

The Mind's 'I' in Meditation: Early Pāli Buddhaddhamma and Transcendental Phenomenology in Mutual Reflection

Khristos Nizamis¹

Introduction

This essay provides a condensed introductory 'snapshot' of just a few of the many and profound correlations existing between early (pre-Abhidhamma) Pāli Buddhism and Transcendental Phenomenology, by focusing on what is arguably the most central and essential 'philosophical problem' in both traditions: the true nature and significance of the 'I' of subjective intentional consciousness. It argues that the Buddhist axiom of 'not-self' (*anattā*) is by no means incompatible with the fundamental phenomenological irreducibility, and necessity, of transcendental subjectivity – or, as Husserl also puts it, of the 'pure' or 'transcendental 'I' – a structure evidently essential to intentional consciousness as 'consciousness-of'. On the one hand, Husserl recognises (and struggles with) the peculiar 'emptiness' of the 'pure 'I''. On the other hand, a fundamental distinction must clearly be drawn between genuine intentional subjectivity – which even Buddhas and Arahants must *of necessity* possess – and the erroneous bases upon which the concept of 'self' (*attā*) that Buddhism rejects is constituted: the feeling of 'I am' (*asmī'ti*), the sense of 'I am this' (*ayam-aham-asmī'ti*), and the concept/conceit of 'I am' (*asmī-māna*) – all of which Buddhas and Arahants by definition do *not* possess. Hence, it is argued that, while the 'pure I' does not refer to some permanent 'entity' called 'self', nor is it merely an empty, non-referring, conventional linguistic marker: it has not merely a 'use', but a genuine *meaning*, which derives from the intrinsic, irreducible, and 'pre-linguistic' experiential structure of 'consciousness-of' itself. What is more, this meaning is not only recognised and admitted, but actively utilised, within the doctrine and methodology of early Buddhism, without any sense of contradicting the axiom of *anattā*.

1. Preliminary (1): The axiom of *anattā*

This essay aims to provide a very condensed and merely introductory 'snapshot' of just a few of the many and very deep correlations that exist between transcendental phenomenology (TP) and early Pāli Buddhaddhamma (EB); but the elements of this 'snapshot' are organized around what is arguably the most essential theme – one might even say, 'philosophical problem' – at the heart of both TP and EB. It is the intention of this essay *not* to contradict the fundamental EB axiom of *anattā*, 'not-self'. In other words, the arguments presented here will *not* posit *any* essentially permanent subjective or objective *entity* or *identity* called *attā*, or 'self'. Nor will they assert '*asmī'ti*, 'I am';

¹ I would gratefully like to thank Peter Harvey for his helpful and encouraging comments on and questions about the previous version of this paper. I hope that through my addressing his comments and questions, the clarity of this paper has been improved for the benefit of others. I would also like to register my respect for and appreciation of the great work accomplished by Bhikkhus Bodhi and Ṭhānissaro: without their beautiful efforts, it would have required at least two more lifetimes for me to gain the understanding of early Pāli Buddhaddhamma which they have helped me to gain within a fraction of this lifetime. I also deeply and gratefully thank the International Association of Buddhist Universities for accepting this paper as part of its 2011/2012 conference program.

or ‘*ayam aham asmī’ti*, ‘I am this’; or *asmi-māna*, the ‘I am’ concept/conceit; or again, *ahaṅkāra*, ‘I-making’, or *mamaṅkāra*, ‘mine-making’.

However, these arguments will propose the conclusion that ‘*pure subjectivity*’ is an inherent and irreducible property of *intentional consciousness* (i.e., ‘*consciousness-of*’), an essential aspect of the actual process of lived conscious experience;² and that there is a definite phenomenological sense in which, when everything else has been ‘excluded’ and ‘reduced’, ‘*pure consciousness-of*’ remains as an absolutely irreducible principle. *But neither pure consciousness-of nor its intrinsic subjectivity can constitute (or be constituted as) a ‘self’ of any kind: they are ‘transcendental’ facts, equivalent to ‘pure emptiness’.*³ Moreover, if there were no phenomenon whatsoever for consciousness-of to be conscious-of, then, given that consciousness-of already apodictically demonstrates the irreducible nature of ‘being conscious-of’, it could be conscious-of nothing but its own consciousness-of. In other words, this would be a form of *absolute cessation (nirodha)*.⁴

For the sake of clarity and reference, the axiom of *anattā* will be summarized here in five items: a general premise and four arguments.⁵ 1. Whatever might be regarded as a personal ‘self’ (*attā*) or ‘I am’ (*asmī’ti*) will inevitably be just the five aggregates of clinging (*pañc-upādāna-kkhandhā*) or some one of them.⁶ 2. The five aggregates are not ‘self’ because one cannot control them to prevent affliction.⁷ 3. The five aggregates are impermanent (*anicca*), painful (*dukkha*), and have the nature of change (*vipariṇāma*); therefore, it is not befitting or proper (*kallaṃ*) to think of them as a ‘self’.⁸ 4. It is not acceptable (*na khamati*) to posit a ‘self’ that is entirely separate from experience and the phenomena of experience.⁹ 5. Dependent co-arising is a sufficient and valid explanation of the continuity of temporal experience; therefore, there is no need to posit a ‘self’ in order to account for that continuity.¹⁰

² In Husserl’s TP terminology, this is *Erlebnis*, ‘lived experience’, ‘mental process’ (cf. also fn. 86 below). In EB terminology, this is *viññāṇa* as a conditioned, constituted, and temporal experiential life-process: i.e., as one of the five aggregates (*khandhas*); as a ‘tying down’ (*nidāna*) or ‘link’ in the continuum of dependent co-arising (*paṭicca-samuppāda*); and thus also as the medium of ‘becoming-again’ (*punabbhava*). (Cf. also fn. 59 below for further aspects of *viññāṇa*.)

³ Cf. Section §2.3 below for a clarification of the terms ‘transcendental’ and ‘transcendent’.

⁴ Here, ‘cessation’ (*nirodha*) should not be taken to imply a nihilistic sense of ‘annihilation’. Rather, it is intended more literally, in the sense of ‘stopping’. For a very similar understanding, cf. Harvey 1995, §11.8, pp. 184-185; §12.3, p. 199; §§12.7-8, pp. 201-202.

⁵ Items 2 to 5 have been adapted from the taxonomy of arguments in support of *anattā* in Collins 1990, §§3.2.2-5, pp. 97-110.

⁶ SN 22.47 (S III 46): *ye hi keci . . . samaṇā vā brāhmaṇā vā anekavihitaṃ attānaṃ samanupassamānā samanupassanti, sabbete pañcupādānakkhandhe samanupassanti, etesaṃ vā aññataraṃ*. The abbreviations DN, MN, SN, and AN will be used to refer to *sutta* numbers, while D, M, S, and A will refer to Pali Text Society volume and page numbers.

⁷ SN 22.59 (at S III 66): *rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, anattā. rūpaṃca hidaṃ, bhikkhave, attā abhavissa, nayidaṃ rūpaṃ ābādāhāya saṃvatteyya, labbhetha ca rūpe ‘evaṃ me rūpaṃ hotu, evaṃ me rūpaṃ mā ahoṣī’ti*. (So also for *vedanā, saññā, saṅkhārā, viññāṇa*.)

⁸ SN 22.59 (at S III 67-68): *yaṃpanāniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, kallaṃ nu taṃ samanupassituṃ: ‘etaṃ mama, esohamasmi, eso me attā’ti?*

⁹ Cf. the refutations in DN 15 (at D II 67-69), which will be discussed below (cf. §4). (Cf. also Bodhi 2010, pp. 42-48, for a detailed discussion of those arguments.) The arguments 3 and 4 above, taken together, constitute a nice dilemmatic argument in support of *anattā*.

¹⁰ The *locus classicus* is MN 38 (M I 256). I do not think that this argument can be treated as an independent one, as it only has decisive force in combination with the arguments of 3 and 4.



2. Preliminary (2): *Pahāna* and *epokhē*

2.1. *Pahāna*

In EB, the *assutavā puthujjana* is the ordinary, common person (*puthujjana*) who has either not heard or not understood (*assutavā*) the ‘transcendental’¹¹ instruction of the Dhamma. Such a person is contrasted to the *ariya sāvaka*, the ‘noble hearer’ or disciple of the Dhamma. The *Mūlapariyāya Sutta* provides an apt ‘phenomenological’ definition of the *assutavā puthujjana*:

He perceives ‘earth’ from ‘earth’; having perceived ‘earth’ from ‘earth’, he conceives ‘earth’, he conceives ‘in earth’, he conceives ‘from earth’, he conceives ‘earth is mine’, he delights in ‘earth’.¹²

This same formula is then applied to ‘absolutely everything’; even, indeed, to *Nibbāna*; as though to say: if a person gets this one thing wrong, they get absolutely *everything* wrong, even the ‘ultimate truth’.

The first essential ‘antidote’ to this problem is *pahāna*, ‘abandoning’. The *Sabba Sutta* and *Pahāna Sutta* teach, respectively, ‘the All’ (*sabbaṃ*) and the ‘Dhamma for abandoning All’ (*sabba-pahānāya dhamma*).¹³ The *Natumhākaṃ Suttas* of the *Khandhasaṃyutta* and the *Salāyatanaṃ Suttas*¹⁴ also teach exactly this same Dhamma in terms of the five clung-to aggregates (*pañc-upādāna-kkhandhā*) and the six sense spheres (*salāyatana*), respectively; but, as the title of these *suttas*, ‘Not Yours’ (*na tumhākaṃ*), indicates, they teach it with an especially interesting twist. The former *sutta* says:

Monks, what is not yours, abandon that. When you have abandoned that, it will be for your benefit and happiness. And what, monks, is not yours? Form . . . feeling . . . perception . . . constitutions . . . consciousness is not yours, abandon that. When you have abandoned that, it will be for your benefit and happiness.¹⁵

¹¹ In this context, the term ‘transcendental’ could legitimately be understood as a translation of the term *lokuttara* (lit., ‘higher than, above, beyond [uttara] the world [loka]’), as this sometimes occurs in the EB *suttas* (as distinct from the ‘technical’ sense that this term is later given within the Abhidhamma system). The term is also often translated as ‘supramundane’. Thus, e.g., MN 96 (at M II 181): *evameva kho ahaṃ . . . ariyaṃ lokuttaraṃ dhammaṃ purisassa sandhanaṃ paññapemi*, “I . . . declare the noble supramundane Dhamma as a person’s own wealth” (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009, p. 789, §12); MN 117 (at M III 72): *atthi . . . sammādiṭṭhi ariyā anāsavā lokuttarā maggaṅgā*, “[T]here is right view that is noble, taintless, supramundane, a factor of the path” (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009, p. 934, §5). It is quite possible and plausible to argue that, in connection with the Dhamma, the term *lokuttara* can be understood to have certain fundamental implications that it shares in common with the TP sense of the term ‘transcendental’; indeed, this point can already be discerned through the correlation between EB *pahāna* and TP *epokhē* that is outlined in this present section; but cf. also §2.3 below.

¹² Unless otherwise cited, translations from the Pāli are by the present author. MN 1 (M I 1): *pathaviṃ pathavito sañjānāti; pathaviṃ pathavito sañnatvā pathaviṃ maññati, pathaviyā maññati, pathavito maññati, pathaviṃ meti maññati, pathaviṃ abhinandati*. Bodhi (2006, p. 27) and Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi (2009, p. 83, §3) translate this formula, in accordance with the interpretations of the commentary and sub-commentary, with interpolations, thus: ‘he conceives [himself as] earth, he conceives [himself] in earth, he conceives [himself apart] from earth’, etc. While this reading is certainly valid, I nevertheless prefer a quite literal translation of the text, as I believe that this makes good (phenomenological) sense, just as it is.

¹³ SN 35.23-24 (S IV 15-16).

¹⁴ SN 22.33 (S III 33) and SN 35.101 (S IV 81), respectively.

¹⁵ SN 22.33 (S III 33-34): *yaṃ, bhikkhave, na tumhākaṃ, taṃ pajahatha. taṃ vo pahīnaṃ hitāya sukhāya bhavissati. kiñca, bhikkhave, na tumhākaṃ? rūpaṃ . . . vedanā . . . saññā . . . saṅkhārā . . . viññāṇaṃ na tumhākaṃ, taṃ pajahatha. taṃ vo pahīnaṃ hitāya sukhāya bhavissati.*

The latter *sutta* says:

Monks, what is not yours, abandon that. When you have abandoned that, it will be for your benefit and happiness. And what, monks, is not yours? Eye . . . visual forms . . . eye-consciousness . . . eye-contact . . . whatever feeling arises with eye-contact as condition, pleasant or painful or neither-painful-nor-pleasant: that, too, is not yours. Abandon that. When you have abandoned that, it will be for your benefit and happiness.¹⁶

And so also for ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental faculty. The commentary explains that the imperative ‘Abandon. . .’ should be understood to mean: ‘Abandon by means of the abandoning of desire and lust’.¹⁷ The *Dutiya Chanda-ppahāna Sutta* supports this, but it is also more exhaustive:

With respect to form . . . feeling . . . perception . . . constitutions . . . consciousness: whatever desire, lust, delight, craving, taking up and clinging, standpoints, adherences and underlying tendencies of the mind there are: abandon these. Thus that form . . . feeling . . . perception . . . constitutions . . . consciousness will be abandoned, cut off at the root, made like an uprooted palm tree, made without (further) becoming, not subject to arising in the future.¹⁸

2.2. *Epokhē*.

In general, it seems true to say that not only human individuals, but human societies, cultures, civilizations – indeed, the human species, as such – are born into, live, and die within a certain ‘pregiven’ and unquestioned attitude towards and assumption about ‘the world’ and their relationship to ‘the world’. This is true not only in ordinary, ‘pre-theoretical’ life, but also in the case of the positive natural sciences; and even, for most people, in religion and religious life. Ordinary, everyday life; the life of science; the life of religion; all of them share and are grounded upon one and the same ‘natural attitude’ (*natürliche Einstellung*).

In this natural attitude, ‘the world’ is given as a self-evident objective and real fact: it exists in front of us, around us, and we live in it: we perceive it, experience it, and act in it. It is ‘simply there, ‘on hand’’.¹⁹ The ‘world’ *was* before each of us and *will be* after each of us; it is independent of us; it is just as it is, from its own side, not from ours; and we see it and know it just as it is – including its ‘illusions’ and ‘hallucinations’ – as though these were simply reflected in our minds as in a blank and passive mirror. The world is made up of objects; and we, too, are objects in the world. Yet the world exists outside of us: we each have our own separate, inner, private, subjective life, our mental life; but the real world is external, public, objective, and physical.²⁰

¹⁶ SN 35.101 (S IV 81-82): *yaṃ, bhikkhave, na tumhākaṃ, taṃ pajahatha. taṃ vo pahīnaṃ hitāya sukhāya bhavissati. kiñca, bhikkhave, na tumhākaṃ? cakkhu . . . rūpā . . . cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ . . . cakkhusamphasso . . . yampidaṃ cakkhusamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi na tumhākaṃ. taṃ pajahatha. taṃ vo pahīnaṃ hitāya sukhāya bhavissati.*

¹⁷ Spk II 265: *pajahathāti chandarāgappahānena pajahatha.*

¹⁸ SN 22.112 (S III 161): *rūpe . . . vedanāya . . . saññāya . . . saṅkhāresu . . . viññāṇe . . . yo chando yo rāgo yā nandī yā taṇhā ye upayupādānā cetaso adhiṭṭhānābhinivesānusayā, te pajahatha. evaṃ taṃ rūpaṃ . . . sā vedanā . . . sā saññā . . . te saṅkhārā . . . taṃ viññāṇaṃ pahīnaṃ bhavissati ucchinnamūlaṃ tālavatthukataṃ anabhāvamkataṃ āyatim anuppādadhammaṃ.*

¹⁹ Husserl 1982, §27, p. 51; Husserl 1976a, §27, p. ‘*einfach da . . . ,vorhanden*“ . . .’. This section begins with a nice ‘first personal’ description of the natural attitude.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Husserl 1982, §30, pp. 56-57; Husserl 1976a, §30, pp. 60-61.



When the scientific attitude says that ‘reality’ is what is really ‘there’ when our own merely subjective consciousness is *not* ‘there’, and then tries to posit and study that ‘mind-independent’ reality, it is simply intensifying the natural attitude. When the religious attitude says that one must be good and do good ‘in this world’, so that one can be granted access to a ‘better world’, perhaps a ‘heavenly world’, it, too, is simply practising the natural attitude. Something remains fundamentally unquestioned, fundamentally hidden from view, in this natural attitude. Husserl writes of the ‘natural attitude’:

Daily practical living is naïve. It is immersion in the already-given world, whether it be experiencing, or thinking, or valuing, or acting. Meanwhile all those productive intentional functions of experiencing, because of which physical things are simply there, go on anonymously. The experiencer knows nothing about them, and likewise nothing about his productive thinking... Nor is it otherwise in the positive sciences. They are naïvetés of a higher level.²¹

For Husserl, the first essential ‘antidote’ to the ‘natural attitude’ is what he calls the *epokhē* – an ancient Greek word meaning ‘check, cessation’; and in late Hellenistic philosophy, having the applied sense, ‘suspension of judgment’.²² For Husserl, the *epokhē* is the radical suspension or exclusion of the ‘natural attitude’ and all that it implies. He argues that the way in which we give ‘validity’ to our sense of the ‘world’ – with ‘ourselves’ as ‘objects’ within it – cannot be examined, let alone overcome, from *within* the natural attitude, because the natural attitude is always-already the *effect* of that bestowal of ‘validity’.²³ We need to step back from, to step out of, that attitude, in order to see how it is constituted in the first instance, and what it obscures from view; in other words, to see what is really and truly ‘here’. He describes this as a shift from a ‘two-dimensional’ to a ‘three-dimensional’ perspective, speaking of the ‘antagonism . . . between the ‘patent’ life of the plane and the ‘latent’ life of depth’.²⁴ ‘This is not a “view”, an “interpretation” bestowed upon the world,’ he says.²⁵ All such ‘views’ have their ground in the pregiven world: but the *epokhē* frees us from this ground itself: we stand ‘above’ the world, which becomes for us a pure ‘phenomenon’.²⁶

Husserl first describes the *epokhē* as a “‘parenthesizing” or “excluding”, as a ‘refraining from judgment’,²⁷ or ‘better, refraining from belief’;²⁸ but all of this, he says, is perfectly compatible with an ‘unshakable conviction of evident truth’.²⁹ More explicitly, he says: ‘We put out of action the general positing which belongs to the essence of the natural attitude.’ Thus,

²¹ Husserl 1970a, §64, pp. 152-153; Husserl 1950, §64, p. 179: ‘Das tägliche praktische Leben ist naiv, es ist ein in die vorgegebene Welt Hineinerfahren, Hineindenken, Hineinwerten, Hineinhandeln. Dabei vollziehen sich alle die intentionalen Leistungen des Erfahrens, wodurch die Dinge schlechthin da sind, anonym: der Erfahrende weiß von ihnen nichts, ebenso nichts vom leistenden Denken. . . Nicht anders in den positiven Wissenschaften. Sie sind Naivitäten höherer Stufe. . .’

²² Cf. Liddell *et al.* 1996, p. 677.2.

²³ Husserl 1970b, §39, p. 148; Husserl 1954, §39, p. 151.

²⁴ Husserl 1970b, §32, p. 120; Husserl 1954, §32, p. 122: ‘der Antagonismus zwischen dem „patenten“ Flächenleben und dem „latenten“ Tiefenleben. . .’

²⁵ Husserl 1970b, §41, p. 152; Husserl 1954, §41, p. 155: ‘Das ist aber nicht eine „Auffassung“, eine „Interpretation“, die der Welt zuerteilt wird.’

²⁶ Husserl 1970b, §41, p. 152; Husserl 1954, §41, p. 155.

²⁷ Husserl 1982, §31, pp. 59-60; Husserl 1976a, §31, p. 64: ‘„Einklammerung“ oder „Ausschaltung“; ‘Urteilsenthaltung’.

²⁸ Husserl 1976b, p. 485: ‘besser: Glaubensenthaltung’. (Marginal note added by Husserl to his copy of the printed text.)

²⁹ Husserl 1982, §31, p. 60; Husserl 1976a, §31, p. 64: ‘unerschütterlichen, weil evidenten Überzeugung von der Wahrheit’.

the phenomenological *epokhē* ‘completely shuts me off from any judgment about spatiotemporal factual being’.³⁰ Husserl describes the *epokhē*, and the phenomenological or transcendental attitude that it awakens, as ‘a *total change* of the natural attitude, such that we no longer live, as heretofore, as human beings within natural existence, constantly effecting the validity of the pre-given world’.³¹ It is ‘by no means a temporary act’, but taken up ‘once and for all’.³² Thus, the *epokhē* is ‘a complete personal transformation, comparable in the beginning to a religious conversion’; but beyond this, he says, it ‘bears within itself the significance of the greatest existential transformation which is assigned as a task to humankind as such’.³³

2.3. A clarification of TP terms: ‘transcendental’ and ‘transcendent’

Never can the limit of the world be reached by travelling;

But nor is there release from the painful without having reached the world’s limit.³⁴

This cryptic passage from the *Rohitassa Sutta* elegantly captures the sense of the two mutually-related yet mutually-exclusive TP terms, ‘transcendent’ and ‘transcendental’. This correspondence is neither merely coincidental nor merely metaphorical: rather, it is not only philosophically, but *phenomenologically*, quite precise.³⁵ Thus: in the quest to find an escape from ‘the painful’ (*dukkha*), even if one could travel forever, one would never reach the limit or end (*anta*) of the ‘world’ (*loka*). By its very nature, the ‘spatiotemporal world’ and all that it comprises is *transcendent* with respect to any ‘moment’ of experience, or even any indefinite ‘continuum’ of experience: it ‘exceeds’ the grasp of experience, and does so in an ‘objective’ and ‘necessary’ manner. This is the sense of ‘the limit of the world’ (*lokassa-anta*) in the first verse of the ‘riddle’. In the second verse, however,

³⁰ Husserl 1982, §31, p. 61; Husserl 1976a, §32, p. 65: ‘Die zum Wesen der natürlichen Einstellung gehörige Generalthesis setzen wir außer Aktion. . .’; ‘. . . die mir jedes Urteil über räumlich-zeitliches Dasein völlig verschließt.’

³¹ Husserl 1970b, §39, p. 148; Husserl 1954, §39, p. 151: ‘. . . eine totale Änderung der natürlichen Einstellung, eine Änderung, in der wir nicht mehr wie bisher als Menschen des natürlichen Daseins im ständigen Geltungsvollzug der vorgegebenen Welt leben. . .’

³² Husserl 1970b, §40, p. 150; Husserl 1954, §40, p. 153: ‘keineswegs ein . . . bleibender Akt’; ‘ein für allemal (entschließen)’.

³³ Husserl 1970b, §35, p. 137 (translation modified); Husserl 1954, §35, p. 140: ‘. . . eine völlige personale Wandlung zu erwirken berufen ist, die zu vergleichen wäre zunächst mit einer religiösen Umkehrung, die aber darüber hinaus die Bedeutung der größten existenziellen Wandlung in sich birgt, die der Menschheit als Menschheit aufgegeben ist.’

³⁴ SN 2.26 (at S I 62) = AN 4.45 (at A II 49): *gamanena na pattabbo, lokassanto kudācanaṃ. | na ca appatvā lokantaṃ, dukkhā atthi pamocanaṃ. ||*

³⁵ The *Rohitassa Sutta* provides us with the Buddha’s profoundly phenomenological (and well-known) definition of ‘world’ (*loka*): ‘Just in this very fathom-long cadaver, percipient and endowed with mind, I make known the world, and the arising of the world, and the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world’. (*imasmiṃyeva byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokañca paññapemi lokasamudayañca lokanirodhañca lokanirodhagāminiñca paṭipadan ti*, S I 62.) The *sutta* is closely related to the *Lokantagamana Sutta* (SN 35.116, S IV 93), which further enhances the preceding definition: ‘(That) by which, . . . in the world, one is percipient of the world, one is a conceiver of the world, that is called ‘world’ in the discipline of the Noble One. And by what, . . . in the world, is one percipient of the world, a conceiver of the world? By the eye . . . by the ear . . . by the nose . . . by the tongue . . . by the body . . . by the mental faculty, . . . in the world, one is percipient of the world, a conceiver of the world.’ (*yena kho . . . lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko. kena ca . . . lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī? cakkhunā kho . . . sotena kho . . . ghānena kho . . . jivhāya kho . . . kāyena kho . . . manena kho . . . lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī*. S IV 95.) Cf. also SN 35.23-29 (S IV 15-21) on ‘the All’ (*sabbaṃ*).



‘the world’s limit’ (*loka-anta*)³⁶ takes on a very different meaning. It refers to the attainment of that which is ‘absolutely beyond’ the ‘spatiotemporal world’ as such: that which the ‘world’, and all that it comprises, cannot ‘reach’ or ‘touch’; namely, of course, *Nibbāna*.³⁷ In just this sense, *Nibbāna* is *transcendental* with respect to all phenomena: its nature is such that it is absolutely non-phenomenal.³⁸ The means to attain the ‘world’s limit’, and thus to transcend the world’s inherent and inevitable painfulness, can only be realized through the fully purified and fully liberated consciousness; for consciousness, too, by its very nature, necessarily partakes of the ‘transcendental’, as well as of the ‘transcendent’.

In his later writings, Husserl refers to what he calls ‘the transcendental problem’ (*das transzendente Problem*): a ‘universal’ problem which ‘arises from a general turning around of the natural attitude’.³⁹ As we have just seen in §2.2, the natural attitude assumes that ‘the real world is pre-given to us as self-evidently existing, ever at hand’.⁴⁰ To ‘reverse’ the natural attitude is, in one sense, ‘to put it out of play’:⁴¹ an allusion to the literal sense of the *epokhē* as a ‘suspending’ of that attitude. But it is also, thereby, ‘to compel a new attitude’, which Husserl calls ‘the transcendental’.⁴² This emerges because the philosophical attention is now free to be directed towards ‘the life of consciousness’ (*Bewußtseinsleben*), which the *epokhē* naturally and spontaneously reveals. One becomes aware that ‘the world’, previously taken for granted as simply ‘pre-given’, is in fact something that in every respect ‘appears’ in, has meaning in, and is validated by, that same consciousness.⁴³ Previously, ‘the real world’ had our complete and one-sided attention and concern, and ‘consciousness’ was barely – if at all – noticed, let alone investigated. Now, through the *epokhē*, we are intimately aware of our own consciousness-of ‘the world’, and ‘the world’ is thus radically disclosed as a ‘pure phenomenon’ in our consciousness. But precisely herein resides the interesting ‘transcendental problem’. In his last major but unfinished text, Husserl writes:

The empty generality of the *epokhē* does not of itself clarify anything; it is only the gate of entry through which one must pass in order to be able to discover the new world of pure subjectivity. The actual discovery is a matter of concrete, extremely subtle and differentiated work.⁴⁴

The ‘work’ to which Husserl refers, here, is the ‘transcendental reduction’, which is made possible through the attainment of the ‘transcendental attitude’ of the *epokhē*: ‘a reduction of “the” world to the transcendental phenomenon “world”, a reduction thus also to its correlate,

³⁶ The slight difference in form between the two compounds is no doubt *metri causa*, and not otherwise significant.

³⁷ Cf., e.g., D I 221-223; D III 274; M I 328-330; M III 63; A I 152; A V 106; Ud 9; Ud 80-81; to mention a few key examples. Like Ven. Thanissaro, P. Harvey, and others, I intuit that there must be an essential and necessary ‘transcendental identity’ between *viññāṇa anidassana* and *Nibbāna*.

³⁸ Hence, *Nibbāna* is categorically defined in the *suttas* as the one and only ‘unconstituted element’ (*asaṅkhatā dhātu*, cf. D III 274, M III 63).

³⁹ Husserl 1997, §11, p. 238 (translation modified); Husserl 1962, §11, p. 331: ‘entspringt aus einer allgemeinen Umwendung der natürlichen Einstellung’.

⁴⁰ Husserl 1962, §11, p. 331: ‘ist uns die reale Welt . . . vorgegeben als die selbstverständlich seiende, immerzu vorhandene’.

⁴¹ Husserl 1962, §11, p. 332: ‘außer Spiel zu setzen’.

⁴² Husserl 1997, §11, p. 238 (translation modified); Husserl 1962, §11, p. 332: ‘eine neue [*sc.* Einstellung] erzwingen, die wir die transzendente nennen’.

⁴³ Husserl 1997, §11, p. 239; Husserl 1962, §11, p. 332.

⁴⁴ Husserl 1970b, §71, p. 257 (modified); Husserl 1954, §37, p. 260: ‘Die leere Allgemeinheit der Epoché klärt noch nichts auf, sondern ist nur das Eingangstor, mit dessen Durchschreiten die neue Welt der reinen Subjektivität entdeckt werden kann. Die wirkliche Entdeckung ist Sache der konkreten, höchst diffizilen und differenzierten Arbeit.’

transcendental subjectivity, in and through whose “conscious life” the world . . . attains and always has attained its whole content and ontic validity.⁴⁵ The transcendental reduction clarifies and brings into sharp relief what Husserl had much earlier described as ‘the essential relationship between *transcendental* and *transcendent* being’: ‘this most radical of all ontological distinctions – being *as consciousness* and being as something which becomes “*manifested*” in consciousness, “transcendent” being’.⁴⁶ This correlation engenders profound insights, but also profound questions. Even so, many of these profound questions are, in an important sense, merely secondary or derivative: they are rooted in, and can be traced back to, the truly fundamental ground of the ‘transcendental problem’, which reveals many layers of ‘ascent’ or ‘descent’.⁴⁷

[W]e have become aware of a peculiar split or cleavage, so we may call it, which runs through all our life-process; namely, that between the anonymously functioning subjectivity, which is continuously constructing objectivity for us, and the always, by virtue of the functioning of anonymous subjectivity, pre-given objectivity, the world. The world also includes within it human beings with their minds, with their human conscious life. When we consider the pervasive and unsuspendable relatedness of the pre-given and self-evidently existing world to our functioning subjectivity, humankind and we ourselves appear as intentionally produced formations whose sense of being objectively real and whose verification of being are both self-constituting in subjectivity. Also, the being of the objective . . . has now appeared as a meaning that constitutes itself within consciousness itself.⁴⁸

But even the task of further clarifying and comprehending ‘this correlation between constituting subjectivity and constituted objectivity’⁴⁹ is not yet the deepest expression of the ‘transcendental problem’. Rather, the fundamental matter is that this ‘constituting subjectivity’ in no sense whatsoever actually ‘appears’ within the ‘constituted objective world’. For, even our own bodies, our sensations, our emotions, and our thoughts are ultimately ‘constituted phenomena’ that ‘appear’ within, and as elements of, ‘the world’: that is to say, they, too, ‘appear’ to our ‘transcendental subjective consciousness’. However, ‘transcendental subjectivity’ does not itself ‘appear’; and, through reflection and analysis, it becomes quite evident that, in principle, it would be a sheer countersense to expect or to suppose that it could or should in any sense whatsoever

⁴⁵ Husserl 1970b, §42, pp. 151-153; Husserl 1954, §42, p. 154: ‘. . . einer Reduktion „der“ Welt auf das transzendente Phänomen „Welt“ und damit auf ihr Korrelat: die transzendente Subjektivität, in und aus deren „Bewußtseinsleben“ die . . . Welt . . . ihren ganzen Inhalt und ihre Seinsgeltung gewinnt und immer schon gewonnen hat’.

⁴⁶ Husserl 1982, §76, p. 171; Husserl 1976, §76, p. 159: ‘[die] Wesensbeziehung zwischen *transzendentelem* und *transcendentem* Sein’; ‘dieser radikalsten aller Seinsunterscheidungen - Sein *als Bewußtsein* und Sein als sich im Bewußtsein „*bekundendes*“, „transzendentes“ Sein’.

⁴⁷ Husserl uses metaphors both of ‘ascent’ and ‘descent’ for the process of the reduction. Cf., e.g., Husserl 1997, §13, p. 245; 1970b, §42, p. 153, an allusion to Goethe, *Faust*, Part II, Act I, Sc. 5 (where, indeed, we read: ‘Sink down (descend), then! I could also say: Climb (ascend)! / ’Tis all the same.’ (Versinke, denn! Ich könnt’ auch sagen: steige! / ’s ist einerlei.’)

⁴⁸ Husserl 1997, §12, p. 242; Husserl 1962, §12, p. 336: ‘[E]iner eigentümlichen Spaltung, so können wir uns auch ausdrücken, waren wir innegeworden, die durch unser ganzes Leben hindurchgeht, nämlich zwischen der anonym fungierenden, der immerfort Objektivität für uns konstituierenden Subjektivität und zwischen der jeweils und vermöge dieses Fungierens vorgegebenen Objectivität, der Welt. In sich faßt diese Welt auch die Menschen mit ihren Seelen, ihrem menschlichen Bewußtseinsleben. In der Beachtung der durchgängigen und unaufhebbaren Bezogenheit der vorgegebenen Welt, der selbstverständlich daseienden, auf die fungierende Subjektivität, erscheinen die Menschen und wir selbst als intentionale Gebilde, nach dem objektiv-realen Sinn und <ihrer> Seinsgeltung sich in der Subjektivität konstituierend. Auch das . . . Sein des Objektiven erschien als ein im Bewußtsein selbst sich konstituierender Sinn.’

⁴⁹ Husserl 1997, §13, p. 243; Husserl 1962, §13, p. 336: ‘diese Korrelation zwischen konstituierender Subjektivität und konstituierter Objektivität’.

‘appear’, as a phenomenon amongst phenomena. We see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think ‘the world’ and what we identify as our psychophysical ‘selves’ within ‘the world’; but that subjective consciousness-of in dependence upon which we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think can never itself appear as an ‘object’ or ‘phenomenon’. It is not itself anything ‘in the world’; yet, there would be no ‘appearing’ of ‘the world’ without it. For this reason, above all others, Husserl refers to it as ‘transcendental’: it is ‘beyond’ or ‘above’⁵⁰ all that ‘appears’ – i.e., the ‘physical’ and ‘mental’ ‘world’-phenomena – and yet it is also the ‘limit’ of ‘the world’: for, ‘the world’ cannot ‘appear’ without it, and is inseparably correlated with it. For these same reasons, however, ‘transcendental subjectivity’, or what Husserl also calls the ‘transcendental ‘I’’, is essentially empty, in itself, of all ‘phenomenal content’.

3. Intentionality and subjectivity: irreducible properties of ‘consciousness-of’

What the *epokhē* and the transcendental reduction reveal, first of all, is the apodictic (i.e., self-evident and self-proving) fact of consciousness itself; more specifically, they reveal that consciousness is inherently and fundamentally a *consciousness-of...* This quality of being *conscious-of...* is called ‘intentionality’.⁵¹ The common sense of the word, ‘intend’, i.e., ‘to have a purpose in mind’,⁵² is included within the wider and deeper phenomenological sense of ‘intentionality’, but only as one possible kind of ‘intentional’ mode or act. The essential sense of phenomenological ‘intending’, of intentionality as such, refers to the way in which consciousness is ‘turned’ or ‘directed’ towards what it is conscious-of; and, moreover, the way in which consciousness thereby gives ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ (*Sinn*) to all that it is conscious-of, even purely through the act of being conscious-of it.

It is not accidental that Buddhaghosa, in explicating the compound *nāmarūpa*, defines the term *nāma*, which literally means ‘name’, as though it were derived from the verb *namati*, ‘to bend, to direct’: ‘[A]ll that should be defined as “mentality” (*nāma*) in the sense of bending (*namana*) because of its bending on to the object.’⁵³ This is not sound etymology; but I think it is fairly obvious that Buddhaghosa was trying to express and justify a sound phenomenological intuition through this word play. Voicing the same intuition, the commentary to this passage says: ‘Bending in the direction of the object means that there is no occurrence without an object; it is in the sense of that sort of bending. . .’⁵⁴ Here, ‘bending in the direction of the object’ is, in the Pāli, literally: ‘bending or inclining with the face towards the object’ (*ārammaṇa-abhimukha-namaṇaṃ*).

⁵⁰ The words ‘transcendent’, ‘transcendental’, and the verb ‘transcend’ (doing service for both of the former senses) derive from the Latin *trānscondere*: *trāns*, ‘across, through, beyond’ + *scandere*, ‘to climb’. A precise Pāli correlate would be *atikkamati*: *ati*, ‘over, above’ + *kamati*, ‘step, walk, go, walk, progress’ (cf. Cone 2001, p. 60.1-2); but the more usual form found in the EB *suttas*, with the technical sense of ‘transcending’ (in the context of the four higher meditative states, or *arūpa jhānas*) is *samatikkamati* (as a gerund, *samatikkamma*) where the prefix *saṃ-* functions as an intensifier, with the sense ‘thoroughly, fully, perfectly’ (cf. Rhys Davids and Stede 1998, p. 655.2; Monier-Williams 1993, p. 1152.1).

⁵¹ From the Latin *intendere*, ‘to stretch forth, give one’s attention to’, from *tendere*, ‘to stretch’.

⁵² This is very close in meaning to *ceteti*, ‘forms an idea in the mind; thinks about, is intent upon; has in mind (to); forms an intention (to); strives mentally for’ (Cone 2010, p. 167.2); and hence to *cetanā*, which could be translated as ‘volitional intent’ (cf. also Cone 2010, p. 164.2, 1.(ii)).

⁵³ Ñāṇamoli 1991, XVIII.3; Vism 587: . . . *sabbampetaṃ ārammaṇābhimukhaṃ namanato namanaṭṭhena nāma nti vavathapetabbaṃ*. I shall leave aside, here, the question of whether ‘mentality’ (or again, ‘mind’) is an appropriate translation of the meaning of the term *nāma* in the compound *nāmarūpa*.

⁵⁴ Ñāṇamoli 1991, XVIII.3, n. 4, citing Pj I 78: . . . *ārammaṇābhimukhanamaṇaṃ ārammaṇena vinā appavatti, tena namanatṭhena*. . .

Of course, what is intended here is the sense in which consciousness is directed towards its ‘object’. This same essential sense can, I believe, be seen in a *sutta* passage such as: ‘See his concentration well developed and his mind well liberated – not bent forward [*abhinataṃ*] and not bent back [*apanataṃ*]. . .’⁵⁵ Here, *abhinata*, ‘bent towards, inclined towards’ is a past participle formed as though from **abhinamati* (*abhi* + *namati*); and ‘*apanata*’, ‘bent away, disinclined, averse’, is the past participle of *apanamati* (*apa* + *namati*).⁵⁶

In revealing consciousness and its intentionality (consciousness-of), the *epokhē* and reduction also reveal, concomitantly, the sense in which consciousness-of is fundamentally characterized by ‘subjectivity’. The fact that ‘consciousness-of’ is consciousness directing – metaphorically ‘stretching’ or ‘extending’ – itself towards its object means that it is *not* its ‘object’; that it is, in a certain sense, *relating itself* to its ‘object’ from ‘within itself’; i.e., from within its own self-evident nature, which is precisely *to be conscious-of*.⁵⁷ This inherent inflection of consciousness-of towards phenomena is precisely that property of consciousness-of to which the term ‘subjectivity’ implicitly refers. In fact, I believe that careful reflection and meditation will reveal that a ‘non-subjective’ consciousness is a phenomenological impossibility, because a consciousness that is not a consciousness-of would be no more than a pure ‘potentiality’ of consciousness.

A very important point that I would like to make clear is that ‘mental acts’ or ‘experiences’ such as ‘feeling’ (*vedanā*), ‘perception’ (*saññā*), or ‘thinking’ (*vitakka-vicāra*; *maññati*), and even advanced meditative states of being purely percipient or aware (*saññī*),⁵⁸ are *inevitably* and *irreducibly* modes of consciousness-of, and are therefore *intrinsically characterized by subjectivity*. The term ‘I’ (*ahaṃ*) is problematic because it is very ambiguous and has several different senses and uses, the most important of which I shall discuss below (cf. §4). However, I argue that, ultimately, all of its various senses must derive from one fundamental and purely experiential fact, which is pre-linguistic: namely, the inherent subjectivity of consciousness-of. Therefore, it is very important to distinguish, on the one hand, between the *purely phenomenological* sense of the term ‘I’ as referring back to ‘pure subjectivity’, which is not a ‘concept’ but a (transcendental) property of conscious experience; and, on the other hand, the manner in which this phenomenological sense – a sense not noticed, let alone comprehended, within the natural attitude – can be turned into, or constituted as (*abhisankhata*), concepts/conceits (*māna*) and underlying tendencies (*anusaya*) such as ‘I am’ (*asmīti*) or ‘I am this’ (*ayam-aham-asmīti*). These are *ontological* concepts, which can only have ‘sense’ if they are taken to refer to something that ‘exists’, ‘manifestly’ or ‘objectively’. For this reason, such concepts/conceits can refer to nothing other than the ‘five clung-to aggregates’ (*pañc-upādāna-kkhandhā*), or to some ideal abstraction that is ultimately derived from these; this

⁵⁵ Bodhi 2000, p. 117. SN 1.38 (S I 39): *passa samādhiṃ subhāvitāṃ cittañca suvimuttaṃ, na cābhinataṃ na cāpanataṃ*. . .

⁵⁶ Cf Cone 2001, pp. 199.1, 164.1.

⁵⁷ Husserl does use the term ‘subject’ (*Subjekt*) in its relation to the ‘object’ (*Objekt*; *Gegenstand*); and sometimes speaks of intentionality in terms of the ‘I-pole’ (*Ichpol*) in its relation to the ‘object-pole’ (*Gegenstandspol*) or ‘counter-pole’ (*Gegenpol*). (Cf., e.g., Husserl 1970b, §50, pp. 170-171; Husserl 1954, §50, pp. 173-174; Husserl 1989, §25, pp. 111-114; Husserl 1952, §25, pp. 105-107). The image of a ‘pole’ or ‘ray’ is significant, because it presupposes that the two ends of the ‘pole’ are inseparable from the ‘pole’ itself; and this is an important aspect of the concept of intentionality of which Husserl was well aware. In any event, I shall consistently avoid the term ‘subject’, for reasons that will become clear in the course of this paper; and will focus, instead, upon the property of ‘subjectivity’.

⁵⁸ Cf., e.g., AN 11.7 (A V 318f.), apparently describing *animitta cetosamādhi* (Harvey 1986, p. 42, reaches the same conclusion). Of the meditator in this *samādhi*, it is said: *saññī ca pana assā ti*, ‘and yet he is percipient (aware)’. (For a translation, cf. Nizamis 2011, AN 11.7 (cf. also AN 11.8), forthcoming).



being the basis of the concept of a permanent *attā* (‘self’, ‘soul’), as an individual and ontologically independent entity. The *phenomenological* understanding of the term ‘I’ has nothing to do with such *ontological* abstractions and positions.

4. The problem

In *Khemaka Sutta*, the Venerable Khemaka says:

Venerable friends, I [*ahaṃ*] do not say “I am” [*‘asmī’ti*] of material form, and I do not say “I am” apart from material form. I do not say “I am” of feeling, and I do not say “I am” apart from feeling; I do not say “I am” of perception, and I do not say “I am” apart from perception; I do not say “I am” of constitutions, and I do not say “I am” apart from constitutions; I do not say “I am” of sense-consciousness,⁵⁹ and I do not say “I am” apart from sense-consciousness. Nevertheless, with respect to these five clung-to aggregates, “I am” is found in me, but I do not regard (them as) “I am this”.⁶⁰

He explains that, even though the five lower fetters may have been abandoned by a noble disciple (*ariya-sāvaka*), ‘with respect to the five aggregates subject to clinging, he has a residual “I am” concept/conceit, an “I am” desire, an “I am” underlying tendency not yet removed’.⁶¹ Khemaka likens this lingering sense of ‘I am’ to the scent of a lotus: one can’t say that the scent belongs to any particular part of the flower; rather, it belongs to the flower as a whole.⁶² However, when the disciple dwells constantly contemplating the growth and decay of the five aggregates, this residual sense of ‘I am’ is eventually uprooted.⁶³ Indeed, at the end of the *sutta* we are told that Khemaka’s mind was freed from the *āsavas* through non-clinging (*anupādāya*).⁶⁴ Thus, Khemaka’s problem was resolved. But ours now commences.

⁵⁹ When the term *viññāṇa* is used specifically in the sense of *viññāṇa-khandha*, I sometimes translate ‘sense-consciousness’: this is in fact the specific definition of *viññāṇa-khandha*. Cf. SN 22.56 (at S III 61): *katamañca, bhikkhave, viññāṇaṃ? chayime, bhikkhave, viññāṇakāyā: cakkhuvīññāṇaṃ, sotavīññāṇaṃ, ghānavīññāṇaṃ, jivhāvīññāṇaṃ, kāyavīññāṇaṃ, manovīññāṇaṃ*. The same definition is given in SN 12.2 (at S II 4) of *viññāṇa* as the third link in the 12-*nidāna* formula of *paṭiccasamuppāda*. In other contexts of the *paṭiccasamuppāda* formula, however, *viññāṇa* is described in terms of the rebirth-process, in which case it cannot be active sense-consciousness, since *nāmarūpa* has not yet developed: cf. DN 15 (at D II 63). On this topic, cf. Wijsekera 1994, §17, pp. 198-200. The term *viññāṇa* also has at least two other senses and usages in the *suttas*: the *viññāṇa* of the ‘immaterial meditative states’ (*arūpa jhānas*), which need not be the *viññāṇa* of an Arahant, but which transcends the material (and hence bodily) sense-spheres; and the sense of *viññāṇaṃ anidassanaṃ anantaṃ sabbatopabhaṃ* (DN 11 (at D I 223); MN 49 (at M II 329)), which may be correlated with *viññāṇa* in the sense of *appatīṭhitaṃ viññāṇaṃ avirūḷhaṃ anabhisañkhacca vimuttaṃ* (e.g., SN 22.53 (at S III 53)) and: *appatīṭhitaṃ ca . . . viññāṇena . . . parinibbuto* (SN 4.23 (at S I 122), SN 22.87 (at S III 124)). (On this topic, cf. Thanissaro 2011, DN 11, fn. 1; MN 49, fn. 9; MN 109, fn. 1. Cf. also fn. 80 below, for references to Harvey 1995.) These various inter-related senses of *viññāṇa* may be understood as differing conditioned and unconditioned affections of ‘intentional consciousness’.

⁶⁰ SN 22.89 (at S III 130): *na khvāhaṃ, āvuso, rūpaṃ ‘asmī’ti vadāmi; napi aññatra rūpā ‘asmī’ti vadāmi. na vedanaṃ... na saññaṃ... na sañkhāre... na viññāṇaṃ ‘asmī’ti vadāmi; napi aññatra viññāṇā ‘asmī’ti vadāmi. api ca me, āvuso, pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu ‘asmī’ti adhigataṃ ‘ayamahasmī’ti na ca samanupassāmi.*

⁶¹ SN 22.89 (at S III 130): *yo ca pañcasu upādānakkhandhesu amusahagato asmīti māno, asmīti chando, asmīti anusayo asamūhato.*

⁶² SN 22.89 (at S III 130): *‘pupphassa gandho’i.*

⁶³ SN 22.89 (at S III 131): *. . . sopi samugghātaṃ gacchati.*

⁶⁴ Along with the minds of sixty other elder monks: SN 22.89 (at S III 132): *. . . saṭṭhimattānaṃ therānaṃ bhikkhūnaṃ anupādāya āsavehi cittāni vimuccisṃsu, āyasmato khemakassa cāti.*

Let me imagine that I had the remarkable good fortune to meet Ven. Khemaka once his residual sense of ‘I am’ was finally removed. I would have liked to inquire, very respectfully, about the nature of his consciousness at that time. From the ample and unambiguous evidence of the *suttas*, I know that there should be no particular technical difficulty in speaking with an Arahant (if we speak the same language): he would be able to see me and hear me; he would understand my questions; and, out of compassion, he might even make an effort to answer them.

I would have liked to say to him: ‘*Bhante*, you have finally eliminated the residual conceit of ‘I am’ from your mind. But now, I am deeply intrigued by the fact that your senses and intellect continue to function perfectly. I also understand that your body is ailing, and that you are experiencing severe physical pain.⁶⁵ These and many other facts demonstrate very clearly to me that you are subjectively and intentionally conscious. I really *do* believe that you have uprooted the residual concept and conceit of ‘I am’. But it is evident, from the way in which your consciousness is functioning, that when you use the word ‘I’, you are not using it merely as a meaningless token for the sake of not disrupting convention. Even though you know that this word ‘I’ cannot refer to the *khandhas* or to anything apart from the *khandhas*, and so cannot refer to any existing entity at all, nevertheless, it seems to me that the word ‘I’ still does have a genuine meaning for you: it refers to the pure subjectivity of your consciousness, your *consciousness-of*. . . You are clearly *conscious-of* me, of the meanings of my words, of the fact that I am asking you about the nature of your own present consciousness; just as much as you are *conscious-of* your bodily pain, and you are *conscious-of* the fact that your mind is fully and finally liberated.⁶⁶ To be *conscious-of* truth, to be *conscious-of* bodily pain: in all cases, to be *conscious-of* necessarily implies to be *subjectively* and *intentionally conscious-of*... This strongly suggests to me that there must be a fundamental difference between the sense of ‘*I am*’, and hence also the sense of ‘self’ (*attā*), which you no longer possess, and the meaning of ‘I’ as neither more nor less than the pure subjectivity of intentional consciousness; without which, there could be no *consciousness-of*... whatsoever; not even for an Arahant.’

The common objection that an Arahant or Tathāgata uses the term ‘I’ merely in accordance with the linguistic conventions of the unenlightened is poorly formulated. But consider the following verses from the *Arahant Sutta* (which are not poorly formulated):

No knots exist for one with conceit abandoned [*pahīna-mānassa*];

For him all knots of conceit [*māna-ganthassa*] are consumed.

Though the wise one has transcended the conceived [*vītivatta*⁶⁷ *maññataṃ*],

He still might say, ‘I speak’ [*ahaṃ vadāmi*’i],

⁶⁵ Cf. SN 22.89 (at S III 127). The *suttas* contain examples of Arahants experiencing severe bodily pain (e.g., if read literally, SN 22.87 (S III 120), SN 35.87 (S IV 55) = MN 144 (M III 263). The Buddha himself, of course, experienced severe bodily pain (cf. SN 1.38 (S I 27), DN 16 (at D II 100); Mil IV.1.8 (Mil 134) cites four cases of injury and illness).

⁶⁶ Cf., e.g., MN 4 (at M I 23): *tassa me evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccittha, bhavāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccittha, avijjāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccittha. vimuttasmiṃ vimuttamiti ñāṇaṃ ahoṣi. ‘khīṇā jāti, vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ, kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyā’ ti abbhāññāsiṃ*. ‘Then, knowing thus, seeing thus, my mind was liberated from the unconscious influence [*āsava*] of sensual desire, from the unconscious influence of being, and from the unconscious influence of ignorance. When it was liberated, there was the knowledge, “It is liberated”. I knew by direct experience [*abbhāññāsiṃ*], “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, no more for being-here.”’

⁶⁷ *vi* + *ati* (emphatic form of *ati*, ‘beyond, over; through’: cf. Cone 2001, p. 59.1) + *vatta* (past participle of *vattati* in the compound *ativattati*, ‘goes beyond, escapes from’ (cf. Cone 2001, p. 69.1). Thus, Bodhi’s rendering, ‘has transcended the conceived’ for *vītivatta maññataṃ*, is, from the TP perspective, an apt translation.



He might say too, ‘They speak to me’ [*mamaṃ vadantī’i*].
 Skilful, knowing the world’s parlance [*loke samaññaṃ*],
 He uses such terms as mere expressions [*vohāra-mattena*].⁶⁸

These verses are spoken in reply to the question whether the Arahant, who is by definition *khīṇāsavo*, ‘one with unconscious influences (*āsavas*) destroyed’, would still be able to speak and to understand the speech of others; and if so, whether this might be because ‘he has come upon conceit [*mānaṃ nu kho so upagamma*]’, which is to say, because he has fallen back upon the conceit/concept ‘I am’ (*asmi-māna*).⁶⁹ For, to be sure, in the *suttas*, Arahants are found to say such things as ‘I eat, I sit; my bowl, my robe’, and other such common, conventional talk.⁷⁰ All that these verses entail is that the Arahant still uses words such as *ahaṃ* and *mama* as the ordinary world uses them, although he has ‘transcended’ their worldly sense. But the commentary’s explanation of the answer to this question takes a somewhat different slant:

Having abandoned talk that presupposes acquisition (of a ‘self’), he does not breach convention, but would speak (in terms of) ‘I and mine’. If he said, ‘The aggregates eat, the aggregates sit, the aggregates’ bowl, the aggregates’ robe’, it is a breach of convention; no one would understand.⁷¹

This interpretation falls back upon the Abhidhamma-based theory of ‘two truths’, which posits two kinds of discourse, the ‘conventionally true’ (*sammuti-sacca*) and the ‘ultimately true’ (*paramattha-sacca*). On that view, the conventionally valid locution is ‘I eat’, etc., whereas the ‘ultimately true’ locution is the technical one, ‘The five aggregates eat’, etc.⁷² Unfortunately, this interpretation completely misses the truly essential point of the problem in question here: for it makes no difference whatsoever whether the Arahant says ‘I eat’ or ‘These five aggregates perform the function of eating’. The truly crucial point is that the Arahant (or, if one prefers, the five aggregates) *can indeed still speak*. Even in this one act itself the entire phenomenological import of subjective intentionality is immediately demonstrated. And since I am prepared to grant that the concept of ‘Arahantship’ is a phenomenologically valid and possible concept, this would entail that even an Arahant devoid of the conceit/concept ‘I am’ is nevertheless *subjectively and intentionally*

⁶⁸ Bodhi 2000, p. 102. SN 1.25 (at S I 14-15): *pahīnamānassa na santi ganthā, | vidhūpitā mānaganthassa sabbe. | sa vītivatto maññatam sumedho, | ahaṃ vadāmītipi so vadeyya. | mamaṃ vadantītipi so vadeyya. | loke samaññaṃ kusalo viditvā. | vohāramattena so vohareyyā’i. ||*

⁶⁹ SN 1.25 (at S I 14).

⁷⁰ Spk I 51: *‘ahaṃ bhuñjāmi, ahaṃ nisīdāmi, mama patto, mama cīvaran’i ādikathāvohāraṃ*. Cf. Bodhi 2000, p. 360, n. 48.

⁷¹ Spk I 51: The passage continues: ‘Therefore, having spoken thus, he expresses (himself) by means of worldly ways of speech.’ [*attā-]upaladdhinissitakathaṃ hitvā vohārabhedam akaronto ‘ahaṃ, mamā’i vadeyya. ‘khandhā bhuñjanti, khandhā nisīdanti, khandhānaṃ patto, khandhānaṃ cīvaran’i hi vutte vohārabhedo hoti, na koci jānāti. tasmā evaṃ avatvā lokavohārena voharatīti*. Cf. Bodhi 2000, p. 360, n. 49. Cf. also MN 74 (at M I 500): *evaṃ vimuttacitto kho . . . bhikkhu na kenaci samvadati, na kenaci vivadati, yañca loke vuttam tena voharati, aparāmasan’i* ‘A bhikkhu with mind thus liberated does not agree with anyone, does not dispute with anyone; what is spoken in the world, that he expresses, without holding on (to it).’

⁷² Cf. Nārada 1975, p. 7, for a classical modern representation of this Abhidhamma view. There may be a certain basis in the *suttas* for an *absolute* distinction between a singular and absolute truth, transcending speech and thought, on the one hand, and, on the other, *all* forms of ‘speech and thought’, even the ‘technical speech and thought’ of the Dhamma itself. (Cf. the simile of the raft: MN 22 at M I 134-135; MN 38 at M I 260-261; cf. also, e.g., Sn 4.12 (Sn 172): *ekañhi saccam na dutīyamatti*, ‘The truth is one; there is no second.’) But there is arguably no basis in the *suttas* for a *relative* distinction between an ‘absolute technical conceptual truth’ (the ‘real truth’ of the reductionist categories and concepts of the Abhidhamma) and ‘worldly, conventional truth’ (which by comparison becomes no ‘truth’ at all).

conscious. Therefore, there must be a *fundamental distinction* to be elucidated between *asmi-māna* and the *phenomenological* import of the term *ahaṃ*.

Another possible objection might be that this purely subjective sense of ‘I’ – as distinct from the ‘I am’ conceit – is somehow merely a natural by-product of the activity of *mano*, the ‘mental faculty’, sixth of the six sense faculties (*indriyas*). This might seem plausible, since *mano* is defined as the ‘refuge’ (*paṭisaraṇa*) of the five bodily senses: ‘*Mano* is (their) refuge, *mano* experiences their field and range.’⁷³ In addition, *mano* experiences its own field and range of purely ‘mental’ or ‘ideal’ objects (*dhammas*). *Mano* thus functions as the unifying synthesis of the six sense-consciousnesses constituting *viññāṇa-khandha*. Might not the sense of the ‘I’ be a mere by-product of this synthetic function of *mano*?

There are perhaps several reasons why this hypothesis cannot be sustained, but I need mention only one of these reasons here because, even by itself, it is as fundamentally decisive as it is simple and self-evident: namely, that the synthetic functions of *mano* would not even be *possible* unless intentional subjectivity is already presupposed. The functions of *mano* include, on the one hand, ‘simple’ acts of feeling, perception and conception; and, on the other, more ‘complex’ acts of cognitive synthesis (e.g., judgments such as ‘The proposition ‘All phenomena are impermanent’ is demonstrably true’).⁷⁴ Both of these types of activities presuppose a mental structure of intentional subjectivity as their unifying principle: that structure cannot be *derived* from the acts themselves; rather, the acts are only possible if that structure is already in place. Every kind of mental act (or *noesis*) has a definite structure of intentional subjectivity directed towards its ‘objects’; and, in that sense, a noetic act also *constitutes* its ‘objects’ through specific kinds of ‘object-meanings’ (*noemas*). There is a strong correlation, here, with the function of *manasikāra*,⁷⁵ which may be

⁷³ SN 48.42 (at S V 218): *mano paṭisaraṇaṃ, mano eva nesam gocaravisayaṃ paccamubhoti*. (So also MN 43 (at M I 295).)

⁷⁴ Such rational judgments must surely belong to the functions of *mano*. Although they clearly presuppose an intuitive sense of ‘truth’, they are conceived and expressed linguistically and logically, and can thus be distinguished from purely intuitive and immediate recognitions of ‘truth’, which in EB are ascribed to ‘wisdom’ (*paññā*) and the ‘wisdom-eye’ (*paññācakkhu*). Thus in MN 43 (at M I 293), it is asked, ‘What can be known by purified *manoviññāṇa*, released from the five sense faculties?’ (*nissatṭhena... pañcahi indriyehi parisuddhena manoviññāṇena kiṃ neyyan’ti?*). The answer is the first three of the four higher meditative states (which the commentaries call *arūpāni jhānāni*, ‘immaterial meditative states’). *Mano* is implicitly contrasted to the wisdom-eye: ‘A *dhamma* that can be understood, friend, is (clearly) known by the wisdom-eye. ... Wisdom, friend, is for the purpose of direct knowledge, for the purpose of full knowledge, for the purpose of abandoning.’ (*neyyaṃ kho, āvuso, dhammaṃ paññācakkhunā pajānāti ... paññā kho, āvuso, abhiññatthā pariññatthā pahānatthā ti*.) I would argue that any ‘intuition of truth’ whatsoever – whether via *mano* or via *paññācakkhu* – is *necessarily* a mental act presupposing intentional subjectivity, and that no ‘intuition of truth’ (no ‘intuition’ of any kind at all) can occur independently of such a structure of subjectivity. This, then, might also serve as a second argument against the hypothesis that the ‘I’ might be a by-product of *manindriya*; for, according to EB, ‘intuitions of truth’ can occur at a level of consciousness (e.g., the level of *paññācakkhu*) that is supposed to be beyond the scope of *mano*.

⁷⁵ Literally, *manasikaroti* means ‘doing or making (*karoti* < √kr) in the mental faculty (*manasi*)’, and *manasikāra* is an abstract neuter noun of action formed from the same root (*manasi* + *kāra* < √kr). It is often translated as ‘attention’, but I think that it (also) more strongly implies a sense of ‘intending towards’, and even, in some contexts, of ‘intentionally constituting’. Thus, e.g., in the formulaic clause, *sabbanimittānaṃ amanasikārā animittaṃ cetosamādhim upasampajja viharati* (SN 41.7, at S IV 297), I think *amanasikāra* is not mere ‘non-attention’, but implies a conscious meditative inhibition, withdrawal, or suspension of intentional functions (i.e., of *intending* towards ‘objects’, and of *intentionally constituting* ‘object-meanings’). I do not believe that mere ‘non-attention’ would be sufficient for attaining an ‘objectless’ (‘non-noematic’) concentration of mind, which the *suttas* identify as subsequent to the ‘sphere of neither perception nor non-perception’ (cf. MN 121, at M III 107-108), and thus second only to the ‘cessation of perception and feeling’. Indeed, this would explain why it is said (in the same passage) of a *bhikkhu* experiencing *animitta cetosamādhī: so evaṃ pajānāti: ‘ayampi kho animitto cetosamādhī abhisāṅkhato abhisāñcetaṃ’*. ‘He (clearly) knows thus: ‘This objectless concentration of mind is [sc. intentionally] constituted and volitionally intended.’’ These matters are discussed in detail in other texts that I am currently in the process of writing.

directed towards (or away from), and also constitute (or not constitute), its ‘objects’ and ‘object-meanings’ or *nimittas*.⁷⁶

At this point, it may be helpful to clarify further the ‘problems’ underlying the sense and usage of the term ‘I’. An example from Wittgenstein may serve as a starting point. Wittgenstein noticed what he called ‘two different cases in the use of the word ‘I’ (or ‘my’), which he called ‘the use as object’ and ‘the use as subject’:⁷⁷

Examples of the first kind of use are these: ‘My arm is broken’, ‘I have grown six inches’, ‘I have a bump on my forehead’, ‘The wind blows my hair about’. Examples of the second kind are: ‘I see so-and-so’, ‘I hear so-and-so’, ‘I try to lift my arm’, ‘I think it will rain’, ‘I have a toothache’.⁷⁸

Wittgenstein takes the ‘object sense’ of the word ‘I’ to refer to the body: that particular body that each of us calls ‘my body’, and which other people can also see, hear, and touch, for example. He goes on to say that this ‘object sense’ of ‘I’ is fallible: it is quite conceivable, for example, that I could, under some peculiar circumstance, visually mistake someone else’s arm for my own. In this way, he illustrates a distinction between the ‘object’ and the ‘subject’ sense of ‘I’. For, it seems nonsensical to suppose that I could mistake a feeling of pain in my arm to be *someone else’s* pain; or for someone to ask me, ‘Are you sure it’s *you* who feels the pain, and not someone else?’⁷⁹ But what does this distinction really imply?

Even though Wittgenstein says (correctly) that it is conceivable that I could mistake an objectively appearing part of someone else’s body as my own, one must point out that it would be just as nonsensical to doubt that it is *I who see* that body – whosoever it might be, or even if it happens to be a hallucination – as it would be to doubt that it is *I who feel* a pain. Wittgenstein’s distinction is useful, but misleading, because it crosses unwittingly between three phenomenologically distinct categories: subjective *consciousness-of*; subjective or immanent phenomena (e.g., *what I actually see*, *what I actually feel*); and intersubjective ‘transcendent’ objects (e.g., my body and the bodies of others, as ‘objects’ in the ‘objective’ world). But at least Wittgenstein was alert to a certain interesting distinction within the ordinary sense and function of

⁷⁶ In the context of EB, the term *nimitta* is usually translated as ‘sign’, and in some contexts as ‘ground’, ‘reason’ or ‘cause’. (Cf., e.g., Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009; Bodhi 2000; Ñāṇamoli 1991. Thanissaro translates as ‘impression’ or ‘theme’, depending on context; cf., e.g., Thanissaro 2011, SN 8.4 (S I 188), SN 22.3 (at S III 10) For a useful survey of its range of meaning, cf. Harvey 1986, §V, pp. 31-33. Harvey (p. 33) concludes: ‘[*Nimitta*] is a delimited object of attention, that may, or should be taken as indicating something beyond itself or the general features of that to which it belongs.’). In my own work, the term *nimitta* has been correlated with the TP concept of *noema* (a correlation that requires a fairly detailed explanation and, no doubt, justification, which are provided elsewhere); that is why, for example, I sometimes refer to *animitta cetosamādhī* as an “objectless” or “non-noematic” concentration of mind”.

⁷⁷ Bischof-Köhler points out (1991, p. 253, referring to W. James [1892] 1961, *Psychology: The Briefer Course*, Harper and Row, New York) that James had already written of this distinction in 1892, contrasting the sense of the ‘Me’, in which one experiences oneself as an ‘object’ (of experience), and the sense of the ‘I’, in which one experiences oneself as the ‘subject’ (of experience).

⁷⁸ Wittgenstein 1958, pp. 66-67. This distinction is phenomenologically valid and useful. As we shall see, Husserl effectively makes just the same distinction, but from the perspective of TP, which differs in very important ways from Wittgenstein’s perspective upon and analysis of this distinction.

⁷⁹ Cf. Wittgenstein 1958, p. 67. Wittgenstein thinks of this distinction in terms of the rules of a ‘language-game’. From a TP perspective, however, we must examine the ‘pre-linguistic’ aspects of subjectivity and intentionality, for which Wittgenstein’s ‘language-game’ theory cannot really account. Furthermore, an interesting and phenomenologically important question is raised by the possibility of ‘knowing another’s mind’ (cf., e.g., SN 16.9, at S II 213).

the word ‘I’: sometimes, we use it to refer to a particular *body*, namely, the one we think of as ‘our own’; and sometimes we use it to refer to our *subjective consciousness-of* whatever we are conscious-of.

Unlike the physical body, however, we cannot point to our subjective consciousness-of, or make it appear or manifest itself in any other way. In this sense, by definition, it is properly ‘transcendental’: i.e., it is not anything phenomenal, something that *could* ‘appear’, whether to ourselves or to others. What ‘appears’ is just what ‘manifests’ itself, what we are conscious-of as a ‘phenomenon’ in any of the modes of the ‘six sense spheres’ (*saḷāyatana*) of consciousness (*viññāṇa*).⁸⁰ On the other hand, we also cannot doubt that we *are* subjectively *conscious-of*; so, this ‘transcendental’ *consciousness-of* is something that we just *know*, immediately and apodictically, because, in any final analysis, when it comes to our own consciousness-of, *what* we know is just the fact *that* we know. This is the one thing about which, in principle, no conscious being could possibly be mistaken.⁸¹ This, in effect, is the result of the *epokhē* and of what Husserl calls the ‘transcendental reduction’.

Husserl says that the *epokhē* and reduction lead us back to ‘absolute intentional consciousness’, and to the function of the ‘I’ as the pure subjectivity of that consciousness. He recognizes that this pure subjectivity is phenomenologically distinct from all that it is conscious-of: that includes, of course, the body, but also all sensations, thoughts, and emotions that appear as phenomena or experiences of that consciousness-of. For this reason, he distinguishes between what he calls the ‘empirical I’ and this pure, transcendental subjectivity. The ‘empirical I’ is that ‘objective’ or phenomenal ‘self’ constituted out of the appearances of ‘my own body’, ‘my thoughts’, ‘my feelings’, and so on, which, as a complex psychophysical ‘entity’, belongs within, and is an inextricable part of, the ‘objective’ and intersubjective ‘world’. We can see, then, that Husserl’s concept of the ‘empirical I’ is similar to Wittgenstein’s ‘object sense’ of the ‘I’, but it is much more inclusive: it includes *all* those phenomena, ‘physical’ *or* ‘mental’, which are taken to constitute the psychophysical person who lives and acts within, and as part of, the ‘world’. Of course, what Husserl has distinguished in this way is, in fact, the five clung-to aggregates (*pañc-upādāna-kkhandhā*), which the ‘ordinary worldling’ (*assutavā puthujjana*), the person in the ‘natural attitude’, assumes to be their ‘self’ (*attā*).

Correlatively, Husserl also recognizes that the pure subjectivity of consciousness-of is utterly *non-phenomenal*: there is *nothing* about it that could possibly ‘appear’. Therefore, it is not a ‘thing’, nor even remotely *like* any ‘thing’. It is more like a ‘no-thing’, a ‘nothing’. Indeed, it

⁸⁰ As is perhaps well known, in its Greek philosophical origins, the *phainomenon* is that which is caused to appear or which reveals itself (*phainesthai*) in the light (*phaos*); and this means, fundamentally, that which appears ‘in the light of the mind’. (Cf., e.g., Heidegger 2001, ¶7, pp. 49-63 (1993, ¶7, pp. 27-39) for a thoughtful account.) The common Indo-European root of these Greek terms is $\sqrt{bhā}$ (cf., e.g., Hofmann 1994, pp. 464-465, 467), a root which appears also in Sanskrit and Pāli (as both $\sqrt{bhā}$ and $\sqrt{bhās}$), with the same meaning: ‘to shine, be bright; shine forth, appear’, etc. (cf. Monier-Williams 1993, pp. 750.3-751.1, 755.3-756.1). This root is evident in EB descriptions of *citta*, ‘mind’, as *pabhassara*, ‘brightly shining’ (e.g., *pabhassaram idaṃ . . . cittam*, AN i.49-52, at A I 10); and, still more importantly, in the descriptions of *viññāṇa anidassana*, ‘non-manifestive consciousness’, as *sabbato pabham*, ‘shining or luminous all round (in all directions)’ (DI223; MII329). (For more details on *pabhassara citta*, cf. Harvey 1995, §§10.20-25, pp. 166-170, §§10.31-35, pp. 173-176; on *viññāṇa anidassana*, cf. *ibid.*, §§12.3ff., pp. 198ff.)

⁸¹ The significance of this result should be understood in the sense of Husserl’s TP, rather than in the incomplete and flawed sense of Descartes’ *cogito*. For Husserl’s lucid and important exposition of why Descartes’ came so close, yet failed to recognize the true (properly phenomenological) meaning and implications of the *cogito*, cf. Husserl 1970b, §§17-18, pp. 75-81; Husserl 1954, §§17-18, pp. 76-83.



really is like a kind of ‘emptiness’⁸² – *except* that it is evidently a consciousness-of, and therefore also a source of mental acts. It is for this reason that Husserl calls it the transcendental or ‘pure I’ (*das reine Ich*). In German orthography, the ordinary first-person pronoun *ich* is clearly distinguishable from the noun-form *Ich*; and Husserl virtually makes a technical term of the noun, *das (reine) Ich*, to name the fact of the pure subjectivity of consciousness-of. But Husserl is aware of a difficulty here, when he writes:

The ‘I’ [*das Ich*] that I [*ich*] attain in the *epokhē* . . . is actually called ‘I’ [„*Ich*“] only by equivocation – though it is an essential equivocation since, when I [*ich*] name it in reflection, I can say nothing other than: it is I [*ich*] who practice the *epokhē*, I who interrogate, as phenomenon, the world. . .⁸³

This ‘essential equivocation’ is in fact an essential *indication* pointing towards what is truly at the basis of the problem of the ‘I’.

On the one hand, pure subjectivity – which Husserl calls, by way of a certain inevitable equivocation, the ‘pure I’, also ‘the experiencing I’⁸⁴ – apart from its nature as consciousness-of, and as a source of acts, ‘is completely empty of essence-components, has no explicable content, is undescribable in and for itself; it is pure ‘I’ and nothing more’.⁸⁵ As pure, subjective consciousness-of, it is phenomenologically quite distinct from all phenomena of which it is conscious, including those constituting the ‘phenomenal person’ through which it ‘lives and experiences’ (*erlebt*).⁸⁶ On the other hand, if it were somehow possible to sever the apparently inseparable unity of this subjective consciousness-of and the phenomena of which it is conscious, that consciousness-of would

⁸² Cf., e.g., Husserl 1982, §80, p. 191; *ibid.*, §57, pp. 132-133 (where he likens the phenomenological ‘I’ to ‘a transcendental nothing [*einem transzendentalen Nichts*]’); Husserl 1980, §24, p. 110; *ibid.*, §24, p. 111; Husserl 1970b, §43, p. 155; *ibid.*, §55, p. 187.

⁸³ Husserl 1970b, §54b, p. 184; Husserl 1954, §54, p. 188: ‘Das Ich, das ich in der Epoché erreiche . . . heißt eigentlich nur durch Äquivokation „Ich“, obschon es eine wesensmäßige Äquivokation ist, da, wenn ich es reflektierend benenne, ich nicht anders sagen kann als: ich bin es, ich der Epoché-Übende, ich, der die Welt . . . als Phänomen befrage. . .’.

⁸⁴ Husserl 1976a, §80, p. 179: ‘das erlebende Ich’.

⁸⁵ Husserl 1982, §80, p. 191 (translation modified); Husserl 1976a, §80, p. 179: ‘. . . ist es völlig leer an Wesenskomponenten, es hat gar keinen explikablen Inhalt, es ist an und für sich unbeschreiblich: reines Ich und nichts weiter.’ Note that, in all quotations from English translations of Husserl, wherever the term ‘ego’ occurs in the translation, I have modified it to ‘I’ or ‘the ‘I’’, corresponding to ‘*Ich*’ and ‘*das Ich*’, wherever the latter occur in Husserl’s original German text. The term ‘ego’, which is of course just the first-personal pronoun in Latin and Greek (*egō*), in modern English connotes something ‘objective’, rather than ‘subjective’; it does not really evoke a *first-personal* sense, as does the word ‘I’. Moreover, the term ‘ego’ has attracted many connotations (e.g., from popular psychology and psychoanalysis) that are quite irrelevant to TP.

⁸⁶ The transitive verb *erleben* means ‘to experience’, and is formed by the prefix *er-* (which has no meaning in itself) added to the intransitive verb *leben*, ‘to live’. The connection between *leben* and *erleben* can be expressed in English: as when someone might say, ‘I know *exactly* what it was like: I *lived* it!’ Here, ‘lived’, of course, means ‘to experience directly, personally’. The noun *das Erlebnis*, ‘experience’, formed by adding the suffix *-nis* (designating the result of an action) to the verb stem of *erleben*, becomes a technical term for Husserl. He specifically thematises the relationship between ‘pure consciousness’ (*reines Bewußtsein*) and its ‘pure correlates’ (*reinen Bewußtseinskorrelaten*) as a temporal process. Thus, Kersten (Husserl 1982) has translated *Erlebnis* as ‘mental process’, while Cairns (Husserl 1970a) translates it as ‘subjective process’. Husserl writes: ‘In itself, every mental process is a flux of becoming . . .; it is a continuous flow of retentions and protentions mediated by a flowing phase of originarity itself in which there is consciousness of the living now of the mental process in contradistinction to its ‘before’ and ‘after’.’ Husserl 1982, §78, p. 179. (‘Jedes Erlebnis ist in sich selbst ein Fluß des Werdens . . .; ein beständiger Fluß von Retentionen und Protentionen vermittelt durch eine selbst fließende Phase der Originarität, in der das lebendige Jetzt des Erlebnisses gegenüber seinem „Vorhin“ und „Nachher“ bewußt wird.’ Husserl 1976a, §78, p. 167.)

lose all possible definition; so, too, correlatively, would the phenomena, because a phenomenon is, by definition, what appears to consciousness-of, in the way that it appears. Thus, we would apparently end up with two virtual ‘nothingnesses’.

Even so, there would still be one fundamental difference here. The phenomenon ultimately depends on consciousness-of for its appearance, although this does *not* mean that consciousness-of *creates* the phenomenon. A phenomenon is, in effect, an essential aspect of an act of cognition; and that cognition may be of something that ‘transcends’ (‘extends beyond’) any momentary subjective act of consciousness-of: e.g., a ‘physical object’ in the intersubjective ‘physical region’, or a ‘mathematical object’ in the ‘ideal region’. Consciousness-of *constitutes* the phenomenon precisely because the phenomenon is inseparable from the intentional act cognizing the ‘object’.⁸⁷ But the phenomenon is *not* merely an image ‘representing’ an ‘object’ hidden behind it: rather, it is the direct but intentionally constituted cognition of the ‘object itself’. In fact, it follows from this that the ‘object’ can have no ultimate, hidden, non-phenomenal ‘essence’ of its own: what the ‘object’ ‘is’ is only ever expressed through the modes of its appearances to consciousness-of.

By contrast, consciousness-of does not depend upon the phenomenon for its own intrinsic property of ‘*being conscious*’ or ‘*being aware*’. It ought to be apodictically evident, in reflection, that the phenomena that appear to consciousness-of cannot be the *cause* of the consciousness-of that cognizes them. On the other hand, one may certainly ask whether a consciousness-of deprived *absolutely* of all phenomenality would still be any kind of ‘consciousness-of’.

In the *Mahānidāna Sutta*, the Buddha provides a neat refutation of the notion of ‘self’ (*attā*) as relative to the experience of ‘feeling’ (*vedanā*). Three ways of regarding ‘self’ (*atta-samanupassanā*) are defined; but, for our purposes, we can legitimately reduce these down to two mutually exclusive ideas: (1) feeling is the self (the self is identical with feeling); (2) feeling is not the self (the self is separate from and independent of feeling). The first notion is denied on the basis that all feeling is ‘impermanent, constituted, dependently co-arisen, subject to destruction, decay, fading away, and cessation’.⁸⁸ The conclusion is: ‘Therefore, here, because of this, it is not acceptable to consider: ‘Feeling is my self’.’⁸⁹ The second notion is denied by means of two expressions of the same argument, framed as rhetorical questions: ‘Where feeling altogether is not, could there be, there, (the thought) ‘I am’?’ Of course, the answer is: ‘Certainly not, Venerable Sir.’⁹⁰ And again: ‘If all feeling were to cease completely in every way, without remainder, then with the complete non-being of feeling, because of the cessation of feeling, could there be, there, (the thought) ‘I am this’?’ Again, of course, the answer must be: ‘Certainly not, Venerable Sir.’⁹¹ These refutations of both (1) and (2) constitute an exhaustive dilemmatic refutation of a permanent, independently existing ‘self’ (*attā*), given that ‘self’ cannot be identified with feeling, but nor can it be identified with anything other than feeling. The Buddha concludes with the following deeply significant statement:

⁸⁷ I have argued elsewhere that the expression ‘to constitute intentionally’, can be very closely correlated with concepts such as *sañkharoti* and *abhisañkharoti* in EB, especially when these are comprehended from a TP perspective.

⁸⁸ DN 15 (at D II 66-67): . . . *aniccā sañkhatā paṭiccasamuppannā khayadhammā vayo-dhammā virāgadhammā nirodhadhammā*.

⁸⁹ DN 15 (at D II 67): *tasmātiha . . . etena petaṃ nakkhamati ‘vedanā me attā’i samanupassituṃ*.

⁹⁰ DN 15 (at D II 67): *‘yattha pana . . . sabbaso vedayitaṃ natthi api nu kho, tattha ‘asmī’i siyā’i? ‘no hetam, bhante’*.

⁹¹ DN 15 (at D II 67): *‘vedanā ca hi . . . sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam aparisesā nirujjheyuṃ, sabbaso vedanāya asati vedanānirodhā api nu kho tattha ‘ayamahasmī’i siyā’i? ‘no hetam, bhante’*.



[W]hen a bhikkhu does not consider feeling as self, and does not consider self as without experience of feeling, and does not consider ‘My self feels; for my self is subject to feeling’ – then, being without such considerations he does not cling to anything in the world. Not clinging, he is not agitated. Not being agitated, he personally attains Nibbāna.⁹²

5. The ‘I’ (*ahaṃ*) in meditation: a prolegomenon

The removal of the concept/conceit ‘I am’: that, verily, is the ultimate bliss!⁹³

In the *Vivekaja Sutta*, Sāriputta says to Ānanda: ‘I [*ahaṃ*] entered and dwelt in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by thought and examination, with rapture and happiness born of seclusion. Yet, friend, it did not occur to me, “I am attaining the first *jhāna*”, or “I have attained the first *jhāna*”, or “I have emerged from the first *jhāna*”. Ānanda thinks: ‘It must be because I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to conceit have been thoroughly uprooted in the Venerable Sāriputta for a long time that such thoughts did not occur to him.’⁹⁴

Once we recognize that the *phenomenological* sense of the term ‘I’ can, and must, be radically distinguished from constituted *ontological* senses such as ‘*asmī’ti*’, ‘*ayam-aham-asmī’ti*’, and *attā*; and once we thereby also recognize that the phenomenological meaning of the term ‘I’ is grounded in the pre-linguistic intentionality of consciousness, and therefore cannot be dismissed as a mere linguistic convention; then, it becomes decidedly *unproblematic* to focus upon an inquiry into the question of the sense of the ‘I’ (*ahaṃ*) in meditation. For, what we are now focusing upon is the question of the intrinsic subjectivity of consciousness-of, an apodictic fact that is entirely unrelated to *asmi-māna-anusaya*, *ahaṅkāra* and *mamaṅkāra*, and thus does not in any sense conflict with the EB axiom of *anattā*. These are recognitions that are most effectively accomplished in the transcendental attitude of the *epokhē* or *pahāna*; and, in particular, by means of the methods of reflection and meditation. It is from within this perspective, and with the aid of these methods, that an inquiry into the ‘I’ of meditation really must proceed.

⁹² Bodhi 2010, p. 70. DN 15 (at D II 68): *yato kho . . . bhikkhu neva vedanaṃ attānaṃ samanupassati, nopi appaṭisaṃvedanaṃ attānaṃ samanupassati, nopi ‘attā me vediyati, vedanādhammo hi me attā’ti samanupassati. so evaṃ na samanupassanto na ca kiñci loke upādiyati, anupādiyamāṇaṃ paritassati, aparitassam paccattaññeva parinibbāyati. . .*

⁹³ Ud 2.1 (Ud 10): *asmimānassa yo vinayo, etaṃ ve paramaṃ sukhanti*. This statement is uttered by the Buddha after his emergence from what seems to have been *nirodha samāpatti*. Cf. also AN 9.34 (A IV 414): ‘This Nibbāna is blissful, friends. This Nibbāna is blissful, friends. . . . Just that, here, friends, is blissful: where the felt is not (where nothing is felt!)’ *sukhamidaṃ, āvuso, nibbānaṃ. sukhamidaṃ, āvuso, nibbānaṃ . . . etadeva khvettha, āvuso, sukhaṃ yadettha natthi vedayitaṃ*. Note that such ‘bliss’ is supposed to be ‘known’ or ‘experienced’ as a *result* of the erasure of the ‘I am’ conceit/concept and of the cessation of ‘the felt’ (*vedayita*). Again, I must reiterate the irreducible principle that, where there is any ‘knowing’ or ‘experiencing’ of any kind at all, there is also (*necessarily*) ‘subjective consciousness-of’ (these being two aspects of one and the same fact). On the other hand, however, the terms ‘subjectivity’ and ‘subject’ definitely *do not* have the same meaning and implications. (This point is further clarified in the concluding Section §6 of the present paper.)

⁹⁴ Bodhi 2000, p. 1015. SN 28.1 (S III 235-236): ‘*idhāhaṃ, āvuso, vivicca kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharāmi. tassa mayhaṃ, āvuso, na evaṃ hoti: ‘ahaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ samāpajjāmi’ti vā ‘ahaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ samāpanno’ti vā ‘ahaṃ paṭhamā jhānā vuṭṭhito’ti vā’ti. ‘tathā hi paṇāyasmato sārīputtassa dīgharattaṃ ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayā susamūhatā. tasmā āyasmato sārīputtassa na evaṃ hoti . . .’ti.*

The *epokhē* or *pahāna*, combined with reflective or meditative reduction, reveal (1) the apodicticity of awareness, (2) of intentionality, (3) of subjectivity, and (4) the intuitional nature of ‘truth’; they disclose (5) the true origin and meaning of the sense of ‘being’; (6) they awaken the phenomenological recognition that the ‘pure ‘I’’ and the pure ‘Now’ are really but two aspects of, or two ways of focusing upon, one and the same structure, thus opening up the problem of the relation between the ‘I’ and temporality in a radically potent and profound way; and they also disclose (7) the basis of the possibility of ‘volition’ and ‘agency’. Within the limited space of this present paper, only the first three of these themes have been touched upon, all too briefly; the fourth has been referred to in passing; the fifth, sixth, and seventh themes are to be discussed in other writings. However, a brief word, here, concerning the seventh theme might be useful for the present discussion.

Although I have not, so far, explicitly mentioned the question of agency, it is in a sense already implicit within the basic concept of the ‘mental act’; and in fact explicit in the capacity of intentional subjectivity to turn its intentional attention toward or away from its ‘objects’, and even to suspend its intentional attention from such ‘objects’.⁹⁵ ‘Agency’, too, is a *phenomenological* property of intentional consciousness; and just as subjectivity does not entail ‘a subject’, so, too, agency does not entail ‘an agent’. Rather, agency is effective, just as subjectivity is effective, precisely because the intentionality of consciousness-of imbues the *khandhas* with *experienced meaning*, and thus makes their dependent co-arising possible. If the *khandhas* lacked the unifying phenomenological ‘I’-sense, they *could not intend and act*; hence *there could be no kamma*; and therefore no *paṭiccasamuppāda* and no *punabbhava*. To put it in quite another way, the *khandhas* are *not* merely a mindless, robotic, deterministic componentry; if they were, enlightenment and liberation would be logically impossible, not to mention literally ‘meaningless’. Rather, it is the constitutive experience of ‘meaning’ – which is another way of describing intentional consciousness – that makes craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*) possible, as it also makes possible dispassion (*virāga*) and abandoning (*pahāna*). It also makes the fundamental contrast between binding ignorance (*avijjā*) and liberating knowledge (*ñāna*) meaningful and consequential.

We should keep in mind that the doctrine of agency or action (*kiriya, kriyā*) is fundamental to EB.⁹⁶ One of five themes set down for frequent reflection by men and women, lay and ordained, is the following:

I am the owner of my actions, heir to my actions, born of my actions, related to my actions, taking refuge in my actions. Whatever action I perform, good or evil, of that I shall be the inheritor.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Cf., e.g., MN 121 (at M III 108): ‘And beyond that, again, Ānanda, a *bhikkhu*, by not intending in *manas* to the perception of the sphere of no-thing-ness, by not intending in *manas* to the perception of the sphere of neither perception nor non perception, intends in *manas* to the oneness (or essence) [*ekattaṃ*] dependent on the ‘objectless’ (or ‘non-noematic’) concentration of mind.’ *puna caparaṃ, ānanda, bhikkhu amanasikarivā ākiñcaññāyatanasaññaṃ, amanasikarivā nevasaññānāsaññāyatanasaññaṃ, animittaṃ cetosamādhim paṭicca manasi karoti ekattaṃ.*

⁹⁶ Cf., e.g., AN 2.35 (A I 62), where the Buddha says: ‘I am one who teaches action (what ought to be done), brahmin, and non-action (what ought not to be done).’ *‘kiriyaṃvādī cāhaṃ, brāhmaṇa, akiriyaṃvādī cā’ti.* (Cf. also Vin III 2, D I 15, D I 132, M I 483, M II 167.)

⁹⁷ AN 5.57 (at A III 72): *‘kammaṣṣakomhi, kammaḍāyādo kammayoni kammabandhu kammapaṭisaraṇo. yaṃ kammaṃ karissāmi, kalyāṇaṃ vā pāpakaṃ vā, tassa dāyādo bhaviṣṣāmi’ti.* Cf. also AN 10.216 (A V 288); MN 135 (at M III 203).

The agency of the ‘I’ is fundamental to Dhamma practice and to the path to liberation. It begins with self-reflection upon and self-disciplining of one’s own mind: ‘A monk himself should reflect upon himself thus. . .’;⁹⁸ ‘Constantly one’s own mind should be reflected upon. . .’.⁹⁹ For an especially unruly mind in meditation, the following example is given: ‘He beats down, constrains and crushes mind with mind.’¹⁰⁰ In brief: ‘A bhikkhu wields mastery over his mind, he does not let the mind wield mastery over him.’¹⁰¹

These descriptions are all in the third person, but one need only transpose them into one’s own subjective practice in order to confirm their first-personal phenomenological sense. That sense is quite explicit in other examples, which *are* expressed first-personally: e.g., it is said that one who, through the arising of vision (*cakkhuppāda*), abandons desire and lust for the *pañc-upādāna-kkhandhā*, might think: ‘For a long time, alas, I [*ahaṃ*] have been deceived, cheated and seduced by this mind [*citta*].’¹⁰² It should hopefully be clear by now why such a use of the term ‘I’ (*ahaṃ*) is phenomenologically meaningful and important, why it cannot be ‘reduced’ to a meaningless linguistic marker or to a mere congregation of atomic components, and why it is doctrinally quite unproblematic because it does not contradict the *anattā* axiom. To the contrary, the sense of ‘I’ is inseparable from the acts of insight and volition without which the path to liberation could not be practised. As we have seen,¹⁰³ ‘abandoning’ (*pahāna*) is itself a foundational act of the path; and this very act of abandoning is itself an act of decision and will motivated by understanding. When the Buddha admonishes the abandoning of the five aggregates because these are ‘not yours’, the question ‘*Who* abandons the five aggregates?’ would be ill-formed and ultimately meaningless,¹⁰⁴ but the question ‘*How* can the aggregates be abandoned?’ would be quite meaningful, and may be understood, and practised, precisely through the recognition that neither the subjectivity nor the agency of intentional consciousness, nor intentional consciousness itself, constitute a ‘self’. Thus, ‘abandoning the All’ is no paradox at all.

The Buddha himself, of course, uses the term *ahaṃ* to refer to his subjective ‘consciousness-of’. That he *is* indeed subjectively conscious and that his experience *is* intentionally constituted is *necessarily* demonstrated every time he hears and understands others who address him and every time he addresses others. It is *necessarily* evident every time he picks up his outer robe and his alms-bowl and goes to the village on his alms-round,¹⁰⁵ or when he surveys the *saṅgha*

⁹⁸ E.g., MN 15 (at M I 98): *bhikkhunā attanāva attānaṃ evaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ*. . . The syntax of the Pāli could be rendered more literally: ‘by a monk himself the self should be reflected upon thus. . .’, which of course does not imply that the monk has a ‘self’ (*attā*), but that he reflects upon ‘his own mind and body’.

⁹⁹ SN 22.100 (at S III 151): *abhikkhaṇaṃ sakaṃ cittaṃ paccavekkhitabbaṃ*. . .

¹⁰⁰ Nāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009, §7, p. 213. M 20 (at M i.121): . . . *cetasā cittaṃ abhiniggaṇhato abhinippīlayato abhisantāpayato*. . .

¹⁰¹ Nāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009, §9, p. 310. MN 32 (at M I 214): *bhikkhu cittaṃ vasaṃ vatteti, no ca bhikkhu cittassa vasena vattati*. Cf. also AN 7.40 (A IV 34).

¹⁰² MN 75 (at M I 511): ‘*dīgharattaṃ vata . . . ahaṃ iminā cittena nikato vañcīto paluddho*. . .’

¹⁰³ Cf. section 2.1 above.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. SN 12.35 (at S II 60): ‘A certain monk said this to the Blessed One: “. . . For whom is there this aging and death?” “Not a valid question”, the blessed one replied.’ *aññataro bhikkhu bhagavantaṃ etadavoca: ‘. . . kassa ca panidaṃ jarāmarañāṇi? ‘no kallo pañho’i bhagavā avoca*. Similarly, SN 12.12 (at S II 13): “‘Who, then, Venerable Sir, feeds on consciousness-food?’ “Not a valid question”, the Blessed One replied.’ *ko nu kho, bhante, viññāṇāhāraṃ āhāreti’i? ‘no kallo pañho’i bhagavā avoca*.

¹⁰⁵ E.g., MN 18 (at M I 109): *atha kho bhagavā pubbaṇhasamayaṃ nivāsetvā pattacīvaramādāya kapilavatthum piṇḍāya pāvīsi*.

silently meditating and is pleased with the progress of the monks.¹⁰⁶ But perhaps the most striking example is the Buddha's first-person description of his attainment of the three knowledges (*tisso vijjā*) on the night of his enlightenment and liberation.¹⁰⁷ Attaining the first knowledge, he says: 'I remembered my various previous abodes [i.e., lives]. . .'¹⁰⁸ This knowledge raises the question, from the first-personal perspective, of the relation between the 'I' and the temporal continuity of subjective experience, both within and between different lifetimes. Attaining the second knowledge, he says: 'With the divine eye, which is pure and transcends the human, I saw beings passing away and reappearing . . . and I understood that beings proceed [*sc.* after death] according to their actions.'¹⁰⁹ This knowledge again raises the previous question, but from a third-personal perspective, and imbued with the recognition of the constitutive power and ethical value of subjective volitional intent and action. Finally, by attaining the third and ultimate knowledge, he automatically attained liberation: 'I recognised directly, just as it actually is: 'These are the unconscious influences [*āsava*]' . . . 'This is the arising of the unconscious influences' . . . 'This is the cessation of the unconscious influences' . . . 'This is the path leading to the cessation of the unconscious influences'. Then, knowing thus, seeing thus, my mind was liberated [*sc.* from the 'unconscious influences'] . . .'¹¹⁰

From this moment on, Gotama was enlightened and liberated; with the extinction of the *āsavas*, the sense of '*asmī*'ti also forever vanished. It is important to recognise that 'liberation', here, is not merely an external 'result' of the 'third knowledge', but is ultimately identical with it: the direct recognition and understanding of the 'unconscious influences' is itself the liberation from them.¹¹¹ This liberation itself is also an act of knowledge: 'When liberated, there was the knowledge: 'Liberated'.¹¹² Here, then, in the Buddha's description of the crucial act of 'knowing' that is the essential final goal of EB, we cannot but recognise the evident irreducibility of intentional subjectivity. Where there is 'knowledge' there is certainly an 'act of knowing': there is certainly a subjective consciousness-of, even though there is no 'self', no 'subject', no sense of 'I am' or 'I am this'.

¹⁰⁶ E.g., MN 118 (at M II 79): *atha kho bhagavā tuṅhībhūtaṃ tuṅhībhūtaṃ bhikkhusaṅghaṃ anuviloketvā bhikkhū āmantesi: 'āraddhosmi, bhikkhave, imāya paṭipadāya; āraddhacittosmi, bhikkhave, imāya paṭipadāya. . .'*

¹⁰⁷ MN 4 (at M I 22-23).

¹⁰⁸ MN 4 (at M I 21-22): *so kho ahaṃ . . . paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ . . . catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja vihāsiṃ . . . so evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte . . . pubbenivāsānussatiññāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesiṃ. so anekavihītaṃ pubbenivāsaṃ anussarāmi.* (I have begun this elliptical quotation of the Pāli text with the first words of the Buddha's extended report, where the pronoun *ahaṃ* occurs.)

¹⁰⁹ MN 4 (at M I 22): *so dibbena cakkhunā visuddhena atikkantamānusakena satte passāmi cavamāne upapajjamāne hīne paṇīte suvaṇṇe dubbaṇṇe sugate duggate yathākammūpage satte pajānāmi . . .*

¹¹⁰ MN 4 (at M I 23): *'ime āsavā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ āsavaśamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ āsavanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ āsavanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ. tassa me evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato . . . cittaṃ vimuccītha. . .*

¹¹¹ The formula expressing the direct recognition of the *āsavas* is of course identical with the formula expressing the direct recognition of the 'Four Noble Truths' (but cf. Harvey 2009); thus MN 4 (at M I 23): *so 'idaṃ dukkhaṃ'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhasamudayo'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodho'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ, 'ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadā'ti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsiṃ.*

¹¹² MN 4 (at M I 23): *vimuttasmiṃ vimuttamīti ñāṇaṃ ahoṣi.* (Cf. also fn. 66 above.)



6. Conclusion: Not ‘thing’, but ‘quality’; not ‘the pure ‘I’’, but just pure “I’-ness’

My point of conclusion, then, will be to propose a decisive terminological shift. Throughout this discussion, I have never made philosophical use of the term ‘subject’, but only of the term ‘subjectivity’. The distinction between these two terms is perhaps self-explanatory, precisely because their two senses (especially in the present context) are so radically different. Although they are both nouns, they belong to fundamentally different categories: the former readily suggests the notion of an ‘independently-existing individual being’, a kind of ‘thing’ or ‘entity’, and so can readily tend towards the concept of *attā*. The latter, however, can only really mean a *property or quality of consciousness*, and so can be readily dissociated, conceptually, from any notion of a ‘subject’ as an ‘independently-existing individual being’. ‘Subjectivity’ can belong to ‘consciousness-of’ without having to belong to ‘a subject’, as such; in fact, ‘subjectivity’ is virtually synonymous with the very sense of ‘consciousness-of’. What has already been discussed so far should hopefully make this point evident.

Perhaps it is also already clear that Husserl’s use of the noun-term ‘I’ (*Ich*), i.e., ‘the pure ‘I’ (*das reine Ich*), ‘the transcendental ‘I’ (*das transzendente Ich*), is problematic. If one understands what Husserl is referring to as the ‘residuum’ of the *epokhē* and of the transcendental reduction, then one also understands the reason why Husserl says, quite rightly, that this use of the term ‘I’ is really ‘an essential equivocation’.¹¹³ But the equivocation can easily be avoided. Just as the word ‘subjectivity’ arguably indicates the actual nature of ‘consciousness-of’, whereas the word ‘subject’ obscures and even deforms it, so too, a term such as “I’-ness’, which would name a quality or property of consciousness, would be preferable to the term ‘the ‘I’’, which can easily be misunderstood and reified, once again, into the notion of an ‘independent entity’. In effect, I am suggesting that “I’-ness’ is ultimately a synonym for ‘subjectivity’;¹¹⁴ and that this is, after all, the *necessary* TP meaning of Husserl’s term, ‘the pure ‘I’’. Looking at the matter in this way perhaps helps to clarify why that which Husserl called ‘the pure ‘I’ was *necessarily* a kind of ‘emptiness’. After all, he himself recognised that what he called ‘the ‘I’ was no kind of ‘positive entity’.¹¹⁵ If we see that ‘the ‘I’ is in fact just the “I’-ness’ – the pure subjectivity – of consciousness-of, then its ‘emptiness’ is not surprising, but quite natural. It is an apodictically knowable property of an apodictically knowable transcendental: namely, the *consciousness-of-consciousness-of*.

The first-personal pronoun, ‘I’, ‘*aham*’, is thus *not* an empty, non-referring linguistic marker used merely according to worldly convention; but *nor* does it refer to some permanent, independently-existing entity. This term has not only a ‘use’, but a genuine ‘meaning’: the intrinsic

¹¹³ Cf. fn. 83, and its main text, above.

¹¹⁴ However, the term “I’-ness’ expresses something that the term ‘subjectivity’ may not express so clearly or vividly; for, the latter term is somewhat conceptual and theoretical, whereas the former term evokes the same property of consciousness in a more directly experiential (‘first-personal’) sense; a more robustly *phenomenological* sense.

¹¹⁵ Cf., e.g., Husserl 1980, §24, p. 111: ‘Everything which ‘appears’, everything which, in whatever way, presents and manifests itself can also not be; I can be deceived by these things. The ‘I’, however, does not appear, does not present itself merely from a side, does not manifest itself merely according to discrete determinations, aspects, and moments. . . As pure ‘I’ it does not harbor any hidden inner richness; it is absolutely simple and it lies there absolutely clear.’ (‘Alles „Erscheinende“, alles irgendwie sich Darstellende, Bekundende kann auch nicht sein, und ich kann mich darüber täuschen. Das Ich aber erscheint nicht, stellt sich nicht bloß einseitig dar, bekundet sich nicht bloß nach einzelnen Bestimmtheiten, Seiten, Momenten. . . Als reines Ich birgt es keine verborgenen inneren Reichtümer, es ist absolut einfach, liegt absolut zutage. . .’) (Husserl 1952a, §24, pp. 104-105.) Cf. also fn. 82 above for further references.

and irreducible pure subjectivity – the “I’-ness’ – of intentional consciousness. If there were no intentional consciousness, with its inherent property of pure subjectivity, not only would the pronoun ‘I’, ‘*ahaṃ*’, have no meaning: it could not exist. Yet, it does exist, and the Buddha had no qualms about using it in the same breath with which he preached the principle of *anattā*, because he understood, much more deeply than we, its true meaning and nature. Indeed, without that meaning, there would be no ‘path’ (*magga*) and no ‘escape’ (*nissaraṇa*).¹¹⁶ If we confuse and conflate the root error of ‘*ahaṃ-asmīti*’ with the true but hidden meaning of ‘*ahaṃ*’ – namely, the intrinsic “I’-ness’ of consciousness-of – then I believe that we lose sight of the genuine possibility of the path and the gateway of escape.

By *you* the effort must be made. The *Tathāgatas* are (but) teachers.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ MN 7 (at M I 39): ‘there is an escape beyond this whole realm of perception.’ *atthi imassa saññāgatassa uttariṃ nissaraṇaṃ*.

¹¹⁷ Dh 20, §276a (at Dh 40): *tumhehi kiccamaṭappaṃ akkhātāro tathāgatā*.



References

Primary Pāli Texts

Buddhasāsana Society 2008, *Chaṭṭhasaṅgītipiṭakaṃ*, Pāli Series 1-40, Aṭṭhakathā Series 1-52, Ṭīkā Series 1-26, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Yangon, Myanmar

Dhamma Society 2011, *World Tipiṭaka Edition: Tipiṭaka Studies in Theravāda Buddhasāsana*, <http://studies.worldtipitaka.org>

Vipassana Research Institute 1995, *Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana Tipiṭaka 4.0*, Version 4.0.0.15

Yuttadhammo, Bhikkhu 2011, *Digital Pāli Reader*, Version 3.3.8

Translations of Primary Pāli Texts

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) 2000, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*, Wisdom Publications, Boston

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) [1980] 2006, *The Discourse on the Root of Existence: The Mūlapariyāyasutta and its Commentaries*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka

Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) [1984] 2010, *The Great Discourse on Causation: The Mahānidāna Sutta and its Commentaries*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu (trans.) [1956] 1991, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga) of Bhaddantācariya Buddhaghosa*, Fifth Edition, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka

Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) [1995] 2009, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya, Translated from the Pāli*, Wisdom Publications, Boston

Nyanaponika Thera and Bodhi, Bhikkhu (trans.) 2007, *Aṅguttara Nikāya Anthology: An Anthology of Discourses from the Aṅguttara Nikāya*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka

Thanissaro Bhikkhu (trans.) 2011, at J. Bullitt (ed.) 2005-2011, *Access to Insight*, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka>

Other Primary, Secondary and Reference Texts

Bischof-Köhler, D. 1991, 'The Development of Empathy in Infants', in M. E. Lamb and H. Keller (eds.), *Infant Development: Perspectives from German Speaking Countries*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale

Collins, S. [1982] 1990, *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

- Cone, M. 2001, *A Dictionary of Pāli*, Part I, The Pali Text Society, Oxford
- Cone, M. 2010, *A Dictionary of Pāli*, Part II, The Pali Text Society, Bristol
- Harvey, P. 1995, *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāna in Early Buddhism*, Curzon Press, Surrey, Great Britain
- Harvey, P. 1986, “Signless’ Meditations in Pāli Buddhism’, *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 25-52
- Harvey, P. 2009, ‘The Four Ariya-saccas as ‘True Realities for the Spiritually Ennobled’ – the Painful, its Origin, its Cessation, and the Way Going to This – Rather than ‘Noble Truths’ Concerning These’, *Buddhist Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 197-227
- Heidegger, M. [1927] 1993, *Sein und Zeit*, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen (Siebzehnte Auflage)
- Heidegger, M. [1927] 2001, *Being and Time*, trans. J Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Blackwell, Oxford UK and Cambridge USA
- Hinüber, O. v. 1996, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature*, Indian Philology and South Asian Studies, Vol. 2, ed. by A. Wezler and M. Witzel, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York
- Hofmann, J. B. [1950] 1989, *Etymologikon Lexikon tēs Arkhaias Ellēnikēs (Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Griechischen)*, trans. A. D. Papanikolaos, University of Athens (Original publication: Verlag von R. Oldenbourg, München 1950)
- Husserl, E. [1929] 1950, *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, ed. by S. Strasser, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague [Husserliana I]
- Husserl, E. [1928] 1952, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Zweites Buch: Phänomenologische Untersuchungen zur Konstitution*, ed. by M. Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague [Husserliana IV]
- Husserl, E. [1934-1937] 1954, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die Transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die Phänomenologische Philosophie*, ed. by W. Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, Haag [Husserliana VI]
- Husserl, E. [1925] 1962, *Phänomenologische Psychologie: Vorlesungen Sommersemester 1925*, ed. by W. Biemel, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague [Husserliana IX]
- Husserl, E. [1929] 1970a, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. D. Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague
- Husserl, E. [1934-1937] 1970b, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. D. Carr, Northwestern University Press, Evanston
- Husserl, E. [1913] 1976a, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, ed. by K. Schuhmann, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague [Husserliana III/1]

- Husserl, E. [1912-1929] 1976b, *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie, Ergänzende Texte (1912-1929)*, ed. by K. Schumann, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague [Husserliana III/2]
- Husserl, E. [1913/1976] 1982, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, The Hague/Boston/London
- Husserl, E. [1928/1952] 1989, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London [Collected Works III]
- Husserl, E. [1927-1931] 1997, *Psychological and Transcendental Phenomenology and the Confrontation with Heidegger (1927-1931): The Encyclopaedia Britannica Article, The Amsterdam Lectures, 'Phenomenology and Anthropology', and Husserl's Marginal Notes in Being and Time and Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. T. Sheehan and R. E. Palmer, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht
- Liddell, H. G., Scott, R., Jones, H. S., and McKenzie, R. [1843] 1996, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Ninth Edition (with Revised Supplement), Clarendon Press, Oxford
- Monier-Williams, M. [1899] 1993, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, Delhi
- Nārada Mahā Thera (ed. and trans.) [1956] 1975, *A Manual of Abhidhamma, Being Abhidhammattha Sangaha of Bhadanta Anuruddhācārya [c. 9th-11th Centuries C.E.]*, edited in the Original Pali Text with English Translation and Notes, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy
- Nizamis, K. (trans.) 2011, at J. Bullitt (ed.) 2005-2011, *Access to Insight*, <http://www.accesstoinight.org/tipitaka/translators.html#niza>
- Rhys Davids, T. W. and Stede, W. (eds.) [1921-1925] 1998, *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary*, The Pali Text Society, Oxford
- Wijesekera, O. H. de A. [1945] 1994, 'Vedic Gandharva and Pāḷi Gandhabba', in Wijesekera, O. H. de A. 1994, *Buddhist and Vedic Studies*, Motilal Banarsidass, New Delhi, pp. 191-212 (Original publication: Wijesekera, O. H. de A. 1945, 'Vedic Gandharva and Pāḷi Gandhabba', *University of Ceylon Review*, Vol. 3., No. 1.)
- Wittgenstein, L. 1958, *Preliminary Studies for the 'Philosophical Investigations', Generally Known as the Blue and Brown Books*, Blackwell, Oxford