

Bracketing the Distortions: A Search for Essence in Colin Wilson's *The Mind Parasites* and *The Black Room*

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This paper explores how Husserlian idea of Reduction or Epoche works in the two fictional works of Colin Wilson namely *The Mind Parasites* and *The Black Room*. The authors of the research aim to examine the features of The Reduction in the novels to identify and describe phenomenological reduction as a potent method to reflect on one's consciousness and experience. It explores the phenomenological ways and methods employed by different characters of the two novels, who consciously or unconsciously engage in epoche and the necessary reductions to bracket off the unnecessary existential trappings, coverings and psychic distortions to catch the essence of different experiences, so as to bring more understanding and purpose to their lives. The paper shows how characters abandon their 'natural standpoint' i.e. the attitude of naivety and taken for grantedness in which human beings, ordinarily live. Epoche modifies their way of perceiving and behaving, allowing them to see the outside world from a fresh angle. The study reveals how the characters in these novels engage in different recognizable forms of The Reduction to relieve the consciousness of all the encumbrances of the 'natural attitude' so as to perceive the objects of experience with a renewed look and consciousness.

Keywords: Reduction, bracketing, consciousness, experience, meaning, freedom.

1. Introduction

In his fictional works, English existentialist author Colin Wilson delves into various aspects of human consciousness in an attempt to comprehend and identify the essence of consciousness. Colin Wilson espouses the "affirmation" concept, arguing that beneath the surface of mundane trivialities that breed apathy and pessimism, there exists a constantly energizing reality that each person must be able to access in order to give life meaning and purpose. Wilson believes that the narrower states of consciousness are the cause of this triviality. Human beings float in this state, taking life for granted and not really living. In this stage, the experience is not fully understood, and as a result, its substance and meaning are

lost.

Wilson contends that in order to create a consciousness which would apprehend a certain experience in its essence, consciousness needs to be stripped of all its accumulations, predispositions and trappings so as to bring purpose and meaning to that experience. This idea of cessation of the everyday attitude quite resembles with the concept of ‘bracketing’ or ‘epoche’ put forth by Edmund Husserl. Epoche means the suspension or cessation of the unreflectiveness and naivety with which man lives his everyday life and takes his consciousness for granted. The cessation of this naïve attitude is one of the basic ideas of Wilson’s philosophy. Husserl and Wilson both express a profound concern for perception, the perceiver, and their fate in all modes of consciousness that are essential to the evolution of consciousness and intricately tied to human will and imagination. Both believe that human powers of will and imagination are stifled in the everyday narrow states and it is only through ‘bracketing’ that one overcomes this narrowness and releases these powers which in turn infuses a new energy into the acts of consciousness. This consequently changes the very mode of perception which takes one to the essence of experience.

This paper attempts to explore the ways in which the notion of Epoché’ or ‘Bracketing’ may be applied to the two novels of Colin Wilson. In order to overcome the life-failure - an overpowering feeling of ennui that persists in people and is reinforced by negative feedback, engendered by the ‘natural attitude’, Wilson’s characters consciously or unconsciously engage in ‘bracketing’ to deeply understand their experiences of varied life phenomena and reach to the essences in their own consciousness and move towards evolution. Wilson’s text is literally the description of experience, rather than telling or explaining of a tale and it is in this respect it could be understood as a phenomenological project: as a reduction from the thematised world of meaning to the pre-reflective world of phenomena. According to Biagio Gerard Tassone, “Wilson applies Husserl’s method of reduction (more specifically: the bracketing of the natural attitude and application of the ‘*epoche*’) and undertakes an ‘intentional analysis of perception” (Tassone 56). Such a phenomenological analysis lays bare the robotic dimensions of human consciousness and gives rise to a need to shock the mind out of its normal habituation which steals human energies and perpetuates the life in the ‘natural attitude’.

In these two novels, Wilson’s portraiture of the protagonists, represents the ‘outsider consciousness’, who having an acute recognition of the mundanity and triviality of the ‘natural attitude,’ actually start their journeys by ceasing to live in its naivety. These journeys which have been objectified in the fictional narratives are verily the subjective explorations into human consciousness. Wilson’s ‘outsiders’ ‘step back’ from the passivity imposed by the trivialities of the objective world and distortions of the subjectivity and seek refuge in some other modes of consciousness. It is a change in perspective with which a person seeks a given experience. Vaughan Rapatahana observes that, “since meaning came from man and was not somehow imposed upon him by external things. By ‘bracketing-out’ (Husserl’s ‘reduction’), Wilson meant a systematic – he called it a ‘scientific’ – analysis of human mental states which ‘reduced away’ any erroneous preconceived ideas.” (7) As an existentialist, Wilson employs the epoche to understand the human existence itself. In this regard, Koestenbaum states:

A logician using the epoche examines a logical essence just as a biologist examines a unicellular organism under a microscope. Both the organism and the essence are data given

objectively, that is, in opposition and confrontation to the ego. The existentialists have expanded the notion of givenness even further by focusing the epoche on moods and other aspects of the human situation. (XXVI)

Wilson fundamentally focuses on these moods and aspects and advocates that man must cease to be carried away by them as they distort the essence of an experience and hinders the consciousness to function at its optimum. The paper attempts to analyse and understand as how the characters in the two novels engage in epoche and its other recognizable manifestations to create, lose, and rediscover the meanings of their lives—making a new world, or at least experience it in a different way. The reduction restructures their world into a meaningful whole. It appears differently to them and they regain its depth and significance or what Husserl would say the meaning of the being of the world is constituted (again).

Wilson employs different genres to put across his ideas about mind and consciousness. He uses science fiction as a device to lay bare the structure and functioning of human consciousness. In *The Strength to Dream*, Wilson states that the role of science fiction is that of liberating the imagination from its ordinary bondage of passivity and blankness. This liberation is accomplished “not by pity and fear, but by attempting to evoke wonder and amazement.” (117). This means it helps in suspending the presuppositions of the everyday trivialities and focus attention on one’s inner spaces. As a science fiction novel, Wilson’s *The Mind Parasites* is a pursuit in the same direction. The theme of *The Black Room* is discipline. The black room technology turns off all outside stimulation and confines the user to their own inner reality. This puts one in a crisis situation and forces them to confront what is about to become conscious. The tool causes people to become more aware of their subconscious forces, which has an impact on the meaning and purpose they give their experiences.

The paper analyses the inner explorations of the characters who strive to restore their conscious states after executing the necessary reductions. It is about integrating the lifeforces to create a stable subjectivity which infuses new meanings to human experience.

2. Literature Review

The novels *The Mind Parasites* and *The Black Room* have been explored through many perspectives. Jhon A Weigel in his *Colin Wilson*, describe the two novels in the science fiction setting and as an espionage story respectively. In his *Nature of Freedom and other Essays*, Colin Stanley highlights how the protagonists in the two novels realize themselves by proper use of imagination and will. Vaughan Robertson points out that Wilson’s approach in dealing with the characters in these novels is that of a “Romantic Mystic” (Robertson 2001). He holds the Wilsonian protagonists as gods in making. In *Colin Wilson and the Sexual Mystique*, Dorothy M. Levin examines the two novels from the perspective of human sexuality in relation to scientific research and eastern tantra, thereby addressing the contradictions between science, mysticism, and sexuality. She highlights that sexuality is a means for man to re-experience his godliness (Dorothy 1983).

Many critics view Wilson's two novels as his exploration of the "bildungsroman," which is the path of a person seeking intellectual and spiritual growth after becoming disillusioned with life's meaningless minutiae. In the two novels, the heroes are symbolic of Reality. Their rescue

rests in realizing and firmly accepting the significance and purpose they seek—things that the mundane world is unable to offer. (Lachman 13). Similarly, Nicholas Tredell notes that Wilson's books are bildungsromane in that they depict the protagonists' existential and evolutionary growth as they go through experiences. (Tredell 2015). These conclusions are also supported by Walter Asa Winsett's research, *Colin Wilson: The Religion of the Outside*, which claims that certain of Wilson's fictional works adhere to the literary genre of bildungsroman, in which the protagonist matures as a result of various life experiences. (Winsett 1968).

3. The Reduction or Epoche

One of the important concepts and a methodological procedure that Husserl bequeathed to the mankind is epoche or reduction. A shift from the natural attitude to the phenomenological attitude is known as phenomenological reduction. It is the focusing of intentionality from the broad natural attitude that aims at any and all things in the world to the more focused phenomenological attitude that aims at one's own intentional life, its related objects, and the world. Epoche is a Greek term which means 'cessation' or 'suspension'. "It involves 'bracketing' or 'suspending' all the natural attitudes towards the objects in the world and towards our psychological acts, suspending all our theories about these matters, and leading back our attention to these pure essences of consciousness" (Moran 136). It also means 'putting out of play' or 'parenthesizing' of the objective world. It is one of those fundamental manners in which human beings lose, make and remake the meanings of their lives, by which they forge a new world or at least experience it in a new way. It minimises the existential interference and allows a person to reflect on his experiences. Reduction leads one to a solitary self-reflection. It frees a person from the sedimentation of world-grounding beliefs and presuppositions that accumulate in him while encountering the world in the 'natural attitude', which constantly seeks to reassert itself. Reduction lays bare the subjective domain of inner experience and reveals the essence of consciousness and subjectivity whereby one gains the ability to apprehend the self as a pure ego. "This subjectivity remains hidden as long as we are absorbed in the pre philosophical natural attitude, where we live in self-oblivion among objects, but which the epoche and the reduction is capable of revealing." (Zahavi 51) In this context, The Delphic motto, "Know thyself" gains a new signification. In the natural attitude, a person loses himself in the world. "One must lose the world by epoche in order to regain it by universal self-examination" (Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations* 157). Reduction tantamounts to the overcoming of the 'forgetfulness of existence' and a lowering of what Wilson calls as the 'indifference threshold'— a state of psychological passivity or habituation that takes existence for granted, and perceive the things without any distracting subjectivities which tend to pull one out of the life and distract the "pure intentional look." (Husserl, *The Paris Lectures* LIV) Epoche is a step towards achieving the epistemic modesty which will bring new meanings to human life. It means self-discipline which is the only way to achieve freedom. Epoche reveals both the subject and the object in their essential nudity which fetches a new perception of both the perceiving self and the perceived object.

Husserl believed that the nature of consciousness can be understood if phenomenology is made a presuppositionless inquiry by removing all sorts of distortions caused by different theoretical

biases including naturalistic and psychic experiences. Bracketing out the distortions by the disciplinary technique of epoché is necessary to purify the consciousness and grasp the things adequately and apodictically given in intuitive evidence. Epoche is all about breaking the habit circuits, bring cessation in the naivety and make one understand the essence of any given experience. It is to get beyond the natural attitude that Husserl compares to a blind person who has been given the ability to see. In *Ideas*, Husserl makes it clear that in his transcendental philosophy it is necessary to free oneself from presuppositions and preconceptions through “a radical attitude of autonomous self-responsibility” (Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* 54) It is with this self-responsibility that man embarks on the path of self-discipline to bring change in his perceptions and consciousness. In order to come out of the dire flat state of ‘natural attitude’, human beings need to discipline their consciousness so as to see the world as full of joy and meaning. Husserl’s ‘reductions’ simply want to purge the mind of all those factors which dilute the experience by not presenting the ‘things themselves’ to the perceiving subject. Its aim is to what Husserl calls ‘overthrow’ the attitude with which a person accepts the existence of the world around him. In reduction this attitude is cast off and what remains is purely encountered in perception.

4. Reduction and *The Mind Parasites*

In *The Mind Parasites*, the narrator Gilbert Austin is an archeologist, who along with his friend Wolfgang Reich needs great knowledge and great powers of intuition to see the civilization that lies behind tiny fragments of exhumed evidence. The novel is an allegory which objectifies the hindrances (parasites) and dramatizes phenomenological self-analysis and perusal to suggest inner growth and evolution. In the novel, Austin and his team keep fighting with the parasites, which symbolise a fight against a habit bound existence or the naivete so as to keep it ‘out of play’ and explore the different realms of consciousness. In this novel Wilson makes it explicit that if mankind would defeat the parasites, the doors of evolution would instantly open and “man would take the legacy of Husserl” (78) and at another place he states as “how Husserl’s methods could be used to combat the parasites” (156). Scientific methodology of analysis, which Husserl considers as a part of one’s ‘natural standpoint’ also needs to be bracketed, because with its limitations, it is not able to discover the truth. Phenomenology is a method to discover this truth by first suspending the outer world and learn to explore the consciousness. Early in the novel when Reich and Austin spent the night at excavation site, Austin had an insightful experience which made him to bracket off the outer world. He completely becomes unaware of everything outside of his self and using all his strength he gazes into his inner spaces. His attention turns inward and he could vividly perceive his thoughts and feelings. Reduction liberates one’s gaze from the prejudices of the natural world and actual/ factual world and spares it to reflect back on how one perceives the things.

Austin wishes to penetrate the realm of mind, which he thinks, by its power of imagination can generate more possible horizons. As Husserl says that a person can let his imagination run free and contemplate some essential and possible worlds of being to achieve the essence of any experience. It is through ‘imaginative variation’ that a person gains the ‘eidetic intuitions’ and develops the understanding of the phenomena in his mental world. But it is only possible when the outer world, where ‘our freedom is limited, can be defied’ (48). Wilson basically

wants to suspend the objective world in its entirety and focus on the subjectivity and its immanence. Austin is digging the human psychoscape to unravel the secrets of human mind which “like the real world is a planet with its own jungles and deserts and oceans, inhabited by all kinds of strange creatures” (54). Wilson believes that drugs like mescaline and LSD can facilitate to move into the deepest levels of being which breaks the habituality and brings a qualitative change in consciousness. In fact, these drugs cut off an individual from the outer world and leads him to self-observation or introspection so as to know how his consciousness functions. Here one should not suppose that Wilson advocates use of drugs to attain such insights rather he believes that in the long run, they sap one’s will and self-discipline but they can only be used on experimental basis to find the more positive ways to evolve into a higher consciousness. Christopher Gutland observes that, “phenomenology cannot only be seen as a kind of introspection, but also as a quite sophisticated method for practicing it.” (12) Man’s energies in the natural attitude get dissipated, when they execute the *epoché*, energy suddenly flows inwards and brings more concentration and space for analysing what is immanent to consciousness. In his *Access to Inner Worlds*, Wilson contends that for practical purposes, my feelings and emotions constitute a separate entity. The emotional body wastes an enormous amount of my time with its damned feelings. (19) Reduction facilitates this recognition which can take place by several means. Austin experiments with mescaline and attempts to turn his attention inward, to observe the exact state of his perceptions and emotions and what he recognises is a feeling that he calls as the vampires of the mind – the forces that resist any analysis and keep man's focus on the outer; to prevent him from exploring the worlds inside himself.

Once these forces are bracketed, there will be a tremendous sense of mental relief, “a vanishing oppression, a surge of energy and optimism” (78). Wilson says that for the first time, man will become an inhabitant of the world of mind. In Husserlian scheme of things he will no longer drift in the objective world but will witness what is ‘given’ to the consciousness. Weissman’s Historical Reflections reveal the same thing. Inspired by his friend Rupert Haddon, Weissman begins to use Husserl’s phenomenological methods to cure his depression and nausea. He used his mind to probe his own sickness – a conscious reflection on what is wrong with one’s consciousness. Weissman time and again feels some alienness or strangeness and not any physical thing inside himself. He finally defeats the parasites and reconnects to his own deeper sources. He can, in Husserlian sense bracket his daily narrowed way of seeing the world and perceive it with a renewed sense – a reconstitution of meaning and perception. The vampires which are the symbol of man’s naivete, make Weissman to continue perceiving the world from natural standpoint, where he drifts in boredom and ignorance. Once the natural standpoint is bracketed, the energies turn *inward* and “man takes up the legacy of Husserl, realising that he has many ‘selves’ (78), which layer upon layer exist in human consciousness. This recognition leads him to a deeper exploration of his subjectivity. Earlier, Weissman tries some small amounts of mescaline to overcome this difficulty, which enables him to do a more deeper and closer inward observation and that eventually leads him to feel something living and alien inside himself.

In fact, Wilson discourages the use of drugs to study consciousness and advocates the Husserlian way of “the conscious reflection alone” (85) After making Fleishman their disciple, Austin and Reich teach him how ‘to close the mind to the parasites and become the master of

the country of the mind and travel to it and map it.' (104) In his *Ideas I*, Husserl states that "the phenomenological method proceeds completely in acts of reflection" (139) Reflection is the phenomenon upon which both Husserl's and Wilson's whole enterprise of phenomenology rests.

Most of the time, people reject their limited states of existence without even being aware of any particular disciplines. They achieve this by putting aside their inclination to be pessimistic, worrying about life, and contemplating the accomplishment of significant goals. By utilizing the inner secret lives, man becomes aware of this trick. Charles W Harvey observes:

In naturalistic language these occurrences might be referred to as the act of doubt, the event of disengagement, and the deed of reconstruction. I believe that these happenings are instances of the proto-methodological prerequisites for developing the formal methodological procedures of epoche, reduction, and constitution as Husserl developed them. And, although he was nearly compulsive about making phenomenology scientific from bottom to top, there is evidence to suggest that Husserl had recognized these not so scientific existential conditions for the possibility of phenomenological reduction. (194)

Human beings engage in numerous commonplace epochés that exist across the gamut of daily social life. In the routine course of daily life, human beings constantly remain within some variant of the epoché and that the commonplace world of the natural attitude is itself made up of several unreflective versions of the epoché. Average individual is unknowingly constantly engaging in an epoché of doubt to make and remake the adjustments within the spatio-temporal world.

Austin in his explorations of the inner world, 'rejects' his old personality and its assumptions and gains more awareness of the different encumbrances of the spatio-temporal world which he had hitherto taken for granted and wanted to leave for self-knowledge. Austin seeks to find his true self in the most profound way. The same way a fearless thinker rejects nationalism and religion, he rejects everything conventional that offered him a sense of identity like his place and time of birth, the fact whether he is a human being rather than a dog or a fish. He let go of all these accidental trappings and is left naked facing the universe.

Quoting Wilson, Howard Dossor makes a similar point when he states that, "Personality is a distorting glass that lies between man's inner reality and the reality of the outside world. In a poet this distorting mechanism suddenly vanishes; the inner and the outer world face each other directly with no distorting glass between them." (182) In the natural world, human beings live with their common-sense assumptions and beliefs with their perceptions coloured by different prejudices and biases thus giving rise to a 'taken for granted' and 'casual' attitude while engaging with the world. Epoche enables a person to take a reflective attitude and execute different reductions to penetrate these layers of prejudices and biases so as to capture the essence of experiences. Consciousness and its different features get revealed through this reflective consideration, wherein the consciousness turns towards itself and the domain of this phenomenological reflection is rigorously defined by the epoche. "Both epoche and reduction can consequently be seen as elements of a transcendental reflection, the purpose of which is to liberate us from a natural (is tic) dogmatism and to make us aware of our own constitutive (that is, cognitive, meaning giving) contribution." (Zahavi 46) Wilson sets an apt analogy for making his point about the man who keeps lingering 'out there' and the one who descends into

his own self and transcends the spatio-temporal horizon. He points out that people are incapable of entering their own minds as for they exist in the physical world. A man who can lose himself in thought over a lengthy train ride has transcended both space and time, but a man who yawns and glances out the window is forced to experience every minute of the journey. It is precisely this capacity to go inside one's own self and confront the mind parasites that imbues man the ability to combat them. Through this analogy, Wilson hints upon the fact that human beings need to first recognise their habit patterns which prevent them from achieving any degree of freedom and meaning. It highlights distinction between a naïve attitude and a phenomenological attitude. Wilson characterizes the natural attitude as habit circuits and points out that to destroy these circuits is very difficult. It is "to stripe man of everything....as if you have stripe him of his skin" (129). But these habit circuits are to be bracketed to achieve the true consciousness. Austin realizes that by basic methods of phenomenology he and his associates will be able to defeat the parasites and release their entire will to explore the dimensions of consciousness. They do so in a typical Husserlian fashion thus:

We drew the blinds, locked the doors, and all sat and concentrated hard. I had become so used to this operation that I did it almost automatically. The first step was identical with the one I take when I wish to fall asleep; complete dismissal of the outside world, forgetfulness of my body. Within seconds, I was plunging downwards into the darkness of my own mind. The next step took some practice. I had to detach myself from my ordinary physical personality. The intelligent part of me had to remain wide awake, and move down into this world of dreams and memories (145).

Austin says that he can analyse his inner world peeling layer upon layer of the content of his consciousness. With complete consciousness, he makes his way across the dream layer. He feels as though he was floating beneath the water in this odd, silent environment known as the dream layer of the mind.

Unlike Husserl, Wilson does not proceed with the systematic process of reductions to know the nature of consciousness but he does analyse the contents – the moods, thoughts and perceptions to apprehend the consciousness in its purity and intensity. And most of the time, Wilson states, people suspend their naivete when confronted with some emergency which compels them to concentrate on the issue at hand and suddenly the energies rush in and the bracketing occurs. Poets and mystics, who have some degree of control and discipline, now and then detach their minds from the trivial and enter some other horizons. But the epoche is a discipline which needs practice to be learnt. Austin realises that he "knew that there is some 'knack' of getting deeper, but acquiring a knack takes a certain amount of exploration, of practice" (147). Wilson says that to achieve such a detachment and knack of analysis is akin to "putting the mind in and out of the gear so as to know the secret of godhead" (168). Bracketing is a source of insight into the essential nature of experience. Austin and his associates learn about the nature of parasites and their implications for evolution of consciousness only by bracketing off the 'interferences of doubt, fatigue, depression, delays and accidents which confront them on their voyage to freedom.

Wilson advocates the phenomenological exploration of man's inner spaces aided by the *epoche*, that Austin and his team employs. By incorporating the elements of death, danger and

risk in the story, Wilson has shown the need of urgency in one's efforts to escape the hold of automatism and access the freedom and meaning. And this he believes is possible by bracketing off the automatism and pave the way for analysing and understanding the structures of consciousness which is crucial in bringing a transformation in both the perceiver and the perception.

5. Reduction and *The Black Room*

The Black Room which is apparently an espionage story, deals with the techniques and methods of how human subjectivity could be made independent and stable by cutting it off from the incessant stimuli of the external world. The protagonist of the novel, Kit Butler makes an evolutionary leap into a higher level of consciousness through a phenomenological analysis of his mental experiences. Wilson saw the *Black Room* as a crucial symbol because it represents a crisis situation on the brink of daily existence where people can either rise above or fall deeper by moving toward the independence of the physical world through the release of latent mental powers—a trait that Wilson believed to be unique to the next phase of human evolution. This evolution is necessarily preceded by reduction and ordinarily and mostly, a crisis effects this reduction. Quoting Tredell, Dossor remarks that “black room is a technological equivalent of the tub of Diogenes, of the cell of medieval anchorite ... the purpose of which is to cut out all external stimuli in order that its inhabitant might confront his own inner reality” (271) Wilson believes that body has its limitations which limits the mind and turns it passive. The mind needs to be detached from the physical to release its powers, this may free a man from the oppressive dearth of stimuli in the black room by causing a severe sensation of crisis that could result in either extreme fear or a feeling that he is capable of controlling his response. According to Heidegger, it occurs “when the care-structure of our existence is shattered and our ontological and epistemological foundations are shifted to another realm.” (Moran 224)

The Black Room, which is an experiment in sensory deprivation, scientifically cuts all the external stimuli or inputs and facilitates a focus on the internal phenomenon i.e., what is given to the consciousness. In this way, it analyses the human subjectivity and reflects the different responses of people. Its purpose is to suspend the objective world and make a person attentive to his own consciousness. It is to transcend the ‘forgetfulness of existence.’ It is all about discipline, which under ordinary conditions is induced by a crisis situation or can be deliberately done with an experiment like the black room. Kit Butler, the protagonist of the novel points out that “If only I could learn the trick of shaking my mind awake, without the need for crisis, I would have found the secret of turning men into supermen” (Wilson, *The Black Room*, 53). Ordinarily people have no goals outside of surviving, staying in a dark environment creates feelings of apathy and dullness which subsequently forces a person to work for recovering and regaining the stability of his subjectivity.

The dullness and apathy that the ‘black room’ induces, naturally leads to “a collapse of the sense of reality and the values and hence a retreat into one’s inner world” (67). The black room state of mind, according to Wilson is a condition of “spiritual dyspepsia” (67), which creates “false fatigue” ... All people have a “fatigue threshold” (70), which characterises a person’s business in the natural attitude, that brings it down. And the cause of it is that man lacks a

discipline, the discipline which could lead to a cessation of false fatigue and an increase in the fatigue threshold. Butler declares that “I believe that it could be done if you could devise the right kind of disciplines *outside*. Disciplines all designed to stop the mind from falling asleep when there is no crisis...” (72). But the crisis like situation, which would ensure a suspension of naivete – “the drifting moods of boredom and blankness” (110) and development of self-consciousness can solve the ‘black room’ problem. Unlike Husserl who is more interested in immanence and meaning constitution, Wilson says that this suspension is accompanied with an awakening of subconscious. An awakening which he equates with the religious conversion. However, Spiegelberg points out that, “Husserl himself conceived of his transcendental phenomenology as a distinctive existential possibility, and that in particular the transcendental reduction included for him a liberating conversion of human existence.” (67)

Butler’s experiences at station K further throws light on different mental disciplines. Ernst Stauffmann, the chief of the station has devised the concentration machine as a possible solution to the black room problem. Ordinarily, man’s attention is unfocused which Stauffmann believes is due to the alpha rhythms that his brain generates in everyday routine life. The concentration machine helps to bracket off these rhythms. It is a possible antidote to the black room problem. But, Butler points out that he would like to solve the problem as an artist. He believes that as a musician, he can use music to suspend the routine life of close-upness and relive certain instances of profound understanding. According to Husserl Aesthetic attitude and phenomenological attitude are similar because both advocate a suspension of any existential interference, to experience the reality of phenomenon as a pure manifestation. (Rozzoni 120) Butler wants to maintain this state – “and I would do my best to preserve a certain self-discipline and prevent myself from getting too low”. (288) In the ‘natural’ states of consciousness, man’s energies dissipate and to use the Wilson’s image, the springs of the grandfather clock slacken. But the self-discipline increases his concentration and infuses strength to the spring, thus restoring the vitality. In Husserlian scheme of things it is a shift from passive consciousness to intentional consciousness which is preceded by epoche facilitated by intense efforts of concentration. This concentration, Wilson believes can be caused by music, sex, or any crisis situation which “unites the whole being and prevents the subconscious from going off duty” (290). Man must convince his subconscious to exert effort as well, if he wants to be truly strong. It’s about startling the mind to get it out of its lazy state. Butler tells Ehrlich that he has learnt the discipline of keeping his moods ‘out of play’ and concentrate for intense experience. “I have ceased to experience the old ups and downs of temperament – or rather, I know how to compensate for them. It’s a matter of losing the mental habit of passivity” (291) and bring more consciousness to one’s experiences.

In the novel, Station K in its own way is an abode of discipline, which has its own methods of analysing each human experience and observing the changes those experiences bring to the consciousness. Stauffmann’s conviction is that man requires a great degree of discipline. When he achieves it, everything falls into place. Black room facilitates this achievement by cutting all the external engagements and pushing the individual to attend his own subjectivity. Mind in its ordinary states is asleep. When Wilson talks about ‘a high level of discipline,’ he means to “accustom the mind to stay alert” (306). And to remain alert is to be attentive to what is happening in one’s inner world and prevent the mind to slip into its *habitus*.

Stauffmann’s concentration machine reflects the human subjectivity on the screen objectively.

It is what Husserl calls as the ‘givenness’ which can be analyzed on the screen. Each thought and emotion which generates a particular rhythm is displayed as dots on the screen. Butler’s experience at the concentration machine is significant. He closes his eyes, brackets off the objective world and then ceases to think. Stauffmann is surprised to see that the dot on the screen disappears which indicates a distraction-free subjectivity, which Butler achieved through epoche. He states that “it had revived the sense of inner purpose, of drive and direction, and feeling of nervousness had vanished” (314). Stauffmann too reaches the same conclusion and he realises that he has always been fascinated by the issue of life- failure and why things may get so monotonous and uninteresting out of the blue. He now knows the solution. He points out that human beings are exhausted and out of breath. When they will shed that “mental fat”, (314) their feeling of purpose will become vibrant.

Epoche literally corresponds to the gesture of suspension of the usual course of thoughts by interruption of their continuous flux. When a person ‘gets rid of the ‘mental fat’ – the pre-given and unquestioned values, he moves towards meaning and freedom. In the natural attitude, subjectivity is sub-ordinate to the world. But with epoche, an individual becomes able to recognise a more free and powerful state of consciousness in its purity, which now controls the world and this is what the novel *The Black Room* brings to light.

6. Conclusion

This paper establishes that phenomenological reduction paves the way for reflecting back on the conscious self so as to analyse and understand the structure and functioning of consciousness which has implications for how human beings perceive the objects of their experience which affects the quality of their consciousness.

The novel *The Mind Parasites* allegorizes the exploration of human consciousness in the form of archeological digging, laying bare the layer upon layer to recognise the parasites which symbolise habituality. In the novel, Austin and his team, explore human psychoscape and consciousness and succeed in bringing a cessation to the effects of parasites. This freedom from automatism releases their powers of will and imagination and make their experiences meaningful. The novel *The Black Room* is all about discipline. The black room device cuts all the external stimuli and subjects the individual to his inner world. This leads to a crisis situation, pushing one to pay attention to what is immanent to consciousness. The device brings back the attention to the acts of consciousness and awakens the subconscious forces and makes human beings more conscious which has implications for the purpose and meaning they imbue to their experiences.

After executing the different reductions, a fresh awareness emerges in the characters which gives them a fresh perspective to understand the world. These characters attempt to achieve this fresh perspective by redefining and reconstructing the meanings of their lives through a variety of reductions. They achieve this, by giving up on the distractions of the subjective world and the business of the external, objective world. Bracketing proves to be an effective technique for them in breaking the robot's automatism and conquering their ‘forgetfulness of existence’, which they had otherwise taken for granted. It brings a qualitative change in both the perceiver and the perception which has a direct bearing on how human beings bring value,

purpose and meaning to their life.

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