Husserl, Buddhism and
the Problematic of the Crisis of European Sciences

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I. Husserl, Hegel and the Euro-centric conception of philosophy

One of the reasons for the success of the phenomenological movement, being one of the most influential contemporary cross-cultural and interdisciplinary intellectual movements, resides probably in Husserl's life-long vocation to establish phenomenological philosophy as a genuine universal science. Yet in spite of the undeniable success of this movement, some of Husserl's public statements on Chinese and Indian philosophies, professed towards the end of his extremely rich philosophical life, have Euro-centric overtones which constitute some kind of thorn within the movement itself. These statements continue to cause considerable embarrassment among researchers of phenomenology, especially those of Asian origins. It is well-known that in his Vienna lecture delivered in May 1935 entitled "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Humanity", Husserl declared that "it is a mistake, a falsification of their sense, for those raised in the scientific ways of thinking created in Greece and developed in the modern period, to speak of Indian and Chinese philosophy and science (astronomy, mathematics), i.e., to interpret India, Babylonia, China, in a European way."¹ In what way does this statement contain Euro-centric overtones? In face of a human world whose cultural forms always have pluralist expressions, it seems natural and logical to accept that there exist different forms of philosophy among different cultural traditions. This, however, is not Husserl's opinion. To the founder of contemporary phenomenology there is only one form of philosophy which merits this very name. For Husserl, only that form of intellectual activity which is conducted under the guiding idea of "pure theōria" and orientates itself towards the realization of an absolutely universal science can be veritably called philosophy.² Thus one will not be surprised to find Husserl declaring the following in the same lecture: "Today we have a plethora of works about Indian philosophy, Chinese philosophy, etc., in which these are placed on a plane with Greek philosophy and are taken as merely different historical forms under one and the same idea of culture. Naturally, common features are not lacking.

² E. Husserl, Die Krisis ..., Husserliana VI, pp. 325, 331; The Crisis ..., pp. 280, 285.
Nevertheless, one must not allow the merely morphologically general features to hide
the intentional depths so that one becomes blind to the most essential differences of
principle. What, according to Husserl, are "the most essential differences of
principle" between Greek philosophy on the one hand and Indian and Chinese
philosophies on the other? We can find the answer to this question in the Prague
lecture Husserl delivered six months after the Vienna lecture, which was later
developed into the book length The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental
Phenomenology. In this latter work, which had given a fresh impetus to the
subsequent development of the phenomenological movement, Husserl formulates his
answer, which is disguised under the form of a question, in the following words:
"European humanity bears within itself an absolute idea, rather than being merely an
empirical anthropological type like 'China' or 'India'". What Husserl actually means
is this: only the form of philosophy developed within modern European humanity can
be said to be genuine philosophy, because only European philosophy has inherited the
attitude which originates from the Greek way of philosophical thinking as pure
theoria. All other forms of philosophy are either derivative or inauthentic. Husserl
even presents his juxtaposition between European civilization and all other forms of
human civilization by positing the following two possibilities of development of
human civilization: it gives rise either to "the spectacle of the Europeanization of all
other civilizations (die Europäisierung aller fremden Menschheiten) which
bears witness to the rule of an absolute meaning, one which is proper to the sense of
the world", or else "to a historical non-sense of the world". In other words, if the
path of development of human civilization is derailed from the mode of
"Europeanization", the world itself will lose its sense forever and will fall into an
absolute abyss. This is nothing other than positing European civilization as the bearer
of the criterion of meaningfulness of all other civilizations. Likewise, the yardstick of
whether China or India can develop a genuine form of philosophy derives entirely
from the Greco-European idea of philosophy.

We can of course compare Husserl’s statements on Chinese and Indian
philosophies with those professed a century earlier by Hegel. We can felicitate
ourselves that Husserl has never placed Eastern philosophy at the lowest step of the
ladder of world philosophy, as did the 19th Century official philosopher of the
Prussian state. Nor Husserl has pronounced, as Hegel did, some very pejorative

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3 E. Husserl, Die Krisis ..., Husserlian VI, p. 325; The Crisis ..., pp. 279-280.
4 E. Husserl, Die Krisis ..., Husserlian VI, p. 14; The Crisis, p. 16.
5 E. Husserl, Die Krisis ..., Husserlian VI, p. 14; The Crisis, p. 16.
6 Hegel, Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I (G. W. F. Hegel, Werke in zwanzig
Bänden, Bd. 18), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971, pp. 138-170; Lectures on The History
judgment on Chinese and Indian philosophies. On Chinese philosophy, Hegel's evaluation could not be worse: "China remains in the abstract. When they pass onto the concrete, what they call the concrete is, theoretically speaking, only the external connection of the sensible. That is something without [logical, necessary] order, and without fundamental inner intuition.... The expression of imagination of Chinese are strange: state-religion is the expression of their imagination. But the philosophy which is developed in connection with their religion is abstract, because the content itself of their religion is dry. The content cannot provide with thinking a creative kingdom of [determinate] categories." On Indian philosophy, Hegel's value judgment is no better: "We have seen that in India the point of main importance is the soul's drawing itself within itself, raising itself up into liberty, or thought which constitutes itself for itself. This becoming explicit of soul in the most abstract mode may be called intellectual substantiality.... Intellectual substantiality [in India] is the opposite of the reflection, understanding, and the subjective individuality of the European.... That intellectual substantiality that thus remaining in abstraction, has as its existence the subjective soul alone. Just as in empty vanity, where the subjective power of negation alone remains, everything disappears, this abstraction of intellectual substantiality only signifies an escape into what is empty and without determination, wherein everything vanishes." In the eyes of Hegel, Oriental philosophy, represented by Chinese philosophy and Indian philosophy, has the most serious defect of remaining in the abstract, and is thus unable to attain the veritable objective ground of thinking. The result is that both forms of philosophy are content wise poor and dry: "In the Eastern Philosophy we have also discovered a definite content, which is brought under our consideration; but the consideration is destitute of thought or system because it comes from above and is outside of the unity. On that side there stands intellectual substantiality, on this side it appears dry and barren." In a word, regarding Greek philosophy as the true beginning of history of philosophy whereas Chinese philosophy and Indian philosophy representing the most primitive and most elementary forms of philosophy, Hegel's conception of philosophy is explicitly Euro-centric. Likewise when Husserl places the origin of the "genuine" form of

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philosophy in Ancient Greece and projects on to Europe alone as the bearer of the "absolute meaning" of the future development of the entire human civilization, its Euro-centric overtones could not be more apparent, even though it is done within the context of his diagnosis of the crisis of European civilization.10

II. Husserl's praise of Buddhist scriptures

Yet to the surprise of most readers, Husserl had pronounced, a decade before the Vienna lecture and the manuscripts grouped around Crisis, some very laudatory words on Buddhist scriptures, the most shared philosophical and spiritual source across the whole Asia. Such words are not hidden in the little known manuscripts of Husserl's Nachlass, but rendered public during Husserl's most productive years in the form of a short review article. This article, entitled "Über die Reden Gotamo Buddhos" ("On the discourses of Gautama Buddha"), is a review of the re-edition of the celebrated Viennese oriental scholar Karl Eugen Neuman's German translation of various parts of the classical Buddhist texts Suttapitaka.11 The exceptional passionate tone of this barely known "in praise of Buddha" piece, in sharp contrast to the plain but rather chauvinist mention of Indian and Chinese philosophies in the Vienna lecture, merits a detour. Below is the English translation of Husserl's full text which the present author would like to share with his readers.12

I have now read the greatest portion of Karl Eugen Neuman's German translation of the main parts of the Holy Scriptures of Buddhism.13 Once when I had begun this reading, I could not rid myself of it, even if I still had other more urgent works. In fact, this has also brought an additional marvelous treasure to the German translation literature. Through the organization of this new edition, which from every point of view is exemplary and of the

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10 On Husserl's Euro-centric conception of philosophy in Crisis, cf. our article: Kwok-ying Lau, "Para-deconstruction: Preliminary Considerations for a Phenomenology of Interculturality", in Phenomenology of Interculturality and Life-world, special issue of Phänomenologische Forschungen, ed. E.W. Orth & C.-F. Cheung, Freiburg / München: Verlag K. Alber, 1998, pp. 233-237. The present author has some new thoughts on this problem which will be discussed in another article.


12 Our translation was benefited by the English version provided by Karl Schuhmann in his article "Husserl and Indian Thought", in Phenomenology and Indian Philosophy, ed. D. P. Chattopadhyaya, Lester Embree and Jitendra Mohanty, Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 25-27.

13 Throughout the review article, Husserl has not stated precisely which volumes or which texts among the Newman translations he had read. Yet according to Karl Schuhmann's estimation, Husserl probably had read translations of the Majjhima-Nikaya, the Therigata and Theragathat, and may be also of the Dhammapada, all originally written in Pali. Cf. K. Schuhmann, "Husserl and Indian Thought", op. cit., p. 40, n. 29.
highest taste, of the immortal life work of K. E. Neumann, the publisher has rendered an exceptional service. This highest flower of Indian religiosity, whose vision and practical effort are purely directed inwards—which, I would say, is not “transcendent”, but “transcendental”—will enter with these translations the horizon of our religious-ethical as well as philosophical consciousness, and without doubt will from now on take up the vocation of the effective co-determination of this consciousness. The perfect linguistic re-creation of the canonical Buddhist Scriptures provides us with the perfect possibility, in a way completely opposite to our European one, to see and to know the world, to take a stand with regard to it, to overcome (überwinden) it in an ethico-religious way, to understand it genuinely through the lived-through experience of the world itself, and to experience out of this understanding its lived effectiveness. For us, for everyone who, in this time of the collapse of our superficial and degenerated culture, looks around with enthusiasm to search for spiritual purity and authenticity as well as the peaceful overcoming of the world, this coming into visibility of the Indian way of overcoming the world is a great experience. For to any devoted reader, it should be clear very soon that Buddhism, as it speaks to us out of its pure original source, is about an ethical-religious method of spiritual purification and pacification of the highest dignity; this method is thought through and practiced with an almost incomparable internal coherence, energy and nobility of the mind. Buddhism can only be paralleled with the highest formations of philosophical and religious spirit of our European culture. From now on, it is our destiny to contrast the Indian spiritual way which is entirely new for us with our old way, and by virtue of this contrast to re-vitalize and to strengthen our own.

Through the richness of the faithfully marked tradition, the present scriptures can render visible Buddha himself and his most distinguish disciples as representatives of a new type of human “holiness” in an almost tangible way. It is regrettable that there exists no more German translation of the original scriptures of our religion, which has been historically a living religion and is in no way inferior to Buddhism, comparable, with respect to its capacity to refresh our understanding, to this German translation by Neuman of the Suttapitakam. This is because the German language has fatally moved away from the language of Luther’s translation of the Bible; its “church language” is deprived of the sense of living language immediately flowed out of spiritual activities. Considered from this respect, the breakthrough of this Indian religiosity in our present horizon may have its good sides. In any case it will awaken new forces of religious intuition; hence it will also contribute to the vivification and deepening of Christian intuition, and thus be beneficial to our ability to understand Christian religiosity in a true and internal way. It is sure that the re-edition of these masterly translations by Neuman constitutes an inestimable value for everyone who takes part in the ethical, religious and philosophical renewal of our culture.

I am awaiting with eagerness the appearance of the later parts of the Neuman
translators.

Anyone with first hand understanding of Husserl's work knows that he was always animated by the spirit of scientific vigour, such that his phenomenological descriptions are always scrupulous and his writing style sober and distanced. The above passionate recommendation of Neuman's German translation of Buddhist scriptures as well as the frequent use of superlatives to describe the theoretical attitude and the practical import of Buddhism represent an extremely rare case of a somewhat flamboyant writing style in Husserl. Nevertheless, we must point out at the same token that in this brief review article there is no internal discussion of the Buddhist doctrine. It simply reveals the effect of a sense of freshness conveyed to Husserl at his first discovery of Neuman's German translation of the *Suttapitaka*, as well as the mental pleasure arisen out of this new spiritual stimulation, resulting in his projection of the hope that Buddhism can awaken anew Europeans' life-force so as to revivify and deepen the Christian religion. Having made this initial reservation, we do think that Husserl's exceptionally high esteem of Neuman's translation of Buddhist scriptures merits some further analysis.

1. This review article was written in the aftermath of the First World War where Europe was the centre of collective violence and rivalry among nations unforeseen in human history. Husserl, suffering from the grief of the lost of a son, was deeply concerned by the downfall of the old European civilization. It seems that he wrote this short review in the intention of promoting the mission of cultural renewal from the ethical, religious and philosophical dimensions. In fact in the same period Husserl has published a series of articles on the method and task of cultural renewal in the Japanese journal appeared in Tokyo and whose title *Kaizo* means precisely "reform".\(^{14}\)

2. To Husserl Buddhism is not just anyone religion, but the one whose "ethico-religious method of spiritual purification and pacification is of the highest dignity", to such an extent that through its practice the state of nobility of the mind attained is comparable only by the highest forms of philosophical and religious spirituality in European culture. He understands that the very rich contents of the Buddhist scriptures are able to render visible the "holiness" of Buddha in the most

\(^{14}\) There are totally five articles in this series. Three of them were published during Husserl's life-time in *Kaizo*, namely "Erneuerung. Ihr Problem und ihre Methode", Vol. 5, No. 3, 1923; "Die Methode der Wesensforschung", Vol. 6, No. 4, 1924; "Erneuerung als individualethisches Problem", Vol. 6, No. 2, 1924. These three articles are now collected in E. Husserl, *Aufsätze und Vorträge (1922-1937)*, *Husserliana XXVII*, op. cit., pp. 3-13, 13-20, 20-43. The other two articles non published during Husserl's life-time, entitled respectively "Erneuerung und Wissenschaft" and "Formale Typen der Kultur in der Menschheitsentwicklung", are now collected in *Husserliana XXVII*, op. cit., pp. 43-59 and 59-94.
concrete way. This supreme appraisal of Buddhism is diametrically opposite to the very pejorative evaluation of Indian and Chinese philosophies by Hegel who, as we have pointed out in the first part of this paper, judges these latter as "having the most serious defect of remaining in the abstraction", "appearing dry and barren", and thus representing the lowest form of philosophy incapable of attaining objectivity.

3. In the eyes of Husserl, Buddhism's contribution is not limited to the ethico-religious aspects, but it has its philosophical import too. On the one hand Husserl thinks that Buddhism demonstrates an "almost incomparable internal coherence". On the other hand Husserl uses the word "transcendental", the term proper to his own phenomenological attitude, and not "transcendent", to describe the theoretical attitude of Buddhism. The use of the word "transcendental", a term philosophically laden with the highest theoretical caliber among Husserl's phenomenological vocabulary, shows that Husserl regards Buddhism as a spiritual and intellectual activity whose theoretical posture can attain a level as high as his own phenomenological philosophy.

4. At the same time Husserl points out that the Buddhist approach is completely different from the European one. Yet he does not go on to specify in what way the two approaches differ from one another.

III. Buddha: the Eastern Socrates?

From the phenomenological point of view, what is interesting in the above review article is of course Husserl's qualification of Buddhism as "not transcendent but transcendental". For this shows that Husserl, as pointed out above, grants to Buddhism a high degree of theoretical significance comparable to his own transcendental phenomenological philosophy. But what are Husserl's underlying reasons for making such a judgment? It is impossible to tell simply from the review article. According to Karl Schuhmann, the most authoritative researcher of Husserl's life, there is no evidence that Husserl has ever read other Buddhist scriptures or classics of Indian philosophy thereafter. Schuhmann's investigation shows that Husserl, just as many Europeans after Schopenhauer, simply identifies Buddhism with Indian thought in general. Thus, always according to Schuhmann, when Husserl


mentions Indian thought in his manuscripts, he refers to Neuman’s German translations of the Buddhist scriptures. In a manuscript written in 1926 under the title of “Socrates—Buddha”, Husserl noted down his further thoughts on Buddhism. He summarizes his understanding of the similarities and the differences between Socrates and Indian thought (i.e. Buddhism) in the following manner:

What is the position of cognition in Indian thought? How is this thought related to Socratic thought? Indian thought aims at liberation (Erlösung), at bliss (Seligkeit) by means of ruthless cognition (rücksichtlos Erkenntnis). It assumes therefore that there are also truths which are valid in themselves. Indian cultural life, too, therefore leads to autonomy—to autonomous cognition, by which a true way to bliss can be won, and thereby also truths in itself for just deeds, an autonomous truth in the cognition of ethical and religious norms. In Socrates, too, theory, i.e. knowledge in the sense of genuine knowledge, has the function of being intuitive knowledge about true practice and its norms.... Has Indian thought produced a science of being (Seinswissenschaft), or at least envisaged its possibility, in the same sense in which this has been achieved concerning the science which leads to bliss? But even the way of thought which is part of the doctrine of liberation is for the Indians not distinguished from natural thought (natürliches Denken) as to its form (and logic, so to speak), but only as to the consistency of its knowledge, its freedom from prejudice (Vorurteilslosigkeit), its resolute suspension of natural life-interest (Ausschaltung des natürlichen Lebensinteresses), its disinterested evaluation of such interests, and its formulation of those evaluations in general judgments. In Greek philosophy, in contrast, positive scientific thought and knowledge depart radically from the knowledge of [daily] life, and they do so by means of a form and method which are in principle logical.

The importance of the above passage resides in the following: through the comparison of Buddha and Socrates, Husserl is able to articulate the similarities and the differences between Buddhism—as far as he could understand—with his own

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18 Husserl, MS B I 21/88-94 (21/22 Jan 1926); reported by Karl Schuhmann, “Husserl and Indian Thought”, op. cit., p. 41, n. 52. According to Schuhmann’s investigation, Husserl has discussed Buddhism in a seminar held in the winter semester of 1925-26. Yet the very sketchy notes left down by Dorian Cairns, the later English translator of the Cartesian Meditations and Formal and Transcendental Logic but whose level of German language at that time was limited, do not constitute a sufficiently solid documentary basis for further analysis. Cf. Karl Schuhmann, “Husserl and Indian Thought”, op. cit., pp. 28-29 and p. 41, n.41.
19 The English translation of the passage in question is provided by Karl Schuhmann, in “Husserl and Indian Thought”, op. cit., pp. 30-31. We have modified in some places Schuhmann’s translation by consulting the translation and discussion of certain relevant passages by Debabrata Sinha in his article “Theory and Practice in Indian Thought: Husserl’s Observations”, Philosophy East and West, vol. 21, 1971, pp. 255-264.
20 Schuhmann translates “Erlösung” by “salvation”, which is a rather Christian term. We have replaced it by “liberation”, one of the now common Buddhist vocabulary in English.
conception of philosophy as transcendental phenomenology. In connection with the analysis of the aforementioned review article, Husserl's understanding of Buddhism can be summarized in the following manner:

1. First of all, for Husserl, the attitude of Buddhism is not an ordinary religious mythical attitude. It is rather an atheist religion, for it does not project a supra-natural transcendent being to explain the origin and the genesis of the world. On the contrary, Buddhism advocates a reflective attitude "purely directed inwards" by the method of meditative practice which withdraws ourselves away from the mundane world so as to leads us back to the thus purified mind. Under the guidance of this reflective attitude we move ourselves away from mundane opinion—doxa, just as what the early Greek thinkers have been doing. This reflective move is already the beginning of the philosophical attitude.

2. Why is it possible to compare the Buddhist reflective attitude with that of Socrates? For Husserl Buddha advocates a supreme ethical practical ideal—liberation and bliss—by means of ruthless cognition. Yet the truth pursued by Buddha is not of the order of mundane objective knowledge, but the truth of ethical and religious norms. This sort of truth serves as a path leading to the realization of an achieved moral life of oneself. Understood in this way, the Buddhist attitude is no different from Socrates' pursuit of a coherent virtuous life under the guidance of the maxim "know thyself". Such a cognitive attitude, common to both Buddha and Socrates, is a specific theoretical attitude. It is neither a theoretical attitude which serves the pragmatic interests of everyday life, nor a pure theoretical attitude of the sciences. Rather, it is a theoretical attitude conducted under the guidance of a universal practical interest of the supreme order. This kind of theoretical attitude is comparable to what Husserl calls later in the Vienna lecture "a third form of universal attitude", "namely the synthesis of the two interests accomplished in the transition from the theoretical to the practical attitude, such that the theōria (universal science), arising within a closed unity and under the époche of all praxis, is called ... to serve humankind in a new way.... This occurs in the form of a new sort of praxis, ... a praxis whose aim is to elevate humankind through universal scientific reason, according to norms of truth of all forms, to transform it from the bottom up into a new humanity made capable of an absolute self-responsibility on the basis of absolute theoretical insights."\(^{21}\)

3. The Buddhist meditative method provides a practical guide towards the renunciation of craving and attachment to mundane life-interests. This attitude of absence from interest is comparable to the basic phenomenological attitude of

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\(^{21}\) E. Husserl, *Die Krisis ..., Husserliana VI*, p. 329; *The Crisis ..., p. 283.*
freedom from prejudice and freedom from presupposition. Through meditative practices, we retain ourselves from any "natural life-interest". Expressed in phenomenological terms, this amounts to the suspension of the natural attitude by the practice of epoché: this constitutes the first step of phenomenological reduction.

4. Buddhism questions the reality of mundane beings. Its theory of liberation is basically the negation of mundane life. Yet what is implicit in the negation of mundane life is the questioning of meaning of the world in its totality. (Let us recall that in the review article Husserl writes that "Buddhist Scriptures provides us with the perfect possibility, in a way completely opposite to our European one, to see and to know the world, to take a stand with regard to it, to overcome it in an ethico-religious way"). This attitude of questioning the world’s meaning is indeed similar to the transcendental phenomenological attitude: this latter too questions the ontological thesis of the world on the whole. Thus when the Buddhist attitude questions the meaning of the world in its totality, it is likewise neutralizing the ontological status of the world; this amounts to the practice of transcendental reduction.

5. Yet if there exists a certain transcendental attitude in Buddhism, it is only a quasi-transcendental attitude and not a genuine transcendental attitude. It is because even if Buddhism aims at liberation and its basic attitude is overcoming the world by renouncing mundane life-interests, in the eyes of Husserl, on the one hand the Buddhist overcoming of the world remains within a religious-ethical attitude without developing a science of being; on the other Buddhism has not developed a kind of cognition “by means of a form and method which are in principle logical” in the same manner as in Greek philosophy. Thus Buddhism is unable, thinks Husserl, to provide a logical form to connect all knowledge in the form of a systemic unity. In this way, Buddhism can never become a universal science, and consequentially can never realize Husserl’s own idea of transcendental phenomenological philosophy.

6. For Husserl, Greek philosophy had to wait for Plato and Aristotle to have made the distinction between epistēme and doxa that the transition from a banal philosophical attitude to the genuine scientific theoretical attitude was complete.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{22}\) E. Husserl, *Die Krisis ..., Husserliana VI*, p. 332; *The Crisis ...,*, p. 285. For a discussion of Husserl’s view on Greek philosophy, cf. Klaus Held, "Husserl et les grecs", in *Husserl*, ed. Eliane Escoubas and Marc Richir, Grenoble: Editions Jérôme Millon, 1989, pp. 119-153. Seen from today, Husserl’s conception of Greek philosophy, being modeled on the idea of universal science, may be the result of the influence of Neo-Kantians such as Natorp. In any case such a conception of Greek philosophy is neither shared by Heidegger nor by some recent specialists of Greek philosophy. For example for the famous French scholar Pierre Hadot, specialist in Greek philosophy whose work has had a decisive influence on the last Foucault, to the Greeks philosophy is a way of life ("la philosophie comme manière vivre") and a kind of mental exercise ("exercices spirituels"). Please see Pierre
Under this condition, even Socrates will not be considered as the founder of Greek science. Thus in spite of the fact that Husserl was comparing Buddha with Socrates, this does not mean that he would concede that Buddhist philosophy can satisfy the requirement of transcendental phenomenology.

IV. Husserl's conception of philosophy, the crisis of European sciences and Buddhism

If the above analysis is correct, it can help us, in spite of its brevity, to understand why there is such a great discrepancy in Husserl’s former and later attitudes towards Eastern philosophy: he had published a very laudatory review article on Buddhism in the 1920s, but held some rather chauvinist and Euro-centric statements on Indian and Chinese philosophies a decade later. We can summarize our analysis in the following terms: even though Husserl has manifested an initial enthusiasm towards Buddhism, thinking that its theoretical position is a transcendental one, upon further reflection, he was of the judgment that Buddhism does not satisfy the requirement of a genuine universal philosophy, because it does not incarnate the vocation of realizing the idea(l) of universal science under the guidance of a pure theoretical attitude.

Indeed it is not easy to determine whether and to what extent Husserl’s encounter with Buddhism, probably relatively brief, has influenced the subsequent development of his conception and practice of philosophy. To the limited knowledge of the present author, there are manuscripts of Husserl, written during the same period, which express a certain form of “primacy of the practical”. For example in a manuscript entitled “The dissatisfaction of positive sciences and <the> First Philosophy”, Husserl writes: ‘The universal theoretical interest was ‘originally’ only a branch and an organ of universal practical interest. Science is force, and science liberates, and freedom through scientific reason is the way of ‘bliss’, i.e. the way to a truly pacified human life, to a new humanity, who masters her/his world with the force of genuine science and produces around herself/himself a rational world through this force.... The nascent great science produces for the understanding a world which appears to rise to the thinking in movement from practical reason.” Here there is a striking similarity of tone and wording with the above cited manuscript “Socrates—Buddha”: science is

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the road to freedom and bliss, universal theoretical interest is derivative of universal practical interest. In another manuscript of the same period, Husserl writes: “Cognition is a practical activity, and rational cognition, that is to say theoretical cognition, is an activity out of practical reason ... directed towards values.” 25 Yet upon further clarification, the Husserlian version of “primacy of the practical” reveals itself to be a disguised one: the seemingly axiological turn of Husserl is ultimately subsumed under theoretical knowledge as supreme value. In the manuscript just mentioned, after recognizing cognition as an activity out of practical reason, Husserl finished his explication by saying: “But a theory is a higher value against all the single truths founding it.” 26 If there were a practical turn in Husserl, it would still be dominated by the intellectualist tendency. And it is this intellectualist tendency which underlies Husserl’s later concept and practice of philosophy, including that of the Crisis period. For example in the Vienna lecture, Husserl advocates the way to overcome the crisis of European humanity by “a far-reaching transformation of the whole praxis of human existence, i.e. the whole of cultural life” in such a way that the latter “receives its norms from objective truth”, and “thus ideal truth becomes an absolute value which ... brings with it a universally transformed praxis.” 27 Yet this new praxis is nothing other than that of the philosopher who has “her/his constant and prior resolve to dedicate her/his future life always ... to the task of theoria, to build theoretical knowledge upon theoretical knowledge in infinitum.” 28 Husserl’s intellectualist conception and practice of philosophy cannot be clearer here.

It is precisely because of this intellectualist conception of philosophy, which strives towards the realization of the idea of universal science under the guidance of pure theoretical interest as its true vocation, that there arises the Husserlian diagnosis of the crisis of European sciences. For it is also precisely these European sciences, submerged in their successful theoretical endeavors, which lose sight of the fact that they are rooted in the life-world, that their ultimate goal is to serve the supreme moral and axiological practices. The blindness of the European sciences with regard to their genuine moral duty results in their degeneration as mere technological instruments in the narrow sense of the term. Buddhism, in the contrary, understands clearly that the intellectual cognitions it pursues serve the highest value of spiritual liberation; hence its cognitive activities will not degenerate into uprooted instrumental rationality. Buddhism, like Husserl’s conception of philosophy, also quests for radical self-knowledge and self-understanding; yet the latter are channeled towards spiritual

26 Husserliana Band, op. cit., pp. 352-353.
27 Crisis, op. cit., p. 287.
28 Crisis, op. cit., p. 286.
self-liberation, which can thus provide the soil for rootedness of cognitive activities. If European civilization could transplant itself on this soil, the crisis of European sciences may one day succeed in finding a path to its overcoming. This probably is the reason why Husserl once projected his hope of renewal of European culture upon Buddhism. Yet Europeans at the aftermath of the First World War had neither listened to the wisdom of Buddha, nor responded to Husserl’s pathetic call for cultural renewal by learning from the Buddhist method. Today, at the daybreak of the Third millennium, the crisis of European culture as seen by Husserl seems to be behind us. Yet that crisis seems to have metamorphosed into a crisis of the entire humanity. For we phenomenological philosophers, as grand-children of Husserl, it is our turn to consider seriously responding once again to our grand-father’s call for cultural renewal by looking for resources from cultural traditions other than the European (Western) one.