

preconceptions and presuppositions that we ordinarily harbour about experience. The general idea is to move from thinking and conceptualizing to *looking* and *seeing*, from “natural attitude,” which invests our experience with unwarranted (metaphysical) presuppositions, to “transcendental attitude,” which enables us to investigate the phenomena as they are experientially given to us. Now, the main source of our preconceptions about experience is what Merleau-Ponty terms “our prejudice about the world” (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 6), which entails not only our (implicit) belief in the existence of a consciousness-independent world, but also the (implicit) belief that the *structure of experience* corresponds to the *structure of the objective world* as usually portrayed in (mechanistic) scientific thought. Merleau-Ponty calls this “the experience error,” i.e., constructing experience out of *things experienced* (ibid. 5). This unwarranted projection of the “objective” into the “subjective” encompasses several factors, but two are of special importance here, namely *atomism* and *causal interrelatedness*. Within the natural attitude, just as the “objective world” *without* is said to consist of externally (causally) interrelated “discrete objects” with “determinate qualities,” so the “subjective world” *within* is said to consist of externally (causally) interrelated “discrete mental entities” with “determinate qualities.”

« 9 » There is some concern that the in-depth analysis provided by Depraz, Gyemant & Desmidt may have fallen prey to “experience error.” Despite the multi-layered classification of experiential categories that include not only fairly run-of-the-mill (sub) categories (perception, kinesthesia, imagination, cognition, etc.), but also transversal dimensions, and circular mechanisms, the end result leaves one with the impression not only that (a) the simpler categories are somehow more fundamental than the subsequent ones, but also that (b) they function as their “causes” or “triggers.” Thus, for instance, the authors state that “surprise [is] caused by the sudden understanding” (§38), “emotion can in turn cause some sort of defense kinesthesia” (§49), “a perceptual experience triggers cognitive, emotional or kinaesthetic experiences” (§46), etc.

« 10 » However, as Merleau-Ponty never tires of pointing out, these seemingly “fun-

damental” elements are more like sedimentations that acquire their significance and function only against the overall framework – the “physiognomy” – of the experiential field. For instance, a recurring point in Merleau-Ponty’s writing is that a careful phenomenological analysis shows that perception and cognition or cognition and emotion (see Colombetti 2014 for a similar point) are, in fact, not two separate processes, where one causes or triggers the other, but are actually two sides of the same existential process of mutual co-constitution of the embodied subject and its world. If anything, the order is reversed – the initial (sub) categories acquire their meaning only in this wider setting of the overall existential situation of the corporeal subject. Thus, when describing the dynamics of, and interrelations between, phenomena, it is important to exercise caution in using objectivist vocabulary (e.g., talk of causality), for – without proper qualification, at least – it may (re)introduce unwarranted (metaphysically-laden) assumptions in our investigations (hence, for instance, the use of “motive,” in Merleau-Ponty, as a “middle term” between “cause” and “reason”). It would seem that the authors tried to stave off objections of this nature in their short and somewhat cryptic paragraph on two types of analysis (§44), but I feel that this point is in dire need of further elaboration, as the distinction they draw is very unclear.

« 11 » Note that these reflections are not intended as an all-out criticism of the work conducted by Depraz, Gyemant & Desmidt; on the contrary, I believe that their project bears great potential, which is why it is all the more important that its foundations be as solid as possible. In general, more needs to be said on the topic of epoché – from a theoretical, but even more so from a *practical* perspective. Particularly, further explication is required as to *how* epoché is conducted, *what, if any, role* epoché plays in training subjects *and* in analysing the acquired data, and how this bears on the end results of the investigation. Without the appropriate methodological and conceptual qualifications, the (implicit) atomistic/causal picture not only (re)exposes first-person research to the standard objections about unwarranted speculations about causal mechanisms (à la Nisbett & Wilson 1977), but also puts in

question the *phenomenological* dimension of the overall endeavor, which I think is something that does not sit well with Depraz, Gyemant & Desmidt’s overall intention.

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“A New Scientific Phenomenology”? Questions about the Evolution of a Phenomenological Endeavor

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> **Upshot** • Given the claims of Natalie Depraz regarding what she called in 2004 the “practical turn of phenomenology,” I ask the authors how they conceive the research they presented in their 2017 article, particularly regarding transcendental phenomenology.

« 1 » The target article by Natalie Depraz, Maria Gyemant and Thomas Desmidt can be regarded as the logical consequence of the “practical turn of phenomenology” Depraz herself announced in her eponymous article of 2004. Indeed, regarding the “phenomenological experience,” Depraz writes: “one can [...] *practice* such an experience, which makes phenomenology an approach *both* metaphysical and empirical” (Depraz 2004: 149; my translation). Moreover, one could already foresee this “practical turn” in the chapter written by Depraz in the book *Naturalizing Phenomenology* (Petitot et al. 1999): in Footnote 28, mentioning Vermersch’s work, Depraz mentions “a *new scientific phenomenology*” which would be “indispensable for the acute and differenti-

ated apprehension of these micro-perspective levels, commonly regarded as inapprehensible” (Depraz 1999: 590). One of the reasons why the present article is interesting is that it appears to be the peak of a research line that has been carefully shaped for many years. In the abstract, the authors claim their article aims “at extending and reforming” Francisco Varela’s neurophenomenological program. Given that Varela was one of the authors of *On Becoming Aware* (Depraz, Varela & Vermersch 2003) and that in 1999 Depraz announced the book as being the “complete methodology” of a “new scientific phenomenology” (Depraz 1999: 590), it is therefore clear that the development from the *Naturalizing Phenomenology* volume to the “Emphiline-ANR project,” from which the present article emerges, is guided by a strong sense of continuity.

« 2 » Another reason why the article is significant, beyond the consideration of its main object, i.e., studying the experiences of surprise in depressive subjects (see, e.g., §23), is the way this very object is enlightened: the analysis of the surprise it provides us with is grounded in a “method of analysis of first person-data, based on [the] interaction between first- and third person data” (§2) and this seems to constitute a significant evolution in the project of the new scientific phenomenology. Indeed, concepts such as “transcendental” and “metaphysical” do not appear in the article at all, whereas they were strongly implemented in the 2004 “practical turn” of phenomenology, defined as “an approach both empirical and metaphysical,” which is supposed to give “birth to an experience both empirically testable and transcendently attestable” (Depraz 2004: 149; my translation). Given this evolution, it would seem that the ultimate meaning of the “practical turn” of phenomenology would consist in a “scientific phenomenology,” understood in a very radical (empirical) sense and being in this respect completely in accordance with Varela’s scientific conception of researches in the study of consciousness:

“My claim is that the so-called hard problem [...] can only be addressed by gathering a research community armed with new pragmatic tools enabling them to develop a science of consciousness.” (Varela 1996: 330; see also Bitbol 2002 and Depraz 2002.)

« 3 » There is another clue that speaks in favour of this radical interpretation of “scientific phenomenology.” In a 2015 article, Depraz and Desmidt wrote that “the neurophenomenological hypothesis set up by Francisco Varela at the end of the 1990s still waits for its experiential probation” (Depraz & Desmidt 2015: 47; my translation). In other words, the “scientific phenomenology” and its evolution towards the 2017 article, including “cardiophenomenology” (Depraz & Desmidt 2015), would correspond to what Jean-Luc Petit called “the project of an *a minima* naturalization – clearly foreseen and sketched in the main outline by Husserl, in spite of his transcendental antinaturalism,” that is to say, “the project of a phenomenological psychology” conceived as “a fine articulation between first-person approaches and third-person approaches” (Petit 2015: 12; my translation). The problem is that this consists in nothing less than “dismissing” the transcendental standpoint in phenomenology (Zahavi 2010: 12; 2004: 343).¹

« 4 » Even though Depraz and Desmidt explicitly write that they wanted to avoid “radically metaphysical” conceptions of surprise in order to avoid the risk of “speculative arbitrary and absence of experiential testability” (Depraz & Desmidt 2015: 48f; my translation), I think it would still be relevant, and important, to know how the authors of the article see the evolution I briefly sketched here, particularly regarding current phenomenology and its relation with scientific research (for an introduction to this relation and the definition of current phenomenology I rely on see Gallagher & Zahavi 2012; Zahavi 2010; Petit 2015). Is the kind of research presented in the 2015 paper and the target article considered sufficient or should it be viewed as a step constitutive of a broader phenomenological endeavor? In other words, after the “practical turn” of phenomenology, what is the status of the analysis of surprise the authors provide us with regarding what Zahavi called the “ultimate aim of phenomenology,” i.e., “to provide a transcendental philosophical clarification”

(Zahavi 2010: 8)? The question is particularly relevant given that the authors explicitly “relied on [...] Husserlian phenomenology and Vermersch’s psycho-phenomenology” (§17). Zahavi, for his part, emphasizes that phenomenology’s “aim differs from that of empirical science” (2010: 8). Of course, the authors carefully distinguished their endeavor from mere third-person perspective work and its weaknesses and also from a mere first-person perspective (§§15, 66), claiming that “the dynamical association of the two accounts [...] could make it possible to overcome their respective weaknesses [...], as well as [leave] room for the possible emergence of new perspectives” (§15). Yet the question remains as to how much room is left for transcendental philosophical clarification in the new scientific phenomenology and these new perspectives.

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1 | This is a classical issue within the context of interactions between phenomenology and sciences clearly stated by Zahavi and Petit but also by various other authors I deliberately did not cite here.