



Learning from Twentieth Century Hermeneutic Phenomenology for the Human Sciences and Practical Disciplines

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Abstract

The implications of commonalities in the contributions of five key thinkers in twentieth century phenomenology are discussed in relation to both original aims and contemporary projects. It is argued that, contrary to the claims of Husserl, phenomenology can only operate as hermeneutic phenomenology. Hermeneutics arose within German idealism. It began with Friedrich Ast and Heinrich Schleiermacher and was further developed by, among others, Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger. Hermeneutics claims that current understanding is created on the basis of the prior understanding taken to any new situation, in that what is initially understood or believed determines the direction and scope for inquiry or action. Subsequent action and conclusions are similarly based on what has been previously understood and believed. As a consequence, however, what may, in some cases, result is the confirmation of prior inaccurate understanding. For these reasons, it is important to be clear about how initial understandings are formed and how they inform a discipline, be it the Husserlian phenomenology of intentionality or any empirical phenomenological approach.

Overview

The introductory section of this paper provides an overview of the argument elaborated in the remainder of the paper. Proceeding from the question about the extent to which research of any kind, including phenomenology in any of its various forms, can be presuppositionless, it questions the claim that transcendental phenomenology has the ability to overcome the “vicious circle” which Husserl (1911/1981a, p. 172) contended made it impossible for natural science, with its empirically relativistic assumption that only experimentalism enables the truth about any matter to emerge, to contribute to grounding itself.

Husserl’s phenomenology was essentially theoretical and originally conceived both to locate philosophy as

a “rigorous science” and to overcome the problems of an excessive zeal for empiricism (1911/1981a). Between the years 1925 to 1929 at least, Husserl was clear that there were two versions of phenomenology. Both were “a priori”, theoretical or philosophical clarifications of experience. Phenomenological pure psychology is a way of understanding how consciousness works in its social context to create meaning. Taking the world and people in it to be real, it defines how mental processes work together to produce specific types of meaning.

Transcendental phenomenology, on the other hand, is a more abstract version of exploring meaning for any consciousness in any social context. For Husserl, it is not necessarily tied to the limitation of understanding this world (Husserl, 1931/1977a, 1962/1977b, 1968/1997a, 1968/1997b). The original forms of

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phenomenology were theoretical endeavours in the way that pure mathematics supports the applied sciences. While a pure psychology supports all real world science and academia, transcendental phenomenology supports philosophy. Both of Husserl's studies are theory-building for later empiricism through understanding consciousness. Whether in its real world psychological form or the transcendental study of meaning in a public world, the phenomenology of the intentionality of consciousness aims to determine the invariant structure of conscious experience (1973/1999).

For Husserl, the dream was never over that transcendental phenomenology and its practitioners or "non-participating onlookers" can conclude on consciousness and how it works (1956/1970, pp. 391-394). Husserl's methods involve working on the raw data of the many co-occurring types of conscious experiences, in order to conclude on the nature of the forms of intentionality that are creative of them (Marbach, 1992, 1993, 2005). The implication is that all of life occurs through various types of awareness about objects that produce different senses of them that can be grasped in various contexts – irrespective of whether those contexts are interpretive ones of understanding, or whether they be perceptual or psychological contexts. Proper explanation in practice and theory concerns making explicit in terms of intentionalities how, for instance, a memory experientially co-occurs in the perceptual present. Husserl asserted that his phenomenology would ground the sciences through mental clarification of the nature of the intentionalities in relation to various aspects of attention. This is the key to making empirical applications of ideas hit their target. For instance, it was Darwin who observed animals and then theorised about heritability and selection. It takes contemporary DNA research to prove him right or wrong. It was Einstein who imagined what it was like to travel at the speed of light in order to make his mathematical statements. It took twentieth century physics to explore his claims.

However, Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur did not agree with the claim that transcendental phenomenology could overthrow the hermeneutic circle between "the aim-providing problems as of its methods", given the existence even in phenomenology of "a certain logical harmony between the guiding problems ... and precisely such foundations and methods" (Husserl, 1911/1981a, p. 189). This can be read precisely as a warning to deal with the blindspot of the circular influence of previous understanding. In agreement with these writers, this paper argues that any inquiry or science

is inevitably hermeneutic in the sense that it *makes sense* and should be self-reflexive in understanding what it takes to its subject matter. It urges contemporary workers in empirical phenomenology and psychology to take heed of what the hermeneutic circle means: *there are no unprejudiced views*. Prior views influence, and maybe even create, what is found by means of their modes of attention to the object of study. If the proposition of the hermeneutic circle is accepted, what is implied is that it is impossible to eradicate the influence of the past on present understanding. This is particularly problematic when it comes to making conclusions in empirical phenomenology, qualitative or quantitative psychology, and other types of empirical research.

In order to show that these claims are justified, it is necessary to side-step some entrenched misunderstandings about phenomenology. Here no criticism is made of empirical phenomenology following the influence of Gurwitsch, Cairns, Giorgi, Wertz, Embree and others. However, the thrust of all of these can be classified as object-oriented empirical phenomenology. An exclusive focus on the sense of objects was never Husserl's project in his exploring of links between the forms of intentionality, the senses obtained about specific objects of attention, and understanding how these exist in contexts or horizons (Husserl, 1913/1982, §§130-132, 150-151; 1980/2005; Marbach, 1992). Consequently, therefore, phenomenology was never merely the description of the senses of objects as an end in itself. For Husserl, the primary focus on intentionality was impeded because "the phenomenological method ... only leads us first into a new naïveté, that of simple descriptive act analysis" that he sometimes called "noetic phenomenology", "noetics", "intentional analysis", "intentional psychology", "elucidation" or "explication", *Auslegung* (stated by Husserl in August 1931: Cairns, 1976, p. 27). The original phenomenology is the elucidation of connections between intentionalities, senses, objects and contexts, as was indicated by Husserl's remarks about making "an uncovering ... an explication ... of what is consciously meant (the objective sense) and correlatively, an explication of the potential intentional processes themselves" (Husserl, 1931/ 1977, §20, p. 46). For this paper, it is precisely this movement from what appears, "the objective sense", to the conclusions concerning what is 'invisible', the "intentional processes themselves", that demands a specific type of hermeneutics of how to make such interpretative conclusions. To spell this out once more: what Husserl claimed was that the applied sciences should understand how consciousness works in concept-making and arguing in relation to the conscious

experiences that occur in their social contexts, in order to justify their claims (1962/1977, §45). Husserlian conclusions are of the sort reported by Marbach (1993, 2005). They concern how all simple and compound types of mental acts exist and connect, one with the others.

The hermeneutic circle is particularly pertinent to Husserlian phenomenology. Because intentionalities do not appear, not even to first-person conscious experience, they can only ever be interpreted. The end-products of the senses of objects appear, but that is the result of the work done by one consciousness in connection with other consciousnesses. It would thus have been better for Husserl to have conceded that what is understood occurs because of contexts of understanding and interpretation that provide specific senses. But that would be contrary to his claims that it is possible for transcendental phenomenology to escape the influence of the hermeneutic circle.

Accordingly, in agreement with Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur, it is contended that the original phenomenology is the interpretation of the forms of intentionality and that this demands hermeneutics. Following the conclusions of Kern, Marbach, Ströker and Zahavi, who are accepted as being the leading writers in the field of Husserlian phenomenology, the contribution of this paper is to emphasise that what appears in conscious experience are the many types of the “*How of its modes of givenness*” (Husserl, 1913/1982, §132, p. 316). The modes of givenness – as spoken about, remembered, heard – are compared and contrasted to interpret concepts that define precisely *how* a memory reappears in current perception, for instance, or in order to understand *how* looking at a painting differs from reading the written word. The aim is to understand how intentionality enables these things to make their publicly-accessible meanings. A more complex example in psychology is when participants fill in a questionnaire, where it is the totality of their previous understanding that enables them to rate themselves and provide answers to the questions. It is also the totality of prior experience that enables the questionnaire to make sense and provides for psychologists then to allocate numerical scores to the answers supplied.

The most general case of the problem of the hermeneutic circle for science and academic inquiry is that the current object is understood on the basis of the old, to such a degree that past learning can obscure the current object. The hermeneutic circle is the “to-and-fro movement ... between interpreting individual phenomena and interpreting the whole”

that “is characteristic of all interpretation” (Rickman, 2004, p. 73). In general, the phenomenon of understanding includes what could be called bias, prejudice or inability to attend to the current object.

The upshot for qualitative psychology, for instance, is a failure to grasp the phenomena of its participants as they experience them, because pre-existing theory mis-directs the researchers away from the phenomena. For qualitative psychology, a psychological hermeneutics would be a formal study of the role of previous understanding that is taken to the current phenomena, in such a way as to create findings in the light of previous understanding. This is observable in psychology, where each school has its own viewpoint that serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The earlier understanding corrupts and excludes new, potentially relevant information. Metaphorically, what is being referred to is that any school of academic inquiry, theoretical or empirical, ‘pulls itself up by its own pig tail’. For instance, evolutionary psychology insists that current experience is dominated by genetic function and success in reproduction. It argues that current events are the result of competition whereby the most effective functioning always wins, and evolution is what primarily shapes human behaviour. On the other hand, discourse analysis, for instance, believes that dominant discourses are most causative, so that what are believed to be socially acceptable ways of discussing a topic are most formative of human behaviour. But, in empirical psychology generally, psychologism holds: Only experiments can determine what is true or not and it is hubris to believe otherwise. Psychologism is thus one of the problems that phenomenology was invented to oppose.

Let us take the claim of the ubiquity of the hermeneutic circle to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology in order to show how it is relevant. Husserl’s dream is that it is possible to determine the true nature of consciousness by attending to the phenomena that appear in conscious experiences without hermeneutics and differences in viewpoint misleading the results. He claimed that transcendental phenomenology can get outside of the hermeneutic circle. But because Husserl held the position called transcendental idealism that “it is nonsense to speak of a *fundamentally* unknowable being that still lies beyond these ultimates ... [because what counts is] the “constitution” of being in consciousness, along with the related problems of being” (Husserl’s letter to Dilthey of 5 July, 1911, 1968/1981b, p. 207), it is not clear how he overcame the circularity within his own practice and theory. Husserl also stated the following in one sentence which is the opposite of what

Heidegger contended: “All experiential knowledge of life is restricted by the particular respective life-practice, which predelineates how far the determinacies are to be determined in advance; theoretical interest and science are practically uninterested and thereby unlimitedly all-inclusive in their focus” (1962/1977, §45, p. 172). Husserl’s object was to understand consciousness generally, and his method involved elucidating his own consciousness and imagining the experiences of other persons (Husserl, 1973, cited in Marbach, 1982). His methods conclude on theory about the nature of consciousness by thought experiments on the universal nature of consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1982, §47; 1968/1997a, §4, p. 165, §8, p. 171; 1968/1997b, §8, pp. 231-232, §11, pp. 240-241; 1931/1977, §34, p. 72, §41, pp. 84-85). There are major problems in using a technique of imaginative variation to conclude on theory. The limits of consciousness, hermeneutics and life experience are constraints:

1. There is the inability to have the experiences and perspectives of others as they have them.
2. There is great difficulty in remembering one’s own childhood or understanding the experiences of infants (as per 1).
3. The ability to imagine another’s experiences is limited according to the breadth of one’s own social and cultural experiences.
4. There is difficulty knowing what sort of human experience to include and hence how to capture the whole of a region in relation to its greater wholes. Relevant in this regard is the fact that Husserl classed phenomenology as a theory-making procedure and not as an empirical one.

Very pertinently for Husserlian phenomenology, there is confusion between aims and methods, particularly when there is a claim to be presuppositionless. Husserl stated a laudable and self-reflexive ideal when he wrote that “The true method follows the nature of the things to be investigated and not our prejudices and preconceptions” (1911/1981a, p. 179). But the problem is precisely – how it is possible to remove the influence of the past and invisible guiding assumptions, and occupy a position of no bias towards the meaningful phenomena of consciousness? This leaves an unanswered question in his work concerning the self-understanding of the transcendental phenomenologist or “non-participating onlooker” who “does not have to assert any realities

and possibilities with respect to the actual and quasi-data belonging to the Ego underneath. What he asserts in this respect are ‘realities’ and ‘possibilities’ in quotation marks” (1980/2005, text 20, p. 697, fn. 13). What this last citation means is that the method of thought experiments about what is merely possible concerning any consciousness in any world was allegedly sufficient to reason about what is universal and what must be the case for all consciousness. To reiterate Husserl’s claim, transcendental phenomenology takes the “‘psychical’, which appears in the natural attitude, and in positively oriented psychology, as a dependent stratum of being in humans and animals, [and] thereby loses even the sense of a mundanely phenomenal event” (Bernet, Kern & Marbach, 1993, p 74). This is claiming that the transcendental reduction removes consciousness from the wrong interpretation of it as a part of the materialistic world, with all the mis-understandings of the natural or everyday understandings of common sense. He claimed that the transcendental reduction and other methods freed consciousness for unbiased inspection. It is not clear how this can be done through the imagination alone, and that is one reason why Husserl has had so many critics.

In line with hermeneutic phenomenology, this paper takes issue with Husserl and demands an encounter with hermeneutics. It is argued that, in order to conclude on the nature of the intentionalities, hermeneutics and phenomenology should sit together. There should be a self-reflexive understanding of what is assumed with regard to what is being emphasised as important and relevant – as opposed to what is not. Theories are not about everything. They highlight specific aspects of what appears and relate it to other relevant aspects and let some matters recede into the background. Two key questions are: to what extent is it possible to break free of false assumptions? – and to what extent is it possible to conclude in language on the truth of the phenomena of consciousness?

Agreeing with hermeneutics means that it is impossible to have a school of ‘no obstructions’. Paradoxically, to believe that one has attained no obstructions is to be blinded both to them and to the blindness of one’s own bias. This is why Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur disagreed with Husserl. As Merleau-Ponty put it: “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (1945/1962, p. xiv). To accept the role of hermeneutics is to agree that it is possible to create schools of research that are self-reflexive in understanding how they draw their conclusions. This is accounting for one’s own

perspective in terms of how meaning and cause are concluded on, for instance. The role of hermeneutics is academic theoretical discourse oriented towards the aim of self-reflexivity.

Husserl's Positive Legacy

Now that the argument of this paper has been outlined in full, the purpose of the remainder of the paper is to provide more evidence for its key claims. The current section comments on certain aspects of Husserl's claims and considers the implications of some key passages from his writing. The following section notes how the phenomenological movement developed towards hermeneutics and meaning, away from the original claim to be presuppositionless and to have overcome the hermeneutic and other circles. In the third section, in support of the link between phenomenology and hermeneutics, commonalities seen across a number of twentieth century hermeneutic phenomenologists are stated in relation to psychology. A short number of general conclusions are stated for the human sciences in the main, although they also apply to other areas.

It is well known that Husserl has had an influence in a number of academic areas. But no other persons have followed his methods and ideas *to the letter* in their development of his work. Not even the closest interpreters like Kern, Marbach, Ströker and Zahavi have published work that shows the details of the thought experiments that clarify the intentionalities. This omission implies criticism. Below, thumbnail sketches of a selection of twentieth century writers are provided in support of the assertion that phenomenology can only exist as a hermeneutic and explicitly self-reflexive approach. What this means is that a *sufficient understanding needs to be taken to a phenomenon in order to reveal it properly*. The opposite effect is also noticeable. Poor or downright wrong understanding can be applied – that obscures and mis-represents – so leading knowledge and practices away from their aims and objects.

Husserl set the scene for a more radical turn to experience than Kant by noting that belief is close to perception and other forms of the givenness of meanings of different sorts (1973/1999, p. 61; 1913/1982, §135, p. 325). Drawing conclusions in language about what is heard, seen and felt requires intellectual work with respect to conscious experience. Any assertions about cause, motives for action and what motivates others in truth must arise from the best possible evidence for such assertions. Indeed, Husserl's definition of reason concerned decreasing partial givenness, or "empty" conceptual

givenness, in order to gain fulfilled experiences themselves and become able to make proper conclusions (§145, p. 344). Even abstract relations were decided by having fulfilled experiences. For instance, the term "transcendental aesthetics" in Husserl means linking the form of the ego to the other, the communal and temporality in seeing the necessary enabling conditions for space, time and cause to exist (1931/1977, §61, p. 146). This is "seeing" the evidence of spaciality, temporality and causality as they apply to the sense of self in connection with others: in that personal being concerns the sense of the lived body as the central point on which each self looks out onto the world.

For Husserl, reason is striving towards better evidence and moving away from lesser types (1913/1982, §138, pp. 332-333, §151, p. 364). What Husserl argued was that consciousness functions to create the world of meaning for people. The possibility of a world of shared meaning demands, as a condition for its existence, that consciousness exist. If there is no consciousness, there is no world of meaning (*ibid.*, §49). Accordingly, intellectual meaning and non-verbal meaning co-occur. Specific meaningful objects appear through, or across, manifold senses. Each sense has its own perspective and context. The modalities of belief are the types of believing that comprise 'the family of belief' as a whole. Some members of the family of belief are certainty, possibility, doubtfulness and certitude. These modalities create objects of attention that are experienced as senses of existence, uncertain existence, probable existence, certainty concerning the non-existence ... and so on. Different types of evidence have different qualities and styles of appearing. Husserl's mature understanding of truth was "an *idea*, lying at infinity" ... not as falsely absolutised, but rather, in each case, as within *horizons* – which do not remain overlooked or veiled from sight but are systematically explicated" (1929/1969, §105, p. 279). Having laid out some of the key passages from Husserl, a few short remarks will be made about the intellectual heritage of hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics

This section sketches the overall nature of hermeneutics via some brief sketches of the early contributors. It was Friedrich Ast who seems to have been the first person to formulate the basic proposition that later became known as the hermeneutic circle (Palmer, 1969, p. 77). This basic idea was developed by Schleiermacher and Dilthey. What all later hermeneutists share is the development

of Ast's original idea. Heinrich Schleiermacher stated the circularity in the following way: how things make sense is that we compare the new to what we already know (p. 87). Schleiermacher developed the idea that the part and the whole interact to make sense. For him, the part and the whole determine each other: He called the overall effect the hermeneutic circle. Understanding is circular because there is a back and forth movement between the whole that defines its parts and the parts that contribute to the whole. Depending on the scope taken, there are greater wholes and lesser parts.

Wilhelm Dilthey developed hermeneutics in the direction of a general theory of understanding. He distinguished between *elementary* understanding, which is fundamental and common, and *higher* forms of understanding of communication of various sorts, with the former enabling the latter (Dilthey, 1976, pp. 218-225). For instance, empathy with historical characters and situations is necessary to understand the historical context in which they were living. Only on that basis can there be accurate readings of history. To situate a specific text in its genre occurs through reading the genre. In contemporary English language circles, Hans Peter Rickman (2004) has done a great deal to explain and build on the connections between Kant and Dilthey. Summing up the hermeneutic circle, Rickman asserts that moving "between interpreting individual phenomena and interpreting the whole of which they are supposed to form part is characteristic of all interpretation There is ... no absolute starting point, no rigid framework of assumptions on which an interpretative theory can rest Interpretation ... is a matter of getting at the meaning of human phenomena ... of discovering from their expressions what people think, feel, and want" (p. 73).

Martin Heidegger's approach became popular because he took Husserl's attention to lived experiences, and, in creating his "fundamental ontology", he indicated that the path for philosophy was to put its house in order by basing its claims about what exists or not on the most fundamental and all-encompassing direct experience of existence and non-existence (1927/1996, §§3-6). The significance of this is that each academic discipline sets its course by identifying a region of genuinely existing objects towards which it is devoted. The prior understanding is that a region and its objects genuinely exist in an implicit way, pre-reflexively (§69b, p. 328), because of temporality (§69c), in the sense that temporality is the most important aspect of being of human being in that the past, the present and the future co-exist. In Heidegger's terminology, once a fundamental

ontology has been established, it would then be possible to ground regional ontologies (academic disciplines concerning parts of the world and regions of objects) on direct experience, properly interpreted "in the right way" (§33, p. 143). By this he meant that there should be an a priori intellectual analysis of human being as temporal, in relation to its situatedness in terms of its contexts, practical action, its social habit, the role of language, its mortality, in relation to its conscience, in occupying physical space, and its other characteristics, including its ability to not know itself.

Husserl never acknowledged the relevance of hermeneutics in his published writing, although he did acknowledge a debt of inspiration to Dilthey. Husserl responded to Dilthey and replied to the hermeneutic tradition as a whole (1968/1981b, 1962/1977, §§1, 2, 3d). Husserl worked to identify parts of the whole. He insisted that basic understanding is drawn through seeing evidence for oneself, a type of experiential learning. However, there is a great deal of meaning that is simply just not present as a fact. The problem with urging people to observe phenomena is that any group of reasonable people will see different meanings in what appears to them. This is why it is necessary to have some account of how meaning is co-created – particularly when the aim is to account for the conditions of the possibility of meaning for more than one person.

The background themes now being in place, the paper proceeds to provide some thumbnail sketches of five key thinkers who concluded either that hermeneutics and phenomenology co-exist or that meaning should be addressed in a holistic way.

The Hermeneutic Commonality within the History of Phenomenology

This section refers to those who critiqued Husserl and developed his ideas. The French readings of Husserl and Heidegger were mixed with other aspects of politics, philosophy, psycho-analysis and Gestalt psychology to produce the expanded view called existential phenomenology. Only a few comments will be made on the positive lead set by Heidegger in regard to uniting hermeneutics and phenomenology. Then some brief characterisations of Sartre and de Beauvoir are provided to show their attention to meaning.

Despite Heidegger's ironic introductory comments that philosophers should be guided by how things show themselves (1927/1996, §7c, p. 30) and that hermeneutics should be used to attend to non-verbal

meaning (§§32, 33), he later stated that the circle is an insufficient figure for understanding (§63, p. 291). What Heidegger was referring to was his view that temporality is the most fundamental way of understanding human being. Temporality connects with history as the proper universe of all forms of understanding and of being self-reflexively cognisant of those ways of understanding. His comments on the relation between theory and reality (§69b, pp. 327-328) are also subordinate to the grasping of the temporality of human being. This could be read as overthrowing Schleiermacher's idea of circularity between the past and the present. Heidegger's view is of the interrelation between past, future and present.

Heidegger stated his position in the abstract and it applies to understanding and interpreting. In practice, it concerns identifying how anticipation is shaped by the past and future – be it for a school of research or an individual person. *Basic Problems* makes it clear: “If we did not understand, even though at first roughly and without conceptual comprehension, what actually signifies, then the actual would remain hidden from us. If we did not understand what reality means, then the real would remain inaccessible. If we did not understand what life and vitality signify, then we would not be able to comport ourselves toward living beings” (1975/1982, §2, p. 10). What he was arguing for was a turn towards understanding human being through a “hermeneutic of the facticity of Dasein in general” (1927/1996, p. 401, n. 1), by which he meant finding the enabling conditions for being in a world through argument concerning everyday experience: like using a hammer (§33, p. 145), understanding road signs (§17, p. 74), or understanding the weather to see if it will rain or not (§17, p. 75).

However, let us turn to the case of understanding people. There is the shared attention to imagining the experiences of other persons in Husserl (1973, cited in Marbach, 1982) and Karl Jaspers (1913/1963; Wiggins and Schwartz, 1997). Jaspers well understood the hermeneutic circle and exemplified it in his approach to psychopathology (1913/1963, pp. 355-359). Such an attention to the experiences of others is of use in meeting with people in that it enables one to understand as well as possible what they are talking about. It is also of use in trying to understand psychopathology generally. Jaspers independently came to the same conclusion as Husserl. In order to understand other persons, it is necessary to imagine, empathise and interpret what their experiences actually are for them (p. 326). Cultural anthropology calls this an “emic” approach. It means understanding others through immersing oneself in what they might be experiencing. Key

portions of the *General Psychopathology* recapitulate the nature of hermeneutics. Jaspers commented that the “totality of human life and its ultimate origin cannot be the object of any scientific research” (p. 543). In short, a number of holistic and hermeneutic aspects are evident. Among these are the ideas that meaning is open and forever capable of re-interpretation (p. 356); the meaningful whole comprises each of its dependent pieces (p. 357); understanding and certainty can increase (p. 358) and so rationality does exist; it is not unphenomenological or unhermeneutic to argue for a conclusion.

Paul Ricoeur (1975) was another who argued for an attendance to conscious meanings and the need for formal ways of making sense of what appears. Ricoeur concluded that hermeneutics is necessary for phenomenology to exist. What this means is that the territory of meaning is a region for natural empirical science. For Ricoeur, phenomenology is the “*indispensable presupposition*” of hermeneutics (1975, p. 85). He thus argued that both disciplines stand together. Ricoeur picked Husserl's definition of the explication of the link between intentionalities and their objects as the explication of these correlations in terms of interpreting the forms of intentionalities in play with respect to their objects (Husserl, 1931/1977, §41, p. 84). Ricoeur focused on finding intentionality in phenomenology because hermeneutics is required for making distinctions between all the types of givenness: as remembered, as heard, as discussed in concepts. Therefore, phenomenology is hermeneutics (1975, p. 99). The link between what Ricoeur pointed out and what Husserl originally wrote is that phenomenology comes into being when “we therefore ask quite universally ... what is evidentially ‘inherent’ in the whole reduced phenomenon ... its ‘perceived as perceived’” (1913/1982, §90, p. 220). The common aim is to interpret phenomena properly, according to their genuine manner of being, which is how the intentionalities and the senses produced overlap and intermingle (1962/1977, §3e, p. 26). The problem to be overcome is that, if it is unclear how initial understanding obscures or represents the phenomena in question, then there is no account of how to conclude properly in any investigation about it.

The term “existentialism” sometimes refers to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre alone and sometimes to existential phenomenology as a whole: what I am calling the “French readings” of Husserl, Heidegger, psychoanalysis and Gestalt. What is concluded by Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1958) is that holism is required for understanding meaning, human nature, the consequences of choices that have been made, and the intersubjective positions held with respect to self

and others. Whilst hermeneutics is not specifically mentioned by Sartre, it is very clear that the important project is attending to conscious meaning. Sartre backed the guiding idea that the conscious needs to be followed as a clue in order to reveal the preconscious. This interpretative strategy is useful in making sense of psychological situations, for instance. Sartre realised that being, having and doing co-occur for human beings (p. 576). He concluded that holism must occur in making sense of the human situation. He argued that human existence is a whole, not just a series of parts, and that the parts indicate the whole to which they belong: “man is a totality and not a collection. Consequently he expresses himself as a whole in even his most insignificant and his most superficial behaviour. In other words, there is not a taste, a mannerism, or a human act that is not *revealing*” (p. 568). Pre-conscious meanings can be interpreted by going from the conscious towards that which is currently out of consciousness, but the object of attention can be retrieved through discussion. He called his method existential psychoanalysis: “Its *point of departure* is *experience*; its pillar of support is the fundamental, pre-ontological comprehension which man has of the human person ... each human individual nevertheless possesses *a priori* the *meaning* of the revelatory value of these manifestations and is capable of deciphering them Its *method* is comparative” (pp. 568-9). These comments have wide-ranging implications in terms of defining what is achievable in human inquiry. It is claimed that Sartre did justice to the complex and constructed nature of ordinary living.

Simone de Beauvoir was another who was exemplary in taking phenomenology and applying it to human development, gender relations and sexuality, for instance (1949a, 1949b). She accepted Jean-Paul Sartre’s holism and applied a contextual view of the intentionality of action to everyday life. For her, actions make sense in their context and aim overall. The same action thus needs to be understood through grasping the attitude and purpose of the specific actor. Such an approach is useful in taking theory to the individual, in understanding what happens for him or her, in any given situation. So it is a prerequisite for understanding personality and how specific events make sense to others. This holism is common to Sartre and Karl Jaspers as well.

Some Implications for the Human Sciences

To return to the original aim of the paper, it should now be clearer how important it is to be self-reflexive in making clear to colleagues and ourselves our own personal responsibility in how we make sense of

situations. This is the concern that creates anxiety about *re-search* methods and the desire for adequate justification in various forms of meaning-oriented *searching again*. Another common aspect between three of the key thinkers mentioned above is now appraised, and that is the role of empathy in donating sense to what appears.

Following Dilthey, Husserl and Jaspers, what empathy contributes to psychological research is that it is the fundamental form of understanding that grasps what is observable and recordable. Empathy breathes psychological meaning into listening to people, observing the non-verbal, reading written descriptions, and concluding on what statistics mean. Psychological meanings appear only through empathic understanding and are themselves incapable of being recorded. The terms empathic understanding and psychological understanding are identical and are part of the greater expanse of commonsense. For instance, intentions and the details of the experiences of others are *indicated* through what people say about their memories, anticipations and what it is like for others to lead their lives. What intentionality means in relation to meaningful objects is that it shows how people react to meanings that are not apparent to others. Stating this point very generally, people react to what they anticipate, feel and reason might happen. These intentionalities are not hallucination or dreaming. Anticipation, emotion and reasoning might be in agreement with the views of others about the same physical object, in the here and now or not. Accordingly, reactions to what is anticipated, valued, remembered, felt or reasoned about are the result of meaning-making processes. Such ‘causes’ of human behaviour evade psychology as natural science. Yet these experiences are valid and existent phenomena: these ‘intangibles’ are interpreted psychological reasons for acting of a completely different sort to the natural causes of genetic traits and chemicals in the bloodstream. The role of the hermeneutic circle is understanding that previous immersion in the social world teaches one how to make sense of the current moment.

What is common to Husserl and Jaspers is immersing oneself in the descriptions of the experiences of others, in order to grasp something like what their first-hand experience might be (Husserl, 1973, cited in Marbach, 1982, pp. 466-467). Jaspers also urged psychiatrists to focus on the conscious experiences of their clients (1913/1963, p. 27), stating that the means of doing so is “the empathic listening to others in which we simultaneously keep touch with ourselves” (p. 21). He further insisted that “we shall keep the expression ‘*understanding*’ (Verstehen) solely for the

understanding of psychic events ‘from within’. The expression will never be used for the appreciation of objective causal connections, which we have said can only be seen ‘from without’” (p. 28). Perceptual presence indicates what is real here and now. It has to be noted that what is psychological is not perceptual – real here and now – in the sense that it is directly observable by anyone else. But it is interpretable, due to social learning. The type of reality of the psychological object is intentional and shared between people. It is a mixture of the past and future in the present. It is the result of past learning and can be open to re-learning.

The commonality between Husserl and Jaspers lies in the themes of intentionality, empathy, and the desire to attend to what other people experience, in the particular and in theory-making. Any conclusions about others require the conscious evidence of what they experience. This general principle is called “fulfilment”, as previously noted. In this case, it is a quasi-experiencing through psychological understanding, entirely obtained through imagination and empathy about other persons, in relation to one’s own life experiences and the basic ability to imagine what life is like for others, even though they might be radically different to oneself. It is important to conclude from experiential evidence of one’s own intentionalities, as others turn towards the same or similar cultural objects. Husserl and Jaspers agree that formal psychological concepts can only be derived from such understanding. Formal psychological concepts can only be derived from such understanding. Husserl’s term for this was “authentic” empathy and this is synonymous with adopting a “personalistic attitude” towards others. He was clear that this is the bedrock for genuine human sciences (Kern, 1997).

Concluding Discussion

Although the biopsychosocial approach is laudable, it remains to be seen precisely how nature and nurture can be made into a unified whole, given that the two disciplines come from radically different ontological bases. There is a major tension between a focus on the biological basis for behaviour as opposed to the open exploration of meaningful qualitative experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology concerns itself with the fundamentals for a qualitative approach to theory and practice. Its strength is that it is ready to account for variability in the senses of the same object. It can work with complex experiences because its holism can identify the contributory parts of experience as intentionality, sense, object and context. What phenomenology shows is that some phenomena are

invisible to the natural science approach and fall outside of its remit.

In working towards a concordant biopsychosocial view, a hermeneutic applied psychology could support the understanding of human being as comprised of biological, psychological and social aspects, in which a great many contexts of parts and wholes could be identified (Kern, 1986). The type of causality at play for human beings is multi-factorial, comprising both nature and nurture. Natural cause is irreversible biological cause in genetic tendencies to have a specific sort of personality and specific sorts of psychological problem (Livesley, 2003, pp. 69-73). Psychological problems may also arise as a consequence of material damage to the brain or the physical structure of the body and its physiological ability to deal with stress, for instance. In the world of nurture, there are the meaningful events of smaller and wider spheres. Thus there is the world of personal choice and action, the world of the family of attachment figures *within* the cultural world of persons who are known, *within* the wider worlds of persons who may not be known but who are still influential. And, finally, there is the widest world possible of society and international influences on the individual life and history. It is a future project to unite the more meaning-oriented and empirical phenomenological approaches to the more natural scientific ones.

Even now only a small proportion of the original writings of Edmund Husserl are available to the public, and their translation into English has delayed the grasping of their full intent and perspective. The mature worldview of Husserl would now be called “social construction”, but Husserl himself created the term “generative phenomenology” to refer to the accrual of meaning across the development of human civilisation (Steinbock, 1995). Husserl took a holistic view of the development of the lifeworld. He focused on social history as the scope for the creation and maintenance of meaning. In overview: cultural worlds create themselves across history. This means that co-construction occurs through people who know each other face to face, and it obeys identifiable laws, societal preferences and traditions of various sorts. The term “world” in phenomenology means a world-horizon that contains within it a set of persons with their meaningful cultural objects of various kinds, such as music, food, ideas, social roles, and emotional responses with respect to the excitements and disappointments found there. Poetry, drama and film depict the worldviews of others in ways comparable to listening to someone speak about his or her life. Not much needs to be said before empathy fills in the

gaps and makes sense of what is auditorially presented to consciousness.

However, what intentionality means is that concepts and experiences refer to the work done by consciousness in making meaning. It is a major task of Husserl's phenomenology to grasp this ability. A large portion of psychological life concerns psychological understanding about the intentions and feelings of others. But the region of natural cause does not properly appear in human behaviour and experience and is hard to identify. Contrary to Husserl, when hermeneutics is accepted there are no absolute starting points, no privileged starting points, and no possibility of self-validation by appeal to some best evidence outside of the hermeneutic circle. For the mature Husserl, "History is the great fact of absolute Being; and the ultimate questions, the ultimate metaphysical and teleological questions, are one with the questions regarding the absolute meaning of history" (1956, p. 506, cited in Bernet, Kern & Marbach, 1993, p. 265). Consequently, the totality of cultural objects signifies human nature and its consciousness. The works produced indicate the intentions and nature of their makers.

This paper has argued that the tradition of phenomenology centres on interpreting lived

experiences in various ways. The original Husserlian project is the mental clarification of the intentionalities in relation to their objects in preparation for new empirical psychological and sociological approaches that would meet their objects properly. But to ignore the ways that previous understanding creates influences will not make them go away. On the contrary, when it is accepted that the expectations of the future in the present are formed on the basis of the influence of the past – then one's own bias can begin to be grasped. In order to distinguish one's own conclusions, it is necessary to ensure that they concern the current topic and not past ones. To have clarity about one's own stance should minimise the confusion of mistaking one's own perspective for the one and only reading of a situation. Thus hermeneutics is part of reasoning about various realms of evidence.

Academics and the general population have widely differing understandings about human nature and what motivates human action. Despite what is ordinarily passed on as "folk psychology", understanding human situations accurately is demanded by life itself. Inevitably, the complex totality of human being exceeds the attempt to grasp it with complete certainty. Understanding must accept its imprecision.

About the Author



Ian Rory Owen was born with the Dutch family name van Loo in Wellington, New Zealand in 1960. He received his Bachelor of Technology degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1982 and worked briefly as a technical journalist and in business during the 1980s. He subsequently trained in counselling, hypnotherapy and psychotherapy, and began his therapeutic career in 1987, gaining a master's degree in counselling and psychotherapy from Regent's College, London, in 1991 and a PhD in 2005, and becoming a UKCP registered psychotherapist in 1995. He is also a Graduate Member of the British Psychological Society. As a Senior Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, he led the MA/MSc programme in Counselling at the University of Wolverhampton until 2001. Since 2001 he has worked for the Leeds Mental Health Trust where he is currently a Principal Integrative Psychotherapist and provides individual brief therapy for adults. He is the author of more than 50 papers and three books on the writings of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and theory of mind for individual psychotherapy.

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