**Learning from twentieth century hermeneutic phenomenology for the human sciences and practical disciplines**

*Five key thinkers in twentieth century phenomenology are discussed for contemporary projects. It is argued that phenomenology can only operate as hermeneutic phenomenology.* *Hermeneutics arose within German idealism. It began with Friedrich Ast and Heinrich Schleiermacher and was further developed by Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger and others. Hermeneutics claims that prior understanding is taken to any new situation to create current understanding. Initial understanding is important because it sets the direction and scope for inquiry or action. Initial understanding may concern how things are believed to exist or not exist. Subsequent action and conclusions are based on what has been understood and believed. However, in some cases, what may result is the false confirmation of prior inaccurate understanding. For these reasons, it is important to be clear about how initial understandings are made and how they inform a discipline, be it the Husserlian phenomenology of intentionality or any empirical phenomenological approach.*

**Overview**

This first section provides an overview of the argument provided in the remainder of the paper. The paper questions the extent to which any discipline can be presuppositionless. It is argued that hermeneutics is all-embracing, so that it too must be accounted for in phenomenology. Husserl originally conceived phenomenology to overcome the problems of an excessive zeal for empiricism (1911/1981a). Between the years 1925 to 1929 at least, he was clear that there were two versions of phenomenology. Both were “a priori,” theoretical or philosophical clarifications of experience. Phenomenological pure psychology is a way of understanding how consciousness works in its social context to create meaning. It defines how mental processes work together to produce specific types of meaning. It takes the world and people in it to be real.

Transcendental phenomenology, on the other hand, is a more abstract version of exploring meaning for any consciousness in any social context. For Husserl, it is not necessarily tied to the limitation of understanding this world (Husserl, 1931/1977a, 1962/1977b, 1968/1997a, 1968/1997b). The original forms of phenomenology were theoretical endeavours in the way that pure mathematics supports the applied sciences. There should be a pure psychology to support all real world science and academia. Transcendental phenomenology supports philosophy. Both of Husserl’s studies for are theory-building for later empiricism through understanding consciousness. In conclusion, the phenomenology of the intentionality of consciousness (in its real world psychological form, or the transcendental study of meaning in a public world) aims to find the invariant structure of conscious experience (1973/1999).

Husserl’s methods work on the raw data of the many co-occurring types of conscious experiences, in order to conclude on the nature of the forms of intentionality that are creative of them (Marbach, 1992, 1993, 2005). The dream was never over that transcendental phenomenology and its non-participating on lookers can conclude on consciousness and how it works (1956/1970, pp. 391-4). Transcendental phenomenology concerns the ability to overcome a “vicious circle”. Specifically, natural empirical sciences cannot contribute to grounding themselves, because to do so “is to be involved in a vicious circle”, (1911/1981a, p. 172). The vicious circle is being empirically relativistic: The assumption that only experimentalism can find the truth. One consequence is that experience occurs through various types of awareness about objects, that produces different senses of them, that can be grasped in various contexts - even if those contexts are interpretive ones of understanding or be they perceptual or psychological contexts. For instance, proper explanation in practice and theory concerns making explanations in terms of intentionalities about how memory experientially co-occurs in the perceptual present. Husserl asserted that his phenomenology would ground sciences through mental clarifications of the nature of the intentionalities, in relation to various aspects of attention. This is the key to making empirical applications of ideas hit their target. For instance, it was Darwin who observed animals and then theorised about heritability and selection. It takes contemporary DNA research to prove him right or wrong. It was Einstein who imagined what it was like to travel at the speed of light in order to make his mathematical statements. It took twentieth century physics to explore his claims.

However, Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur did not agree with the claim that transcendental phenomenology could overthrow the hermeneutic circle. Even for phenomenology they asserted that there is a circle between “the aim-providing problems as of its methods” - because “a certain logical harmony between the guiding problems... and precisely such foundations and methods” exists (Husserl, 1911/1981a, p. 189). This can be read precisely as a warning to deal with the blindspot of the circular influence of previous understanding. In agreement with these writers, this paper argues that any inquiry or science is inevitably hermeneutic in the sense that it *makes sense* and should be self-reflexive in understanding what it takes to its subject matter. It urges contemporary workers in empirical phenomenology and psychology to take heed of what the hermeneutic circle means: *there are no unprejudiced views*. Prior views influence, and maybe even create what is found, by means of their modes of attention to the object of study. If the proposition of the hermeneutic circle is accepted, then one consequence is that that it is impossible to eradicate the influence of the past in making conclusions. This is particularly problematic when it comes to making conclusions in empirical phenomenology, qualitative and quantitative psychology, and other types of empirical research.

**Husserl’s original phenomenology in brief**

In order to justify these claims, it is necessary to side-step some entrenched mis-understandings about phenomenology. Here no criticism is made of empirical phenomenology following the influence of Gurwitsch, Cairns, Giorgi, Wertz, Embree and others. However, these can all be classified as object-oriented empirical phenomenology. But an exclusive focus on the senses of objects was never Husserl’s project of the study of links between the forms of intentionality, the senses obtained about specific objects of attention, and understanding how these exist in contexts or horizons (Husserl, 1913/1982, §§130-132, 150-151, 1980/2005, Marbach, 1992). Consequently, Husserlian phenomenology was never merely the description of the senses of objects as an end in itself. For Husserl, the primary focus on intentionality was impeded because “the phenomenological method... only leads us first into a new naïveté that of simple descriptive act analysis,” that he sometimes called “noetic phenomenology,” “noetics,” “intentional analysis,” “intentional psychology,” “elucidation” or “explication,” *Auslegung* (stated by Husserl in August 1931, Cairns, 1976, p. 27). The original phenomenology is the elucidation of connections between intentionalities, senses, objects and contexts as was indicated by the remarks to make “an uncovering ... an explication... of what is consciously meant (the objective sense) and correlatively, an explication of the potential intentional processes themselves”, (Husserl, 1931/1977, §20, p. 46). For this paper, it is precisely this movement from what appears, “the objective sense,” to the conclusions concerning what is ‘invisible,’ the “intentional processes themselves,” that demands a specific type of hermeneutics of how to make such interpretative conclusions. To spell this out once more: what Husserl claimed was that the applied sciences should understand how consciousness works in concept-making and arguing in relation to the conscious experiences that occur in their social contexts, in order to justify their claims (1962/1977, §45). Husserlian conclusions are of the sort reported by Marbach (1993, 2205). They concern how all simple and compound types of mental acts exist and connect, one with the others.

The hermeneutic circle is particularly pertinent to Husserlian phenomenology. Intentionalities do not appear. Not even to first-person conscious experience. They can only ever be interpreted. The end-products of the senses of objects appear, but that is the result of the work done by one consciousness in connection with other consciousnesses. It would have been better for Husserl to concede that what is understood occurs because of contexts of understanding and interpretation that provide specific senses. But that would be opposite to his claims that it is possible for transcendental phenomenology to escape the influence of the hermeneutic circle.

**Introducing the role of hermeneutics**

Accordingly, in agreement with Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur, it is contended that the original phenomenology is the interpretation of the forms of intentionality and this demands hermeneutics. Following the conclusions of Kern, Marbach, Ströker and Zahavi, who are here accepted as being the leading writers in the field of Husserlian phenomenology, the contribution of this paper is to emphasise that what appears in conscious experience are the many types of the “*How of its modes of givenness*” (Husserl, 1913/1982, §132, p. 316). The modes of givenness – as spoken about, remembered, heard - are compared and contrasted to interpret concepts that define precisely *how* a memory reappears in current perception, for instance. Or to understand *how* looking at a painting differs from reading the written word. The aim is to understand how intentionality enables these things to make their publicly-accessible meanings. A more complex example in psychology is when participants fill in a questionnaire, it is the totality of their previous understanding that enables them to rate themselves and provide answers to the questions. It is the totality of prior experience that also enables the questionnaire to make sense and for psychologists then to allocate numerical scores to the answers provided.

The most general case of the problem of the hermeneutic circle for science and academic inquiry is that the current object is understood on the basis of the old, to such a degree that past learning can obscure the current object. The hermeneutic circle is the “to-and-fro movement... between interpreting individual phenomena and interpreting the whole” that “is characteristic of all interpretation,” (Rickman, 2004, p. 73). In general, the phenomenon of understanding includes what could be called bias, prejudice or inability to attend to the current object.

The upshot for qualitative psychology, for instance, is a failure to grasp the phenomena of its participants as they experience them, because pre-existing theory mis-directs the researchers away from the phenomena. For qualitative psychology, a psychological hermeneutics would be a formal study of the role of previous understanding that is taken to the current phenomena, in such a way to create findings in the light of previous understanding. This is observable in psychology where each school has its own viewpoint that serves as a self-fulfilling prophecy: The earlier understanding corrupts and excludes new, potentially relevant information. Metaphorically, what is being referred to is that any school of academic inquiry, theoretical or empirical, ‘pulls itself up by its own pig tail’. For instance, evolutionary psychology insists that current experience is dominated by genetic function and success in reproduction. It argues that current events are the result of competition whereby the most effective functioning always wins, and evolution is what primarily shapes human behaviour. On the other hand, discourse analysis, for instance, believes that dominant discourses are most causative, so that what is believed as socially acceptable ways of discussing a topic are most formative of human behaviour. But in empirical psychology generally, psychologism holds: Only experiments can determine what is true or not and it is hubris to believe otherwise. (Psychologism is one problem that phenomenology was invented to oppose).

Let us take the ubiquity of the hermeneutic circle to Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology to show how it is relevant. Husserl’s dream is that it is possible to find the true nature of consciousness by attending to the phenomena that appear in conscious experiences without hermeneutics and differences in viewpoint misleading the results. He claimed that transcendental phenomenology can get outside of the hermeneutic circle. But because Husserl held the position called transcendental idealism that “it is nonsense to speak of a *fundamentally* unknowable being that still lies beyond these ultimates... [because what counts is] the “constitution” of being in consciousness, along with the related problems of being”, (Husserl’s letter to Dilthey of 5 July, 1911, 1968/1981b, p. 207). It is not clear how Husserl overcame the circularity within his own practice and theory. Husserl also stated the following in one sentence which is the opposite of what Heidegger contended: “All experiential knowledge of life is restricted by the particular respective life-practice, which predelineates how far the determinacies are to be determined in advance; theoretical interest and science are “practically uninterested and thereby unlimitedly all-inclusive in their focus” (1962/1977, §45, p. 172). Husserl’s object was to understand consciousness generally, and his method involved elucidating his own consciousness and imagining the experiences of other persons (Husserl, 1973, cited in Marbach, 1982). Husserl’s methods conclude on theory about the nature of consciousness by thought experiments on the universal nature of consciousness (Husserl, 1913/1982, §47, 1968/1997a, §4, p. 165, §8, p. 171, 1968/1997b, §8, pp. 231-2, §11, pp. 240-1, 1931/1977, §34, p. 72, §41, pp. 84-5). There are major problems is using a technique of imaginative variation to conclude on theory. The limits of consciousness, hermeneutics and life experience are constraints:

1. There is the inability to have the experiences and perspectives of others as they have them.

2. There is great difficulty in remembering one’s own childhood or understanding the experiences of infants (as per 1).

3. The ability to imagine another’s experiences is limited according to the breadth of one’s social and cultural experiences.

4. There is difficulty knowing what sort of human experience to include and hence how to capture the whole of a region in relation to its greater wholes. Husserl classed phenomenology as a theory-making procedure not an empirical one.

Very pertinently for Husserlian phenomenology, there is confusion between aims and methods, particularly when there is a claim to be presuppositionless. Husserl stated a laudable and self-reflexive ideal when he wrote that: “The true method follows the nature of the things to be investigated and not our prejudices and preconceptions”, (1911/1981a, p. 179). But the problem is precisely how is it possible to remove the influence of the past and invisible guiding assumptions, and occupy a position of no bias towards the meaningful phenomena of consciousness? This leaves an unanswered question in his work concerning the self understanding of the transcendentalist phenomenologist or “nonparticipating onlooker” who “does not have to assert any realities and possibilities with respect to the actual and quasi-data belonging to the Ego underneath. What he asserts in this respect are “realities” and “possibilities” in quotation marks”, (1980/2005, text 20, p. 697, fn 13). What this last citation means is that the method of thought experiments about what is merely possible, concerning any consciousness in any world, was allegedly sufficient to reason about what is universal and what must be the case for all consciousness. To repeat Husserl’s claim once more, transcendental phenomenology takes the ““psychical,” which appears in the natural attitude, and in positively oriented psychology, as a dependent stratum of being in humans and animals, [and] thereby loses even the sense of a mundanely phenomenal event,” (Bernet, Kern & Marbach, 1993, p. 74). This is claiming that the transcendental reduction removes consciousness from the wrong interpretation of it as a part of the materialistic world, with all the mis-understandings of the natural or everyday understandings of common sense. He claimed that the transcendental reduction and other methods freed consciousness for unbiased inspection. It is not clear how this can be done through the imagination alone and that is one reason why Husserl has had so many critics and developers.

Hermeneutic phenomenology takes issue with Husserl and demands an encounter with hermeneutics. It is argued that in order to conclude on the nature of the intentionalities, hermeneutics and phenomenology should sit together. There should be a self-reflexive understanding of what is assumed, as regards to what is being emphasised as important and relevant - as opposed to what is not. Theories are not about everything. They highlight specific aspects of what appears and relate it to other relevant aspects and let some matters fall into the background. Two key questions are: to what extent is it possible to break free of false assumptions? And to what extent is it possible to conclude in language on the truth of the phenomena of consciousness?

Agreeing with hermeneutics means that it is impossible to have a school of ‘no obstructions’: Paradoxically, to believe one has attained no obstructions is to be blind to them. This is why Jaspers, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur disagreed with Husserl. As Merleau-Ponty put it: “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction”, (1945/1962, p. xiv). To accept the role of hermeneutics is to agree that it is possible to create schools of research that are self-reflexive in understanding how they draw their conclusions. This is accounting for one’s own perspective in terms of how meaning and cause are concluded on, for instance. The role of hermeneutics is academic theoretical discourse towards the aim of self-reflexivity.

**Husserl’s positive legacy**

Now that the argument of this paper has been presented in full, the remainder of the paper works to provide more evidence for its key claims. The sections below starts with some comments on the detail of hermeneutics are provided. Second, it is noted how the phenomenological movement developed towards hermeneutics and meaning, away from the original claim to be presuppositionless and to have overcome the hermeneutic and other circles. Third, in support of the link between phenomenology and hermeneutics, the commonalities seen across a number of twentieth century hermeneutic phenomenologists are stated in relation to psychology. A short number of general conclusions are stated for the human sciences in the main, although they apply to other areas.

It is well known that Husserl has had influence in a number of academic areas. But no other persons have followed his methods and ideas *to the letter* in their developments of his work. Not even the closest interpreters like Kern, Marbach, Ströker and Zahavi have published work that shows the details of the thought experiments that clarify the intentionalities. This omission implies criticism. Below, thumbnail sketches of a selection of twentieth century writers are provided in support of the assertion that phenomenology can only exist as a hermeneutic and explicitly self-reflexive approach. What this means is that a *sufficient understanding needs to be taken to a phenomenon in order to reveal it properly*. The opposite effect is also noticeable. Poor or downright wrong understanding can be applied - that obscures and mis-represents - so leading knowledge and practices away from their aims and objects.

Husserl set the scene for a more radical turn to experience than Kant by noting that belief is close to perception and other forms of the givenness of meanings of different sorts (1973/1999, p. 61, 1913/1982, §135, p. 325). Concluding in language about what is heard, seen and felt requires intellectual work with respect to conscious experience. Any assertions about cause, motives for action and what motivates others in truth – must arise from the best possible evidence for such assertions. Indeed, Husserl’s definition of reason concerned decreasing partial givenness, or “empty” conceptual givenness, in order to gain fulfilled experiences themselves and become able to make proper conclusions (§145, p. 344). Even abstract relations were decided by having fulfilled experiences. For instance, the term “transcendental aesthetics” in Husserl means linking the form of the ego to the other, the communal and to temporality in seeing the necessary enabling conditions for space, time and cause to exist (1931/1977, §61, p. 146). This is “seeing” the evidence of spaciality, temporality and causality as they apply to the sense of self in connection with others: in that personal being concerns the sense of the lived body as the central point from which each self looks out onto the world.

For Husserl, reason is striving towards better evidence and moving away from lesser types (1913/1982, §138, pp. 332-3, §151, p. 364). What Husserl argued was that consciousness functions to create the world of meaning for people. The possibility of a world of shared meaning demands consciousness to exist as a condition for its existence. If there is no consciousness, there is no world of meaning (§49). Accordingly, intellectual meaning and non-verbal meaning co-occur. Specific meaningful objects appear through, or across, a manifold of senses. Each sense has its own perspective and context. The modalities of belief are the types of believing that comprise ‘the family of belief’ as a whole. Some members of this family are certainty, possibility, doubtfulness and certitude. These modalities create objects of attention that are experienced as senses of existence, uncertain existence, probable existence, certainty concerning the non-existence... and so on. Different types of evidence have different qualities and styles of appearing. His mature understanding of truth was “an *idea*, lying at infinity... not as falsely absolutised, but rather, in each case, as within *horizons* – which do not remain overlooked or veiled from sight but are systematically explicated”, (1929/1969, §105, p. 279). Having laid out some of the key passages from Husserl, a few short remarks will be made about the intellectual heritage of hermeneutics.

**Hermeneutics**

This section sketches the overall nature of hermeneutics via some brief sketches of the early contributors. It was Friedrich Ast who seems to have been the first person to formulate the basic proposition that later became known as the hermeneutic circle (Palmer, 1969, p. 77). This basic idea was developed by Schleiermacher and Dilthey. What all later hermeneuts share is the development of Ast’s original idea. Heinrich Schleiermacher stated the circularity in the following way: how things make sense is that we compare the new to what we already know (p. 87). Schleiermacher developed the idea that the part and the whole inter-act to make sense. For him, the part and the whole determine each other: He called the overall effect the hermeneutic circle. Understanding is circular because there is a back and forth movement between the whole that defines its parts - and the parts that contribute to the whole. Depending on the scope taken, there are greater wholes and lesser parts.

Wilhelm Dilthey developed hermeneutics in the direction of a general theory of understanding. He distinguished between *elementary*, fundamental and common understanding - that enables there to be *higher* understandings of communication of various sorts (Dilthey, 1976, pp. 218-225). For instance, empathy with historical characters and situations is necessary to understand the historical context in which they were living. Only on that basis can there be accurate readings of history. To situate a specific text in its genre occurs through reading the genre. In contemporary English language circles, Hans Peter Rickman (2004) has done a great deal to explain and build on the connections between Kant and Dilthey. Rickman sums up the hermeneutic circle as moving “between interpreting individual phenomena and interpreting the whole of which they are supposed to form part is characteristic of all interpretation… There is… no absolute starting point, no rigid framework of assumptions on which an interpretative theory can rest... Interpretation… is a matter of getting at the meaning of human phenomena… of discovering from their expressions what people think, feel, and want”, (p. 73).

Martin Heidegger’s approach became popular because he took Husserl’s attention to lived experiences, and in creating his “fundamental ontology,” he indicated that the path for philosophy was to put its house in order by basing its claims about what exists or not, on the most fundamental and all-encompassing direct experience of existence and non-existence (1927/1996, §§3-6). The significance of this is that each academic discipline sets its course by identifying a region of genuinely existing objects towards which it is devoted. The prior understanding is that a region and its objects genuinely exist in an implicit way, pre-reflexively (§69b, p. 328), because of temporality (§69c), in the sense that temporality is the most important aspect of being of human being - in that the past, the present and the future co-exist. In Heidegger’s terminology, once a fundamental ontology has been established, it would then be possible to ground regional ontologies (academic disciplines concerning parts of the world and regions of objects) on direct experience, properly interpreted “in the right way” (§33, p. 143). By which he meant that there should be an a priori intellectual analysis of human being as temporal, in relation to its situatedness in terms of its contexts, practical action, its social habit, the role of language, its mortality, in relation to its conscience, in occupying physical space and its other characteristics, including its ability to *not* know itself.

Husserl never acknowledged hermeneutics’ relevance in his published writing although he did acknowledge a debt of inspiration to Dilthey. Husserl responded to Dilthey and replied to the hermeneutic tradition as a whole (1968/1981b, 1962/1977, §§1, 2, 3d). Husserl worked to identify parts of the whole. He insisted that basic understanding is drawn through seeing evidence for oneself, a type of experiential learning. However, there is a great deal of meaning that is simply just not present as a fact. The problem with urging people to observe phenomena is that any group of reasonable people will see different meanings in what appears to them. This is why it is necessary to have some account of how meaning is co-created: Particularly, when it is the aim to account for the conditions of the possibility of meaning for more than one person.

Now that the background themes are in place, the paper now provides some thumbnail sketches of five key thinkers who concluded either that hermeneutics and phenomenology co-exist or that meaning should be addressed in a wholistic way.

**The hermeneutic commonality within the history of phenomenology**

This section refers to those who developed and critiqued Husserl. The French readings of Husserl and Heidegger were mixed with other aspects of politics, philosophy, psycho-analysis and gestalt psychology to produce the expanded view called existential phenomenology. Only a few comments will be made on the positive lead set by Heidegger in regard to uniting hermeneutics and phenomenology. Then some brief characterisations of Sartre and de Beauvoir are provided to show their attention to meaning.

Despite the introductory and ironic introductory comments that philosophers should be guided by how things show themselves (Heidegger, 1927/1996, §7c, p. 30), and that there should be the use of hermeneutics in attending to non-verbal meaning (§§32, 33), Heidegger later stated that the circle is an insufficient figure for understanding (§63, p. 291). What Heidegger was referring to was his view that temporality is the most fundamental way of understanding human being. Temporality connects with history as the proper universe of all understandings and being, self-reflexively cognisant of those ways of understanding. The comments on the relation between theory and reality (§69b, pp. 327-8) are also subordinate to the grasping of the temporality of human being. This could be read as overthrowing of Schleiermacher’s idea of a circle between the past and the present. Heidegger’s view is one of the inter-relation between past, future and present.

Heidegger stated his position in the abstract and it applies to understanding and interpreting. In practice, it concerns identifying how anticipation is shaped by the past and future – be it for a school of research or an individual person. *Basic Problems* makes it clear: “If we did not understand, even though at first roughly and without conceptual comprehension, what actually signifies, then the actual would remain hidden from us. If we did not understand what reality means, then the real would remain inaccessible. If we did not understand what life and vitality signify, then we would not be able to comport ourselves toward living beings”, (1975/1982, §2, p. 10). What he was arguing for was a turn to understand human being through a “hermeneutic of the facticity of Da-sein in general” (1927/1996, p. 401, n 1) by which he meant finding the enabling conditions for being in a world through argument concerning everyday experience: like using a hammer (§33, p. 145), or understanding road signs (§17, p. 74), or understanding the weather to see if it will rain or not (p. 75).

However, let us turn to the case of understanding people. There is the shared attention to imagining the experiences of other persons in Husserl (1973, cited in Marbach, 1982) and Karl Jaspers (1913/1963; Wiggins and Schwartz, 1997). Jaspers well understood the hermeneutic circle and exemplified it in his approach to psychopathology (1913/1963, pp. 355-359). Such an attention to the experiences of others is of use in meeting with people in order to understand as well as possible what they are talking about. It is also of use in trying to understand psychopathology generally. Jaspers independently came to the same conclusion as Husserl. In order to understand other persons, it is necessary to imagine, empathise and interpret what their experiences actually are for them (p. 326). Cultural anthropology calls this an “emic” approach. It means understanding others through immersing oneself in what they might be experiencing. Key portions of the *General Psychopathology* recap the nature of hermeneutics. Jaspers commented that the “*totality of human life and its ultimate origin cannot be the object of any scientific research*”, (p. 543). In short, there are a number of wholistic and hermeneutic aspects. Some of these are the idea that meaning is open and forever capable of re-interpretation (p. 356). The meaningful whole comprises each of its dependent pieces (p. 357). Understanding and certainty can increase (p. 358) and so rationality does exist. It is not unphenomenological or unhermeneutic to argue for a conclusion.

Paul Ricoeur (1975/1975) was another who argued for an attendance to conscious meanings and the need for formal ways of making sense of what appears. Ricoeur concluded that hermeneutics is necessary for phenomenology to exist. What this means is that the territory of meaning is a region for natural empirical science. For him, phenomenology is the “*indispensible presupposition*” of hermeneutics (1975/1975, p. 85). He argued that both disciplines stand together. Ricoeur picked Husserl’s definition of the explication of the link between intentionalities and their objects as the explication of these correlations in terms of interpreting the forms of intentionalities in play with respect to their objects (Husserl, 1931/1977, §41, p. 84). Ricoeur focused on finding intentionality in phenomenology because hermeneutics is required for making distinctions between all the types of givenness: as remembered, as heard, as discussed in concepts. Therefore, phenomenology is hermeneutics (1975/1975, p. 99). The link between what Ricoeur pointed out, and what Husserl originally wrote, is that phenomenology comes into being when “we therefore ask quite universally... what is evidentially “inherent” in the whole reduced phenomenon... its “perceived as perceived””, (1913/1982, §90, p. 220). The common aim is to interpret phenomena properly, according to their genuine manner of being which is how the intentionalities and the senses produced overlap and intermingle (1962/1977, §3e, p. 26). The problem to be overcome is that if it is unclear how initial understanding obscures or represents the phenomena in question then there is no account of how to conclude properly in any investigation about it.

The term “existentialism” sometimes refers to the work of Jean-Paul Sartre alone and sometimes to existential phenomenology as a whole: what I am calling the “French readings” of Husserl, Heidegger, psychoanalysis and gestalt. What is concluded by Jean-Paul Sartre (1943/1958) is the idea that wholism is required for understanding meaning, human nature, the consequences of choices that have been made, and the intersubjective positions held with respect to self and others. Whilst hermeneutics is not specifically mentioned by Sartre, it is very clear that the important project is attending to conscious meaning. Sartre backed the guiding idea that the conscious needs to be followed as a clue in order to reveal the preconscious. This interpretative strategy is useful in making sense of psychological situations, for instance. Jean-Paul Sartre realised that being, having and doing co-occur for human beings (p. 576). He concluded that wholism must occur in making sense of the human situation. He argued that human existence is a whole, not just a series of parts. And that the parts indicate the whole to which they belong: “man is a totality and not a collection. Consequently he expresses himself as a whole in even his most insignificant and his most superficial behavior. In other words there is a not a taste, a mannerism, or an human act that is not *revealing*”, (p. 568). Pre-conscious meanings can be interpreted by going from the conscious towards that which is currently out of consciousness, but the object of attention can be retrieved through discussion. He called his method existential psychoanalysis: “Its *point of departure* is *experience*; its pillar of support is the fundamental, pre-ontological comprehension which man has of the human person... each human individual nevertheless possesses *a priori* the *meaning* of the revelatory value of these manifestations and is capable of deciphering them ... Its *method* is comparative”, (pp. 568-9). The comments have wide-ranging implications in terms of defining what is achievable in human inquiry. It is claimed that Sartre did justice to how ordinary living is complex and constructed.

Simone de Beauvoir was another who was exemplary in taking phenomenology and applying it to human development, gender relations and sexuality, for instance (1949a, 1949b). She accepted Jean-Paul Sartre’s wholism and applied a contextual view of the intentionality of action to everyday life. For her, actions make sense in their context and aim overall. So that the same action needs to be understood through grasping the attitude and purpose of the specific actor. Such an approach is useful in taking theory to the individual, in understanding what happens for them, in any given situation. So it is a pre-requisite for understanding personality and how specific events make sense to others. This wholism is common to Sartre and Karl Jaspers as well.

**Some implications for the human sciences**

To return to the original aim of the paper, it should now be clearer how important it is to be self-reflexive in making clear to colleagues and ourselves, our own personal responsibility in how we make sense of situations. This is the concern that creates anxiety about *re*-search methods and the desire for adequate justification in various forms of meaning-oriented *searching again*. Another common aspect between three of the key thinkers mentioned above is now appraised and that is the role of empathy in donating sense to what appears.

Following Dilthey, Husserl and Jaspers, what empathy contributes to psychological research is that it is the fundamental form of understanding that grasps what is observable and recordable. Empathy breathes psychological meaning into listening to people, watching non-verbals, reading written descriptions and concluding on what statistics mean. Psychological meanings only appear through empathic understanding and are themselves incapable of being recorded. The terms empathic understanding and psychological understanding are identical and are a part of the greater expanse of commonsense. For instance, intentions and the details of the experiences of others are *indicated* through what people say about their memories, anticipations and what it is like for others to lead their lives. What intentionality means in relation to meaningful objects, is that it shows how people react to meanings that are not apparent to others. Stating this point very generally, people react to what they anticipate, feel and reason might happen. These intentionalities are not hallucination or dreaming. Anticipation, emotion, and reasoning might be in agreement with the views of others about the same physical object, in the here and now or not. Accordingly, reactions to what is anticipated, valued, remembered, felt or reasoned about - are the result of meaning-making processes. Such ‘causes’ of human behaviour evade psychology as natural science. Yet these experiences are valid and existent phenomena: these ‘intangibles’ are interpreted psychological reasons for acting; of a completely different sort to the natural causes of genetic traits and chemicals in the bloodstream. The role of the hermeneutic circle is understanding that the previous immersion in the social world teaches how to make sense of the current moment.

What is common to Husserl and Jaspers is immersing oneself in the descriptions of the experiences of others, in order to grasp something like what their first-hand experience might be (Husserl, 1973, cited in Marbach, 1982, pp. 466-7). Jaspers also urged psychiatrists to focus on the conscious experiences of their clients (1913/1963, p. 27) and when he stated that the means of doing so is “the empathic listening to others in which we simultaneously keep touch with ourselves”, (p. 21). And “we shall keep the expression ‘*understanding’* (Verstehen) solely for the understanding of psychic events ‘from within’. The expression will never be used for the appreciation of objective causal connections, which we have said can only be seen ‘from without’”, (p. 28). Perceptual presence indicates what is real here and now. It has to be noted that what is psychological is neither perceptual – real here and now – in the sense that it is directly observable by anyone else. But it is interpretable due to social learning. The type of reality of the psychological object is intentional and shared between people. It is a mixture of the past and future in the present. It is the result of past learning and can be open to re-learning.

The commonality between Husserl and Jaspers are the themes of intentionality, empathy and the desire to attend to what other people experience, in the particular, and in theory-making. Any conclusions about others require the conscious evidence of what they experience. This general principle is called “fulfilment,” as noted above. In this case, it is a quasi-experiencing through psychological understanding, entirely obtained through imagination and empathy about other persons, in connection with one’s own life experiences and the basic ability to imagine what life is like for others, even though they might be radically different to oneself. It is important to conclude from experiential evidence of one’s own intentionalities, as others turn towards the same or similar cultural objects. Husserl and Jaspers agree formal psychological concepts can only be derived from such understanding. Husserl’s term for this was “authentic” empathy and this is synonymous to taking the “personalistic attitude” towards others: He was clear that this is the bedrock for genuine human sciences (Kern, 1997).

**Closing discussion and conclusion**

Although the biopsychosocial approach is laudable, it remains to be seen precisely how nature and nurture can be made into a unified whole because each discipline comes from radically different ontological bases. There is a major tension between a focus on the biological basis for behaviour – as opposed to the open exploration of meaningful qualitative experiences. Hermeneutic phenomenology concerns itself with the fundamentals for a qualitative approach to theory and practice. Its strength is that it is ready to account for variability in the senses of the same object. It can work with complex experiences because its wholism can identify the contributory parts of experience as intentionality, sense, object and context. What phenomenology shows is that some phenomena are invisible to the natural science approach and fall outside of its remit.

In working towards a concordant biopsychosocial view, a hermeneutic applied psychology could support the understanding of human being as comprised of biological, psychological and social aspects, in which a great many contexts of parts and wholes could be identified (Kern, 1986). The type of causality at play for human beings is multi-factorial, both nature and nurture. Natural cause is irreversible biological cause in genetics and materially-caused tendencies to have a specific sort of personality and specific sorts of psychological problem (Livesley, 2003, pp. 69-73). Of course, psychological problems also as the consequence of material damage to the brain or the physical structure of the body and its physiological ability to deal with stress, for instance. In the world of nurture, there are the meaningful events of smaller and wider spheres. Thus there is the world of personal choice and action, a world of the family of attachment figures, within the cultural world of persons who are known, within the wider worlds of persons who may not be known, but who are still influential. And finally, there is the widest world possible of society and international influences on the individual life and history. It is a future project to unite the more meaning-oriented and empirical phenomenological approaches to the more natural scientific ones.

Even now only a small proportion of the original writings of Edmund Husserl are available to the public and their translation into English has delayed the grasping of their full intent and perspective. The mature worldview of Husserl would now be called “social construction” but the term created by Husserl was “generative phenomenology” of the accrual of meaning across the development of human civilisation (Steinbock, 1995). Husserl took a wholistic view of the development of the lifeworld. He focused on social history as the scope for the creation and maintenance of meaning. In overview: cultural worlds create themselves across history. This means that co-construction occurs through people who know each other face to face and it obeys identifiable laws, societal preferences and traditions of various sorts. The term “world” in phenomenology means a world-horizon that contains within it a set of persons with their meaningful cultural objects of various kinds such as music, food, ideas, social roles, and emotional responses with respect to the excitements and disappointments found there. Poetry, drama and film depict the worldviews of others in comparable ways to listening to someone speak about their life: for instance, comparing the world of Charlie Chaplin to present day Hollywood. Not much needs to be said before empathy fills in the gaps and makes sense about what is auditorially presented.

However, what intentionality means is that concepts and experiences refer to the work done by consciousness in making meaning. It is a major task of Husserl’s phenomenology to grasp this ability. A large portion of psychological life concerns psychological understanding about the intentions and feelings of others. But the region of natural cause does not properly appear in human behaviour and experience and is hard to identify. Contrary to Husserl, when hermeneutics is accepted there are no absolute starting points, privileged starting points and no possibility of self-validation by appeal to some best evidence outside of the hermeneutic circle. For the mature Husserl: “History is the great fact of absolute Being; and the ultimate questions, the ultimate metaphysical and teleological questions, are one with the questions regarding the absolute meaning of history”, (1956, p. 506, cited in Bernet, Kern & Marbach, 1993, p. 265). Consequently, the totality of cultural objects signifies human nature and its consciousness. The works produced indicate the intentions and nature of their makers.

The paper has argued that tradition of phenomenology centres on interpreting lived experiences in various ways. The original Husserlian project is the mental clarification of the intentionalities in relation to their objects in preparation for new empirical psychological and sociological approaches that would meet their objects properly. But to ignore the ways that previous understanding creates influences, will not make them go away. On the contrary, when it is accepted that the expectations of the future in the present are formed on the influence of the past – then one’s own bias can begin to be grasped. In order to distinguish one’s own conclusions, it is necessary to make sure they concern the current topic and not past ones. To have clarity about one’s own stance should minimise the confusion of mistaking one’s own perspective, for the one and only reading of a situation. Thus hermeneutics is part of reasoning about various realms of evidence.

Academics and the general population have widely differing understandings about human nature and what motivates human action. Despite what is ordinarily passed on as “folk psychology,” understanding human situations accurately is demanded by life itself. Inevitably, the complex totality of human being exceeds the attempt to grasp it with complete certainty. Understanding must accept its imprecision. It is agreed that theorising and interpreting include a practice of a sort - as does practice include theory of a sort.

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