

# THE AWARENESS PRINCIPLE, ADVAITA AND EUROPEAN PHENOMENOLOGY



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The Awareness Principle is a radical new foundational principle for life, science and religion. In contrast to the current basis of most scientific, spiritual and religious thinking it is based on the recognition that Awareness alone is - in Principle - the sole possible reality underlying and constituting all things and all beings, since it is the transcendental presupposition for our experience of any thing or being whatsoever.

The Awareness Principle is thus also all of the following:

- THE sole possible 'Theory of Everything'.
- THE most revolutionary new philosophy of religion, science and everyday life.
- THE simplest, most practical principle by which to transform your life and transform our world.
- THE most radical re-interpretation of the fundamental nature of 'God' and 'Spirit', 'Matter' and 'Energy', 'Space' and 'Time', 'Creation' and 'Evolution', 'Being' and 'Consciousness', 'Soul' and 'Body', 'Life' and 'Death', 'Freedom' and 'Enlightenment'.

Central to The Awareness Principle is the recognition that 'pure' or 'transcendental' awareness has the essential character of a *field* or *space* of awareness - indeed constitutes the essentially *subjective* essence of space as such, experienced as a spatial *field* of awareness or subjectivity.

Just as space is both *distinct* and *inseparable* from anything within it, so is 'pure' or 'transcendental' awareness both *distinct* and *inseparable* from any thing we are aware of within it.

The Awareness Principle has as its principal precursors both the 'non-dual' or Advaita schools of Indian philosophy and the radical critique of modern scientific 'objectivism' (the belief in a universe of pre-given objects independent of consciousness) associated with the European tradition of 'phenomenology'. In relation to Advaita it stresses the primacy of Awareness ('Chit') over existence or Being ('Sat').

It also reconceives the essential principle of 'non-duality' or 'A-dvaita' as a principle of *inseparable distinction* - understanding pure awareness as neither *separate* from the world of experience and its differentiated contents of consciousness, nor merged in *indistinct* unity with them.

In relation to phenomenology it is both a critique and *fulfilment* of the great and groundbreaking project of Edmund Husserl – that of refounding both the natural and human sciences on the basis of phenomenology and the phenomenological method, understood as a new fundamental science. As he already announced at his inaugural lecture at the University of Freiburg in Breisgau in 1917:

**"A new fundamental science, pure phenomenology, has developed within philosophy: This is a science of a thoroughly new type and endless scope. It is inferior in methodological rigor to none of the modern sciences."**

He defines this new fundamental science as 'phenomenology' because it is a "science of pure phenomena" as distinct from 'objects'. Objects are experienced phenomena, which both naïve

belief and modern science treat, paradoxically, as entities entirely independent of, foreign to and outside of the very consciousness that experiences them. The objectivistic viewpoint is itself a subjective attitude or bearing towards phenomena that is:

**"... so singularly astonishing that it bestows upon its own [subjectively experienced] phenomena the sense of being appearances of objects foreign to consciousness."**

Recognising this allows him to define 'phenomenology' not only as "the science of pure phenomena" but also as an innately subjective science or "science of consciousness" - one diametrically opposed to the presuppositions of 'objective' science.

**"This places two separate sciences in the sharpest of contrasts: on the one hand, phenomenology, the science of consciousness as it is in itself; on the other, the "objective" sciences as a totality."**

Husserl also sharply differentiates phenomenology in this sense from any type of philosophical or scientific 'psychology' which treats internal 'psychical objects' (feelings, volitions) as fundamentally distinct from external 'physical objects' – as if the latter were not themselves experienced subjectively, within a perceptual field of consciousness.

In contrast to the artificial division of an internal subjective world of 'soul' and an external, purely 'objective' universe of physical bodies he introduces the notion of a singular 'life-world' [*Lebenswelt*]. Neither philosophers nor scientists have a standpoint from which to step apart from, observe and theorise about this world, for they themselves and their own theorising subjectivity are a part of it.

As Husserl writes in 'The Crisis of the European Sciences':

**"The naïveté of speaking about "objectivity" without ever considering subjectivity as experiencing, knowing, and actually concretely accomplishing, the naïveté of the scientist of nature or of the world in general, who is blind to the fact that all the truths he attains as objective truths and the objective world itself as the substratum of his formulae (the everyday world of experience as well as the higher-level conceptual world of knowledge) are his own life-construct developed within himself - this naïveté is naturally no longer possible as soon as *life* becomes the point of focus."**

In essence there are no dimensions of experience, internal or external, and no sciences whatsoever that can be regarded as anything other than subjective or 'psychological'. What stands in the way of this recognition is only the reduction of 'psychology' to but one science among others – one which seeks to objectify human subjectivity itself – whether in the form of 'internal' psychical objects, or else by seeing it as the property of one bodily object among others – the human brain.

Hence Husserl's key question regarding the artificial separation of external and internal, 'physical' and 'psychical' dimensions of our experiential life-world.

**"Why does the whole flowing life-world not figure at the very beginning of a psychology as something "psychic," indeed as the psychic realm which is primarily accessible, the first field in which immediately given psychic phenomena can be explicated according to types? And correlatively: why is the experience which actually, as experience, brings this life-world to givenness and, within it, especially in the primal mode of**

perception, presents mere bodily things - *why is this experience not called psychological experience rather than "outer experience," supposedly by contrast to psychological experience?* Naturally there are differences in the manner of life-world experience, depending on whether one experiences stones, rivers, mountains or, on the other hand, reflectively experiences one's experiencing of them or other ego-activity, one's own or that of others, such as holding sway through the living body ... Can psychology, as a universal science, have any other theme than the totality of the subjective? Is it not the lesson of a deeper and not naturalistically blinded reflection that everything subjective is part of an indivisible totality?"

If this artificial separation is dissolved, what new type of science can we conceive except a 'phenomenology' of subjective experiencing which does not treat experienced phenomena as 'objects' independent of consciousness or subjectivity as such? Certainly not 'Galilean' natural science and its contemporary heritage in today's sciences, all of which, by reducing our qualitative, lived experience of phenomena to purely quantitative statistical or mathematical abstractions - or else to purely abstract ideas such as 'quanta' or 'forces' - are in essence an extreme form not of 'materialist' science but of abstract philosophical *idealism*.

**"For Galilean natural science, mathematical-physical nature is objective-true nature; it is this nature that is supposed to manifest itself in the merely subjective appearances. It is thus clear - and we have already pointed this out - that nature, in exact natural science, is not the actually experienced nature, that of the life-world. It is an idea that has arisen out of**

**idealisation and has been hypothetically substituted for actually intuited nature. The conceptual method of idealisation is the fundament of the whole method of natural science (i.e., of the pure science of bodies), the latter being the method of inventing "exact" theories and formulae and also of reapplying them within the praxis which takes place in the world of actual experience."**

The founding methodological principle for what Husserl called a "new sort of thinking" and with it his great project of evolving a new phenomenological foundation to the sciences, was heralded in two clarion calls, both of which enunciate in their own way the essence of what I term 'The Awareness Principle' - in contrast to 'The Being Principle':

***"Consciousness is taken purely as it intrinsically is with its own intrinsic constituents, and no being that transcends consciousness is co-positd."***

***"Thus it is not the being of the world, as unquestioned, taken for granted, which is primary in itself; and one had not merely to ask what belongs to it objectively; rather what is primary in itself is subjectivity..."***

What was it then - in Husserl's own thinking as well as that of his critics - that stood in the way of realising his great project and left it open to critique? It is in answering this question that the contrast between Advaita and Phenomenology becomes critical. Strictly speaking neither Advaita nor Phenomenology are schools of philosophy, but names given to primary principles - principles themselves open to a variety of differing philosophic, scientific and theological interpretations.

'The Awareness Principle' is a radical evolution and refinement of the *principles* that constitute the essence of both Advaita and Phenomenology. As such it offers a new perspective from which to understand the essential difference between them - and an understanding also of why *neither* has so far succeeded in fully undermining 'The Being Principle', whether in science, religion or in everyday experiencing of our 'life-world'. Probing Husserl's phenomenology further, we find that he consistently interprets 'consciousness' - even that 'Transcendental Subjectivity' or 'Pure Consciousness' which I term 'Awareness - as the 'intentional activity' of a Transcendental Ego or 'I'. At the same time he interprets the phenomenological method as 'pure reflection' on that intentional activity. In contrast, Advaita does not seek to merely *reflect* on the transcendental ego, subject, self or 'I' (the 'Atman') but to *realise* it - to *achieve* a state of 'non-duality' or identity with it. The *realisation* of this identification with Transcendental Subjectivity however, is achieved precisely by letting go of those types of intentional activities which Husserl associates with it - all of which effectively reduce it to its counterpart - the limited, localised or 'empirical' ego of the human being. The result of this true 'self-realisation' is that the 'I' or 'Self' that is realised is no longer experienced as a separate being 'with' consciousness but rather as identical with a 'Transcendental Subjectivity' or 'Universal Consciousness' *which is not itself a being*.

The Awareness Principle alone clearly states the central issue of principle at stake here - affirming that consciousness or subjectivity is not, in principle, the property of a being or 'I'. Instead it is the other way round - egoity or 'I'-ness on all levels is the property of a pure ego-less *awareness* of being. The stated principle of Husserlian phenomenology - to "take consciousness



purely as it intrinsically is" without need for any "co-positing of a being that transcends consciousness" - cannot be achieved by stating it only *in principle*, but requires also a definite practice or 'yoga' of awareness. Such a Practice of Awareness cannot be reduced to a Husserlian practice of "pure reflection" however. For all reflection on lived experience is part of that experience, and part of the intentional activity of the ego. Here The Awareness Principle clearly spells out the central *practical* principles at stake. True phenomenology does not begin with reflection on immediately experienced phenomena but rather with the cultivation of a pure thought-free *awareness* of all that we experience. It is not through reflective activity but only through a wholly quiescent, non-active, and ego-less *awareness* of such activity (and of all 'intentional' activities of the ego as agent) that consciousness can be experienced "purely as it intrinsically is" – as a field of awareness that is 'transcendental' only because, like space, its horizon not only encompasses but *transcends* everything we are simply aware or conscious *of* in it.

All the Yogic traditions associated with Advaita recognised that it was only by *identification* with a pure, ego-less *awareness* of the ego and of its intentional activities (including reflection itself) that we can pass from a purely intellectual path of 'reflection' to a direct *experience* of a Divine-Transcendental Awareness, both in itself, and in its activity of constantly manifesting itself in all phenomena. As *yoga* ('joining' or 'unification') Advaita is that practice of identification with Transcendental Subjectivity that allows us to experience its unbounded and divine reality without need of any co-positing ego or subject of experiencing that is separate from it. Simply refraining *in principle* from intellectually reflectively "co-positing" any being that transcends subjectivity, does not allow an experiential identification with pure awareness

in its *absolute* and *divine* character – not as the property of any being, human or divine, but as the divine source of all beings and their divine self or 'I' – that 'God' and that 'Self' which does not 'have' but IS Awareness, an Awareness unbounded by space, time or any body 'in' space-time.

The challenge to Phenomenology from Advaita is to recognise the crisis not just of the European sciences but also of European religions – indeed all 'monotheistic' religions which posit a supreme *being* as the ultimate source or creator of all that is. In essence, Husserl's concept of the Transcendental Ego, lacking as it necessarily does all characteristics of the merely human, 'psychological' ego, is nothing but the pure *abstraction* of an ego entirely separate and apart from the world that it constitutes or creates - that abstract ego which became the common object of worship or 'God-concept' of the major monotheisms, beginning with Judaism. Like earlier Jewish religious philosophers, Husserl abstracts the egoic God-concept of Judaism from all its original and all-too-human characteristics whilst at the same time re-instating it as an implicit God-concept in the form of the pure abstraction of the Transcendental Ego. Whereas Buddhist theology and phenomenology emphasises the need for a pure ego-less awareness, Husserl's neo-Judaic phenomenology reduces pure awareness to the pure reflective abstraction of egoity. Both Buddhism and Abrahamic monotheisms however, deny the *absolute* metaphysical reality of subjectivity and are therefore challenged at their core by the philosophy of 'Absolute Subjectivism' which finds expression in 'The Awareness Principle'.

Husserlian phenomenology is 'Advaitic' in so far as it recognises in principle that awareness and its phenomenal contents - whilst distinct – are also inseparable or 'non-dual'. Advaita is Husserlian

*in so far* as it also recognises the 'Transcendental Ego' in the form of the 'I'-ness or 'I'-consciousness of a Divine-Transcendental Awareness.

Yet only The Awareness Principle also clarifies for the first time three of the most fundamental, long-standing and still *unresolved* questions that remain implicit in Indian Vedantic and Advaitic philosophy - for these are questions which have their counterpart in European and specifically Husserlian Phenomenology. The first is the essence of 'non-duality' as such. For the philosophical language of Advaita is unable to conceive of duality as anything but a state of *separation* and, conversely, has no language by which to conceive of non-duality as anything but an undifferentiated state of unity lacking all *distinction*. In contrast, The Awareness Principle conceives non-duality as a relation of inseparable distinction comparable to the two sides of the same coin - which are both distinct or 'dual' and inseparable or 'non-dual'. To posit as the Shaivist 'Trika' or trinitarian philosophy does, an overarching third term which is the 'unity' of duality and non-duality does not clarify the nature of either duality, non-duality, or this 'unity' itself - unless all three are reconceived as a relation of inseparable distinction.

The second fundamental question unresolved within Advaita is the relation and relative primordality of *Sat* and *Chit*, Being and Awareness. A third fundamental question is the relation between Transcendental Subjectivity as such and its 'I'-consciousness' - the Advaitic equivalent of the Transcendental Ego.

With respect to the second fundamental question, Vedantic philosophy or 'Advaita Vedanta' clearly tends in the direction of asserting the primacy of Being or *Sat* over Awareness or *Chit* and identifying *Brahman* with 'The Being Principle'. Only the Shaivist

Advaita of Abhinavagupta shows an explicit inclination towards asserting the primacy of Awareness and 'The Awareness Principle' over Being and 'The Being Principle'. Yet even Shaivist Advaita does not fully clarify or resolve a *third* fundamental question – for its language hovers ambiguously between, on the one hand, asserting the Divine-Transcendental '*I*-consciousness of Shiva as primary reality (thus implicitly 'co-positing' Shiva as an individual being or subject) and, on the other hand, asserting that Shiva as *identical* with Transcendental Subjectivity *as such* – understood as an absolute subjectivity independent of and prior to *anyself* or subject, being or body, ego or '*I*', human or divine.

The Awareness Principle is a clarification and resolution of all these unresolved questions implicit in *both* Advaita and Phenomenology. That is because it recognises - *in principle* - that awareness as Transcendental Subjectivity is *neither* the 'property' of a Transcendental Ego or Divine '*I*-consciousness (even that of Shiva) *nor* the property of a being (even if the latter, as Brahman, is understood as identical with Being as such). Instead all individual beings and their '*I*-consciousness are understood as the 'selving' and 'individualisation' of a Divine Subjectivity which is *not itself* a being, self, ego or '*I*'. The Divine Subjectivity itself is understood as a spacious non-local field of awareness, one that, like space, embraces and transcends all localised human 'subjects' and 'objects' of 'knowing' - all individual subjectivities or selves and all the phenomena they experience as elements of their life-world.

The Awareness Principle asserts, quite simply, that Absolute Subjectivity - Awareness as such – is Everything and Everyone. For it is constitutive not only of all experiential worlds and 'phenomena' experienced in consciousness, but also of all

individualised 'egos' or subjects of consciousness. That so many human beings now accept the intrinsically absurd belief that the external contents of their own consciousness can be 'external' to consciousness itself, and that they have gone even further - reducing consciousness itself to a property or function of some bodily object such as the brain - all this is indeed an astonishing historical turnaround or 'revolution' of human awareness, albeit one with a dire existential consequence of the sort anticipated by Martin Heidegger. The consequence at stake is nothing other than humanity's *self-destruction* - achieved through the total 'scientific' negation of its *object-independent* subjectivity.

This program of self-destruction is now being programmatically advanced by American pseudo-phenomenologists such as Daniel Dennett, whose 'heterophenomenology' no longer even takes account of Husserl's most basic phenomenological distinction - between phenomena as such and 'objects'. Instead they confuse phenomena with objects co-positing as pre-given entities *independent* of consciousness - and then use such objects to 'explain' consciousness. This is the very opposite of phenomenology. It seems then, that Husserlian phenomenology, with its challenge to the unthought presuppositions of 'The European Sciences' - the 'objective' sciences - has now itself become an object of intellectual subversion by a reductionistic and scientological pseudo-phenomenology of consciousness.

Pity then, that Husserl himself regarded "past philosophy" as having "not even the slightest conception of a subjectivism in this transcendental style." For were he to have been acquainted with the Advaitic tradition of Indian philosophy - one which predated by over twelve centuries the birth of 'transcendental philosophy' in Europe - he might have been better equipped to advance,

refine and defend his radical project. This is a project still vital, not just in laying a new foundation for the sciences, but also in offering a new understanding of religion. As such it remains a project vital for the future of humanity as a whole.

Only The Awareness Principle is the foundation for a 'unified field theory' of science and religion - one based on a new concept and experience of the Divine as Absolute Subjectivity. It offers a new synthesis of Advaitic theosophy and Phenomenological science - one that alone can explicate and answer the *two basic, unresolved questions* that remain implicit within them both - thereby doing full justice to the age-old wisdom of Advaita and the futural potential of Husserl's project. It was unfortunate that Heidegger abandoned this project of creating a *universal science of subjectivity* through falling 'at the second hurdle' - clinging to the old notion that subjectivity or 'I'-consciousness is the property of a self or subject. It was for this false reason that he dismissed the entire language of 'subjectivity' as philosophically inadequate to addressing the more essential question of Being. The paradox is that Heidegger himself eventually came to an understanding of the transcendental 'horizon' of thinking and experience as a primordial Openness or Clearing (*Lichtung*) that is a counterpart of the primordial space ('Akasha') and light of awareness ('Prakasha') central to Shaivist Advaita. And through the notion of an 'enowning' (*Ereignis*) he reverses the 'owning' or 'appropriation' of Being by beings. In this way Heidegger himself found a way to use the 'Language of Being' itself to point to the central Principle of Awareness as Absolute Subjectivity - that it is not *owned* by beings or subjects but needs to once again be known and experienced by each being or subject as 'enowning' their own subjectivity and indeed 'en-knowing' their own knowing.

Since 'The Question of Being' begins for each being with a primordial 'knowing' or 'awareness' of being, 'Being' as such needs to be known as that very "Knowing Awareness" – an awareness that is in turn the source of all individual beings and subjects. The decisive turn in thinking pointed to by Heidegger is a re-turn to, re-cognition and re-grounding of our being, thinking and individual subjectivity in this primordial Knowing Awareness – through letting ourselves be appropriated by it. This letting ourselves be 'enowned' by awareness is the decisive event or 'Ereignis' that can be translated as 'Enowning' or 'Enpropriation'. This critical turn or event has its counterpart in Vedantic and Shaivist Advaita where it is understood as an initiatory event bringing about Liberation or Enlightenment. Heidegger too understood his thinking as a discipline or 'yoga' – a path to knowledge requiring a decisive or initiatory 'turn' – an equivalent of the Eastern experience of 'Enlightenment' and 'Liberation' – one different in principle from Western 'Enlightenment' concepts of 'Freedom'. For what is meant by 'Freedom' in both Heideggerian and Eastern thinking is liberation from the illusory reality ('Maya') of a world *made* unreal through unaware ways of 'being-in-the-world' and thinking that world – in particular the *objectification* of our lived experience of phenomena in both thought and perception itself. What is needed is a *re-turn* to the transcendental field or horizon of pure, *pre-reflective* and *pre-perceptual* awareness. This is the Openness or Clearing (*Lichtung*) within which all experienced 'phenomena' first show themselves or come to light (*sich er-äugen*<sup>1</sup>), whilst at the same time shining forth or radiating (Greek *phainesthai* / Sanskrit *sphurana*). What they shine forth is, in tantric terms, the light of awareness constituted by the Clearing or Openness – a light of which all phenomena are but variegated shapes or glistenings ('Sphurita').

Heidegger was also pre-cogniscent of a most important world-historic and human purpose of The Awareness Principle, which is to free Husserlian Phenomenology not only from distortions inherited from the history of *European* metaphysics and philosophy, but *also* from corruption by global American *scientology*. For as Heidegger noted most emphatically: "Science IS the new religion". The corporatist, commercially-driven and neo-religious cult that currently calls itself 'The Church of Scientology' merely symbolises the inherently 'scientological' nature of globalised corporate culture. If this global culture continues to not only colonise India but also to academically marginalise even the very study of Indian philosophical traditions such as Advaita, there is no hope for "a new sort of thinking" - that "other thinking" of which Heidegger spoke. Yet it is this New Thinking which 'The Awareness Principle' expounds - both in honour of an age-old Advaitic tradition and in order to offer a new and clearer explication of its essential principal - 'The Awareness Principle' - and the practices that lead from and to it.

## Note

1 As Thomas Sheehan emphasises, Heidegger also follows the Grimm brothers in retracing the verb *er-eignen* back beyond the 1600 century beginnings of its association with *ownership* and property (*Eigentum*) to its roots in the archaic German verb *er-äugen* (to 'place before the eyes') and the reflexive form of this verb that evolved from it (*sich er-eigen*), meaning 'to manifest or show itself' in the open field that it *stretches out before us* (Latin *ostendere*). This very 'stretching' (Latin *tenere*) has its roots in the Sanskrit *tan*, as in *tan-tra*, the *-tra* having its roots in the Sanskrit *tra* - to protect or guard. This 'guarding' is both epistemologically and etymologically cognate with 'awareness' - 'guard and 'ward', 'wary', 'beware' and 'aware', all deriving from the Indo-European root *wer*.



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