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THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE AND THE INDIAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION*

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In introducing a 'comparative' perspective in the interpretative understanding of a philosophical tradition, the accent has to be placed on the thematic interplay of the perspectives concerned, within the parameter of certain philosophic problems and issues. Neither isomorphic parallelism nor historical interrelations would be the operative concern in such a study. In the present discourse we seek to show how, in principle, the phenomenological philosophy of the West (particularly, Husserlian) could have meaningful relevance towards an attempted reunderstanding of the philosophical tradition(s) of India. On the other hand, such relevance is also indicated towards thinking afresh the positions and problematics arising in philosophic thought under the focus of the crosscultural perspective derived from comparison.

As a prelude to the task we are addressing ourselves to, it may be observed that 'comparative philosophy' need not be directed towards a mutual juxtaposition of the concepts or categories and theories in the respective traditions which are sought to be compared. What I have in view here could rather be stated as a dialogical confrontation, as it were, of the two perspectives brought to bear upon each other in a 'hermeneutic' situation.** The latter would imply participation of contemporary philosophic consciousness in the thought tradition in question. Translating the thought in the philosophical (not literal) sense would thus take the form of putting questions, so to say, to the body of texts

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** The term "hermeneutic", in the present context, is used in the general sense of 'philosophical hermeneutics' — that is, the methodological exposition in terms of understanding in all its modes. of the texts carrying the authority of a tradition. It pertains to situations in which we encounter meanings not directly understood but calling for thematic interpretation. No specific model of contemporary hermeneutics (e. g., Heidegger, Gadamer or Ricouer etc.) is as such under reference here.

under consideration, and letting the texts themselves respond to the questions. In this manner of understanding through interpretation, the present-day scholar-thinker could possibly relate his/her reflections to those within the tradition sought to be understood in its authenticity.

It is in this context of an explorative hermeneutic understanding of classical Indian thought that the relevance of phenomenological philosophy comes into consideration. The task of 'comparative philosophy' being comprehended in the way I have broadly indicated above, phenomenology, of all the Western philosophies, could prove to be perhaps the most appropriate medium for the said undertaking. As presently to be discussed, this is because phenomenology offers a programmatic outlook for a first-hand critique of experience rather than a metaphysically committed theory of reality. Its avowed freedom from presuppositions, metaphysical as well as naturalistic, combined with an openness to the possible regions of experience, seems to promise a suitable medium of interpretation in respect of classical Indian thought, which in its central thrust is preeminently experience-oriented. I am not, however, proposing here that phenomenology be adopted as the exclusive model for interpreting classical Indian philosophy. Nor do I plead for an exercise of oblivion of the historical perspectives and cultural conditions that form the respective backgrounds in the two traditions concerned. What I suggest is that phenomenological philosophy, broadly speaking, could offer the appropriate mode of methodological reflection, in terms of which the intent and content of some of the major strands of Indian thought could intelligibly be approached in their thematic relevance by contemporary philosophers.

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Edmund Husserl introduced his programme of philosophy as a 'rigorous science (Wissenschaft)'[2], and towards the end of his career indicated "the spiritual telos of European Man", as he typically expresses it, to be constituted by the originally Greek idea of 'reason', which guides the spirit of *theoretic* philosophy.[3] The Husserlian exposition of "philosophical culture" (philosophische Kultur) proceeds on the basis of the functions of the theoretic endeavour, the ideal of which, according to Husserl, was realized

in the 'European humanity'. This projection in favour of 'European rationalism' is sought to be directly aligned with the programme of transcendental phenomenology. This note in Husserlian thought might, on the face of it, discourage outright any 'comparativist' attempt to review Indian thought in the light of phenomenological philosophy—so far as Indian thought would unmistakably represent a 'non-European', 'non-rationalist' tradition la Husserlian typology.

An exaggerated concern of such a predisposition of Husserlian thought need not, however, divert our attention from the preeminently positive features and stresses of the programme that phenomenology offers and thereby promises a fresh approach in philosophic interpretation. In fact, making its way between the stereotyped polarities of idealism and realism, rationalism and empiricism, phenomenology proposes a breakthrough within the usual Western dichotomies of reason and experience, intellect and intuition, logic and mysticism, rationality and irrationality. In all this, and in its orientation of a methodological intuitionism, phenomenology seems to offer an appropriate and relevant philosophical idiom to translate the essential strands in classical Indian thought. Some salient features of phenomenological philosophy as relevant in the present discourse are briefly discussed here, in terms of its founder and central exponent, Husserl.

Phenomenology was introduced by Husserl as a programme for total reform aimed at a presuppositionless philosophy. The true basis for such a philosophy would be provided by the strict evidence of intuition, i.e., insight into the pure structure of experiencing consciousness. Correlative to such intuition there would be the fact-neutral 'essences', which subsist as universal. This intuitive or 'eidetic' insight (Wesensschau) is not directed to empirical-psychological contents, nor to externally existent physical facts. Phenomenological reflection entails a suspension of the natural attitude of positing judgements concerning realities — be it on the natural-factual level or on the metaphysical level. Accordingly the primary recommendation in the phenomenological reflection is 'epochē' or 'bracketing'—the disconnection of the metaphysical implications of the naive or natural attitude to the world.

What specifically determines the phenomenological analysis

of knowledge and experience is 'intentionality' or referentiality, characterizing the basic structure of consciousness. Consciousness is necessarily an *act*—act of being directed to something, or being *of* something. Thus phenomenological analysis is concerned with the ways of referentiality pertaining to the acts of consciousness, and not with real existent objects (which are 'bracketed'). So the principle accent is on the modes of appearance in which the intended referents present themselves. This is how 'phenomena' (in the strictly *phenomenological* sense of objects-as-meant, disconnected from the reality-factor) come to be derived.

The central method of phenomenological investigation is 'reduction'—disconnecting the contents of experience from its existential-factual character and tracing it back to its immanent origin in consciousness. The method turns on the fundamental distinction between fact and essence, and the consequent suspension of the factual assertion in favour of essences or idealities. What is supposed to be gained through this method is, on ultimate analysis, the region of purified consciousness—an immanent region, the home of essences. And the core of such 'purified' region is 'transcendental subjectivity'. The latter is to be distinguished from empirical psychological subjectivity; it is neither factual nor metaphysical—neither a mental state nor ontologically substantive. Yet that is the principle with reference to which all meanings of being pertaining to all possible objects of experience are constituted. Thus what prevails is the "transcendental" motive of tracing back the originary sources in which all possible forms of knowing and experience are functionally grounded.

Phenomenology thus proposes the open programme of a critique of experience from the 'transcendental' standpoint of the originary conditions for the possibility of experience, grounded in the immanental region of consciousness. Departing from psychologism and empiricism, and yet avoiding the commitment of metaphysical world-view, such mode of analysis seeks to proceed entirely on immanental lines.

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It may generally be pointed out that the phenomenological method of 'intentional' analysis of experience in the first hand,

without bringing in metaphysical presuppositions, could provide a broad modus operandi in any philosophical programme of reinterpreting a traditional philosophical system. In stating the position of philosophy in relation to 'traditions', Husserl points out two possibilities. Either the traditionally valid is completely rejected, or its content is taken over philosophically, that is, formed anew " in the spirit of philosophical identity ".[4] This method of *philosophical* reapprochement is recommended on the path of questioning back (Rückfrage) to originary evidence; and it need not operate in the sphere of religious beliefs alone (which Husserl cites as the example), but could as well be exemplified in respect of *philosophical* traditions. It is in this context that the phenomenological procedure offers a viable framework of interpretive understanding in the field of classical Indian thought, irrespective of the metaphysical positions concerned.

Of all the classical system of India, Advaita Vedānta, I think, would bear the closest relevance to the phenomenological perspective—and the present paper will concentrate on that area in working out the themes of mutual relevance. However, before coming to Vedānta, I may make brief reference to some of the other systems relevant in this context. Firstly, in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, its mode of enquiry into the ontological categories (*padārtha*) may be read in the light of a broadly phenomenological analysis of knowledge—irrespective of the realistic metaphysics that the system is committed to. The Vaiśeṣika categories of reality, formulated as they are, basically the enumeration of the *meant*, they are brought under the broader category of the 'knowable' (*prameya*). And as the Nyāya dictum holds, the knowable is established on the basis of the way of valid knowing under consideration—*pramāṇebhyaḥ prameyasiddhiḥ*. Thus an analysis of the modes of givenness in experience would provide the clue to the nature of objectivity. For, the Nyāya philosopher points out, every case of consciousness—be it valid or non-valid in the accepted sense—must have some content referred to—*pratītiḥ saviṣayā*.

Thus here we come across the method of appealing to the first-hand evidence in consciousness–and consciousness, so far as it exhibits modes of reference to something objective–without a prior ostensive commitment, naturalistic or metaphysical. This could

be interpreted broadly in terms of the phenomenological viewpoint. Of course, so far as this methodological approach of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika is eventually made subservient to a positively realistic metaphysics, we could hardly carry on the phenomenological mode of analysis too far within the frame of reference of this metaphysics. On the other hand, such procedure seems to have yielded to a formalistic-linguistic mode of analysis in later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika (i.e., Navya-Nyāya) at large.

Coming to a different group of *āstika* philosophies, namely, Sāṅkhya and Yoga, an attempt may legitimately be made to interpret their theory of knowledge and psychology—as they are usually designated—in the light of a possible critique (and a transcendental critique) of experience. Thus the different *tattvas* of Sāṅkhya–particularly, *Buddhi*, *Asmitā*, *Manas* and *Indriya*—could be explained with reference to the different stadia in the analysis of consciousness, without necessarily involving any metaphysical (cosmological, as often the case is) implications. In fact, the said categories could be more intelligibly understood, if they were demonstrated as the functional ('noematic', in the typical phenomenological language) correlates of consciousness—from the level of psycho-physical complex to that of transcendental consciousness per se (that is, *puruṣa*). Thus an implicit phenomenology of subjective and objective experience may be traced in Sāṅkhya.

As for Yoga philosophy too, its central conception could be sought to be presented in terms of a methodology meant for a gradual ascent from the psycho-physical level to the supposed meta-psychological level of *samādhi*. Here too, as in Sāṅkhya (and, of course, in Vedānta, as we will see in the sequel), gradual steps or grades of reflection could be worked out, and the corresponding categories understood accordingly, with reference to the stages of dissociation of consciousness from the relevant psychological conditions. In this connection the concepts of *citta* and *citta-vṛtti* would particularly come up for consideration. The inner (immanental) relation between *citta* (mind) and *vṛtti* (mental modifications) has to be brought out through transcendental analysis—it proves to be a peculiar distinction within *citta* itself. In this way the dynamism of citta as a flowing stream (in continuity) may be interpreted more or less in a phenomenological manner.

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The area for which the standpoint and outlook of phenomenological philosophy could bear the closest relevance is perhaps Advaita Vedānta. What in this context is meant here is the 'transcendental' phase of phenomenology rather than the earlier 'descriptive' phase as such. Vedāntic thought appears, on a closer look, to be largely amenable to the transcendental-phenomenological way of understanding in the direction of a possible metaphysics (or critique) of experience. It is, however, not a question of imposing the superstructure of Husserlian thought, its conceptual apparatus and terms of reference, with its implicit a priorism and rationalism. For Vedānta, like most other areas of Indian thought and unlike Western tradition in general, would not proceed by way of necessary and universal logical structure of thought (logos) mutatis mutandis the structure of the world of reality. In other words, the accent on the *a priori*, which is in intent present in Husserlian thought, though not overtly operative as in broadly rationalistic tradition of Western thought in general, is rather missing in Vedānta. This a priorism-rationalism apart, the point here is to work out and unfold the inherent phenomenology, that is the implicit (transcendental) critique of experience, within the system of reflection that Vedānta presents.

In the Vedāntic position itself, which appears otherwise to be ontologically loaded, a scheme of experience-critique could possibly be brought out from its fundamental premisses. There are two major steps in the Vedāntic approach. Firstly, the Absolute, that is Brahman, is to be reduced to the region of immediacy right from its transcendent ontological status, through equation with individual self in the form of 'I'. The enquiry would thereby be brought within the range of immanent experience from the transcendent heights of ontological Being—reflection being directed to the subjective field of consciousness rather than to the metaphysical world-ground. Next there comes the stage of distinguishing the *pure* from the mundane subjectivity; that would imply the restoring of the true (innermost) essence of subjectivity behind the complex of empirical consciousness as marked by the ego. A phenomenological analysis of consciousness evidently pertains to the latter phase of the enterprise.[5]

As the basis of such an approach towards the possible under-

standing of Vedānta, there comes up the unique standpoint of subjectivity in Vedānta. The notion of 'pure consciousness' (*Cit*), the pivotal concept in Vedānta, could well offer a parallel to the phenomenological model of transcendental subjectivity, with its possible role in a system of experience-critique. The Vedāntic *cit* is conceived of as non-empirical, unobjective foundational background of the continuum of consciousness, and, as such, it could be most intelligible if translated in terms of pure subjectivity, autonomous and self-evidencing. The typical Vedāntic expression "*svaprakāśa*" (lit. self-manifest) indicates this unique character of consciousness. Negatively, *cit* proves to be completely unamenable to subjective evidence; it is uncognisable as an object (in the widest possible sense of objectivity, i.e., presentation in distinction from the apprehending subject). Yet there is a unique evidence with regard to *cit*—it is immediately self-evidencing, it has an immediate self-certitude about it (not mediated by any perceptual or inferential process)[6].

The movement of Vedāntic reflection proceeds from the bodily level, involved as it is in the world around, through the sensory, the vital, even the mental and intellectual levels, to the innermost essence supposed to be behind them all. The awareness or sense of 'I' as involved in the psycho-physical complex of an ego ('I-man' —'Ich-Mensch', as Husserl might put it) serves as the point of departure in the progression towards the notion of pure consciousness. Such consciousness is as much involved in all the psychological and epistemological phases as beyond them all. As the necessary precondition of all mental states, of all our cognitive life (and non-cognitive experience too), *cit* comes close to the position of the Kantian 'transcendental unity of apperception' or still further, of Husserlian 'transecendental subjectivity' ('transcendental consciousness').

The phenomenological-transcendental role of *cit* in relation to the psychological and epistemological process of the individual subject can be indicated with reference to the characteristic concept of *sākṣin*, that is, 'witness' or evidencing consciousness. The metaphor of 'witness' is cited to explicate the *transcendental* situation of every possible mental state (cognitive or non-cognitive) being presented to the 'observer' in the background of the subjective succession of experience-continuum. The manifold of physical

and psychological phenomena would be in some way presented to the evidencing consciousness of the pure subject—there being, of course, no distinction between subject and consciousness. The Vedāntic dictum states that all things, whether known or even unknown, are in the last analysis, objects, in some way or other, in relation to the witnessing consciousness (*sāksicaitanya*)[7].* Even the empirical ego or 'I' (*aham*), with all its 'physico-mental associations and world-involving references, is conceived as presented to a deeper 'I' which has a presuppositional evidencing character. One could well compare, in this respect, the phenomenological position as stated by Husserl : " The 'I' and 'we' which we apprehend presuppose a hidden 'I' and 'we' to whom they are present."[8] The reference to 'we', i.e., intersubjectivity, is however, not a conspicuous problem in Vedānta.

An analysis of experience, to be truly phenomenological, should no doubt proceed on the basic premise that consciousness is of the nature of *act* in the sense of reference function being constitutive of consciousness. But in the Vedāntic context the question arises: can pure consciousness be conceived of in terms of *act* ? It cannot, after all, be denied that consciousness is actually grasped in its *immanence* (in the phenomenological sense) so far as it is involved within mental states (*vṛttis*) themselves. In this respect alone would it be relvent to speak of consciousness as ' act '. As Advaita theory of knowledge puts it, object is reduced to *vṛtti* (modalisation of the internal organ, *antaḥkaraṇa*), which in its turn cannot stand but as evidenced by consciousness. So the object is not taken as 'transcendent' (in the sense of being real beyond the region of experience), but is sought to be *reduced* to consciousness by way of *vrtti*-mediation. Such mediation in some form or other is recognised as present at every level of experience, external or internal. Although on the empirical level of explanation, sharing the realistic position of the independent reality of things and the externality of sense-perception, Advaita nevertheless brings in the transcendental standpoint (i. e., the standpoint of pure subjectivity) in shifting the question to that of the object as *meant* or 'intended'—or, in other words, of consciousness being 'intentionally related' to

* Here a distinction is evidently drawn between 'knownness' in the ordinary epistemic sense of *pramāṇa* and as being *transcendentally* evidenced (i.e., *sākṣi bhāṣya*).

the object under consideration. Only the intended object is taken to be in some *alogical* relation of identity (*tādātmya*) with *cit*.

From this it follows that in the analysis of knowledge and experience the Vedāntic concern, as in phenomenology (and in Kant), is essentially with *objectivity* rather than with the object as a spatio-temporal fact. Here also, as in Husserl so conspicuously, this objectivity is translated in immanental terms, combined with the negative implication of disconnection from the factuality of objects. As for the essential import of objectivity, however, Vedānta explains it as the identification with consciousness which, though, is false (*adhyāsa*). Here in a situation, which is otherwise largely parallel to phenomenological 'reduction', the difference between the two perspectives is also evident.

Firstly, while with Husserl the epochē or bracketing of reality is still a *theoretic* attitude, to facilitate the mind in turning back within itself and inspecting it from within, in Vedānta the exercise of turning from the flux of phenomena and events is recognised to be a serious phase in the spiritual life of man. With Advaita, unlike, with Husserlian phenomenology, transcendental subjectivity or consciousness is not a theoretical heuristic presupposition; nor is the movement towards grasping its essence a purely theoretic attitude. For Vedānta is, after all, motivated by the deeper interest and belief in liberation (*mokṣa*), recognised to be the supreme value of man.

Secondly, the introduction of the factor of *false* identification (*adhyāsa*), bringing into play the more generic principle of nescience (*ajñāna/avidyā*), is the typical Advaitic way of interpreting human experience. In a philosophy wedded to subjectivity as the transcendental principle, nescience stands for the principle of objectification—the prime *alogical* element that hings on to unobjective consciousness. Similar to, but at the same time unlike, the Kantian concept of 'object in general', *ajñāna* in Advaita philosophy is to be understood not just as a formal principle, but as the concrete implicate of pure experience. The cognizance of the presence of nescience is grounded in evidencing consciousness itself—*ajñāna* is recognised to be no less foundational to the essential structure of experience than pure consciousness. The latter, in a most inexplicable way, involves the former; in a thoroughly baffling manner does the anoetic *avidyā* hang on to the foundational

cit. Thus the progression towards pure consciousness as the ever-receding, yet everpresent, horizon of all our experiences goes correlatively with the recognition of *ajñāna*—a fundamental correlativity of *cit* and *avidyā* in transcendental reflection.

That *ajñāna* is not just a category of logical postulation would be more evident if we consider how it could be traced from the level of objective experience in degrees of generic essentiality. In its pure essence it would be intuited (in a phenomenological sense) on the transcendental level of 'purified' (that is, from possible objective associations) experience alone. This is suggessted by the state of dreamless sleep (*suṣupti*), wherein the unmodified mass of *ajñāna*, as it were, stands evidenced in the unfailingly present background of consciousness.* In the intermediate region of normal waking experience, however, the meaning of nescience is too implicit, and is recognizable, if at all, only as signifying 'function' of pure consciousness. *Ajñāna*, viewed as function in relation to pure consciousness, would represent 'reference in general'; and the various modalities of Function (in general), invarying degrees of generality, constitute the world of experience. As modalized nescience in the form of modifications of internal organ correspond to modalized consciousness, so unmodalized nescience would correspond to unmodalized consciousness, that is *sākṣi-cit*, evidencing *ajñāna* as a generic datum, not determined in terms of any specific object of experience. It is on the *sākṣin* level that the correlativity of *cit* and *ajñāna* comes into full focus.

The above is an attempt to translate, in a broadly phenomenological language, the Vedāntic orientation, in a *cit*-centric critique of experience, of the notion of nescience (*avidyā*), which, in a general way, forms a common presupposition in the Indian tradition.** This brings out at the same time the basic distinction in the terms

* It may here be mentioned that Husserl, at least at one place, introduced briefly the topic of 'dreamless sleep' (traumloser Schlaf) — as a case of 'outermost limit' in experience. And, interestingly enough he also raised the question of remembrance of such a state of 'being sunk' (Versunken-sein). But he did not develop the theme further; also the positive significance of *suṣupti* seems evidently to be missed by Husserl.[9]

** To render *ajñāna*/*avidyā* in its literal sense as ignorance or absence of knowledge—as often done—would be to miss its essential experiential import as *positive* presence in human experience.

of reference between the phenomenological and the Vedāntic perspectives. Nevertheless we should not lose sight of certain fundamental Husserlian insights into the nature of consciousness which almost appears to ring a Vedāntic note. With a rather ontological overtone, Husserl focuses on the fundamental theme of consciousness as the foundational stratum of our experience. He speaks of " the immortality of transcendental I" and of "the impossibility that transcendental I were born."[10] The pure transcendental I—not the empirical wordly I, that can well perish—cannot cease in its continuously living present, because such cessation itself would presuppose non-cessation, namely, consciousness in which such cessation itself would be made conscious of. In the wake of his analysis of the enduring continuity of time-consciousness, Husserl observes : "Each human 'I' conceals in itself, in a certain way, its transcendental I' and the latter does not die nor does it originate; it is an eternal being in becoming."[11] Would not this idea of Husserl find an essential resonance in the cryptic statement of Vidyāraṇya in *Pañcadaśī :* " Neither arising nor ceasing, consciousness is self-illuminating?"[12] For the Vedāntist, like the phenomenological philosophers—and in a more pronounced way—the absence of consciousness is inconceivable. To recognise *cit* in its identical essence apart from the varying modes of reference (*vṛtti*) amounts to denying that it is temporally determined in terms of origination and annihilation. Even Husserl, viewing temporality (in inner sense) as phenomenologically constitutive of consciousness, recognises, on final analysis, 'eternality of being' (in a non-metaphysical, phenomenological sense) pertaining to transcendental I.*

Having explored the possibility of reconstructing a critique of experience broadly in phenomenological terms of reference, in respect of the major strands in Vedāntic thought, let us now, in this concluding section of our discourse, take a closer look at some of the outstanding issues in cross-perspective. While basically recognising the legitimacy of introducing the phenomenological

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* A detailed treatment of the phenomenological implications of the various aspects of the doctrine of Consciousness, as may be explored in the system of Advaita Vedānta, can be found in the author's *The Idealist Standpoint : A Study in the Vedāntic Metaphysics of Experience*, Viśva-Bharati, Santiniketan, 1965. See Part II : Vedāntic Phenomenology (Chs. V & VI).

mode of descriptive interpretation in the area, we can still hardly push the model too far in our zeal for comparison.

Firstly, it is important to take into account, as already mentioned, the predominantly 'practical' concern for total spiritual freedom (*mokṣa*), combined with the ontological accent on concrete being, that mark out Vedānta from the theoretic aprioristic outlook of the phenomenological enterprise. As Husserl, with some justification, observed in a manuscript (which, to my knowledge has not yet been published), the main interest of philosophizing in the area of classical Indian thought—in fact, more in the earlier than in the later phase—has been directed to 'life-practice' (Lebenspraxis) as he calls it. So the original motive of reflection relates itself directly or indirectly to the stratum of Lebenspraxis.*

Yes, all being said to the contrary, it would still not be quite legitimate to treat theory and praxis in terms of a rigid polarity. Neither is Western thought (the Husserlian model of European tradition) exclusively theoretic or theoretically oriented, nor is Indian thought, to that extent, exclusively practical. After all, both move within the wide spectrum of reflection, wherein praxis and theory cross into each other in varying orders and degrees of emphasis.

This fundamental ratio-cum-theory—centricity of the Western tradition, of Husserl for our present purpose, brings into play certain other characteristic features in the standpoint and outlook of phenomenological philosophy vis-a-vis Vedānta. In the first instance, the phenomenological programme of a critique of experience (Erfahrungskritik) is marked by a concern for structure. The drive towards order ('harmonia'), identified with the noetic soul (psyche), by way of reason ('logismos'), had been the Platonic heritage in Western thought. Husserl attempts to present in his analysis of consciousness an ordered structure—in terms of temporality or 'inner time-consciousness', regions or 'regional constitution', the *a priori* of the world of lived pre-scientific experience (*Lebenswelt*), and so on. Such a structurally-oriented approach,

* This issue of theory-practice interrelation in the cross-cultural perspective has been discussed more thoroughly, in the context of the Husserlian manuscript under reference in my article: "Theory and practice in Indian thought : Husserl's observations" in: *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 21, No. 3 (July 1971).

strictly speaking, is rather conspicuous by its absence within the Vedāntic doctrine of consciousness, unless, of course, brought out indirectly by way of methodological implication. Temporality and historicity, in any case, do not form a constitutive movment in the Vedāntic conception of consciousness.

It is not being denied, however, that Vedānta presents a scheme of interpretation of experience, and as such, a structure. But within that scheme one could hardly look for any structure of apriorities or essentialities in the phenomenological sense. In an indirect (perhaps inverted) way, however, there could be a structural frame of reference in terms of the modes of *ajñāna*. As indicated in the earlier section, *ajñāna* could be interpreted as implying grades of objectification (or of objectivity) for pure consciousness to be dissociated from, in steps of transcendental reflection. The latter are tied up with the levels of identification of *cit* with nescience in different degrees and order—traced from the sub-psychic level of the body ('I-body' or body felt as the subject) to the higher point of *buddhi* or apperceptive understanding. There is the possibility of working out such a structured analysis within the Vedāntic frame of reference, eventually tied up, as it may be, with the Sāṇkhya *tattvas*. It would be an inverted description though—perhaps a *negative* phenomenology, to that extent.

Secondly, with all its subjectivism and idealism (though characterized as 'transcendental'), Husserlian phenomenology still bears a fundamental accent on *objectivity*. Sparking off from anti-psychologism in his earlier phase, Husserl's dominant concern lies with the constitution of objectivity, of the modes of givenness—combined with the central accent on transcendental subjectivity. Śaṅkara too certainly shows an inclination to objectivism—in his polemic against Buddhist subjectivism of Vijñānavāda—but on the level of empirical realism, and not in the direction of Platonic realism of ideal entities, as with Husserl (cf. *Logical Investigations*). As for the transcendental interest in objectivity, the Vedāntic reflection, unlike Husserl, is centrally directed to the essence of all essences, that is *Cit*, the innermost truth behind human subjectivity. As already pointed out, the interest in objectivity could come into play in a thoroughly *cit*-centric philosophy only in an indirect way (that is, in terms of *avidyā*). Yet there could, in terms of this schematic, possibly be a 'negative phenomenology' of objectivity,

in the sense that the reverse direction of the analysis would illuminate the central theme itself (viz., *Ātman*), which is the limiting point of all analysis and description — so of all phenomenological endeavour too.

Further, intentionality provides the central frame of reference in terms of which consciousness is viewed in phenomenology—even when, on final analysis, Husserl projects the model of 'world-accomplishing subjectivity'. The Vedāntic *sākṣin*, on the other hand, would be the outermost (or rather, innermost) limit within which the phenomenological equivalence of 'transcendental subjectivity' could be spoken of. For *sākṣin*, the terminal point of individual consciousness, still suggests a *reference*, though free, to the evidenced phenomena or continuum of phenomena, demanding at the same time the status of absolute self-subsistence. The epithet of *svaprakāśa* goes further to underline its primordial immediacy, which could only be realized (existentially) at a level where epistemic dichotomy does no longer suffice. The essential Husserlian (if not originally Cartesian) structure of 'cogito-cogitatum-qua-cogitatum' is not the paradigm to which *cit* ultimately conforms. It seems consciousness, in its drive towards total autonomy and self-realization, tends in a way to transcend itself, its primary ostensive character of being 'of something'.

This picture of consciousness is plainly not circumscribed within the epistemological model in terms of subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy—one to which the phenomenological standpoint appears to be committed. A glance at the concluding stage of Husserlian thought might show us how transcendental phenomenology, driven by its objective of experience-critique tends, to converge towards the notion of 'transcendental observer' (Zuschauer), involving a necessary separation of the reflecting subject and the reflected continuum, of the interiorized consciousness and the objectivated phenomena.[13] In the face of such a situation, some concrete mediation within the polarity is perhaps called for. But could such mediation be obtained short of an existential-intuitive breakthrough to a meta-phenomenological, meta-epistemic dimension as the final paradigm ?

So the phenomenological standpoint, in its strict methodological approach, poses certain inevitable dilemmas and ambiguities, such as : 'the paradox of human subjectivity' (as Husserl states in

the *Crisis*—see footnote 11), the 'anonymity' in the relation of empirical I and transcendental ego, the need for mediation between the transcendental subject and the reflected continuum of phenomena. Perhaps to all these problematics the said Vedāntic model of *cit-avidyā* correlativity might offer some positive answer—of course, with the admitted alogism of the *avidyā* principle itself. Nevertheless phenomenology, with its singularly theoretic insight into pure consciousness in its unobjective autonomous dimension does, offer a methodological programme to relate a transcendental analysis of consciousness to the world of experience with its immanent structures. The Vedāntic notion of consciousness, on the contrary, is 'un-Western', in the sense that neither objective reference nor individuality constitutes its ultimate essence—combining as it does, plenitude and spontaneity of being with the denial of objectivity and duality. Vedānta, be it admitted, cannot directly meet the modern philosopher's demand for a structured explanation of objectivity and relation to historicity. Yet, on the other hand, it could perhaps encounter more confidently the existentialist demand—as Heidegger would bring forth vis-a-vis the Husserlian model of 'ego cogito'—so far as *cit* is presented as concrete being (*sat*), as existing (*asti*). As for the further existentialist theme of the reality of the *human* situation, of human *Dasein*, Vedānta would very likely respond, again, in terms of its *avidyā* principle.

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NOTES

1. See Helmuth von Glasenapp, *Das Indienbild deutscher Denker*, Stuttgart : Kohler Verlag, 1960.
2. Cf. Edmund Husserl, *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft*, Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt, 1965 (first appeared 1910/11),
3. See "Die Krisis des europäischen Menschentums und die Philosophice" in : *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie* (Husserliana VI), Abhandlungen A, The Hague : Martinus Nijhoff, 1954.

4. Ibid., p. 335
5. Cf. "Brahmaṇaḥ parokṣasya pratyakṣatvasiddhyaye ahamātmam upadiśya punah tadvyudāsena mukhyātmatvam upadiśati", *Pañcapādikā-Vivaraṇa* I.
6. Cf. "Avedyatve sati aparokṣavyvahārayogyatvam", Citsukhācārya, *Tattvapradīpikā*, Ch, I.
7. Cf. "Sarvam vastu jñātatayā vā ajñatatayā vā sākṣicaitanyasya viṣaya eva", *Pañcapādikā-Vivaraṇa* I.
8. See Ed. Husserl's article on "Phenomenology" in: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 17 (14th edltion).
9. Cf. Husserl-Manuskript MSKIII6 (Husserl-Archiv, Koln)
10. See Husserl, *Analysen zur passiven Synthesis*, Beilage VIII + 10, The Hague, 1966 ("Unsterblichkeit des transzndentalen Ich-Unmöglichkeit, dass das transzendentale Ich geboren wird").
11. Ibid., p. 381
12. "Nodeti nāstametyekā samvideṣā svayamprabhā" in: Vidyāraṇya Muni, *Pañcadaśī* I, 7
13. See Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften* etc., Part IIIA.