered with the South African professional board as both a research and a clinical psychologist.

Currently, while continuing to supervise postgraduate research at the University of Johannesburg, he conducts a full-time clinical psychology practice at a health-care centre, and also serves as a consultant in the fields of forensic investigation and behavioural risk management.

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