Husserlian phenomenological clarification of the “I-am-me experience” in
crudhood might result in the idea of “samsara” as a view of life and death.

Tsuneo WATANABE

Abstract:

There are some children who wonder by themselves “why am I me?” and
“why am I here and now”. For example: “One day when I was about five
years old, I was just sitting around, doing nothing, when I realized I was me,
and began to wonder why I wasn’t somebody else (in recollection of a senior
high school girl)” (Spiegelberg, 1961). Spiegelberg, who was a
phenomenological philosopher, named this kind of experiences “I-am-me
experiences”. Since then, similar experiences have been examined by several
psychologists, mainly in Japan and Netherlands, by asking people to recall
and report such childhood experiences. In this paper, I present two more
examples of this experience. In one example, a Dutch woman, when she was
nine years old, suddenly found herself to be “an only self in the world,” but
arrived at the thought that “each and every person is “an only self”. In the
other example, a Japanese novelist described his own I-am-me experience
and at the same time experienced the idea of “samsara”. I have attempted to
clarify these experiences phenomenologically. In the first example, the Dutch
woman might have encountered the paradox between “onlyness” of her own
self and the fundamental equality of self and others. This corresponds to the
Husserlian paradox between the onlyness of transcendental ego as myself
and the fundamental equality of self and others. Husserl tried to overcome
this paradox in his “Cartesian meditations” (1931), but I believe that he
failed in this attempt. However, I have reinterpreted Husserlian
intersubjectivity on the basis of Held’s (1968) criticism of Husserlian theory
and developed the idea that each one of the other selves is in reality my own
self in a different time. This idea is suggestive of “samsara” as a view of life
and death, and phenomenologically elucidate the example of the Japanese
novelist described above.