



Editorial

by Les Todres

Guest Editor

Special Edition on Method in Phenomenology

One can trace the meaning of “method” to the Greek word “hodos” (street or way). It is in this broad sense that the present edition on method is conceived. It offers a range of papers that have implications for the ‘way’ of phenomenology, particularly in relation to the human sciences. Topics thus necessarily go back to the epistemological, ontological and ethical foundations that forge this ‘way’ as a possible path. To trace a certain coherence in this broad path, and how such a path can accommodate a number of specific pathways, may be an exciting and productive venture.

Brent Robbins’s paper questions the boundaries between the human and natural sciences. He welcomes Goethe as a phenomenologically-compatible thinker who extended a more holistic invitation to the natural world to reveal itself in non-reductionistic ways. In the urgent light of our increasing ecological alienation, this is a very timely consideration.

Scott Churchill also questions the boundaries of human science by reflecting on his experiences of communicating with Bonobo monkeys. What are the boundaries of intersubjective interaction between species? What implications does this have for studying such interactions without access to ready-made, shared language? What are the lessons of this for psychology? These and other questions about the depth of our kinship with others are provocatively pursued.

Linda Finlay’s paper explores a similar ontological concern, and focuses on inter-embodiment as a source of intersubjective understanding. She pursues some of the methodological challenges of attending to both the intimacy of inter-embodied understanding, as well as the ‘otherness’ of the other. Interesting examples from her own research projects are used to illustrate the value and possible limits of utilising embodied reflexivity as one methodological pathway in human science research.

Amedeo Giorgi offers a scholarly paper that touches on the philosophy of science within its historical context, in order to examine the role of values when approaching human science enquiry and research. Human Science researchers often struggle with the status of their own ‘values’ position, and the extent to which they should reflexively include or exclude such value stances. Giorgi offers a number of useful distinctions that clear the way for including the possibility of acknowledging human values and being informed by them, while, at other stages, entering a more disciplined moment, where a certain suspension of values informs the enquiry.

The Phenomenological Movement has sometimes been criticised for not sufficiently including an emphasis on how social contexts constitute experience, and thus there is a charge of excessive ‘individualism’ in its approach. Karin Dahlberg demonstrates how both Husserl and Merleau-Ponty do, in fact, provide a philosophical basis for understanding an intimate intertwining between world

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(including the social dimension) and the individual that does not prioritise 'individualism'. However, neither does it prioritise the social or political dimension; to do so would be a new 'determinism'. The challenges of such co-constitution are considered for phenomenological-methodological practices, in particular the challenge of how to articulate cultural or social levels of discourse within phenomenological description.

Ernesto Spinelli also considers the meanings and implications of intersubjectivity, but takes this in a more existential direction in order to consider its implications for how we value and relate to one another. As such, he examines the value of relatedness in psychotherapy and how the irreducible aliveness of an unknowable human encounter places limits on our fantasies of turning psychotherapy (and, by implication, qualitative research) into predictable techniques. He also pursues some of the implications that a radically relational perspective has when pursuing 'individualistic' goals within the one-to-one encounter of psychotherapy.

The paper by Anna Kirova and Michael Emme raises two important and topical questions for method: the limitations of language in cross-cultural situations, and the challenge of accessing and re-presenting children's worlds. The topic of the study, the experience of childhood that has been interrupted by immigration, is also very important and timely. The authors offer an innovative method of using a 'fotonovella' as a means of both capturing and communicating the phenomenological worlds of children's everyday experiences of being immigrants.

Attention to epistemological, ontological and ethical concerns are well integrated as a coherent foundation to the method's way.

Eugene Gendlin is perhaps best known as a phenomenologically-informed thinker who developed Focusing-oriented Psychotherapy, an approach that helps people pay attention to implicit personal meanings carried in their lived body. Kevin Krycka offers a contribution based on a different strand of Gendlin's work called "Thinking at the Edge". This is essentially a phenomenologically-oriented practice in which people reflect on their own experiences in order to articulate fresh meanings that may be useful to the public world. After considering some of the parallels and differences between this approach and phenomenological research, Krycka illustrates the method of this approach with reference to his own research into the experience of 'self-as-becoming'. He demonstrates how the steps of the method are productive in articulating a description of the phenomenon in fresh but faithful ways.

It has been very gratifying for me, as Guest Editor, to discover both the overlapping themes in the papers of this special edition, as well as the unique emphases and directions. I found it very valuable to read them in relation to one another, and thank the contributors for an exciting edition. I would also like to express my gratitude to my fellow reviewers for their thoughtful and responsive comments and suggestions.

About the Author

Les Todres, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and Professor of Qualitative Research and Psychotherapy at the Institute of Health and Community Studies, Bournemouth University, England. His previous occupational roles have included serving as head of a student counselling service and director of a clinical psychology training programme. Professor Todres has also worked within NHS clinics and general medical practices. He has published in the areas of Phenomenological Psychology and Integrative Psychotherapy. In his current position, he co-founded and co-leads the Centre for Qualitative Research. He also provides clinical supervision to psychological therapists at the Intensive Psychological Therapies Service in Poole.