

Knowledge and Transcendence:
Modern Idealist Philosophy and
Yogācāra Buddhism

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THE EVOLUTION OF YOGACARA THOUGHT

The Yogācāra school (*Yogācāra-vijñānavāda*) is usually considered one of four great schools representing Indian Buddhist philosophy (along with the Sarvāstivāda, Sautrantika, and Mādhyamika schools). Yogācāra and Mādhyamika are especially known as the two pinnacles of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Both establish their philosophies on the basis of "Emptiness" (*śūnyatā*), and try to subsume or include all else into this Emptiness. They nevertheless appear as two rivalling standpoints because their methods of approaching and ways of trying to express the character of that same Emptiness show a rather different character.

To briefly outline, and thereby probably oversimplify, their differences, Mādhyamika thought is permeated by a spirit of intense criticism and negation in an endeavor to apprehend Emptiness by a wholesale negation and dismissal of the entire situation to which we are bound by our limited existences. By contrast, rather than denying all limited things at a stroke, Yogācāra philosophy digs for the roots of our limited situation, and then attempts to bring us to a point whereat an understanding of Emptiness realizes itself from within the limitations of existence, by a conversion process or "change of base." On this analysis, we might say that in contrast with Mādhyamika's direct

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and unmediated grasp of the notion of Emptiness, Yogācāra takes a more indirect and mediated approach.

A similar difference between two standpoints can be found in a number of places. For example, in the difference which Hegel sees with respect to the understanding of the Absolute between his own dialectical method and Schelling's intuitive method, we can recognize an analogous distinction. According to Hegel, Schelling's standpoint of intellectual intuition, whereby direct contact with the Absolute is gained in a transcendence, in one big sweep, of all finite and relative elements, means that everything ends up in a blind and contentless whole, "as the night in which all cows are black." The realization of the Absolute, if it is to be real, cannot come about by a one-sweep transcendence of all the relative but must, on the contrary, develop and come to self-awareness at one with the relative elements and from within the activity of these elements themselves. For Hegel, rather than a "direct intuition" of the Absolute, its "presentation" (*Darstellung*) was important. If we apply the difference between these two standpoints to the attitudes and methods of approaching the notion of Emptiness, we may say that the Mādhyamikan attempt to negate all limited existence at once is quite close to Schelling's stand on "direct intuition." On the other hand, Yogācāra's attempt to let Emptiness realize itself (develop into self-awareness) by an enlightenment from within the limited realm itself is rather close to Hegel's dialectical standpoint in this respect. And it is from within this dialectical method that for the first time the notion of Emptiness can take concrete form and put down roots in the hearts of men.

Yogācāra philosophy was perfected in the fifth century A.D. by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, but in fact constitutes a major current running through and pervading Mahāyāna Buddhism from its very beginnings. Therefore, in order to grasp the full picture of Yogācāra thought, we must pause to consider the historical development of some of its basic themes. We actually should trace the origins of these basic

themes—the doctrine of "conscious construction only" (*viññapti-mātra*), the theory of the "change of consciousness," the "three-nature" doctrine, and the theory of yoga—from the Mahāyāna sūtras of the middle period (the 5th century) back to the original Mahāyāna canon; and likewise look at their further development in commentators posterior to Asaṅga and Vasubandhu. It would also be important to examine the influence and interaction of other Buddhist sects on Yogācāra. But that is a demand beyond the ability of this writer, and in any case beyond the scope of this essay.

Our purpose here, as mentioned before, is the more modest one of seeking clues within Yogācāra Buddhism which will deepen our grasp of or help to resolve the modern Western philosophical problem of the hidden background and basis of human consciousness—how they came about, how they are interpreted, and how they may be transcended. Nevertheless, in order to understand Yogācāra adequately, it is necessary to have at least a brief glance at its historical development.

An eminently simple and clear description of Yogācāra's development can be gleaned in Hattori Masaaki's essay, "Yogācāra as Yoga" (Hattori, 1970). In the following rough outline of the development of Yogācāra, we shall follow Hattori's description. Yogācāra was indeed largely perfected by the minds of Vasubandhu and Asaṅga, but the immediate origin of their thought is to be found in a middle-period Mahāyāna text, the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* (Explication of Mysteries). If we trace further back towards earlier origins, we shall find them in the "the three worlds are nothing but mind" doctrine of the *Avataṃsaka-sūtra* of the early Mahāyāna canon. It may be of interest to note a basic difference between such immediate middle-period Mahāyāna sources of Yogācāra thought as the *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, the *Tathāgata-garbha-sūtra*, the *Srīmālādevī-siṃhanāda-sūtra*, etc., and sūtras of the early Mahāyāna canon, such as the *Avataṃsaka*, the *Makā prajñā-pāramitā*, and the

Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra (Lotus). Whereas the early sūtras place the main point of emphasis on the truth of Emptiness and the omnipresence of Buddha-nature, the middle-period sūtras interpret truth more subjectively and are replete with practical concern to understand it in its association with the state of mind of each individual subject. However, there is a converse side to this strong expression of practical concern with pulling the truth of Emptiness and the omnipresence of Buddha-nature into relation with the individual subject, which is that our attention is inevitably drawn towards the "dark real side" of the human mind, that side of subjectivity which strives to refuse the truth of Emptiness.

The **Samādhinirmocana-sūtra**, for example, sheds some light on the dark real side of the human mind. But this dark side of the subject is truly the negative side of the truth of Emptiness, and first comes to light as a result of that very truth. In Yogācāra, therefore, we can see both dark and light sides—and see that they are inseparably interconnected. On the one hand, Yogācāra does take note of the darkness which envelops the minds of all sentient beings, but on the other it propounds the "Tathāgata womb" (*tathāgata-garbha*) idea which sees Buddha-nature—or Emptiness—at the origin of the minds of all sentient beings. The peculiarity of Yogācāra is not just that it directly stresses the omnipresence of Buddha-nature and Emptiness, but that it tries to present this as passing through the negative side of the reality of the subject and conquering this negativity. Put another way, Yogācāra philosophy could not exist apart from the notion of the Bodhisattva which sees the Buddha-nature at the roots of the minds of all beings, but conceives this omnipresent Buddha-nature as forever surfacing from the depths of the darkness (which is the actual state of the mind of all sentient beings), and breaking through this dark principle. Therein lies what we may call the religiosity of Yogācāra thought: the fact that it does not evaporate into mere speculation on Emptiness.

Although its broad outlines were completed by Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, Yogācāra was expanded, developed, and refined into a subtle and elaborate doctrine by many subsequent thinkers and commentators. As is the case with many great religious ideas, Yogācāra thought gave birth, in the course of its development, to two separate streams: a philosophical side and a religious side. The philosophical side is the dimension most carefully considered by such thinkers as Dignāga (ca. 640-700) and Dharmapāla (ca. 650-710); the religious emphasis, on the other hand, can be found in such Yogācāra representatives as Paramārtha (ca. 510-570) and Sthiramati (5-6 century). It is from seeing two streams of such different character that people like Frauwallner have divided the Yogācāra thinkers into two types and even come up with the theory that Vasubandhu may have been two separate persons.

To discuss such a theory would require much more extensive bibliographical and philological research, but to enter that area is beyond our present purpose. Let us simply remark that this division of a stream from a single source into several branches is typical not only of natural rivers but is found throughout the history of intellectual life. We need not conclude that there were two separate sources from the fact that there are now two different streams. Nor do these separate streams always settle in their own tracks; rather in the process of leaving the old ruts and returning to their source, they eventually give new life to once inflexible and dried up schools of thought.

One historical impetus which made a dramatic contribution to the progress of the research on Yogācāra thought was the discovery of the Sanskrit originals of Yogācāra texts in the early part of the twentieth century. An important fact gleaned from this research was that the Yogācāra thought which was transmitted from China to Japan by the Hossō sect, took its roots in the Ch'eng wei-shih lun, i.e., the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi-śāstra* of the Indian Dharmapāla) which stressed the theoretical and epistemological side of Yogācāra. The fact that Japanese

interpretations of Yogācāra were based entirely on that one text is now seen to be a serious obstacle to proper understanding of the real basis of Yogācāra thought. The dialectical philosopher Dharmapāla's Yogācāra was conveyed to China by Hsüan-tsang (in 659 A.D.), while the religious side of Yogācāra was transmitted to China by the translations of Paramārtha (a century earlier). But Paramārtha's contributions have long been hidden by the greater authority of Hsüan-tsang. The discovery of the Sanskrit originals then opened the way to see the two in true perspective and to discern the distance between the two.

As Ui Hakuju has indicated, it now appeared that Hsüan-tsang, modeling himself on Dharmapāla, did not adequately preserve the religious side of Yogācāra, and a reappraisal of the importance of Paramārtha resulted. Put differently, among the by-products of modern Buddhology, grounded as it is in the methods of literary criticism, can be counted the possibility of shedding new light on the religious dimensions of Yogācāra Buddhism.

Does this mean that the religious side of Yogācāra was not in the least transmitted to or alive within Japan? I do not think so. Taking a hint from Yamaguchi Susumu, the truly religious side of Yogācāra was transmitted by the scholars-commentators of the Pure Land school to Shinran, and was profoundly revived in the thought of Shinran himself. Of course, Shinran's interpretation was not based on philological research but rather on the intuition of a religious creative genius. Intuitions detached from research may end only in subjective fancy but, on the other hand, to break out of the ruts of literary scholasticism we have no other means but intuition. If in some sense we can say that the religious side of Yogācāra Buddhism found its way down to Shinran, then conversely we might surmise that through Shinran's thought we can in turn illuminate something of Yogācāra and express some of its religious depth.

THE MEANING OF CONSCIOUS CONSTRUCTION ONLY
Let us now return to Yogācāra thought itself, and consider

some of its central themes. The basic theme of Yogācāra evolved from the problem of knowledge, the central project being to shed light on the state of our knowledge and on the conditions of its establishment. As the term, *vijñaptimātratā*, itself implies, this doctrine tries to make clear that all that exists exists merely as a construct of consciousness, and that there are no independent objects in existence that could be underlying causes of these appearances or expressions of the mind. That is why one came to speak of "conscious construction only without any external object." Exactly what would have been the Yogācāra's basic intention in explaining everything by the "construction-only" theory?

"In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the three worlds (or three levels of existence) are theorized to be no more than appearance only. As it is written in the sūtras, 'Yea disciples of Buddha, everything in the three worlds is only within Mind.' Compressing these words from the twenty-second chapter of the *Avatamsaka-sūtra* into the expression: 'The three worlds are only conscious construction,' the *Vimśatika-vijñaptimātratā-siddhi* of Vasubandhu develops its arguments as an elucidation of these words. The three worlds, of course, consist of the realm of desire (*kāma-loka*), the realm of form (*rūpa-loka*), and the spiritual or metaphysical realm (*arūpa-loka*). Although a human being is affected by each of these realms and presents a living synthesis of them, they are all relative, as the line 'the three realms are only conscious construction' says. All things which present themselves to human experience are indeed no more than conscious constructs. There is nothing which possesses its own real essence and thus exists in reality; since all is conscious construction, everything is simply like phantasms. If we press further, anything appearing or experienced in any realm or domain, all so-called 'existents,' are no more than an expression of mind. Even things which are normally thought to be independent objects existing on their own in the external world completely apart from consciousness are in fact set up by

the mind as if they existed by themselves. In short, behind all that appears in consciousness, there are no objects independently existing. Thus, the *Vimśatika-vijñaptimātratā-siddhi* denies the existence of an independent external world and makes everything internal and mind-dependent. Insofar, its intention seems to be to develop an epistemological theory of consciousness explaining how our conscious construction of things is established; and to move from a realistic theory of knowledge into a pure idealism.

This, however, does not exhaust the meaning of Yogācāra thought. Yogācāra's denial of external objects and internalization of them in mind is not based on a theoretical interest in epistemological doctrine, but rather on the practical concern of cutting off the shackles constituted by the outer objects. In the last part of the *Vimśatika-vijñaptimātratā-siddhi*, it is propounded that a true understanding of "conscious construction only" is the "realm of Buddha" (Buddha-land). The Buddha-land is then described as a realm free from all shackles and completely unhindered by any obstacle, as a realm of freedom. Therefore, an accurate understanding of "conscious construction only" entails more than a mere explanation of the way external objects are established by consciousness, for it is first of all a reaching towards that realm of freedom, far from the spell, threat, or enchantment of external objects through the denial of their external existence.

In this sense, even if we can say that Yogācāra with its theory of "conscious construction only" is a Buddhist idealism, such an account fails to grasp the fundamental essence of this philosophy. For the essence which permeates all Yogācāra thought is more than a concern with illuminating the transcendental condition of objects, but is rather the practical concern with abolishing the enchantment and delusion which come from those objects.

Therefore, the second important issue we must scrutinize at this juncture is to clarify the nature of the "objects" in the context of "conscious construction only without objects (*artha*).\" Even while using the single word

"objects," we can distinguish many situations and contextual meanings of "objects." Perhaps the first objects which come to mind are objects of sense perception in space, such as a tree or a rock. But we can say that imaginary mental images in time are also objects. In the case of the latter, however, our desires and emotions enter into them and mingle with them, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to make the clear separation between self and objects which we can see on the perceptual level. Objects wherein the self and the object intermingle so as to make a clear distinction difficult could be called "objects on the emotional level."

These two types of objects do not necessarily appear separately; more commonly they overlap. When overlapping with objects of sense perception, imaginary images take on more definite shapes and, conversely, our sense perceptions, when supported by our prior mental images, come to be distorted by worldly desires and emotions. Yet we must keep distinguishing these two types of objects. The tree disinterestedly perceived before my very eyes and the tree perceived as an obstacle to traffic (or from a utilitarian perspective as so much usable lumber, or again as an object of deep aesthetic or even emotional appeal) are the same tree. But, while it is the same tree perceived in each of these cases, its character as an object comes to differ as the desires or emotions lacking in the first perception are included in the latter. Thus I may see my own feelings even in the tree perceived before my eyes. In this way I develop an intimacy with objects and come to be tied to them by invisible strings. What is important here is to understand the peculiar status of objects on the practical, emotionally influenced level.

At first glance, the objects whose independent self-existence is denied by the *Vimśatika-vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi-śāstra* seem to be objects in the dimension of sense-perception, since the textual demonstration of this point uses objects of sense-perception as examples. But, in my opinion, these objects must really rather be those of the

practical-emotional dimension. For the objects of the realm of sense perception do not inevitably fetter and bedazzle our wills. Rather, our perception of these objects for what they really are, apart from our practical interests, can work to release us from our enchantment with them. The objects which so daze and enchant us are not just the objects of sense perception but rather these objects as mental images in our imaginations. We are not troubled or made to suffer by the tree or rock before our eyes. What troubles us and causes us to suffer are the "river of pus," "the forest of needles," and the "guardians of hell" (all images of hell in Buddhist mythology) before our eyes.

To be freed from the threat of such images of our imaginations it would be helpful if we would pay much closer attention to the physical rock or tree. From this view, the objects which we must negate are not the perceptual objects in space but the imaginary images in time. Our text uses perceptual objects as examples in its demonstration of "conscious construction only," because it sees them as analogies to the practical realm; and we do not need to take them literally. Even if we were to take them literally as referring to the realm of perceptual objects, we must at least remember the practical intentions of the demonstration, and that the objects of the perceptual realm are taken as strongly colored by the practical realm.

The state of our everyday experience is one of envelopment by passions and delusions, because each of us embraces in himself, and is tossed about by, so many absolutes or idols that enchant him and shackle him right in the middle of himself. Those are only imaginary and therefore unreal objects, but precisely because they are unreal and imaginary, they enchant us and fool us. And as long as such "objects," while imaginary and lacking in foundation, move us, then in a sense we can say that they exist for us. This is the kind of object which Yogācāra is trying to negate; Yogācāra's purpose is to liberate us from the objects of our own imaginations that control and enchant

us.

Gabriel Marcel says that the objects with real existence for me are the things which participate in "my body." This is no longer the kind of object which we can call "an object" in a strict sense. Marcel says that "the object exists only as long as it partakes in the nature of 'my body'—or, in other words, only as long as we do not think of it as an object." This is also the meaning of "object" within Yogācāra thought. Put conversely, even if the object is represented, as long as it does not partake of the nature of "my body," it cannot become a reality that can beleager and entrance me with its opaque and mysteriously important background. This is why Marcel says: "The idea, so far as it is represented on the pattern of an object shares with the object as such the characteristic of non-existence, the object only existing in so far as it shares in the nature of my body, i.e., in so far as it is not thought of as object" (Marcel 1949, p.9). We might say that such an idea does not really exist for us.

What hypostatizes objects which do not really exist, and becomes bound and fascinated by them, is less the perceptual conscious construction of objects in space than the imaginary images of the temporal dimension, as we indicated before. The world wherein we are bound and driven by those hypostatized objects is a world wherein we are shut up in an invisible prison. Therein we may be essentially free insofar as we are human, but effectively we are not free at all. Our freedom is distorted and undone by this world of passions, this world wherein we are caught up in the objects of our own hypostatizing. The passivity of the passions, then, is not a simple passiveness, but rather an active passivity; not a bodily passivity, but rather a spiritual passivity: a passivity under the self-enchancement which the spirit imposes upon itself. It is from this imprisonment of the world of the passions that we must seek salvation.

What makes this liberation especially difficult, however, is that we have here an imprisonment that depends

not on external factors, but that hinges on the individual's own volition and arises as the self-binding and self-imprisoning of the will of the subject. The world of passion is a "magical world," in the sense that in it there is no gap between subject and object, but the two are conjoined. Here the subject cannot free itself from the object because the ordinary realm of perceptual images is interrupted and shut out. The *Vimśatika* characterizes this condition with the "guardians of hell" besetting and harming us. The guardians of hell appear as our persecutors insofar as they appear as "beings that persecute and cannot be persecuted," beings such as do not exist in the realm of sense perception; therefore as images of the imagination not existing in reality. What threatens, fascinates, and oppresses us is just such imaginary objects; and insofar as they exhibit power, the spatial realm of perceptual objects disappears. The first step towards breaking out of the opacity and miasma of the "magical realm," therefore, is to become aware that the world of sense perception has been lost sight of.

When we understand ideas like "the three worlds are mind only" and "conscious construction only" from this kind of practical perspective, we can see that, even if their discussion is developed like an epistemological investigation of perceptual conscious construction, we should not interpret this literally according to our ordinary view of cognition which takes perception as its model. As Professor Hattori says, "the purpose of Yogācāra philosophy was not to prove that knowledge could be established even without any objects of the external world" (Hattori 1970, p.107). Nor was it to illuminate the conditions of this establishment, while regarding as normal and objective our experiential knowledge. The purpose of the Yogācāra philosophy is to apprehend the totality of our knowledge as something shackled by the spell of objects, and therefore swayed by pollution and delusion, and to secure a purified and supra-mundane wisdom by abandoning this pollution.

So, the reason Yogācāra reaches back towards the

roots of experiential knowledge is to comprehend the cause which grounds all experiential knowledge as a dream, and by that comprehension to awaken us from that dream.

THE ACTIVATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The practical meaning of Yogācāra thought lies in the fact that, by enlightening us to the fact that the objects of knowledge are unreal, it detaches us from a fate bound by objects and thus lets us enter a realm of unobstructed freedom. That is why "conscious construction only without objects," realistically understood, is considered to border on the Buddha land (*buddha-gocara*). However, even if conscious construction only is the true condition of knowledge, it is not easy to dissolve the fact that our experiential knowledge is actually sullied by the bonds of the hypostatized objects of its own mental imagery. This is why we must shed light on the origins of our naive realist experiential knowledge; and that is the goal of the *Triṃśika-vijñaptimātratā-siddhi-kārikā*.

Let us have a brief look at the relationship between the *Triṃśika* and the *Vimśatika*. The main emphasis of the *Vimśatika* is to expose the unreality of the objects of knowledge. On the other hand, the *Triṃśika*, we might say, tries to expose the source of the real-seemingness of those objects to us, in spite of their ultimate unreality. In that sense, the *Triṃśika* tries to trace back to the roots of our experiential knowledge and to illuminate all the conditions which establish it.

At his point, Yogācāra thought has the same intention as Western idealist philosophy. Still, we must not lose sight of some fundamental differences between the two systems' reasons for looking back to the grounds of experiential knowledge. In Western idealist philosophy, it is to seek out the "fundamental knowledge" underlying experiential knowledge, and to lay this bare at the root of experiential knowledge through that experiential knowledge itself; in other words to come to the "knowledge of knowledge." In the case of Yogācāra it is rather to shed light on and

come to grips with the origins of the delusions which perplex our experiential knowledge.

Thus, from the outset, these systems differ in their judgments of the character of experiential knowledge. In Western idealism, even if it is supposed to be a severely limited and bounded thing, experiential knowledge is still viewed as value-neutral and set apart from questions of good and evil. In Yogācāra, however, experiential knowledge is not value-neutral. It is seen as already polluted, covered with delusions, and hence evil. Thus, to achieve pure and supramundane knowledge, apprehension of a transcendental knowledge at the bottom of experiential knowledge (as in Western idealism) is not enough. According to Yogācāra, we can secure pure knowledge only by a complete turn-about of the principle of delusion that so deeply underlies all experiential knowledge.

From Paul Ricoeur we can learn something about the difference in the meaning of "reflection" between Western idealism and Yogācāra thought: It is the difference between the eidetic and the empirical. In the case of eidetic reflection, experiential consciousness is taken in the common, value-neutral, sense, without any differentiation of good and evil; and so the transcendental knowledge found at its roots is also neutral, neither good nor bad. Thus this transcendental knowledge is still abstract, and does not really constitute the transcendent. By contrast, empirical reflection starts from the actual condition of our knowledge and treats it as something already deluded and polluted. Thus, within it we cannot discover true, pure knowledge, unless that delusion be fundamentally turned around. It is here that knowledge ceases to be value-neutral and is seen as constituting a liberation from evil. It is also in this kind of knowledge that the transcendental becomes actual for the first time (Ricoeur 1950, pp. 7-31).

Where then can we find the cause of our ordinary knowledge being deluded and polluted, of our taking things which do not exist for existing objects, and thus of our being shackled by them? The *Trīṃśika* explains it in terms

of the power of imagination at the roots of consciousness, and suggests that the objects that bind us are due to the working of that power which reifies its own mental images into real-seeming objects. The *Triṃśika* calls this power of image-reification "the activation of consciousness" (*viññāna-pariṇāma*) and considers the structure of this activation to be divisible into three levels.

That which functions at the most basic level is called maturation (*vipāka*), the second level reflective activity (*manana*), and the third level (which results from the other two) is called the "conscious construction of the objective world" (*viśayasya vijñapti*). It is the totality of the workings of these three levels which results in the activation of consciousness that in turn gives birth to our experiential knowledge. This activation of consciousness, however, does not all take place at a conscious level. What appears to our consciousness is the "conscious construction of the objective world," the most obvious level of the process. Beneath that lie hidden, without ever entering our conscious thought, self-consciousness as "reflective activity" (*manana*), and still on a deeper level the stream of fundamental consciousness as maturation or *vipāka*.

To interpret experiential knowledge in this way, not only on the superficial level of objectified symbols, but also in terms of its hidden backdrop of self-consciousness and pure process of activation, means that to understand our knowledge simply from its actually apparent state is not sufficient. If we fail to understand also its interconnections with the latent and subconscious, its real character will never come to light.

Thus the process of the activation of consciousness includes three levels or stages and is the working of *vikalpa*, the power of imagination or image-reification. The hypostatization of all objects of perception is born from this power. It must now be added that the almost inescapable tendency of this power results from its becoming internalized within consciousness as habituation. Put a little differently, these structural tendencies at the roots

of our hypostatization of objects are hidden in the subconsciousness as "seeds." Through the growth and actualization of these "seeds," the images of the objective world are established. Nor is this process something "einmalig," born in a moment to be destroyed the next. As the seeds mature and what had once been latent becomes apparent, this actualized entity in turn leaves its memory again as a new seed in the subconscious. In this presupposition, there must be some locus where these seeds of consciousness are preserved and held. This was thought to be the *ālaya vijñāna* (or storehouse consciousness) part of the subconscious. This storehouse consciousness exists continuously at the bottom of the actual consciousness. Even when superficial consciousness is interrupted or apparently destroyed, this storehouse consciousness never perishes. Therefore, while preserving all the seeds of consciousness, it itself changes without discontinuity, and is likened to a "rushing torrent," in the sense of something which is always turning and moving. The most basic level of the activation of consciousness, which we have called above the "maturation" level, is none other than this storehouse consciousness.

That which functions at the roots of the human condition as karma and rebirth, is also this storehouse consciousness. As we saw above, all the objects which present themselves to our present consciousness are born from a maturation of seeds in the storehouse consciousness. But these seeds are what the habits of past actions have left in the present. The maturation and appearance of these seeds in present consciousness is called "actualization," and what present actions leave as seeds in the storehouse consciousness is called "the aura of habit" (*vāsanā*). Our present actions are enacted from the accumulation of habits of past lives, and again the "aura of habit" of our present actions through its perpetual accumulation comes to stipulate our actions in the future.

Thus, "actualization" and the "aura of habit" being mutually inter-active and present consciousness and the subconscious shaping one another, our actions are

continually determined from the infinite past into the endless future. Therein consists our human condition as karma and rebirth. Our present actions are thrust out as it were from the indefinite past like the wave crests born as the rolling sea is thrust upon the seashore. On that seashore they then leave their salty foam, a part of which they take along as they return to the deep of the rolling sea.

In seeking the grounds of our experiential cognitions, idealist philosophy reaches towards "self" or "knowledge of knowledge" as the source of light, while Yogācāra thought reaches rather the storehouse consciousness as a dark principle that gives rise to karma and rebirth. But the reason this storehouse consciousness is taken as the basis of our experiential knowledge is not to put it up as an ontological or metaphysical principle for the explanation of how that knowledge comes to be. It is indeed true that this consciousness is the root cause of our human condition in terms of karma and rebirth. But that same consciousness is seen in turn as the very place which makes the liberation from this root possible. That is, in Yogācāra, this process of tracing actions back to their roots at the same time intends the separation of these actions from these roots. That is what is meant by the term "conversion of base" (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*). The uniqueness of Yogācāra thought lies in its understanding of the storehouse consciousness as the locus that enables this "conversion of base."

But we must look more closely at this situation. Takeuchi Yoshinori considers the uniqueness of Buddhist logic from the perspective of Heidegger's *Grund qua Ab-grund* (the ground qua non-ground) (Takeuchi 1972, pp.65-68). Here we see why Buddhist logic must be, not ontological but rather, de-ontological. It is this in the sense that the "qua" in its theory of the ground qua non-ground is first of all practical rather than theoretical, and expresses a conversion from delusion to enlightenment. However, the tendency to see in the storehouse consciousness not such a conversion but rather something already in existence, and to set it up as a metaphysical principle for

the explanation of our experiential consciousness is undeniably present in some Yogācāra thought. Since these people posit consciousness as a being and try to derive all other things from there, their "school" is called the "form-possessing Mind-only theory," in contradistinction with the "formless Mind-only theory," which apprehends consciousness as the locus of activation, and therefore as itself empty and void of essence. Whereas Sthiramati and Paramārtha are representative of the latter school, Dharmapāla and Dignāga, who stressed the epistemological side of Yogācāra, are taken to be representatives of the former. The parallel existence of these two directions within Yogācāra thought lies at the origin of the theory that "Vasubandhu was two persons."

In the storehouse consciousness two types of seed (the obstacle of passion and the obstacle to knowledge) exert their influence. As these seeds grow and actualize, the world of our experiential knowledge and action, enveloped as it is in impurities, comes into existence. It is here that the storehouse consciousness appears as something like gravity at the base of our existence, something which tends to oppress and even exclude the upward-striving movements of our hearts. One could liken it also to a stream, which carries countless billions of bacteria, turning into dark stagnation and allowing no other organisms to survive there; or again to a darkly stagnant pool, pulling us in like gravity. As this kind of gravity, storehouse consciousness, which determines and controls the actions of the present from out of the accumulation of mental habits of the actions and dispositions of our selves from the endless past, might be thought of as analogous to Kant's idea of "original evil." We need not here demonstrate nor fully explain the existence of this kind of storehouse consciousness. But when we look back on the motivations of our own actions, we cannot fail to sense the existence of a dark force that pulls and controls us like a kind of gravity from the depths of our own being.

This dark and heavy aspect of the storehouse

consciousness, however, does not depend on the storehouse consciousness itself, but comes rather from the influence of the "seeds" stored in this storehouse. Just like the blackness of the stagnant river is not due to the water itself but rather to the innumerable bacteria carried by the river water. The storehouse consciousness itself is not fixed or polluted, neither good nor bad. It is so swirled about by all the seeds it contains that it is more like a rumbling torrent that does not rest for a moment. Thus, to liken the storehouse consciousness to "original evil" is not exactly fair; it does not constitute original evil, it merely permits it. Accordingly, if the noxious seeds are stopped and thereafter innoxious seeds come to mature, the character of the storehouse consciousness is changed, and what had been a dark and stagnant pool becomes a clear rushing stream. Thus the basis of a person's existence changes: freed from the "evil weight," which pulled him down like gravity, he becomes "light and easy."

From the standpoint of Yogācāra thought, this change of base denotes the destruction of the storehouse consciousness itself; for Yogācāra holds that the storehouse consciousness is the locus of only noxious seeds. But, if the noxious seeds are cut off, does not there have to be some place at which the innoxious seeds which then grow up can exist? Maybe that would be the dharma-dhātu, the realm of truth. But the realm of truth only comes into being based on the converted nature of the storehouse consciousness, which in turn depends on the cutting off of the noxious seeds in it. But it is perhaps better not to call the storehouse consciousness that has been converted by that name any longer, but rather by the name, "Womb of the Tathāgata (Buddha)" (*tathāgata-garbha*). However, just as a dark and stagnant pool, when "reborn" as a transparent stream, is still the same water, so one could consider that the storehouse consciousness becomes the womb of the Tathāgata when its character is converted.

An alteration in consciousness therefore not merely denotes the workings of the power of image-reification.

Yogācāra's "conversion of base" is equally an alteration of consciousness, and the fundamental meaning of any alteration of consciousness is to be sought in the latter. Thus we can say that the alteration of consciousness has two sides. One is the false discrimination which hypostatizes objects (*vikalpa*). The other side is the coming into being of the realm of Truth—as a result of the alteration in the nature of the contents of the storehouse consciousness (or after this consciousness has been destroyed). It is this latter side which is particularly important. The most fundamental meaning of "alteration of consciousness" is precisely this conversion in which consciousness turns itself from false discrimination to great reflective wisdom. Consciousness ceaselessly changes; and since it turns around in the above two meanings, it is in itself "empty."

YOGA

How does this conversion of base come about? It is effectuated by the medium of yoga practices. As the very name of the sect implies, the origins of Yogācāra philosophy are inseparable from the practice of yoga. As we mentioned above, a conversion of base cannot be perfectly realized unless the seeds of passions located in the storehouse consciousness are eradicated. But these seeds of passions are not present to our actual consciousness; they are hidden at the bottom of our consciousness. So, to eradicate these noxious seeds requires that we go beyond our ordinary consciousness to the bottom of our subconsciousness. It is yoga that has the capacity of working on the seeds of consciousness at that level. Yoga refers to meditative concentration, but what lies at its center? Let us try to apprehend it as **attention**.

Yoga is attention concentrated and focused to the highest degree. But to grasp the real nature of attention, we need to look closely at the difference between attention and will. The basic difference between the two is that will is interrelated with present consciousness and has no part of the subconscious, while it is only attention which

can function at the level of the subconscious. We can interrupt or temporarily suppress the evil desires which surface to consciousness by an act of will, but we cannot thereby cut off their roots. But as long as we do not eradicate the roots of those passions, they will appear again even if they are momentarily suppressed. Merely by the force of will we can do nothing in confronting such a situation, and if we try it all the same, it is ultimately our wills which break down.

Attention, however, can accomplish what is impossible for will. By descending to the bottom of suppressed consciousness and eradicating the noxious seeds therein, attention can dissolve the strife between will and desire. Therein lies the "religious nature" of the power of attention. Simone Weil may be considered to be the prime example of a philosopher concerned with the deep religious import of the power of attention, as the distilled essence of prayer and meditation. Weil holds that attention is the highest part of the spirit. It is an intuitive faculty which, in the midst of the sensible, can catch echoes of another sort than the ones emanating from the senses themselves. In short, a faculty which can respond to the **logos**. The greatest of all evils in man is the lapse or collapse of his power of attention. She has written about attention as follows:

Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object; it means holding in our minds, within reach of this thought, but on a lower level and not in contact with it, the diverse knowledge we have acquired which we are forced to make use of. Our thought should be in relation to all particular and already formulated thoughts, as a man on a mountain who, as he looks forward, sees also below him, without actually looking at them, a great many forests and plains. Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth the object that

is to penetrate it.

All wrong translations, all absurdities in geometry problems, all clumsiness of style and all faulty connection of ideas in composition and essays, all such things are due to the fact that thought has seized upon some idea too hastily, and being thus prematurely blocked, is not open to truth." (Weil, 1973, pp.111-112).

Attention is an effort, the greatest of all efforts perhaps, but it is a negative effort. Of itself, it does not involve tiredness. . . . Something in our soul has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. This something is much more closely connected with evil than is the flesh. That is why every time we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves. If we concentrate with this intention, a quarter of an hour of attention is better than a great many good works (Ibid., p.111).

Intuitive attention is the sole source and wellspring of all perfect beauty in art, of all truly brilliant scientific discovery, of all philosophy truly aiming for wisdom, of the brotherly love that truly can save man. When attention is turned in the direction of God, true prayer is born." (Weil 1951, pp.367-368)

In Yogācāra, many levels of meditation are analysed, which must be thoroughly mastered in order to attain to the highest enlightenment. But we can say that all of those levels and processes are fundamentally just levels of the training of attention. What purges the dark stagnant pool of the storehouse consciousness and turns it into a pure realm of truth is not its changing course or it being dammed up. It is the miraculous purifying action of the power of attention. We can compare it to a kind of chemical activation: it is like a carbolic solution which is polluted milky white. When the proper acid is added, carbon particles separate and precipitate with the result that a clear liquid is reborn. Similarly, when the light of the power of

attention touches the seed-polluted stream of the storehouse consciousness, the noxious seeds of evil precipitate to the bottom and the flow of the storehouse consciousness is reborn into the pure dharma-realm of truth.

However, this cloudless and pure realm of Truth is not created out of nothing by some mysterious chemical reaction. It always resides in the original minds of all beings, but becomes evident only when the obstacles that prevented its appearance are removed and the covering veil is cleared away. Yogācāra places a major emphasis on the thesis that the realm of Truth is born from the purging of the storehouse consciousness. But that realm of Truth is also the revelation in its maturity of the Buddha-nature concealed in the depths of the hearts of all beings. Seen from that point, Yogācāra thought is deeply interconnected with the thought around the tathāgata-womb idea, and is reinforced by it.

If we apprehend the notion of "conversion of base" in its deepest sense, or again take its contents positively, the storehouse consciousness reveals itself as none other than the appearance of the womb of the Tathāgata (enlightened Buddhahood) concealed in the hearts of all beings. Or, if we re-interpret the emergence of Buddhahood from a more subjective angle, it is itself that "conversion of base." Thus, the positive content and ultimate meaning of Yogācāra thought are provided and supported only by the philosophy of the tathāgata-garbha.

THE CONVERSION OF BASE AND THE THREE NATURES

Yogācāra philosophy explains the idea of the conversion of base (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*) more concretely by its three-nature doctrine (*trisvabhāva*), the view that the forms of existence which appear to us are of three types. We have already observed that our blind and fettered condition is due to our hypostatization (mental reification) of objects which do not really exist, and our becoming entranced by them. The conversion of base is the destruction of those delusions, which enables us to be reborn into pure knowledge of

reality, a realm of freedom and true knowledge. Yogācāra then explains this conversion as one from the condition of "imagined nature" (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) to that of "perfected nature" (*pariṇiṣpanna-svabhāva*). But the important point is that this conversion is effected by the mediation of "other-dependent nature" (*paratantra-svabhāva*). This interpretation of the conversion of base through the mediation of this "other-dependent nature" is a peculiarity of the three-nature doctrine that shows us the concreteness of Yogācāra philosophy.

Precisely what state of existence is meant by this other-dependent nature? On the one hand, it has some points in common with "imagined nature" and lies at its basis. The state of "imagined nature" is that of a falsely hypostatized world, from which Yogācāra thought tries to help us extract ourselves. But this world of hypostatized objects, although called imagined, is not produced out of absolute nothingness. It is like when we hear a voice whispering in the murmur of the wind in the leaves, or when we mistake a complete stranger walking down the street for the figure of an intimate friend. Just as there is a real sound of leaves or a real stranger at the bottom of our illusions, so the state of imagined nature is constructed upon "other-dependent nature." This other-dependent nature is a world of objective reality, a world of humans and affairs, which continues to revolve unconcerned with our personal subjective wills and desires. Thus it is also the world of the interconnectedness of all things, the world of *pratītya-samutpāda*. For the human subject, it is also the world of inexorable necessity and indifference, hard to endure. Therefore, we color it with our subjective desires, activate and humanize it, rebuilding it from the bottom up into a more friendly universe, and then live in it. In so doing, we have left the world of reality in order to live in an unreal dream world—and it is that world which is called "imagined nature."

The conversion of base is the arising of a change in the forms of existence apparent to us, an escape from our

state of existence as this imagined nature. It is not a departure from all of the interrelationships of our practical lives; it is rather a return to the interrelationships of our lives themselves, in other words to "other-dependent nature." As indicated above, it is rather like the whispered voice now turning out to be the sound of the wind in the leaves of a tree. This activation is the conversion from imagined nature to perfected nature. But perfected nature is not separated from other-dependent nature; it is the true comprehension of other-dependent nature itself, and it has other-dependent nature as its contents. But other-dependent existence by itself is not equal to perfected nature. It is only when the curtain which hangs over other-dependent nature is lifted and other-dependent nature is properly understood that there is perfected nature. Thus, other-dependent nature has points in common with perfected nature as well as with imagined nature. Therein lies the uniqueness of other-dependent nature, as the mediation of the conversion from imagined to perfected nature.

Yogācāra's concrete practical realism is thus seen in its interpretation of the conversion of base in terms of the triple nature, particularly the other-dependent nature. In the Mādhyamika view, on the other hand, the conversion of base is understood merely in terms of two factors: the worldly and the supramundane. The supramundane totally denies the worldly, and no part of the worldly is allowed to exist within the supramundane. Here we lose all foothold in reality. For Yogācāra, however, the other-dependent world is situated squarely between the imagined and perfected natures; and it is not completely negated by perfected nature. When other-dependent nature is purified and cleansed of the parts covered and polluted by imagined nature, it can exist in its own true form.

Yogācāra thought explains conversion of base by the three-nature doctrine with other-dependent nature as the mediating point, because this is the place of the reality wherein we live. If it failed to grasp the conversion of base in the place where we really live, the religious

subject would be left floating in the sky with no roots in reality.

The fact that Yogācāra thought is based on the idea of other-dependent nature indicates anew that its central concern is always with the problem of cognition; but in the sense of: how can cognition escape from the control of misty darkness and gravity and reach the realm of clear and pure light, how can it convert from the secular to the sacred? That this conversion is effected not by mere logical reflection, but only by way of practice constitutes the special quality of Yogācāra philosophy.

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