Right Here and Out There: A Phenomenological Interpretation of *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* in the Context of Mindfulness of the Body

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Abstract

According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, mindfulness of the body involves seeing the body in a threefold way: *ajjhattaṃ*, *bahiddhā* and *ajjhatta-bahiddhā*. This article attempts to show how an investigation of bodily perception, following the approach adopted by the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, can serve as the basis for a philosophically grounded understanding of the Pāli words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*. The interpretation that emerges is the distinction between 'right here' and 'out there': two mutually dependent, internally related domains that are experienced as what Merleau-Ponty called the 'chiasm' or the 'intertwining'. This is different from the standard interpretations found in the *Abhidhamma*, the Pāli commentaries, the *Visuddhimagga* and the instructions of most contemporary meditation teachers. It is hoped that the interpretation offered here can give some exposure to a movement within Theravāda Buddhism, initiated by Ñāṇavīra Thera but slowly gaining traction, characterised by a phenomenological reading of the Pāli *sutta*s.

Keywords: Buddhism, Pāli, mindfulness, phenomenology, perception, Merleau-Ponty, Ñāṇavīra Thera

1 Introduction

One of the most famous *sutta*s in the Pāli canon, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (M I 55), describes how a monk in training develops *satipaṭṭhāna*, the establishment of mindfulness. We are told that there are four *satipaṭṭhāna*s—four ways to establish mindfulness, or four themes that one might take as a basis for the development of mindfulness. As is well known, these four are: (1) body, (2) feeling, (3) mind and (4) phenomena (*dhammā*). In a refrain that recurs throughout the *sutta*, the words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* are used to describe the threefold way in which mindfulness is developed. In the section that deals with mindfulness of the body (M I 56), this description is as follows:

> Thus, in regard to the body he dwells seeing the body *ajjhattaṃ*, or in regard to the body he dwells seeing the body *bahiddhā*, or in regard to the body he dwells seeing the body *ajjhattabahiddhā*.[1]

Although there appears to be a broad consensus that the adverbs *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* can be translated into English as 'internally' and 'externally', there have been many interpretations and much debate about the actual meanings of these terms. The dominant Theravāda view, expounded in the commentaries (e.g. Ps), the *Abhidhamma* (e.g. Dhs) and the *Visuddhimagga*, associates "internal with the personal and external with corresponding phenomena in other human beings" (Anālayo 2006, pp. 94–95). In the case of the body, this is understood as the difference between contemplating one's own body and contemplating the bodies of others. Generalizing this to the other *satipaṭṭhāna*s raises the question of whether psychic powers are required in order to contemplate another person's feelings or states of mind (not to mention phenomena, whatever that might mean in this particular context). Bodhi (Ñāṇamoli 1995, p. 1190, n.143) and Anālayo (2006, p. 96) believe that they are not, and that one can observe these things indirectly via their outer manifestations (e.g. facial expression, tone of voice or bodily posture). However, a number of scholars are uncomfortable with the traditional interpretation. For example, it is difficult to reconcile the contemplation of someone else's mental activity by inference with the fact that the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* "appears to be rooted in basic, direct experience" (Qian 2019, p. 317). Furthermore, as Ditrich (2016, p. 136–137) points out, the Buddha generally instructs monks to practise in solitude, not in the company of other people.

A number of modern meditation teachers, who also emphasize silent, solitary meditation, have proposed alternative interpretations. Some, such as Goenka (2015, p. 54), take the dichotomy to refer to what is spatially inside and outside. Feelings that are 'internal' are deep within the body; feelings that are 'external' are on the surface of the skin. According to Anālayo (2006, pp. 99–100), some modern teachers talk about the difference between 'internally' and 'externally' in terms of the difference between apparent (*ajjhattaṃ*) and ultimate (*bahiddhā*) truth, while others have understood it to refer to the difference between mental (*ajjhattaṃ*) and physical (*bahiddhā*) objects. Qian (2019) has argued that 'internal' and 'external' should be understood in terms of the subjective (*ajjhattaṃ*) and objective (*bahiddhā*) aspects of our experience.[2] Judging from the range of options available, we may conclude that Ditrich (2016, p. 139) is quite right to say that the terms *ajjhattaṃ*, *bahiddhā* and *ajjhattabahiddhā* have long been problematic for interpreters and translators alike and new approaches are required.

1. *iti ajjhattaṃ vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, bahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati, ajjhattabahiddhā vā kāye kāyānupassī viharati.* Here I have translated the locative *kāye* as 'in regard to the body'. Due to limitations of space, I will not be commenting on this aspect of the meaning of the phrase *kāye kāyānupassī*. What is more at issue for the purposes of this article is the meaning of 'seeing the body *ajjhattaṃ*, *bahiddhā* and *ajjhattabahiddhā*'.

2. Qian does not provide much elaboration of the meaning of his terms "subjective" and "objective". He may have adopted a historical perspective in his analysis of the words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* throughout Buddhist literature (2019, 317), but he does not consider the historical development of the meaning of subject/subjective and object/objective. For a study of the history of the these words in western philosophy, see Hatab (2015) and Taylor (1989).

The lack of clarity here points to a deeper issue. The question is not merely which interpretation is right but, even more fundamentally, how we could possibly go about finding out which interpretation is right. Is there a way to go beyond this plurality of views and, if so, what methodology can we turn to in order to guide us in our interpretation? An exegetical analysis of the texts can only take us so far, since the meaning of *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* is not explained in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and, as Ditrich (2016, p. 140) observes, there are no other *sutta*s in the *Nikāya*s that provide clarification of their significance for the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

The traditional approach to this problem has been to examine the commentaries, the subcommentaries, the *Abhidhamma* and later literature in order to find explanations. I would like to suggest an alternative approach. A careful exegesis of the early Buddhist texts may help to bring us in proximity to the historical Buddha's teachings.[3] However, instead of looking to the commentarial literature for explication, I would like to propose a turn toward phenomenology. Phenomenology provides a set of conceptual tools and descriptive distinctions that can help us get a better grasp of what many, myself included, take to be the central subject matter of the early Buddhist texts: *the nature of our experience*. By undertaking a phenomenological investigation of our own experience, it is possible to uncover important and apodictic truths that can serve as the basis for a more informed hermeneutics. More specifically, some phenomenological reflection upon the essential structure of our bodily capacity to perceive things will provide a philosophical grounding for an interpretation of what the Buddha may have been referring to when he spoke of seeing the body *ajjhattaṃ*, seeing it *bahiddhā* and seeing it *ajjhattabahiddhā*.

There is a small but growing movement within the Theravāda tradition that was initiated by Ñāṇavīra (2009) and has gained impetus from Ñāṇamoli (2014), Akiñcano (2019), Vörös (2021), Dellinger (2023), and others. The central characteristic of this school of thought is a philosophical reading of the early Buddhist *sutta*s through the lens of existential phenomenology. This area of research has not yet had a significant impact on the wider academic community and remains "unfortunately chronically understudied" (Vörös 2021, p. 5). It is hoped that the following study of the meaning of *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* will help to shine some light on this phenomenological approach to the study of the early Pāli texts.

In an attempt to accomplish this, the rest of this article will be structured as follows. First, in section 2, I will undertake a brief phenomenological investigation of my own perceptual experience, giving particular precedence to the way in which (1) my senses and (2) the things that I perceive on account of my senses manifest in my experience. Then, in section 3, I will turn to the Pāli *sutta*s in order to explore how the words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* are used. My primary aim is to ascertain the extent to which our phenomenological investigations in section 2 can facilitate an interpretation of these words and whether it is possible to situate this interpretation, in the context of mindfulness of the body, within a phenomenological account of perception. In section 4, I will suggest avenues for further research that lie beyond the scope of this article. In order to develop a fuller understanding of the words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* along the lines suggested here, all the other contexts in which they occur would have to be acknowledged. Finally, I will conclude by attempting to demonstrate an affinity between phenomenology and the *Dhamma* insofar as they both involve a transcendental turn away from what happens to have appeared in my experience right now, toward what it is that makes my experience possible. For this reason, I will argue, phenomenology ought to be taken seriously as a methodological approach that can play an important role in the interpretation of the Pāli *sutta*s.

3. Throughout this article, when I use expressions like 'the early Buddhist texts' or 'the Pāli *sutta*s', I am referring to the following texts from the *Sutta-piṭika*: *Dīgha-nikāya*, *Majjhima-nikāya*, *Saṃyutta-nikāya*, *Aṅguttara-nikāya*, *Suttanipāta*, *Dhammapada*, *Udāna*, *Itivuttaka*, *Thera-therīgāthā*.

2 A Phenomenological Investigation of the Body

As I write these words, sitting in the midst of a forest, outside my humble dwelling (or, to use its Pāli name, my *kuṭi*), I look up from the screen and see a young sandalwood tree. This particular tree is now the centre of my attention, but I notice that it is situated against a background of many other things—the sandy path behind it, the *kuṭi* to my left, all the surrounding trees, the blue sky above—which I am aware of peripherally and which appear less distinctly than this tree. As has been documented at length by Gestalt psychologists (e.g. Koffka (1936)), my perceptual experience always involves these two mutually dependent components: figure (what I am concerned with) and ground (the framework that contains and determines the figure). There can be no figure without a ground, just as there can be no ground without a figure, each one being implicated by the other.

> What I am presented with (figure) has meaning for me in virtue of that which it is not (ground). The figure and ground are thus *internally related*: they are not two separate entities, but rather *two aspects of a meaningful whole.* (Vörös 2021, p. 11)

In the words of Merleau-Ponty: "[t]he perceptual 'something' is always in the middle of some other thing, it always belongs to a 'field'" (2012, p. 4). However there are, as Vörös (2021, pp. 11–12) demonstrates, at least two further dimensions that must be added to this picture in order to capture its existential totality. The first is the fact that my experience is inescapably temporal. My perception of the sandalwood tree is not a timeless snapshot, but is given against a temporal background of both past experiences and future possibilities. Every perception is encountered in the midst of both spatial and temporal horizons. Second—and it is this that will be the primary focus of my own investigation—the spatio-temporal figure-ground structure of my perceptual field is inextricably bound up with my body. As Merleau-Ponty realized:

> one's own body is the always implied third term of the figure-background structure, and each figure appears perspectivally against the double horizon of external space and bodily space (2012, p. 103).

Thus, let me try to describe how my body shows up in this experience. As I look at the tree I can just about make out my hands resting on the keyboard in front of me. Of course, I am able to move my attention in order to look at them directly, so that they now become the centre of my attention and the tree recedes into the background. If I turn my gaze to the rest of my body, I can see my stomach, my chest, my arms, my shoulders, but if I try to go above this I encounter an absence. I cannot, without the help of a mirror, see my neck, my cheeks, my forehead or my eyes.

The absence of my eyes from my visual field cannot be accounted for solely in terms of their location, in the way that the absence of the aloe vera plant can be explained by the fact that it is behind my back. To speculate wildly for a moment, let us imagine that I had one of my eyes surgically removed from its socket and then, holding it carefully in his hand, my surgeon turned it around to face my other eye. If none of the nerves were damaged, one would expect that I would be able to use that eye to look at the eye in my face. My eye that sees sees the other eye as a visible object. Now I switch my perspective and, with the eye that remains in its socket, I look back at the gruesome eye in the doctor's hand. But the fact remains that, even if I were able to move my eyes so that one of them could gaze upon the other, I would not be able to see my left eye with my left eye. An eye cannot see itself and so it must always remain absent from its own field of vision. Furthermore, and more importantly, although my left eye may be able to see my right eye—just as when I look into a mirror—what I would see is a visible object.

I would not see my *faculty* of seeing visible objects. There is an important sense in which the other eye (as 'seer') cannot be seen: it can never be seen *in its seeing*.

There is a basic underlying principle here that applies to all the senses. While my right hand is touching an object, I can simultaneously feel my right hand with my left, and yet the right hand *qua* object of touch is quite different from the right hand *qua* toucher. As Merleau-Ponty (2012, p. 94) puts it:

> The first is an intersecting of bones, muscles, and flesh compressed into a point of space; the second shoots across space to reveal the external object in its place. Insofar as it sees or touches the world, my body can neither be seen nor touched. What prevents it from ever being an object or from ever being 'completely constituted' is that my body is neither tangible nor visible insofar as it is what sees and touches.

We have identified an important difference between the absence in my visual field of the aloe vera plant behind me and the absence of my eyes, for although I can simply move myself in order to see the aloe vera plant, I can never get into a position where I can see my eye as that which sees. I cannot step outside of my body in order to look back down upon it because wherever I go my body comes with me as itself the source of my vision. In his own phenomenological reflections on the body, Leder (1990, p. 13) describes the situation as follows:

> my lived body (*Leib*) always constitutes a nullpoint in the world I inhabit. No matter where I physically move, and even in the midst of motion, my body retains the status of an absolute 'here' around which all the 'theres' are arrayed.

Leder's use of the word *Leib* here is a reference to Husserl (1989). Husserl made use of two German words for 'body' in order to conceptually distinguish between *Leib* (my living body, the sum of my senses, my mode of access onto the world of perceptual objects) and *Körper* (my physical body, my body as flesh and bone, my body as just another object in the world). My body as lived—what Vörös (2021, p. 12) calls "'my own body' (*corps propre*), my experiential 'zero point' or 'anchorage' in the world"—necessarily recedes from the perceptual field that it discloses. And yet my body is, on the other hand, another physical object in the world. My body exists in these two distinct modes, which we can perhaps now articulate in terms of Merleau-Ponty's 'bodily space' and 'external space' or, to slightly modify Leder's formulation, 'here' and 'out there'.

My body is a perceptible thing 'out there' in the world; and yet it is also the 'here' that is not perceived but that, rather, makes it possible for me to perceive things 'out there'. Merleau-Ponty also uses the word 'here' in order to express the fact that my body "is never truly in front of me, that I cannot spread it out under my gaze, that it remains on the margins of all my perceptions" (2012, p. 93). "When the word 'here' is applied to my body," he says, "it does not designate a determinate position in relation to other positions or in relation to external coordinates. It designates the installation of the first coordinates" (2012, pp. 102–103).

The space within which my body as *Leib* resides cannot be measured in terms of the external space that I perceive. If I press my hands together, I do not experience them as two simultaneous and juxtaposed sensations, as if they were nothing more than two objects side by side. My experience is better described as "an ambiguous organisation where the two hands alternate between the functions of 'touching' and 'touched'" (p. 95). In response to Merleau-Ponty's assertion that one's body is never "completely constituted" (2012, p. 94), the translator comments that this is likely an allusion to Husserl (1989, p. 167): "[t]he same Body which serves me as a means for all my perception obstructs me in the perception of it itself and is a remarkably imperfectly constituted thing." In its capacity as both

the body-that-perceives (*Leib*) and the body-as-perceived (*Körper*), my body cannot be exhaustively constituted or unified, for that would require me to unify two kinds of spaces. This I cannot do. These two ineluctable, ever-present domains of my experience "intertwine, but never phenomenologically coincide" (Leder 1990, p. 14). They remain divided yet they are mutually dependent, internally related, "the obverse and the reverse of one another, the one forever behind the other" (Merleau-Ponty 1968, p. 152). In order to be what they are, each one requires the other. In his later writings, Merleau-Ponty (1968) refers to the entanglement of these two indispensable yet interdependent aspects of my experience as the "chiasm" (*le chiasme* or *le chiasma*; from the Greek *χιασμός*, 'placing crosswise') or the "intertwining" (*l'entrelacs*).

Now that I have sketched out a preliminary description of the essential characteristics of the structure of perception, I will take on the task of examining how the topic is dealt with in the Pāli *sutta*s. In the next section, I will look at how the words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* are used in the *sutta*s and will explore the ways in which our phenomenological investigations appear to align and can perhaps guide us towards a phenomenologically grounded interpretation of the early Buddhist texts.

3 A Phenomenological Interpretation of *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*

At D III 243, a distinction is made between the two different kinds of domains (*āyatanāni*) of our experience: the *ajjhattika* domains and the *bāhira* domains. The *ajjhattika* domains are the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind (*mano*): the six senses that make it possible for us to perceive things. What, then, are the *bāhira* domains? According to M I 111, they are *not* the perceptions we have on account of these senses, but the things that make such perceptions possible:

> Friend, because of the eye and sights, eye-consciousness arises. The meeting of the three is contact. With the support of contact, feeling. Whatever one feels, one perceives.[4]

A visual perception (*rūpasaññā*) is made possible by the coming together of an eye, a sight and eye-consciousness (*mutatis mutandis* for the other five perceptions). In order for me to have a perception of a tree (to see it, touch it, imagine it, etc.), not only must there be senses and consciousness, but there also must be a tree out there in the world. The *bāhira* domains are not my perceptions of things, but the things I have perceptions of. They are the visible things out there in the world, the audible things out there in the world, the tangible things out there in the world, etc., that have to be out there in the world in order for me to see, hear or touch them.[5]

It seems reasonable to follow PED in interpreting the adjective *bāhira* as 'outside' or 'external', and the corresponding adverb *bahiddhā* as 'externally' or 'outside' (or, as I prefer, 'out there'). However, despite the almost universal tendency for translators, scholars, meditation teachers and dictionaries to translate *ajjhattika* as 'internal' and *ajjhattaṃ* as 'internally', I would like to suggest an alternative. CPD, DOP and PED all agree that *ajjhattaṃ* is related to the Sanskrit *adhy-ātmam*, which MW defines as 'own, belonging to oneself; concerning self or individual personality'. PED defines the Pāli *ajjhattaṃ* as

4. *cakkhuñcāvuso, paṭicca rūpe ca uppajjati cakkhuviññāṇaṃ, tiṇṇaṃ saṅgati phasso, phassapaccayā vedanā, yaṃ vedeti taṃ sañjānāti…*

5. It is perhaps worth pausing here to reflect on the fact that, according to this framework, *dhammā*—all imaginable things, all things that manifest in our experience because we have a mind (*mano*)—are 'out there' in the world (*bāhira*). It is likely that this statement will be difficult to make sense of for those who are reading these texts through the lens of either modern science or psychology. Nevertheless, in order for me to imagine a phenomenon such as a unicorn, that phenomenon has to be out there as something imaginable. Thoughts, like sights, are things out there that I happen upon. With the word 'world', I am not referring to the planet earth but to the world of meaning, the intelligible situation I find myself in. For a detailed phenomenological exposition of the meanings of 'world', see Heidegger (1962, pp. 91–148).

'interior, personal, inwardly', but CPD and DOP steer more closely to the Sanskrit with 'within oneself' and 'concerning oneself, in oneself; inwardly, personally; in regard to oneself' respectively. Interestingly, if we turn to PED's definition of the prefix *adhi-*, we are told that this can be used to denote a sense of place, not 'inside' but rather, it tersely states, "[o]ften simply deictic 'here'". The example provided in order to illustrate this is the adverb *ajjhattaṃ*: 'this self here'.[6] This is quite different from 'internally' and can, I believe, facilitate a reading of the *sutta*s that has been informed by a phenomenological insight into the nature of our senses. What, after all, is internal or inward about my eye? I do not experience my senses as being 'inward', 'internal' or 'inside' something. I experience them as being 'right here' as opposed to 'out there'.

The fact that *ajjhattaṃ* appears to derive from the word 'self' (Sanskrit: *ātmán*, Pāli: *attā*) perhaps requires further comment if we are to address the question of how the *arahat*s, for whom there is no 'self view' (*attavāda*), can dwell practising mindfulness of the body 'within themselves'. Ñāṇavīra Thera distinguishes between two meanings of the word 'self': (1) the reflexive self and (2) the self that is the entity that an 'ordinary person' (*puthujjana*) assumes that they, *qua* subject, are.

> The *puthujjana* confuses (as the *arahat* does not) the self-identity of simple reflexion—as with a mirror, where the *same* thing is seen from two points of view at once ('the thing itself', 'the selfsame thing')—with the self as the *subject* that appears in reflexion—'my self' (i.e. 'I itself', i.e. the *I* that appears when *I* reflect).
> Ñāṇavīra (2009, p. 38)

This is a subtle yet crucial distinction. Throughout the *sutta*s, the Buddha compares ordinary people, who understand their experience in the wrong way, to the noble disciples, who have attained the right view and have entered the stream of *Dhamma*. The difference lies in the fact that most people assume that there is an enduring self to whom their experience is happening. For them, right at the heart of everything is the dichotomy between the experience and the entity ('me') whose experience this is. Thus it is said that a *puthujjana* sees their experience (i.e. the five aggregates) in terms of self: "an uninstructed ordinary person… sees matter as self, or self as having matter, or matter as in self, or self as in matter…" (S III 16).[7] The experience is seen to depend in some way or other upon 'me'. Those who have attained the right view, however, do not see their experience in this way. When they reflexively consider what they are doing, the entity that appears is not taken to be the owner of the experience. It is, rather, simply another aspect of the experience. A noble disciple understands that it is not that the five aggregates depend upon 'me', but that everything (including a *puthujjana*'s sense of self) depends upon the five aggregates; and those aggregates are impermanent and unownable. Thus, even though the Buddha says that all things are not-self (e.g. Dhp 279),[8] it is quite possible to imagine him looking at his reflection in a puddle and commenting on the fact that he can see *himself*. This latter use of 'self', which simply denotes reflexivity ('I can see the one that sees'), is quite different from the 'self' that a *puthujjana* (but not the Buddha) assumes himself to be. We see something similar going on with the word *paccattaṃ* (*paṭi+attan*) in the well-known epithet of the *Dhamma* (e.g. M I 37), in which we are told that the *Dhamma* should be seen 'for oneself'.

It is to be expected that PED's suggestion of a literal translation of *ajjhattaṃ* as 'this self here' (or, maybe slightly better, 'myself here') will merely lead to confusion due to the subtlety of the distinction

6. When the prefix *adhi-* occurs before vowels, we find it undergoing assimilation, taking the form *ajjh-*°. Further examples that PED offers to illustrate the deictic meaning of *adhi-* are: *adhiṭṭhāna* place where; *adhivasati* to inhabit; *adhisayana* "lying in", inhabiting.

7. *assutavā puthujjano… rūpaṃ attato samanupassati, rūpavantaṃ vā attānaṃ, attani vā rūpaṃ, rūpasmiṃ vā attānaṃ.*

8. *sabbe dhammā anattā'ti.*

between the two meanings of 'self' outlined above. It will, therefore, perhaps be more helpful to simply emphasize the deixis. For this reason, I will from now on translate *ajjhattaṃ* as 'right here' or 'here'. Mindfulness of the body involves seeing (and not losing sight of) the body in the two spaces or domains that it partakes in. Insofar as my body 'right here' is on the other side of all that appears in my perceptual experience, it is not itself a perceptible thing 'out there' in the world. This may be why the Buddha says that if a wise, intelligent, clever individual investigates one of the senses, "it appears to be absent, it appears to be lacking, it appears to be empty" (S IV 174–5).[9] It is not 'out there' in external space because it is what makes that very external space possible. Everything that I can possibly experience can only be experienced on account of this body. I can only see what my eye sees and hear what my ear hears. Thus we are told:

> it is only within this fathom-high body, with perception and mind, that I describe the world, the origination of the world, the cessation of the world and the way leading to the cessation of the world (S I 62).[10]

However, even though the body can be considered as the necessary basis for this entire world, it can also be regarded as an object out there in the world, like the sandalwood tree in front of my *kuṭi*. There is an important sense in which my body is just another material entity in the world that shares the same nature as all other material entities.

> This body of mine is material, made of the four great elements, produced by mother and father, an accumulation of rice and porridge, having the nature of impermanence, rubbing, crushing, disintegration and destruction. (M I 500)[11]

My experience involves an interfolding of two simultaneously present but distinct domains, and yet my body somehow straddles both of these domains, depending on the perspective I adopt toward it. At S II 24, the Buddha says that, for *puthujjana* and *arahat* alike, "there is this body and name-and-matter (*nāmarūpa*) out there (*bahiddhā*). In such a way there is this dyad."[12] This statement enumerates the two discernible dimensions of my experience: all the external phenomena ("name-and-matter") that appear in my experience, and this body right here that makes it possible for all the external phenomena to appear. This distinction between bodily space and external space is another way of saying *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*.

However, there is an added complexity that S II 24 does not allude to. Not only do I say 'body' to refer to this thing here that makes it possible for me to perceive things out there, but I also call the thing I see in the mirror my 'body'. My body is, after all, an entity out there in the world. The word 'body', insofar as it refers to either side of the dyad, evinces an uncanny twofoldedness that is perhaps best articulated at S IV 95:

> The eye, friends, is that in the world because of which one perceives the world and thinks about the world. The ear, friends… The nose, friends… The tongue, friends…The body, friends… The mind, friends, is that in the world because of which one perceives the world and thinks about the world. Friends, that in the world because of which one perceives

9. *rittakaññeva khāyati, tucchakaññeva khāyati, suññakaññeva khāyati…*
10. *imasmiṃyeva byāmamatte kaḷevare sasaññimhi samanake lokañca paññapemi lokasamudayañca lokanirodhañca lokanirodhagāminiñca paṭipadanti.*
11. *ayaṃ kho me kāyo rūpī cātumahābhūtiko mātāpettikasambhavo odanakummāsūpacayo aniccucchādanaparimaddanabhedanaviddhaṃsanadhammo…*
12. *ayañceva kāyo bahiddhā ca nāmarūpaṃ, itthetaṃ dvayaṃ…*

> the world and thinks about the world—that, friends, is called 'world' in the noble one's discipline.[13]

The six senses constitute my body 'right here' that allows me to perceive and think about all the things in the world around me. However, my body is not only 'right here'; it is also something 'out there' in the world. It is that particular thing out there in the world because of which I can perceive things in the world. It is that in the world because of which I am in a world. In other words, my body can be seen either from the perspective of 'right here' (*ajjhattaṃ*) or from the perspective of 'out there' (*bahiddhā*).

According to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the body can also be seen to be both 'right here' and 'out there' (*ajjhattabahiddhā*). As Ditrich (2016, p. 137) and Qian (2019, p. 351) both point out, neither the Pāli *sutta*s nor Buddhaghosa's commentaries explicitly comment on the meaning of this. How, then, can our phenomenological enquiry help us to understand this aspect of *satipaṭṭhāna*? What would it be to see our body as both right here and out there? As we have seen, I cannot see my eye in the act of seeing. Insofar as my hand is currently touching something, it is not something that can be touched. I can consider my body *ajjhattaṃ*, as *Leib*, as what it is that discloses all that I perceive, or I can consider my body *bahiddhā*, as *Körper*, as an object of perception, but I cannot obliterate the dyad and get these two domains to coincide. While I am regarding my body *ajjhattaṃ*, I am necessarily not regarding it *bahiddhā*, and vice versa.

However, despite the fact that I cannot unify these two opposing points of view, the fact remains that this body is that thing that I experience in these two ways. My body is both *ajjhattika* and *bāhira*. I cannot forsake the undeniable truth that my experience always involves a particular perspective at any given moment. Nor can I step outside of my situation in order to look down upon it from Nagel's (1986) "view from nowhere" and enclose the *ajjhattika* and the *bāhira* in some kind of togetherness. Nevertheless, we are told that it is possible to 'see' that the body can be accessed in these two distinct ways. This would suggest that the 'seeing' (in Pāli: *anupassī*) in 'seeing the body *ajjhattabahiddhā*' should not be taken in the sense of 'perceiving', but in the sense of 'knowing' or 'understanding'. It is not a question of achieving the impossible and perceiving what makes all my perceiving possible, but the 'knowing and seeing' (*ñāṇadassanā*) that this body, the ground that makes it possible for all these perceptions to be here, can be regarded from a different viewpoint, as another perceptible object in the world. That which is 'right here' can, with a shift in perspective, be seen to be 'out there', since it is that in the world because of which I perceive the world and think about the world.

I would now like to turn our attention to another *sutta* in order to provide further support for this reading of *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* as 'right here' and 'out there'. In the *Bāhiya Sutta* (Ud 8),[14] the Buddha tells the wanderer Bāhiya to train in the following way:

> 'In the seen there will be only the seen, in the heard there will be only the heard, in the sensed there will be only the sensed, in what you are conscious of there will be only what you are conscious of '. When, Bāhiya, for you in the seen there is only the seen, when in the heard there is only the heard, when in the sensed there is only the sensed, when in what you are conscious of there is only what you are conscious of, then, Bāhiya, you will not be 'that because of which'. When, Bāhiya, you are not 'that because of which', you will not be 'there'. When, Bāhiya, you are not 'there', you are not 'here' (*idha*), not 'yonder' (*huraṃ*),

13. *cakkhunā kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī. sotena kho, āvuso… ghānena kho, āvuso… jivhāya kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī. kāyena kho, āvuso… manena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī. yena kho, āvuso, lokasmiṃ lokasaññī hoti lokamānī—ayaṃ vuccati ariyassa vinaye loko.*

14. The same instruction is given to the venerable Mālukyaputta at S IV 73.

not 'in either of these' (*ubhayamantarena*). Just this is the end of suffering.[15]

There is much that can be said about this famous passage. We might begin by acknowledging the fact that the adverbials *tena*, *tattha*, *idha*, *huraṃ* and *ubhayamantarena* are difficult to interpret, having led translators in various directions. However, let us see if we can interpret the meaning in light of our investigations so far. We may first note that the Buddha appears to be encouraging Bāhiya to clarify the *bāhira* domain. If whatever is perceived (the seen, the heard, etc.) is seen *bahiddhā*, then it will be understood correctly: as nothing other than the objects out there in the world that appear on account of these senses. If I see external sights, sounds, smells, and so on as things out there in the world that make it possible for me to have perceptions of them, then I see them as impersonal things in a world that is not of my making but which I have, in Heidegger's (1962) famous phrase, been 'thrown' into. In this way, the Buddha says, "you will not be 'that because of which' (*tena*)". The seen and the heard are what manifest in my experience on account of the eye and the ear. It is not *I* who makes these things appear in my experience, but these senses. These senses are 'that because of which' there are sights, sounds, smells, etc. But my senses are not *me*. I did not ask for them, I did not create them, and I cannot prevent them from deteriorating with age, becoming damaged and breaking apart. The necessary condition for all my perceptions is not 'me' but the senses: these faculties that I have been subjected to and am not fully in control of. If that is sufficiently understood, there will no longer be any room for the notion of an *I*. There will be no sense of *I* 'there' (*tattha*) in my experience.

According to my reading of this, the word *tattha* ('there', 'in that place') does not mean 'out there' (*bahiddhā*). It refers to the entirety of my experience, including all of its spatial and temporal horizons. It is where the sense faculties ('here') and the sense objects ('out there'), together with the corresponding sense consciousness, are in contact (*phassa*). To say that 'you will not be there' means 'there will not be a self for you there in your experience'. This use of 'there' aligns with Heidegger's name for human being: *Dasein* ('being-there'). Being-there, he says, is "that entity which in every case has being-in-the-world as the way in which it is" (p. 72). Being human means being 'there', which means being in a world, and it is only because we have this as our way of being that we can discern, though never fully separate, the intertwining of 'here' and 'out there'.[16]

The demarcation of one's experience into these two domains comes in the following clauses, with the words *idha* and *huraṃ*. There will be no sense of *I* 'here' (*idha*) and there will be no sense of *I* 'yonder' (*huraṃ*). Given that we are talking about the domains of our experience that pertain to the senses and all that appears on account of them, it seems reasonable to conclude that *idha* and *huraṃ* are equivalent to *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*. If there is no sense of *I* 'here' and no sense of *I* 'out there' then there is no sense of *I* at all, for there is nowhere other than these two domains. As S IV 15 tells us, these two domains are "the all".

If *ajjhattaṃ* and *idha* both mean 'here' and *bahiddhā* and *huraṃ* both mean 'out there', then what does the final term, *ubhayamantarena*, mean? It is usually translated as 'between the two'[17] or 'in between the two'.[18] According to PED, *ubhaya* means 'both' and the adverbial *antarena* can mean 'between'. However, we now have two sources of evidence, both textual and phenomenological, that challenge the idea of a third space 'in between' the two primary spaces of 'here' and 'out there'. Not only does S IV 15 tell us that 'here' and 'out there' is everything, the totality of our experience, but we have

15. *'diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissatī'ti. evañhi te, bāhiya, sikkhitabbaṃ. yato kho te, bāhiya, diṭṭhe diṭṭhamattaṃ bhavissati, sute sutamattaṃ bhavissati, mute mutamattaṃ bhavissati, viññāte viññātamattaṃ bhavissati, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tena; yato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tena tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tattha; yato tvaṃ, bāhiya, na tattha, tato tvaṃ, bāhiya, nevidha na huraṃ na ubhayamantarena. esevanto dukkhassāti.*

16. A similar account of this passage is provided by Ñāṇavīra (2010, pp. 438–440).

17. e.g. Sujāto (2021), Ṭhānissaro (2014, p. 43), Ñāṇavīra (2010, p. 439).

18. e.g. Ānandajoti (2008), Ireland (1994, p. 21), Bodhi (2000, p. 1176).

identified for ourselves that our experience involves an interplay of two—not three—domains: all that is there in my experience, and what it is that makes it possible for it to be there in my experience. There is nothing 'between' these two. Nevertheless, perhaps we can refer to *ubhayamantarena* as the 'in-between' in the sense of the interweaving of the 'here' and the 'out there'. These two spaces can never coalesce, and yet they are both simultaneously present in my experience in the form of a chiasm. Alternatively, since the primary meaning of *antara* is 'in' or 'inside', we might translate *ubhayamantarena* as 'in either of these' (c.f. Masefield's (1994, p. 10) "in both"). What is being referred to here is not a third domain between the *ajjhattika* and the *bāhira* domains, but the totality of all that is 'there' (*tattha*). A totality that is experienced as an intertwining of *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*: *ajjhattabahiddhā*, 'both here and out there'.

4 Conclusion

In two important suttas, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Bāhiya Sutta*, the Buddha describes two regions. We have seen that something strikingly similar to these two regions was independently identified by phenomenologists, such as Merleau-Ponty and Leder, who conducted studies of human perception. Their investigations led them to describe the inexorable two-sidedness of perceptual experience, involving the simultaneous presence of two distinct yet entangled dimensions: a bodily space that is 'right here' and an external space 'out there'. My body is something that can, depending on the point of view I adopt towards it, be seen to partake in either one of these dimensions.

However, my body is not the only phenomenon in my experience that can be seen *ajjhattaṃ*, *bahiddhā*, or *ajjhattabahiddhā*. In order to show how the approach taken in this article might be applied to the various other contexts in which these terms appear throughout the *sutta*s, a lot more work would be necessary. For example, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* goes on to say that a monk developing mindfulness may dwell seeing feeling (*vedanā*), and mind (*citta*) in this threefold way. What is being referred to with these words 'feeling' and 'mind', and what would it mean to see these things 'right here' or 'out there'? Although there is no space to pursue this here, I would suggest that in order for such an enquiry to move forward, one would need to consider the aspect of our experience that each of these words designates as 'something in the world because of which I am in a world'. They are, like my body, things out there in the world that enable me to perceive and think about things out there in the world.

The words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā* appear in many other contexts in the early Buddhist texts. For example, in the gradual training (e.g. MN I 180) a monk who is fully accomplished in virtue is said to experience a blameless pleasure *ajjhattaṃ*. Later on in that very same *sutta* (M I 181), we find second *jhāna* being described as tranquillity *ajjhattaṃ*. At M I 185–9, we encounter the four great elements (earth, water, fire and wind) and are told that they are twofold: *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*. In many *suttas* (e.g. S III 47–8), the five aggregates are spoken of in terms of the words *ajjhattaṃ* and *bahiddhā*. Indeed, if we return to the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, we hear of someone who dwells seeing *dhamma*s *ajjhattaṃ*, seeing *dhamma*s *bahiddhā* and seeing *dhamma*s *ajjhattabahiddhā*. Since the word *dhamma* here refers to any thing, any phenomenon, anything that can manifest on account of my mind, then it would seem that anything whatsoever can be seen in this threefold way: 'right here', 'out there', 'both right here and out there'. While further research would be required in order to spell this out more fully, it is hoped that this article has offered an indication of how a phenomenological study of our experience might serve to clarify an otherwise obscure distinction central to the *sutta*s.

Returning to our example of the body, the phenomenological interpretation of 'seeing the body *ajjhattaṃ*' that I have been developing here involves seeing my body in its capacity as that which makes it possible for all of these things to be here in my perceptual experience. It is to see my body as a

necessary condition for my experience. There is a veritable cornucopia of terms in the early Buddhist texts that serve to convey this meaning. The words *hetu*, *paccaya*, *nidāna*, *adhikaraṇa*, *ārammaṇa*, *mūla*, *sambhava*, *pabhava*, *āhāra* and *samudaya*, for example, are translated with words like 'cause', 'reason', 'condition', 'source', 'support', 'root', 'foundation', 'basis', 'nutriment', 'origin', 'origination', and so on. Of course, there are differences in the way all of these words are used in the Pāli, and I do not wish to suggest that these are bad translations. Nevertheless, I believe it is possible to discern a basic underlying meaning that they all share in, a meaning that plays a crucial role in the early Buddhist teachings. They all express something like 'what it is that makes something else possible'. Perhaps the most important Pāli word in which this meaning is detected is the word *saṅkhāra*, which Ñāṇavīra (2009, p. 10) defines in the most general terms possible as "a thing from which some other thing is inseparable—in other words, *a necessary condition*". Seeing the body *ajjhattaṃ* means seeing the body as a necessary condition, as a *saṅkhāra*, as that which my experience depends upon.

To see what it is that something else is inseparable from is to see: "whenever there is this, there is this" (e.g. S II 70).[19] The Buddha calls this 'dependent origination' (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). This is not some kind of Humean causality that can be illustrated in terms of billiard balls: the white ball strikes the red ball and *causes* it to move. Nowhere in the Pāli *sutta*s do we find the metaphor of momentary 'links' in some kind of temporal 'chain' of events. Instead, we are told that the *Dhamma* is *akālika*—literally, 'not time-ish'; 'atemporal', 'not involving time' (M I 265). This makes sense if we understand dependent origination to be the basic phenomenological insight that for as long as something (other than *nibbāna*) is present in our experience, there is always something else that has to be simultaneously present. For example, whenever there are perceptions of things out there in the world, there is also a body (i.e. these six senses; *saḷāyatana*). If there were no body, there would be no perceptions. The moment this body appeared, perceptions appeared; as soon as this body ceases, all these perceptions will cease. Two aspects of my experience: I cannot possibly have one without the other. According to M I 191, "whoever sees dependent origination, sees the *Dhamma*; whoever sees the *Dhamma*, sees dependent origination."[20] In order to 'see the Dhamma', I must develop a sensitivity to the dependent nature of all that has arisen in my experience. I must see—and understand the nature of—what it is that is simultaneously there in my experience, making all of this possible. This involves what we might call an 'originary perspective' on my situation, such that I am not merely concerned with the things in front of me, but I am also sensitive to the broader context, the ground that is not in front of me, but which is the necessary basis for all that is in front of me.

This transcendental move, in the Heideggerian sense of the phrase, is one of the hallmarks of phenomenology.[21] The phenomenological reduction (from the Latin *re-ducere*, 'to lead back') involves stepping back from the natural attitude, in which things are assumed to be already out there existing independently of my experience of them, in order to study the ground that they depend upon and are determined by. As Vörös points out, although this ground is *not a thing* (insofar as it is not something in the world), neither is it *nothing:* "it is a *no-thing*, an indeterminate sphere of implicit meanings whose temporary equilibrium brings forth the explicit meaning of the thing I am attending to" (2021, p. 11).

Heidegger's philosophical breakthrough occurred when he came upon the enduring topic of his career: "the pretheoretical and preworldly 'primal something' (*Ur-etwas*)" (Kisiel 1993, p. 21) that makes our experience possible. This is what characterizes the phenomenological movement that Heidegger so profoundly influenced: a concern not with our theoretical knowledge about the world, but with the more fundamental factical 'something-or-other' ('no-thing') that ontologically—not chronologically—precedes

19. *imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti…*

20. *yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatīti.*

21. For a comprehensive discussion of the role that transcendental philosophy plays in Heidegger's thinking, see Engelland (2017).

and makes possible that knowledge, of which our knowledge always speaks. Phenomenology does not limit its enquiry to perceptions or thoughts. It attempts to disclose the wider ground that all perceptions and thoughts depend on. Just as the *sutta*s differentiate between (1) our perceptions of things (e.g. perceptions of sights (*rūpasaññā*), perceptions of sounds (*saddasaññā*), perceptions of tangible things (*phoṭṭhabbasaññā*)) and (2) the things that we have perceptions of (e.g. sights (*rūpā*), sounds (*saddā*), tangible things (*phoṭṭhabbā*)), so too, in its efforts to understand the domain of perception, phenomenology is a mode of research "which actually reaches up to the things themselves" (Husserl 2001, p. 178).

Both phenomenology and the early Buddhist teachings emphasize the importance of adopting an originary perspective towards our own, first-person experience. This suggests a resemblance that invites further investigation. In many *sutta*s (e.g. A I 13, M I 7), we find the Buddha valorizing a particular way of attending to things that he called *yoniso manasikāra*. This, we are told at A I 87, is one of the conditions for the arising of the right view, that is, 'seeing the *Dhamma*' and entering the stream. The phrase tends to be translated as 'careful attention', 'wise attention' or 'proper attention', but let us note here that the word *yoniso* literally means 'from the womb' or 'from the origin'. Could it be that what is being designated with the expression *yoniso manasikāra* is an originary way of attending to things, an originary perspective on one's experience in which one does not get lost in the details of what happens to have appeared, but instead takes a step back and brings into view the more fundamental ground that makes all of this possible in the first place? Could it be that *yoniso manasikāra* is a Pāli term for something that closely resembles what we in the twenty-first century now refer to as 'the phenomenological attitude'? Is it, as Vörös (2021, p. 14) suggests, what Merleau-Ponty was getting at when he described his philosophy as "a radical reflection, that is, a reflection that attempts to understand itself" (2012, p. 251)? It appears that questions such as these have not yet been seriously addressed within the Early Buddhist Studies community. Much research has investigated the relationship between Continental phenomenology and, for example, Chan Buddhism (e.g. Nelson (2010)), Yogacara Buddhism (e.g. Lusthaus (2014)) and the contemporary mindfulness movement (e.g. Stone and Zahavi (2022)). Perhaps it is time for scholars of early Buddhism, as well as those within the Theravāda tradition, to explore what phenomenology has to offer anybody who wishes to undertake a study of the meaning of the Pāli *sutta*s.

Abbreviations

A	*Aṅguttara-nikāya*
CPD	*Critical Pāli Dictionary* (see Trenckner *et al.* (1924–)
D	*Dīgha-nikāya*
Dhp	*Dhammapada*
Dhs	*Dhammasaṅgaṇi*
DOP	*A Dictionary of Pāli, Part I* (see Cone (2001))
M	*Majjhima-nikāya*
MW	*Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (see Monier-Williams (1899))
PED	*Pāli-English Dictionary* (see Rhys David and Stede (1921–25))
Ps	*Papañcasūdanī (Majjhima-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā)*
S	*Saṃyutta-nikāya*
Ud	*Udāna*

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