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Getting it quite wrong: van Manen and Smith on phenomenology

Abstract:

Max van Manen and Jonathan Smith have recently had an exchange in *Qualitative Health Research* concerning their respective use of phenomenology. I welcome the attempt to get clearer on what phenomenology amounts to and I agree with van Manen that an overly arbitrary use of term will lead to an erosion of the reputation of phenomenology. However, I think both of them are to blame for promoting various confusions concerning the nature of phenomenology. The aim of my article is to make some critical remarks concerning van Manen's and Smith's understanding of phenomenology and to suggest alternative resources for qualitative researchers interested in phenomenology.

Getting it quite wrong: van Manen and Smith on phenomenology

As a philosopher who has published on phenomenology since 1989 and who for decades has worked to demonstrate and defend the vitality of phenomenology – most recently as editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Phenomenology* (2012) and *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Phenomenology* (2018), and as author of *Husserl's Legacy* (2017), and *Phenomenology: The Basics* (2019) – I find it both perplexing and disheartening to read the recent exchange between van Manen and Smith in *Qualitative Health Research* (van Manen 2017a, 2017b, 2018, Smith 2018). I welcome the attempt to get clearer on what phenomenology amounts to and I agree with van Manen that an overly arbitrary use of the term will lead to an erosion of the reputation of phenomenology. However, I think van Manen and Smith are both to blame for promoting various confusions concerning the nature of phenomenology.

Let me first say a few words about Smith's approach and then discuss van Manen's in more detail. Let me also make it clear from the outset that my concern in this context is with Smith's and van Manen's understanding of phenomenology. I am not taking a stance on the general quality of their work. As I will eventually suggest, however, I think qualitative health researchers interested in phenomenology should look elsewhere for theoretical inspiration and methodological guidance.

1. Interpretative phenomenological analysis

In recent years, Smith's *Interpretative phenomenological analysis* (IPA) has gained increasing popularity among qualitative researchers. Its focus is idiographic in that it seeks to understand how particular individuals experience particular events and life-episodes, and it has taken issue with the claim – promoted, for instance, by Giorgi (2012) – that a phenomenological psychology must remain descriptive. Smith holds that we, qua human beings, are always already engaged in interpretative meaning-making activities. Interpretation is a basic structure of our intentional life and is consequently not only permissible, but unavoidable.

The approach of IPA is clearly qualitative. It is non-reductive and it seeks to provide rich experiential descriptions. But is that enough to secure its phenomenological credentials? Is it sufficient simply to consider the first-person perspective of the agent/patient/client in order to make the approach in question phenomenological? Phenomenologically informed qualitative research has different aims than phenomenological philosophy, but it is questionable whether the former can qualify as phenomenological if it either ignores or misinterprets the latter. In his co-authored introduction to IPA, *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*, Smith does offer brief descriptions of the theoretical work of Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, but it is hard to see how their work is actually being put to use in the subsequent application of the method. Smith has claimed that his approach is phenomenological because it seeks to examine experience according to its “own terms, rather than according to predefined category systems”, and has also insisted that IPA has adopted suggestions from phenomenology about how to pay attention to and examine experience (Smith, Flowers, Larkin 2009: 32). Moreover, in his recent exchange with van Manen, Smith has argued that since IPA takes the primary role of the researcher to consist in i) inviting the participant to share his sense making, (ii) witnessing its articulation, and (iii) in turn, making sense of it, this aligns IPA with

Heidegger's conceptualization of hermeneutic phenomenology (Smith 2018: 1956). When confronted, on previous occasions, with the criticism that there is far more to phenomenology than this, Smith has replied that "philosophy does not own phenomenology" and that what philosophers have been doing is to formalize something that all of us were already doing (Smith, Flowers, Larkin 2009: 32-33). As a philosopher trained in phenomenology, I find it hard to take any of this seriously. Not only does it belittle the actual contributions of philosophers like Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty, who were certainly not simply repacking commonsensical truisms. It also fails to recognize that the appeal to both subjective experience and sense making can be found in many other disciplines and traditions besides phenomenology.

In his exchange with van Manen, Smith warns against being overly prescriptive about what counts as phenomenological and has insisted that no single person has the authority to prescribe rules about what does or does not constitute phenomenology (Smith 2018: 1956). This might be right, but we should not accept the flipside of this and simply accept any definition. Phenomenology might not be a copyrighted term, and various odd uses of it can be found in the contemporary landscape. By labelling itself the way it does, however, IPA clearly stresses the link between its own endeavor and the phenomenological research tradition. But that link does not amount to very much.

2. Phenomenology in its original sense

I share a good part of van Manen's concern about Smith's approach. However, I also have serious concerns about van Manen's own account. Van Manen is a prolific writer, and in the following I

will focus only on his recent contributions to *Qualitative Health Research* (van Manen 2017a, 2017b, 2018).

A recurrent claim of van Manen's is that we shouldn't make do with the secondary literature, but that we ought to return to the origin and consult "the primary literature, tradition, and movements of phenomenology" (van Manen 2018: 1966). We should read the writings of leading phenomenologists such as Husserl, Stein, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty etc. (van Manen 2017b: 824). van Manen also stresses that "phenomenology in its original sense is a philosophically based form of inquiry" (van Manen 2017b: 824) and that its practitioners must have a "scholarly commitment to orient to past and present leading phenomenological literature" (van Manen 2017b: 824). I agree with all of that and also think van Manen is quite sincere when he writes that he is "motivated and committed to the century-old philosophical and methodological scholarship of phenomenology". The problem, however, is that van Manen's own account and description of phenomenology is a vivid example of how that very tradition has been "poorly understood" (van Manen 2017a: 776).

There are plenty of points to take issue with but let me in the following restrict myself to three.

1. van Manen repeatedly claims that phenomenology is the study of the lived meaning of an experience and that the basic phenomenological question is the question of "what is this lived experience like" (van Manen 2017a: 776). This is simply untrue. The irony is that when van Manen claims that phenomenology is the "pursuit of insight into the phenomenality of lived experience" (van Manen 2017a: 779), he is not giving us the original sense of phenomenology but is unwittingly propagating the same superficial and trivialized understanding of phenomenology that one can find in some contemporary cognitive science and analytic philosophy of mind. In both of

the latter disciplines, there is an increasing recognition that a scientific account of consciousness must include and address phenomenology. In both cases, however, the terms “phenomenology” and “phenomenological” are often used as synonyms for “phenomenality,” i.e., as labels for the qualitative character of experience. To discuss phenomenology in that context is consequently to discuss a certain dimension of experience and at best to offer first-person descriptions of what the ‘what it is like’ of experience is really like. This way of talking about phenomenology has, however, little to do with phenomenology understood as a specific method or tradition in philosophy. When thinkers like Husserl, Scheler, Sartre, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty engaged in phenomenological philosophizing, they most definitely were not simply seeking to offer fine-grained descriptions of the qualitative character of different experiences; they were not simply seeking to attend to hitherto unreflected and unnoticed aspects and details of lived experience. To suggest that they were is to utterly miss out on the philosophical character of their work. Consider, for a moment, the actual content of some of the major works in phenomenology. Take Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (1900-01), a recognized milestone in twentieth-century philosophy and indisputably a work of phenomenological philosophy. This is the work, where Husserl made his famous claim concerning the need for returning to the ‘things themselves’ (Husserl 2001/I: 168). What type of content does one find in the book? Among the many topics treated in the book, one can, for instance, find Husserl’s defence of the irreducibility of logic and his analysis of part-whole relationships. Thus, Husserl spent considerable effort showing that logical principles could not be reduced to psychological regularities. He also discussed the relation between wholes and parts, and carefully distinguished pieces (or independent parts) and moments (or non-independent parts). Whereas a piece, say, a leaf or leg, can exist independently of the whole (a tree or body) to which it belongs, moments, such as a hue or a pitch, cannot exist on their own. A hue can only exist as

part of a colour, and a pitch only as part of a sound. Analyses like these are not about what various experiences are really like. The same holds true if we go to Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy I*, or to his *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, to Heidegger's *Being and Time*, or to Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. Amassing experiential descriptions is a poor substitute for the systematic and argumentative work that we find in the phenomenological philosophers. Offering descriptions of "what this experience is like" would not allow us to elucidate the kind of questions that the phenomenological philosophers have often been occupied with, say, the relation between perceptual intentionality and scientific rationality, the link between subjectivity and objectivity, the difference between empathy and inferential mindreading, or the relation between the individual and the community. It is no coincidence that many of the phenomenologists dismissed a purely descriptive endeavour devoid of systematic ambitions as mere 'picture-book phenomenology' (Spiegelberg 1965: 170; Scheler 1973: xix).

Perhaps van Manen would offer the following rejoinder: How can one deny that phenomenologists are concerned with the phenomenality of experience, with what it is like to experience this or that phenomenon? After all, in his article "Phenomenology in its original sense", van Manen quotes extensively from Heidegger's analysis of what it is like to be bored and also discusses Levinas' and Marion's analyses of what it is like to experience the face of another. My claim, however, is not that phenomenologists are not interested in the phenomenality of experience, my claim is that phenomenology cannot be reduced to a concern with that topic. When phenomenological philosophers are providing the kind of analyses that van Manen is interested in, they are doing so for a systematic purpose. The descriptions in question are means rather than ends. To think otherwise is fundamentally to misconceive the philosophical character of

phenomenology. Taking Heidegger's analysis of boredom as an example, van Manen argues that the traditional distinction between philosophical phenomenology and human science based phenomenology is difficult to sustain (van Manen 2017b: 816). Perhaps van Manen is right. Perhaps we do need to rethink that distinction, but the argument he provides is spurious. When considering Heidegger's concrete description of boredom, one should not overlook the systematic context in which it occurs. Heidegger's most extensive discussion of boredom can be found in a lecture course titled *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Heidegger 1995). The reason Heidegger engages with boredom is that he thinks it can provide us with a deeper understanding of fundamental ontological questions. Heidegger's concern with these types of questions is not to be distinguished from his phenomenology, as if Heidegger was in reality engaged in two different projects, an ontological and a phenomenological. There is a reason why Heidegger in *Being and Time* can write that ontology is only possible as phenomenology, and that the analysis of our being-in-the-world is the key to every ontological exploration (Heidegger 1996: 31), just as there is a reason why he in *History of the Concept of Time* can declare "there is no ontology *alongside* a phenomenology. Rather, *scientific ontology is nothing but phenomenology*" (Heidegger 1985: 72). Likewise, we shouldn't distinguish Husserl's phenomenological analyses of consciousness from his concern with metaphysics and epistemology. On the contrary, as Husserl repeatedly makes clear, his approach to philosophical questions, including questions of metaphysics and epistemology, is a phenomenological approach. Indeed, as Husserl writes in a letter to Peter Wust from 1920, phenomenology was from the beginning never supposed to be anything except the path to a radically genuine "strictly scientific metaphysics" (Husserl 2014: lxiv). One cannot even start to comprehend Heidegger's and Husserl's claims as long as one believes that the fundamental question of phenomenology is to understand what it is like to have this or that experience.

2. Another repeated claim made by van Manen in his recent papers is that the fundamental method of phenomenology is the reduction and the epoché (van Manen 2017b: 819). I agree, but when van Manen then sets out to explain the function and purpose of the epoché and reduction, he once again gets it wrong. In his view, the reason phenomenologists employ the epoché and the reduction is because this will allow them to grasp “the phenomenological meaning of a human experience” (van Manen 2017b: 819) and permit them to investigate the “primal, eidetic, or inceptual meanings that are passed over in everyday life” (van Manen 2017b: 812). If, however, we turn to the work of Husserl – which is where we ought to look if we want to understand the epoché and the reduction¹ – this is hardly the explanation we find.² Husserl often contrasts philosophy proper with the work done by the positive sciences. The latter are so absorbed in their investigation of the natural (or social/cultural) world that they do not pause to reflect upon their own presuppositions and conditions of possibility. They all operate on the basis of a natural (and necessary) naivety, namely the tacit belief in the existence of a mind-independent reality. This realist assumption is so fundamental and deeply rooted that it is not only accepted by the positive sciences, it also permeates our daily pre-theoretical life, for which reason Husserl calls it the

¹ As should be well known, Husserl is the only major figure among the classical phenomenologists who consistently and explicitly made use of the epoché and the reduction. Whether the other phenomenologists rejected his methodological prescriptions, or rather simply took them for granted, is a matter of scholarly debate.

² I have discussed the motivation for introducing the epoché and the reduction *in extenso* in previous publications, so the following can only serve as a brief overview. For a more extensive treatment, see Zahavi 2003, Zahavi 2017, Zahavi 2019.

‘natural attitude’. Regardless of how natural this attitude might be, if philosophy is supposed to amount to a radical form of critical elucidation, it cannot simply take our natural realist assumptions for granted, but must instead engage in a reflective move that allows it to explore and assess the epistemic and metaphysical presuppositions of the latter.

This is where the epoché enters the picture. To avoid simply presupposing the validity of realism, we need to suspend our acceptance of the natural attitude. We keep the attitude (in order to investigate it), but we bracket its validity. The purpose of the epoché is not to doubt, ignore, neglect, abandon, or exclude reality from our research, but to suspend or neutralize a certain dogmatic *attitude* towards reality. By suspending this attitude and by thematizing the fact that reality is always revealed and examined from some perspective or another, reality is not lost from sight, but for the first time made accessible for a proper investigation (Husserl 1970: 151-152). Indeed, for Husserl, a philosophical exploration of reality does not consist in inventorying the content of the universe, but in accounting for the conditions under which something can appear as real. Rather than making reality disappear from view, the epoché is precisely what allows reality to be investigated philosophically. It is only thereby that the phenomenologist can accomplish his main, if not sole, concern, namely to transform “the universal obviousness of the being of the world—for him the greatest of all enigmas—into something intelligible” (Husserl 1970: 180).

To perform the epoché is to effectuate a thematic re-orientation. It is not as if we cannot continue to observe, thematize and make judgments concerning the world, but we must do so in a reflective manner that considers the world as related to the perspective we bring to bear on it. By adopting the phenomenological attitude, we do not turn the gaze inwards in order to examine the happenings in a private interior sphere. Rather, we look at how the world shows up for the subject. We pay attention to *how* and *as what* worldly objects are given to us. By doing so, by analyzing

how and as what any object presents itself to us, we also discover the intentional acts and experiential structures in relation to which any appearing object must necessarily be understood.

In the reorientation of the epoché nothing is lost, none of the interests and ends of world-life, and thus also none of the ends of knowledge. But for all these things their essential subjective correlates are exhibited, and thus the full and true ontic meaning of objective being, and thus of all objective truth, is set forth. (Husserl 1970: 176)

In *Crisis* Husserl describes phenomenology as the final gestalt (*Endform*) of transcendental philosophy (Husserl 1970: 70). Rather than amounting to an exploration of what a given experience is like, Husserl's phenomenology offers a fundamental account of the nature of reality and objectivity. Strictly speaking, the epoché can be seen as the first step towards what Husserl terms the *transcendental reduction*, which is his name for the systematic analysis of the correlation between subjectivity and world. For Husserl, the greatest and most important problems in phenomenology are related to the question of how objectivities of different kinds, from the prescientific ones to those of the highest scientific dignity, are constituted by consciousness. Indeed, "it is therefore a matter of inquiring, in the most comprehensive universality, into how Objective unities of any region and category are 'constituted in the manner peculiar to consciousness'" (Husserl 1982: 209).

Both epoché and reduction can consequently be seen as elements in a philosophical reflection, the purpose of which is to liberate us from our natural(istic) dogmatism and make us aware of our own constitutive contribution, make us aware of the extent to which our own subjective accomplishments are at play when worldly objects appear in the way they do and with

the validity and meaning that they have. By effectuating the epoché and by carrying out the reduction, Husserl ultimately came to embrace the view that reason, truth and being are essentially interlinked, and that the right place to locate objectivity is in, rather than beyond, the appearing world.

3. The final point I take issue with concerns van Manen's repeated claim that phenomenology aims to dwell "inceptually" in the meaning of an experience for which we do not really have the proper words. He talks of how the unique feature of phenomenology is that it focuses on the originary meaning of the experiences as we live through them prior to any linguistic articulation (van Manen 2018: 1964). This is an idea that van Manen has promoted for many years. Indeed, in his early work, van Manen insisted not only that phenomenology should take its point of departure in the lifeworld, the world of the pre-reflective, pre-theoretical attitude. He also suggested that phenomenology should remain at this level, since he claimed that the task of phenomenology was to describe how we experience the world pre-reflectively, prior to any classification and taxonomization (van Manen 1990: 9).

There are two main problems with this characterization. First of all, if it were really the case that the aim of a phenomenological study is "to let a phenomenon (lived experience) show itself in the way that it gives itself while living through it" (van Manen 2017b: 813), then phenomenological studies would arguably be superfluous. There would be nothing for phenomenology to do, since the goal in question is achieved automatically whenever we experience something. This follows directly from a key tenet in classical phenomenology, the idea namely that consciousness is characterized by pre-reflective self-givenness (Zahavi 1999). Here is, for instance, what Husserl says in *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*:

The flow of the consciousness that constitutes immanent time not only *exists* but is so remarkably and yet intelligibly fashioned that a self-appearance of the flow necessarily exists in it, and therefore the flow itself must necessarily be apprehensible in the flowing. The self-appearance of the flow does not require a second flow; on the contrary, it constitutes itself as a phenomenon in itself (Husserl 1991: 88).

The aim of the phenomenological description cannot be simply to reproduce the original experience unaltered. Rather, as Husserl points out, at the beginning we are confronted with the so to speak dumb experience that must then be made to articulate its own sense (Husserl 1960: 38). One aim of the phenomenological work is consequently to disclose, disentangle, explicate, and articulate those components and structures that are implicitly contained in the pre-reflective experience (Husserl 2008: 242, Zahavi 2015). Perhaps this is what van Manen had in mind all along, but then the task is precisely not to simply let the experience show itself in the way it does when it is lived through.

Secondly, van Manen's suggestion that phenomenology should restrict itself to a study of the lived, pre-reflective, pre-predicative meaning of an experience is also wrong, since an important part of the phenomenological work is to understand the transition between our pre-reflective and pre-conceptual grasp of the world and our subsequent conceptualization of and judgment about it. How does the theoretical attitude that we employ when we conduct science arise out of and change our pre-theoretical being-in-the-world? Husserl described this process in *Crisis* and *Experience and Judgment*. It was also a topic that both Merleau-Ponty and Heidegger worked on extensively.

3. Conclusion

As should be clear by now, I do not think that either van Manen or Smith is offering anything close to phenomenology in its original sense. “So what?” some might say. As should be clear, however, I am not objecting to the fact that van Manen and Smith are departing from phenomenology. I am objecting to the way they characterize their own work and to the fact that they despite their departure continue to claim that their approaches are aligned with the philosophical phenomenology of thinkers like Husserl, Heidegger, or Merleau-Ponty. But if qualitative researchers interested in phenomenology are not best served by consulting the work of van Manen and Smith,³ what should they do? Let me by way of conclusion briefly point to some alternative resources.

1. Anybody promoting a method, procedure, or approach that is supposed to merit the label “phenomenological” should be familiar with phenomenological theory and with its philosophical origin. With the continuing publication of Husserl’s, Heidegger’s, and Merleau-Ponty’s lectures, research manuscripts and working notes, scholarship on these seminal figures is quite different today than 30-40 years ago (cf. Zahavi 2018, 2019). Qualitative researchers interested in phenomenology ought to familiarize themselves with at least some of this new research. Had they done so, some of the strange claims found in the qualitative research literature might have been avoided. Consider, for instance, Paley’s claim that Husserl tried to “break out of experience (into the realm of pure consciousness) through the phenomenological reduction” (2013: 148), or

³ For some critical remarks about Giorgi’s approach, see Zahavi 2019.

Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling's claim that "Heidegger's concept of being involved reformulating the question of being that had proved a challenge for earlier philosophers by challenging the concept of being as a dualism" (2016: 2). Indeed, sometimes the mistakes are appalling as when Dowling in an article titled "From Husserl to van Manen" not only claims that Husserl founded an empirical philosophy and defended a positivist type of phenomenology (Dowling 2007: 131, 134) but also manages to misspell the names of Hegel (Hegal), Merleau-Ponty (Merleu-Ponty), Kierkegaard (Kierkagaard), and Dreyfus (Drufus) (Dowling 2007: 132, 137).

2. If one is interested in the question of how phenomenology can be applied and developed outside of its philosophical home, one should look beyond the different proposals currently found within the qualitative research literature. There are very successful applications of phenomenology to be found elsewhere, applications that can offer substantial theoretical and methodological inspiration and support to qualitative researchers. Relevant resources include the work of classical phenomenological psychologists, such as David Katz, Erwin Straus or Franz From, the tradition of phenomenological psychiatry, with figures such as Karl Jaspers, Eugène Minkowski, Wolfgang Blankenburg, Louis Sass or Josef Parnas, or contemporary discussions of what has become known as "naturalized phenomenology."

In his book *Lived Time* from 1933, the psychiatrist Minkowski did not only discuss how insights from philosophical phenomenology could expand psychiatric knowledge and be used in clinical practice, he also emphasized how philosophical phenomenology might learn from its engagement with psychiatry and psychopathology. By disclosing various experiential anomalies, psychopathology could not only help the philosopher distinguish accidental regularities from truly essential features, but also bring the taken-for-granted, unnoticed conditions of normal existence,

be it at the level of intentionality, intersubjectivity, or self-experience, into sharp relief (Minkowski 1970: 7-8).

Seven decades later, a group of researchers with extensive clinical experience and expertise in philosophical phenomenology went on to develop a qualitative and semi-quantitative psychometric checklist called *EASE* (Examination of Anomalous Self-Experience) (Parnas et al. 2005). *EASE*, which consists of 57 items ordered in different experiential and existential domains, was designed to be used in semi-structured interviews in order to facilitate a systematic and comprehensive clinical exploration of various experiential anomalies. In addition to contributing to a better psychopathological understanding of these phenomena, the use of this phenomenological instrument has also benefitted the patients. It has allowed for earlier detection and identification of those with high risk for developing schizophrenia and thereby also permitted earlier therapeutic interventions (Møller et al. 2011, Nelson et al. 2012).

For years, the discussion of phenomenology within qualitative research appears to have taken place in a surprisingly insular fashion. Many qualitative researchers seem quite unfamiliar with the important developments that have occurred in the cognitive sciences since the early nineties. Back in 1991, the authors of *The Embodied Mind* heralded Merleau-Ponty as someone who already early on “argued for the mutual illumination among a phenomenology of direct lived experience, psychology and neurophysiology” (Varela, Thompson, Rosch 1991: 15). Since then an increasing number of scientists and scholars have argued that cognitive scientists interested in consciousness should learn from Husserl and Merleau-Ponty and that phenomenological tools and concepts could be used in developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, clinical psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience and even biology (Varela 1996, 1997, Gallagher 1997, Petitot et al. 1999, Lutz and Thompson 2003, Thompson 2007, Gallagher & Zahavi 2012). Although this approach

continues to remain a minority view in cognitive science, the initial publications by Varela, Thompson, Gallagher and others triggered an intense and ongoing debate. It led to the launch of the journal *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* and to a number of phenomenologically informed empirical studies of, for instance, narrative identity, pre-reflective experience, mental imagery, action coordination, embodied habits, interpersonal understanding, skilful coping, existential feelings, collective intentionality, etc., that unequivocally demonstrated the fecundity of the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology can not only make a difference in the handling, analysis and interpretation of the data, but also in how the data are obtained in the first place – be it, for instance, through the development of special interview techniques or by influencing the experimental design (cf. Gallagher 2003, Petitmengin 2006, Høffding and Martiny 2016).

3. For Husserl, the epoché and the reduction are crucial components of the phenomenological method. As I pointed out above, however, the epoché and the reduction are also explicitly connected to very specific philosophical aims and pursuits. They are essential to Husserl's transcendental philosophical project. It is much less obvious that they are also notions that everybody seeking to apply phenomenology outside of philosophy must constantly bear in mind. There are other features of phenomenology that are considerably more relevant to the qualitative researcher. Consider, for instance, phenomenology's criticism of scientism and its recognition of the importance of the lifeworld, its insistence on developing an open-minded and non-biased attitude (which is *not* to be conflated with the effectuation of the epoché), and its careful analysis of human existence, where the subject is understood as an embodied and socially and culturally embedded being-in-the-world. Rather than trying to adhere to Husserl's, Merleau-Ponty's, or Heidegger's recommendations regarding how to apply phenomenology, let alone

seeking to adopt their philosophical method, qualitative researchers should rather strive to let their own research be informed by central phenomenological concepts such as lifeworld, intentionality, empathy, pre-reflective experience, horizon, historicity and the lived body, etc. Consider, for instance, how a health care professional by drawing on notions such as perceptual intentionality, the lived body, sense of agency, empathy, or temporality might be able to elucidate how different dimensions of human existence are affected in pathology, illness or difficult life-circumstances, and thereby generate new insights or allow for better therapeutic interventions. It is often claimed that a qualitative researcher who wishes to conduct phenomenological research must start out by performing the epoché in order to bracket any preconceived beliefs, opinions or notions about the phenomenon being researched (which, to repeat, happens to be a misinterpretation of the epoché). By contrast, my recommendation is that the qualitative researcher should not only forget about the epoché (there is no need for a general suspension of our natural attitude) but should also approach and investigate the phenomenon (or conduct the interview) in light of quite specific prior ideas and notions, namely notions taken from phenomenological theory. To conduct phenomenologically informed qualitative research is not merely a question of being open-minded and interested in first-person experience. It is very much also about adopting and employing a comprehensive theoretical framework concerning the subject's relation to him- or herself, to the world, and to others.

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The Author declares that there is no conflict of interest

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