



Editorial

by **Dr Christopher R. Stones, Editor in Chief, IPJP**

This issue of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* is being released at a tumultuous time in modern history given the ongoing traumatic events in the Middle East, with little prospect of early resolution and the enormous sociological and psychological upheavals that this must bring for those individuals directly involved in the Middle East and Iraq conflict. Given the “global village” in which we now increasingly live, few, if any, of us can remain untouched by occurrences in lands distant, especially when these tend to be of cataclysmic proportions. Accordingly, there is the ever-important need to understand human experience, thoughts, feelings and emotions not only in a fundamental (arguably, some might say, universalistic) way but also within their containing socio-political and cultural frameworks. It is, after all, this lived-milieu that provides much of the context for human fulfilment, joy, safety and security but also simultaneously for the darker side of the human condition, namely, human suffering, despair, emotional and physical pain, the numbness of unfulfilment, depression, fear and so on. There is thus the social science imperative to comprehend what it means to be human in the hope that interpersonal and national conflict and trauma can be minimised or, at least, so that the consequences can be dealt with in an effective and efficient manner. Perhaps there is no greater

urgency than now, in our present age of “global shrinkage”, for the social and philosophical sciences to get to grips with how best to understand human experience in its many diverse socio-political and cultural manifestations – both nuanced and obvious. It would seem appropriate therefore that the aim of this edition should be to promote debate around methodology in phenomenology as well as to stimulate discussion around the advent of phenomenology in education. This latter development is particularly important in the light of the essential role of education as a moral enterprise through which, mainly young, people may be guided and inspired to lead meaningful and moral lives.

In the previous edition of the journal (November 2003), two themes were announced, *Method in Phenomenology* and *Phenomenology in Education*. The first two papers in the present edition deal with these areas in the hope that this will not only invigorate debate around these notions but also so that, in due course, dedicated topic-focused journal editions can be released.

The first of these invited papers is a review of an American Psychological Association (APA)-sponsored text that deals with qualitative research in psychology and derives its content from 35 contributors who, between them, present 10 different qualitative (although not necessarily

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phenomenological) methods, and each debates the relationship between theory and practice. This “review” by Rex van Vuuren (St Augustine College, South Africa) poses a range of questions that challenge readers to take up the debate regarding various methodological stances and their usefulness within the broad ambit of social science but particularly phenomenology. Van Vuuren has presented a somewhat unusual review in that he allows the authors to speak for themselves by quoting a range of author-extracts that illuminate the various methods described in this APA-endorsed text. His review concludes with several questions revolving around *inter alia* the life-span of a particular method, particularly in relation to the nature of the phenomena being studied and, moreover, how the procedure used influences the findings that emanate from the research. His paper ends with a question regarding whether psychological science has “*ever-expanding perspectives in designing methods*” and, if so, what this might mean for the social sciences and philosophical debate.

The second invited paper by Hennie van der Mescht (Rhodes University, South Africa) deals with education leadership, and particularly the use of phenomenology – as an investigatory approach - in education. His paper concerns issues around education leadership and the extent to which it will become increasingly important in an ever-changing world where values and boundaries seem to take on an increasingly flexible “plasma-like” form.

Van der Mescht’s paper opens with a brief overview of what he understands by the term “phenomenological research”, pointing out that his approach to research is not of a “Husserlian” phenomenological genre but rather of an “empirical” nature. He argues that an empirically-based research process provides a “powerful way of making sense of education practitioners ... sense-making, and can lead to startling new insights into the uniquely complex process of learning”. After spending a brief time

on elaborating “interpretive phenomenology” and providing examples of research conducted within an interpretive framework, van der Mescht’s paper proceeds to report on case study in the field of education leadership, which he uses to illustrate how an interpretative phenomenological approach may be applied within an educational setting. Van der Mescht’s paper is appealing in that while it refers to specific changes taking place in the South African educational milieu, the themes emerging from his paper nevertheless have significant relevance for the broader field of social science qualitative research with particular regard to learning, organizational change, and leadership. To some extent, while his paper provides a *pro forma* research design within the field of education leadership research, it also raises issues around the imperative of how best to engage one’s subject matter in a fundamentally profound fashion to ensure that the research outcome is a faithful reflection of the meaning inherent in the subject matter itself.

Readers should note that as with van Vuuren’s paper which was published in an endeavour to stimulate debate in the field of method, so too van der Mescht’s paper aims to stimulate debate in the broad field of education and leadership. (Readers are encouraged to visit the “Scheduled Journal Themes” section of the IPJP.)

While these first two articles were invited by the Editor, the remaining articles in this edition were submitted by various researchers and phenomenologically-oriented practitioners in the field. In this regard, two very different sets of manuscripts tend to be submitted to the journal for consideration, each having its own merits. On the one hand, there have been – and will continue to be – submissions emanating primarily from the academic and philosophical community while on the other hand, many submissions come from researchers and practitioners using qualitative approaches, with varying degrees of phenomenological flavour, in their contextualized inquiries. Concurrently, two

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distinct audiences can be discerned in the journal's readership. While one is the professional philosopher primarily concerned with the elucidation of phenomenological notions and theory-building, the other group of readers tends to comprise practitioners and scholars who are seeking ways to enrich their practices through the use of phenomenology. Regrettably, these two groups tend not always to have a mutual respect for one another's work. While this might seem a banal point, it nonetheless is central to the dilemma that a journal often faces when its readership covers a diverse range of scholars, practitioners and researchers rather than restricting itself to those specialising in a particular field. This dual-track submission poses a significant challenge to the panel of reviewers, some of whom find themselves in the "empirical" camp while others find themselves firmly in the "theoretical-philosophical" camp. Consequently, the implicit criteria used by each to evaluate submitted papers tend to be somewhat different as they arise from a different set of equally valid and appropriate assumptions about phenomenological enquiry and its epistemology. In this regard, it is important to note that all submissions go through a rigorous and independent review process, the details of which are to be found on the IPJP web site. This "dual track" tension is possibly best contained by referring to the purpose of the journal – and it to this that I shall turn for a moment.

Emblazoned on its web site, the purpose of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* is clear: to provide researchers (particularly in the southern hemisphere) with *an avenue through which they can express their scholarship*. Moreover, the journal serves *as a networking opportunity*, and its underlying assumption is that phenomenology provides researchers with a *unique research philosophy which allows them to explore issues central to the question of being human. It enables the richness of human experience to be explicated especially in areas such as human meaning, experiences, values, and*

truthfulness. In order thus to remain true to its vision, the editorial mandate becomes one that aims to ensure not only a high-calibre journal content but also that a sufficiently diverse range of writings and inquiry appear in the journal pages. To achieve, and maintain, quality assurance is not an easy task as the journal review process has constantly to reflect upon appropriate acceptance criteria and whether the purpose of the journal is being met: Readership response is crucial to this endeavour.

The first of the unsolicited papers in this edition of the IPJP is by Peter Willis (University of South Australia) which devotes considerable time dealing - from an academic practitioner perspective - with various gradations in phenomenological research, and how different approaches have been associated with contemporary social science attempts to understand "knowing" "and "learning", particularly in the fields of education and nursing research. Willis explores four contemporary approaches, beginning with the distinction between imaginal and rational knowing as complementary modes of attempting to understand human experience, through to the so-called "expressive" approach to investigation followed by a hermeneutic text mode of inquiry and, finally, the use of a cyclical heuristic approach in the striving to understand human experience. For any researcher new to the field of phenomenology, Peter Willis's paper is an excellent introduction to the different nuances of phenomenological research, each approach emphasising the different ways of better getting to understand the subject matter of enquiry, namely, human experience.

Following on from an explication of different "voices" in phenomenological research is a paper by Rodrigo Becerra (Murdoch University, Australia) in which he boldly traces what he considers to be phenomenological influences on what might, at first, appear to be a starkly contrasting paradigmatic model, that of cognitive

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behaviour therapy. Entitled “*Atmosphere*”, a precursor of “*Cognitive Schemas*”, Becerra argues that CBT, as articulated by Aaron Beck in the early 1960s, owes a significant intellectual acknowledgement to various philosophical thinkers, in particular, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Martin Heidegger. Using emotional pathology as a vehicle of exploration, Becerra argues that while the theoretical terminology might be different, the fundamental ontology and epistemological positions have their origins in similar intellectual traditions. Becerra’s paper argues that early phenomenological inquiry into the nature of psychopathology led to the emergence of various phenomenological themes, which could just as easily have been used in the genesis of certain core concepts in cognitive behaviour therapy. Moreover, he argues that this “conceptual harmony” has still not yet been explicitly developed in the literature which is especially regrettable in view of Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s early discontent with the psychology of their time which, in turn, became a legacy adversely influencing contemporary phenomenological thinking regarding much of contemporary psychological theory. Becerra goes on to argue that the thrust of his paper has more to do with the practical aspects of psychology and the various phenomenological precepts relevant to the arena of psychopathology than an attempt to generate philosophical commentary *per se*. Using Dreyfus’ notion of phenomenology to reconceptualise psychopathology, Becerra aspires to show how there can be a rapprochement with contemporary cognitive behaviour therapy as developed by figures such as Albert Ellis and Aaron Beck. To this extent, Becerra’s paper provides a novel primer for those keen to trace commonalities between various contemporary models of practical psychological theory and early philosophical theory as it relates to the field of psychopathology.

At the heart of psychopathology and disorders of personality is a range of theoretical constructs

that point to ways of being, which – for a variety of reasons – are dysfunctional. It is pertinent therefore, that Les Todres’ paper (Bournemouth University, United Kingdom) offers a somewhat different perspective on narcissism: that it might, indeed, potentially be the source of human compassion. Todres asserts that self-absorption does not necessarily have to be construed negatively since the very process of inward-looking can, in itself, be a significant source of existential possibilities. After providing a brief overview of the drama and myth of Narcissus, Todres begins to explore the philosophical and psychological history of narcissism and how it relates to facets of psychological vulnerability, which – his paper argues - are necessary for an existential openness to the world. Before concluding, Todres’ paper considers narcissism from an existentialist perspective, making use of writers such as A H Almaas and Eugene Gendlin.

As mentioned earlier in this editorial, there would appear to be two broad sets of readership, those more philosophically-inclined and concerned with theory-building on the one hand, whilst on the other hand there is that group of readers whose concerns seem more to cohere around the notion of empirical phenomenology and existential considerations relating to human experience. Anita Sinner’s paper is one such example, her thesis being that physical pain can, to an extent, function as a precipitating element in the decision to return to learning. Using theoretical perspectives emanating from grounded-theory, phenomenological and narrative analysis, Sinner (PhD student in Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada) conducted an empirical investigation in an attempt to elucidate the lived-experiences of pain and its relation to learning and subsequent participation in college and university courses. Just as Les Todres suggested that an understanding of narcissism could make positive contributions to a greater comprehension of human experience and relatedness, so Sinner’s paper points to a lived dimension of pain that,

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within a social context, can serve as a catalyst in the decision-making process to return to scholarship. Sinner's paper is essentially a catalogue of the lived-experiences of three women whose initial encounter with pain truncated their careers but then over time appeared to be responsible for a metamorphosis of pain-as-an-inhibitor to pain-as-a-facilitator. Anita Sinner's paper concludes with the suggestion that "the dialectic of pain offers a new lens onto learning, moving beyond the current boundaries of educational thought". Furthermore, she argues, the lived-experience of pain brings "a new voice to the learning landscape, which educationists and theoreticians should take serious account of when endeavouring to understand the influences that cohere around issues of learning and scholarship".

The final paper in this edition looks at a client's experience of a complementary health practice, and in so doing demonstrates the contribution that phenomenologically-based research can offer regarding the debate on the efficacy of complementary health practices vis-à-vis mainstream psycho-medical health intervention. Tessa Therkelston and Trish Sherwood demonstrate the appropriateness of phenomenological methodology through the presentation of a case study of a patient's experience of the external therapeutic application of ginger (known as the ginger compress) by anthroposophically trained nurses. In addition to presenting a brief overview of previous research regarding complementary health practices, their paper outlines the phenomenological approach used in their study and thus provides an exemplar of practical phenomenology in process. After explicating the emergent themes from their case study of a small group of clients' lived-experiences of undergoing a ginger compress treatment, Therkelston and Sherwood suggest that their study might go some way towards elucidating the reasons for complementary health

services continuing to rise in popularity, despite the oft criticism of their efficacy. (Tessa is the Director of the RATO Natural Health Clinic in Lower Hutt, New Zealand, while Trish chairs the phenomenological research group at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.)

In concluding the editorial for this issue of the IPJP, it is important to stress the journal's continued commitment to its fundamental purpose: to provide a networking opportunity for scholars and the dissemination of the fruits of their research – theoretical and empirical – and thus the facilitation of a better understanding regarding concerns central to the question of being human. Hopefully, this current edition of the journal fulfils some of these lofty ideals.

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 Chairman of the South African Society for Clinical Psychology as well as Vice-President of the South African Association for Psychotherapy. 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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