

**KNOWLEDGE,
THEORIZATION
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RENEGOTIATING THE CONNECTIVES**

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Heritage of the Yoga Philosophy and Transcendental Phenomenology: The Interlocution of Knowledge and Wisdom across Two Traditions of Philosophy

Koshy Tharakan

Today we possess all sorts of studies on Indian, Chinese, and other philosophies, studies that place these philosophies on the same level with Greek philosophy, considering them merely as different historical formulations of one and the same cultural idea. . . Before anything else, the attitude of these two kinds of "philosophers," the overall orientation of their interests, is thoroughly different. . . Only with the Greeks, however, do we find a universal ("cosmological") vital interest in the essentially new form of a purely "theoretical" attitude¹.

Benjamin Franklin reports the unique advantage of the dual vision that bifocals offered to him during his visit of France:

I find [bifocals] more particularly convenient since my being in France, the glasses that serve me best at table to see what I eat not being the best to see the face of those on the other side of the table who speak to me; and when one's ears are not well accustomed to the sounds of a language, a sight of the movements in the features of him that speaks helps to explain; so that I understand French better by the help of my spectacles².

The advantage of comparative philosophy consists precisely in enabling a vision of the other tradition. Contrary to Husserl's claims that philosophy, as a pure "theoretical attitude", is uniquely European as according to him the theoretical attitude began only with the Greeks, in many systems of Indian philosophy we encounter similar theoretical attitude³.

The discourse on 'self' and 'consciousness' is central to almost all systems of Indian Philosophy as it is with the wont of any school of Western philosophy. Thus, for all classical schools

of philosophy in India, except the “Cārvāka” materialist school, the ultimate goal of philosophizing is the attainment of “*Mokṣa*” (liberation of the self/ freedom of the self from ignorance-bondage). The philosophy of Yoga as espoused by the sage Patañjali in his *Yoga Sūtra* is foremost in delineating the path to liberation, which it construes as “*Kaivalya*” - the state in which the individual self abides in itself, without any fluctuations towards the world of everyday reality. Though different schools of Indian Philosophy emphasize different paths to the attainment of *Mokṣa* like *Jñāna Mārga* (path of knowledge), *Bhakti Mārga* (path of devotion) and *Karma Mārga* (path of action), underlying all these paths is *Sādhanā* – a “discipline” cultivated by intense reflection on self and consciousness. The best exemplification of *Sādhanā* is found in the Yoga philosophy of Patañjali. The paper argues that *Sādhanā* has striking similarity with and is the practical counterpart of the theoretical move aimed at “Reduction” in Husserlian phenomenology.

The term ‘Yoga’ has different connotation and its meaning differs in different kinds of Yoga (such as Rāja Yoga, Haṭha Yoga, Karma Yoga, and Bhakti Yoga). Semantically, the word ‘Yoga’ is a derivative of the Sanskrit verbal root ‘Yuj’, meaning ‘to yoke’ or ‘to join’ or ‘to unite’. In its wider use, Yoga refers to the arithmetical operation of addition, planetary conjunction that brings certain consequences for the individual in astrology, and the syntactical formation of words in grammar. S. C. Banerji in his *Studies in Origin and Development of Yoga* mentions the different meanings of Yoga such as ‘skill in work’, ‘desireless action’, ‘acquisition of true knowledge’, ‘indifference to pleasure and pain’, addition in arithmetic and conjunction in astronomy.⁴ Swami Prabhupada writes: “*Yoga* means the connecting link between the soul and the Supersoul, or the Supreme and the minute living creatures.”⁵ Veda-Vyāsa has written a commentary on *Yoga-Bhāṣya* to Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* and Vācaspati-Miśra has provided an explanation (‘*vivarāṇa*’) of the *Yoga-Bhāṣya* called *Tattva-vaicārādi*. In this work, Vācaspati-Miśra points out that when Vyāsa defines Yoga provision-

ally as 'concentration' (Samādhi), he uses the term Yoga in its etymological derivation from the stem 'Yuj-a' in the sense of 'concentration' and not 'conjunction'⁶. Thus, we may take the connotation of 'Yoga' in the philosophy of Patañjali as 'concentration' rather than 'union'. Such an understanding of Yoga as 'concentration' would lead us to recognize that '*Sādhanā*' as underlying the Yogic practice is equivalent to the 'phenomenological reduction' in the Husserlian phenomenology on a theoretical plane. According to Husserl, the way we tarry in the *life-world* is from a 'natural attitude', an attitude that takes for granted the existence of phenomena we encounter in our everyday experience. In order to attend to the way in which these phenomena get constituted in our experience, we need to enter into a 'phenomenological attitude' from the 'natural attitude'. For Husserl, phenomenological reduction is the gateway to such an attitude. Much like *sādhanā*, phenomenological reduction too is a practice that needs to be cultivated in order to move out of the 'default' attitude — the natural attitude — to enter into the phenomenological attitude.

Patañjali in *Yoga Sūtra*, First Book (*Samādhi Pāda*) second *Sūtra* states the distinguishing characteristic of Yoga as "the restriction of the fluctuations of mind-stuff". Later in *Sūtra* I. 12 it is stated that the means of restriction of the fluctuations consist in 'Practice' ('*abhyāsa*') and 'Passionlessness' ('*vairāgya*'). *Vairāgya* arrests the flow of mind-stuff towards objects whereas the practice of 'discriminatory knowledge' opens up '*Viveka*' or 'discrimination'. Only when these two are practiced together will the restriction be achieved. Practice that is '*abhyāsa*' is an effort (*prayatna*) with the goal of attaining permanence in the restricted state. Such 'discriminatory-practice', that is *abhyāsa* coupled with *vairāgya* finally leads to "*Kaivalya*" (*Yoga Sūtra* I. 16) wherein the "Self abides in himself" (*Yoga Sūtra* I. 3). The 'discriminatory-practice' ('*Sādhanā*') of Yoga may be read in terms of Husserl's concept of 'Phenomenological Reduction' as enabling the transition from the 'natural attitude' to the phenomenological attitude — or in the case of Yoga as enabling to attain the state where the "Self abides in himself".

According to Husserl all sciences except phenomenology remain in the natural attitude. Their aim is to cognize the world comprehensively and reliably as it confronts us, from the natural standpoint. The greatest impediment to cognition is that, in natural standpoint, the style of research will always be one-sided, as they take for granted the objects or phenomena that appear in our experience. The phenomenological attitude on the other hand, sets aside all such prevailing habits of thinking. It helps us to develop a method – the method of reduction by which we are able to ‘transcendentally purify’ the phenomena, that opens the proper direction of regard to every cognition. The general positing, the characteristic of natural attitude, is a consciousness of the object as actually existing. This natural attitude is not an accidental or particular act; rather it is a continuous attitude throughout the natural life. One might characterize it as the default attitude. The reduction opens up a true ontological realm of pure or absolute consciousness. Thus, from its epistemological starting point Phenomenology reaches to an ontological realm.⁷ The reduction operates at two levels, the objective sphere as well as the consciousness-sphere, simultaneously. Both the object posited and the act of positing is subjected to reduction. Thus, by phenomenological reduction (*epoché*/bracketing) the object is bracketed and the act is put out of action.⁸ The whole world and its objects posited in the natural attitude cease to be valid for us. Then, phenomenological reduction is the operation necessary to make pure consciousness and subsequently the whole phenomenological region, accessible to us. The term ‘reduction’ characterizes the turn towards transcendental phenomenology. It provides the conditions of the possibility of the empirical knowledge of being as well as the sense of being itself.

Husserl talks about three stages of reductions. The first reduction or ‘phenomenological reduction’ effectuates the exclusion of the natural world and the corresponding sciences. Thus, the first reduction is the gateway to the phenomenological regard or attitude. Thus, the turn towards the phenomenological attitude is called the phenomenological reduction. The

'eidetic reduction' deals with material and formal essences that are transcendent. In it, all references to the particulars are withheld and the essences are brought to light. In an eidetic enquiry, the greatest handicap is that one is tempted to "psychologize the eidetic" and thereby ends up in Idealism. In other words, idealism is a result of the confusion of essences with the resulting consciousness of the essences. Thus, eidetic reduction vindicates the eidetic as eidetic. Husserl makes a distinction between the essence of something 'immanent' and essence of something 'transcendent'. That is between "essences of formations belonging to consciousness itself" and "essences of individual affairs transcendent to consciousness." The latter is constituted in the consciousness by virtue of sensuous appearances. Now, Husserl reminds us that the eidetic reduction is confined to the eidetic of the transcendent.⁹ The eidetic science, however, remains a positive science as it restrains the validity of the natural apperception of the world. When we inactivate this by means of transcendental reduction we enter the realm of the transcendental phenomenology.¹⁰ The third reduction is transcendental reduction. It brackets all references to the transcendent as the intentional correlation of our acts. Thus the world becomes a world-phenomenon. This universal *epoché* transforms our attitude in the 'life-world'. Through this reduction we discover the correlation between the world and world-consciousness. Transcendental reduction liberates one from the internal bond of the pre-givenness of the world to a realm of absolutely self-enclosed and absolutely self-sufficient domain of consciousness. It reveals the transcendental subjectivity, which validates the world.

The method of reduction in phenomenology should not be confused with Cartesian method of doubt. Cartesian doubt is an abstention from an existential belief in order to attain certainty of knowledge. Phenomenological reduction or *epoché*, on the other hand is the disclosure of a belief as a belief. The one who practises *epoché* is already detached in principle from the belief. The *epoché* then is a means to reinforce and confirm this

detachment. Thus the *epoché* is a peculiar mode of consciousness and contrary to Cartesian doubt, does not present itself as a negated belief. As an act, it offers itself for noetic analysis, thereby uncovering the hidden intentional acts. However, its noematic correlate is the experience of the belief in the world. Hence the *epoché* does not negate the existence of the world, but retains it intentionally. As Stroker points out:

This correlative structure of the reduced *noema* must be taken into consideration when one inquires into the sense and achievement of the universal *epoché*. If one overlooks this, one runs the danger of misinterpreting the *epoché* in such a way that one thinks of the phenomenological on-looker, who utilizes the *epoché*, as being exclusively turned to the subjective contents of experience and no longer interested in the being of the world at all. *But the epoché is not meant to lead me to the stream of my act-life because I want to take my leave of the world, as if it were something that could be separated from this stream; rather it leads me to this stream because the world, and all being, is contained in it intentionally.*¹¹

Thus transcendental reduction shows that all questions pertaining to being can only be raised within transcendental subjectivity. It is in transcendental subjectivity that the justification of being is carried out. What the transcendental reduction offers us is the realm of absolute consciousness or transcendental subjectivity. Pure consciousness is the phenomenological residuum and is the theme for its investigations. Husserl reiterates that with 'reduction', "... we have not lost anything but rather have gained the whole of absolute being which, rightly understood, contains within itself, "constitutes" within itself, all worldly transcendencies".¹²

With the transcendental reduction, human beings as persons in association with fellow human beings living in a society are excluded as what remains after the reduction is the pure subjectivity – the transcendental ego. The pure subjectivity or ego is something necessarily present in all cogitations; nevertheless,

it is not a part or moment inherent in the mental processes themselves¹³. The pure or transcendental ego is transcendence within immanence. It is the primal region of all being. All other regions of being are rooted in and essentially relative to the region of transcendental (pure) consciousness. The phenomenological reduction makes a radical ontological distinction: being as consciousness and being as something which becomes "manifested" in consciousness.

The phenomenological method operates in the acts of reflection. Reflection is the ego's living in its mental processes. In other words, it is "... the name of the method of consciousness leading to the cognition of any consciousness whatever."¹⁴ In phenomenology, reflection itself becomes an object of study as by reflection, we also mean a group of mental processes that are essentially united. Such a reflective analysis reveals the intentional structure of consciousness. Intentionality is the essential peculiarity of consciousness. "Intentionality is what characterizes *consciousness* in the pregnant sense and which, at the same time, justifies designating the whole stream of mental processes as the stream of consciousness and as the unity of *one* consciousness."¹⁵ Intentionality is the directedness of consciousness. According to Husserl, consciousness, in almost all instances, is always directed to some object. In other words, consciousness is consciousness of something. The phenomenological analysis of consciousness reveals the *noesis-noema* structure of experience. *Noesis* is the objectifying act and *noema* is the intended object. *Noesis* and *noema* correspond to the subject and object poles of experience respectively. Every *noesis* has its corresponding *noema*. However, the same object can be apprehended differently. That is to say that the many intended objects may refer to the same object grasped in varying intending acts. This implies that there is an underlying unity or identity of different '*noemata*' of varying acts. Without this unity we cannot support any claim to objectivity. If we maintain the right attitude and obey the clear eidetic data without any prejudice, the same insight can be had for everyone.

Thus, Husserl says:

. . . firm results are directly produced, and the same thing occurs for everyone having the same attitude; there accrue firm possibilities of communicating to others what one has himself seen, of testing descriptions, of making salient the unnoticed intrusions of empty verbal meanings, of making known and weeding out errors by measuring them again against intuition.¹⁶

From the above discussion, we see that the phenomenological reduction that Husserl performed was free from any preconceived notions about the reality of the world and was aimed at opening up the domain of pure consciousness by a cultivated mode of reflection. In a similar tone, Patañjali states: “the knowledge of the Self arises as the result of constraint upon that which exists for its own sake” (*Yoga Sūtra* III. 35). Constraint or ‘*Samyama*’ is a technical term in yoga referring to ‘*dhāraṇā*’ (concentration), ‘*dhyāna*’ (meditation), and ‘*samādhi*’ (the final stage of meditation where the meditating consciousness loses its own form). Again, in *Yoga Sūtra* IV.22 it is mentioned that “the intellect (*citi*) which unites not [with objects] is conscious of its own thinking-substance when the [mind-stuff] takes the form of that [thinking substance by reflecting it].”

In *Yoga Sūtra*, the Second and the Third books, namely *Sādhanā Pāda* and *Vibhūti Pāda* explain the five external or indirect aids to yoga and the three direct or internal aids to yoga. Thus, we have been told that an aspirant for yogic knowledge must prepare himself/herself by these external aids, which include *Yama*, *Niyama*, *Āsana*, *Prāṇāyāma*, and *Pratyāhāra* in order to embark upon the practices of *Dhāraṇā*, *Dhyāna* and *Samādhi*. *Yama* and *Niyama* preclude uncontrolled desires and emotions, whereas *Asana* and *Prāṇāyāma* eliminate disturbances arising from the physical body. The function of *Pratyāhāra* is the withdrawal of sense organs from the mind thus cutting it off from the external world and the sense impressions it produces on the mind. Puligandla identifies this preparatory stage (*Pratyāhāra*) as the yogic counter part of the phenomenological

reduction¹⁷. However, we argue that it is not just '*Pratyāhāra*', but the entire '*Sādhanā*' – the 'discriminatory practice' that should be construed as similar to the phenomenological reduction. In Husserlian phenomenology, 'phenomenological reduction' refers not only to the withdrawal of senses that cuts off the mind from the world, but to enter a new way of looking at the world in which objectivity is seen as constituted in the subjectivity itself. This phenomenological seeing is attained through a disciplined reflection on consciousness which is like the 'discriminatory-practice' of yoga. Nevertheless, as Sinari has pointed out the crucial difference between phenomenological reduction and yogic meditation consists in the fact that phenomenological transcendental reduction does not amount to total annulment of the reflective activity of consciousness, whereas the Yogic meditation precisely aims at such a state of transcendental subjectivity, where the subjectivity releases itself into a state beyond the conscious activity – the highest state of "*Samādhi*."¹⁸ This is so, because unlike Husserlian phenomenology, the Yoga philosophy does not construe 'intentionality' – the directedness of consciousness or the 'aboutness' of consciousness as an intrinsic feature of consciousness.

In contrast to the Husserlian understanding of "theory" as "pure knowledge", Gadamer offers a different account. According to Gadamer, '*theoria*' in the sense of a detached theoretical approach based on a reflective consciousness is a later development. The primordial meaning of *theoria* in the Greek thought is to participate in an event – a sharing that emphasizes being present. As Gadamer notes, the earlier meaning of *theoria* has to do with taking part in a delegation to a festival meant to honour the gods.¹⁹ Strikingly, this original Greek concept of '*theoria*' as a "social practice" resonates with the Yoga notion of '*sādhanā*' – the 'discriminatory practice', albeit sans the "social" dimension of practice as the emphasis of Yoga philosophy is not so much on the social dimension of the practice of *sādhanā*.

Our reading of phenomenological reduction in the light of yogic *sādhana* helps us to recognize firstly how despite Husserl's own avowed claim that philosophy is distinctively a Western intellectual achievement, his own philosophy has striking parallels in the Eastern philosophical thought. Secondly, *sādhana* as a "theoretical practice" understood in the context of Gadamer's retrieval of the original sense of 'theoria' as a "social practice" helps us to reinstate the cultural heritage and wisdom embedded in local and regional identities marginalized by Globalization even while appreciating the shared commonalities between two traditions of philosophy. Perhaps, such an understanding of Indian philosophy was not available during Husserl's time – it required a gradual but continuous seeping of traditions and tendencies in our milieu of globalization of ideas to reject such 'Eurocentric' notions of philosophy as it had to await the availability of "cultural bifocals" or "fusion of horizons" in the Gadamerian sense.

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