

# Finding Claude's "Essence": A Phenomenological Self-Study

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## Abstract

This presentation describes a conversation with Claude AI as I planned a different research project. What started as a request for the etymology of a term grew into conversations lasting several hours about key ideas in my study, opinions about my opinions and asking Claude to challenge my positions. The phenomenological dimension was motivated by the increasingly collegial nature of the human/AI conversation and my initial dismissal of the notion that AI "relationships" could substitute for human relationships. The session will describe how van Manen's hermeneutic philosophical reflections were used to analyze interactions in terms of four lifeworld themes: lived space, lived body, lived time and lived world. The presentation will highlight conversation excerpts where my conceptions of AI/human interactivity underwent changes. The guiding question was: How is the essence of the AI/Human relationship constructed in the process of interaction? There was a distinction between the practical and phenomenological aspects of my AI/Human relational exploration. I accessed Claude to determine if that interaction would improve a project in which I am engaged. The results were positive and constructive. (1) Claude suggested new directions, provided challenges I could expect from critics; inspired additional directions and provided legitimate challenges to some assumptions. (2) Claude was close to (even more helpful in some cases) to a human colleague. (3) The increasing conversational give-and-take feeling of the interaction challenged my speculations about the possibility of meaningful AI/human "relationships". I even wondered if Claude should be considered a legitimate co-author? While I attempted to bracket my assumptions about AI/Human interaction, I found them to be too embedded to allow a truly phenomenological exploration of the potential for a human-like relationship between conversation partners. This was especially true in considering: (1) lived body (corporeality) – there were no facial expressions or body language necessary to what I consider the essence, and what I need, in conversation and relationship. It also promoted a Cartesian assumption about what and how we know by making the process more housed in the intellect than in the larger phenomenon. (2) lived human relation (relationality) – despite helpful suggestions and responses from Claude, there was little of the essence of relationship or even conversation in that the direction was generally determined (and limited) by what I entered. There was no "memory" of previous conversations unless I reentered previous conversations. Even then, that meant that I could determine the "memories" that Claude had of our relationship.

## Keywords

AI-Human Conversation, Claude AI, Metacognition