



## A Short History of Phenomenological Psychology in South Africa

by Dr Dreyer Kruger

My decision to introduce Phenomenological Psychology as part of the undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in psychology at Rhodes University had its origins in 1969 (while I was still teaching at Fort Hare University) when J H van den Berg (who at that time was a professor of psychiatry at the University of Utrecht – he had also taught at Leiden) visited the university.

He noticed Ludwig Binswanger's book, Grundformen und Erkenntnis Menschlichen Daseins (Basic Forms and Understanding of Human Existence) which has not yet been translated into English, on my bookshelf and we began talking about Binswanger's work. I told him that I simply could not understand most of what he was writing about. Van den Berg then told me more about the phenomenological movement in psychology and psychiatry, which was still current in Holland but was no longer academically popular. He also spoke about the Daseinsanalytic Institute in Zurich and Amedeo Giorgi in Pittsburgh, U.S.A. Upon discovering that van den Berg himself was a prolific writer, I set about reading his books as well as the work of Medard Boss and Gion Condrau in Zurich.

Van den Berg again visited South African and Fort Hare University in 1972, when he offered a two month course on phenomenological psychology at Hartebeespoort Dam near Pretoria – this was a sabbatical year! Nevertheless, I

found it worthwhile. In 1973 I spent some time in further study of phenomenology, including coming to grips with Heidegger's Sein und Zeit (Being and Time).

In 1974 I moved to Rhodes University and there began incorporating this new (for South Africa) approach into my teaching, dedicating an entire third-year block to Phenomenological Psychology. (As an interesting sidelight; at the end of this block, Peter Parker, now Dr Parker, living in Australia, came to me to say that the course had convinced him that it would be worth his while to continue studying psychology). He eventually went on to do Honours, and in his theses for both MA and PhD, he used the phenomenological model. Les Todres (now in England) took to Phenomenological Psychology like a duck to water and Rob Schweitzer did pioneering work on black diviners (amagqira) in his PhD thesis.

In 1983 I was in Europe for an international conference and there gave a lecture, which was later published in the proceedings. In 1979 I published An Introduction to Phenomenological Psychology (with a chapter on research by Dr Chris Stones). Duquesne University Press also published this book in 1981. A second (revised) edition appeared in 1988 and this was reprinted once more. The book was also prescribed at Pretoria University by Dr Rex van Vuuren and

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was used until relatively recently. (He is now at St Augustine's College in Johannesburg).

I published three other books while at Rhodes University, namely: A first encounter with psychology (Human and Rousseau), which went through several reprints, as well as The changing nature of modern man (Juta) to which a variety of famous scientists, including Hubertus Tellenbach (Germany), Medard Boss and Gion Condrau (Switzerland), the ex-South African, Bertha Mook, and the South Africans, A.B. Preller and J. Robbertze, contributed. Last, but not least, my research on psychotherapeutic interpretation was published by the Human Sciences Research Council (which had also funded the research).

I published mainly in the South African Journal of Psychology but an article on dreams appeared in the Journal of Phenomenological Psychology in 1984.

My last period of study leave was in 1986–1987 and most of it was spent at the Daseinsanalytic

Institute in Zurich. In 1987, the Rhodes Psychology Department initiated the first PhD in Psychotherapy – in fact Rhodes was the first University to initiate teaching in Psychology at the PhD level. The first graduates of this doctoral programme were Drs Jackie Watts and Mark Thorpe, who were both awarded their degrees at the beginning of 1989. Les Todres, Roger Brooke, Dave Ruthenberg and myself did the teaching of the course. I am sad to say that all of these staff members, except myself, have emigrated since then.

Looking back, I can say that my whole career as a psychologist (from 1949 in the Department of Labour, private practice in Pretoria in 1964 and 1965, my professorship at Fort Hare from 1966 and then at Rhodes from 1974 to 1989) was interesting and eventful. I did have setbacks and disappointments but I have very few regrets and regard my career at Fort Hare (1966 – 1973) and Rhodes especially (1974 – 1989) as the best part of my life.