

Structural Existential Analysis (SEA): A phenomenological research method for counselling psychology

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Content & Focus: *This paper discusses the foundation of phenomenological research in Husserl's original ideas. A specific form of phenomenological research, called Structural Existential Analysis (SEA) is then introduced and outlined. The paper details various components of SEA, such as use of the three reductions, dialogical and hermeneutic interviewing, working with bias, the four worlds' model and its paradoxes, working with the timeline and making us of the emotional compass.*

Keywords: *Phenomenology; structural existential analysis; hermeneutic interviewing; dialogue; bias; four worlds' model; paradox; timeline; emotional compass.*

MY FIRST INTRODUCTION to phenomenology was as a philosophy student in France in the early 1970s when I learnt phenomenology the hard way by reading Husserl's seminal work (Husserl 1900, 1913, 1925, 1927). My subsequent training as a psychologist helped me to make the links between the philosophical method and the practice of projective testing. As a psychotherapist I greatly valued the phenomenological methods I had learnt in recording, formulating and writing up case studies, and I have demonstrated this practice in my published casework for many years (van Deurzen, 1988, 1998, 2010, 2012).

When I began training and supervising therapists and counsellors at the end of the 1970s, I shared these methods, expecting students to come to grips with the principles of phenomenology by reading Husserl's work. Phenomenology is not just a technique to rival with statistical analysis. It is a way of life and you cannot practice it unless you understand its spirit and adopt its philosophy. Practising phenomenology teaches you to sharpen your capacity for observation and self-observation. It demands that you immerse yourself in your sensory experience and become reflective about your affective life. We have to

learn to master the way in which we experience and perceive the world and our own consciousness more and more clearly.

What is phenomenology?

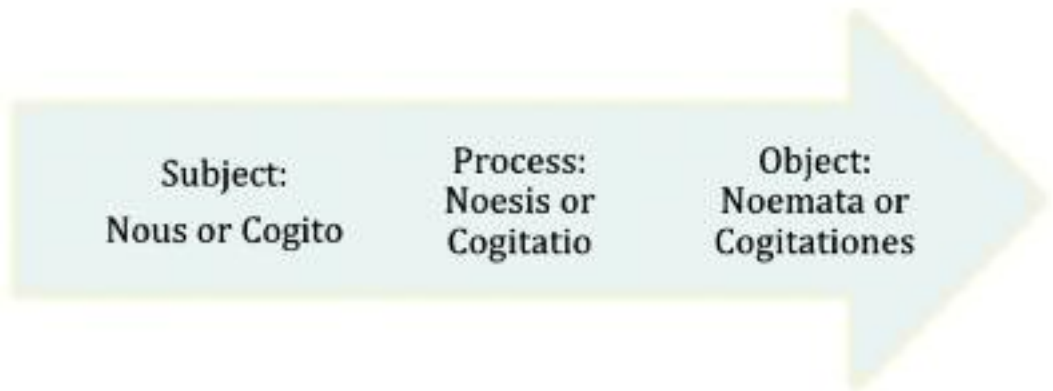
People often accurately define phenomenology as 'the study of phenomena as they appear to us'. Sometimes they will wrongly describe phenomenology as the study of subjectivity, forgetting that it sets out to study subjectivity objectively and objectivity subjectively, whilst addressing the whole of human conscious experience in all its complexity. The concept of intentionality is key to grasping the idea of phenomenology. It was Franz Brentano, Husserl's (as well as Freud's) teacher, who first described this concept (Moran, 2000).

The main point to hold on to is that human consciousness is always and inevitably related to and directed towards something beyond itself. This is the arc of intentionality, which is the process of meaning making. In Husserl's words: '*...in perception something is perceived, in imagination something is imagined, in a statement something is stated, in love something is loved, in hate something is hated, in desire something is desired, etc.*

(Husserl, 1900/1970, p.554)

There is always a subject, an object as well as a process connecting them that we call consciousness. Phenomenology seeks to

address all of these aspects of our experience equally.



Phenomenology works right across the whole intentional arc, reducing each aspect in turn, becoming aware separately of subject, predicate and object. This enables us to find the essence not only of the object in question but also of the intentional action or connection with which it relates to the subject. We shall see that the subject itself will also come under scrutiny.

Often, what people mostly remember about phenomenology is the process known as the 'Epoche', or 'suspension' which they often remember as being about 'bracketing' our assumptions and prejudice. This consists of the suspension of our natural attitude of preconceptions, in a movement of purification of our intentionality. It is about clearing our consciousness of previous knowledge and setting this aside, in brackets, not in order to get rid of it, but in order to take awareness of our bias, our particular take on the situation. Bias can never be eliminated, but it can be accounted for and altered as truth emerges. You cannot un-think or unknow anything once you know it, but you can become more aware of what you believe and what may not be true.

Our bias is our cutting edge on the world, the lens through which we regard it. It is of some value in making sense of things.

As a mathematician and systematic scientist Husserl sought to keep our own bias separate from our observations of the process of observation and perception of the object as much as possible. When mathematicians put part of an equation in brackets they do so not to eliminate it, but in order to deal with it separately. The brackets keep things clean and clear.

In phenomenological observation we can never make any claims to truth. As Sandberg (2005) puts it:

'as the researcher is intentionally related to the research object, the truth claim does not refer to an objective reality as such but to the specific meaning of the research object as it appears to the researcher.' (Sandberg, 2005, p.56)

What we aim to grasp in phenomenological research is the complex reality of what researcher and participants are experiencing. This is about grasping the way in which a person is situated in the world and takes account of context, text and subtext of her life, her history, her intentionality, her project and her pathway. It is never just about a 'social construct' or 'schemata'. While we cannot establish the truth of any matter by phenomenological methods, we can approach the truth in a constantly reiterated process of verification. This is

achieved in many different ways, and mostly through ensuring that we come to our observations from many different perspectives, for instance by having different researchers considering the same data or sieving this through different methods.

There is no room in this paper to explain in great detail how to conduct the research through each of the reductions, but more information can be found in my book *Everyday Mysteries* (Deurzen, 2012) or in *Skills in Existential Counselling and Psychotherapy* (van Deurzen & Adams, 2010).

I shall limit myself to a brief overview of the many layers of phenomenological work as applied in Structural Existential Analysis (SEA), considering the following:

1. The three reductions;
2. Dialogical and hermeneutic interviewing;
3. Working with bias;
4. The four worlds' model and its paradoxes;
5. Working with timelines;
6. Emotional movement and the compass.

All of these can be interwoven seamlessly as the analysis is complete and the research conclusions are braided together from all three strands of phenomenological analysis.

1. The three reductions

Each aspect of the arc of intentionality is dealt with by a separate reduction. The phenomenological reduction applies to the process (*noesis* or *cogitatio*) of consciousness. The eidetic reduction applies to the object (*noemata* or *cogitationes*) of consciousness. The transcendental reduction applies to the subject (*nous* or *cogito*) of consciousness. Let's consider them in turn.

(a) The basic principles of the **phenomenological reduction** are to:

1. **suspend** our previous assumptions about the process of our consciousness by locating, observing, tracking and bracketing our bias (*Epoche*);
2. **describe** carefully how we observe or experience rather than analysing or interpreting our observations, becoming aware of our intentionality;

3. **horizontalise** what we observe by setting it in context and paying attention to the limits of our vision;
4. **equalise** what we experience, by according equal attention to everything in sight as much as possible being aware of the tendency to give more weight to one thing than another;
5. **verify** our observations over and over again by checking our descriptions with the facts in front of us.

(b) The basic principles of the **eidetic reduction** are to:

1. pay close attention to the **objects** (*cogitationes*) of our observation in a new more careful lived-world manner;
2. be aware that things come to us in many different **facets** or under different aspects or adumbrations (*Abschattungen*), paying attention to all of these: considering things from different angles and perspectives;
3. look for the **essences** behind the appearances directly (*Wesensschau*);
4. mind the **genetic**, rather than static constitution of entities, bearing in mind that everything is in movement and flux so that we have to observe how things change over time;
5. aim to grasp the **universals** beyond the properties of things, taking the view from the infinite.

(c) The basic principles of the **transcendental reduction** are to:

1. focus on the thinking self, the *ego cogito*, the **subject** of our intentionality, creating awareness of our experience with self-conscious observation;
2. search for the *transcendental ego*, that is, the ego that unites us all, the principle of **consciousness** rather than the personal perspective;
3. overcome solipsism in a movement towards **inter-subjectivity**;
4. find the **horizon of intentionality** that applies to a particular consciousness;
5. locate the **point zero** of the self, that is,

the centre from which consciousness springs;

6. establish an interactive interpersonal way of checking truth, from **multiple perspectives**.

Husserl kept adding different reductions and different ways of ensuring that we would represent reality fairly and that we would have better means of grasping truth than by the limited means of mathematics and logic which had constituted such a two dimensional view of the world. He aimed for any observations to be immersed in the real world so that we would draw our understanding from it and would always return to it to find it richer each time we added further observations. Most importantly he called us to interweave all these elements so as to be aware that we are participating in the world through our own experience.

2. Dialogical and hermeneutic interviewing

In order to get to as much depth of truth as possible, we work through dialogue. This is the disciplined search for understanding by using words carefully to get to the underlying meanings of something. Gadamer (1960/1994), Buber (1923, 1929), Scheler (1921, 1926), and Bohm (1996) all considered dialogue the best way of approaching or at least approximating truth. In phenomenological research dialogue should be central. Furthermore, we should aim for coherence and simplicity in our interpretation of the facts. We follow the principles of hermeneutic interpretation, which is a form of interpretation that ensures that meanings expressed correspond to what was actually intended by the subject of these meanings. We look for essences and for an intuitive rightness that feels whole, simple, consistent and congenial and also universal, but we keep returning to the process of verification to sieve our results more and more finely. We do not apply our own theoretical meanings to another person's understanding but may use heuristic devices to expose meaning, as long as we verify that the meanings derived

correspond with the meanings actually experienced.

French phenomenologist Michel Henry provided an interesting guide to phenomenology in his books (Henry, 1969, 1975, 2008), showing that we cannot just undo our usual way of approaching the world. We cannot simply change our gaze. The best we can do is to discipline our gaze, applying it to the process of thinking, the object of our thinking and our own thinking consciousness. He speaks of the movement by which the *cogitatio* has to be placed under the regard of thought. Every aspect of our consciousness and its process deserves fresh reflection and new attention. To learn to bend our mind to observing our own observations systematically is a great challenge. It is something quite different to being 'naïve' or even being in 'wonder'. It is a feat of consciousness to sharpen the focus of our attention and to distribute it more deliberately, evenly and carefully. Phenomenology is only possible after we have learnt to be conscious, articulate and reflective of our own process of perception and knowing. It is not like meditation, although many compare it to this. Meditation is an emptying of the conscious mind, a setting aside of cognitive processes that cause turmoil, a purifying of awareness by the removal of redundant thought. Phenomenology is also based on purification and focusing of the conscious mind, but not in order to eliminate anything, but rather to heighten consciousness to a more intense level where we can be more precise in understanding reality than in our normal 'natural' way of going about knowing the world. Phenomenology is not an emptying of the mind, but rather a polishing of its lens in order to let the light through and illuminate things more brightly.

As we do phenomenological research we are in relationship to our participants and we need to enable them to participate in what will be their own phenomenological investigation. The quality of the contact with participants matters greatly. The interviews are never conducted by questionnaire or by

routine semi-structured interviews. They are about dialogue, interaction and close and intense scrutiny of whatever we are studying. We aim to create as much focus as possible. We aim to bring our participants to deeper consideration of a particular phenomenon. We are lending our sharpened capacity for consciousness to help others to get as close to their own experience as possible. We use our capacity for feeling into their experience, to help them amplify it, feel it more deeply and describe it more completely. This is about partaking in the other's experience and participating in what it is they are trying to put into words.

For this we rely on the experience of existential-phenomenological psychotherapy and its methods of engagement, encounter and resonance. Existential psychotherapy is particularly committed to emphasising presence in the relationship and in challenging therapists to engage and resonate with clients instead of keeping them at arms' length. We can only create a true I-Thou encounter with the other by making ourselves fully available for a meeting in which we share the other's concerns, moods, inner thoughts and even the beliefs that they hold in order to make sense of their world (Buber, 1923, 1929). We prepare ourselves to be touched and moved by the other's take on the world, by the other's worldview and all that this means and evokes for them. This is the condition of us being able to collect rich information about the actual experiences they are describing.

We need to go beyond the abstraction and relatively distant way of interviewing people in the manner that has become standard in phenomenological research. Instead of keeping the other at bay in our investigation we need to let ourselves go where they are. The element of careful management of data comes in later, when we consider the descriptions we have gathered in this initial phase of full immersion. At that later moment our tools of observation and scrutiny of the data, that is, the heuristic devices of structural analysis will help us

organise the information systematically. But we do not keep aloof during the phase of information-gathering. We engage fully in the situation. The more we are able to resonate and the closer we will place ourselves to the new data. Our observations will only be as valid as the intensity of experience we have been able to generate when collecting them.

We have to forget about cautious objectivity and measured enquiry, plunging into what Jaspers' called feeling into the other, or *Einfühlung*, an idea originally proposed by Theodor Lipps (Jaspers, 1951, 1963). What Jaspers intended was to challenge us to move towards the other until we can resonate with their consciousness in genuine co-presence, or being-with-the-other in a Heideggerian *Mitsein* manner (Heidegger, 1927).

A dialectical movement will be created between researcher and participant to clarify, describe and challenge the shape and experience of the life world of one of them, that is, the participant. Participants are urged to scrutinise their experience more precisely, as their source of understanding is unique and needs to be communicated to the researcher. As they zoom into their own point of view more closely, more intimately, to feel it more intensely, focusing on it more sharply, the researcher is presented with a new insight that momentarily affords her a suspension of her own reality. The researcher encourages this process of deeper immersion. In this process, like in existential psychotherapy, both parties are inevitably altered, as they cannot isolate themselves from the interaction but are fully committed to it. Therefore, each bit of phenomenological research represents the outcome of a dynamic dyadic interaction. The two parties are co-creating a particular picture of reality. They are truth finding, but invariably will have a particular take on the reality they are describing. Their truth will be partial and temporary, a snapshot of the overall human capacity for truth finding. The research is a mere moment of a complex process and should be repeated many times for it to

provide us with a more reliable outcome. Repetition of the process and multiple stages of verification are of the essence. The statements provided are always a shard of truth, a vision through the prism of the worldview we are investigating, but they are nowhere near the ultimate truth of the matter. To do phenomenological research properly, one would, therefore, need many researchers, each applying themselves to multiple layers of investigation and multiple points of view of observation, all repeated variously over time, verified again and again. It is surprising that such big projects of phenomenological research have not been undertaken to date and that we always do small projects with relatively small samples and modest outcomes which are never generalisable. This stands in flagrant contrast to Husserl's intentions for phenomenology. He meant his method to aim to define what was universal about human experience and reality.

What is needed in terms of training phenomenological researchers is therapy training: honing the full capacity to be with an other in order to faithfully collect their experience. The attunement has to be such that the researcher has a personal sense of what is being described so that the participant confirms this understanding or corrects it.

The interview should be considered a cooperative and dialectical effort, a joint enquiry (Reason & Bradbury, 2013). It also involves looking into what is hidden under the surface. Phenomenology addresses itself to the perception of what actually is, but in order to penetrate deeply into what lies beneath. We aim to fathom the things that seem impenetrable, obscure and profound. When we speak in dialogue with research participants, they often do not know what treasures they hide and may yield up through our descriptive searching and gentle probing and eliciting of further meanings. We need to look for both what is already evident and in the light and also find out what is behind this in the dark. The shadow side of a person's perception matters

as much as the immediately available evidence.

It is to the extent that we truly engage with participants in this way that we will obtain data worth having. The more we engage with the experience of the participant and the deeper the impact of our study. The resulting data will be gathered carefully before they are considered systematically with our heuristic instruments.

Our objective is to gather more complexity and subtlety and new meanings of human experience. We are allowing meanings to emerge from a person's life world and connect these to the meanings of other people on the same subject. These layers of intertwined meanings will provide us with a better grasp of the world.

We go in search of people's projects, points of view, values, ideas and ways of presenting the lived world to themselves (Ashworth, 2003, p.146), and we need to find ways to harvest these, accurately record them and make sense of them. What we make sense of is a particular process of engagement with the world. This is not just about the worldview or ideology a person has, it is about their way of living it and being in the world.

3. Working with bias

As we do this work of dialogical investigation, we need to be attentive to our bias and the bias of our participants throughout the experience. As mentioned above bias is not something we can avoid: it is our particular take on the world, our edge on the observations we make. The stronger our bias is and the sharper our edge of observation and our capacity for judgement will be. Bias is not always bad. In doing phenomenology we learn to use our bias, by recognising it, locating it at all times and learning to suspend it temporarily when necessary and possible. We also learn to observe how the people we study use their own bias and how this is part of their particular take on the issues we are studying. In a way phenomenology is the study of bias and how it affects

reality. It is the study of different ways of engaging with the world and making sense of it.

The researcher then has to learn how to become aware of bias in all the different forms and shapes in which it presents itself to us. The objective here is not some kind of scientific neutrality, but a clearing of the lenses so as to make the best possible observations.

It may help to bear in mind that our bias is shaped by:

Our personal outlook, the tacit assumptions we hold, the beliefs about existence that we carry, the prejudice that comes from previous information and experience and the blind spots this gives us. Some of this prejudice comes from the way we are constituted. For instance, a tall person makes different observations to a smaller person. An animal with a taste for meat makes different observations to a vegetarian. We are each embedded in the world, and this embedded-ness provides us with a particular kind of perspective.

You can remember to trace bias, both in yourself as a researcher and in your participants or co-researchers (or clients), by remembering the following mnemonic prompt as an aide-memoire:

SOAR: State of Mind, Orientation, Attitude, Reaction:

- **State of Mind:** What is the current situation I am observing? What is my own or other person's basic orientation in the world? What is my/their point of view? What is our current emotional state, mood or disposition? We do not seek to explain but only to notice and register these.
- **Orientation:** What is my own or their approach to the question? This is likely to be based on the worldview, beliefs and theoretical belief system the person holds. What is this? What is their perspective and cultural bias?
- **Attitude:** What is their current attitude towards the object in question? This is

based on their aptitude and to some extent this will be dependent on their genetic predisposition and constitution, their temperament and the values they have adopted through previous experiences.

- **Reaction:** How is the person responding in this particular situation, in relation to this person, in this specific interaction and how might they feel they have been provoked into this response?

4. The four worlds' model and its paradoxes

In order to keep ourselves within that objective line of investigation, we need to make sure that we cover all the ground of the phenomenon under investigation. On the one hand SEA is wide open to observations when it collects new information. When it processes this information on the other hand it provides clear structures as a framework for investigation, so that the observations we make are systematic rather than haphazard or impressionistic and subjective. One of the heuristic devices used is that of the four worlds' grid.

Working with space in a systematic manner is one way of seeing to it that we cover all angles. Human space is multidimensional. Human beings move and act in relation to a physical world, in which they move forwards towards things, or backwards away from things, where they interact with the material world in specific ways, creating a particular kind of intertwinement and interaction. They also move in an interpersonal, inter-subjective way, where they engage with others or disengage from them. Where they open to some people and close off to others, where they try to connect with some and disconnect from others at the same time as being welcomed as kind by some and rejected with hostility by others. They also have the experience of an inner world, where they can retreat into a sense of personal privacy and intimacy and they can be more or less open or closed to that and in which they can move in time, by recollecting the past, focusing on the present

or imagining and anticipating the future. They also have a world of ideas, or a spiritual world, where they create meanings and organise their understanding of and purpose in the world. To pay attention to these different dimensions will provide a first framework of organisation of the data we collect. We need to learn to observe carefully and systematically at which level the studied phenomena take place and what movement the protagonist makes in relation to this. Are they located in the physical dimension, the social dimension, the personal dimension or the spiritual dimension? And if so, in what way are they experiencing this and acting on it?

The four relational layers can be represented in many different ways. If we consider them in terms of the depth of experience of the person and their points of contact with the world around them from their centre, the circular representation is helpful, but if we prefer a hierarchical organisation the pyramidal representation is more illustrative, showing how each layer builds on the previous one in a Maslovian manner. However, there is no assumption that each layer requires previous attainment at the lower layer, as the four layers are equally important, interactive and intertwined.

Figure 1: Four relational layers.

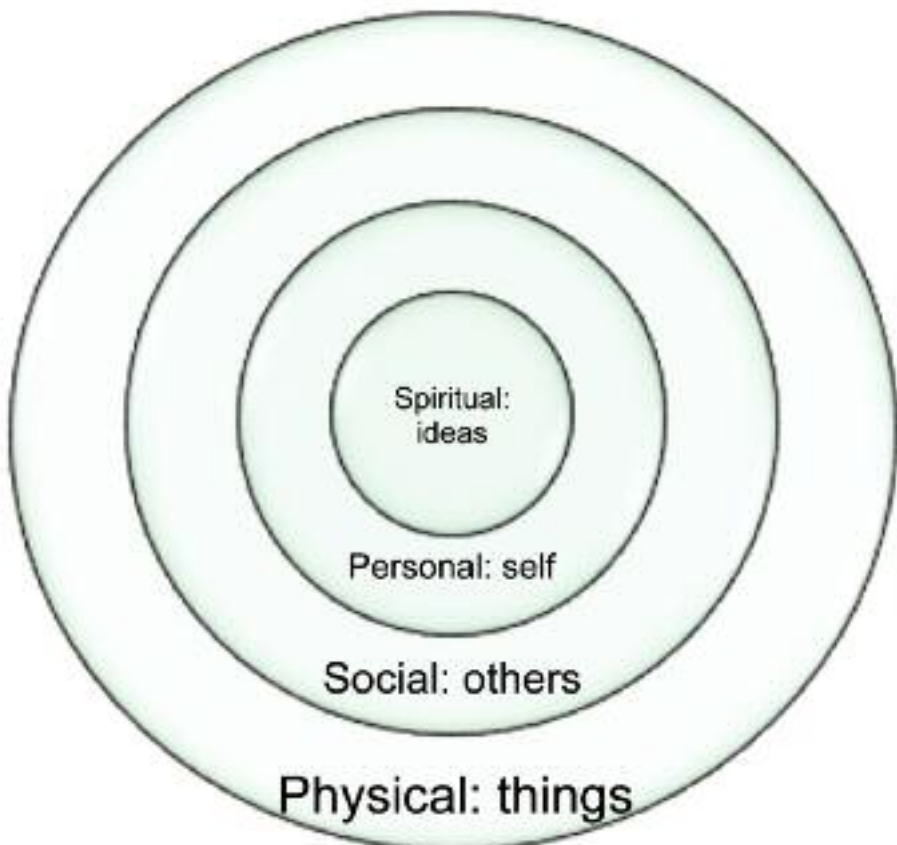


Figure 2: Dimensions of Existence.



In terms of keeping open to different representations we should not imagine that the four worlds model is an actual representation of how the world is organised. It is not a map. It is merely a structural heuristic device to facilitate our systematic observations and allows us to be more thorough. In order to keep the dynamic element of our phenomenological observation alive, we must remember that at each of these dimensions people are torn between tensions and dilemmas, conflicts and polarities. They face challenges on all these levels and these challenges are often spread over several layers of the dimensions. Things are not neatly separated into four quarters in the real world. To be aware of these dynamic tensions at so many levels can help us to describe the kinds of struggles people are dealing with and discussing in therapy or as part of a research project that they are participating in terms of a particular life experience.

The tensions on each dimension are multiple and manifold, but we can again sketch out a blueprint of some of the major

tensions all human beings are inevitably exposed to, in order to create a framework that helps us place and locate the particular tensions a specific person is struggling with at any one point. Of course, we need to bear in mind, that people sometimes find themselves at one extreme of such a tension, rather than being aware of the tension or the whole spectrum of responses that they might generate. We often think of these predictable tensions as conflicts or polarities, but they actually represent paradoxes as well, in that we cannot avoid either side of these tensions, even though most people attempt to do so. The paradoxical nature of existence is that only to the extent that we are willing and able to deal with one side of the equation can we manage the other side successfully as well.

Observing how people do try to avoid one side of a conflict on a particular dimension can be very helpful and instructive. Below are some suggested tensions that everyone needs to deal with sooner or later in life. It is not hard to imagine how easy it is

Figure 3: Overview of paradoxes of existence.

Overview of conflicts, challenges and paradoxes on four dimensions

World	Umwelt	Milieu	Eigenwelt	Überwelt
Physical	Nature: Life/ Death	Things: Pleasure/ Pain	Body: Health/ Illness	Cosmos: Harmony/ Chaos
Social	Society: Love/ Hate	Others: Dominance/ Submission	Ego: Acceptance/ Rejection	Culture: Belonging/ Isolation
Personal	Person: Identity/ Freedom	Me: Perfection/ Imperfection	Self: Integrity/ Disintegration	Consciousness: Confidence/ Confusion
Spiritual:	Infinite: Good/ Evil	Ideas: Truth/ Untruth	Spirit: Meaning/ Futility	Conscience: Right/ Wrong

for most people to wish for the positive side of these tensions while wishing away the negative. There is little doubt though that life becomes easier to the extent that we neither deny the negatives, nor plunge ourselves headlong into them whilst denying the potential of the positive opposite pole.

5. Working with the timeline of the life-world

The next layer of phenomenological structural work is to consider the element of time, which is another dimension that needs to be plotted and explored in any research or any therapy.

The timeline of a person's experience is eminently important and dictates the direction in which a person's thinking is proceeding. Phenomenologists have made many observations about time, and the most well known of these is Heidegger in his magnum opus *Being and Time* (Heidegger, 1927). His idea was that human beings as they are born are thrown into the project that is the forward movement from birth to

death. We are in time. We are pockets of time in progress and are always in the throw towards the end of life. With our inevitable demise our trajectory is finally complete. Heidegger's notion of temporality is closely wound in with the notion of historicity: that movement of time in which we can look back and create a different narrative depending on how closely to the actuality of the experience we can bring ourselves to be. The future is equally important and we can contemplate it with so the more accuracy and resoluteness as we are more capable of anticipating our end. Heidegger's term is that of the Ec-stasies of time, where we literally stand out of ourselves in past remembering or recollecting, stand out of ourselves in re-presenting ourselves in the given moment, engaged or disengaged, and where we reach out more or less energetically towards a future, anticipating possibility as well as the end of possibility. Below is an overview of his use of words. Famously Heidegger spoke of the moment of vision, the *Augenblick* (blink of an eye), in which we

somehow bring past, present and future vision into one, and rise above our being in time, temporarily overseeing life in an experience of authentic presence in the situation.

In his later work he noted the absence of an overarching category of temporality and came to speak of the Being Eternal and of the capacity of human beings to repossess themselves of this event of Being in Time, which he called *Ereignis*, the Event, literally meaning re-owning.

Heidegger's ec-stasies

We find ourselves at all dimensions:

- 1. In the Past: as having been: forgetting or regretting (*Gewesenheit*) but also: as recollecting or repeating. Awareness means that we know that we are no longer.
- 2. In the Present: as being: waiting, rushing (*Gegenwart*), but also as being there, and being with others with concern. Awareness means that we become capable of being present in the situation.
- 3. In the Future: as going toward, longing or dreading (*Zukunft*) but also: being with anticipation and possibility, being towards death. Awareness means we become capable of grasping that we are not yet fully realised.
- 4. In Temporality: as Being eternal or infinite (*Ereignis*) but also: becoming and letting be. Awareness means that we become capable of the moment of vision in which we take ownership of being in time.

Heidegger's categories allow us to note where a person is situated and moving in terms of their trajectory and project. This gives a more dynamic sense of their intentionality. Instead of considering them to be shut into some of the boxes of existence, we note instead how they handle that precious resource that is the time of their life, which is always retracing and predicting its own steps and at other times tries to escape from being present all together by rushing ahead.

It is interesting to look at a piece of phenomenological research through the

lenses of time in this manner, as we will notice much more of what is implied in a person's words, though it is perhaps not stated explicitly. The use of a tense, or the reference to past, present or future experience will set the scene for more discoveries about what has been said than was evident at first sight.

6. The movement between emotion and values: The compass

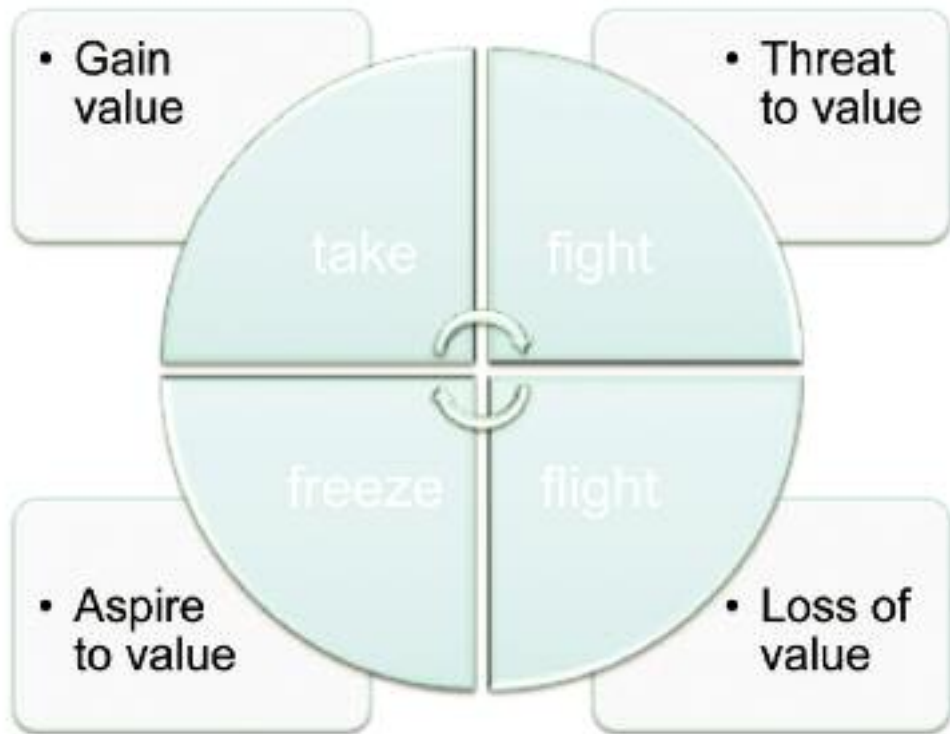
The same can be said for focusing on the issue of affections. Our attunement to the world is a rich source of further information about what a piece of research shows up. Heidegger had a lot to say about affectedness, or disposition (*Befindlichkeit*). He demonstrated how central emotionality is to human existence. We always find ourselves in relation to the world in a particular mood. We are never not in a mood. Husserl already spoke of this element of connectivity to our life world. Not only are we always in relation to a world, in the shape of objects, people, our self, or ideas we interact with, but that connection always happens in a movement towards or away from these connections, as we more or less value what we are connecting to or disconnecting from. This attunement to the world is elemental and happens in a preverbal manner. Emotions are always already there when we become aware of a connection or a relation to anything in the world. Sartre (1943) spoke of values as partridges springing up in the world as soon as we act in it. Indeed we cannot live or exist without setting off these partridges of our values and we cannot stop feeling the emotions they evoke in us. Because of this the lens of emotions is a particularly important one for us to consider and find a systematic way of working with. The model of the compass is not meant to indicate that everyone needs to feel their emotions in the same way or that emotions happen in predictable cycles that we cannot get away from. On the contrary, the model allows us to plot the way in which a particular individual is located in relation to specific

values. We can be anywhere on the emotional compass at any time and move from there to anywhere else, though certain trajectories are more likely than others. We must also remember that any person at any time is connected to the world in literally millions of ways at once and that in each of these ways certain values are stimulated. It is

the confluence of several big affective events creating a river of emotion that makes the emotion show up as an outstanding and explicit feeling that can become experienced as either pleasant or unpleasant but that is always in some ways significant.

Here is the outline of the basic categories of the model:

Figure 4: Four kinds of emotion.

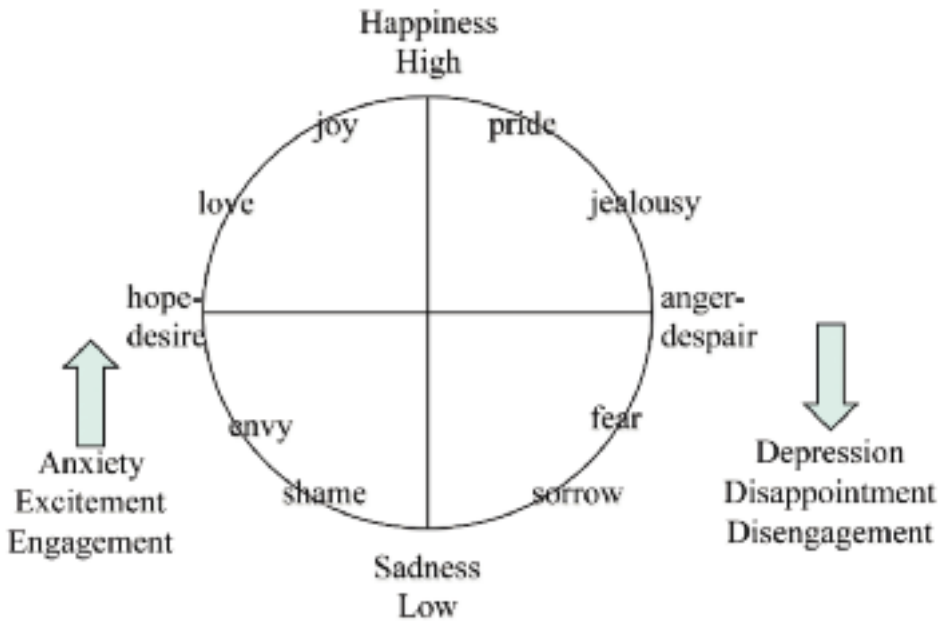


The above diagram is based on the work of Spinoza, who in his *Ethics*, astutely observed that emotions are an expression of our values and our position in relation to the things that we value or fear. In a structural sense this observation leads to a system of four quarters of the whole cycle of attunement. We are either attuned to a value that we wish to gain, or we are feeling threatened by the potential loss of a value we prize strongly, or we are mourning over the loss of such a value, or we

are beginning to feel the stirrings towards such a value but have not yet managed to approach ourselves to it very much yet.

The four quadrants of emotions can be placed together in the overall compass to form a complete representation of the different positions our relationship to our values can take. At the top of the compass is the happy position of union with a value, the bottom is that of the unhappy position of alienation from a value.

Figure 5: The compass of emotions.



This diagram shows only a few, easily recognised emotions, but we have more specific diagrams representing the senses, social feelings, thoughts, or moral intuitions, that illustrate a more phenomenological description of the particular ‘feel’ of our relation to our values, lost or found.

We can recognise the emotional words people use and where this places them in relation to their intentionality, particularly in relation to specific values. Structurally this helps us to be systematic about our understanding of the evidence obtained when we were intensely engaged with the other person to harvest their experiences and their feelings about those experiences. It takes a bit of time to learn to use all these instruments effectively, but this is very much part of the work of psychologists and psychotherapists, and they are, therefore, well placed to use these phenomenological methods in their research.

Some of my doctoral research students have come up with their own ways of recording these compass readings, in

different colours, or by marking the quadrant of emotional experience (as ^ or > for instance), as, for instance, in Bennett’s research on binge-drinking (2014).

Alternatively the compass can be read as a compass with emotions being denoted as North for the possession of the value, South for the deprivation of value, East as the cusp where the value is lost and West as the cusp where the value is hoped for. We can then refer to each value as defined in space, for instance pride as North-north East.

There is a third possible practice for notation, which is that of using the compass as a clock, and speak of an emotion as a 1 o’clock emotion (just away from safe 12 o’clock of possession) or 2 o’clock, where the journey towards loss has just begun or 3 o’clock where the loss is now becoming consolidated, etc., etc.

It will be easy to understand how such shorthand can be helpful in recording a Structural Analysis of emotions and their dynamic movement in time in full. There are different compasses for the different dimen-

sions of world experience: a sensory compass for the physical dimension, an emotional compass for the social dimensions, a mental compass for the personal or inner dimension and a moral compass for the spiritual or ideological dimension, and each has its role to play.

SEA has been developed over several decades (van Deurzen 1988, 2012), initially as a basis for existential therapy. Doctoral researchers have included elements of SEA for many years. A full case study using SEA can be found in the second edition of *Everyday Mysteries* (van Deurzen, 2010). It is hoped that a full SEA analysis will be published in a future edition of this publication.

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