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*For information address:*



SAGE Publications, Inc.  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320  
E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.  
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EPOCHÉ,  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION,  
IMAGINATIVE VARIATION,  
AND SYNTHESIS

Husserl called the freedom from suppositions the *Epoche*, a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain. Epoche connects me with my Greek roots and contains the voice of my parents, an expression of their concern, a warning to be alert, to look with care, to see what is really there, and to stay away from everyday habits of knowing things, people, and events.

In the Epoche, we set aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things. We "invalidate," "inhibit," and "disqualify" all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience (Schmitt, 1968, p. 59). The world is placed out of action, while remaining bracketed. However, the world in the bracket has been cleared of ordinary thought and is present before us as a phenomenon to be gazed upon, to be known naively and freshly through a "purified" consciousness.

Husserl (1931, p. 110) contrasted the phenomenological universal Epoche with Cartesian doubt. The phenomenological Epoche does not eliminate everything, does not deny the reality of everything, does not doubt everything—only the *natural attitude*, the biases of everyday knowledge, as a basis for truth and reality. What is doubted are the scientific "facts," the knowing of things in advance, from an external base rather than from internal reflection and meaning. Husserl (1931) asserts that, "*all sciences which relate to this natural world . . . though they fill me with wondering admiration. . . . I disconnect them all, I make absolutely no use of their standards, I do not appropriate a single one of the propositions that enter into their systems, even though their evidential value is perfect*" (p. 111).

As I reflect on the nature and meaning of the Epoche, I see it as a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. This is not only critical for scientific determination but for living itself—the opportunity for a fresh start, a new beginning, not being hampered by the voices of the past that tell us the way things are or voices of the present that direct our thinking. The Epoche is a way of looking and being, an unfettered stance. Whatever or whoever appears in our consciousness is approached with an openness, seeing just what is there and allowing

Evidence from phenomenological research is derived from first-person reports of life experiences.

In accordance with phenomenological principles, scientific investigation is valid when the knowledge sought is arrived at through descriptions that make possible an understanding of the meanings and essences of experience. Husserl (1970b) believed that

we must exclude all empirical interpretations and existential affirmations, we must take what is inwardly experienced or otherwise inwardly intimated (e.g., in pure fancy) as pure experiences, as our exemplary basis for acts of ideation. . . . We thus achieve insights in pure phenomenology which is here oriented to *real (reellen)* constituents, whose descriptions are in every way "ideal" and free from . . . presupposition of real existence. (p. 577)

what is there to linger. This is a difficult task and requires that we allow a phenomenon or experience to be just what it is and to come to know it as it presents itself. One's whole life of thinking, valuing, and experiencing flows on, but what captures us in any moment and has validity for us is simply what is there before us as a compelling thing, viewed in an entirely new way. Thus the Epoche gives us an original vantage point, a clearing of mind, space, and time, a holding in abeyance of whatever colors the experience or directs us, anything whatever that has been put into our minds by science or society, or government, or other people, especially one's parents, teachers, and authorities, but also one's friends and enemies. Epoche includes entering a pure internal place, as an open self, ready to embrace life in what it truly offers. From the Epoche, we are challenged to create new ideas, new feelings, new awarenesses and understandings. We are challenged to come to know things with a receptiveness and a presence that lets us be and lets situations and things be, so that we can come to know them just as they appear to us.

The challenge of the Epoche is to be transparent to ourselves, to allow whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naive and completely open manner. Thus, in the process of being transparent in the viewing of things, we also become transparent to ourselves. Although the attentive Ego practices abstention, everything meant is retained but as "mere phenomena," all prior positions are put aside (Husserl, 1977, p. 20). Husserl states that

what I . . . acquire by it is my pure living, with all the pure subjective processes making this up, and everything meant in them, *purely* as meant in them. . . . The epoche can also be said to be the radical and universal method by which I apprehend myself *purely*: as Ego with my own pure conscious life, in and by which the entire Objective world exists for me and is precisely as it is for me. (1977, pp. 20-21)

This way of perceiving life calls for looking, noticing, becoming aware, without imposing our prejudgment on what we see, think, imagine, or feel. It is a way of genuine looking that precedes reflectiveness, the making of judgments, or reaching conclusions. We suspend everything that interferes with fresh vision. We simply let what is there stand as it appears, from many angles, perspectives, and signs. Sallis (1982) remarks that the return to beginnings makes the phenomenologist a perpetual beginner. Quoting Husserl, he adds that we "seek to attain the

beginnings in a free dedication to the problems themselves and to the demands stemming from them" (p. 115).

In the Epoche, no position whatsoever is taken; every quality has equal value. Only what enters freshly into consciousness, only what appears as appearance, has any validity at all in contacting truth and reality. Nothing is determined in advance. Everything that appears is marked "with a horizon of undetermined determinability" (Husserl, 1977, p. 30) by the possibility of being seen and known in its essential nature and meaning.

Although the process of Epoche requires that everything in the ordinary, everyday sense of knowledge be tabled and put out of action, I, the experiencing person, remain present. I, as a conscious person, am not set aside. On the contrary, with an open, transcendental consciousness, I carry out the Epoche: "I . . . still exist as the doubter and negator of everything" (Husserl, 1970a, p. 77). The self-evidence that I am capable of knowing, in the Epoche, is available to me. I know that I see what I see, feel what I feel, think what I think. What appears before me and in my consciousness is something I know is present regardless of how many others perceive that phenomenon differently. My consciousness is not rooted in them. The Epoche frees me from this bondage to people and things. In the pure Ego state,

I am the one who performs the epoche, and, even if there are others, and even if they practice the epoche in direct community with me, (they and) all other human beings with their entire act-life are included for me, within my epoche, in the world-phenomenon which, in my epoche, is exclusively mine. The epoche creates a unique sort of philosophical solitude, which is the fundamental methodical requirement for a truly radical philosophy . . . it is I who practice the epoche, I who interrogate, as phenomenon, the world which is now valid for me according to its being and being-such. (Husserl, 1970a, p. 184)

This passage alludes to the difficulty of achieving the Epoche, the pure state of being required for fresh perceiving and experiencing. I must practice the Epoche alone, its nature and intensity require my absolute presence in absolute aloneness. I concentrate fully, and in an enduring way, on what is appearing there before me and in my consciousness. I return to the original nature of my conscious experience. I return to whatever is there in memory, perception, judgment, feeling, whatever is actually there. Everything that appears in my consciousness

becomes available for self-referral and self-revelation. The loneliness of such presence, of such consciousness, enables me to target my energy so that I am attending to just what appears and nothing else. The challenge is to silence the directing voices and sounds, internally and externally, to remove from myself manipulating or predisposing influences and to become completely and solely attuned to just what appears, to encounter the phenomenon, as such, with a pure state of mind. There must be individual consciousness first of all, and as the last court of appeal to knowledge. Farber (1943) points out that, "If I as an individual ego 'eliminate' other human beings, I must also suspend all judgments based upon them or involving them . . . with the natural attitude I find myself in the world, along with other human beings. If I abstract from the others, I am alone" (p. 530).

Everything referring to others, their perceptions, preferences, judgments, feelings must be set aside in achieving the Epoche. Only my own perception, my own acts of consciousness, must remain as pointers to knowledge, meaning, and truth. Schmitt (1968) makes this emphatic: "It is I who must decide whether the claims to reality of the objects of experience in particular, and of the world in general, are valid claims. I discover that whatever has sense and validity, has sense and validity for me" (p. 60). Schmitt adds that the world prior to the Epoche and the world following it do not differ in content but only in the way in which I am related to each of them (p. 61). Sartre (1965) catches the sense of this in the following: "The being of an existent is exactly what it appears . . . What it is, it is absolutely, for it reveals itself as it is. The phenomenon can be studied and described as such, for it is absolutely indicative of itself" (p. xlv1).

The process of Epoche, of course, requires unusual, sustained attention, concentration, and presence. However effective we are in attaining the radical change of outlook, what we see requires that it really be there. The thing before us must be delimited in distinction from every other thing (Salis, 1982, p. 117). It must have a definite identity, a presence that marks it as an entity.

What is before me increasingly comes into meaning as I remain with it, as I linger in its presence, as I open myself to it, as I focus on it in its manifold appearances, in its dimensions, and as a whole. Schleidt (1982) captures the challenge of this kind of presence, involvement and commitment that is the heart of the Epoche process: "A simply prodigious amount of time, spent in presuppositionless observation, is nec-

essary in order to be able . . . to lift the gestalt from its background. . . . Such sustained endeavors can be accomplished only by those whose gaze, through a wholly irrational delight in the beauty of the object, stays riveted to it" (p. 678).

Such an ability to gaze with concentrated and unwavering attention, whether inward or outward, is indeed something that requires patience, a will to enter and stay with whatever it is that interferes until it is removed and an inward clearing is achieved, an opening, an intention directed toward something with clarity and meaning. Every time a distorted thought or feeling enters, the abstinence must once again be achieved until there is an open consciousness. I envision a rhythm of being receptive, of being struck with the newness and wonder of just what is before me and what is in me while also being influenced by habit, routine, expectation, and pressure to see things in a certain way until at last, with effort, will, and concentration, I am able to perceive things with an open presence.

In practicing the Epoche, I must focus on some specific situation, person, or issue, find a quiet place in which I can review my current thoughts and feelings regarding this person, situation, or issue. Each time in my review I set aside biases and prejudgments and return with a readiness to look again into my life, to enter with hope and intention of seeing this person, or situation, or issue with new and receptive eyes. This may take several sessions of clearing my mind until I am ready for an authentic encounter.

Another dimension of the Epoche process that encourages an open perception is that of reflective-meditation, letting the preconceptions and prejudgments enter consciousness and leave freely, being just as receptive to them as I am to the unbiased looking and seeing. This meditative procedure is repeated until I experience an internal sense of closure. As I do, I label the prejudgments and write them out. I review the list until its hold on my consciousness is released, until I feel an internal readiness to enter freshly, encounter the situation, issue, or person directly, and receive whatever is offered and come to know it as such.

The Epoche process inclines me toward receptiveness. I am more readily able to meet something or someone and to listen and hear whatever is being presented, without coloring the other's communication with my own habits of thinking, feeling, and seeing, removing the usual ways of labeling or judging, or comparing. I am ready to perceive and know a phenomenon from its appearance and presence.

Although the Epoche is rarely perfectly achieved, the energy, attention, and work involved in reflection and self-dialogue, the intention that underlies the process, and the attitude and frame of reference, significantly reduce the influence of preconceived thoughts, judgments, and biases. Further, regular practice of the Epoche process increases one's competency in achieving a presuppositionless state and in being open to receive whatever appears in consciousness, as such.

Despite practice, some entities are simply not "bracketable." There are life experiences that are so severe, intense, and telling, some things that are so ingrained, and some people so attached to or against each other and themselves that clear openness or pure consciousness is virtually an impossibility. On the other hand I believe that with intentions of truth and reality can be bracketed and put out of action. The Epoche offers a resource, a process for potential renewal. Approached with dedication and determination, the process can make a difference in what and how we see, hear and/or view things. Practiced wisely, realistically, and with determination to let go of our prejudices, I believe that the actual nature and essence of things will be disclosed more fully, will reveal themselves to us and enable us to find a clearing and light to knowledge and truth.

#### PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

The Epoche is the first step in coming to know things, in being inclined toward seeing things as they appear, in returning to things themselves, free of prejudices and preconceptions. In Phenomenological Reduction, the task is that of describing in textual language just what one sees, not only in terms of the external object but also the internal act of consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self. The qualities of the experience become the focus; the filling in or completion of the nature and meaning of the experience becomes the challenge. The task requires that I look and describe; look again and describe; look again and describe; always with reference to textual qualities—rough and smooth; small and large; quiet and noisy; colorful and bland; hot and cold; stationary and moving; high and low; squeezed in and expansive; fearful and courageous; angry and calm—descriptions that present varying intensi-

ties; ranges of shapes, sizes, and spacial qualities; time references; and colors all within an experiential context. So, "to the things themselves," an open field, where everything and anything is available as given in experience. Each angle of perception adds something to one's knowing of the horizons of a phenomenon. The process involves a prereflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to what is horizontal and thematic. Such an approach to elucidating one's knowledge is known as "Transcendental Phenomenological Reduction." As stated earlier, it is called "Transcendental" because it uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning; "Phenomenological" because the world is transformed into mere phenomena; and "Reduction" in that it leads us back to our own experience of the way things are (Schnitt, 1968, p. 30). Schnitt adds that:

The world is examined in relation to myself when I try to distinguish those aspects of experience which are genuinely evident from those which I merely assume or suppose to be the case. The subject is examined in relation to the world when I inquire into the beliefs, feelings, and desires which shape the experience. (p. 67)

When we perceive straightforwardly, we focus on the object itself and not the perceiving experience (Miller, 1984, p. 177). We are not so engrossed in our conscious experience that we lose touch with what is actually before us, with the thing itself. It is a matter of shifting attention and focus, but one thing is certain: Our consciousness is directing us meaningfully toward something that continues to remain present however much we may turn inward to our internal experience. Our gaze significantly is on the thing itself, its presence and elucidation. Schutz (1967) puts the matter thus: "Through the attending directed glance of attention and comprehension, the lived experience acquires a mode of being. It comes to be *'differentiated,' 'thrown into relief,'* and this act of differentiation is nothing other than being comprehended, being the object of the directed glance of attention" (p. 50).

The method of Phenomenological Reduction takes on the character of graded prereflection, reflection, and reduction, with concentrated work aimed at explicating the essential nature of the phenomenon (Husserl, 1931, p. 114). The explication may include perceiving, thinking, remembering, imagining, judging, each of which contains a definite content. Husserl (1931) comments that "every experience in the stream which our reflection can lay hold on has its own essence open to

intuition, a 'content' which can be considered in its *singularity* in and for itself" (p. 116). The task is to describe its general features, excluding everything that is not immediately within our conscious experience.

Phenomenological Reduction is not only a way of seeing but a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings.

Brand (1967), quoting Husserl, further elucidates the process of Phenomenological Reduction:

I begin, therefore, by questioning that which has in me, under the heading "world," the character of the conscious, the experienced, and the intended, and which is accepted by me as being: I ask what it looks like in its being accepted thus: I ask how I become conscious of it, how I may describe it, how I can designate it, in terms valid for every occasion; how what is subjective in this way manifests itself in different modes, what it looks like in itself, as experienced or as intended as this or that, or what this experiencing itself as experience of the mundane looks like, how it is to be described. . . . That is the general theme opened up by the reduction. (p. 209)

The experiencing person turns inward in reflection, following "the most original information being obtained from myself because here alone is perception the medium" (Husserl, 1931, p. 14). Whatever shines forth in consciousness as I perceive it, reflect on it, imagine it, concentrate on it, is what I attend to—that is what stands out as meaningful for me. Each looking opens new awarenesses that connect with one another, new perspectives that relate to each other, new folds of the manifold features that exist in every phenomenon and that we explicate as we look again and again and again—keeping our eyes turned to the center of the experience and studying what is just before us, exactly as it appears.

Husserl (1931) states that, "We are aware of things not only in perception, but also consciously in recollections, in representations similar to recollections, and also in the free play of fancy. . . they float past us in different 'characterizations' as real, possible, fancied" (p. 117-118). Stay with the phenomenon, let it be in its appearance, view it from different angles, persist to the point of exhausting what it offers during a particular time and place of perceiving and experiencing, or as Husserl advises, "Let us reduce till we reach the stream of pure con-

sciousness" (1931, p. 172). We never totally exhaust the perceptual possibilities of our experience. When the experiencing person is satisfied that the evidence is "complete" the object is said to be given to us *adequately*; we have adequate evidence regarding its existence (Miller, 1984, p. 184).

Although there is always an overlap between looking from one perspective and viewing something as a whole, it is possible to separate the object as a point of focus from my experience of it as a whole, to take one angle of it and look freshly once more, and then another angle, connecting each looking with my conscious experience. I continue this process to the point of unifying the parts into a whole. The process itself is like a visual ray that changes with every experience of perceiving or thinking, shooting forth fresh perceptions with each new moment of seeing as it appears and disappears (Husserl, 1931, p. 172). In *Logical Investigations*, Husserl points out that "we must rather practice 'reflection,' i.e., make these acts themselves, and their immanent meaning-content, our objects. . . . We must deal with them in new acts of intuition and thinking" (1970b, p. 255). Their contents can be contemplated and explicated. The sole aim of the research participant is to see, to describe fully what is seen, just as it is, in such and such a manner (Husserl, 1970a, p. 35).

When the looking and noticing and looking again is complete a more definitely *reflective* process occurs, aimed at grasping the full nature of a phenomenon. To some extent each reflection modifies conscious experience and offers a different perspective of the object. Husserl (1931) emphasizes that, "Only through acts of *experiencing* as reflected on do we know anything of the stream of experience and of its necessary relationship to the pure Ego" (p. 222). The whole process of reducing toward what is textually meaningful and essential in its phenomenal and experiential components depends on competent and clear *reflectiveness*, on an ability to attend, recognize, and describe with clarity. Reflection becomes more exact and fuller with continuing attention and perception, with continued looking, with the adding of new perspectives. Reflection becomes more exact through corrections that more completely and accurately present what appears before us. Things become clearer as they are considered again and again. Illusion is undone through correction, through approaching something from a different vantage point, or with a different sense or meaning. Some new dimension becomes thematic and thus alters the perception of what has previously appeared. Husserl relates this to a shift in expectation-

horizon (1970a, p. 162). Something else in the phenomenon becomes horizontal; a different kind of expectation; something not seen is now recognized; the expectation of it makes the appearance more likely. In addition, things far away are viewed differently when they come near; inevitably we make corrections as things come into sharper focus and clarity.

Husserl (1970a), in commenting on correction, states that

It is easy to see that the change of apperceptive sense takes place through a change of the expectation-horizon of the multiplicities anticipated as normal (i.e., as running on harmoniously). For example, one saw a man, but then, upon touching him, had to reinterpret him as a mannequin (exhibiting itself visually as a man). (p. 162)

Many of us have had the experience of being visually attracted to a bouquet of flowers, moved by their brilliant life colors, their soft petals, grand fragrance, and even their earthy qualities, only to discover on closer look and touch that they are made of silk material. At such a time, our experience radically changes. There have been moments when I utter disbelief I smelled and touched such flowers before being convinced that they were artificial, thus necessitating a correction in my perception and judgment and ultimately arriving at a completely different experience.

In correcting our conscious experience of things we are often influenced by what other people say they see; we are encouraged to look again, from the perspective of another self. Ultimately, we may be seeking an intersubjective description of what appears as phenomenal. We grasp the other's experience with the same perceptual intention that we grasp a thing or event presented to us (Schutz, 1967, p. 106). This self-reference, the return to self, is an essential requirement. We begin with our own perception of the way things are; we see what is before us, first and foremost, with our own eyes, and describe what we see through our own experience of something and the meanings it generates in our awarenesses. Individual perceptions, memories, judgments, reflections, are core and figural in our developing understanding of things and people. Husserl (1970a) comments that we naturally carry out the Epoche and the Reduction from our own vantage point, for ourselves, from our own original self-evidence and consciousness of life-world (p. 253). Following our own self-evidence of what appears to us, we check

with others regarding what they perceive, feel, and think. In the process of this kind of careful checking we may revisit the phenomenon and discover something new that alters our knowledge of the thing. Husserl calls this process of interaction with others, and shift in perception and conscious experience, a form of communalization. He states that "*in living with one another* each one can take part in the life of the others. . . . In this communalization there constantly occurs an alteration of validity through reciprocal correction" (1970a, p. 163). My corrections move me toward more accurate and more complete layers of meaning. Kockelmans (1967) observes that, "We penetrate deeper into things and learn to see the more profound 'layers' behind what we first thought to see" (p. 30).

Another dimension of Phenomenological Reduction is the process of horizontalization. Horizons are unlimited. We can never exhaust completely our experience of things no matter how many times we reconsider them or view them. A new horizon arises each time that one recedes. It is a never-ending process and, though we may reach a stopping point and discontinue our perception of something, the possibility for discovery is unlimited. The horizontal makes of conscious experience a continuing mystery, one that opens regions of laughter and hope or pain and anguish as these enter our conscious life. We may think that some perception of experience will forever remain, but the contents of conscious life appear and disappear. No horizon lasts indefinitely, regardless of wish, hope, or fear.

In Phenomenological Reduction we return to the self; we experience things that exist in the world from the vantage point of self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-knowledge. Things enter conscious awareness and recede only to return again. Something essential is recovered: "The phenomenological reductions make it possible for the mind to discover its own nature; originally lost in the world, the mind can find itself again by means of these reductions" (Kockelmans, 1967, p. 222).

Each horizon as it comes into our conscious experience is the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinctive character. We consider each of the horizons and the textural qualities that enable us to understand an experience. When we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence. Keen (1975), for example, in exploring the horizons of a student's question felt uncomfortable "because I had the vague sense that he was begging for something" (p. 28). The "begging" sense was Keen's immediate,

prereflective experience of his student. As he reflected on the begging phenomenon, he decided to avoid the student as he would "beggars on the street" (1975, p. 29). Keen exclaims:

I felt uncomfortable about his question [of whether he should become a psychologist] because I had the vague sense that he was begging me for something. That was an immediate and prereflective experience of him at that moment, and it is important to allow that experience to be what it was, to recall it and to articulate its content. Having done so, we need now to reflect on that experience. (1975, p. 28)

Keen continues, "It was horizontal to my experience of him as begging me for something. It is only by careful examining of my experience that these horizons became apparent" (1975, p. 29). On further reflection, Keen discovered that the student reminded him of his patients and also with youthful ambivalence toward elders, the student's relationship to his father, and a member of the displaced class coping with the privileged class, and finally that perhaps his student was asking for something he never got from his father—acceptance and respect (p. 31). These horizons were constituents of the phenomenon of "begging" in a relationship and provided a way of describing the bracketed phenomenon, "begging."

The final challenge of Phenomenological Reduction is the construction of a complete textural description of the experience. Such a description, beginning with the Epoché and going through a process of returning to the thing itself, in a state of openness and freedom, facilitates clear seeing, makes possible identity, and encourages the looking again and again that leads to deeper layers of meaning. Throughout, there is an interweaving of person, conscious experience, and phenomenon. In the process of explicating the phenomenon, qualities are recognized and described; every perception is granted equal value, nonrepetitive constituents of the experience are linked thematically, and a full description is derived. The pre-reflective and reflective components of Phenomenological Reduction enable an uncovering of the nature and meaning of experience, bringing the experiencing person to a self-knowledge and a knowledge of the phenomenon. Or stated differently:

Each experience is considered in its singularity, and for itself. Within the brackets, the phenomenon is perceived and described in its totality, in a fresh and open way, a graded series of reductions coming from a trans-

dental state, a total differentiated description of the most essential constituents of the phenomenon. (Mousakas, 1986, p. 16)

To summarize, the steps of Phenomenological Reduction include: *Bracketing*, in which the focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question; *horizontalizing*, every statement initially is treated as having equal value. Later, statements irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping are deleted, leaving only the *Horizons* (the textural meanings and invariant constituents of the phenomenon); *Clustering the Horizons Into Themes*; and *Organizing the Horizons and Themes Into a Coherent Textural Description* of the phenomenon.

A description of the essential constituents of pure depression is excerpted from Keen's study (1984), "Emerging From Depression."

Depression is experienced as the stoppage of time, the emptiness of space, and the reification of others. Time stops; development of myself, of situations, and of relationships all grind to a halt. Everything appears static, dead, with no change except a progressive deterioration like rusting or rotting. Most of all, the future ceases being really future, really new, unknown, fruitful. Rather, the future seems to promise only a dreary repetition of the past. Space is empty. There are things, but they have lost their importance. My house, once a haven and a home, is a mere building, drained of its echoes of vitality and love. My clothes, once full of interest for me, now hang gaping stupidly in my closet. My books are dead, my tennis racket a mere thing. And other people—their development in time, like my own, gave the future its hope and cast meaning into spaces and places—now are mere things, walking and talking like manikins, mechanically echoing scripts written long ago. (p. 804)

#### IMAGINATIVE VARIATION

Following Phenomenological Reduction, the next step in the research process is that of Imaginative Variation. The task of Imaginative Variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different



positions, roles, or functions. The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words the "how" that speaks to conditions that illuminate the "what" of experience. How did the experience of the phenomenon come to be what it is?

Describing the essential structures of a phenomenon is the major task of Imaginative Variation. In this there is a free play of fancy; any perspective is a possibility and is permitted to enter into consciousness. Husserl (1931) points to how the process evolves:

The Eidos, the *pure essence*, can be exemplified intuitively in the data of experience, data of perception, memory, and so forth, but just as readily . . . in the play of fancy we bring spatial shapes of one sort or another to birth, melodies, social happenings, and so forth, or live through fictitious acts of everyday life. (p. 57)

Variation is targeted toward meanings and depends on intuition as a way of integrating structures into essences. In *C Cartesian Meditations* (1977), Husserl states that, "Every imaginable sense, every imaginable being, whether the latter is called immanent or transcendent, falls within the domain of transcendental subjectivity, as the subjectivity that constitutes sense and being" (p. 84). We find in fantasy the potential meaning of something that makes the invisible visible (1931, p. 40). The uncovering of the essences, the focusing on pure possibilities, is central in the Imaginative Variation process. In this phase of the process the structures of the experience are revealed; these are the conditions that must exist for something to appear. Kockelmans (1967) comments that, "Reduction leads us from the realm of facts to that of general essences. . . . [it] is the methodic procedure through which we raise our knowledge from the level of facts to the sphere of 'ideas' " (p. 30). For example, in considering the red of individual objects we know that there is a generic *redness* as such. No matter how many variations we perceive in the color red, all have the redness of red running through them. We can arrive at this intuition only through an imaginative integration of what is common in all the shadings of red.

In Imaginative Variation the world disappears, existence no longer is central, anything whatever becomes possible. The thrust is away from facts and measurable entities and toward meanings and essences; in this instant, intuition is not empirical, but purely imaginative in character. Husserl (1931) emphasizes that, "*pure essential truths do not make the*

*slightest assertion concerning facts*, hence from them *alone* we are not able to infer even the pettiest truth concerning the fact-world" (p. 57). The Imaginative Variation process includes a reflective phase in which many possibilities are examined and explicated reflectively. Free imaginative fancy is coupled with reflective explication giving body, detail, and descriptive fullness to the search for essences. Casey (1977) has stated that in Imaginative Variation we contemplate as many imagined objects or events as possible; existent or not; an imaginary unicorn, for example, is a purely possible entity (p. 75).

Imaginative Variation enables the researcher to derive structural themes from the textual descriptions that have been obtained through Phenomenological Reduction. We imagine possible structures of time, space, materiality, causality, and relationship to self and to others. These are universal structural groundings connected with textual figures. Through Imaginative Variation the researcher understands that there is not a single inroad to truth, but that countless possibilities emerge that are intimately connected with the essences and meanings of an experience.

The steps of Imaginative Variation include:

1. Systematic varying of the possible structural meanings that underlie the textual meanings;
2. Recognizing the underlying themes or contexts that account for the emergence of the phenomenon;
3. Considering the universal structures that precipitate feelings and thoughts with reference to the phenomenon, such as the structure of time, space, bodily concerns, materiality, causality, relation to self, or relation to others;
4. Searching for exemplifications that vividly illustrate the invariant structural themes and facilitate the development of a structural description of the phenomenon.

Borrowing again from Keen's study (1984), the structural emphases are included in this excerpt:

Emerging from depression involves not the disappearance of a symptom but the reappearance, reinvention, or rediscovery of a self with a past and a future. My present life, which leads from the past into the future, matters when it is part of a historical unfolding within which I can place myself in an integral part. Having a job, being a parent, engaging in crafts, for

example, can supply such a story. In depression, these ordinary aspects of life have been neutralized—rendered meaningless—by the death themes of depression: the stoppage of time, the emptiness of space, and the reification of people. The reestablishment of a future, the refurbishing of space with significance and vitality, and the repersonification of others are all implicated in reinventing myself and emerging from depression. (p. 808)

#### SYNTHESIS OF MEANINGS AND ESSENCES

The final step in the phenomenological research process is the intuitive integration of the fundamental textual and structural descriptions into a unified statement of the essences of the experience of the phenomenon as a whole. This is the guiding direction of the eidetic sciences, the establishment of a knowledge of essences (Husserl, 1931, p. 44).

Essence, as Husserl (1931) employs this concept, means that which is common or universal, the condition or quality without which a thing would not be what it is (p. 43). Sartre (1965) refers to essence as the principle of the series, the "concatenation of appearances" (p. xlvii). He states that, "The essence finally is radically severed from the individual appearance which manifests it, since on principle it is that which must be able to be manifested by an infinite series of individual manifestations" (p. xlviii).

The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textual-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon. Husserl (1931) concludes that "every physical property draws us on into infinities of experience; and that every multiplicity of experience, however lengthily drawn out, still leaves the way open to closer and novel thing-determinations; and so on, *in infinitum*" (pp. 54-55).

Keen (1984) presents a synthesis of the meanings and essences of the experience of emerging from depression in the following:

The final truth seems to be that emerging from depression is never really complete. The work of remembering, and feeling the sadness, must be renewed a little every day. The fight into distractions avoids that sadness

and makes us more cheerful, perhaps. But it is the superficial good cheer of the game show host, or the empty pride of the dedicated professional achiever. Addiction to happiness is no less an addiction than the vilest narcotic. Withdrawal provokes panic. Flexibility is gone; dependency is complete.

The sadness of memories is far preferable to the happiness of subclinical depression, for it throws into relief the really good things in life, and makes them shine forth. In this way, ecstasy and tragedy are two sides of the same coin. Depression can be devastating, but having emerged, I find that depression is enriching and enlightening as I live the reinvented self, born in the struggle of emergence. (p. 810)

#### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Understanding the nature, meanings, and essences of Epoché, Phenomenological Reduction, Imaginative Variation, and Synthesis is necessary in order to conduct phenomenological research. Through phenomenology a significant methodology is developed for investigating human experience and for deriving knowledge from a state of pure consciousness. One learns to see naively and freshly again, to value conscious experience, to respect the evidence of one's senses, and to move toward an intersubjective knowing of things, people, and everyday experiences.

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## METHODS AND PROCEDURES FOR CONDUCTING HUMAN SCIENCE RESEARCH

In deriving scientific evidence in phenomenological investigations, the researcher establishes and carries out a series of methods and procedures that satisfy the requirements of an organized, disciplined and systematic study. These include:

1. Discovering a topic and question rooted in autobiographical meanings and values, as well as involving social meanings and significance;
2. Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;
3. Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers;
4. Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research;
5. Developing a set of questions or topics to guide the interview process;