



## Phenomenology in nursing studies: New perspectives: Authors' response to Morley (2019)



Dan Zahavi\*, Kristian M.M. Martiny

University of Oxford, Faculty of Philosophy, Radcliffe Humanities, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6GG, United Kingdom

We appreciate Morley's thoughtful comments (Morley, 2019), and although we do not agree with everything he says in his commentary, we still wish to emphasize how much we share his interest in and concern for promoting better phenomenological research beyond the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy. In the following very brief reply, we will, however, point to what we take to be a few misunderstandings, and then focus on what amounts to a substantial disagreement.

Part of Morley's commentary discusses our use of Paley and our criticism of existing qualitative phenomenological methods. Morley thinks we attribute too much importance to Paley. We do think that Paley has identified certain weaknesses in the way phenomenology is currently being used within nursing research, but this certainly doesn't mean that we share his wholesale rejection of the existing methods, or their theoretical foundations, or that we somehow favour Paley's own alternative. We do, however, think that his criticism should motivate the nursing community to rethink how it is currently using phenomenological ideas in research and clinical practice. The aim of our article was to point to some resources that have by and large been overlooked by qualitative researchers, but which offer different perspectives on how to apply phenomenology.

Morley also claims that our criticism of existing qualitative phenomenological methods is flawed as a result of our lack of familiarity with other disciplines than philosophy. This is a surprising criticism given that both of us over the years have collaborated extensively with qualitative researchers, psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, developmental psychologists, anthropologists and neuroscientists.

Morley next claims that we advocate a return to a phenomenologically informed experimental psychology. We really do not understand this criticism. Not only because we nowhere in our article endorse such a return, but also because none of the three concrete cases of applied phenomenology that we highlight as examples to follow involve experimental psychology. It is true that we also do mention Katz as an early and partially forgotten figure,

who not only did use ideas and insights from phenomenology in his experimental work, but whose use of these ideas also made a concrete difference in terms of the results he was able to obtain. We think this is the right way forward and a model to follow. If nurses are to spend any time on phenomenology, it shouldn't be out of veneration for the history of philosophy, but because ideas from phenomenology can make a valuable difference, can allow for new insights or, say, better therapeutic interventions. But Katz was just one example, a reminder to the nursing community that there are untapped resources, and we could have picked other figures to exemplify the same point.

So why does Morley claim that we favour the experimental approach, why does he write that we ultimately want all non-philosophical applications of phenomenology to be strictly empiricist, and why does he end his paper by insisting that qualitative research is not going away, thereby insinuating that we would somehow want it to disappear? A likely explanation for all these different – rather odd accusations – is probably to be found in what is indeed a fundamental disagreement.

Morley laments our proposal that qualitative researchers should leave pure phenomenology to philosophers, and he suggests that if nurses were to give up pure phenomenology and were to stop using the epoché and the reduction, then they would not only stop doing phenomenology, but also qualitative research altogether. Not only do we think that most qualitative researchers quite justifiably would shrug their shoulders when confronted with such a claim and simply continue with their own research without feeling any compulsion to start reading Husserl. We also disagree with Morley's claim that the epoché and the reduction are essential to any kind of applied phenomenology.

One of us has addressed this issue in far more detail in a recent paper (Zahavi, 2019), so let us be brief. Consider the following. Back in 1914, shortly before the outbreak of World War I, Adolf Reinach, one of Husserl's most talented early followers, gave an influential introductory talk entitled "What is phenomenology?". Reinach began his lecture by saying that he didn't want to simply *talk* about phenomenology, rather together with the audience he wanted to *do* phenomenology. In the course of this exercise, Reinach clarified the nature of the phenomenological attitude, emphasized the importance of getting closer to the thing itself, explained how one

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [dan.zahavi@philosophy.ox.ac.uk](mailto:dan.zahavi@philosophy.ox.ac.uk) (D. Zahavi).

might come to learn about experiences one didn't even realize one was having, just as he stressed the need for a direct intuition of essences. These are presumably all features that are also important to Morley. How many times did Reinach refer to the epoché and the reduction in his lecture? Not even once. Reinach was a phenomenologist, but he didn't share Husserl's interest in transcendental phenomenology, and it is only in the latter context that the epoché is indispensable. For Husserl, the epoché has a very particular philosophical purpose. Its aim is to suspend our automatic and deep-seated belief in the mind-independent existence of reality. It is completely unclear to us why nurses who are interested in using phenomenology to provide adequate health care or in doing research on, say, the changed life-circumstances of COPD patients would need to engage in this kind of exercise. To insist that they must does not only lack theoretical justification, it has in our view also proven quite counterproductive. It has generated too many publications where

protagonists and antagonists alike rather than focusing on the matter itself – say, how different dimensions of human existence are affected in pathology, illness, or difficult life-circumstances – instead spend their time on highly abstruse metaphilosophical questions that are then frequently misinterpreted.

We are not arguing that qualitative researchers should stop using phenomenology. We are arguing that the quest for purity is a red herring when it comes to a fruitful application of phenomenology, and that philosophers and nurses should instead jointly rethink how to work with mixed methods.

## References

- Morley, J., 2019. Phenomenology in nursing studies: New perspectives – Commentary. *Int. J. Nurs. Stud.* 93, 163–167.
- Zahavi, D., 2019. Applied phenomenology: why it is safe to ignore the epoché. *Cont. Philos. Rev.*