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## **Two Paths: A Critique of Husserl's View of the Buddha**

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I hereby declare and assure that I, Jason Kyle Day, have drafted this thesis independently, that no other sources and/or means other than those mentioned have been used and that the passages of which the text content or meaning originates in other works - including electronic media - have been identified and the sources clearly stated.

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## Abstract

In “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” (1925) and “Socrates-Buddha” (1926), Edmund Husserl claims that the Buddha achieves a transcendental view of consciousness by performing the epoché. Yet, states Husserl, the Buddha fails to further develop a purely theoretical and universal science of being because his purely practical goal of *Nibbāna* limits his knowledge of consciousness. I evaluate Husserl’s claims by examining the Buddha’s *Majjhima Nikāya*, arguing that Husserl correctly identifies an epoché and transcendental viewpoint in the Buddha’s teachings. However, I contend that Husserl’s distinction between pure theory and pure praxis leads him to misconstrue the function of the Buddha’s epoché, the extent of knowledge that the Buddha gains from the transcendental viewpoint, and the nature of *Nibbāna*.

## Introduction

In “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” (1925) and “Socrates-Buddha” (1926), Edmund Husserl made several remarkable claims about the teachings of the Buddha (c. 563–483 BCE). In the *Majjhima Nikāya* primarily—the Buddha’s middle length discourses—Husserl recognised a way of investigating human experience of the world that intersects, at the following two points, with the phenomenological way that he established.<sup>1</sup> First, Husserl identified a similar beginning between them, namely, a suspension of everyday belief in the existence of the world along with all the interests, values and habits according to which it is usually experienced (Husserl 2010, 5–6, 11, 16; 2017, 403, 410, 414). He further understood the performance of this epoché to have led the Buddha, like himself, to achieve a transcendental view of the world, that is, to discover that the world is

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<sup>1</sup> The only primary Buddhist texts that Husserl is known to have read are K.E. Neumann’s German translations of the *Sutta Piṭaka* (the Pāli collection of the Buddha’s discourses), of which “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” is a review (Schuhmann 2005, 144, 148). Unfortunately, Husserl did not indicate which volumes of this translation he read. According to Karl Schuhmann, Husserl read the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Therīgāthā* and *Theragāthā* (collected poems by monks and nuns), and perhaps the *Dhammapada* (collected sayings of the Buddha) (Schuhmann 2005, 144n29).

only as it is subjectively experienced as being (Husserl 1989, 125; 2005, 145; 2010, 16; 2017, 414).

However, despite thereby aligning the Buddha with transcendental phenomenology (Schuhmann 2005, 147), Husserl suddenly parted ways with the Buddha's teachings. He claimed that the Buddha, unlike himself, was unable to develop a scientific approach to consciousness—subjective experience in general—from this transcendental viewpoint, and asserted that this inability owed to the Buddha's goal of *Nibbāna* (Husserl 2010, 12, 16; 2017, 410, 414). A scientific approach, Husserl argued, can only be developed with a purely theoretical interest in gaining scientific knowledge to no other end (Husserl 2010, 9; 2017, 407). The Buddha, he claimed, only has a purely practical and finite interest in achieving *Nibbāna* and is thereby limited in his knowledge of consciousness (Husserl 2010, 9, 12; 2017, 407, 410).

However, Husserl presented no textual evidence from the *Majjhima Nikāya* to support his claims. This has not yet been remedied in secondary literature. Several publications compare Husserlian phenomenology and Buddhism but fail to address the texts that Husserl wrote about the Buddha (see Larrabee 1981; Hanna 1993; Patrik 1994; Lusthaus 2002; Depraz and Varela 2003; Nizamis 2012; Prosser 2013; Li 2016; Sharf 2016; Varela et al. 2016; Hanna et al. 2017; Gokhale 2018; Depraz 2019; Bitbol 2019; Stone and Zahavi 2021). In the few publications that address Husserl's texts on the Buddha, Husserl's claims are not evaluated against the Buddha's discourses that Husserl read (see Sinha 1971; Hanna 1995; Schuhmann 2005; Ni 2011; Lau 2016).

I will address this gap in research by critiquing Husserl's view of the Buddha through a close examination of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. My task here is philosophical rather than historical or philological. This means that I evaluate Husserl's claims strictly on his own philosophical terms, just as he used them to evaluate the Buddha's teachings. I first reconstruct Husserl's texts on the Buddha into a more cohesive form, identifying Husserl's idea of a purely theoretical and

universal science of being as the ultimate measure against which he judges the Buddha's teachings.<sup>2</sup> As Husserl's definition of this science is vague in these texts, I further draw on *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (1913) and *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (1929) for clarification. These are Husserl's two major works on transcendental phenomenology as a universal science of being, and are also those closest in date of publication to his texts on the Buddha.

Having defined the terms of Husserl's reading of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, I evaluate the four claims that are central to his view of the Buddha. When addressing each claim, I focus on their dependence on Husserl's distinction between pure theory and pure praxis, since I identify this distinction as the root of Husserl's several misunderstandings of the Buddha. I argue that (1) Husserl correctly identifies the performance of an epoché in the Buddha's teachings. However, Husserl misconstrues it as a theoretical and practical renunciation of the world and misunderstands the Buddha's emphasis on bodily techniques and ethical conduct as a purely practical interest. I then confirm that (2) Husserl's characterisation of the Buddha's teachings as transcendental is feasible. Against Husserl, I contend that the Buddha's knowledge of consciousness is not limited to knowledge of its transcendental nature. I subsequently show that (3) the goal of *Nibbāna* does not limit but motivates knowledge of consciousness. I further argue that the distinction between pure praxis and pure theory is inapplicable to the Buddha's teachings, and thereby indicate that (4) there is no reason that the Buddha could not have developed a universal science of being.

By way of conclusion, I suggest that Husserl began abandoning his distinction between pure theory and pure praxis in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy* (1936) when he briefly considered how phenomenological

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<sup>2</sup> Husserl refers in "Socrates-Buddha" both to a "universal science" (*universale Wissenschaft*) (Husserl 2010, 12, 13n16, 17; 2017, 410, 411n28, 414) and a "science of being" (*Seinswissenschaft*) (Husserl 2010, 5; 2017, 403). I refer to a universal science of being to succinctly cover both phrases.

investigation can transform one's way of life. This opens up the possibility for Husserlian phenomenologists to re-engage with the Buddha's teachings in which the rigorous investigation of consciousness as a radically new way of life is already developed extensively.

### **1. Husserl's First Encounter with the Buddha**

In "On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha," Husserl characterises the Buddha's teachings as "a religious and ethical method" for "spiritual purification and pacification" (Husserl 1989, 125; 2005, 145). This constitutes a way of looking at and "overcoming the world" that is "transcendental" because it "looks purely inward in vision and deed" (Husserl 1989, 125; 2005, 145). However, Husserl states that the Buddha's way of looking at the world remains "the complete opposite of our European one" (Husserl 1989, 125; 2005, 145). Husserl provides no explanation for these statements, giving only unsubstantiated praise for the Buddha's teachings. Husserl notes their "internal consistency" and states that they "can be paralleled only with the highest formations of the philosophical and religious spirit of our European culture" (Husserl 1989, 126; 2005, 145).

### **2. Husserl's Scientific Approach to the Buddha's Teachings**

In "Socrates-Buddha," Husserl understands the Buddha to have forged a path to "emancipation" (*Erlösung*) and "bliss" (*Seligkeit*) (Husserl 2010, 5; 2017, 402–403) upon recognising that human life is one of general "unhappiness" (*Unseligkeit*) (Husserl 2010, 12; 2017, 412). Humans continually strive towards satisfaction in the world. But since life in the world is one of unforeseeable change, and because the irrational motives, values and interests of humans are temporary and inconsistent, they are generally dissatisfied (Husserl 2010, 12–14; 2017, 412).

On Husserl's account, the Buddha's approach to emancipation from dissatisfaction exhibits the performance of an epoché. This entails a suspension of any pre-established world-view, a dissociation from daily praxis and habits, a suppression of all evaluations and valuations of the world, and an exclusion of all the interests and goals of ordinary life (Husserl 2010, 5–6, 11, 16; 2017, 403, 410, 414). Furthermore, the Buddha inhibits the “absolute positing of the being of the world” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414)—he suspends any belief about whether the world exists apart from or differently to how it is subjectively experienced as being.

The Buddha, freed of all prejudice, next disinterestedly and autonomously directs “a pure, knowing and universal view towards the factual world in general” (Husserl 2010, 12; 2017, 409). He then imaginatively modifies the experienced world in “fantasy” (*Phantasie*) (Husserl 2010, 12; 2017, 410) to contemplate all its practical possibilities. The Buddha also contemplates “the most general essence of the universal life of the will” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414) with all its goals, interests and values. He thereby determines that it is the essence of the subject's will and the experienced world to be constantly changing and that any lasting or final satisfaction is therefore impossible (Husserl 2010, 12–16; 2017, 405–414).

However, according to Husserl, the Buddha sees a “way out in transcendentalism” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414) because he realises that “the world is a mere phenomenon in subjectivity” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414). In other words, by looking inwards to the nature of his own experience, he sees that the world is only as it appears in subjective experience and only has the sense of constant and independent existence that the experiencing subject gives to it. Consequently, the subject can cease believing in the independent existence of the world and, having neutralised this belief, cease having any interest in it. Thus, states Husserl, the Buddha realises that bliss—as emancipation from striving for satisfaction—requires a categorical “renunciation” (*Entsagung*) (Husserl 2010, 17; 2017, 415) of the world and all theoretical and practical interests therein. The subject

consequently “averts its gaze away from [the world]” and “lives, turned into itself, in the state of a volitional loss of will” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414).

Husserl now clarifies why he stated in “On the Teachings of Gotama Buddha” that the Buddha’s transcendentalism is the opposite of European transcendentalism, with phenomenology belonging to the latter. The reason lies in Husserl’s answer to these two questions, wherein he conflates the Buddha’s teachings with all Indian thought:<sup>3</sup>

1. “What is the status of knowledge in Indian thought?” (Husserl 2010, 5; 2017, 402)
2. “Has *Indian thought* produced a science of being or did it ever have the possibility of such a science in view? Did it deem it to be irrelevant and therefore not develop it? Was it aware of a science of being as something fundamentally new although grounded in experience just like the science that leads to bliss?” (Husserl 2010, 5; 2017, 403)

For Husserl, a universal science of being can only be developed with “a pure and authentic so-called theoretical interest” (Husserl 2010, 13; 2017, 411) in “scientific knowledge” (Husserl 2010, 5; 2017, 403). This means that it cannot be motivated by any finite practical interests and purposes (Husserl 2010, 9; 2017, 407). By performing the epoché, this science establishes a purely theoretical interest in consciousness, which it investigates by a specific logical form and method, namely, the use of fantasy and the seeing or “contemplation of ideas” (*Ideenschau*) as the basis for scientific knowledge (Husserl 2010, 5, 7; 2017, 403, 405).

Husserl argues that although the Buddha performs the epoché, is grounded in experience, achieves a transcendental view of the world, and identifies essences in fantasy, he fails to develop a universal science of being with its logical form and

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<sup>3</sup> Husserl also refers to the Buddha’s teachings as being of an “Indian spirit” (Husserl 2010, 17; 2017, 415) and “Indian attitude” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414).

method (Husserl 2010, 12, 16; 2017, 410, 414). This is because the Buddha lacks the purely theoretical interest that this science requires. Instead, he has a purely practical interest in emancipation and bliss—*Nibbāna*—and thereby remains in “the universal practical attitude” (Husserl 2010, 13; 2016, 411).

Husserl further claims that the Buddha’s “knowledge of the world has significance only as a knowledge directed towards proving the transcendental standpoint” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414) and that this is proved “for the sake only of what is best in practice [...] for the sake of one’s own ‘bliss’”(Husserl 2010, 12; 2017, 410). All else is disregarded as irrelevant. In other words, “praxis limits” knowledge (Husserl 2010, 9; 2017, 407) and “to want to solve the tasks of knowledge that have a finite practical purpose will never amount to a science” (Husserl 2010, 9; 2017, 407).

Concluding that the Buddha could not develop a universal science of being, Husserl never again engaged with the Buddha’s teachings. Throughout his oeuvre, Husserl asserted that science is unique to European thought, that philosophy is a scientific way of thinking, and that Indian thought is therefore not philosophy (Husserl 1954, 14, 325–31; 1970, 16, 280–85; 2010, 5; 2017, 403). It is thus clear that Husserl’s main criteria for evaluating the Buddha’s teachings are (1) the distinction between purely theoretical interest and purely practical interest, and (2) the idea of a universal science of being. Yet Husserl’s idea of science requires further explication before the *Majjhima Nikāya* can be examined accordingly.

### **3. Husserl’s Idea of a Universal Science of Being**

#### **3.1. The Phenomenological Reductions**

In *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl establishes transcendental phenomenology as a universal science of “essential being” (Husserl 1950b, 6; 2012, 3). Its exclusive aim is to gain “knowledge of essences” (*Wesenserkenntnisse*), that is, of the essence of “transcendental subjectivity”

(Husserl 1950a, 58; 1960, 18), its everyday “consciousness” (*Bewusstsein*) of the world and all phenomena that can possibly appear therein (Husserl 1950b, 6; 2012, 3).

Husserl describes the phenomenologist as a “scientific traveller” (Husserl 1950b, 241; 2012, 203) to this end, with their journey beginning from their position in everyday life. Husserl terms this position “the natural attitude” (*die natürliche Einstellung*) (Husserl 1950b, 57; 2012, 51). Here, the spatio-temporal world is experienced as certainly existing throughout all changes in the experienced things of which it is the totality. However, the world is not experienced merely as a world of facts and affairs but as a world of values and practicalities (Husserl 1950b, 11, 59; 2012, 10, 53).

The world is furthermore experienced as having its being “out there” (Husserl 1950b, 63; 2012, 56). This constant presupposition that the world exists independently of subjective experience is called “the general thesis of the natural attitude” (Husserl 1950b, 63; 2012, 56). The subject is always directed towards the world without being aware of this fundamental belief in its existence and without reflecting on their consciousness of it (Husserl 1950a, 57; 1960, 17). It is thus impossible for the phenomenologist to reflect on their own consciousness of the world if they remain within the ignorance of the natural attitude. What is required is a radical change of attitude.

A new “phenomenological attitude” (Husserl 1950b, 117; 2012, 97) is achieved through a series of “phenomenological reductions” consisting of different steps of “bracketing” (*Einklammerung*) (Husserl 1950b, 73; 2012, 63). The first step is the “phenomenological epoché” (Husserl 1950b, 65; 2012, 59)—the beginning of phenomenology as a science (Husserl 1950a, 48; 1960, 7). The phenomenologist thereby abstains from using any methods and judgements from the natural sciences, previous philosophy, tradition and culture. For this all remains within the natural attitude that is next put out of play by the “universal epoché” (Husserl 1950b, 40–41, 63–66, 136; 2012, 34, 56–59, 110). This means suspending the

general thesis—the implicit belief in the independent existence of the world. But this does not mean denying or doubting its existence (Husserl 1950b, 40–41; 2012, 57–59). Instead, the phenomenologist ceases to accept or make any judgement concerning the being or non-being of the world as well as concerning their existence as a human being (Husserl 1950b, 151–52; 2012, 127). All the values, beliefs and interests of everyday life are thereby also put out of action. This involves setting aside all previous habits of thought and the “mental barriers” or “psychological resistances” set by them (Husserl 1950a, 60; 1950b, 5, 160; 1960, 20; 2012, 2, 134).

At this point, neither the natural attitude nor the world have been eradicated or lost. The world appears to the phenomenologist just as it did before, with all its usual belief-characters, meanings, values and interests. In this sense, the phenomenologist remains precisely where they were before performing the epoché. However, they now see everything in a radically new way. Through the epoché, their consciousness of the world and the sense that it has for them therein is opened up to view for the first time. The world is now seen within brackets as a “mere phenomenon” (Husserl 1950a, 60; 1960, 20), that is, strictly as it appears in consciousness.

According to Husserl, performing the epoché creates “a universe of absolute freedom from prejudice” in which the phenomenologist becomes a neutral or “disinterested onlooker” of their consciousness (Husserl 1950a, 73; 1960, 35). By next performing a “transcendental reduction” (Husserl 1950b, 74; 2012, 63), the phenomenologist directs their gaze towards their everyday consciousness of the world. This becomes the exclusive field of scientific research, where acts of consciousness and directly experienced phenomena are the only permissible evidence (Husserl 1950a, 53–54; 1950b, 52, 69–74; 1960, 12–13; 2012, 43, 61–63).

### 3.2. Transcendentalism and the Eidetic Method

The phenomenologist's sole and purely theoretical interest is now "to see and to describe adequately what he sees purely as seen, as what is seen and seen in such and such a manner" (Husserl 1950a, 73; 1960, 35). But the problem stands that consciousness is "the realm of Heraclitean flux" (Husserl 1950a, 86; 1960, 49). There are simply too many experiences and phenomena to individually describe, and whatever is individually described changes while it is being described (Husserl 1950b, 171–72; 2012, 143–44).

However, Husserl argues that acts and objects of consciousness—phenomena—conform to general types and ordered ways of appearing. These can be fixed in strict concepts so that they can be accurately described (Husserl 1950a, 86; 1950b, 369–70; 1960, 49; 2012, 316). These concepts are "essences" (*Wesen* or *Eidos*) or "ideas" (Husserl 1950b, 47; 2012, 40) that should not be understood as metaphysical entities that exist behind all appearances. Rather, an essence describes the necessary and invariant features that any possible phenomenon in concrete experience must exhibit in order to appear as such (Husserl 1950b, 48–50, 75–76; 2012, 40, 65).

"Eidetic intuition" (*Wesensschau*) (Husserl 1950a, 106; 1960, 72)—meaning to see essences—is made possible by performing the "eidetic reduction" within the "free play of fancy [fantasy]" (Husserl 1950b, 6, 74; 2012, 4, 64). The phenomenologist imagines situations based on evidence from everyday life or rehearses recollected experiences "just as they are in their natural setting as real facts of human life" (Husserl 1950b, 74; 2012, 64). By, on the one hand, altering their perspectives on and modes of consciousness of something and, on the other hand, varying the characteristics of the object of consciousness, the phenomenologist identifies the respective features of the act and object of consciousness that remain unchanged throughout the imagined variations. They describe these features as the respective essences of the act and object of consciousness (Husserl 1950a, 104–105; 1950b, 75–76; 1960, 70; 2012, 63–65).

These eidetic descriptions are made according to the “doctrine of categories” (Husserl 1950b, 174; 2012, 146). This is a logical framework wherein essences are categorised into species, genera, and regions. At each level, a more general and invariant way of appearing is prescribed to particular corresponding phenomena that appear in experience (Husserl 1950b, 32, 39; 2012, 25, 32). This doctrine of categories can be viewed as a map of consciousness (de Warren 2015, 227; Martin 2015, 329) that allows the phenomenologist to systematically identify and analyse acts and objects of consciousness. Husserl provides the following map, which I present only in broad strokes relevant to his characterisation of the Buddha’s teachings as transcendental.

The most general delineation is between the regions of consciousness and reality (*Wirklichkeit*) or “Being as experience” and “Being as thing” (that which appears in experience) (Husserl 1950b, 95–98; 2012, 78–79). As follows, these regions are discovered upon performing the epoché. Although the reality of the world is suspended, it appears just as before except now within brackets. This means two things. First, since the reality of the world can be suspended, the sense of the world as being real is dependent on consciousness. Second, although the existence of the world can be suspended, the phenomenologist’s own existence cannot be, for they remain conscious of the world even after suspending its reality. Husserl hence argues that consciousness is the original region of being on which all other regions depend for their essential being (Husserl 1950b, 174; 2012, 146). This does not mean that the material world exists only in consciousness, but that it is only in consciousness that it appears and has the sense of being real.

There is a further correlation between the regions of consciousness and reality in that the essence of consciousness is intentionality. This means that consciousness is always consciousness *of* something (Husserl 1950b, 203–205; 2012, 170–71). The realisation of this essential correlation—the dependence of the world on consciousness and the intentionality of consciousness—defines phenomenology as “transcendental idealism” (Husserl 1950a, 118; 1960, 86). The meaning of “transcendental” pertains to the insight that it is the essence of anything that

appears in consciousness to appear partially. One is only ever conscious of something from a certain perspective that reveals only certain aspects of it. In this sense, things in the world are essentially transcendent to consciousness. But they only appear at all in consciousness. Husserl thus characterises consciousness as transcendental—it is the condition of possibility for anything to appear (Husserl 1950b, 91–98, 101; 2012, 76–80, 83).

Consciousness is subcategorised into two genera, namely, the *cogito* (the act of consciousness) and the *cogitatum* (the object of consciousness) (Husserl 1950a, 74–77; 1960, 36–39). *Noesis* designates the different species of the *cogito*—such as perception, imagination, recollection and judgement—that give meaningful form to the sensory and sensuous content (*hyle*) of any experience (Husserl 1950b, 207–12; 2012, 174–78). It is the essence of the *cogito* to have an intentional object. This is the *cogitatum*, and its different species are the *noema*—that which appears in an act of consciousness in a certain way, for example, a perceived visual thing *as* visually perceived (Husserl 1950b, 218–21; 2012, 184–86).

Husserl further categorises the “pure Ego” (Husserl 1950b, 67; 2012, 62) or transcendental subject, that is, the necessarily present and irreducible conscious subject as being distinct from its continually changing acts and objects of consciousness (Husserl 1950b, 195–96; 2012, 164). Yet the pure Ego is not a real part or phase to be found in consciousness and it is not an object in the world. It is instead a stream of temporally ordered and intentionally structured conscious processes, abilities and dispositions (Husserl 1950a, 65–67, 74, 90; 1950b, 123, 179; 1960, 26–29, 36, 54, 65; 2012, 111, 163).

The pure Ego’s essence is to constitute the being of the world by experiencing it in a certain way and believing certain things about it (Husserl 1950b, 260–62; 2012, 221). Moreover, every belief, act of consciousness and decision of the pure Ego in relation to the world gives its conscious life a habitual style, stable personal character and sense of the world. It is hence also the essence of the pure

Ego to constitute its own being through its constitution of the world (Husserl 1950a, 100–109, 163; 1960, 66–75, 136).

Since all acts and objects of consciousness that can possibly occur and appear in the life of the pure Ego are categorised, Husserl thereby establishes phenomenology as a universal science of essential being. In summary, Husserl's criteria for this science are as follows. The performance of the epoché and transcendental reduction establish a neutral attitude towards, purely theoretical interest in, and transcendental view of consciousness as the exclusive field of research. Through the eidetic reduction in fantasy, consciousness is then described according to the doctrine of categories. I will now examine the *Majjhima Nikāya* by Husserl's above criteria for a universal science of being, and accordingly evaluate the validity of Husserl's claims about the Buddha's teachings.

#### 4. An Examination of the *Majjhima Nikāya*<sup>4</sup>

Husserl correctly states that the Buddha is motivated by the general unhappiness of human life to forge a path leading to emancipation and bliss (Husserl 2010, 12; 2017, 412). The Buddha's path begins with the problem of *dukkha*—the dissatisfaction or frustration experienced by all human beings. The Buddha identifies the origin of *dukkha* as craving (*taṇhā*) and clinging (*upādāna*). This is argued to be rooted in a fundamental ignorance (*avijjā*) regarding the nature of experience and a corresponding set of false beliefs about the experiencing subject (MN 38.17). An ordinary person conceives of some aspect of experience or the world in general as being their self (*atta*), their self as being part of it, their self as being apart from it, or it as being part of their self (MN 1.3–26). However identified, the self is conceived as permanent, unchanging and existing independently of all else (MN 2.8). But the Buddha contrarily asserts that all aspects of experience are impermanent (*anicca*), subject to change, and

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<sup>4</sup> I henceforth refer to the *Majjhima Nikāya* as MN, with citations indicating the discourse and paragraph numbers. Standard transliterations are found in the Pali Text Society's Pāli-English Dictionary (2008).

dependently arisen (*paṭiccasamuppannā*). He thus argues that all that comprises experience is therefore not-self (*anattā*) and yet that there is no self that exists apart from this (MN 22.26).

*Dukkha* arises as follows. I crave and cling to whatever I believe can give me lasting satisfaction, but I am continually frustrated because all things are impermanent and changing. I am also attached to an aspect of experience that I believe to be the self. But this is likewise impermanent and changing, and so I am continually distressed by this changing aspect and crave eternal existence (MN 138.20). I am also averse to whatever I believe cannot satisfy me or that I find unpleasant. I despair at its presence despite my aversion to it, and may even crave annihilation of the self (MN 9.16).

However, the Buddha claims that the cessation of *dukkha* is possible. Since *dukkha* arises from craving and clinging, and since this is rooted in ignorance, liberation from *dukkha* depends on the cessation of ignorance (MN 38.20). This is achieved through direct knowledge (*abhiññā*) of the impermanence, *dukkha* and not-self of all aspects of experience. This knowledge is acquired through gradual training, practice and progress on the Buddha's path (MN 70.22) consisting of the following broad stages: “the abandoning of greed and hate, giving vision, giving knowledge, which leads to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*” (MN 3.8, 139.5). Husserl's claim regarding the Buddha's performance of the epoché concerns the first of these stages.

#### **4.1. Abandoning Hindrances and Giving Vision: The Buddha's Epoché**

The first step on the Buddha's path is developing a state of mind (*citta*) and body (*kāya*) that is “well-disposed for awakening to the truths” (MN 48.8). This requires the *bhikkhu*— someone following the Buddha's path—to abandon all that obstructs them from being able to directly “see things as they actually are [*yathābhūtam*]” (MN 48.8), that is, as impermanent, *dukkha* and not-self. They

begin by purifying their ethical conduct and way of life—abandoning all activities, interests and commitments that arouse desire. They also restrain their mind and senses from habitual craving for and clinging or aversion to the signs and features of all that they experience, and abandon all theoretical speculation about the world (MN 39.8, 48.8). The *bhikkhu* instead devotes themselves to daily acting in full awareness (*sampajānakārī*) of their states of mind, body and whatever they experience. They furthermore practice formal meditation daily, cultivating the ability to maintain a tranquil body as the basis for developing awareness (*sati*) and concentration (*samādhi*). The *bhikkhu* thereby abandons the five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*)—covetousness, ill will and hatred, sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and doubt (MN 39.3–14).

With repeated effort, the *bhikkhu* attains sequential states of extreme concentration called the four *jhānas*. By the fourth, *upekkhā* (equanimity) is achieved (MN 4. 22–26), that is, a neutral attitude towards everything that they are aware of (Conze 1983, 89–90). They now abide “unattracted, unrepelled, independent, free, dissociated, with a mind free of barriers” (MN 111.4), and feel “neither-pleasure-nor-pain” (MN 4.27). As the *bhikkhu* progresses in meditative practice, they eradicate the fetters of identity view (*sakkāyadiṭṭhi*), doubt (*vicikicchā*), and adherence to rules and observances (*sīlabbataparāmāso*) (MN 2.11). They increasingly do not “form any condition or generate any volition towards either being or non-being” (MN 140.22) and cease “favouring and opposing” (MN 38.40). This is the Buddha’s Middle Way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*), culminating in the extinguishment of all attachment and aversion that is *Nibbāna*.

This stepwise process is what Husserl correctly recognises, on his terms, as the performance of an epoché. The Buddha recognises in human life a natural attitude—of attachment and aversion—characterised by ignorance of the nature of experience and implicit beliefs in the existence of the world and the self. Like Husserl, the Buddha sees that this attitude must be neutralised along with all its worldly beliefs, interests, habits, and theorisations (Depraz and Varela 2003, 215;

Schuhmann 2005, 147; Lau 2016, 62; Gokhale 2018, 452) if direct knowledge of experience is to become possible.<sup>5</sup>

Husserl recognises in the Buddha’s teachings that one can “exercise the epoché ‘theoretically’ as well as practically” (Husserl 2010, 16; 2017, 414). However, there is a key difference between Husserl’s formulation of the epoché and the Buddha’s analogous epoché to be identified here. Husserl states that all previous habits of thought as well as mental barriers or psychological resistances must be overcome by the epoché (Husserl 1950b, 5, 160; 2012, 2, 134). Yet Husserl provides no instructions as to bodily techniques, ethical conduct and way of life for doing so (Depraz and Varela 2003, 228; Varela et al. 2016, 19, 27–28; Bitbol 2019, 138–40), that is, for performing the epoché “practically.” This neglect is problematic because it arguably marks a weaker formulation of the epoché. A phenomenologist who follows Husserl’s instructions alone would conceivably fail to put out of play many interests, habits and prejudices that are bound up with the practicalities of daily life and bodily conduct. These would obstruct a phenomenologist’s purely theoretical investigation of consciousness. Indeed, the idea that pure theory is possible apart from bodily and ethical praxis may be one of these unsuspected prejudices. In short, the Buddha would surely ask of a Husserlian phenomenologist, “since you do not know what development of body is, how could you know what development of mind is?” (MN 36.7).

Unlike Husserl, the Buddha finely details techniques for a *bhikkhu* to increase the scope and consistency of the epoché through gradually transforming their daily way of life and embodied way of habitually seeing and acting in the world. The Buddha details the bodily conduct to be observed in everyday life—instructing observances such as a life of homelessness in community with other *bhikkhus*, moderation in eating, and constant awareness of bodily movements and sensations (MN 39.3–7). He also teaches bodily techniques for meditation—such as correct

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<sup>5</sup> Odysseus Stone and Dan Zahavi (2021) critique comparisons between contemporary Buddhist mindfulness practice and the epoché. My description of the Buddha’s instructions clarifies that mindfulness practice alone indeed does not constitute a method comparable to the epoché.

posture and control of breathing (MN 10.4)—as the foundation for developing sustained mental awareness and concentration.

Here, Husserl misunderstands the Buddha’s focus on bodily techniques, ethical conduct and way of life as a purely practical interest. It is instead the case that careful attention to these practicalities is necessary for being mentally and physically capable of gaining direct knowledge of experience. The Buddha is concerned with the development of what Diego D’Angelo has termed—within a phenomenological context—“embodied attention” (D’Angelo 2019, 961). D’Angelo argues that “even those activities usually regarded as ‘purely mental’ or at least ‘purely theoretical’ are possible only because the body is in play,” and that there are “bodily conditions that need to be met in order to be attentive: a certain posture of the body; the satisfaction of primary needs; and habitualised movements” (D’Angelo 2019, 965, 974). This is why the Buddha instructs a certain bodily posture in meditation, observances regarding daily needs of the body, and transforming bodily habits. This is the foundation for the sustained mental awareness and concentration that eventually allow a *bhikkhu* to direct their mind freely towards whatever aspects of experience they choose (MN 20.8, 32.9, 119.29).

Finally, Husserl claims that the Buddha’s performance of the epoché amounts to averting his gaze *away* from the world and that his categorical imperative is a complete theoretical and practical renunciation thereof (Husserl 2010, 16–17; 2017, 414–15). But just as the Husserlian epoché is not a denial of or negative position towards the world (Husserl 1950b, 40–41; 2012, 57–59), the purpose of relinquishing attachment and aversion to the world is not to turn away from or renounce it (Iyer 2017, 402). Like the phenomenologist, the *bhikkhu* instead aims to achieve a neutral attitude *towards* the experienced world in order to gain unprejudiced knowledge of it.

## 4.2. Giving Knowledge: The Buddha's Transcendentalism

I will now evaluate Husserl's claim that the Buddha—via the epoché—achieves a transcendental view of the world but cannot gain further knowledge than this because he is limited by his purely practical interest in *Nibbāna* (Husserl 2010, 9, 16; 2017, 407, 414). Husserl consequently asserts that the Buddha could not develop a universal science of being. Yet Husserl, without explanation, ascribes the seeing of essences in fantasy to the Buddha (Husserl 2010, 12, 16; 2017, 409, 414)—two crucial aspects of this science. It is outside the scope of this article to provide the detailed analysis of these aspects that is needed to definitively evaluate Husserl's ascription of them to the Buddha.<sup>6</sup> However, while focusing in sections 4.2–4.4 on evaluating Husserl's aforesaid claim concerning the Buddha's transcendentalism, knowledge, and goal of *Nibbāna*, I suggest—for further research—related points in the *Majjhima Nikāya* that could be compared to seeing essences in fantasy and furthermore to Husserl's doctrine of categories. I am thereby able to question Husserl's insistence that the Buddha could not develop a universal science of being when I lastly address the relationship between gaining knowledge of consciousness and achieving *Nibbāna*.

I shall first determine whether the Buddha achieves a transcendental standpoint. The Buddha “teaches the *Dhamma* through direct knowledge, not without direct knowledge [...] with a sound basis, not without a sound basis” (MN 77.12). The *Dhamma* refers to the Buddha's teachings, and its sound basis is a theoretical framework, that is, a structured set of conceptual classifications of consciousness (experience in general). Direct knowledge is strictly of the nature of the *bhikkhu*'s own direct experience (Anālayo 2003, 46)—“only of what [they] have known, seen, and understood for [themselves]” (MN 38.24) and “is visible here and now” (MN 38.25). As is the case for Husserl's science, the Buddha thereby delimits consciousness as the exclusive field of investigation and what is directly

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<sup>6</sup> Liangkang Ni states that Husserl identifies an eidetic reduction in the Buddha teachings (Ni 2011, 150), but Ni provides no relevant evidence from the Buddha's discourses.

experienced as his only evidence. This constitutes, in Husserlian terms, a transcendental reduction (Nizamis 2012, 195, 225).<sup>7</sup>

The Buddha teaches several classificatory schemes that account for the totality of *dhammas* (phenomena) that constitute experience (Gethin 1986, 48).<sup>8</sup> The most general classifications are *nāmarūpa* and *viññāṇa* (MN 9.54). *Nāmarūpa* is divided into *nāma* (mentality)—sub-classified into *vedanā* (feeling), *saññā* (perception), *cetanā* (volition), *phassa* (contact) and *manaskāra* (attention)—and *rūpa* (materiality) which is the physical world as experienced by the conscious subject (Gethin 1986, 36). *Viññāṇa* designates the consciousness of the subject in distinction from the object of consciousness (Somaratne 2005, 169).

Here, I find further reason for Husserl to state that the Buddha achieves a transcendental view of consciousness (Husserl 1989, 125; 2005, 145; 2010, 16; 2017, 414). The Buddha states that “with the arising of consciousness there is arising of mentality-materiality” (MN 9.54). This is comparable to Husserl’s assertion that the world is a mere phenomenon in subjectivity, i.e., that it only arises with consciousness. In this sense, consciousness is transcendental. The Buddha continues: “have I not stated in many ways consciousness to be dependently arisen, since without a condition there is not origination of consciousness? [...] consciousness is reckoned by the particular condition dependent upon which it arises” (MN 38.5). This is comparable to Husserl’s assertion that the essence of consciousness is intentionality (Depraz and Varela 2003, 225; Prosser 2013, 153; Nizamis 2012, 226), i.e., that consciousness is only consciousness *of* something or only arises on the condition that it is of something.

A central scheme by which the Buddha *further* classifies the aspects of all possible experience is the five aggregates (*khandhas*). Belonging to materiality,

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<sup>7</sup> Eugen Fink, assistant to Husserl, remarked that “the various phases of Buddhist self-discipline were essentially phases of phenomenological reduction” (Cairns 1976, 50).

<sup>8</sup> These schemes notably include the following. The five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) and seven enlightenment factors (*bojjhaṅgas*) classify states of mind. The five aggregates (*khandhas*) and the twelve spheres (*āyatana*s) classify aspects of experience. The twelve links (*nidāna*s) and Four Noble Truths (*ariyasaccāni*) detail the fact of *dukkha*, its origin, cessation, and how it ceases. I further discuss the meaning of *dhamma* in section 4.3.

this includes *rūpa* (material form) and, belonging to mentality, this includes *vedanā* (feelings), *saññā* (perception), *saṅkhāra* (volitional formations) and *viññāṇa* (consciousness) (MN 10.38). These are sub-classified according to the six sense-spheres (*saḷāyatana*s) in which any phenomenon can arise. Here, phenomena are determined in relation to what their condition for arising is. For example, there are six classes of *viññāṇa* determined according to the contact between the specific sense-faculty and sense-object that they arise from (MN 38.8). Furthermore, each aggregate is defined as being dependently arisen with every other aggregate.<sup>9</sup>

This short description of the five aggregates demonstrates that Husserl is wrong to assert that the Buddha's knowledge of experience extends no further than proving the transcendental standpoint. The knowledge that consciousness and the world are dependently arisen is not sufficient for achieving *Nibbāna*. Rather, all possible aspects of experience must be further classified and investigated so that direct knowledge is gained of their impermanence, *dukkha* and not-self.

The Buddha presents himself as a guide on the path to *Nibbāna* (MN 51.14) and provides a classificatory map of experience, the sound basis of the *Dhamma*, for reaching this end (Shulman 2014, 124). This serves the same basic function as Husserl's doctrine of categories as it also provides conceptual classifications for identifying and investigating all possible aspects of experience. I will now describe how the *bhikkhu*, operating within the Buddha's epoché, can thereby achieve *Nibbāna*.

#### **4.3. Direct Knowledge, Peace and Enlightenment: The Investigation-of-dhammas (*dhammavicaya*)**

The *bhikkhu* first surveys their direct experience in daily life and formal meditation. As the Buddha details in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10), the *bhikkhu*

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<sup>9</sup> All the above classifications are detailed in MN 9, 18, 28, 38, 43, 59, 78 and 148.

in formal meditation initially operates in the mode of *sati*. This denotes a heightened awareness of the body (*kāya*), feelings (*vedanā*), mind (*citta*) and *dhammas* (phenomena). In this mode, the *bhikkhu* does not interfere with or react to whatever they are aware of. They begin with mindfulness of breathing and proceed to contemplate the body as body, feelings as feelings, mind as mind, and *dhammas* as *dhammas*. This means that the *bhikkhu* identifies them just as they appear, noting each of their aspects and variations as they arise and vanish to view (MN 10.1–35). In Husserlian terms, the *bhikkhu* in *sati* operates within the epoché, remaining neutral towards whatever they experience, and the transcendental reduction, taking what they directly experience as their only evidence.

The *bhikkhu* next shifts their awareness from the individual characteristics of a particular phenomenon to its general features as a certain type of phenomenon (Anālayo 2003, 93). While *dhammas* can generally mean directly experienced phenomena, at this stage of *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, *dhammas* specifically means “ideas” or “mind-objects” (Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi 2009, 54) contemplated in meditation.<sup>10</sup> They are mental representations of directly experienced phenomena. The *bhikkhu* defines and distinguishes these *dhammas* into their respective classifications and sub-classifications according to what is seen to be their general nature or characteristic quality (MN 10.36–45; Anālayo 2003, 182–86). This procedure is broadly comparable to the phenomenologist identifying and categorising the essences of ideal phenomena in fantasy.

The *bhikkhu* also uses the classificatory schemes of the five hindrances to identify and abandon mental hindrances to their investigation of consciousness, and uses the seven enlightenment factors to identify and cultivate states and faculties of mind that are beneficial to it (MN 10.36, 10.42). This can be seen as a further refined performance of the epoché.

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<sup>10</sup> The Buddha uses the term *dhamma* in many distinct ways (see Gethin 2004).

Having surveyed and classified the *dhammas*—while carefully maintaining the epoché—the *bhikkhu* “investigates and examines” *dhammas* “with wisdom and embarks upon a full inquiry into” them (MN 118.31). The aim is now to attain direct knowledge of the impermanence, *dukkha* and not-self of all *dhammas* constituting all possible experience. The *bhikkhu* thereby sees that all *dhammas* classified into the five aggregates are impermanent and subject to change, and are thus *dukkha* because they cannot satisfy craving and clinging (Vetter 1988, 40). The *bhikkhu* tests the thesis that the self is permanent, eternal and not subject to change, finding that there is nothing in experience that has this nature. They thus see that all five aggregates are not-self because they lack the permanence, independent existence and unchangeability that a self should have. Since the *bhikkhu* discovers that they can experience nothing other than the five aggregates, they find that the self is nowhere to be seen (MN 22.16–29).

This conclusion, contrary to Gokhale’s view (Gokhale 2018, 467), is not opposed to Husserl’s assertion that the pure Ego is necessary and irreducible. For Husserl also states that “we shall never stumble across the pure Ego as an experience among others within the flux of manifold experiences as transcendental residuum. Nor shall we meet it as a constitutive bit of experience” (Husserl 1950b, 123; 2012, 111). Thus, Husserl does not hold a view of the self that is necessarily at odds with the Buddha’s assertion of not-self since he does not assert that the pure Ego is a permanent, independent, and unchanging entity. Nor does the Buddha deny the existence of an experiencing subject (Anālayo 2003, 211). He rather argues that there is no self that exists as the aforesaid entity apart from experience. Moreover, similarly to Husserl’s assertion that every act of consciousness contributes to giving the pure Ego a habitual style of life (Husserl 1950a, 65–67; 1960, 66–69), the Buddha states that “beings are owners of their actions, heirs of their actions; they originate from their actions, are bound to their actions” (MN 135.4).

I now return to describing the path to *Nibbāna*. The *bhikkhu* furthermore sees that they cannot grasp their meditative states of mind as the self. For they see that even

the most concentrated and neutral state of mind “is connected with the six bases that are dependent on this body and conditioned by life” and that it is “conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation” (MN 121.10–11). In other words, the *bhikkhu* sees that all that constitutes experience is impermanent, that their mind is conditioned by experience, and thus that any possible state of mind is impermanent and cannot be grasped as the self.

It is with the final knowledge that everything constituting experience is impermanent, *dukkha* and not-self that the *bhikkhu* achieves enlightenment (*bodhi*). Upon eradicating all ignorance of the nature of experience, they are finally liberated from all false beliefs concerning it (MN 121.11). No longer believing that there is anything that is permanent, independently existing, not subject to change and the self, they do not cling to and crave any aspect of experience as if it were. All craving and clinging is thus extinguished and, the former being its cause, all *dukkha* ceases. This is *Nibbāna* here and now.

#### **4.4. *Nibbāna* and Knowledge**

Husserl is right to say that the Buddha’s interest in investigating consciousness is not purely theoretical. The goal is to achieve *Nibbāna* and not simply to develop a theory of consciousness. But the question can now be raised as to whether, as Husserl claims, *Nibbāna* is a purely practical goal that limits knowledge of consciousness. The Buddha states that “destruction of the taints is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and see” (MN 2.3), and his classificatory schemes, which structure this knowing and seeing (Shulman 2014, 124), cover all possible aspects of experience. Achieving the so-called purely practical goal of *Nibbāna* thus requires universal knowledge of consciousness on the basis of knowledge of the Buddha’s theoretical framework. The goal of *Nibbāna* therefore does not limit but motivates and requires theoretical knowledge of consciousness (Sinha 1971, 259).

However, the objection could be raised that the Buddha instructs the *bhikkhu* to “remember what [he] has left undeclared as undeclared [...] Why [has he] left that undeclared? Because it is unbeneficial [...] it does not lead to [...] direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*” (MN 63.7). This seems to support Husserl’s claim that the purely practical goal of *Nibbāna* limits knowledge. But what is left undeclared is what does not lead to direct knowledge of all aspects of consciousness as impermanent, *dukkha*, and not-self.<sup>11</sup> To achieve *Nibbāna*, nothing can be overlooked that could be believed to be otherwise. Thus, the goal of *Nibbāna* again does not limit knowledge. The aforesaid instruction can rather be understood as an instruction to remain within the epoché—to declare only that which one directly sees for oneself.

In any case, Husserl’s distinction between the purely theoretical and purely practical is inapplicable to the Buddha’s soteriology. *Nibbāna* means being “completely liberated through final knowledge” (MN 107.11) that is gained by dedicating one’s life to knowing the *Dhamma* and applying it to the investigation of consciousness. Here, there is no distinction between pure theory and pure praxis. By performing the Buddha’s epoché, the *bhikkhu* transforms their bodily and ethical conduct and way of life in order to investigate consciousness. In turn, this investigation transforms their bodily and ethical conduct and way of life as they gradually cease their attachment and aversion to all aspects of experience through directly knowing their impermanence, *dukkha*, and not-self.

Nonetheless, Husserl’s claim that the Buddha cannot develop a universal science of being still stands. But, as I have shown, the Buddha performs the epoché and transcendental reduction, and thereby establishes consciousness as his exclusive field of investigation. He may identify essences in fantasy, and his classificatory schemes may function similarly to Husserl’s doctrine of categories. The only criterion for a universal science of being that is not met by the Buddha is to have a purely theoretical interest in consciousness. Since all the above criteria have been

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<sup>11</sup> For example, whether the world is eternal and whether there is an immaterial soul persisting after death is left undeclared (MN 63.3).

met or at least indicated for further research, it becomes questionable whether a purely theoretical interest is a necessary criterion for this science and whether the goal of *Nibbāna* is incompatible with it.

Moreover, *Nibbāna* refers to two distinct moments in the life of a *bhikkhu*, which Husserl does not recognise. *Nibbāna* here and now—during life—concerns liberation from *dukkha*. This is the moment at which a *bhikkhu* becomes an *arahant* (liberated person). This is the end of the path, the point at which a *bhikkhu* does “not [...] still have work to do with diligence” (MN 70.12). But the attainment of *Nibbāna* is not the end of their life, which is referred to as *parinibbāna*. In the context of rebirth—perpetuated by craving and clinging—this denotes the final cessation of the five aggregates upon the death of the *arahant* and their consequent liberation from rebirth (Collins 1998, 143; Brahmāli 2009, 33).

*Arahantship* refers to a new way of life that begins with *Nibbāna*. An *arahant* experiences the very same world that they did before (MN 1.51–171). But they now abide in a radically heightened awareness of and neutral attitude towards their experience of the world that is free of *dukkha*. However, although *arahants* have completed the path, the Buddha states that they continue living a secluded life and practicing meditation because they “see a pleasant abiding for [themselves] here and now, and [they] have compassion for future generations” (MN 36.34). Meditative practice in itself gives them bliss and satisfaction (Anālayo 2003, 272). Having done what has to be done concerning liberation from *dukkha*, an *arahant* is not only able to continue developing their knowledge of consciousness along with their capacity for awareness and concentration (Engelmajer 2003, 33, 49; Anālayo 2003, 273), but to do so freely of any ulterior interests—the very thing that Husserl claims that the Buddha’s path does not allow. It is thus the case that even post-*Nibbāna* there is no limitation of knowledge.

Husserl states that the Buddha’s teachings are “certainly not a science that ensues from a theoretical interest, a ‘free’ science, a ‘purposeless’ science, a ‘play’ of leisure in opposition to the ‘seriousness of life’” (Husserl 2010, 12; 2017, 410). Yet this could describe the aforementioned meditative practice of an *arahant*—bar the open question of its scientific method—who leisurely delights therein, no longer has any other purpose for doing so, and does so freely of the seriousness of life that is *dukkha*. An *arahant* is also free—should they choose, as the Buddha did—to continue living within a community of *bhikkhus* in order to guide others to *Nibbāna*. Thus, contrary to Husserl’s view, the Buddha’s path does not lead to a theoretical and practical renunciation of the world that is solipsistic. It instead leads to a radically transformed way of living therein.

### Conclusion

Although Husserl’s ascriptions of the performance of an epoché and transcendentalism to the Buddha are supported by evidence from the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Husserl’s distinction between pure theory and pure praxis leads him to misconstrue the purpose of the Buddha’s epoché, the extent of knowledge that the Buddha gains from the transcendental viewpoint, and the nature of *Nibbāna*. It finally seems that Husserl and the Buddha’s approaches to consciousness diverge in their respective scientific and soteriological goals, and that Husserl’s distinction between pure theory and pure praxis renders them incommensurable. By way of conclusion, I suggest that this is not necessarily the case.

In the *Kaizo* articles (1922–1924), Husserl states that the continual dissatisfaction of naïve human life can be rationally overcome. This means achieving an ethical and consistently satisfactory life that is protected from the painful disappointment of realising that what was irrationally strived for was falsely valued and fails to satisfy. This requires the phenomenologist, as Husserl also indicates in “Socrates-Buddha,” to self-critically ground all their goals, values and interests on the scientific knowledge gained by phenomenological investigation (Husserl 1989, 1–

13, 30–31; 2010, 13–16; 2017, 411–13). Hence, phenomenology has a soteriological character (Lau 2016, 150). Husserl even states in the *Crisis* (1936) that “the total phenomenological attitude and the epoché are destined to effect, a complete personal transformation, comparable at the beginning to a religious conversion,” and that “a thoroughly new way of life” is thereby attained (Husserl 1954, 140, 153; 1970, 137, 150). The similarities to the *bhikkhu* are striking here. To overcome *dukkha*, their entire life must become grounded, via the Buddha’s epoché, on knowledge of consciousness. This brings about a complete personal transformation and new way of life that culminates in *Nibbāna* and continues to develop in *arahantship*.

Furthermore, Husserl arguably abandons his distinction between pure theory and pure praxis in the *Crisis*, for here the scientific investigation of consciousness is understood as simultaneously bringing about a complete transformation of life. Husserl can be seen to thereby approach the view of the Buddha who extensively developed the transformative potential of investigating consciousness. However, Husserl still neglects to consider the development of bodily and ethical conduct for performing the epoché, and so the feasibility of thereby beginning a completely transformed and consistently satisfactory way of life is questionable. For, as I have argued, this neglect leaves in place misguided interests, habits and prejudices that are bound up with the bodily attachments and aversions of daily life, and that cause *dukkha*. Moreover, Husserl conceives of phenomenology as one vocation among many in an individual’s life (Husserl 1954, 139–54; 1970, 136–51), though it is unique since “every new piece of transcendental knowledge is transformed [...] into an enrichment of the content of the human soul” (Husserl 1954, 267; 1970, 264). Yet the Buddha does not see the investigation of consciousness as a special vocation among others, instead teaching that dedicating one’s entire life to this effort is the surest path to *Nibbāna*.

I propose that by engaging with the Buddha’s teachings from where Husserl, due to his misunderstandings, left off, Husserlian phenomenologists can explore whether phenomenology can feasibly become a way of life—especially by

incorporating the bodily techniques and ethical conduct taught by the Buddha into their performance of the epoché. Granted, Husserl never wavered in his view that the scientific character of European philosophy, epitomised by phenomenology, is superior to Indian thought. But I have shown that this view is based on misunderstandings of the Buddha's teachings. If, as Husserl states in "Socrates-Buddha," "science is the supra-national, common good of all peoples, who want to raise themselves to an autonomous knowledge" (Husserl 2010, 10; 2017, 408), then this should not mean a hegemonic domination of European philosophy over all peoples. Rather, as Husserl proclaimed upon his first encounter with the Buddha, "from now on it will be our destiny to blend that Indian way of thinking which is completely new to us, with the one which for us is old, but which in this confrontation becomes alive again and strengthened" (Husserl 1989, 126; 2005, 145).

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