



Editorial

by **Dr Robert Schweitzer**

A recent debate on an email list server to promote the discussion of philosophical issues in nursing, drew attention to the “varieties” of phenomenological research. One of the contributors, John Paley drew attention to the lack of continuity between Husserlian Phenomenology and the practice of phenomenology by nurse researchers who often focus upon “what’s it like for them” type of studies. The same comments may be directed at a range of disciplinary groups who have various traditions of focussing upon explicating the experience of phenomena as experienced by participants in contrast to describing the phenomena as the phenomena presents itself to the observer. While both projects result in descriptions the underlying questions, assumptions and intent of each approach are quite different.

Husserl stressed the importance of “returning to the thing itself” as he strove to uncover indubitable truth. He argued that the essence of everyday experience is revealed in our emotions, actions and perceptions of things and relationships as opposed to Descartes’ notion of arriving at certitude through rationality and logic (McLeod, J. 2001) . This is an important distinction which sets phenomenology apart from other approaches to qualitative research which accept constructivist and constructionist propositions in regard to the relativity of truth.

How than do we operationalise phenomenology?

A number of researchers have attempted to utilise phenomenological constructs derived from Husserl in their research of real world phenomena. The Duquesne school of empirical phenomenology is probably the best known example of this attempt to discover the structure of co-constituted phenomena. While this School is not without its detractors, researchers influenced by its methods have made some important forays into exploring experiences such as the experience of psychotherapy or criminal victimisation, which otherwise might continue to be researched from perspectives dominated by the traditional empirical methodology.

The Indo Pacific Journal of Phenomenology does not take an orthodox view of phenomenology but seeks instead to promote ideas and methodologies that have been informed by phenomenology. There is an acceptance that we do not have a single methodology that yields “truth” in the manner that some of the physical sciences are underpinned by a particular methodology, nor do we seek to be prescriptive. My own view is to look at the common elements which “drove” Husserl to establish philosophy as a foundational science. His endeavours were characterised by creativity and passion. While these characteristics alone will not yield truth, they are essential elements of any meaningful research enterprise.

The Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology (IPJP) can be found at www.ipjp.org.

The IPJP is a joint project of Rhodes University in South Africa and Edith Cowan University in Australia. This document is subject to copyright and may not be reproduced in whole or in part via any medium (print, electronic or otherwise) without the express permission of the publishers.

The current issue of the Journal comprises 3 papers, each of which has been driven to a significant degree by the authors passion for the subject matter. The paper by Edwards and the paper by Hughson and Inglis both deal with a fundamental human experience, that is, the experience of self in relation to the meaning of exercise and “sportive life-worlds”. Edwards’ paper is an integration of personal reflection and external data to discover the meaning of exercise experience as well as the impact of such experience upon the community. Hughson and Inglis provide a philosophical critique and analysis based upon the work of Merleau-Ponty in their contribution to a greater understanding of what they term “sportive life-worlds”. Their example is drawn from soccer. These papers both present a perspective on the experience of sport quite different to any analysis found in traditional psychology Journals and I suspect, most human movement Journals.

Zelda Knight has written about the experience of psychotherapy. While her paper is not phenomenological in a more traditional sense, she highlights several traditions that arguably are derived from phenomenological precepts.

No doubt, the debate as to the nature of phenomenology will continue as well as the search for appropriate methodologies. I will also not seek to categorise the above papers in terms of the “mode of phenomenology” but to simply highlight an important issue. That is, the term

“phenomenology” is often used broadly and we need to maintain a critical view of current practices as we seek to develop our understanding of the paradigm and the contribution that this paradigm may make to our understanding of the human condition. We trust that each issue of the Journal will continue to contribute the delineation of a phenomenological approach to the investigation of human issues in our region.

About the Editor

Professor Robert Schweitzer is the Associate Professor and Head of Counseling Studies at the School of Psychology and Counseling, Queensland University of Technology in Queensland, Australia.

Dr Schweitzer is the Editor-in-Chief of the IPJP. His doctoral studies, at Rhodes University, entailed completing a thesis which was a phenomenological study of dream interpretation among urban and rural Inguni people.

Dr Schweitzer has published widely on psycho-social aspects of the family, of adolescence, and of mental health. He is regularly consulted in the area of professional development and the supervision of psychologists.

His areas of research interest include process and outcome studies in Psychotherapy and Indigenous healing.