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Rediscovering Husserl: Perspectives on the Epoché and the Reductions

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Abstract

The processes associated with implementing a phenomenological study in the Husserlian interpretation can seem daunting to the new researcher. This is especially true if the researcher intends to implement Husserl's concepts with intentionality and reflexivity. A leading cause of difficulty lies in the tendency for Husserl to change how he described key elements of his phenomenology, particularly the epoché and the associated reductions. Although many very good manuals exist within which a new researcher will find a host of prescriptions for the execution of a phenomenological study, an essential difficulty exists for those who want a deeper understanding of the intentions of phenomenology, not only as a research method, but as a personal orientation for the scholar-practitioner. The intention of this paper is to provide perspectives useful to the new researcher beginning the process of developing a personal orientation to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.

Keywords

Epoché, Husserl, Phenomenology, Reductions

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Rediscovering Husserl: Perspectives on the Epoché and the Reductions

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The processes associated with implementing a phenomenological study in the Husserlian interpretation can seem daunting to the new researcher. This is especially true if the researcher intends to implement Husserl's concepts with intentionality and reflexivity. A leading cause of difficulty lies in the tendency for Husserl to change how he described key elements of his phenomenology, particularly the epoché and the associated reductions. Although many very good manuals exist within which a new researcher will find a host of prescriptions for the execution of a phenomenological study, an essential difficulty exists for those who want a deeper understanding of the intentions of phenomenology, not only as a research method, but as a personal orientation for the scholar-practitioner. The intention of this paper is to provide perspectives useful to the new researcher beginning the process of developing a personal orientation to Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Keywords: Epoché, Husserl, Phenomenology, Reductions

This paper is motivated by the sense that transcendental phenomenology offers a depth of possibilities for describing lived experiences (Reeder, 2010). When I began the practice of research, I was confronted with the challenges of understanding the intricacies of what unique individuals reported to me about their perceptions. I became drawn towards transcendental phenomenology as a means to understand those perceptions, because the differences in how people construct meaning is so attractive to me. My practical challenge was to let the experience of the participant stand as he or she intended it to be understood, but my tendency was to filter their experiences through my own eyes, through my own experiences. As an aid to hearing the voice of my participants, phenomenology, as explained in the various writings of its founder, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), became the perfect method within which I could begin to understand how the perceptions of others helped them to understand their world.

Phenomenology provides a means to observe individual and personal epistemological realities as they arise from their unique perceptions (Pietersma, 2006). The opportunity to understand the subjective perceptions of participants is in itself a compelling draw to phenomenology as a method, yet the orientation seems difficult to fully grasp, particularly in understanding the evolution of Husserl's thinking. Reeder, (2010), as an example of this difficulty, explains that Husserl's writings "need to be read and reread" so that we become aware of how Husserl's "later explorations of consciousness correct and amplify earlier ones" (p. 158). It is not uncommon, even as it was in my past experience as a doctoral student, to be exposed only to a cursory look at phenomenology and its various constructs. This established for me a need to engage in a personal exploration of Husserl's writing so that I could begin to understand some of the many complexities which exist in the method. The orientation I received as a student exposed the difficulties inherent to the method on an intellectual level, but those challenges became real only after beginning to implement the method. A particular difficulty exists in the task of intentionally engaging with what Husserl called the "epoché" (Sousa, 2014, p. 31), and the associated processes of "reduction" and "bracketing" (Chan, Yuen-ling, & Wai-tong, 2013, p. 1). The terms are used so frequently and with so much seeming familiarity that my initial tendency was to falsely embrace an external, superficial

examination of the context and meaning within phenomenology. It was only after reading through Husserl's writings that I realized the extraordinary personal investment Husserl asks of the aspiring phenomenologist (Husserl, 1982).

What I intend in this paper is to provide a perspective, acknowledging that there are many such perspectives, with which to understand the epoché and associated concepts in research as they exist in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology. Additionally, the sense that the epoché and the reductions occur on multiple planes simultaneously is an inherent conclusion. As I write above, the aspiring phenomenologist must make an intentional personal investment in the process of phenomenology, in actually doing something within the phenomenological method, but what is often overlooked is the transformational effect *doing* phenomenology ultimately has on the researcher (see Jacobs, 2013).

What I do not attempt to do is to provide a philosophical examination of these terms. Others are far better suited to that task, and I leave it to them happily. This paper is therefore centered on discussing the epoché and the reductions as a fundamental part of transcendental phenomenological research.

In the phenomenological sense epoché indicates, as Taminiaux (2004) suggests, a suspension of what "blocks the way to the phenomena" (p. 9). In practice this requires an intentional disruption of one's tendency to overlay personal assumptions on interpretations of the experiences and perceptions of others. Thus, the tendency to retreat to personal beliefs in the interpretation of phenomena can result in a pseudodoxia, leading to false conclusions about the subjective perceptual realities of others. In the interpretation, perceptions recounted by participants can become falsified if the researcher fails to disregard his or her personal experiences. Because of the human tendency to rely on personal experience, Husserl (1982), commenting in the beginning of the Cartesian Meditations, suggests that "we make a new beginning, each for himself and in himself. . .," indicating the extraordinarily personal context of epoché (p. 6). Thereafter, Husserl continues, ". . . we shall put out of action all the convictions we have been accepting up to now" (p. 6). That which I know, I know from my subjective experience alone, yet I must be the objective observer, suspending my tendencies to interpret using my understandings all the while searching for the true heart of the experiences of the participant. That charge is a unique and not easily implemented imperative of phenomenology. The problem of divesting oneself of personal assumptions became evident at a recent doctoral candidate's defense in which the researcher was asked to describe the process used to implement the epoché. The reply simply indicated that the epoché had been performed, and was thereafter not questioned. But how had it been performed, in fact, can it be performed? How had the researcher prepared to remove the accretions of her subjective experience from the interpretations of another's reality? The answer to that question is a fundamental challenge of epoché, and of phenomenology itself.

Questioning the Process

The experience as an observer in the aforementioned student's doctoral defense prompted my current questioning of Husserl's intention regarding phenomenological processes, specifically the epoché and the reductions. Although much scholarly writing about Husserl's ideas has been done, scholars have reached a wide and not wholly complementary variety of conclusions. These disparate results evidence the complications associated with the task of interpretation. Difficulties exist, observes Duranti (2010), precisely because Husserl, conceivably due to the continued evolution of his thinking, had the propensity to continuously restate the "epistemological and ontological foundations of his philosophy" yet tended not to provide clear examples of his thinking (p. 17). Overgaard (2002) agrees, particularly about the reductions, commenting that the variety of scholarly conclusions reveal that Husserl often

lacked clarity “about which functions his reductions were to serve” (p. 209). The result for the researcher implementing the phenomenological process is that a choice needs to be made regarding which interpretation will inform the project under consideration. Do we rely on a method, one of many written over the years by a host of authors, or do we invest in attempting to understand Husserl himself?

Epoché

At the beginning of a qualitative phenomenological project, researchers can benefit by revisiting the philosophy of Edmund Husserl as a means to understand the epoché. One may be tempted to ask why this is so, as Mortari (2008) did in her study of phenomenology, and it would be remiss not to offer the explanation she articulated:

In order to comprehend the essence of the phenomenological method, the authentic phenomenological researcher cannot rely on manuals where the method is already codified; indeed, if the watchword of phenomenology is “going to the things themselves,” then the task of the authentic phenomenologist is “going to the original texts.” (Mortari, 2008, p. 4)

The point is that the phenomenological researcher must find his or her own way not only to an understanding of Husserl’s intentions, but ultimately to an intersection with his or her authentic self. Particularly in terms of process, this is a pragmatic means to locate oneself as researcher, as academic, and as human being in relation to the participants in the study, and to begin the task of removing all the assumptive detritus that attaches to and describes the researcher as a person living in the world. This goal is central in the epoché and fundamental to operating within the Husserlian method. Simply put, the researcher intentionally refrains from influencing “the participants understanding of the phenomenon” (Chan, Yuen-ling, & Wai-tong, 2013, p.1). Husserl, according to Dowling and Cooney (2012), held that the purpose of phenomenology is to understand the “essence or true meaning of a phenomenon” (p. 23). To say that this is a difficult undertaking is an understatement. Husserl acknowledges the difficulty for the phenomenologist in his introduction to the *Ideen*, in which he uncontroversibly explains the difficulties in the initial tasks of the method:

Indeed what makes so extraordinarily hard the acquisition of the proper essence of phenomenology, the understanding of the peculiar sense of its problems, and of its relationships to all other sciences (in particular to psychology), is that, for all this, a new *style of attitude* is needed which is entirely altered in contrast to the natural attitude in experiencing and the natural attitude in thinking. (Husserl, 1983, XIX)

Once the researcher makes that philosophical turn, it becomes apparent that one’s own experiences are now barriers to a pure objectivity. Nevertheless, one’s ability to look past his or her own experiences is fundamentally important to the phenomenological process. Husserl (1983) specifies that the phenomenologist must approach the world with the conviction to “alter it radically” (p. 57). Husserl’s process includes the element of Cartesian doubt as a means to begin to find a freedom from our assumptions. All of what we know of a phenomenon in the natural attitude, and which is our grounding to interpretation, is subjected to a “parenthesizing” that allows the researcher to implement “a certain refraining from judgment” about the phenomenon, “which is compatible with the unshaken conviction of truth, even with the unshakable conviction of evident truth” (Husserl, 1983, pp. 60-61). Although we know the

absolute facticity of a thing, Husserl says, “we put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude” (p. 61). The natural world, bracketed, parenthesized, negated, doubted, nevertheless remains “according to consciousness as an actuality even if we choose to parenthesize it” (p. 61). What exists in all facticity is bracketed away from the researcher’s judgment in order that he will be free to interpret a *separate* reality. Bracketing, the most frequently accessed metaphor within epoché, is a continuous process of self-constraint; it is not a one off event that takes place once and for all and then is done (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

Once the researcher’s experience is bracketed, the problem of interpretation arises. How is one to interpret without the use of background and domain assumptions derived from personal experience and central to the researcher’s core, which have now been put out of action? Bracketing requires more investigation in order to see the way forward towards the experiences of participants as they accumulate in data collection, and of which one must make interpretive sense in the process of analysis. The participant’s voice provides the evidences of his or her perceptual experience on which phenomenological investigations proceed. Reeder (2010), in discussing phenomenological data, uses the term *evidence* as opposed to the more frequently found term *experience*, but this usage denotes a fundamental assumption that lived experiences, the actual substances of Husserl’s method, are the evidences of phenomenology. As a philosophical science, evidence exposed by phenomenological inquiry is indicative of the subjective realities of individuals living in the social milieu. Schutz (1967) gives a thorough accounting of the processes of evidence which result from the means in which an actor’s “subjective experiences manifest themselves,” and in which the “objectivations” or “products of action” become “evidence of what went on in the mind of actors who made them” (p. 43).

Bringing an individual’s perceptual moments to light is the challenge of phenomenological inquiry. Reeder (2010) affirms the conclusion, observing that phenomenology attempts to “make explicit the evidence for certain kinds of claims” reflectively doing so by “seeking objective truths” thereby exposing the “subjective appearances of these truths” (p. 22). A retreat to Schutz (1970) explains the dissonance surrounding the intersection of objective reality to subjective experience. Husserl, explains Schutz, saw phenomenology as dealing with human experience, and as Schutz clarifies, phenomenology deals with the “underlying assumptions and their implications” people make about, and because of their experiences (p. 56). Consequently, experience is the foundation of individual subjectivity. Schutz goes on to say:

How can I, in my attitude as a man among other men or as a social scientist, find an approach to all this if not by recourse to a stock of pre-interpreted experiences built up by sedimentation within my own conscious life? (Schutz, 1970, p. 56)

As much as one’s individual experiences with the social milieu are separate and apart from that of others, despite levels of convergence that may occur in the socially mediated task of meaning-making -- the value laden constructs that make up social groups -- those experiences are ultimately only relevant to that individual. Despite that, the combined human stream of consciousness that exists with all together, and of which all are a part, continues to exist. This is not an objective truth but an accretion of combined subjective experiences. Schutz (1970) uses the example of living “in the flow of duration” but goes on to explain that only by a pure act of “reflection” can “I turn my attention to my living experience” (p. 62). This turn, however remains intuitively subjective.

Notwithstanding the role of subjectivity in developing meaning for individual actors, questions about the role of objectivity for the researcher persist. If the experiences I have as

an actor in the social stream are rendered subjective, as they must be, how can my observations of another's interpretation of their lived experience not be a subjective interpretation as well? Schutz (1967) removes the confusion by announcing that "objective meaning therefore consists only in a meaning-context within the mind of the interpreter, whereas subjective meaning refers beyond it to a meaning-context in the mind of the producer" (p. 44). As the observer, I cannot place my interpretation of the subjective acts of others as if I had performed the acts, for in so doing I have relied not on their experience and intent, but on my subjective meaning making capacity. Rather, only by "bracketing" out my subjective self, can I reflect on the intentionality of the actor (Schutz, 1970, p. 316). Nonetheless, the notion that bracketing remains in place as a container for personal assumptions, experiences, and meaning and knowledge constructs exists, but although a researcher brackets these elements of personal lived experience, the researcher is nevertheless left with the essence of all that he or she is, and the conscious awareness of that aspect of the self.

Husserl explains this, argues Findlay (2012) in his commentary on the *Ideen*, by recalling that all lived experience is of the natural world, and that this experience is incorporated in the "natural attitude" (p. 69). Further, all natural attitudes incorporate a "thesis" which "regards the natural world as having unquestioned existence" (p. 69). Suspending the natural world is the intentional objective of epoché. Nevertheless, when we suspend the natural world, Findlay argues, a "residuum" of the natural thesis remains that "cannot be put out of action" (p. 70). The residuum are the acts of consciousness which comprise the things of the natural world. Husserl, Findlay concludes, concedes that the epoché cannot "suspend the a priori of consciousness itself" (p. 75).

With that understanding, researchers must be aware that even in the most fruitful instantiation of the transcendental epoché, conscious awareness still operates, and presumably still exercises the data with the researcher's internalized experiences. A fundamental tension appears to exist in the competing realities of bracketing one's assumptions, on one hand, and acknowledging the continued existence of conscious awareness on the other? One might think of conscious awareness as a consciousness of the self in the world, or as Perniola (2011) observes, citing Husserl's *Vienna Lectures*, conscious awareness becomes the "human posture which immediately intervenes in the whole remainder of practical life with all its demands and ends" (Perniola, 2011, p. 158, citing Husserl).

This intervention poses quite a problem for the researcher, as it did indeed for Husserl in his fundamental arguments on consciousness and subjectivity. Awareness of the self is both distinct from and implicit in the researcher's purposeful intention to expose the essence (wesen) of the phenomenon under investigation, an implied contested territory within which knowledge of the self and a represented knowledge of the other exists which must be reconciled. Thus, the reconciliation, indeed the refutation of the self / other dichotomy is an implied task of the epoché. Moreover, the dichotomy of the phenomenon itself is a contested territory for the researcher to tackle, as Mortari (2008) observes citing Arendt, "what appears (phenomenon) is a mere appearance that conceals the truth (being) of the thing, which does not appear above the surface" (p. 4). What we see is not the reality of a phenomenon in its essence; rather, it is the actuality of the phenomenon as it appears to our interpretation. Without invoking the phenomenological attitude, what becomes known is only a subjective interpretation colored by one's subjective arsenal of assumptions. Jacobs (2013) clarifies further explaining that the inherent sense of phenomenological reflection Husserl intends requires of the researcher an acknowledgement of those things not seen by developing "perceptiveness to the difference between what appears and the way in which it appears to me" (p. 354). In my experience, doing so is not a simple act of will. Understanding the practical implication of Jacobs's statement requires that the researcher must attempt to understand the phenomenon as it is, in its own environment, as separate from the researcher's assumptions. The method for a

researcher to do so is through the epoché and the reductions, a process that I frequently experience to be frustratingly just of reach. Indeed, quieting one's interpretive frame is a personally challenging necessity in order to implement the phenomenological method.

Epoché through Reduction

With that area of contestation firmly in mind, and as previously explained, the phenomenological method relies on the epoché as a means to reduce the interjecting awareness of the self in favor of the experience of the participant. Epoché, in the interpretation intended by Husserl qua phenomenology is explained, argues Russell (2010), as "the state reached by the way of the reduction(s)" (p. 57). Russell is quick to note that Husserl used epoché in a number of ways, for example, as "transcendental reduction," or as "phenomenological reduction," both of which should be understood to be synonymous expressions indicating the process by which assumptions are cleared through the phenomenological method (p. 57). For this process, Husserl used the metaphorical term "bracketing" (Russell, 2010, p. 57). Hopkins (2010) adds Husserlian color to the context of epoché observing that the epoché, as transcendental reduction, takes all that exists, all that is understood about a phenomenon as a priori knowledge, and causes it to be "put out of action in advance by the epoché" (p. 210). The target of the epoché in that usage is the researcher, not the phenomenon.

Thus armed with a definition of epoché, the researcher is faced with the problem of process, the steps of the phenomenological process which constitute the epoché. Creswell's (2013) often referenced methodological approach, rather than explaining the epoché in useful terms, relies instead on Moustakas' sense that researcher takes "a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 80). While helpful, this fails to provide usable detail. Again, researchers are left with the problem of identifying the means with which to accomplish the epoché, calling to mind and adding immediacy to Mortari's (2008) prescription, earlier referenced, that we return to the originals. With the necessity of original understandings put forth, it may be helpful not only understand epoché, as was begun above, but to investigate the phenomenological reductions as a means to find a usable phenomenological method.

The Phenomenological Reductions

Having landed on a definition of the epoché as indicative of the reductions, the next task is to uncover how reductions respond to the epoché. Clear scholarly insight or agreement has not always been evidenced as to whether or not reductions are needed for phenomenological research, or if epoché alone suffices, an argument that Perniola (2011) considers in his quest to "expand" the epoché (p. 158). In the process of his essay, Perniola rests several of his conclusions on Bossert's restating of Spiegleberg's argument that reduction is not necessary for epoché, in fact, that "Husserl never succeeded in clarifying the relation between epoché and reduction" (Perniola 2011, p. 159, citing Bossert). On the surface, this perceived lack of clarity on Husserl's part seems to add to the difficulties of employing the reductions at a personal level. In at least one view, the argument is imprecise at best, perhaps more than that, wholly inaccurate. Reaching back to Schmitt (1959), as an example, is commentary which challenges Spiegleberg's claim. Schmitt agrees with those who contend that epoché and reduction are synonymous terms, but only in Husserl's early and middle period. In his later writings, Schmitt explains, Husserl explicitly describes epoché and reduction as distinct terms suggesting that "the suspension of all natural belief in the objects of experience is called the epoché" (p. 240). More to the point is the second half of Husserl's statement according to Schmitt, calling the enacted epoché "a precondition for reducing the natural world

to a world of phenomena” (p. 240). This is a clear indication of the path from epoché to reductions, with the reductions dependent on the epoché.

Others have taken this purist interpretation of phenomenology. Jacobs (2013) makes a persuasive argument for the reductions, observing that once a “radical bracketing of the world” has occurred, and as one continues to gain “phenomenological insights,” a significant change occurs to the “character of the reduction” (p. 361). Lübcke (1999) had previously taken that a step further suggesting that once Husserl succeeded in changing phenomenology into transcendental phenomenology, the “sense of the epoché” changed (p. 6). Further, for the transcendental phenomenologist, nothing exists “outside the epoché” (p. 7). If that is true, then the phenomenological researcher, once having employed the epoché, has made an intentional commitment that alters the manner in which a phenomenon is known in its entirety by that researcher, thereby accomplishing a transformational reduction of the experiences of the self. Let me explain, as a researcher, once I make the commitment to the epoché, I can no longer give validity to my previous understandings regarding a particular phenomenon, even those which I may have previously shared with another. Once I put away my natural understandings, it becomes possible to arrive at a new understanding of the phenomenon based purely on the essential characteristics of the phenomenon itself. Cerbone (2014) clarifies, arguing that I thereafter am not looking at the “objects of my experience,” but rather I now “focus my attention on the experience of those worldly objects” (p. 23). This changes the researcher’s method of approaching phenomena. Returning to Jacobs (2013) discussion of the effect implicit on the researcher:

One is not a phenomenologist when, in order to satisfy a fleeting interest that is awakened by the new phenomenological literature, one does some phenomenology, performs for a while some phenomenological reduction, and becomes acquainted with a few intentional analyses, or even carries them out oneself. Rather, one is a phenomenologist, when one has made a personal life choice. (p. 356)

The sense of the epoché taken herein is informed by Schmitt (1959), referenced previously, that in order to come into the reductions, one must perform the epoché; the process of disassociating the mind from the assumptions previously held about one’s own experience, and deciding to withhold decisions about the validity of new experience(s). It is the move towards the philosophical attitude which Husserl (1965) observes has “grown out of a critical attitude to each and every traditional predisposition” (para. 44). Moran (1999) observes the personal nature of this confrontation with epoché as “a means to purify transcendently . . .” and to “access to the domain of consciousness itself” (p. 137). This is the working of the epoché on the inner person, the crucial phenomenological confrontation which radically changes that person not just in terms of a particular phenomenon, but in terms of all experience.

Inside the Reductions

To add more fuel to the fire concerning the distinctions between the epoché and the reductions, commentary by Schmitt’s (1959) contemporary, Rudolf Boehm (1965), begins to explain the task of uncovering Husserl’s views on the reductions. Reduction, in the form of the phenomenological reduction, argues Boehm, first appeared in Husserl’s 1905 lectures (Boehm, 1965). His evidence for the claim is none other than Husserl himself, who wrote a note on a folder of research manuscripts, Boehm contends, which stated the following: ““Historical note: In the Seefeld pages (1905) I already find the concept and the correct use of phenomenological reduction.”” (Boehm, p. 190, citing Husserl). This indicates that Husserl’s

notion of reduction developed during the time of the *Logical Investigations* and “in the thoroughly explicit presentation of the phenomenological reduction contained in the five lectures on the *Idea of Phenomenology*,” which occurred in 1905 to perhaps 1917 (p. 190).

The idea of the reductions was thereafter made explicit, argues Boehm (1965), by Husserl himself with the following insightful declaration:

This means that any transcendence involved is to be marked with the index of elimination or of indifference, of epistemological nullity, which means that the existence of any transcendent whatever, whether I believe in it or not, is no concern of mine; this is not the place to pass judgment upon it, it simply plays no role here. (Boehm, pp. 190 – 191, citing Husserl)

This is the substance of what Husserl termed a reduction, according to Boehm (1965), and what we have come to identify as “the phenomenological reduction” (p. 191), which Boehm takes to be the essential confrontation with the epoché. The epoché and the phenomenological reduction, as epistemological instantiations, are synonymous. Yet, here again, refuting Spiegleberg’s argument cited earlier, even in the sense of symmetry existing between the two terms, the processual exists which continually renders them as separates. McGuirk (2008) provides more clarity exclaiming that “both of these notions can be understood as means of bringing about the reorientation of the philosophizing subject from the natural to the phenomenological attitude” (p. 106). The reorientation McGuirk points to is synonymous with “the transcendental turn” which comes into itself as one turns toward the natural attitude, not as a means of embracing the natural world, but of acknowledging that it is simply “there” (p. 107). Thus objectifying the natural world, one observes its happenings, but does not live therein.

Finlay (2008) provides concrete direction to the processes involved in phenomenological reductions explaining them as four individual epochés. She contends that the steps include “the epoché of the natural sciences” (p. 5), which works to move the researcher into the “lifeworld” as seen from within the “natural attitude” (p. 5). Thereafter, the “epoché of the natural attitude” is exercised (p. 5), which Finlay understands to be a process of bracketing the “natural taken for granted lifeworld” (p. 6). The third epoché is the “transcendental reduction,” and the fourth is the “eidetic reduction” (p. 5) which describes phenomenon by their very essence. This account resonates with McGuirk’s (2008) above, moving one from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude, all reductions that take the researcher closer to what Husserl described in the following:

All natural interests are put out of play. But the world . . . has not disappeared . . . it is just that . . . it is under our gaze purely as the correlate of the subjectivity which gives it ontic meaning . . . I stand above the world, which has now become for me, in a quite peculiar sense, a *phenomenon*. [Italics in the original]. (Finlay, 2008, p. 7, citing Husserl)

Finally, in the eidetic reduction one is able to see the essence of what had formerly been seen as an object, but now is understood in its more abstracted form (Finlay, 2008). The result, as Jacobs (2013) had earlier suggested, is an epiphany of sorts for the researcher:

Perhaps it will become manifest that the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché belonging to it are destined in essence to effect . . . a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion, which then, however, over and above this, bears within itself the significance of the

greatest existential transformation which is assigned to mankind as such.
(Finlay, 2008, p. 8, citing Husserl)

Finlay's (2008) contention that the reductions are individual epochés is not without precedent. Consider Moran's (1999) contention that the epoché is "part of the reduction" (pp. 147-148). In this explanation, the terms are synonymous in action; that is to say one does not perform a reduction without the associated epoché, yet in the character of that which is synonymous, while the terms are alike, they are not exactly alike. Moran explains that Husserl thought the need for the epoché was as an aid to "grasping consciousness" (p. 147). Without the processes of reductions, it would be all too easy to use our natural understandings in characterizing the eidetic. Tying the process together, Moran remarks that the "move to the eidetic is difficult to achieve" without the "vigilance of the epoché" (p. 147).

Conclusion

It remains difficult to pin down the reductions and the epoché in terms of the meaning that Husserl ultimately intended and which has been suggested in the preceding narrative. Husserl used the titular aspects of the reductions haphazardly, and often combined them or changed their qualities. Moran (1999) recalls that, in one particular text, Husserl denoted "eight different forms of reduction" (p. 147). Despite the tendency to change the language used to describe the reductions, Husserl was convinced that the reductions were the way to clear the conscious mind for the work of phenomenological science that existed "within the sphere of the epoché" (Moran, p. 147, citing Husserl). In fact, even Husserl was given to muse about the need for a "systematic theory of phenomenological reductions" (p. 147) which he did not live to formulate.

As a researcher approaches phenomenological research, the process begins with the self, when, with the reductions and the epoché, he or she begins to suspend the natural world (Schmitt, 1959). One moves from a position of using personal assumptions and experiences to interpret phenomena to a point where those assumptions and previous experiences are refuted. More precisely, as Husserl (1913, 1983) explained, one subjects assumptions to a "certain annulment of positing," they are encapsulated, set aside through the intentional process of bracketing (p. 58). The reductions are at once the primary means towards realizing a transcendental awakening for the researcher, and concomitantly, to work towards a sensitization of the phenomenologist towards the eidetic qualities of all phenomena. This has the capacity, and in fact is intended to change the researcher once and for all. Despite the challenges in understanding the many varied uses of terms describing phenomenology which Husserl employed, the sense still exists that the phenomenological, epistemological, and transcendental changes that occur for the researcher are what Husserl intended all along, a radical inner reorientation towards all lived experience which eclipses both time and space.

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