

PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION AND YOGIC MEDITATION: COMMONALITIES AND DIVERGENCIES

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Abstract: Western philosophers and scholars have long maintained the assumption that there is a gulf of difference between “Western rational thinking” and “Eastern irrational, mystical-metaphysical brooding” (cf. Beinorius 2005; Carrette & King 2005; Halbfass 1990; Tart 1969). Among those that are reasonably familiar with both traditions, however, it is well understood that neither Chinese nor Indian thinking, for example, is in any way inferior to that which can be found in the West (cf. Fung 1966; Dasgupta (1922-1955; Radhakrisnan (1929-1931)). However, it is not the aim of this paper to make a general comparison of Eastern and Western thought relative to such criteria as level of achievement, rationality, scientific-mindedness and so forth. Rather, it's more modest and specific aim is to compare Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) methods for achieving knowledge/truth (i.e., the phenomenological reduction(s)) with those often propounded by the Indian darśana¹ or system of thought (i.e., yogic/jñānic meditation);² as to the latter of these, my primary source will be Patañjali's Yoga Sūtras.³ More specifically, it

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¹This literally means how something presents itself or is experienced from a certain perspective or school of philosophic thought. In ritual and/or pilgrimage: the “auspicious sight” of the deity.

²Clearly, even this more modest objective can only be scantily treated in a short paper such as this.

³Precisely when Patañjali lived has not been established. Although different sources have made very different assessments, it seems clear that it was somewhere between 200 BCE and 200 CE. It also seems clear that Patañjali was not the author, but rather the “editor” or “compiler” of the *Sūtras* s. The text consists of 194 short aphorisms, divided into four book or chapters (*Pāda*). It is believed by most that the manner of their current arrangement originated from around 500 CE. Book I (*Samādhi Pāda* (51 Sūtras s)) treats the theory of yoga; Book II (*Sādhana Pāda* (55 Sūtras s)) treats its practice, technique or discipline; Book III (*Vibhūtipāda* (56 Sūtras s)) treats the *siddhi* or super-natural powers that the practitioner can develop; and, Book IV (*Kaivalya Pāda* (34 Sūtras s)) treats *kaivalya* (“isolation”), meaning emancipation or liberation (the goal of the practice). Since the time of Patañjali, the yoga system has evolved to include a large number of philosophical, religious, self-improvement and self-realization schools and movements, and today there exists a large body of literature treating various types (and aspects) of this tradition that cannot be gone into here (Carrette& King 2005). The general opinion of these texts, however, is that Patañjali's work is the foundational and most authoritative work about yoga. Regardless of their differences, all schools of yoga seem to consider Patañjali the founder of the practice, just as all movements within phenomenology more or less accept Husserl as their principal founder. In this paper, I use the translation by I.K. Taimnis (1961). How Patañjali's method (*jñānic* - or concentration meditation) relates to other forms of meditation (e.g., modern Buddhism's *vipasayanā* or insight meditation) cannot be treated here. (See Eliade 1959, kap. 5; King 1980, kap. 1; Goleman 1977; Sander 1988.)

compares Husserl's phenomenological reduction(s) and Patañjali's yogic/jñānic meditation as a methodological tool (or technique) for achieving a form of higher knowledge or truth that each claims to be otherwise impossible to reach. In making this comparison I intend to draw attention to a particular similarity as well as a particular distinction between the two: on the one hand, Husserl's epoché and phenomenological reductions⁴ bear a striking resemblance to the method(s) advocated by Patañjali; on the other hand, although the epoché and the phenomenological reductions are often presented as being central to the phenomenological effort,⁵ unlike Patañjali, few phenomenologists have had something meaningful to say about what one must practically do to acquire and execute the involved techniques.

According to Husserl, the *epoché* and the phenomenological reduction(s) are the most essential methodological tools in terms of conducting the *radical reflexion* of consciousness that is necessary to free us from the various conditioned presuppositions (needs, habits, *hexis*, etc.) that, in our “natural attitude” (*natürliche Einstellung*), largely determine and direct our experience of the world and ourselves, thus preventing us from seeing things as they “*really*” are—i.e., as “pure phenomena”. In other words, Husserl’s method aims to cleanse or purge the mind in such a way that one’s experiences are no longer affected by the various factors that separate the experiencing subject from “the things themselves” (*die Sachen selbst*).⁶

⁴Authors such as Goleman (1977, spec. part I and III), Johansson (1979, 1983), King (1980) and Ornstein (1971) have argued that this resemblance also applies to those meditational methods described in Buddhism’s Nikāya literature, which is perhaps most systematically described in Buddhagosa’s *Visuddhimagga* (‘The Path of Purification’). These authors also argue that the Buddhist “introspective” or – if we observe the distinction between introspection and reflexion (Zaner 1970; Idhe 1977) – reflexive descriptive psychological analysis, is the most detailed and complete empirical description and analysis of the mind and its structures, functions and processes that has been made before the birth of “modern” depth psychology (cf. also Carrette & King 2005). Moreover, as I see it, it has the strength of being practical and agent/participate-based, and not theoretical and observer-oriented (like most phenomenological theories).

⁵It should be noted that there are many different schools (or directions) within the phenomenological movement (to use Spiegelberg’s term (1982)), and that these contain various ideas about what phenomenology is and how it ought to be performed. As such the understandings of Husserl, for example, differ in substantial ways from those of Heidegger, Sartre, Schütz and Merleau-Ponty, who, in their turn, differ from each other. These differences are identified by the use of terms such as “transcendental phenomenology”, “social phenomenology”, “phenomenological ontology” and “life-world phenomenology”. The emphatic claim that the *epoché* and the phenomenological reduction(s) are necessary components of the phenomenological method primarily applies to advocates of transcendental phenomenology. In the phenomenological theories of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, for example, these elements play only a very minor role (if any at all) (Sander 1988, part III).

⁶The fact that this Decartian/Husserlian (and, as we will see, Patañjalian) method is highly controversial is reflected in the following comment by Macintyre (1977: 462): “To say to oneself or to someone else ‘Doubt all your beliefs here and now’ ... is an invitation not to

Only when the mind is “purified” in this manner can the experiencer reach phenomenology’s goal of absolute freedom from presuppositions and prejudices (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*), which is a necessary precondition for the ultimate achievement of so-called apodictically true and certain knowledge.⁷ Arguing for what appears to be a very similar goal, the opening aphorisms of Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtras* state that “*yoga* is the inhibition of the modifications of the mind [which establishes] the Seer in his own essential and fundamental nature. In other states, there is assimilation (of the Seer) with [those] modifications” (1:2-4). Miller (1996: ix) claims that Patañjali “... seeks a new perspective on the nature of knowing – a way to clear the mind of accumulated experiences and memories”, and such an observation can as readily be applied to Husserl. The paper ends by pointing out a dilemma (or, perhaps, inconsistency) that appears to come along with the serious acceptance of phenomenological theory and method as a means for achieving the type of “pure” absolute unprejudiced and apodictically true knowledge that Husserl claims to be his goal. This dilemma roughly consists of the fact that Husserl’s theory prevents him from continuing his reductions all the way to their inevitable (and unavoidable?) end. In other words, if one were to consistently carry phenomenological reduction to its natural end, it would logically bring one to the point of becoming freed from (or going beyond) the phenomenological-theoretical point of departure itself—an end that Husserl appears to have never achieved. Put a bit differently, although phenomenology should have been pure method, it became theory instead. This sort of dilemma, on the other hand, is one that the yogi can potentially avoid.⁸

philosophy but to mental breakdown, or rather to philosophy as a means of mental breakdown”. Wittgenstein (1961) repeatedly makes the same point.

⁷It should be obvious that the attainment of this goal presupposes that the *entirety* of our consciousness—its various sedimentary experiences and their organizations (relevancy structures)—is accessible to its own reflective gaze, meaning that our consciousness is totally transparent relative to its own gaze. In other words, everything in our consciousness can be investigated by the reflexion of the intentional analysis. There cannot be any *de facto* inaccessible strata or layers of “sub-“ or “unconscious” “material” (that can affect our experiencing) anywhere in the consciousness (mind). Husserl (as well as Sartre) believed that every experience (every content of consciousness) is capable of being completely and perfectly explicated and “unveiled” by the phenomenologist, an uncovering in which *all* included moments (in their process of constitution) can be separated and isolated from each other and be objects for the “intuitive” gaze of the (transcendental or pure) ego (cf. 1950 (1973a), especially the Forth Meditation). As far as I can see, yoga and several other *darśanas* share the opinion that the properly trained subject can reflect all content of consciousness. As is well known, Freud and Jung, among others, were of a different opinion. Both Husserl and yoga seem to be of the opinion that *real* objectivity and truth can be had only from “nobody’s point of view”, or from God’s (if there is any difference). As has been noted by Nagel (1974), objectivity and truth presuppose “departure from a specifically human or even mammalian viewpoint”.

⁸To avoid any misunderstandings, let me emphasize that my aim here is not to prove that one or the other of these “schools” is better (more correct or true) than the other, or to argue that the phenomenologist should become a yogi (or vice versa); nor am I suggesting that one or the

I. The Indian Tradition of Thought

Before entering the main topic of this article, let me set the stage by outlining my views on the principle theme of Indian thought, which from the Upaniṣads (approx. 700-500 BCE) onwards appears to have been largely existential (cf. Sander & Andersson 2010). By this I mean that throughout its history, Indian philosophy's primary effort has been to describe, analyze and explain the human predicament, and especially the temporality and historicity of mankind. In this regard, human beings are viewed as entities that are conditioned by a multiplicity of inner and outer factors, with the central problem being to surmount (or become "liberated" from) these various "determinants" and achieve an unconditioned, non-temporal, non-historical state of existence (*mokṣa*).⁹ Here it should be noted that the primary aim of this sort of analysis was not to attain a precise, coherent theory of the human being, but rather to comprehend the extent to which consciousness¹⁰ has been conditioned and, most significantly, to ascertain the nature of that which potentially exists beyond (or outside of) the determinations of the temporal world—i.e., what it would mean to be a wholly free and unconditioned living being.

This is one reason that long before the Western development of deep psychology, Indian thinkers had already initiated a detailed functional examination of the human mind (or consciousness) and its formative role in our experience of self and world. What they discovered in this regard was that while the "outer" (cultural, social, etc.) determinants were relatively easy to identify, comprehend and overcome, the major challenge to the achievement of a completely liberated life (the goal of the *yogi*) involved understanding the structure and organization (*vāsanās*) of the normally unconscious, deeply rooted properties of one's own mind (needs, dispositions, motivations, impulses, etc. (*saṃskāras*)) and then methodically transcending them.¹¹ Here it is important to emphasize once again that among Indian thinkers, knowledge of the various characteristics of consciousness and its role in the determination of the self, its experiences and so forth was never an end in itself, something of only

other school *really* has methods by which we can *de facto* obtain apodictically true knowledge. My opinion regarding this last matter can be found in Sander 1988.

⁹ According to Tart (1969: 3), one indication of Indian philosophy's great interest in consciousness and other related problems is that Sanskrit has developed over 20 terms for describing various forms of consciousness.

¹⁰ Whereas in Indian philosophy mind and consciousness are systematically distinguished, in phenomenology as well as in much of Western psychology they generally are not. In Indian philosophy, mind (*manas*, or in the yoga tradition, *citta*) is normally considered an individual "entity", limited to one person, whereas consciousness (*cetanā*) is considered universal and unlimited. An individual mind is (considered to be) conscious due to universal consciousness, and yoga is the method by which that limited conscious mind is made to mingle with the unlimited, thus establishing a being in its "true" nature.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion on the various factors that determine our experiencing, see Sander 1988, spec. part III, sect. 3.2.3.1., 3.3.3.8., part IV sect. 4.1.

theoretical or academic interest. On the contrary, it was consistently pursued for practical use in the process of self-liberation. Knowledge of consciousness, in other words, was primarily of instrumental value, as a means for controlling and mastering the mind: *mokṣa* was the superior goal, and everything else was subordinate to this. As such, the main attraction for Western philosophers and psychologist that have looked to Indian thought has not been in its *theories* of consciousness, but rather in its *methods* and *techniques* for “de-conditioning” (Eliade), “de-automatizing” (Deikman) or liberating the mind from its normally unconscious, automatically operating determining factors and processes. Indeed, it is likely in this area that Western psychologists, phenomenologists and philosophers have most to learn from Indian thinkers.

From this we now turn to the concept *māyā*, which, as is commonly known, holds great importance in Indian thought. While the term’s etymology and meaning has been much discussed, a dominating view seems to be that it originates from the Indo-European root *ma*, which means to make, produce, create, measure, form or build.¹² Whatever the truth about its etymology, *māyā* has been used within many *darśana* to indicate “mirage”, “phantom”, “magic”, “coming into being”, “unreal(it)” and “(cosmic) illusion”. To my understanding, *māyā* is unreal or illusory primarily because it “comes into being” and is characterized by “changeableness” and “temporality”, and thus cannot be an aspect of *Being*. And because all temporal entities carry the seed of their own destruction, so to speak, they are incapable of providing complete satisfaction, at least according to most *darśanas*.¹³

Early on, Indian thinkers became aware of the relation between illusion, temporality and human suffering, making this one of their principal themes. Although this relation was often expressed in “cosmic terms”, a closer reading indicates that, as a rule, the problem of human suffering and disharmony was conceived as being determined by historic-temporal structures and categories of experience that prevented one from experiencing and living in harmony with “Reality”, or *ens*

¹²In which case it shares etymology with the Latin *materia*, *materies*, and the like.

¹³Cf. the platonic distinction between the world of changeable and perishable entities (the empirical world of our senses) on the one hand, and the world of unchangeable and imperishable entities (the world of ideas or forms) on the other. The former is relative and less real than the latter, which is absolute. That is why the only type of knowledge we can have about the former is *doxa* (belief, opinion), while we can have *episteme* (true, absolute, justified and apodictic knowledge) about the latter. As can be seen, it is not only an Indian idea that the only “thing” *really* and *truly* worth striving for, and the only “thing” we can *really* have knowledge about, is something eternal and unchangeable. We also find the same theme in the Bible (especially Ecclesiastes), where all our strivings for temporal, worldly “things” are described as follows: “vanity of vanities; all is vanity”. These are just two examples of what Eliade claims to be our human “ontological thirst”: “Religious man can live only in a sacred world, because it is only in such a world that he participates in being, that he has a *real existence*. This religious need expresses an unquenchable ontological thirst. Religious men thirst for *being*” (1959: 64). This type of *essentialism* was not attacked at its core before Sartre and his radical *existentialism*.

realisimum.¹⁴ “Being in *māyā*” is thus roughly equivalent to what many Western thinkers have described as “being in false consciousness” or “being an ideological subject”, meaning being helplessly embedded in the thought and knowledge determinants¹⁵ of one’s own epochal, geographical, social, cultural, etc. location. *Māyā* means, in other words, that the life-world we experience and exist in is only relative, contingent and not the *really real* thing.¹⁶ Accordingly, to live in *māyā* is to live with a “gap” between “what our senses receive” and “what our mind experiences”—between *Reality As It Is* and reality as we experience it through our historically, culturally and socially derived patterns of interpretation.¹⁷ It is not too difficult to imagine that those who seriously (existentially) embrace this perspective will likely experience a sense of dissatisfaction with mundane historic-temporal existence and long to experience and live within the framework of *True* reality. To summarize, although *māyā* clearly indicates cosmic illusion, the term also, and above all, indicates temporality and historicity: existence and coming into being not only on the scale of the eternal cosmos, but also in terms of mundane time and history.¹⁸

¹⁴Or by whatever term one desires to call it: Supreme Reality, Supreme Being, Brahman, Mahadeva, Mahadevi, Ground of Being, etc.

¹⁵These determinants of our thought and knowledge, the “mental” structures through which we constitute our identities and life-worlds, the structures that give us our specific understanding of the world, our self and our place and role in it, have many names in the literature, for example: *Weltanschauung*, definition of reality, preconception or *Vorverständnis*, belief/dis-belief system, stock of knowledge, pattern of interpretation, *habitus* and the like. Bourdieu (1977: 82-83) describes them as a “system of lasting, transportable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, function at every moment as a *matrix of perceptions, apperceptions, and actions* and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks, thanks to the analogical transfers of schemes permitting the solution of similarly shaped problems”. For reasons described in Sander (1988, 2000), I will here use the term “pattern of interpretation”, meaning the conceptual system (where “conceptual” is used in the broad sense of an element of a mental code) through which the individual selects, organizes, structures and interprets his/her experience, a conceptual structure through which the individual constitutes and perceives him/herself and his/her world.

¹⁶Cf. Berger & Luckmann (1967: 61), who describe the basic thesis of the sociology of knowledge as follows: “*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*”. Briefly, the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the relation between human thinking and its results on the one hand, and the social matrix in which it arises on the other—i.e., it is the science about “the determination of thought and knowledge”. Cf. Schütz 1976: 229f, 1973: 347f. For a more detailed discussion, see Sander 1988, sect. 3.5.3.

¹⁷This, of course, is only a social-psychological version of Lettvin’s et al (1959) famous “What the frog’s eye tells the frog’s brain” problematic.

¹⁸It is more complicated than this, as different philosophical schools have developed the “general” concept *māyā* in different directions and ways. In the Yoga school of thought, *māyā* is understood as the five *kleśas* (*avidyā-asmitārāga-dveṣa-abhiniveśaḥ* and *vidyāvṣetramuttareśamprasuptatanuviccinnodaraṇam* (see Yogasūtra 2.3-4)), which means there are five kinds of ignorance that cause a living being see him-/herself as an individual, rather than in terms of his/her original universal nature. Here, *avidyā* is ignorance or false opinion about the objective world. *Asmitā* is identification of *puruṣa* and the *citta*. *Rāga* is the

Given this, it appears that the problem that much of the Indian philosophy has been more or less grappling with over the centuries revolves around the following paradoxical situation:

1. On the one hand, we human beings are born into a world that in all relevant respects has been already “mapped out” for us by our predecessors, meaning that we enter into a situation containing pre-constituted historic-cultural patterns of interpretation that we then naively and unreflectively adopt via one or another process of socialization. In this way we are handed and deeply internalize a specific definition of reality that comes along with a host of equally specific (if relative) preconceptions, prejudices, beliefs, values, norms, rules and so forth, all of which remain largely invisible. This “invisibility” is one reason that it is so difficult to transcend our own pattern of interpretation: we are normally unaware that something is there that needs to be overcome! The pattern of interpretation, in other words, has become (in a Kantian sense) a transcendental structure of the mind (consciousness)—i.e., an *a priori* element of experience that conditions knowledge. This is why the contingent life-world that one naively experiences through one’s pattern of interpretation is normally experienced as “the world, or reality, *itself*”.¹⁹ In the natural attitude there is generally no consideration that the fundamental features of the world can be different than they appear to be through one’s pattern of interpretation, with most people uncritically, spontaneously and naively assuming that their perceptions and experiences are placing them in (more or less) direct contact with an independent, orderly and meaningful outer world that roughly corresponds with their own experience of it.²⁰ They are, in short, prisoners of their historic-cultural-biographical situation;

2. On the other hand, we know (by way of the history of science, among other things) that we “doom” ourselves to ideology, irrationality, mistakes and delusion when we naively and unreflectively embrace and live in accordance with the historic-cultural pattern of interpretation that we have automatically inherited. Thus, one that seeks to escape this fate through the achievement of trans-historical, trans-cultural (or universal) *Knowledge* of self and world must acquire a method by which to become aware of, and free from, the mind’s contingent determinations. The serious seeker of truth, in other words, must find a means to a position from which he can “look back with wonder at the long and tedious journey which he has completed in the realm of

emotional weakness of man, which prompt him to seek and to attach himself to things merely for the pleasure they are able to give. *Dveṣa* is man’s tendency to avoid and to hate what gives him pain. *Abhiniveśa* is attachment to life and fear of death.

¹⁹In more poetic language, Whitehead puts it like this: “Nature gets credit which in truth should be reserved for us, the rose for its scent, the nightingale for its song, and the sun for its radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellence of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless, merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly” (quoted from Ornstein 1977, s. 45. Cf. James 1950a, ss. 288 f).

²⁰Sander 1988 (especially Part III) repeatedly notes that from a philosophical point of view this type of “everyday epistemology” is extremely dubious.

Time while all the time he was living in the Eternal", as expressed by Taming (1961: xiii). To my understanding, both phenomenology and yoga constitute at least the attempt to create a pathway to what Husserl describes as "being without bias or prejudice" (*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*), and thereby to "the pure – and, so to speak, still dumb – psychological experience, which now must be made to utter its own sense with no adulteration" (1950: 77)²¹—i.e., experience that is *not* structured or processed by "concepts" (the empirical prerequisite for apodictic knowledge).²²

II. The Notion of the Observing Self

The attempt to establish a philosophical dialogue between phenomenology and yoga entails numerous challenges, and thus stands a good chance of leaving the adherents of both systems with some sense of disappointment.²³ One such challenge is purely terminological in the sense that both traditions are rather fond of using particular (if not peculiar) technical nomenclatures that outsiders can perceive as being almost intentionally obscure, esoteric and as incomprehensible; as "the emperor's new clothes" in H.C Andersen's classic fable. My own and others view on this matter is that despite their apparent terminological conceits, both traditions have achieved important knowledge, understandings and discoveries that are worthy of attention and pursuit, including what many within these disciplines regard as their greatest discovery: "the mind (consciousness) as witness" or "the observing self" (to borrow a phrase from Diekman). The conception of the mind as witness emphasizes that "beyond" our experience (or the content of our consciousness) lays a "pure, transcendental consciousness" (or ego) that is liberated from all historic-temporal-biographic structures and determinants – the consciousness of the "enlightened" being. The experience of one that has emancipated his/her mind (consciousness) from this network of delimiting conditions, and thus tasted true freedom, is (in James' words) "ineffable" (Sander 1988, sect. 2.9). It is this sort of conquest of consciousness—this absolute freedom, isolation and perfect spontaneity²⁴—that, in

²¹... *die reinen und sozusagen noch stumme Erfahrung, die nun erst zur reinen Aussprache ihres eigenen Sinnes zu bringen ist* (Husserl 1950: 77).

²²The matter of whether or not such (uniquely unmediated) experiences (or conscious events) are even possible has been much discussed (cf. Gennaro 2008). The outcome of this debate, however, is of little consequence relative to this paper (cf. Sander 1980: 315-322, spec. 539-548). (For both private and philosophical reasons, I myself (if pushed) would opt for Patañjali, Stace and Forman over Katz and the like.)

²³From the perspective of phenomenology, Zaner (1970: 30) notes that "the difficulties of introducing phenomenology are notorious, and quite sufficient to dissuade even the hardest of souls"; and echoing this view, Schütz notes that "[the] attempt to reduce the work of [Husserl] to a few basic propositions understandable to an audience not familiar with his thought is, as a rule, a hopeless undertaking" (1973: 100). In my view, analogous statements could be made about the theory of yoga.

²⁴Compare the concept of *wowei* within the Daoist tradition (for example Fung 1966: 100ff, 114ff; Kasulis 1981: 36ff, 138).

my view, constitutes the ultimate goal of Indian philosophical as well as Husserlian phenomenological theories, methods and techniques.²⁵ And among these, the Sāṃkhya yoga *darśana* is certainly one of the earliest and most accessible examples.

III. The Phenomenological Reduction(s)²⁶

The most essential ingredients of the phenomenological method²⁷ are the *epoché* (the parenthesizing (*einklammerung*) of our ordinary knowledge, beliefs, etc. about the world) and the phenomenological reduction (the philosophical technique by which normally experienced realities become pure phenomena (*bloße Phänomen*)). Taken together, these two moments of the method can be said to constitute the transcendental phenomenological reduction.²⁸ Beginning with his 1913 publication of *Ideen I*, Husserl would always emphasize that phenomenology is a *reflexive* activity. In light of this understanding, the transcendental phenomenological reduction can be conceived as the conversion of the natural, non-reflexive attitude (*natürliche Einstellung*) to one that is reflexive and counter-natural (*widernatürlich*), meaning a special kind of phenomenological reflexive attitude. Regarding the *epoché*, it can be basically conceived as the starting point of the radical reflexion of consciousness (and its roles and functions) that Husserl considered necessary to free the mind from the above-described conditions, presuppositions, assumptions and various other determinants that ordinarily (in the natural attitude) govern our experience of the world and ourselves. The aim is to problematize, “bracket” or de-activate our belief in a world that exists independently of our consciousness as well as in the various objects, laws, rules, theories, norms, value systems, etc. that ordinarily prevent us from experiencing, seeing or intuiting “the things themselves” (*die Sachen selbst*). Here it is important to emphasize that this constitutes not a denial of the objective world and its “content”, but merely a suspension of judgment concerning whether or not that world factually exists. In short, the *epoché* is a necessary step (or

²⁵ Skjervheim (1971: 11f) expresses this idea as follows: “The transcendental ego is not something mystical; all of us are it, although we might not know it. It is in the transcendental ego, in the actual here and now, that we must search for the freedom of man. We can never find freedom as a fact. It is rather in freedom that we can find the facts. Freedom will in itself not be found as a fact” (my translation).

²⁶ A more detailed account of this very sketchy and simplified description can be found in Sander 1988 (esp. Part III.), where additional references can also be found. See also Sander 1999.

²⁷ Which, according to most phenomenologists, constitutes the core or essence of phenomenological philosophizing (see, for example, Spiegelberg 1982, Introduction and Ch. xiv; Merleau-Ponty 1965: vii; Natanson 1973: 3; Haglund 1977: 8, 12; Cairns 1943: 3ff; Husserl 1950: 23ff; Farber 1943: 561ff).

²⁸ It is, of course, a bit more complicated than this. In the second “moment”, Husserl, for example, distinguishes between the phenomenological reduction, the eidetic reduction and the transcendental reduction. For present purpose, however, what has been said above should suffice.

methodological tool) in the process of neutralizing, de-automatizing and/or cancelling the natural attitude, thus making it possible for us to experience things in a “pure” way, meaning *exactly* as they present themselves to us. The moment of the *epoché* is thus a prerequisite for the moment of the transcendental phenomenological reduction, which consists of reducing all mundane existences (the entire natural world) to “pure phenomena” (*bloße Phänomene*): those (irreal and ideal) entities of meaning (*noemata*)²⁹ that are the phenomenologist’s true object of study. Thus, and once again, the phenomenological reduction consists of converting our naïve, natural, pre-analytical or pre-reflective attitude into one that is reflexive or counter-natural, something that is frequently depicted as seeing the world “with new eyes”, “from a new perspective” or “in a new light”, and can be described as the returning (or bringing back) of the world to our consciousness of it.³⁰

Theoretically, when such a reduction has been properly executed, thus purifying our naïve experience of so-called independent reality, we have achieved what Husserl calls “a transcendental attitude or outlook”, which transforms (or better, reveals) all mundane existences as *phenomena*; what remains is only our consciousness of the world, which Husserl terms, “the transcendental.”³¹ The reduction, in other words, is “transcendental” because it causes a reversal in which all mundane existences are “meditatively” withdrawn onto consciousness and “phenomenological” because it transforms all mundane existences into “pure phenomena”. With this, according to Husserl, we should be able to intuit the pure meaning or essence (*eidōs*) of every object in a direct and immediate way (cf. 1950 sect. 8, 1962: 155).³² Such essences are pure, self-evident universals, or general concepts, that present our consciousness with pure possibilities whose validity is independent of (normal) experience. In this way, the phenomenological reduction is the methodological tool that opens the phenomenological field for study; it is “the avenue of access to phenomenology and its objects”, to borrow a phrase from Gurwitsch (1966: 175). The new attitude arising from the phenomenological reduction contains a critical dimension as well, in that what was once (naively) experienced as clear, simply and unambiguous “reality” now turns out to be a complex of “mere possibilities” (*bloße Möglichkeiten*)—i.e.,

²⁹ And thus, in a sense, universals, essences or *eidōs*.

³⁰ Cf. Farber (1943: 216) where he claim that Husserl considered his phenomenology as a method/technique to change and amplify his “seeing” within philosophy and psychology, thereby making it complete and perfect.

³¹ The terms “transcendent” and “transcendental” are used differently in Husserl’s various writings. However, for him to be able to attain his epistemological goals, the transcendental must be used to denote everything that is completely genuine and adequately presented or given (and thereby completely available) in an act of intuition (*Anschaungsakt*), whereby the given is something that we can have presuppositionless and apodictic knowledge about. Every experience to which this does not apply is considered transcendent. For an explication of the term “transcendence”, see Sander 1980 sect. 2.5.1.

³² The term “object” should here be interpreted in the widest possible sense. It denotes (for Husserl) *everything* that can appear for a consciousness, whether real or ideal, whether perceived, imagined, dreamt, felt or intuited.

undetermined experiences in need of clarification. This reflexivity helps not only to uncover (or perhaps *recover*) the entire content of consciousness, but also to distinguish that which is “given in itself” (*selbstgegeben*) from that which comes only from “opinion” (*Mitmeinung*). In other words, it enables us to separate that which is *genuinely given* from components that are supplied (appresented) by our own consciousness via (pre-predicative) “interpretation” (appresentational filling) based upon earlier experiences, knowledge, expectations and so forth. In this way, we learn to distinguish between what our senses perceive and what our mind experiences, thus creating (by way of the reduction) a “universe totally without prejudice” (*Universum absoluter Vorurteilslosigkeit*) (1950 sect. 15). From this it should be clear that rather than diminishing, discarding or detracting from our experiences, the reduction factually enhances them, meaning that through its ability to uncover or de-automatize previously anonymous material, it provides us with both new and (perhaps more importantly) previously unnoticed data. In other words, one important function (or effect) of the method is to expose implicit aspects of consciousness that are normally invisible to the naïve experiencer; the method facilitates the “uncovering of the *potentialities ‘implicit’* in actualities of consciousness”³³ (1950: 83, cf. sect. 20). Given this background, phenomenology can be roughly characterized as a descriptive study of the total contents or meanings (*noemata*) that constitute our consciousness (or mind) as well as its meaning-giving and other activities.

According to Husserl, the most important discovery that comes along with making consciousness (or mind) the object of phenomenological examination is that it is always “directed towards something”: a tree, a stretch of time, a number, a feeling, a ghost, a devil or a god. In other words, consciousness is seen to *always* intend something other than itself (with a different mode of being than itself), but that it intentionally includes, encloses or contains. Every thought is a thought *of* something (has its “thought object”), every wish is a wish *for* something (has its wished-for object) and so forth. Husserl defines “intentionality” as “the unique peculiarity of [*all human*] experience ‘to be the consciousness *of* something’”,³⁴ noting it to be “an

³³ “ihre überall eigentümliche Leistung ist Enthüllung der in den Bewusstseinsaktualitäten implizierten Potentialitäten”.

³⁴ “die Eigenheit von Erlebnissen, ‘Bewusstsein von etwas zu sein’”. These, at least, are all the experiences that need concern us here. It should, however, be noted that Husserl claims that there can be psychic phenomena without intentionality; he primarily refers to these as “sensory material” or *hyle* (See for example 1976 sect. 85, espec. pp. 193 f). It should also be noted that these non-intentional objects – if they exist – are something that we within the scope of phenomenology (as most phenomenologists understand it) *cannot* obtain any knowledge about. Being non-intentional, they simply cannot be experienced! (Sander 1988, part III, sect. 3.1.4.2). This is probably also the reason that Forman (1986) does not want to call “episodes” of pure consciousness (i.e., empty, interiorized awareness with no sensory affective, or epistemic content beyond the knowledge of being aware itself, or, with Forman’s own definitions: “the subject is awake, conscious, but without an object or content for consciousness – no thoughts, emotions, sensations, or awareness of external phenomena ... Yet neither is the subject sleeping, for he may afterwards confidently report that he was not asleep” (Forman 1986: 49)

essential peculiarity of the sphere of experience in general, since all experiences in one way or another participate in intentionality...It is intentionality which characterizes *consciousness* in the pregnant sense of the term" (1976 sect. 84, s.187, cf. sect. 36, ss. 73 f, sect. 146, ss. 337).³⁵ In Husserl's view, this intentional (meaning-giving) moment must be acknowledged as a special and irreducible element of consciousness. Without this intentional moment, our perceptions (experiences) would be blind, as they would be empty without sensation (1984 V sect. 14). Husserl refers to mental phenomena that are "intentional" in the above sense as "acts of consciousness"—or, in short, "acts". An intentional act is thus a mental phenomenon in which an object is intended or meant; every intentional act presents the subject with an object (a meaning or a *noema*). Given this, it follows that where there is an act that is characterized by certain determinable properties there will also be an object (a *noema*) that is characterized by those same determinable properties; and more importantly, the properties of the object are determined by the property of the consciousness in which it exists. In other words, to say that an act is directed towards (intentionally includes, is related to or "has") an object (a *noema*) is *only* to say that the act in question has the properties in virtue of which the experience is just such as it is. To say that an act is directed towards (or has as its object) the deity Shiva, for example, can be viewed as a metaphorical way of expressing that the act in question has the specific properties by virtue of which the person who "has" the act can be correctly said to be thinking about or seeing the deity Śiva.³⁶ According to phenomenology, the key to accessing and understanding an object is to access and understand the structure and function of the consciousness that determines or constitutes that object. It is this "purifying" of consciousness from all (empirical) historic-cultural-biographical contingencies that the *epoché* and the reduction are ideally supposed to engender, thus affording one the possibility to create a "universe

and "a condition of being entirely without any sensory or mental content ... or without any intentional content for the awareness" (1999: 13)) "*experiences* of pure consciousness" but rather "pure consciousness *events*" (PCE).

³⁵"*Sie ist ... eine Wesenseigentümlichkeit der Erlebnissphäre überhaupt, als alle Erlebnisse in irgendeiner Weise an der Intentionalität Anteil haben ... Die Intentionalität ist es, die Bewußtsein im prägnanten Sinne charakterisiert.*"

³⁶Kockelmans (1967 s. 34) express this as follows: "Intentionality, then, does not consist in an external object entering somehow into a relationship with consciousness nor in a relationship between two psychical contents in our consciousness. Intentionality has nothing to do with relations between 'real' objects, but is essentially an act that gives meaning. Thus the object of any act is an inseparable aspect of the meaning phenomenon itself. In Husserl's philosophy the object appears as essentially determined by the structure of thinking itself; this thinking itself first gives meaning to the object and then continues to orient itself to the pole of identity which it itself has already created." According to Husserl, no metaphysical conclusions can be drawn from the fact that acts (which are concrete, real psychic phenomena) "have", intentionally include or are intentionally related to objects (*noemata*), which are entities of meaning and thereby ideal and irreal. From the understanding of *noemata* as entities of a different ontological type than the concrete acts that "have" them, it does not follow that it is necessary to postulate objects over and above (or in addition to) the concrete acts.

absolutely free from prejudice³⁷—the precondition for the achievement of apodictic knowledge. Here, regardless of the objections of Husserl and others, it seems fairly clear that the distance from this to so-called transcendental idealism is not very great and that transcendental idealism is the logical end of the phenomenological project. Be that as it may, it nonetheless appears that it is this process of moving from the *epoché* to the intentional and constitutional analysis that constitutes the “transcendental phenomenological reduction”, which, in turn, allows us to access our pure, transcendental consciousness or ego. Instead of the universal doubt of Descartes, then, Husserl proposes this universal “*epoché*”. A new scientific domain is thus determined. All the sciences that refer to the natural world are also eliminated: no use is made of their propositions and results. They may only be assumed in brackets, and not as propositions presuming validity. That which remains when the entire world is eliminated (including us with all *cogitare*) is ‘pure’ or ‘transcendental’ consciousness. That is the phenomenological residuum (Farber 1943: 527). In other words, the transcendental phenomenological reduction culminates in the realization of pure subjectivity, and from there the task becomes to access and comprehend—via some form of immediate, direct and conceptually unmediated intuition (or insight)—how this pure self (this “transcendental ego”) constitutes objects and functions as the source of all objectivity.³⁸ For phenomenology, then, the only existing objectivity is that which is constituted, experienced or, if you prefer, *subjective* (cf. Sander 1988a del III, spec. sect. 3.1.5, 3.5.3., 3.6.6. and 3.6.7). Accordingly, the endeavor of the reductions is to free (purify) consciousness from all the contingent contents and structures *for* the world that “imprison” us, so as to reach unprejudiced, presuppositionless and absolutely certain knowledge of the dumb (pure and true) essence (*eidos*) of reality. Husserl, however, never attempted to bring this purifying process to its natural, logical end: the ultimate purifying of consciousness from *all* activities and *all* content. For him, even the “pure” transcendental consciousness was an intentional (constituting) “consciousness *of* something”. Given Husserl’s point of departure and his aim of employing reduction not as end in itself, but rather as a means of achieving apodictic knowledge *about something*, this is both understandable and legitimate.

This notwithstanding, it should be at least theoretically possible for the phenomenologist to pursue the reductions such that they enable her/him to move beyond intentional consciousness (consciousness *of* something) to wholly undifferentiated and empty consciousness—i.e., the “experience of emptiness” or, in the terminology of Forman, the “pure conscious event” (PCE) (cf. Sander 1988 part

³⁷ “*Universum absoluter Vorurteilslosigkeit*” or “*Voraussetzungslosigkeit*”

³⁸It might be worth mentioning that it took Husserl a while to find the transcendental ego. In the first edition of *Logische Untersuchungen* (1900/II/1:361) he notes: “I am quite unable to find this ego”. In a note in the second edition (1913) he adds, however, that “I have since managed to find it, i.e. have learned not to be led astray from a pure grasp of the given through corrupt forms of ego-metaphysic”. Even if Husserl was aware of the fact that a pure, transcendental ego could never be experienced, he was from then on convinced of its “existence”, even its necessary “existence” (Husserl 1913, § 57).

IV, sect. 4.4.1).³⁹ Regardless of whether or not such an extreme reduction would be “useful” in terms of resolving Husserl’s original epistemological problem (the problem of explaining the relation between an act of knowing and its object), it appears philosophically indefensible to *a priori* delimit the Husserlian method by discounting the possibility of its enabling the achievement of such a “pre-reflexive” state. Indeed, it is just this pre-reflexive transcendental subjectivity, this experience of absolute emptiness, this cessation of all psychophysical activity, sensation and experience that appears to be the final aim of the yoga system we are about to discuss, meaning the condition (*asamprajñāta samādhi*) of total withdrawal (*nirodha*) from the world.

IV. Yogic Meditation

The yoga system’s prescribed method for accessing one’s true nature (*ātmasiddhi*) and thereby achieving liberation (*mokṣa*) is rooted in Sāṃkhya philosophy’s conception of man and the universe, which asserts a basic dualism.⁴⁰ The universe, it is said, consists of twenty-five elements, twenty-four of which are manifestations of *prakṛti* (from *pra*≈ before and *kṛti*≈ creation), an unconscious, indiscriminate and insentient material substance of which *everything* that exists within the causality of time and space consists or, rather, can be derived and explained. *Prakṛti* is the root cause of the perceivable material world; everything that we can experience has evolved or developed out of *prakṛti*—or “*procreatix*”, the intriguing Latin translation suggested by Veeraswamy Krishnaraj (2002: 12). And beyond *prakṛti* there is *puruṣa*, the twenty-fifth principle consisting of absolute, pure, unchangeable, unconscious and inactive consciousness (or subject), which is devoid of properties and characteristics.⁴¹ *Puruṣa*, which constitutes the true “I”, “self” or “soul”, is described

³⁹Husserl never went that far for the reason that non-intentional “entities” or “events” can never be something we can have *knowledge* about. He did, however, despite this, postulate the existence of a pure, transcendental Ego “as *necessary* in principle” – even if he accepted that “we shall never stumble across the pure Ego as an experience among others within the flux of manifold experiences which survives as transcendental residuum” (1976 § 57). It was deemed necessary because without it he could not explain, among other things, how the various “individual experiences” that constitute our stream of consciousness “hung together” “vertically” and “horizontally” to one unified consciousness. He needed, in other words, the pure Ego as “the glue” or synthesizing principle of consciousness.

⁴⁰The Sāṃkhya philosophy, which was developed from approx. 500 BCE, claims to be both a complete and systematic worldview and a philosophy of life, both *darśana* and *anu-ikṣiki* (survey or summary of all things).

⁴¹The term “consciousness” is notoriously ambiguous and problematic, and even more so is the term “unconscious consciousness”. The general opinion seems to be that what makes a mental state conscious is that it is accompanied by some sort of higher order thought or awareness to the effect that “I am now in mental state M.” In other words, “a conscious state is a mental state whose subject is aware of being in it” (Lycan 2001: 3). With this definition, of course, it is difficult to talk about “unconscious consciousness”. Consciousness, however, is also spoken about in more general terms, such as when we make a distinction between conscious and non-

by Radhakrishnan (1931 Vol. II: 313) as “mirrors with nothing to reflect”.⁴² *Prakṛti* consists of pure, unconscious and inert material form, incapable of generating action and “energy” by itself. It is only when it comes in touch with the consciousness of *puruṣa*, the energetic principle, that it becomes productive. In this regard, *prakṛti* can be conceived as the objective principle of reality and *puruṣa* can be conceived as its subjective principle, with the important difference being that whereas *prakṛti* (as the basic cause of material reality) is said to manifest all the universe’s physical and mental objects and entities, *puruṣa* is said to neither transform nor develop, even though its involvement is absolutely essential to *prakṛti*’s transformational and developmental functions. Another difference is that unlike *prakṛti*, there are a vast, even “uncountable”, number of *puruṣas*. Indeed, each sentient being that is involved in the realm of *saṃsāra* (the endless cycle of repeated birth and death) has (or rather is) its own *puruṣa*.

In this regard, it is the union of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* that constitutes what we normally describe as an individual (sentient) being. An experience or a consciousness of something arises in the contact between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, meaning that everything real and ideal that one can experience in empirical reality (be it an object, a sound, a feeling, an emotion, a thought, a memory or a dream) is comprised of *prakṛti*. From this, of course, it follows that *prakṛti* is also the entirety of the empirical self, meaning the sum of our inborn abilities, dispositions, etc., in combination with all our various experiences and the manner of their organization in consciousness or the mind.⁴³ Moreover, since *puruṣa* exists beyond and *prakṛti* exists within time, space and causality (at least in terms of its secondary manifestations), the two can neither affect nor “mix” with each other. *Puruṣa* is indeed conceived as being a totally isolated (*kaivalya*) and passive “witness” (*sākṣin*) (like a mirror that only reflects), while *prakṛti* is conceived as being all the phenomena that are being witnessed (or reflected). As such, *puruṣa* can be no more affected by *prakṛti* than a mirror can be affected by the images it reflects. *Puruṣa*, according to Sāṃkhya, is the “essence of consciousness”, that which forms the very foundation or basis for every “consciousness of something”. It is the pure “observing self” (or “subjective consciousness”), which exists beyond all contents, beyond our senses and intellect, and thus cannot be “observed” or “known” like an ordinary object of perception or

conscious organisms, so-called “creature consciousness” (Rosenthal 1993). It is in the direction of this latter meaning that we must go in order to understand *puruṣa*. Of course, this kind of “pure consciousness” (*nirbīja samādhi*), like Husserl’s pure transcendental ego and Forman’s pure conscious event (PCE), cannot be experienced or known in any normal, rational, objective way. According to Forman (1993, 1998), however, it can be known in terms of the special kind of knowledge he calls “knowledge-by-identity” (which is distinct from William James’ “knowledge-by-acquaintance” and “knowledge-about”).

⁴²*Puruṣa* is generally considered to be equivalent to the final principle *Ātman* or *Brahman* in the Upaniṣads. *Sāṃkhya*, however, is pluralistic with respect to its final principle, unlike the Brāhmanical systems.

⁴³Or, in more phenomenological terms, in our “pattern of interpretation”, “stock of knowledge” (Schütz) or *habitus* (Bourdieu).

experience. Ordinary consciousness is always a consciousness *of* something, but cannot observe itself (or be its own object of investigation), except, of course, in a retrospectively reflective manner; whatever meaning is ascribed to a PCE must be imposed after the experience has occurred (cf. Zaner 1970 ch. 3).

The problem of the generally unenlightened is that through the workings of *ahamkāra* they are wrongly identifying with the reflection of *prakṛti* in *puruṣa* rather than with *puruṣa* proper. This is what provides them with the sense of being an empirical self within time and space and binds them to the cycle repeated birth and death, with its concomitant sufferings and dissatisfactions. The intention of the yoga system is to eliminate this ignorance (*avidyā*) through the achievement of genuine insight (*prajñā*) into the factually nature of reality.⁴⁴ Yoga's fundamental purpose can thus be roughly restated as follows: to realize by the practice of a specific method that we are in reality *puruṣa*, the pure conscious observer, and are thus not *really* a self within *prakṛti*. It is only when we are enlightened as to the true condition of ourselves and the world that we can achieve liberation from our suffering (*mokṣa*). According to the Yoga Sūtras, the technique involves reining in and acquiring personal mastery over the mind and senses such that the "real" ego (*puruṣa*) is able to detach itself from everything extraneous, thereby discovering its true identity. To achieve such mastery and insight, however, requires great concentrative and meditative abilities, and thus the candidate (*sādhaka*) must first practice certain physical and mental exercises that enable the following of the various moral and other prescriptions that are required by the yoga system—e.g., bodily and mental purity, truthfulness, self-control, moderation, contentedness, non-violence, non-enviousness, non-covetousness and so forth. Taken together, these exercises and regulative principles are known as the yoga system's first five "limbs" (*aṅgas*): *yama* (\approx death, regulation or abstention), *niyama* (\approx observance, moral duties),⁴⁵ *āsana* (bodily posture), *prāṇāyāma* (\approx breathing regulation or technique), and *pratyāhāra* (\approx liberating the senses from their objects or internalization of the senses).

Command of the first two limbs eliminates distractions arising from uncontrolled thoughts, desires and emotions. *Āsana* and *prāṇāyāma* remove disturbances caused by a lack of control over the physical body. The function of *pratyāhāra* is to free the consciousness or mind from distractions conveyed by the sense organs, to teach the mind not to be distracted by sense-impressions from the external world. According to Patañjali, when full command of the first five *aṅgas* has been achieved, the *sādhaka* will then be in a position to undertake the concentrative and meditative practices of

⁴⁴See Sander 1988, espec. pp. 422-424 for a discussion with regard to this kind of knowledge.

⁴⁵The *yamas* are rules of conduct that will help bring a compassionate "death" to the ego or "the lower self"; they can be viewed as the "do'ts" in our dealings with the external world, whereas the *niyamas* can be viewed as the "do's" in our dealings with the inner world: "Nonviolence (*ahimsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), abstention from stealing (*asteya*), celibacy (*brahmacarya*) and non-acquisition of possessions (*aparigraha*) are the restrictions (*yamas*)" (Patañjali Yoga-Sūtras s 2.30); "Cleanliness (*śauca*), contentment (*santoṣa*), austerity (*tapasyā*), study of the Vedic scriptures (*svādhyāya*) and surrender to God (*īśvara-prāṇīdhāna*) are the observances (*niyamas*)" (Yoga-Sūtras s 2.32).

yoga: to see without hearing, hear without seeing, neither see nor hear and so forth. In my view, these preparatory yogic exercises basically correspond with the technique of suspending the natural attitude within phenomenology. When, through the mastery of the five *āṅgas*, the *sādhaka* is freed from all distractions, hindrances, obstacles and/or “afflictions of the mind” (*kleśas*)⁴⁶, his/her consciousness is now prepared to direct its full and undistracted attention to any given object such that (s)he is able to purely comprehend and experience it. In order to reach this state of completely pure (transcendental) intuiting, however, (s)he must also learn to master the three levels of concentration that constitute the last three of Patañjali’s *yogāṅgas*: *dhāraṇā* (≈ concentration, fixating), *dhyāna* (≈ contemplation, meditation), and *Samādhi* (≈ absorption). The attainment of *samādhi* is the first, but not the final, goal of yogic meditation, despite the vast attention it receives in popular books on yoga. In reality, it is only a necessary step on the pathway to *kaivalya* (“detachment” or “perfection through integration”), alternatively known as *mokṣa*, or ultimate liberation from all afflictions of the mind. To attain this state, the yogi must first aspire to be free from all forms of desire, hankering and attraction, with the final aim of giving up even the desire to be free of desire: “By non-attachment even to that, on the very seed of bondage being destroyed, follows *kaivalya*” (Yoga Sūtras III:51). In the final Sūtras (IV: 34), *kaivalya* is described as “the state (of Enlightenment) following reemergence of the *Guṇas* because of their becoming devoid of the object of *Puruṣa*: In this state the *Puruṣa* is established in his Real nature which is pure Consciousness.”

The attainment of *kaivalya* entails first learning to master the eight levels of concentration (or *jñāna*) that precede the highest stage of *nirodha* (≈ cessation), the state of consciousness (or mind) in which all fluctuations (*vṛtti*) of *prakṛti* have ceased. It is as a consequence of this state that one can achieve *insight* into the absolute separateness of *puruṣa* from *prakṛti*. *Kaivalya*, in other words, is that state in which *puruṣa* is entirely free from *prakṛti*—an ineffable state that is impossible to describe in propositional terms (Sander 1988, part II, sect. 2.9).⁴⁷ At this juncture, some description about the three last *yogāṅgas* needs to be mentioned:

⁴⁶Patañjali identifies five principal *kleśas* that prevent us from realizing our *puruṣa* as our true self: *avidyā* (*a* - not, *vidyā* – knowledge) – Ignorance, forgetfulness, not knowing; *asmittā* – ego or ‘I am-ness’; *rāga* – attraction to pleasurable experiences; *dveṣa* – avoidance of pain; and, *duḥka*, *abhiniveśa* – fear of death or clinging to life. “*The problem, the obstacle to living the state of Self – which is total Sat Citānanda, total Truth, Consciousness, Bliss – the obstacles to living that is the kleśas.*”

⁴⁷Perhaps Patañjali’s best attempt at a description is found in Sūtras IV: 7, where he states that the *karma* of the yogi who has attained *kaivalya* is “neither white nor black”. The interpretation of this Sūtra has been discussed, but its “surface meaning” seems clear. White means good and black means bad. Further, according to Sāṅkhya-yoga, there are four types of *karma* (≈ actions): black *karma*, which is “demonic” (*asura karma*); white *karma*, which is totally good (*devas karma*); both white and black *karma*, which is the *karma* of most people; and finally, neither white nor black *karma*, which is the *karma* of the perfect yogi. As I see it, the most reasonable interpretation of this is that the perfect yogi is (and acts) so completely in harmony with the physical and moral laws of the universe (*Ṛta*, *Dharma*) that it is no longer meaningful

Dhāraṇā ("Concentration", "Holding Steady" or "Single Focus"). "Concentration is the confining of the mind within a limited mental area (object of concentration)" (*Yoga Sūtras* III: 1). In its normal condition, our mind wanders from object to object and is continuously associated with (and colored by) various judgments or "attitudes" (among other *doxic* and *sentio* positionalities (Sander 1988, part III, sect. 3.6.2.2)). The aim of *dhāraṇā* is thus to suspend all judgment while constantly fixing the mind on *one* object and promptly bringing it back under control whenever it inevitably wanders. The success of this vigilant practice is measured by how often one is distracted from the object of concentration; when the number of interruptions and the time it takes to return to concentration is greatly diminished, success in *dhāraṇā* is considered to have been achieved.

Dhyāna (Contemplation, Meditation). "Uninterrupted flow (of the mind) towards the object (chosen for meditation) is contemplation" (*Yoga Sūtras* III: 2). The movement from *dhāraṇā* to *dhyāna* takes place after being able to uninterruptedly fix the mind on one object for a long period of time without its wandering. In understanding this, the concept of *pratyaya* can be helpful. *Pratyaya* refers to that which occupies the full focus of a subject's attention at a given moment; it is the center or object of focus of a subject's entire field of perception, such, and only such, as it is given to consciousness and appears in strict descriptive analysis. *Pratyaya*, in other words, rather than being the total content of a field of perception or consciousness, is only its object of focus.⁴⁸ Here it will suffice to say that while the mind in its normal condition is constantly shifting from one *pratyaya* to another, in *dhāraṇā* this tendency is greatly diminished, and in *dhyāna* it is more or less diminished to nil.

In *dhyāna*, "field" and "margin" data are severely restricted and not allowed to affect the meaning of the *pratyaya*. Although these data do not belong to the *pratyaya* proper and is only part of its background or context, they nonetheless exists in consciousness and, in normal acts, co-determines the meaning of the *pratyaya* (Sander 1988, spec. part III, sect. 3.2.7). The *only* relation these background data has to *dhyāna* is that they co-exist with the *pratyaya* and (in marginal acts) are experienced at the same time (in what Schütz calls "the counterpointal structure of mind" (1970: 12, 120)). For all practical purposes, the mind in *dhyāna* can be said to have one, and only one, content (object, meaning, *noema*). It should be noted, however, that while the mind continues to flicker and vary despite its strict focus and

to say that it is (*s*)he that acts or does things. It is as if *dharma* works and expresses itself through the yogi. As such, both (s) he and his/her actions are beyond the right and wrong (or good and bad) of the mundane world. In other words, (s) he has transcended every normal (worldly, human) ethic-moral judgment and thus his/her actions no longer generate *karma*—i.e., they are neutral with respect to reincarnation.

⁴⁸The meaning and usage of the term *pratyaya* in yoga has a high correspondence with the meaning and usage of the term "theme" in Gestalt psychology. A discussion of "theme", along with the closely related terms "thematic field" and "margin", can be found in Sander 1988, part III sect. 3.2., espec. 3.2.7. There (espec. Sect. 3.3.3.5, 3.5.2.3. and 3.5.2.7), in this connection, the important phenomenon of "change of theme" is also discussed.

restrictedness, this variability is occurring wholly within the frame of the chosen *pratyaya*—i.e., as various forms of *pratyaya* development.⁴⁹ This should be viewed not as a deficiency in the practice of *dhyāna*, but rather as a means of examining the object of concentration in all its aspects (which is part of the practice). In sum, the state of *dhyāna* has been reached when one can uninterruptedly fix the mind on a chosen *pratyaya* for long periods of time without being distracted. The success of this practice can be measured by the degree of mental effort that is required to maintain one's focus on the *pratyaya* and the promptness with which one is able to regain one's concentration when it is lost. When the practice of *dhyāna* has matured to a point at which the mind has become basically unwavering in its concentration, one can be said to have mastered this level of the yoga process.

Samādhi. (Absorption). "The same (contemplation) when there is consciousness only of the object of meditation and not of itself (the mind) is *samādhi* " (*Yoga Sūtras* III:3). Because this *Sūtra* (together with *Sūtras* s I: 17 and I: 18) can be considered the most important in terms of understanding the ultimate objective of Patañjali's yoga system, it is need of a somewhat lengthier discussion.⁵⁰ Let me begin with the term itself. In general, *samādhi* refers to the process (coming after the mastery of *dhyāna*) by which one enters ever more deeply into the normally inaccessible regions or strata of consciousness, with the aim of ultimately transcending and liberating oneself from all the content of the mind (consciousness) and attaining total union with (or absorption in) pure consciousness (*puruṣa*) itself—the state that Sāṃkhya philosophy refers to as *that which is really real* (*ens realissimum*). In the progressive movement towards the goal of total liberation from all that conditions and limits the mind (consciousness), one is required to pass through various types (or stages) of *samādhi*. Once all *saṃskāras* have been transcended, the yogi's consciousness attains the state of *kaivalya* and can function in perfect and absolute freedom. It is to achieve this end that the yogi must master the various levels

⁴⁹Schütz discusses this type of development of a given object or "theme" and its various forms in: 1974: 190-195, 1974: 29-32. Cf. Sander 1988, part III, espec. Sect. 3.5.2.3.

⁵⁰Apart from the *Yoga Sūtras* s' strongly condensed, stylized, and aphoristic form, one of the major problems Western scholars face in studying them is their almost total lack of thematic organization. The *Sūtras*' treatment of *Samādhi*, for instance, is not restricted to one specific portion of the text, but is rather spread throughout the whole work. Over and above that, the various discussions regarding this topic come in what appears to be a highly unusual order. For example, some of the most esoteric and difficult to comprehend theoretical aspects are treated early on in the text, while many of the preconditions for understanding them are treated in Book III. In terms of understanding *Samādhi*, perhaps the most important *Sūtras* (given in my preferred order) are as follows:

1. The three stages of meditation leading to *samādhi*. III:1 - 4.
2. *Samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta samādhi* I:17, 18.
3. The content of the process of *sabīja samādhi* I:41
4. The different phases of *sabīja samādhi* I:42 - 50.
5. The technique of *nirbīja samādhi* I:51, III:8, IV:26 - 29.
6. The three stages of transformation involved in *samādhi* III:9 - 2.

of concentration known as *samādhi*. For present purpose, I will here only discuss the two most important stages: *samprajñāta* and *asamprajñāta samādhi*.⁵¹

Samprajñāta samādhi literally means “*samādhi* with *prajñā*” and (as the prefix “a” in Sanskrit generally indicates “not”) *asamprajñāta samādhi* means “not *samādhi* with *prajñā*”. This, however, should not be viewed as indicating that *asamprajñāta samādhi* is without *prajñā*, meaning that this stage of *samādhi* is also associated with *prajñā* (*samprajñā*), but in a way that is distinct from *samprajñāta samādhi*. The difference between the two is based upon whether or not a *pratyaya* exists in the *sādhaka*’s field of consciousness. In other words, the two forms of *samādhi* can be roughly characterized as differentiated *samādhi* with *pratyaya* and undifferentiated *samādhi* without *pratyaya*, respectively. Let us first examine *samprajñāta samādhi*. It begins with mastering the level of *dhyāna* (well described above), which culminates in the ability to wholly and undeviatingly fix the mind on a particular *pratyaya*, and to do so in a purely descriptive manner, without involving judgments, attitudes and/or “positings” vis-à-vis that object.⁵² This capacity, however, is still not enough to attain the “pure seeing” of the “pure essence” of the object that is the goal of *samprajñāta samādhi*. In order for the *pratyaya* to “shine in its pure existential originality” one hurdle remains to be overcome: the *sādhaka*’s awareness of him/herself as an experiencing subject. According to Patañjali (as well as Husserl and Schütz) not only do we ordinary experiencers naïvely, automatically, pre-reflexively and pre-predicatively infer that the objects of our experience have a real (transcendent) existence beyond our consciousness of them, we also as naïvely, automatically, pre-reflexively and pre-predicatively infer from the existence of the objects of experience that there is a thinking, perceiving subject, ego or “I” that is *having* the experience; in other words, we are having the experience that our experience is *our* experience. This sense of “I” (*ahamkāra*) is *constantly* present in the ordinary untrained mind, creating the distinction between subject and object, between “self” and “world”. It is this sense of “I” that is responsible for our constantly falling into the Cartesian fallacy and is moreover considered to be one of the most prominent causes of mundane disharmony

⁵¹In Sūtras I:17, we read: “*Samprajñāta Samādhi* is that which is accompanied by reason, reflection, bliss and sense of pure being” and in I:18: “The remnant impression left in the mind on the dropping of the *Pratyaya* after previous practice is the other (i.e. *asamprajñāta samādhi*)”.

⁵²In other words, the *sādhaka* has learned the difficult task of not drawing pre-predicative conclusions from the existence of objects of experience to the existence of a, in relation to the experiencer him/herself, transcendent object, and, on the basis of this pre-predicative conclusion, in a likewise normally pre-predicative way, constitute the experience as an experience of this transcendent object. In phenomenological terms, (s)he carried out the transcendental phenomenological reduction, meaning that (s)he has brought the whole world back on consciousness, reduced it to *bloße Phänomene*. His/her experience lacks, by virtue of its own inherent properties, every form of judgment about, or attitude to, the object regarding its (transcendent) existence or non-existence—i.e., it lacks every form of *doxic* positing. It also lacks any kind of evaluative or normative attitude towards the object, as well as any activation of any behavioral disposition to act vis-à-vis the object.

and suffering. Due to *ahamkāra*, for example, we falsely identify with the temporal, changing empirical self and perceive its conditions as our own, with expressions such as “I suffer” and “I enjoy” being examples of this false identification.

Here it can be noted that the movement from *dhyāna* to *samādhi* entails the removal of this last covering of *ahamkāra*, thus opening the door to ultimate *truth* or *reality*. It is this extinguishing of self-experience or self-consciousness that Patañjali terms *svarūpa śūnyam iva*, roughly, the “disappearance of the essential nature of mind, as if”.⁵³ Let us describe in a bit more detail what this can mean. According to Patañjali, everything that appears before consciousness has two forms: *rūpa* and *svarūpa*. The former of these denotes the outer, superficial, temporary and non-essential aspect of the object while the latter denotes its inner, essential substance, form or nature. As applied to consciousness in the *dhyāna* process, it is the *rūpa* form (object consciousness) that constitutes *pratyaya* and it is *through* the *rūpa* form that *pratyaya* takes its expressions. The *svarūpa* form, for its part, consists of the mind’s (residue) consciousness of its own role and activity in the *dhyāna* process, the mind’s consciousness of itself as mind (or subject), the pure subjective nature of consciousness. When the yogi passes from *dhāraṇā* to *dhyāna*, and concentration on the object of meditation increases, the mind’s consciousness of itself (as subject) decreases to a corresponding degree. The mind’s consciousness of its own *svarūpa* form is thus still present in the stage of *dhyāna*, if only in a weak form. It is only after entering the stage of *samādhi* that this last residue of self-, I-, or ego-consciousness completely disappears, allowing the object of concentration to entirely and unwaveringly absorb the mind (consciousness).⁵⁴ This can be conceived as a “fusion” or merging of the mind (the subject) with its object, meaning that these two cease to exist as separate entities, leaving only pure object (or *rūpa*) consciousness, which cannot be characterized as an “object” in the normal sense of the term, the sense in which a subject is presupposed to stand out from or exist in relation to it. In this case, it is as if the structure of the subject and the structure of the object coincide. Such a state is described in much of the literature on mysticism as an experience of unity or a unifying vision.⁵⁵

⁵³ *Iva* (\approx as if) is a commonly existing qualification in *Yoga Sūtras* as well as in *Sāṃkhya Kārikā*.

⁵⁴ In *Tractatus* 5.64, Wittgenstein notes: “Here it can be seen that solipsism, when its implications are followed out strictly, coincides with pure realism. The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality coordinated with it”. This seems to roughly mean that the more the self draws itself back, the more the world stand out. When the subjectivity becomes so “perfect” that it disappears, the only thing remaining is the object (reality) in its own perfect and unstained objectivity—i.e., pure, unmediated object consciousness.

⁵⁵ The problem of how to reach this union (or merge with our object of meditation), and, by virtue of this, to achieve special *prajñā* (knowledge) of its innermost, essential nature, cannot be tackled here. See, however, *Sūtras* 1:41 for the first of these problems, and *Sūtras* 1:51, III:8 and IV-26-29 for the latter.

The term *śūnyam* can mean “emptiness”, “void”, “empty”, “nothingness” or “zero”. In relation to the discussion at hand, the last meaning is perhaps the most appropriate, since we are here referring to reducing something to its “zero limit” rather than emptying it of all content. What factually occurs in the transition from *dhāraṇā* to *dhyāna* is that the mind (consciousness) is constantly “filled up with” and not “emptied of” the object of meditation. What *svārūpa śūnyam* refers to is the reduction of “I-consciousness” (and thus the reduction of the activities of *ahamkāra*) to zero—i.e., to a “pure, uniquely unmediated object experience”.⁵⁶ And within the framework of the activities of *ahamkāra* we include all the functions of the mind (consciousness) that are based upon it (e.g., *manas*, the mind’s registering function, and *buddhi*, its discriminating and judging function), along with their role in the constitution of the meaning of their objects. It is, moreover, to prevent us from concluding that *svārūpa* permanently disappears when we attain *samādhi* that Patañjali adds the word *iva*, “as if”. *Samādhi*, in other words, consists of a nullification of *svārūpa* that endures only for as long as one is in that state. As soon as one withdraws from the state of *samādhi* and returns to the normal plane of consciousness, one’s temporarily suspended sense of “I-ness” returns as well.

According to Patañjali, the yogi in *samprajñāta samādhi* gains access to a supra-rational form of insight or wisdom⁵⁷ regarding the chosen object of meditation. This “knowledge”, known as *prajñā*, is considered to be a “pure”, “direct”, “immediate” and conceptually unmediated apprehension of *reality in itself* that is completely free from the interference of linguistic factors and the normal constitutional processes of consciousness (including all of its retentional, protentional and appresentational functions).⁵⁸ It consists, in other words, of direct and immediate contact with the true essence or “suchness” of *Reality*, in the sense that the experiencing subject, being free from all determinations and distractions (including the sense of “I-ness”), never goes beyond what is in itself given in the pure experience “as such”. This type experience can be conceived as one in which the subject remains or resides in the pure experience itself, in the sense that (s)he does not constitute the object “as such” as an experience *of* an object *for* a subject; neither does (s)he form any (existential, normative, etc.) opinions or judgments nor activate any dispositional reactions in its regard.⁵⁹ This is typically described as “the experience unitary consciousness”, “the

⁵⁶Which, phenomenologically (or purely descriptively), is an experience that nobody is having. If in a pain experience, for example, we reduce the involvement of the “I” or “ego” to zero, thereby becoming a pure observer of the pain (meaning that the distinction between “a pain” and “my pain” is nullified), it should be understandable why it can be claimed that all evaluations, dispositions, activities, etc. normally associated with a pain experience can be said to disappear as well.

⁵⁷Cf. Forman’s knowledge-by-identity.

⁵⁸I.e., without being affected or “processed by” the experiencer’s pattern of interpretation.

⁵⁹For a somewhat more detailed discussion on this type of experiencing, see Sander 1988, part IV, espec. sect. 4.4.1. Most theories of meditation commonly contain the notion that by mastering some technique for “stopping” or “deactivating” the normally spontaneous (or pre-predicative) processes of constitution in our consciousness – and experiencing in what many

fusion of subject and object” and the like. Here it should be clear that in proposing that one is able to reduce all the constitutive, appresentational, etc. functions of the mind (consciousness) to zero, Patañjali has moved beyond what Husserl ever claimed to be possible. What he proposes is an experience of an object in which *nothing* is hidden and *nothing* is supplemented or added. It is, in other words, an experience in which one obtains absolute, complete, evident and apodictic knowledge about the object, and not only about its “surface aspects”, but also about its “inner” essential nature. With this, the experiencer can be said to have transcended *all* physical and psychological as well as historic-cultural-biographical determinants and presuppositions regarding his/her experience.⁶⁰ Furthermore, the supra-mundane knowledge (*prajñā*) that is obtained in true *samprajñāta samādhi* is not merely a new theoretical understanding of the object,⁶¹ but rather a practical form of knowledge that has a concrete existential impact on the manner in which one experiences, thinks, feels and acts thereafter. *Prajñā*, in other words, is *obligatory* in the sense that it centrally affects and transforms the attitudes, commitments, behaviors and actions of those that have achieved it.⁶² It is of a type that once having been achieved it cannot be omitted from one’s personality and life—from one’s pattern of interpretation *for* the world and oneself. In some sense, the individual has become a new person in a new life-world. And because *prajñā* contains this practical dimension, the insight or realization it brings regarding the *real* existence of things is also said to *liberate* the individual from false opinions and conceptions and obliges her/him to apply this newfound “knowledge” and freedom within the framework of her/his concrete-

Buddhists call “bare attention” – we can reach the pure object in its suchness and, by doing so, obtain some sort of supra-rational knowledge. (See, for example: Batson, Shoenrade & Ventnis (1993); Buddhaghosa (1976); Conz (1969); Deikman (1969a, 1969b, 1980, 1982, 1984); Goleman (1977); Kasulis (1981); King (1980); Naranjo & Ornstien (1971); Sundén (1966); Suzuki (many works); Thera (1962)—to mention only a few.)

⁶⁰That is why it cannot be a *conscious* mental state in the normal sense.

⁶¹As I have argued, the *sādhaka* or yogi is not primarily looking for answers to a theoretical problem of knowledge about what or how something *is*. Such questions and their answers are only interesting for him/her in an instrumental sense, as the basis for answers to the more vital practical question about how (s) he should act and live in order to reach the final goal of becoming and being what (s)he *really* is—i.e., to realize his/her True Nature (*āmasiddhi*) and thus achieve the final and permanent goal of liberation (*mokṣa*). One of the main points in my 1988 thesis is that this type of practical knowledge (cf. Aristotle’s *phronesis*) about life is the primary objective of “religious man”.

⁶²A somewhat more detailed discussion of these obligations can be found in Sander 1988 (Part III, sect. 4.5.3.). Cf. Heidegger’s discussion on our knowledge about our own death. We all know that we will die, but that knowledge is normally only “theoretical” or inauthentic. According to Heidegger, when we *really* and *authentically* comprehend that we are finite and that death is our inevitable fate, this realization *cannot* fail to have a major impact on how we live our lives and occupy our time as well as on our attitudes towards ourselves, other people and the world

(Heidegger 1962, espec. Part II, Chapter 1, Sections 45-53).

practical life. According to Patañjali, *prajñā* is more of an agent's than an observer's knowledge.⁶³

The *sādhaka* can select any object whatsoever to serve as his/her object of meditation (*pratyaya*) as well as that with which to merge in the *samprajñāta samādhi* stage. The more establish one is in his/her *sañyama* (\approx inner discipline \approx *dhāraṇā*, *dhyāna* and *samādhi* (Yoga Sūtras III:4)), the more abstract and subtle can his/her *pratyaya* be. According to Patañjali, within *samprajñāta samādhi*, when one who is well established in *sañyama* has “exhausted” an object on a certain level of concreteness/abstraction, (s) he can move to one on a higher, more subtle, level—i.e., on a “deeper” level of consciousness. Central in this regard is the fact that this can be done *without* having to withdraw from the state of *samādhi* itself. In other words, during the time that elapses between abandoning a *pratyaya* at one level and establishing a new *pratyaya* on a higher, subtler level, the yogi is in an *objectless* state of *samādhi* or *asamprajñāta samādhi*.⁶⁴ In this phase, the yogi remains fully aware despite the fact that his/her consciousness is without either object- or self-awareness, both having reached total emptiness (the zero level), like a “mirror with nothing to reflect”. Here it is important to note that this is an active and dynamic emptiness (*śūnyam*), and not the passive unconsciousness that characterizes deep, dreamless sleep or coma. Apart from the fact that it has no *pratyaya*, *asamprajñāta samādhi* is in every respect identical with *samprajñāta samādhi*. In terms of such features as clarity, level of concentration and alertness, for example, there is no difference, at least so Patañjali appears to claim.

The ultimate aim of the yoga process is to proceed to subtler and subtler levels of consciousness in *samādhi* until one reaches the *ātma* level (the most subtle level of *pratyaya*). From here, the yogi is finally able to attain *Dharma Meghaḥ* (IV:29): the stage of *asamprajñāta samādhi* that constitutes his/her own *outermost Reality*, where (s)he can establish him/herself in pure *puruṣa* consciousness. Having achieved this highest level of *samādhi*, the yogi has completely freed him/herself from all identifications with *prakṛti* and is his/her own *svarūpa*, realizing *puruṣa* to be his/her True ego and identity. Of course, even after this realization the yogi continues to experience pain and pleasure; the difference is that such experiences are no longer experienced as his/hers! (S)he is *absolutely* and *completely* free from *prakṛti*, from the influence of *ahamkāra*, and from all fluctuations (*vṛtti*) in *citta* (cf. Koller 1985: 61). In summary, the path of yoga consists of a continuous transcending (or, perhaps, “involution” through) the “grosser” mental levels with their objects via intermediate experiences of emptiness to their most subtle level; and even this most subtle level must also be transcended, for it is only when *all* levels of *samprajñāta samādhi* have

⁶³The distinction between observer and agent knowledge is explicated in Furberg 1975: 90-102. Patañjali, however, never precisely explicates the nature of the relation between insight or realization and liberation. The same can be said of Freud, who claims his own version of the thesis. In the Indian systems of thought, the relation mainly seems to be stated as some kind of empirical generalization.

⁶⁴Or, to again revert to the language of Robert Forman (1986, 1999), in a “pure conscious event (PCE)” state.

been set aside and the yogi has established him/herself in his/her own *svarūpa* that the final goal of *kaivalya* has been reached, the state at which his/her individual consciousness has become one with his/her *puruṣa* consciousness. It is this (experience of) union with the *puruṣa* consciousness that constitutes the level of concentration/meditation that is termed *nirodha*—an absolutely pure state of mind (consciousness) that is free from every activity (*vṛtti*) and object (*pratyaya*), and thus cannot be a *conscious* mental state or a state having epistemic value. The state in question is, however, *associated* with *prajñā*, whereby it gives complete liberation from everything not included in it, from everything that is transcended by it (i.e., from all *prakṛti*).⁶⁵

Conclusion

The above sketch should at least make it plain that there are various similarities between the systems of Husserl and Patañjali despite the fact that their motives and aims appear to have been quite different. Both systems, for example, aspire to achieve absolutely direct, unbiased, unmediated, unprejudiced, certain and self-evident (apodictic) knowledge, and both claim that such knowledge can be achieved by practicing a certain “process of purification”: for Husserl, the transcendental phenomenological reduction; and, for Patañjali, the eight limbs of yoga (*yogāṅgas*). Both, moreover, claim that the knowledge achieved through their specific method is different and superior to “normal” “rational” knowledge: it is available via a unique form of intuiting or “gazing” (*Wesensanschauung*) that is neither associated with nor “contaminated” by contingent theories, concepts, etc., as is “normal” empirical-scientific knowledge.⁶⁶ Both also seem to argue that their respective forms of intuiting consist of some sort of non-, a- or supra-rational (although not irrational!) form of knowledge. “Supra-rational” is perhaps the best way of putting this, even though Husserl would probably not have been happy with the term.

Although both projects also appear to have as their epistemological objective the attainment of a direct, evident and unequivocal intuition and revelation of all the various pre-conditions for knowledge as well as the achievement of absolutely certain (apodictic) knowledge about “the things themselves” (as and only as they are), I am in agreement with Kockelmans (1976: 223f), who considers Husserl’s own conviction to have been that “a consistent phenomenology must turn its back on every established theory, on all traditional, prejudiced, and ‘metaphysical’ views in order to gain access to a pure and primordial experience in which the ‘things themselves’ appear to us in a genuinely original way”. In my view, this is as close to “the thing in itself” as it is possible to get. Husserl’s opinion also seems to be that it is *this sort of knowledge* that should be the basis and foundation of all sciences. Or, to quote Queintin Lauer:

The novelty lies in Husserl’s insistence that intuition, in the full sense of the term, is the presence to consciousness of an essence, with all that that implies by way

⁶⁵Cf. above regarding the *karma* of the full-fledged Yogī.

⁶⁶Cf. Husserl 1976 sect. 3, 15; Yoga Sūtras 1:49.

of necessity and universal validity. Phenomenological intuition is essential intuition, which is to say an *intellectual* intuition, the impossibility of which Kant had so vigorously asserted. It is plain to see, then, that such an intuition *must be something more* than the simple view contained in perception or imaginative representation, even though these latter acts are the examples from which the notion of intuition is derived. For Husserl intuition means *more* than empirical contact with an object. On the other hand, *it is not some sort of mystical penetration* into a world of essences' inaccessible to merely rational thought. (Quoted in: Kockelmans 1967: 153, (italics mine.))

At the beginning of this article I mentioned that phenomenology ends up in a dilemma that the theory of yoga is able to avoid; it is also probable that Husserl (like Lauer above) would dispute my claim that his intuition carries the potential of providing some sort of "mystical" knowledge. These two claims are connected. As I see it, the dilemma that Husserl and phenomenologist such as Lauer fall into is that, on the one hand, they ascribe to a particular conception of science (i.e., that it is meant to be rational, intellectually honest and so forth),⁶⁷ and on the other, they realize that their own epistemological aims and objectives fail to meet the test of this definition.⁶⁸ To put it plainly, it seems that something like the yoga system is what many phenomenologists would factually like phenomenology to be, but without being able to say so out loud, lest they be accused of being unscientific and "mystical". This dilemma can already be seen in relation to Patañjali's description of *samprajñāta samādhi*: roughly, as indicated above, the contact between and merging of the transcendental subject and its object in their pure existences. With the exception of the "merging", this, according to my understanding, is exactly what Husserl intends to achieve with his transcendental phenomenological reduction. It is intended, as we have seen, to reduce the subject to pure, transcendental subjectivity so as to make it possible for him/her to non-prejudicially and non-judgmentally intuit his/her object as well as the role of his/her own consciousness in the constitution of objects as they are "in themselves".⁶⁹ For Husserl, however, even the transcendental subject is a

⁶⁷This is not the place to discuss the Western "Enlightenment" view of science or measure its rationality or reasonableness (cf. Couvalis 1997; Dampier 1989; Hempel 1966). Suffice it to say that it exists and that it deviates from the view of many Indian *darśanas*.

⁶⁸Cf. Sander 1988, Part III, sect. 3.1.4.2.

⁶⁹Kockelmans (1967: 222f) expresses this as follows: "The phenomenological reductions make it possible for the mind to discover its own nature; originally lost in the world, the mind can find itself again by means of these reductions. Only when that discovery opens up the possibility of an entirely new task can the mind begin to interpret the world as a coherent system constituted as such by itself. The coherence and unity of the world are ultimately founded upon the unity of the ego, to which all elements of the world necessarily refer. The task of constitutive analysis is to clarify how the ego constitutes worldly Being and the world itself." He also notes: "Phenomenology becomes a self-explanation of the ego, even there where the original interest was in the constitution of the object, the realm of the physical or cultural. The ego is here no longer the subject-pole placed opposite an object-pole; it instead becomes that which encompasses everything. Everything now becomes *constructum* of and for the transcendental subjectivity; the whole world of reality becomes a mere product of the transcendental ego's activity. Phenomenology as a whole becomes a self-explanation of one's

reflecting subject, even if the reflexion it is involved in is a special “transcendental phenomenological reflexion” (Husserl 1950, sect. 15). For him, in other words, the objects always remain intentional objects, objects *for* a subject, and thus the subject-object dualism is never fully transcended or abolished within his system. This limitation appears to prevent Husserl from reaching all the way to an *entirely* and *totally* direct, immediate, unmitigated and unmediated intuition of an object: the thing itself (*die Sachen Selbst*). In this regard, it seems that the reason Husserl could not “bring himself” to carry his phenomenological reduction to the point at which *noesis* and *noema* “merge” into one unity,⁷⁰ thus breaking down the doctrine of intentionality and making it impossible to talk about subject on the one hand and object on the other, is that he primarily viewed the reductions as a logical-epistemological tool in his attempt to establish a strict, unbiased *science* that would constitute the foundation for *all other sciences*.⁷¹ And since non-intentional experiences provide no knowledge and have no epistemological value (apart from what Forman has termed “knowledge-by-identity”), these were of little use in terms of Husserl’s overarching aim.

Husserl’s *shortfall* in not carrying his reductions to what I consider to be their logical end (or “zero-limit”), however, need not necessarily be viewed as a *shortcoming* of the phenomenological project. As in all cases, the degree to which one considers it useful to apply a given theoretical-methodological tool is wholly dependent on the objectives that one has in mind. This notwithstanding, it is difficult to avoid thinking that the transcendental phenomenological reduction (and thus the entire transcendental phenomenological endeavor) involves the following (“can’t-have-your-cake-and-eat-it”) contradiction: On the one hand, Husserl’s theoretical aim of establishing a strict, foundational science can only be achieved within a matrix in which the subject-object distinction (or dualism) is upheld, and on the other, the method by which to accomplish this aim (the transcendental phenomenological reduction), when carried to its furthest limit, leads to the very collapse of that self-same distinction—and thus, in one sense, to mysticism.

The yogi’s apparent avoidance of this dilemma seems based on the fact that both his theoretical-methodological aims and his criteria for “intellectual honesty” are different from those of the phenomenologist. As has been several times noted above, the yogi’s aim is the cessation (or negation) of reflexive consciousness in order to attain pure empty consciousness (*nirvīja samādhi*) and be able to achieve *dharma-megha-samādhi* and ultimately *kaivalya* and *mokṣa*—which are practical-existential rather than scientific-theoretical goals. In this sense, the yogi is free to traverse the reductive path to its very end, finally discovering (or so it is claimed) that just as (s)he has negated everything else, (s)he can also negate the last residue of (empirical) ego-involvement (or “I-ness”) in the object that is being experienced and unite with the

own ego taken as subject of all possible knowledge” (1967: 230) (The quotation within the quotation is from *Cartesian Meditations* sect. 41).

⁷⁰Whether or not this “point” exists, and if so, whether or not it is possible to reach by either Husserl’s or Patañjali’s method is irrelevant to the discussion at hand.

⁷¹To establish *Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* (Husserl 1911)

pure transcendental ego (*puruṣa*). And by doing so, (s)he is left with only the pure experience of pure consciousness “as such”. It is no longer an experience of something and there is *nobody* who is having it. When these “remnants of the experience” are reduced to nil, the yogi is said to have achieved *asamprajñāta samādhi*. A final matter that deserves attention concerns whether by halting the reduction at an earlier stage, the phenomenologist gains any advantaged over the yogi in terms of the intelligibility of his/her findings and the strength of his/her truth claims to others. Here again, however, it appears that the yogi is in the better position, since, from the outset, (s)he openly declares his/her intuiting to be “mystical” (supra-rational), and thus impossible to entirely comprehend, communicate⁷² and validate via the conceptual schemes and rational categories of any given mundane science (a fact the phenomenologist must to some degree fudge). This is not meant to suggest, however, that the yogi has nothing meaningful to say about the efficacy of his/her techniques. On the contrary, those interested in attempting to comprehend and validate the claims of the yogic process are invited to practice the techniques themselves, and judge them accordingly. The claim is, in other words, that the yoga system can be understood and validated only by practicing it, and fully comprehended only by the advanced practitioner.

What then of the phenomenologists in this regard? Here I would argue that, unlike the yogi, their contradictory stance vis-à-vis phenomenology once again draws them into a dilemma: on the one hand they claim (like Lauer above) that phenomenology is, and must be, a rational, scientific discipline (if not a type of “super-science”) and on the other they claim (like Ihde and Heidegger⁷³) that it is impossible to (completely) comprehend the transcendental phenomenological project and validate its results without practicing it oneself (i.e., without being a trained phenomenologist).⁷⁴This, combined with the fact that phenomenologists are generally quite fastidious when it comes to describing their method in concrete, practical terms, gives phenomenology an air of “mysticism”, at least in the eyes of many non-phenomenological philosophers. In this particular area, whereas the yoga system

⁷²For a more detailed discussion on relevant problems of understanding and communication in this regard, see Sander 1988, spec. sect. 2.9.

⁷³Ihde (1977: 14) states this position as follows: “in the case of phenomenology, I would make an even stronger claim: *Without doing phenomenology, it may be practically impossible to understand phenomenology*. This is not to say that one may not learn *about* phenomenology by other means. ... Nevertheless, without entering into the *doing*, the basic thrust and import of phenomenology is likely to be misunderstood at the least or missed at most”. Cf. Heidegger (1972: 75-79); Spigelberg (1975); Husserl (1929: 209 f). See also Sander (1988, part III, sect. 3.1.1).

⁷⁴The type of knowledge provided by the method is so-called *hodological* knowledge (Greek: *hodos* ≈ path, way, road), knowledge that we must reach and experience ourselves, experiences that are centrally involved in the key concepts of this knowledge. Phenomena such as love, pain, orgasm and intoxication are often mentioned as examples of *hodological* concepts (Cf. Sartre 1969: 279; Furberg 1975: 97; Sander 1988, Part III, sect. 3.3.3.3).

provides detailed descriptions and instructions regarding its methods and how to perform them (even to the point of holding courses), phenomenology remain basically silent, leaving it up to interested parties to find their own way. To the extent that both the yogic and the phenomenological schools are such that it is impossible to *completely* comprehend and validate the results of their methods without practicing them, and that yogic practice is described in far more explicit and systematic terms, the matter of which is the more scientific and which is the more mystical is not merely rhetorical. From my perspective, the primary difference between these two “schools” lies not in their respective methods or techniques, but rather in the ultimate aims and objectives they are endeavoring to achieve: for phenomenology, the aim is to achieve absolutely true, unprejudiced and apodictic *knowledge* so as to build an irrefutable and unshakable foundation for all rigorous science; and, for the yoga system, the aim is to alleviate what is perceived to be the root cause of human suffering and misery, to resolve the predicament of unenlightened human existence.

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