



WISSENSRAUM NO. 18

THE ILLUSION OF SELF- OBSERVATION

On the De-Dramatization of the Self and the Collapse of Measuring

“Sometimes insight begins precisely where one stops trying to force an answer.”

AKADEMIE DER WEISHEIT — WISSENSRÄUME

◆ 1. The Human Being Who Learned to Watch Themselves

That a person can look at themselves is among the great gifts of consciousness. It becomes difficult only where occasional looking has turned into a permanent state.

Whoever wonders why a conversation stays with them in the evening, whoever pauses before saying something hurtful, whoever checks after an argument what happened inside them, is doing something valuable. Without this capacity there would be no remorse, no responsibility, no maturation that grows from experience. A person can step back and look at themselves, and in this distance lies a part of their freedom. This Wissensraum therefore does not begin with suspicion against self-observation, and it will not look for blame in it at its end either.

It begins with a quieter observation. What began as a capacity can unnoticeably turn into an attitude, and the attitude becomes an instance that no longer looks in now and then but is constantly present. The person then no longer simply lives; they observe how they live. They no longer merely feel; they check whether they feel correctly. They no longer merely decide; they afterwards examine why they decided as they did. And at some point they begin to observe, on top of this, how thoroughly, how consciously and how honestly they observe themselves.

Something changes in this that is hard to show, because it makes no noise. The moment that was meant to be lived becomes material for evaluation. A sorrow is no longer merely sorrow but a finding. Anger is no longer merely anger but a pattern. Even joy can be examined: whether it is genuine, whether it is deserved, whether it perhaps means repression. The person does not lose their experience. They lose the immediacy with which it might show itself.

This space therefore does not ask whether self-knowledge is good or bad. It asks what happens when awareness itself becomes a new form of inner measuring, and what the old paths of wisdom say about it, each in its own language and with its own presuppositions.

“*Looking is not the question. The question is whether anyone is still there to be looked at.*”

◆ 2. Consciousness as a New Ambition

There was a time when inner development was a slow, often unnoticed ripening. Today it can become a task that wants to be fulfilled.

Earlier ages knew the maturing of a human being as something that happened while they lived: through loss and responsibility, through love, through illness, through the quiet aging of one's

own certainties. No one would have said they were working on their maturation, any more than they would say they were working on their hunger. It was a process, not a project.

The present has given the inner life an infrastructure of its own. There are books, courses, conversation formats and applications for almost every stirring. Modern people know their patterns, their triggers, their attachment styles, their beliefs, their needs, their wounds and their fields of development, and much of this has been truly helpful. People have understood through it why they react as they do, and some found the strength to change something only through it. It would be foolish to diminish that.

At the same time a peculiar shift shows itself. Self-optimization no longer ends with body, career and productivity. Mindfulness, healing, awareness and spirituality too can become fields of achievement in which one can advance, fall behind and compare oneself. Whoever does not develop their consciousness is almost forced to explain themselves. Whoever does develop it is expected to be able to show it, in words, in concepts, in the right language of the inner life. In this way consciousness becomes a new ambition, and the ambition itself dresses in serenity.

A new tiredness belongs to this situation, one that is hard to name because it is not overload through work but through one's own interior. It is the tiredness of someone who is never finished, because there is always something more to understand, integrate or resolve. Whoever feels it easily doubts themselves, and the doubt at once supplies new material for the next examination.

“The maturation that used to happen became a development that is supposed to be accomplished.”

◆ 3. From Tool to Inner Giver of Truth

At the beginning stands a tool, and it is a good one. That one day it decides who one is, no one resolved.

Naming and ordering one's own stirrings first of all gives support. Whoever can say that what runs through them is fear, and not threat, is already a little less at its mercy. The pattern that has been recognized loses some of its power. The ordering of the inner life, like any ordering, is a gain and deserves respect before it is questioned.

Then reduction begins, and it begins kindly. A description becomes a characteristic, a characteristic an identity, an identity a yardstick. *That's just how I am. I have this pattern. I'm not*

there yet. The sentences sound like self-knowledge, and yet a small shift already lies in them: what is observed is fixed as the observed, and the observer becomes the one who knows how one stands.

From here it is only a step to reversal. Whoever has oriented themselves long enough by an inner measure no longer hears, at some point, that it is a measure. It becomes the voice that says what is true about one's own reality: whether this feeling is justified, whether that reaction was mature, whether one truly loves what one believes one loves. The tool that was set up for clarification has become the inner giver of truth, and like every giver of truth it demands obedience.

How the human being over time became the measured himself, and how he finally carried the scales with him, was told by Wissensraum No. 16 — Degradation of the Self. Here the gaze rests on another side of the same movement. It is not about the history of the measure, but about the inner shape of the one who wields it, and the question of what might release him from this task.

“*The measure that once helped now passes judgment on the one who applied it.*”

◆ 4. The Second Observer

Where a person continually looks at themselves, a second participant arises beside the experience. It does not intervene, but it evaluates, and the experience feels its gaze.

A woman has sent a message after a conversation, and it remains unanswered. At first there is only disappointment, plain and bodily, a small sinking. Then the inner work begins. Why does this affect me so much? Is this my fear of loss? My attachment pattern? Why do I need his answer at all? Am I dependent? Shouldn't I have let go long ago? Why can't I manage that, am I not far enough yet?

After an hour she is hardly occupied with the other person any more. She is occupied with herself, occupied with the other person. Each of the questions may make sense on its own, and none is wrong. Together, however, they have brought about something the single question did not intend: the immediate encounter with the other has disappeared behind self-interpretation. The other has become a mirror in which she looks for her degree of maturity, and thereby unnoticeably ceases to be a truly Other. How this disappearance of the counterpart was described from the side of relationship in Wissensraum No. 14 — Faithfulness to One's Own Perception need not be elaborated here again.

And at some point the simplest sentence might have become almost unreachable: *I am sad because this person matters to me.* It contains no analysis and no solution. It is simply true, and needs nothing in order to be so.

This is the real difficulty of the second observer. It doubles the event, and both sides claim to be the real thing: that which desires, grieves and hopes, and that which examines, brakes and demands that it be otherwise. The quarrel between them produces an additional noise that is mistaken for the original feeling. Whoever continually regards themselves easily loses the strength simply to be. It does not heal when the regarding never ends. It divides.

“I am sad because this person matters to me.”

◆ 5. The Space of Mirrors

Whoever wants to observe the observer ends up in a space in which every answer brings forth a new question, and in which what is sought always stands one level above what is being regarded.

It can be followed as a simple consideration. Suppose I notice that I am anxious. Then in this moment I am the one who notices, and that which is noticed. If I now notice that I am anxious and that I notice it, someone is again there who notices this, and again stands outside what is noticed. Every observation of the observer brings forth a new observer. The regress has no end, because it never arrives at an object.

Philosophy has followed this riddle for a long time. David Hume reported that when he looked into himself he stumbled only on single perceptions, a tone, a warmth, a stirring, but never on a self that had them. Immanuel Kant spoke of an I that must be able to accompany all representations without being one of them. And Ludwig Wittgenstein found the simplest image: the eye is no part of its field of vision. One sees everything, except seeing itself. In our own time Jiddu Krishnamurti too pressed the thought that the observer cannot be separated from the observed, without any method being able to come of it.

The space of mirrors that self-observation builds is therefore not a fault of the person but a property of the arrangement. Where the subject makes itself an object, the object can never be complete, for the one who regards it remains outside. In this way the I is described ever more precisely, ever richer in insights and distinctions, and at the same time it grows quiet around the question of who actually experiences all this. The more map arises, the more easily the territory is forgotten.

Whoever has understood this might be tempted to solve the regress by seeking the last, the final observer. This space does not follow them there. It would be like looking for the last reflection in order finally to find the way out of the hall of mirrors.

“The map grows more exact, and the territory grows quieter.”

◆ 6. What Psychology Knows About This

Psychology has long distinguished between a self-regard that clarifies and one that circles. And it knows the limits of what we can learn about ourselves.

Research on self-awareness, which began in the early seventies with Shelley Duval and Robert Wicklund, showed that a person whose gaze is directed at themselves perceives the deviation from their own standards more sharply. That can be an occasion for correction, but it can also produce discomfort, which one then tries to escape through withdrawal or distraction. Self-awareness is evidently no neutral light.

The distinction made later by Paul Trapnell and Jennifer Campbell is therefore important: reflection and rumination are not siblings but different processes. Reflection is carried by curiosity and leads somewhere. Rumination circles around one's own inadequacy and leads above all to more rumination. Susan Nolen-Hoeksema described in a long series of studies how sustained rumination tends to prolong low mood rather than resolve it.

To this comes a finding that is more uncomfortable, because it touches trust in one's own introspection. Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson showed as early as 1977 that people often believe they know more about the reasons for their behavior than they actually do, and that their explanations are often plausible theories rather than immediate insight. Emily Pronin later described this as the introspection illusion: the tendency to credit one's own inner gaze with a reliability one denies precisely to the gaze of others. Timothy Wilson and Jonathan Schooler also found that giving reasons for one's preferences reduced satisfaction with certain choices.

Even the opposite of control does not work smoothly. Daniel Wegner described that the attempt not to think a thought may under some circumstances keep it precisely present; the findings in detail have turned out quite differently, yet the picture of a control that produces its opposite has proven compatible. Therapeutic approaches that aim to create distance from thoughts therefore do something else: they do not demand that the observer be perfected, but teach people to perceive thoughts as thoughts. More on this later.

An appreciation remains important. Self-reflection remains valuable, therapeutic self-exploration likewise, and nothing this Wissensraum says speaks against them. Psychology only shows how fine the line runs: the same movement can clarify or circle, depending on whether someone leads it or it leads them.

“The same movement can clarify or circle. It depends on who leads whom.”

◆ 7. The I-Maker — Advaita Vedānta

The traditions that have concerned themselves with the self for millennia did not first ask the question in our time. The first of these voices comes from India.

In Advaita Vedānta, the teaching of non-duality, the inner world has a precise description. Its collective name is Antaḥkaraṇa, the inner instrument, and in it functions work that are kept apart: Manas, the thinking and doubting mind; Buddhi, the discriminating and deciding faculty; Citta, the store of impressions; and Ahaṁkāra, literally the I-maker. It is the one that makes experience into personal property: *I* am afraid, *my* pain, *my* development.

Whoever takes this description seriously notices that the examining, evaluating observer of which this Wissensraum speaks belongs to this instrument. It is no witness in the sense of the tradition but an activity of the mind that forms judgments and attributes them to the I. Precisely here lies an important distinction: the Sākṣin, the witness, is in the teaching bare awareness, which lets everything appear without evaluating and without wanting anything. It is not the inner judge, and it cannot be improved, because it has nothing to improve.

For this reason the tradition does not stop at description. Since the Upaniṣads the thought is repeated that the self that knows everything cannot itself become an object of knowledge: the seer of seeing cannot be seen. The classical answer is not to seek it after all, but to give up the confusion. Where the human being equates themselves with the thought, the feeling, the body, the role, they are asked which of these they truly are. *Neti, neti*, not this, not this, is the movement, and it is less negation than relief.

It would be a misunderstanding to take Advaita for a technique of self-observation. Self-inquiry, Ātma-vicāra, as it appears with Ramana Maharshi, directs attention not to the checking of states but to the source from which the feeling of I itself arises. It is the opposite of surveillance. And that Brahman, the Absolute, lies in the teaching beyond all categories means too that no description of the I, however exact, reaches what is meant in it.

“The I-maker works without pause. It is only not the one it takes itself to be.”

◆ 8. The Emptiness of the Observer — Buddhism and Zen

Buddhism goes a step further than Advaita does: even the observing instance has no lasting essence. What examines itself is itself conditioned and impermanent.

It also differs from Advaita in one presupposition, and that matters. Where the Upaniṣads speak of Ātman and think it not different from Brahman, the Buddha's teaching denies a lasting core: Anattā, not-self. In a famous discourse, which tradition places at the beginning of his teaching, the Buddha asks his listeners whether body, feeling, perception, formations and consciousness can be a self. Were they, one could dispose over them: *Let it be thus, let it not be thus*. Because they escape this disposal and lead to suffering when clung to, they are not self. The claim to command one's own interior is here not criticized morally but exposed as factually impossible.

This touches the examining observer directly. It too is experience among experiences, a process that arises when conditions are present and passes when they fall away. The observer who wants to get to the bottom of herself therefore finds, however far she searches, processes but no owner. Nāgārjuna made from this a language of emptiness, Śūnyatā, which is often misunderstood as nothingness. What is meant is the absence of an independent, self-subsisting essence, not the absence of world. And he explicitly warns against making emptiness itself into a view that one could hold and possess.

In practice this corresponds to an attitude attributed to the old discourse to Bāhiya: in the seen there shall be only the seen, in the heard only the heard. This is not surveillance but a return of seeing to the seen. Sati, remembrance or mindfulness, means in this sense an awake presence and expressly not evaluating every stirring. That modern practice sometimes degenerates into the latter is a misunderstanding, not an essential trait of the teaching.

In Zen this concern takes a terse, almost playful form. Dōgen laid the study of the self and the forgetting of the self into a single movement, and Shunryū Suzuki later spoke of the beginner's mind, which does not know what is coming and therefore stays open. Neither means a program. The beginner's mind that resolves to be one has already ceased to be one.

“Whoever wants to get to the bottom of themselves finds processes. And it grows quiet when they no longer seek an owner.”

♦ 9. The Examining and the Pacified Self — Sufism

In Sufism self-examination is itself a path. That makes this voice especially revealing for our theme, for it knows examination and knows at the same time its end.

The Qur'an speaks in several places of the nafs, the self or soul, and the later teachings distinguished it by states. Best known is the threefold division: the nafs that urges toward evil, al-nafs al-ammāra; the nafs that reproaches itself, al-nafs al-lawwāma; and the nafs that has come to rest, al-nafs al-muṭma'inna. Other schools know more stages, and the threefold division is only the most widespread among several divisions.

The middle stage is the most revealing for our theme. The reproaching self is the inner instance that examines, admonishes and starts at every omission, and the tradition did not discard it. It practiced it. Muḥāsaba, self-accounting, is a recognized practice in which a person calls their day to account before themselves, and with it Murāqaba, the watchfulness of the heart, is joined. The early author al-Muḥāsibī carries self-accounting in his very name, and al-Ghazālī dedicated a book of its own to both practices.

It is important that this path does not end where it begins. The goal is not perfect examination but the self that has come to rest. In the teachings of passing away and remaining, Fanā' and Baqā', it is described how the self-image one wanted to guard and improve steps back, and how afterwards something remains that lives and acts without self-guarding. It is no extinction of the person. It is the end of the necessity of continually confirming it.

It is worth hearing the voice of Sufism alongside the other two, because it prevents the misunderstanding that self-examination is fundamentally wrong. It was a path, and paths have goals that are no longer path. At the same time it shows that this tradition too reckons with a danger the path itself brings along: that the examination becomes its own purpose.

“The reproaching self is no enemy. It is only not the goal.”

♦ 10. Gelassenheit and the Water — Meister Eckhart and Taoism

Two voices from very different worlds approach the thought from two sides, and they speak more of letting than of doing.

Meister Eckhart, the Dominican of the fourteenth century, coined in his German a word that still resounds: Gelâzenheit. It does not mean equanimity but a letting, namely a letting go of one's own, of self-will and self-possession, also the spiritual kind. Related is Abegescheidenheit,

detachment, which he even places above love. In his sermon on poverty of spirit he describes the poor person as one who wants nothing, knows nothing and has nothing. Eckhart says this not as instruction for self-observation but as a direction in which everything the I could hold on to, including its own piety, may be let go. With him too it is no program that someone fulfills; it happens where the human being does not stand in its way.

From an entirely different world speaks the Daodejing. The Dao is described there as something that cannot be held and cannot be named, and the person who follows it acts in wu wei, in not-forcing, which does not mean inactivity but an acting that goes with the course of things. Study, it says there, increases daily, but the Dao decreases daily. Water, which forces nothing and reaches everything, is the image of this attitude, and it speaks of a way that demands no proof of achievement.

The Zhuangzi, the second great book of this tradition, contains images that strike our theme particularly well. Yan Hui reports to his teacher that he can now sit and forget, *zuowang*, letting limbs and intellect fall. The perfect person, it says elsewhere, uses their heart like a mirror: they take nothing in and hold nothing fast, they respond and do not store. That is the counter-image to the space of mirrors of self-observation, for this mirror collects no results.

At the end of this book stands a short story. Hundun, the undivided, has no openings in his face, and his two friends, out of gratitude, bore him one each day so that he may see and hear and breathe like the others. On the seventh day he dies. One can read in it the story of every well-meaning measuring.

“*Water demands no proof. It goes the way it goes.*”

◆ 11. At the Limit of Measuring — Five Paths, No Pyramid

Five traditions have been given a voice here, and it would be a mistake to draw them together into a single teaching. They stand beside one another, not above one another.

Advaita knows a self that never becomes an object. Buddhism denies a lasting core and teaches not-self. Sufism assigns self-examination to a path at whose end stands a self come to rest, living in relation to a Counterpart that it is not itself. Eckhart speaks of a letting that meets God in the ground of the soul, and the Daodejing of a way that cannot be named. These are different presuppositions about what is, and no one does a tradition a favor by translating it into the language of another in order to rescue the commonality.

There is no pyramid at whose peak all would converge, and no sequence of stages that would ascend from the Daodejing through Eckhart to Advaita. Whoever builds one has already introduced another observer who surveys and classifies everything. What connects the voices in this Wissensraum is a single question, and it comes not from them but from here: *What happens to the claim of the I to be able to know, master or produce itself completely?*

They answer this question differently, but strikingly similarly in the way they meet the claim. None of them promises that the observer will one day see through itself conclusively. None demands that it must keep exerting itself for this. Advaita dissolves the claim by giving up the confusion; Buddhism by showing that there is nothing available over which to dispose; Sufism by subordinating self-examination to a coming to rest; Eckhart and the Dao by speaking of a letting that cannot be made.

This is a resonance, not an equation, and the distinction is important. Resonance means that something vibrates along in a space without having to be the same. The Wissensraum hears several tones and asserts no chord.

“Five paths, no pyramid. And a question that need not be answered on any of them.”

◆ 12. When Stillness Becomes Achievement

Here lies the most dangerous point of the path, and it lies not at the beginning but near the goal: even liberation from measuring can be measured.

A small step is all it takes. Whoever has understood that the observer is a construction can resolve to be less of an observer. *I must identify less. I must let go. I must become stiller. I must not think so much.* The sentences sound like wisdom, and yet nothing has changed. The measurer has merely changed his clothes. He now checks how well the letting go succeeds, how deep the stillness is, how far he already is from his ego.

In this lies a self-contradiction that cannot be circumvented. Whoever wants to forget themselves keeps remembering that they want to forget themselves. Self-forgetfulness as a goal cancels itself, for a goal requires someone who moves toward it and checks their progress. The traditions know this trap very precisely. Nāgārjuna warns against making emptiness a view. Eckhart says that even the wish for God can be self-will. Sufism reckons with the danger that even purity becomes possession. The Daodejing recommends not wanting too much, not even not-wanting.

In addition, stillness does not heal when it is prescribed as a remedy. It is no medicine and no technique one could apply to achieve something particular. Some people experience stillness as

relief, others as distress, and both experiences are valid. Whoever seeks something promised in it makes it another yardstick.

A word on withdrawal belongs here too. Withdrawal from the noise of constant self-questioning is no escape, and silence is not absence. Yet it makes a difference whether someone detaches from the quarrel of their inner voices or from the relationship with the people who need them. A stillness that turns away from the world in order to regard itself undisturbed remains self-observation, only in finer form.

“Whoever wants to achieve stillness has merely put the scales in another room.”

◆ 13. The Collapse of the Measurer — and Its Limit

What can then happen is no victory of the true over the false I and no higher stage. It is rather the end of an effort that has exhausted itself.

One can imagine that the measurer is one day not overcome but ceases, because no one renews the commission any more. Thoughts may remain thoughts, sensations sensations, and not-knowing may be not-knowing without already being a finding. There is no perfect observer who would be left over, and no perfect state one could claim. The scales do not lose their precision but their necessity. This is an image, a contemplative one, and it should be read as such.

Here the Wissensraum must draw its own limit. It is not permissible to make of this image a state one could bring about or strive for, and still less to equate it with psychological experiences of entirely different origin. There are people for whom the constant circling of thoughts is no philosophical question but part of a burden: with persistent rumination, with depression, with anxiety, with compulsions that express themselves in checking and examining. For them the advice simply to let go of observation means nothing that could be put into practice, and at worst only another reproach.

Equally valid: whoever experiences that their own experience appears strange, unreal or as if behind glass, that the sense of their own I is fading, or whoever after intense meditation or self-inquiry falls into persistent restlessness, emptiness or fear, should not interpret this as spiritual progress. Research on meditation-related distress, as described for instance by Willoughby Britton and her group, shows that such experiences occur and are to be taken seriously. Here people belong in professional support, in medical and psychotherapeutic hands, not in another project of self-development.

The same applies to the therapies that work with distance from thoughts. Approaches such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy or mindfulness-based cognitive therapy have good evidence, and they do something other than what this Wissensraum speaks of: they practice noticing thoughts as thoughts, in a protected setting and with a clear aim. At the same time research on mindfulness as a whole urges precision rather than euphoria. What philosophy and contemplation describe does not replace such help, and is not meant to.

“The image of collapse belongs to contemplation. Where people suffer, it belongs in professional hands.”

◆ 14. Conclusion — The Maturation of Return

Maturation is here no further stage but a way back: to where what happened was already happening.

It would be a misunderstanding to think of the way out of the space of mirrors as an exit from life. Whoever stops turning every inner stirring into a statement about themselves does not withdraw from relationship, responsibility and world. They rather return to them. Then it is once again about eating and working, loving and grieving, quarreling, failing and deciding, and from none of these moments need an identity check be made. Maturation would then be the return into the ordinary, not as a renunciation of awareness but as awareness that no longer has to prove anything to anyone.

One can imagine it very simply. A breath that comes and goes. A step on a staircase. A hand that holds a cup and sets it down. A sound from the street that one hears without knowing what it is supposed to mean. None of it says anything about the one who experiences it, and none needs an interpretation. Perhaps the woman of the unanswered message too returns one day to her evening, with the same sadness, which is now only what it is, because this person matters to her.

Nothing needs to become empty. Perhaps it may simply stop being continually filled, interpreted and measured.

This is no teaching, and there is no way to it that someone could walk and tick off. It is rather a possibility that is already there when no one lays claim to it. This question may remain standing without being answered: Who would I be if I did not have to answer this question? And the other: What would happen if, for the length of a breath, nothing about me needed to be clarified?

“Sometimes insight begins precisely where one stops trying to force an answer.”

◇ Sources & Lines of Thought

This Wissensraum is not a scientific text and gives no references in its running text. Those who wish to follow the movements described here further will find connection in the following lines of thought. The traditions are placed side by side, not equated; for passages and wordings it is advisable to consult the respective editions.

David Hume described in the *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739/40, Book I, Part 4, Section 6) that when looking into himself he always finds only single perceptions, never a self that has them.

Immanuel Kant spoke in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (B 131) of the “I think” that must be able to accompany all my representations.

Ludwig Wittgenstein noted in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921, propositions 5.632–5.634) that the subject does not belong to the world but is its limit, and compared it with the eye, which does not occur in the visual field.

Gilbert Ryle treated in *The Concept of Mind* (1949, ch. VI) the impossibility of grasping one's own subject as an object.

Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (III, 4, 2, also III, 7 and III, 8): the seer of seeing cannot be seen. The Kena Upanishad (II) circles the same thought of the knower who withdraws from knowing.

Śaṅkara (*Upadeśasāhasrī*) and the tradition of Advaita Vedānta; on the distinction between seer and seen, the text *Dṛg-Dṛśya-Viveka*, attributed to Advaita. On self-inquiry, the teachings of Ramana Maharshi.

Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta (Saṃyutta Nikāya 22.59): the discourse on not-self. Bāhiya Sutta (Udāna 1.10): in the seen only the seen. Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta (Majjhima Nikāya 10): the foundations of mindfulness.

Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (among others XIII.8 and XXIV.18): emptiness as dependent arising, and the warning not to make it a view.

Dōgen, *Genjōkōan* (in the *Shōbōgenzō*): the study of the self and its forgetting. Shunryū Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (1970): the beginner's mind.

On the nafs: Qur'an 12:53, 75:2 and 89:27. Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, early author on self-accounting; Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*, with its sections on Muḥāsaba and Murāqaba.

Meister Eckhart, *Reden der Unterweisung* (Talks of Instruction) and the sermon on poverty of spirit (Sermon 52, in the numbering of the Quint edition): Gelâzenheit and Abegescheidenheit.

Daodejing, among others chapters 37, 48 and 71. Zhuangzi, chapter 6 (sitting and forgetting) and chapter 7 (the mirror; Hundun).

Shelley Duval and Robert Wicklund shaped research on self-awareness with *A Theory of Objective Self-Awareness* (1972).

Richard Nisbett and Timothy Wilson examined in “Telling more than we can know” (*Psychological Review*, 1977) the limits of introspective report; Emily Pronin described the introspection illusion in 2009.

Timothy Wilson and Jonathan Schooler, “Thinking too much” (*Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1991): giving reasons for preferences can impair decisions.

Paul Trapnell and Jennifer Campbell distinguished rumination and reflection in 1999 in *JPSP*; Susan Nolen-Hoeksema studied rumination from 1991 onward, Treynor and colleagues its facets in 2003.

Daniel Wegner, “Ironic processes of mental control” (*Psychological Review*, 1994).

Steven Hayes and colleagues, *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* (1999); Zindel Segal, Mark Williams and John Teasdale, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression* (2002).

On meditation-related distress: Jared Lindahl, Willoughby Britton and colleagues, “The varieties of contemplative experience” (*PLoS ONE*, 2017); Nicholas Van Dam and colleagues, “Mind the hype” (*Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 2018).

Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (2010) and *Psychopolitics* (2014); Alain Ehrenberg, *The Weariness of the Self* (1998/2004): on the present of the achievement subject.

Jiddu Krishnamurti, *Freedom from the Known* (1969): the observer and the observed.

◇ Glossary

Note: The terms stem from different worlds of thought and belief. They stand side by side here and form no unified doctrine. Their application to the question of self-observation is a philosophical approach, neither proof of effectiveness nor an equation of the traditions.

Term	Origin	English	Meaning in this Wissensraum
Ahaṃkāra	Sanskrit (Vedānta)	I-maker; I-principle	The function that makes experience “my” experience; here the place where events become the possession of a person.
Antaḥkaraṇa	Sanskrit (Vedānta)	inner instrument	Collective name for Manas, Buddhi, Citta and Ahaṃkāra; the whole of the inner functions.
Manas	Sanskrit	thinking, doubting mind	The back and forth of imagining and doubt.
Buddhi	Sanskrit	discriminating faculty	The judging, deciding faculty; related to the examining instance without being equated with it.
Ātman	Sanskrit (Upaniṣads)	self; innermost self	In Advaita that which never becomes an object; not the observing I.
Brahman	Sanskrit	the Absolute	In Advaita not different from Ātman; beyond all categories.
Sākṣin	Sanskrit	witness	Bare awareness without evaluation; expressly not the examining observer.
Dṛg–Dṛśya	Sanskrit	seer – seen	The distinction between subject and object of perception.
Ātma-vicāra	Sanskrit	self-inquiry	In the sense of Ramana Maharshi; no self-surveillance, no checking of states.
Anattā / Anātman	Pāli / Sanskrit	not-self	The insight that no lasting, available core is to be found in experience; no claim that there is no I in everyday life.
Śūnyatā	Sanskrit (Mahāyāna)	emptiness	Absence of independent existence; neither nothingness nor nihilism, and itself no view to be held on to.
Pratītyasamutpāda	Sanskrit	dependent arising	Everything that appears arises conditionally, the observer too.
Sati	Pāli	mindfulness; remembrance	Awake presence; not synonymous with evaluating self-observation.
Shoshin	Japanese (Zen)	beginner's mind	The openness of one who does not already know; no state that one produces.
Genjōkōan	Japanese (Dōgen)	actualizing the fundamental point	Title of a text by Dōgen; study and forgetting of the self as one movement.
Nafs	Arabic	self; soul	Often described in three states: ammāra (urging), lawwāma (reproaching), muṭmaʿinna (come to rest). The threefold division is only one of several.

Term	Origin	English	Meaning in this Wissensraum
Muḥāsaba	Arabic (Sufism)	self-accounting	A recognized practice of self-examination; here an example that examination is a path and not its goal.
Murāqaba	Arabic (Sufism)	watchfulness of the heart	Attentive keeping-present; in the tradition directed at the Counterpart, not at the self-image.
Fanā' / Baqā'	Arabic (Sufism)	passing away / remaining	The stepping back of the self-image and what remains afterwards; no extinction of the person.
Gelâzenheit	Middle High German (Eckhart)	letting-be; releasement	Letting go of self-will and self-possession, not mere equanimity.
Abegescheidenheit	Middle High German (Eckhart)	detachment	Inner freedom from clinging, also to piety.
Dao	Chinese	the Way	That which cannot be held on to and cannot be named completely.
Wu wei	Chinese (Daoism)	not-forcing	Acting that goes with the course of things; not inactivity.
Zuowang	Chinese (Zhuangzi)	sitting and forgetting	Image of letting go of limbs and intellect; no procedure.
Rumination	Psychology (Lat.)	rumination; brooding	Circling, little solution-oriented thinking about one's own situation.
Decentering	Psychology	distance from thoughts	Noticing thoughts as thoughts without taking them for facts.

∞ Further Exploration

Those who wish to pursue the questions touched on here will find adjacent explorations in the WISSENSRÄUME series:

- Wissensraum No. 7 — Beyond Listening: The Essence of True Presence
- Wissensraum No. 12 — The Reality of Non-Duality
- Wissensraum No. 14 — Faithfulness to One's Own Perception
- Wissensraum No. 16 — Degradation of the Self
- Wissensraum No. 17 — The Radical Presence

○ WISSENSRÄUME — Appreciation

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△ WISSENSRÄUME — Notes

This text serves orientation, deeper reflection and personal engagement. It replaces neither medical, psychotherapeutic, nursing nor legal advice, and constitutes neither a diagnosis nor a recommendation for treatment. Anyone in a burdensome life situation will find professional support with physicians, in psychotherapeutic practices, in counselling centres and in pastoral care. This expressly includes persistent rumination, anxiety, depressive moods, compulsions, experiences of alienation and distress connected with meditation or self-inquiry.

The lines of thought named here stand for possibilities of connection, not for a complete account of the respective works. The connections presented here are a model of thought, not a scientifically established doctrine. The traditions remain different in their presuppositions; placing them side by side is a resonance, not an equation.