



MIND & LIFE
EUROPE

Second Workshop of Contemplative Phenomenology The Phenomenological Epochè as Practice, and the Practice of Meditation

- **Date:** May 13-17, 2019
- **Venue:** A quiet farm in the region of Vendôme, close to the Loire Valley, France
- **Prerequisites for participation:** meditators, having followed a training course in micro-phenomenology (training courses can be proposed before the first workshop if needed), and having had an introductory course into philosophical phenomenology.

General presentation of the Initiative for Contemplative Phenomenology

Most Western scientific approaches to contemplative disciplines investigate meditation from an external (behavioral, neurological) third-person point of view. Phenomenology, a philosophical discipline created by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), provides a genuine alternative. Indeed, this discipline aims at describing verbally the major invariant features and structures of lived experience from the perspective of the subject herself.

The project of the *Initiative for Contemplative Phenomenology* is to cultivate and describe the experience that unfolds during the practice of meditation from a first-person perspective. A major tool for doing this is the micro-phenomenological interview method. In a micro-phenomenological interview, subjects are encouraged to retrieve neglected and half-forgotten aspects of their own lived experience by way of stimulating yet neutral questions.

A major difference between this kind of inquiry and standard scientific approaches is that it does not take meditation as an *object* of study, not even a mental object of study. Instead, it relies on striking similarities between essential aspects of phenomenology and the very principle of meditation. Thus, studying meditation is no longer separate from its practice; and the act of studying meditation with a phenomenological approach can be taken as one more skillful means for improving its practice.

At bottom, the precondition of phenomenology consists in suspending all beliefs about the things we experience, and instead, delving into unfabricated and uninterpreted experience. It implies the self-transformation of phenomenologists, just as much as the contemplative disciplines imply the self-transformation of practitioners. Furthermore, applying the micro-phenomenological interview method to meditation helps meditators to become *mindful* of their own lived processes. The outcome of a micro-phenomenological study is thus similar to that of the so-called “analytic meditation” (*Vipasyana* in Sanskrit, *Vipassana* in Pali), and contributes to enhancing the focus and accuracy of the latter.

The first workshop in contemplative phenomenology, supported and sponsored by Mind & Life Europe, took place in June 2017 at a farm close to Nemours, south of Paris, France. Its topic was the experience of the present moment. It gathered 30 participants, philosophers, psychotherapists, cognitive scientists, and medical doctors.

The workshop of May 2019

The topic of this workshop will be the common ground of both phenomenology and meditative practice: the suspension of verbal and perceptive judgment, the suspension of conceptual superimpositions on lived experience, a form of letting go. The act of suspension was called *epochè* in ancient Greek philosophy and in phenomenology; and it was called *nirodha* in Brahmanic and Buddhist India. Nirodha is a Sanskrit word that was used in Patanjali's *Yogasutras* and in the third noble truth of Buddhism to mean "cessation".

Each day, three activities will be practiced: a whole morning of meditation; an afternoon of inquiry into these experiences of meditation, using the micro-phenomenological interview method; and an evening of advanced teachings on the experience of epochè based on Western and Buddhist phenomenologies, from Husserl to Shantarakshita.

This meeting will include about 30 skilled participants. Its aim will be to establish a database of interviews about the experience of "cessation", and later use it for a collective publication in the microphenomenology of meditation. This is one of the main differences between objective and phenomenological approaches of meditation: in the first case, a workshop is meant to present results of laboratory research, whereas in the second case, the laboratory is the workshop itself.

Organized by: Michel Bitbol, Natalie Depraz, James Morley and Claire Petitmengin

Application: all applications (including CV and letter of motivation) must be sent via e-mail to Anne Remillieux: anne.remillieux@free.fr. To apply, please consider the two options depending on whether you are already trained in the microphenomenological interview or not.

- a) For those who are *already trained* in the microphenomenological interview, the deadline is February 28th, 2019; the decision will be announced on March 15th, 2019.
- b) For those who are *not yet trained* in the microphenomenological interview, the deadline is December 11th, 2018: decision will be announced on December 14th, 2018. The applicants will then be invited to apply (before December 22nd, 2018) to a week-long training in the microphenomenological interview organized by Claire Petitmengin in Paris from January 28th to February 2nd, 2019.

Rates: The cost of the week, covering full board in double rooms, is 360 Euros. Grants from Mind & Life Europe are however available to waive entirely this cost for two participants who would need this.