



The Dynamics of the Self in Phenomenology As Related To the Self-No-Self Debates in Neuroscience Today

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Abstract: Contemporary neuroscience studies brain activity corresponding to various sensual, emotional, and cognitive mental acts. Researchers more or less agree about the content of these acts, but they profoundly disagree about more basic mental phenomena implied in these acts such as awareness, self-awareness, consciousness, self-consciousness, and Self. A conceptual multiplicity and confusion about Self, its profiles, and its functioning in human mentality is remarkable and needs to be addressed. The author tries to avoid two traditional approaches in analysis of consciousness: scientific reductionism which plays consciousness down and treats it as something traceable with detectors; and metaphysical reductionism which plays consciousness up and treats it as a unique conscious substance or entity. Phenomenology is advocated as a promising approach to consciousness because (1) it does not reduce consciousness to something which it is not: mental states, linguistic structures, cultural archetypical mentality, religious entities, statistical experimental data, or MRI measurements of human brain activity; (2) it allows to address consciousness as phenomenon, disclosing itself in itself, by itself, and for itself without building an external level of observation, i.e. articulating it in a non-objectified manner; and (3) it can access consciousness as intrinsically intimating, self-revealing, and auto-referential. The Self is necessarily presented in any mental act though it is explicated as experiential, non-substantial, or object-like and displays certain characteristics: (i) direct intuition as in "I am I," (ii) seen via a set of attributes recognized as the same in various experiences during a person's life, (iii) intimated as the subject-pole of any mental act, and (iv) represented in reflection as the result of ideation while diachronically identified and perceived as same in various mental acts. Complete or partial disregard of the Self in neuroscience is implied due to its scientific methodology; it is of a different nature than a Buddhist disregard of Self as ultimately empty of intrinsic nature, or the dissolution of Self on a certain level of phenomenological analysis when empty intentions are constituted.

Keywords: Neuroscience; phenomenology; Buddhist concept of Self; consciousness; self-consciousness; awareness; Self; no-Self; time-consciousness; flow of consciousness.

Self As a Problem in the Context of Consciousness

Consciousness is a very sure reality for anyone. It is a mental state or condition we are immediately aware of; we know it intuitively and clearly that we are here, and we know when we are conscious. It does not require

any procedures of evidencing and demonstrating for us. And some philosophical traditions and philosophers understand and analyze consciousness as awareness. Awareness can take many forms and take place on many levels in human psyche and mental life. Awareness or consciousness manifesting itself as awareness is implied in many mental acts such as

recollection, fantasy, recognition, marking, naming, willing, judging and other more complex intellectual operations. For example, when I perceive something I am aware of what is given to me in the act of perception, but also of the fact that it is me who is performing it. So, in addition to the direct, intuitive, non-attributive, pre-reflexive awareness of me as myself, consciousness can appear as a trifold awareness of: (1) things in the world, (2) mental or cognitive acts themselves, and (3) the Self as the actor, agent, or subject of experience. In other words, engaging my intuitive grasp of myself, primal pre-reflective awareness of myself, any act of perception in which I can reach out to what I perceive, I realize that perception is taking place, and that it is I who perceives.

Consciousness is responsible for intuitive experience of the closest reality – I, myself, mine – and it mediates all our mental life which makes it possible for us to experience the world in a human way. But can it be observed, detected, marked, and measured? Can it be extracted from mental acts? Can it be the data of an objective scientific analysis or experimental study? Contemporary neuroscience claims that it can, by means of approaching consciousness via brain activity. Equipped with advanced technologies, neuroscientists see and trace processes which are taking place in neurons, and consequently identify brain areas responsible for memory accumulation and memory loss, visual recognition, cognitive operations, emotions, and so on. Moreover, the pharmacological science claims to decode consciousness due to its ability to chemically control so-called malfunctioning consciousness which shows itself in such states as depression, anxiety, obsession, delusion, and others. Pharmacologists also identified the chemical elements presumably responsible for happy mental states and emotions. It looks like science can address consciousness by means of observing behavioral changes in an individual due to biochemical intervention. A person's direct experience of perception, memory, fantasy, or other mental and cognitive acts becomes secondary. Does it make sense to study consciousness without the one who is conscious?

So far, brain activity corresponding to various mental and cognitive acts has been studied more vigorously than brain activity corresponding to consciousness, awareness, self-consciousness, or the Self in and by itself.¹

Moreover, neuroscience does not use just one uniformed concept of Self. For example, Patricia Churchland has a tendency to avoid usage of the concept of Self at all. She reduces it to what traditionally was called soul, a kind of spiritual substance, and rejects it since not-extended substance makes no sense as non-material matter. Instead she deals with the cortex, a special tissue containing tens of thousands of neurons which establish billion of connecting sites by signaling impulses.²

Another neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio, advocates the concepts of the proto-self (core-self, and core-consciousness). It was developed as a result of observation of a patient with a severe memory loss which led to his inability to form new memories and to recall himself and his perceptions. Though this patient lacked the capacity to identify himself in two different mental states, i.e. what later will be called a narrative Self, the core-consciousness was present in his mental operations. It was rather an experiential Self which could be described in terms of wakefulness, expressing preferences, sense of purpose of a given task.³

Obviously these two neuroscientists understand the notion of self differently. Patricia Churchland attacks the Self as a spiritual substance; whereas Antonio Damasio defends the functional Self as it is interwoven in any human mental experience and is the foundation of the conscious mind. Conceptual confusion in regard to self, its profiles, and properties is one reason why a scientific research in the area of consciousness and self-consciousness advances slowly. Hence preliminary conceptual clarification of these notions is much needed both for the further scientific research of the Self and deeper philosophical understanding of realities surrounding the Self.

However, it seems to me that one should avoid a traditional philosophical criticism of reductionism in analysis of consciousness and self expressed by Colin McGinn in his review of Patricia Churchland's book.⁴ If we do not see a profound novelty of the most recent scientific data related to brain functioning and keep on talking that consciousness can not be played down to a chemical reaction in a neuron and keep on opposing

² Patricia S. Churchland, *Touching a Nerve: The Self as Brain*, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.

³ Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999.

⁴ Colin McGinn, "Storm Over the Brain," *The New York Review of Books* 61/7 (April 24, 2014), 62.

¹ See Tilo Kircher and Anthony S. David, *The Self in Neuroscience and Psychiatry*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

it with appealing to consciousness as a unique entity, we do not help ourselves in a metaphysical way either. After all, precisely giving up Aristotle's notion of forms, that is, welcoming a reductionist approach in description of natural phenomena, led to the intellectual procedure which we call science today and which includes conducting research, formulating hypothesis, and performing experiments.

Phenomenology as a Promising Methodology for Studying Consciousness

Phenomenology can be a promising reflective tool to analyze consciousness without reducing it to a physical, conceptual, or metaphysical entity. Phenomenology treats consciousness as it manifests itself in the multiplicity of experience. A phenomenologist does not substitute mental states, linguistic structures, cultural symbolic representations, or religious realities for consciousness, and does not approach it in terms of statistical or MRI data. Instead, a phenomenologist views consciousness as phenomena, that is as the content of human experience of the outside or inside world, the content which discloses itself in itself, by itself, and for itself while the formation of meaning is taking place.

This means that a phenomenologist intends and manages to explore the foundation of mental and cognitive acts, such as moving via suspending the outside world in a variety of steps: from transcendental objects (material reality) to immanent objects (perceptions, memories, fantasies viewed by a reflective eye), further on to internal objects (intentional poles of mental and cognitive acts), and finally to the occurrences of a self-revealing stream of consciousness. In moving on this reflective ladder a phenomenologist does not need to build the next higher reflective level in observation of various mental or cognitive acts, but can mark and observe consciousness without turning it into an object of observation. It is accessible, recognizable, and observable from inside by the Self. If I perceive something as a visual object, I do see it and at the same time become aware immediately of myself perceiving it. If I, by the same token, turn my reflective attention to my perception and make it my immanent object of observation, I face time as a condition for the possibility of perception as an immanent object. If I turn my reflective look to the act-pole of the immanent sphere of consciousness and handle intentions as objects, the difference between the object-pole and subject-pole

disappears. In fact, phenomenology found the way to present consciousness as self-revealing in human mental and cognitive acts.

Moreover, phenomenology allows consciousness to be observable both in experience (immediate mental and cognitive acts), and in philosophical reflection about the experience of these acts. It aims at elucidation of the structure and necessary conditions for the possibility of such acts, and their meaning. Reflecting on foundation of act-pole of the constitution of meaning, Edmund Husserl discovered some levels on which consciousness lives or is streaming, as if by itself providing conditions for the possibility of a subject and self to be constituted on higher levels of its occurrence. At a first glance, this appears to contradict the whole pathos of phenomenology—there is no meaning without experience and there is no experience without the one who experiences. A closer look at consciousness as it reveals itself in the experience of Self and the acts of self-consciousness is needed.

Self, Consciousness, and Self-Consciousness

In Western traditions, the idea of self is central and Western philosophies have developed the notion of self since recorded history. Numerous conceptual models to unfold the self have been constructed: self as entity, substance, operator of the mind, manifestation of consciousness, givenness of consciousness to a conscious being, illumination, instantiation of consciousness, articulation of consciousness, marking of consciousness. The theoretical foundation of all humanities in the West is built on concepts loaded with the meaning of self: Emotions, perceptions, sensations, free will, higher cognitive operations, discourse and reasoning, imagination, identities, memory, artistic creativity, religious faith, moral and legal responsibility, social and political behavior—in all these areas of human involvement, the self could be a tangible reality, substance, or entity. It is central to any experience, culturally shaped, psychologically multilayered, and religiously grounded. But it is not clear what the self is, whether it is a spontaneously pulsating source of all human cognition and actions, the result of the very same cognitive acts and actions, or both.

At the same time, this strong affirmation of self throughout Western culture can become shaded, diminished, and even nullified through the experience of emotional exaltation, profound religious revelations, or enormous creative impulses. In all such cases the

self—supposedly sustaining an overwhelming power of emotion, mystic experience, or creative drive—is claimed by its carrier as dissolved or disappeared. It is not them who love—Eros himself got hold of their souls; it is not them who believe in god—it is god himself shining through their souls and borrowing their tongues to speak; it is not them who paint, make music or write poetry—the muses themselves have usurped their inner voices and use them as their own. Allegedly, the self is now transformed in such a way that it becomes a conducting device through which high powers are streaming effortlessly. Creative personalities who are responsible for coining the very foundation of the Western mind and who themselves indeed personify the idea of irreducible ultimate individuality, give it up at the most authentic point of their existence—at the moment of exaltation, revelation, or creativity. A phenomenologist will not simply dismiss such forms of self-awareness as psychological peculiarities since they are aspects of experience, and as such mechanisms of disclosure of the world inasmuch as it reveals itself in the constructs given to the self as meaning.

To clarify whether such constructs are tragic contradictions, justifiable dialectical complementary oppositions, or conceptual confusions of a Western mind, one can learn from the different metaphysical readings of the self and its relation to consciousness.

Buddhism views the self as an obstacle to experiencing and understanding consciousness, rather than as a central focal point of conscious life at which consciousness happens and at which the self becomes observable through direct experience. In the Buddhist perspective consciousness is not a spontaneous pulsating activity of the self; it is also not the illuminating mind shedding light on what is happening both in the outside physical and cultural worlds as well as in the inside world of human, mental, and cognitive activity. Instead, consciousness is understood as awareness which does not require an enduring, solid, and permanent Self, because it is connected intrinsically with any human experience as it takes place. That is, any mental act is accompanied with reference to the one who has it. It is in the nature of awareness to remain unclear whether it is anonymous automatic reflexivity interwoven into all mental acts, or is it the outcome of reflective efforts performed by a witnessing Self.

Buddhist rejection of the Self, so argues Joel Krueger, is based on their general view of the world as an endlessly changing process. In such world, many phenomena which are constantly arising, existing,

and passing away "have no substantial reality outside of this dynamic matrix of dependent origination."⁵ Since humans are the part of the physical world they are involved in the same "process of the causes and conditions" as everything else and therefore their selves are "empty of any intrinsic nature" (*WHE* 30). However, Krueger continues, this denial of the Self in Buddhism does not mean the denial of subjectivity of human experience. First, there is "the sense of oneself as a single entity enduring throughout time [and this is] an autonomous self distinct from the flux and the flow of ever-changing experience" (*WHE* 30). It also includes the aspect of egocentric structure of human existence. Another self-illuminating aspect of self-awareness is that it includes "immediate acquaintance with both the content of our conscious states...as well as with the character of our conscious states" (*WHE* 30). Nonetheless, admitting functionality of subjectivity does not mean admitting reality of the enduring self. The first-person perspective in experience is not self itself; rather "it is a feature of the stream of experience and not a self standing behind the experience" (*WHE* 33). According to Buddhist conception of self-awareness, the claim that subjectivity implies the permanent and stable self is a "result of reification of the sense of self central to the phenomenal character of consciousness" (*WHE* 33). Such rejection of self as an illusion and obstacle on the way of reflective examination of consciousness is not native to Buddhism alone. Other Indian philosophical schools, for example Advaita Vedanta, also advocated the view that consciousness, though reflexive and self-illuminating, does not yield reality of Self as endured and standing on its own.⁶ Buddhist adepts insist that meditations allow them to contemplate elements of awareness of mental acts not just as objects, but as instances given to a higher, witnessing, or monitoring self within the context of the expanded consciousness. But the issue persists: whether consciousness is self-reflective, reveals itself, points to itself, and illuminates

⁵ Joel W. Krueger, "The Who and the How of Experience," in *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, eds. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, New York: Oxford University Press 2010, pp. 27-55, here p. 30. [Henceforth cited as *WHE*]

⁶ See Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, "Situating the Elusive Self of Advaita Vedanta," in *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, eds. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, New York: Oxford University Press 2010, pp. 217-37.

itself in any cognitive act without generating the phenomenon called the Self, or does consciousness presuppose subjectivity as it leads to the Self as its major mode of appearance (the first person perspective) and its *modus operandus* (the enduring center of narration in changing experiences), and ultimately constitutes the invariant Self?

Phenomenology seems to be capable to navigate between reification and substantialization of the Self in Western metaphysics, ontological neutralization of Self in Buddhism, and rejection of a Self by some contemporary neuroscientists. Phenomenology starts not with a particular concept of consciousness, but with experience, that is, various cognitive acts. Any act not only presents an object, but contains a tacit reference to the pre-reflective subject interwoven into the act. Thematized in reflection these acts reveal the highly active agents of experience constituting the meaning of both what is given, the object, and how it is given, the subject. For the purpose of explicating the self let us focus on the act-pole of experience.

Phenomenology: Consciousness and Self As Constituted in the Internal Time-Consciousness vs. Consciousness as Constituting in the Stream of Consciousness

Phenomenology raises all philosophical issues in the context of consciousness; this is natural and logical for a tradition that deals with phenomena – reality discloses itself as meaning in various cognitive acts including cognitive acts themselves. The meaning is not a creation of a cognizing human mind; though human consciousness has a constructing or constituting power which makes it possible for the world to show itself in a multiplicity of modes. Husserl has been dealing with mental acts, various lived-through psychological experiences, intellectual activity, formation of categories and scientific notions throughout his entire philosophical career.⁷

⁷ His lectures on the Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness (*Phenomenologie des Inneren Zeitbewusstseins*, 1893-1917), The "Bernau Manuscripts" about Time-Consciousness (*Die "Bernauer Manuskripte" über das Zeitbewusstsein*, 1917-18) and The C-Manuscripts (*Die C-Manuskripte*, 1929-1934) are dedicated to his theory of consciousness. I will mostly refer to his lectures since they directly address the concerns of this essay. See Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, trans. James S. Churchill, Bloomington, IN: Indiana

For Husserl, time was not an independent academic problem in its own right; it was a functional problem that he faced in the process of searching for a foundation of a working consciousness, that is, consciousness producing true knowledge about objects and processes in the world. Husserl's original question refers to how an object given to consciousness as existing independently is formed within a multiplicity of different acts of consciousness. He finds that an object or material thing is given to consciousness within a multiplicity of its aspects or points of view, in other words, constitutive elements of perception are spacious and temporal. But if one reflects on perception itself, it turns out to be constituted within another multiplicity, that of sensations and impressions which do not have any reference to a physical object and have only one dimension—temporal. In consciousness time, the temporal position of an event matters (what is earlier and what is later), not any of the other qualifiers (what is to the right and left, above and under, far-away and close-by, big or small, with fuzzy borders or distinct, and so on). Impressions have no visual characteristics, smell, or sound; they happen, have presence as marks on a temporal duration, and they endure. Time is the only means to differentiate between various occurrences inside consciousness. That is why Husserl's focus is on the meaning of succession and duration, the meaning of temporal differentiations (present, past and future), and the meaning of the present as the privileged mode of givenness. Perception of any object and awareness of any act of perception itself logically implies awareness of time. Husserl has paired time and consciousness and coined the neologism "time-consciousness" in which two notions are held separately and together at the same time. Each is equally basic, neither is more primordial and has more explanatory power than the other. Neither ontologically, nor epistemologically is either one preceding the other or subordinated to the other.

Husserl's conceptual fusion of time-consciousness points to the fact that temporal differentiations, being a ferment of consciousness, forming the whole structure of it, are indeed the authentic means to thinking about and conceptually explicating consciousness. In turn, consciousness as a pure enduring happening is the authentic way to explicate the meaning of time. Unpaired with one another, consciousness and time both lose their specific features and their sense; they cease to be in description what they are in reality. Separated, they both

University Press, 1964. [Henceforth cited as *PIT*]

become substantialized. The temporal duration becomes the spatial succession and the conscious event, which is the event in one's consciousness or consciousness as given to the Self, is reduced to a composition or arrangement of quantified psychic elements or the result of application of mental force.

Husserl recognizes four levels on which the meaning of time is constituted:⁸ the objective flow of time, the immanent time, internal time-consciousness, and a-temporal flow of consciousness.

(1) The objective flow of time takes place where objective events happen in the real world. Husserl suspends the world in *epoché*, by withholding any truth claims about its existence to address the meaning of objective events. That is to say, he wants to clarify subjective conditions for the formation (constitution) of real events' meaning in the objective flow of time moving in the direction from the past through the present to the future.

(2) Level two is immanent time within which temporal differentiations are constituted in the context of immediate experience of consciousness—these are impressions and sensations. The constitution of meaning of these acts requires awareness of continuity and succession. Husserl uses a metaphor of musical tone, which does not appear out of simple successions of notes, to explicate the meaning of succession. Perception of succession and succession of perceptions are different events. In order to hear a melody as a harmonious whole, but not as momentary non-connected sounds, the sound itself must not completely disappear from the actual phase of sounding; it must be retained in it at the next moment, i.e. as elapsing, fading, but leaving a trace of presence in the following moment of sounding. So, the formation of the meaning of the past happens in the similar way. The temporal gene, consisting of the just-passed and the just about-to-become, cushions the original impression which takes place in the present. Any experience (perception, fantasy, imagination, recollection, and so on) will have the same three-fold structure of perception: retention, actual impression, protention. Husserl calls the retentive transformation

of perception in the actual phase of its happening a primary memory which is interwoven into the structure of perception itself. In other words, the presence of the present is always tinted with two absences: the past and the future which are always on the horizon of actual perception. Retention or the primary memory of what just has been is spontaneous and non-conscious occurrence of consciousness. It is intrinsically linked with the actual phase of perception and takes place in the present. The retentive consciousness functions as a temporal apprehension towards the content of sensation. It holds the elapsed though modified moments of the actual perception and provides the enduring of the temporal object. The primary memory (retention) is different from the secondary memory (remembrance and recollection), when what is retrieved took place in the past and the very act of reviving of the past is taking place in the present and has its own actual phase, retention, and protention.⁹

(3) Internal time-consciousness opens up when a reflective look shifts perceptions and sensations from immanent objects to acts, by reflecting upon their intentional side. Intentionality of immanent objects must be twofold. First, it constitutes the unity of immanent object itself; second, it constitutes the flux of consciousness as a constituting mechanism. This means that when someone remembers a perception (by reflectively posing an original act), one reproduces in consciousness not only what is perceived, but also oneself as perceiving. Robert Sokolowski offers the following interpretation: "the flow of time-consciousness can transcend itself in such a way as to allow another flow to be present within itself."¹⁰ Intentionality of reflection on the immanent object goes in two directions: forward, performing the present reflective act itself (or any reproductive act), and backward, reproducing the moments of the original perception. The same structure of double intentionality providing the immediate awareness of the object is also found in expectation, with one correction: the expectational intuition is inverted. Since our consciousness is open for constant uploading with the new impressions, the old perceptions are

⁸ Though sometimes Husserl speaks about three levels of time constitution—the objective time, immanent time, and inner time-consciousness—adding as something special the fourth level: absolute time-less flow of consciousness. Sometimes he excludes the first level of objective time as suspended in *epoché* and speaks about three levels—immanent time, inner time, and time-less flow of consciousness. See *PIT* 98, 150.

⁹ Husserl insists that even fantasy—which does not have the primary impression, retentions, and protentions of the past experience—to be reproduced has the same threefold structure. See *PIT* 74-5.

¹⁰ Robert Sokolowski, *Husserlian Meditations: How Words Present Things*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1974, p. 147. [Henceforth cited as *HM*]

constantly modified through fading-away. Perceptions are constantly generating various temporal positions of immanent objects and therefore different temporal positions in objective time.

(4) Absolute time-less flow of consciousness is the final level of analysing consciousness whose temporal segments are both the constituted and constituting elements of working consciousness. At this level, intentions themselves are constituted; consciousness intends itself, it constitutes itself as the constant intending; it is filled with itself and in this sense it is empty. Consciousness creates its own possibility as empty acts of consciousness. They do not have any duration because they cannot be differentiated individually as those which start at some point and end at some point. If intention intends itself all its profiles are given in the present, rather spatially than temporally; the intention can not be identified as the same through the series of alternations: "there is nothing here which is altered, and therefore it makes no sense to speak here of something that endures" (*PIT* 99). It cannot be described in terms of process either because it presupposes persistence which is absent in the flux. The only abiding characteristic of the flux is its formal structure. Each phase of the flux has one and the same flowing form. The content of this form is not something brought into it from the outside. The content is determined by the form: a now constituted through an impression and its joined retention and protention.

So, if segments of the flux cannot be described in terms of duration, alterations, process, succession, or simultaneity how can they be determined at all? If in the continuous shading-off in the flux retention of the original act of perception and retention of the act memory are "co-present with the central impression" (*HM*158), they are not simultaneous because their status is more basic than that of simultaneity; they are attached to each other, they are all-at-once, they are together, they happened momentarily, but not in time. Husserl calls the intentionality which goes through the flux of consciousness a longitudinal intentionality. Through it the coincidence of the flux with itself is constituted. The condition for all temporal phenomena is constituted as the quasi-temporal disposition of the phases of the flux: the phase of actuality and the series of pre-actual and post-actual phases. Husserl uses the notion of actuality as well as the absolute subjectivity which one can give a name "flux" only metaphorically and which consists of the lived experience structured as the primal impression in the context of moments of reverberation. It is called

by Husserl "living present" and it can be interpreted as pulsating flux of consciousness, a self-objectivation of the act-moments of consciousness.

On this level the subject which was the major element in constitution of both objects and acts of consciousness is dissolved because it becomes the absolute subjectivity since there is nothing in the flux but intentions intending themselves. Yet, Husserl tries to thematise the absolute subjectivity pointing out various stages of its fading-away or expiredness based on the double intentionality which characterizes memory. But the intentionality of the flux is triple and covers internationalities in the constitution of all three types of objects: transcendental (physical entities), immanent (psychic acts), and inner (intentions). Theoretically if there are no new impressions for the self to deal with and for consciousness to constitute their meaning the flux might exhaust itself. The sense of awareness, tacit reference to the subject, self-revealing flow of consciousness—all these areas of meaning are based on the capacity of the flow of consciousness to partially preserve itself with modifications in every actual phase of its own passing-away and by doing so generate its own reflective occurrences.

There is an on-going controversy among Husserl scholars and contemporary phenomenologists in interpreting the nature of occurrences on all three levels of explication of the nature of conscious phenomena in the context of the meaning of temporal phenomena. On the level of immanent time where the constitution of perception and sensation via the primary impression, retention, and protention is taking place, the disagreement is caused by the unclear status of retention and protentions. If they are generated by a perception itself automatically and are given in the act non-thematically, tacitly, while it is happening, how can the one who perceives gain explicit awareness about them? The act of reflection cannot transform their profiles into temporal objects which can be experienced by a human being; they have to be considered merely as conceptual models. That goes against the very basic phenomenological principle—every meaning must be grounded in experience of consciousness. On the level of the inner time, where the constitution of intentions is unfolding and where the sense of "I" is first introduced by Husserl as a performer of the act of perception, it is not clear whether this "I" is the subject of the original act of perception which seizes to be in the next act of perception or it endures, becomes the self and continues to be the same in the following acts of perception. On

the level of the a-temporal flux of consciousness which grounds the constitution of the active poles of mental acts on all three levels of constitution: the performer of the original mental acts (the subject), the performer of reproductive acts—remembrance, imagination (the self), and the Ur-performer, consciousness itself as self-constituting occurrences of a sheer possibility for any mental act (the empty intention). It is not clear what this self-constituting consciousness is and why consciousness on this level does not require any further level of reflection for its explication. If it were transparent for itself and self-evident Husserl himself most likely would not have used highly metaphoric language which does not yield any clarity on what it is. Whether it should be thought as pure constant change, or as alterations without what alters remains undecided. There is no answer to the question whether the a-temporal flux of consciousness is pure actuality which contains in itself its own instantiations, timeless and eternally dwelling reality—similar to Thomas Aquinas' god as *actus purus*—or whether it is something like a fountain which has in itself its own manifestations and throws itself out inasmuch as an individual has an experience, or whether it is something alive, the living present (*lebendige Gegenwart*) which breathes and metabolizes every moment of its existence.

There is an on-going discussion about Husserl's theory of consciousness and particularly about the status of the immanent objects, internal objects, temporal objects, and the living present in his explication of mental acts, Self, and subjectivity. Robert Sokolowski and John Brough apply a modified model of temporal constitution of perception of transcendental objects which are physical objects in the real world,¹¹ to the constitution of immanent objects which are perceptions and sensations. Though Sokolowski insists on the difference between two types of constitution, by having introduced a distinction between parts which can be thought as separable from the whole supporting discrete spatial objects, and moments which cannot be thought as separable from of the whole supporting continuous temporal objects. In the first case, the elements will be the parts of the separate segment of the flow of consciousness; in the second case,

they will be moments of the same segment. The phases of the flow of consciousness can be thought as parts only in a theoretical analysis. The momentary segments of the flow of consciousness or the units of conscious life, the living present, cannot be described in temporal terms at all.

Dan Zahavi finds it highly problematic to constitute immanent objects as temporal objects.¹² After all, any act-object that is constituted on levels two and three contains as a unique component the "I" which, having in itself a subjective moment, can not be an object, neither can it be objectified without losing its essential characteristics. If occurrences which are unfolding on the level of the flux of consciousness are neither subject-like, nor object-like, the question remains, what exactly are they? The next section will analyse some perspectives on this problem.

Regaining the Subject and the Self in the Context of Consciousness

Since the absolute flux of consciousness lacks distinct characteristics, the matter of its further structuralization and interpretation becomes critical. Husserl's phenomenological description of the flux of consciousness (pure consciousness) as the immediate intuitive a-personal awareness of constantly happening intentional acts, which are empty and differentiate themselves only by means of eventuality or temporality, could be interpreted in a Kantian sense as the necessary transcendental condition for all possible content-laden experiences. However, for Husserl phenomenology has a transcendental character and he juxtaposed it to all kinds of psychological naturalization of consciousness.

Later on, as if trying to regain the meaning of the active subject, the Ego (the Self in our terminology) in the constitution of conscious acts, Husserl added two more elements—also as the transcendental conditions—to the subject-free subjectivity of the flux, namely intersubjectivity and the live-world (*Lebenswelt*).

The relationship to other people and viewing oneself in the perspective of existence of the other can transform significantly the self-awareness of a person and with it the constitution of all three types of temporal objects—transcendental, immanent, and inner. Intersubjectivity is supposed to determine the

¹¹ See Robert Sokolowski, *The Formation of Husserl's Concept of Constitution*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970; and John Brough, "The Emergence of an Absolute Consciousness in "Husserl's Early Writing on Time-Consciousness," *Man and World* 5/3 (August 1972), 298-326.

¹² Dan Zahavi, "Time and Consciousness in the Bernau Manuscripts," *Husserl Studies* 20/2 (June 2004), 99-118, here p. 101. [Henceforth cited as *TCB*]

areas where the constitution of the subject – as involved in experiences – is contingent on its relationship with other subjects who would provide conditions for the subjects' recognition as experiential and conscious Self. One can develop identity (to become oneself) in identifying oneself with the other, even in becoming the other. In other words, the subject, seen by Husserl as gained psychological, social, and cultural characteristics in relationship with other subjects, presented the different matrix for constitution of his own mental and cognitive acts. The entirely mono-logical constitution of objective, immanent, and inner objects in the context of time-consciousness became modulated. If the subject perceives the other as having autonomous reality irreducible to his, the one also perceives oneself as irreducible to the others and as an invariant in various counter-actions with the other. The inter-subjective other becomes a factor in developing awareness by the subject as a performer of mental and cognitive acts and increases the subject's potentials to become the Self.

The tendency of the subject to move in the direction of the Self is further reinforced by Husserl with the introduction of the *Lebenswelt*, the cultural world which is taken for granted, is not supposed to be suspended in *epoché*, and is experienced by the subjects together. The *Lebenswelt* can be interpreted as the result of a phenomenological self-correction of phenomenology. To reach immediate consciousness one does not need to isolate it from all concrete empirical circumstances, thus converting it into abstraction. On the contrary, consciousness itself is to be experienced as it is actually given. In the *Lebenswelt* the field of consciousness gets multi-faceted culturally and changes from a mono-logical to a multi-logical occurrence. Even if we remain within Husserl's paradigm and think of individual *Lebenswelten*, sharing with others brings additional forms of awareness and materials for shaping one's identity. Interactivity in any form presents all kind challenges for the solitary monological Self and at the same time a very rich source of its development and integration. Precisely this direction is taken by many contemporary phenomenologists.

Following Husserl, consciousness is given non-thematically in psychic acts and traceable only in non-objectifying reflections upon contents that are very difficult to formulate conceptually. Zahavi emphasizes that consciousness is intuitively given to a person's experience so that such person can be conscious or aware of perceiving, sensing, dreaming, etc., without any additional special "higher order of representation,

internal monitoring, or introspection" (*TCB* 103). He calls this feature of consciousness "the first-personal givenness" of consciousness and builds on its basis more a complex Self's diachronic identity. It becomes shaped when one identifies oneself as the same performer of various psychological acts, recognizes oneself as the enduring and the same through the periods of time and endorses oneself with certain characteristics by developing the so called "narrative Self."¹³

In the analysis of Husserl's theory of consciousness we have pointed out four directions in which a subject loosing the self or transforming into Self can be constituted as: (1) the subject as a performer of mental and cognitive acts; (2) the subject as the result of ideation of the act (perception), various acts (perception and memory), and reflection upon those acts; (3) the subject as disappearing in subjectivity in the constitution of the flux of consciousness; (4) the Self gained through inter-subjectivity and within the *Lebenswelt* and acquired narrative in the process of self-identity. It turned out that phenomenology can offer ideas, insights, and methodological guiding for any scientific, sociological, or psychological study of consciousness. It provides the meaningful context for such notions as proto-self, minimal self, narrated self, invariant self, endured self, spontaneous self, lost self, split self, layered self. However, philosophically the most interesting and the most challenging approach to understand the self proceeds from the fact that, starting from the very early age, humans have the direct intuition of their own enduring and continuous selves, the most immediate awareness of themselves as distinct from the other humans, animals, and all other things in the world, and they sense other conscious beings similar to them. Paradoxically, humans appear to not need consciousness for being conscious of themselves. Even when humans develop highly sophisticated ways of attribution and predication to recognize, identify, and express themselves artistically the way they are and know themselves for themselves, this takes place in a direct, non-verbal, non-discursive, self-referential awareness of "I am I," "I am myself," or "me is me." In this way a human being is an inborn mystic; a human

¹³ Dan Zahavi, "The Experiential Self: Objections and Clarifications," in *Self, No Self?: Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*, eds. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, New York: Oxford University Press 2010, pp. 56-78, here p. 60. [Henceforth cited as *ES*]

being knows directly with the highest clarity and in the most obvious way what it means to be and to be oneself. This may very well be the source of the sense of reality which later becomes a criterion for all other realities a person encounters in life. Consciousness given as a self is the only phenomenon that can accomplish both reality and awareness of reality in a single instance of its own occurrence. Zahavi refers to the importance of the me-factor, mine, for-me-ness in his explication of consciousness. Different experiences have in common one thing: they all are characterized by the same fundamental first-person character: "conscious mental states are given in a distinct manner, with a distinct subjective presence, to the subject whose mental states they are, a way that in principle is unavailable to others" (ES 60). Studying the Self and myself, me and mine-ness from both reflective and non-reflective perspectives and not necessarily as the access code to pure consciousness is urgently needed and phenomenology offers many paths of research and analysis.

As I mentioned in the beginning of this essay, in studying consciousness one needs to be mindful of cases and situation when people claim losing their selves, losing themselves, feeling lost, feeling not themselves, or perceiving to live not their own lives. Moreover, when highly creative and talented people or religious believers reject their self or spontaneously lose it and talk about being driven in their creation by superior forces, muses, or gods it is should not be taken as a metaphor, but literally. Such experience can be the source of learning something important about the basic innate self-givenness or me-intuition, ways of developing self-awareness, and consciousness in general. What do people lose when they are deprived of the self willingly or forcefully? Is it dangerous? Is it a personality disorder, mental condition, deviation from the norm which should be treated with drugs and therapy as illness, or it is advantageous for a person in certain ways? The absence of self is as heuristic for consciousness as its presence and can be strongly articulated in positive terms because it might have impact on a person's self-awareness and behavior. Sometimes people manipulate with their selves; they turn them on and off on purpose, using alcohol or drugs for example, in order to withstand some overwhelmingly high emotional tide, difficult personal crisis, pain, inhumane treatment, loss, abuse, or humiliating living conditions. The point I am trying to make is that a person is constantly working on updating and developing one's narrative Self which is rather a

dynamic enduring diachronic system of multiple sub-selves which in the course of life or even in the course of the day can be transitional and relationship between them can be engaging, conflicting, and dramatic. Even in extreme cases of self-oblivion, self-denial, bypassing self, or dealing with consciousness without self—like in Buddhist meditative practice, which allows extinguishing the sense of self as illusionary and attaining the state of witness-consciousness leaving behind ownership-consciousness—experience of contemplation is needed to sustain the whole drama of reality related to a no-self mental state. A person cannot claim anything about it without experiencing it as a state; a person cannot experience an experience which is not one's own. Instead, the Self, given in a pre-reflective intuition and reflectively gained as the ideated same Self of various mental acts and the unity of diachronic experiences, functions as a guarantee against infinite regress in Husserl's self-constituting stream of consciousness.

For neuroscience the metaphysical concepts of Self, mental acts, experience, conscious and unconscious memories (retentions), self-identity, a narrated self can be instrumental in studying the process of storage and retrieval of information in human brain. Scientists can argue whether Husserl's notion of the primary memory, retention, defined as a spontaneous non-conscious modified preservation of the content of the actual perception in the next phase of perceptual experience when it is no longer taking place at the present moment, is applicable in description of changes which are occurring in a neurone when a person perceives something. But they are equipped with a hypothetical knowledge of many types of memory—retention, memorization, recollection, memoir, and reminiscence—which are interwoven in human experiences and are differentiated on the basis of the degree of involvement of the Self.

The scope of the engagement of the Self becomes even more significant on the higher levels of complexity of human mental and intellectual activity when the brain seems acting spontaneously out from within itself as if being detached from both the Self and the Self's environment. One can observe this in any synthesizing, constructing activity of human intellect and behavior—in imagining, fantasizing, inventing. The more Self mediates the content of experiences the more disguised it might look. Creativity in various fields might even generate a mythological upside down turn which portrays the brain as taking over a person and using

the self to its own advantage. In such circumstances the regaining conscious control over a person's mental activity becomes an urgent task. Whether consciousness can be reached directly via MRI, pharmacological, or other tangible way is not clear at the present state of the brain science. But a phenomenological guidance

might come handy at this point: by spelling out tacit presuppositions in a structure of consciousness called "the lost self" and by articulating hidden layers of a self's presence where it appears absent, this keeps brain research within reason.