

Thirty Verses on Conscious Life

Trimśikā-Kārikā-Vijñaptimātratā

by Vasubandhu

translations and commentary



Principles of Buddhist Yoga

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

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Translations of and Commentary on

Vasubandhu's *Trimśika-vijñapti*

by

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

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Phenomena have three kinds of characteristics.
First is the characteristic of mere conceptual grasping.
Second is the characteristic of dependent origination.
Third is the perfect characteristic of reality.

Samdhanirmocana Sūtra, chapter 4

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If the doors of perception were cleansed,
everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite.

For man has closed himself up
till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

William Blake : *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Preface

The *Triṃśikā-Kārikā-Vijñaptimātratā* or *Treatise on the Thirty Verses on No More Nor Less than Representation Only* by Vasubandhu (ca. 316 – 396), is a short and concentrated set of thirty verses crucial to the Yogācāra, the second branch of the Mahāyāna.

It became canonical and was translated into Chinese, forming the heart of the *Cheng wei shih lun*, the *Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi-śāstra*, *The Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*, a major 7th-century work of the Chinese traveler, scholar, translator, and yogācārin Hsüang-tsang (Xuanzang, 602 – 664).

In this work, the ideas of Vasubandhu were turned into an ontological idealism, with the subject *constituting* the object. Was this warranted?

The present commentary avoids this common metaphysical interpretation of Vasubandhu's take. It views his original approach as a critical and phenomenological Yogācāra ('yoga practice' or 'one whose practice is yoga'). Also, it is called '*citta-mātra*,' Mind-Only or Consciousness-Only primarily to underline that all sensate and mental objects always appear to a mind.

Yogācāra is, next to Madhyamaka or Śūnyavāda (initiated by Nāgārjuna), the second of the two schools of Great Vehicle Buddhism. Coming after Madhyamaka, Yogācāra could reflect the emergence of an *independent yoga theory*. Given the best understanding (*prajñā*) of the tenets of the Madhyamaka also depend on meditation (*bhāvaṇa*), Yogācāra is unlikely the reaction against the so-called 'intellectual' approach of the pandits. Rather an individualization of yogic practice, a branch of the Great Vehicle especially focused on *yogic experience*.

The seeming duality between textual and yogic approaches is overcome as soon as their complementary function is spotted.

I conjecture the *Thirty Verses* are an apt summary of the *principles* of Buddhist Yoga by a Great Vehicle yogi proficient in Lesser Vehicle practices and an Abhidharma expert.

Knowing the principles of Buddhist Yoga, we can better understand the specificity of Buddhadharmic practice.

The *Triṃśikā* is the crown jewel of Vasubandhu's vast *corpus* of texts. He offers a concise overview of his take. One may argue that in other parts of his work, different perspectives can be found. No doubt this is the case.

Here, we are at the heart of the Yogācāra.

I translated and wrote a commentary on the *Thirty Verses* because it lays down the principles of Buddhist Yoga. Also, to introduce another take on the Yoga Practice School, disagreeing with those who claim Yogācāra is intended as a system of ontological idealism, with the subject constituting the object. Neither does Yogācāra expect *perfect nature* to exist inherently from its own side (as some Prasaṅgika Madhyamakās claim). While in the Tibetan tenet-system of emptiness meditations, the position of the Yogācāra may be justifiably underneath the Prasaṅgika Madhyamaka, adherence to an object-constituting subject was not part of Early Vijñānavāda.

Yogācāra's view on self-empty perfect nature can and should be harmonized with other-emptiness, the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine, and suddenism (Ch'an, Zen, Ati-Yoga, Dzogchen).

The Yoga Practice School and the Madhyamaka are the two branches of the Great Vehicle and reflect the distinction between 'knowledge' (Ānanda) and 'practice' (Moggallāna). Only when both *work together* can the mind be adequately trained. Yoga without philosophy or philosophy without meditation both lead to a barren practice. In a contemporary approach, the advances made by Western philosophy, hermeneutics, linguistics, cognitive sciences, etc., can be integrated into 'knowledge.' A fertile interaction may

add skill to yoga and deepen wisdom and, eventually, make intellect useful.

A study of the Śūnyavāda (*Emptiness Panacea*, 2017) was done attempting to characterize self-emptiness as formal as possible, striking a balance between the excellent understanding of philosophy, a form of conceptual wisdom, or 'prajñā' (Gr. *sophia*), and the non-conceptual, direct, nondual experience or 'jñāna' (Gr. *gnosis*) of Yoga.

Thanking all my teachers and friends, I dedicate this work to the benefit of all and acknowledge that mistakes are due to my ignorance.

The transformation of consciousness is discrimination.
What is discriminated, therefore, does not exist (as such).
So everything is representation-only.

Triṃśikā, verse 17.

Introduction

'If all thought (using categories) is taken away from empirical knowledge, no knowledge of any object remains (...).'

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, B307.

'... observations, and even more so observation statements and statements of experimental results, are always *interpretations* of the facts observed ... they are *interpretations in the light of theories* ...'

Popper, 1965, p.107f.

'Experiences arise *together* with theoretical assumptions, *not* before them, and an experience without theory is just as incomprehensible as is (allegedly) a theory without experience ...'

Feyerabend, 1993, p.168.

The Lesser (Foundational) Vehicle (Hīnayāna) represents the *individual approach* to the Buddhadharmā. It focuses on the purification of *personal* stains, aiming at selflessness (*anātman*). Unlike the Greater Vehicle (Mahāyāna), these practitioners do not consider liberating *other* sentient beings as part of the path. The fruit is Arhathood (liberation), not the awakening (enlightenment) of Buddhahood. In this view, awakening can only be attained *after* being reborn in Tuṣṭita, one of the six heavens nearby. Okay.

Individual Vehicle Jhāna Yoga does *not* generate the mind of awakening for all sentient beings (*bodhicitta*) and considers an even mind (equanimity) as the best of minds. For some, the idealism and optimism of the Greater Vehicle are as exaggerated as it is unjustified. Maybe. We know that already in the Foundational Vehicle, a broader view on *otherness* was present (cf. the Mahāsāṃghikas). Would Buddha not have introduced skillful means assisting *all* sentient beings ? Moreover, the continuity of liberation was in doubt, for some claimed the Arhat or Foe Destroyer could fall back, while a Buddha never does. Positing Buddhahood *on this plane of existence* makes it possible to assist all suffering sentient beings right here on Earth.

These and many other factors prompted the slow emergence of a new shoot, a broader view including *all sentient beings* in its salvic aim, the Mahāyāna or 'Great Vehicle,' starting about a century BCE. In its incipience, salvic scope (*bodhicitta*) was the main issue. As this was directly associated with the activity of the Bodhisattva, mature Mahāyāna primarily focused on the latter as the best way to become *a fully enlightened Buddha* (attain Buddhahood). In the first four centuries of the new millennium, the Great Vehicle organized itself both monastically as textually, manifesting its two operational branches : Mādhyamika and Yogācāra ; philosophy and yoga.

This division should not surprise. In the Foundational Vehicle, *yoga* and *sūtra* were clearly distinguished. Knowing and understanding the texts is not the same thing as excellent yogic accomplishments. Although 'right mindfulness' and 'right concentration' are part of the Eightfold Path, philosophically minded practitioners often neglect rigorous yogic training. At the same time, excellence in yoga coupled with excellent scholarship is also a rare find.

Minds enjoying discursive activity may generate the wrong idea conceptuality will lead (cause, generate, bring forth) awakening. But this is not the case, for only a contrived, fabricated *simulacrum* of emptiness is realized. While this is a lofty understanding and an excellent (indirect) wisdom (*prajñā*), it is not a direct 'seeing' (*jñāna*) of the absolute properties of every object. Confusing conceptual wisdom with living wisdom, the mind identifies emptiness with a blank, objectless mind, as if the absence of inherent existence implies there is nothing there anymore. Minds finding peace and direct insight by way of yogic training are less inclined to organize the stages of the path in formal categories (Tib. *Lamrim*). They are so familiar with the absolute nature of mind that conventional knowledge seems futile, vain, and pointless insofar as spiritual training goes. Study, reflection, and any fabricated meditation remain within the conceptual domain and, even when very subtle and refined, defined by the thinking mind. Yoga moves *beyond* this mind, and once this has happened, adding a superstructure to allow others to 'grasp' at this may seem quite conceited.

One of the unique features of the Buddhadharma is accepting that *for different people, different paths are appropriate*. The so-called '84,000 Dharma Doors' are so many instructions guiding *all kinds of people* to awakening ; philosophers, yogis, monks, hermits, wanderers, laypeople, etc.

All vehicles, schools, and lineages practice Buddha's teachings and aim at liberation or awakening. What do they all share ? The Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Two Truths (First Turning), Compassion, Emptiness (Second Turning), and Buddha-nature (Third Turning).

Accepting the Diamond Vehicle, Tantra is added (Fourth Turning).

When different schools practice in isolated environments, without much contact between them, sectarianism and prejudice may rise, as was the case in Tibet between Kagyupas and Gelugpas. And even today, tensions are present between the Lesser and Greater Vehicles and between Sutric and Tantric methods or between the Vajrayāna and Zen.

Even within the Vajrayāna, different views emerge (between idealists and realists, between self-empty and other-empty), etc.

The divide between the more textual and philosophical Gelugpas (linking with Nāgārjuna) and the more yogic Kagyupa (going back to Indian *mahāsiddhis* like Saraha and Tilopa) also reflects the differences between human temperaments. Overt sectarianism or covert sectarian behaviors are contrary to the complementarity and interdependence between, on the one hand, knowledge (and understanding) and, on the other hand, direct nondual seeing.

All of this boils down to the *integration* of philosophy and yoga.

Conceptual yoga will clear intellectual obscurations, but only non-conceptual yoga ends these and also ceases the root causes of our ignorance (innate self-grasping).

The **Mādhyamika School** was initiated by Nāgārjuna (second to third century CE). It became the most prominent philosophical school of Buddhism, attracting the best Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese minds. These Madhyamakas gave rise to Middle Way philosophy, with emptiness (*śūnyatā*) at its core. They represent the Śūnyavāda. Pivotal texts of the Mādhyamika School are :

Nāgārjuna (2th CE) : *Mūlamādhyamakakārikā*
(A Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Way)

and *Śūnyatā-saptatikārikānāma*

(The Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness)

Āryadeva (3th CE) : *Catuhśatakaśāstrakārikā* (Four Hundred Stanzas)

Chandrakīrti (ca. 600 – 650) : *Mādhyamakāvātāra*

(Entering the Middle Way)

Śāntideva (8th CE) : *Bodhicharyāvātāra*

(A Guide to the Bodhisattvas Way of Life)

Tsongkhapa (1357 - 1419) : *The Essence of Eloquence, The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment and The Ocean of Reasoning*

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the absence or lack of substance, own-form (*svabhāva*) or inherent existence in all that exists (*śūnyatā* = *asvabhāva* or *niḥsvabhāva*). Ignorance (*avidyā*) is the opposite of emptiness : affirming inherent existence. So, *vidyā* = *śūnyatā*. Process or non-substantiality is the case because we only find dependent origination to identify and organize what exists when we investigate.

Nāgārjuna singled out *existentia*, or phenomena, and showed how absurd consequences result when *essentia* are thought. For Madhyamaka, the *noumenon*, i.e., ultimate or absolute reality, is merely the absence of inherent existence in all possible objects of knowledge. This strict nominalism was revolutionary (not unlike the impact of Willem of Ockham and Kant in the West). Madhyamaka uncovers the strict nominalism implied by Buddhas *anātman*. Indeed, the Hindu *ātman* calls for a universal soul existing from its own side (*paramātman*, *brahmātman*), not an *existential subjectivity* integrating the depth of subjectivity implied in the suffering, *samsāric* sentient being. Buddha wants to address this

suffering without introducing a supernatural ontological realm. He seeks to understand reality existentially and phenomenologically, without essences whatsoever. *Being is becoming*, and (human) existence is a node in this universal process. Hence, the existential situation of sentient beings is central, and *nirvāṇa* is the end of conceptual imputation.

‘Independent (of conceptual imputation), at peace and not fabricated as named things, beyond thought-construction, without distinctions, thus the way things really are.’

Nāgārjuna : *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XVIII, 9.

The **Yogācāra** or **Yoga Practice School**, the second of the two independent but complementary branches of the Mahāyāna, aims to systematically understand the *experiences* and *realizations* resulting from the practice (*ācāra*) of Buddhist meditation (*yoga*), deemed crucial to deliver all sentient beings. The foundational teachings of this so-called Mind-Only School or Vijñānavāda (path of consciousness) were mainly written down by Asaṅga (ca. 300 – 370) and his half-brother Vasubandhu (ca. 316 – 396), but many others contributed.

They require logic, epistemology, psychology, phenomenology, ontology (metaphysics), and, last but not least, soteriology, thereby introducing new schemata and concepts. They are *sūtra* based.

Samdhinirmocana Sūtra (ca. 2nd century)

Śrīmālā-devī-siṃhā-nāda Sūtra (3rd century)

Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra (4th century)

Lankāvātāra Sūtra (4th century)

Triṃśikā-Kārikā-Vijñapti (4th century)

Extinct in India by the end of the first millennium, the Yoga Practice School traveled to China, Tibet, and Japan. There it mingled with other elements like Ch’an, Zen, Tantra, and Ati-Yoga (Dzogchen). In Tibet, Yogācāra terminology was employed (e.g., by the Nyingmapas), though not necessarily its view. Yogācāra should be regarded as a Great Vehicle system of teachings *in its own right*.

Approaching the predicament of sentient beings *existentially* is the Yogācāra method of practice, complementing the philosophical take of the Madhyamakas. While the negative (non-affirmative, exclusive) emptiness logic of Nāgārjuna is accepted, the Yogācāra introduces various affirmative, inclusive theories, such as knowing-only (*vijñapti-mātra*), consciousness-only (*citta-mātra*), the three natures (*trisvabhāva-nirdeśa*), the three bodies of a Buddha (*trikāya*), etc. By introducing storehouse consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), they also explain the continuity of *karma* and the mindstream. In later centuries, integrating its ideas and terminologies, Indian and Tibetan Buddhism presented Mādhyamika thought as the leading school of the Mahāyāna, overlooking Yogācāra as an *independent* branch in its own right. Indeed, without Yogācāra, Mahāyāna would not have reached its present all-comprehensive vantage point. In India, Early Yogācāra was predominantly epistemological, phenomenological, and psychological, but in China, Yogācāra promoted absolute idealism, an interpretation of Mind-Only returning in Tibetan Buddhism. Together with, and not made dependent on Madhyamaka, this Yoga School is critical in understanding the full scope of the Great Vehicle. Hence, the Tibetan take, deeming Yogācāra lower on the tenet-ladder than the Middle Way School, is seen as a pedagogic device in an overall Madhyamaka educational leaning.

As the Middle Way is not devoid of the practice of meditation (Calm Abiding and Insight Meditation on emptiness), knowing the principles of Buddhist Yoga beforehand is helpful. Yogācāra accepts the non-affirmative conclusions of Mādhyamika's philosophy on emptiness (self-emptiness) but adds an affirmative logic based on direct yogic experience (absence of duality and other-emptiness).

In *A Fundamental Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna puts into evidence how the supposed presence of self-powered, fixed, self-subsisting substances leads to absurd consequences. His logic of dependent origination accepts dynamic continuity without establishing substantial identity. Yogācāra agrees but adds that *the experience of awakening is nondual*.

The prime focus of the Middle Way is not on the practice of meditation but the *dereification* of concepts, ending substance-obsession, steering in-between the extremes of affirming (substances) and denying (existence has an ontological principal). To succeed, Yoga is needed. Yogācāra, based on meditation, offers a logical, epistemological, and phenomenological account of the crucial salvic role of the fifth aggregate, consciousness (*vijñāna*). Yogācāra seems a philosophy but is truly a practice *for every moment* (in this sense, it resembles an Ati-Yoga like Mahāmudrā).

Whereas the early Indian branch of Yogācāra is represented by Maitreya, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, Paramātha and Sthiramati, the later new school was initiated by Dharmapāla and Xuanzang (in China). In the 5th to 8th centuries, the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine became fully part of the edifice, and Yogācāra embraced absolute idealism. From this point onwards, Yogācāra became a form of idealism. Mind-Only and Consciousness-Only became synonyms for the idea the subject constitutes the object. It developed further in Tibet (Śāntarakṣita and Atiśa) and was even incorporated in the Mādhamika School and integrated into Tantra. After Śāntarakṣita (725 – 788), who attempted a synthesis of Mādhyamika and Yogācāra, no further doctrinal developments happened, and the school became extinct in India but traveled to China and Japan, where it continues as *hossō* at Kōfukuji Temple in Nara.

Note that the object of the Third Turning (Buddha-nature) can be combined with Yogācāra without turning it into an ontological idealism promoting an object-constituting subjectivism.

‘And what is consciousness ? It is awareness of an object-of-consciousness, visible, etc.’ – *Pañcaskandhaka-Prakaraṇa* (A Discussion of the Five Aggregates), 5.

Consciousness (*vijñāna*) is the fifth aggregate (*skandha*) next to matter (*rūpa*), volition (*saṃskāra*), feeling (*vedanā*), and thinking (*saṃjñā*). This mind coalesces volition, feeling, thinking, and consciousness. This whole is the *nāmakāya* (mental body), the transmigrating personality. In Buddhist psychology, when the

physical body (*rūpa*) dies, this mental body does not (interactionism between body and mind is postulated). Consciousness takes the activities of each of the other aggregates as its object. These are its mental *dharmas* (*caittas*). Consciousness can also cognize its operations. It is a dynamical, multi-dimensional continuum of sensations and mentations, denoted by (a) what happens on the sensitive surfaces of the five senses (sensate objects) and (b) by what happens in mind (mental objects).

Six Senses (<i>indriyas</i>)	Six Sense-Objects (<i>viśayas</i>)	Six Consciousnesses (<i>śad-vijñāna</i>)
1. sense of vision	7. visible object	13. eye-consciousness seeing
2. sense of audition	8. sound object	14. ear-consciousness hearing
3. sense of smell	9. smell object	15. nose-consciousness smelling
4. sense of taste	10. taste object	16. taste-consciousness tasting
5. sense of touch	11. tangible object	17. touch-consciousness touching
6. faculty of mind (<i>mano-dhātu</i>)	12. mind-object	18. thinking consciousness (<i>mano-vijñāna</i>)

In the Abhidharma, mentation (the activity of the discursive, conceptual, thinking consciousness, or *mano-vijñāna*) is a sixth sense-centered consciousness discriminating and cognizing physical objects. This thinking consciousness depends on non-sensuous mind-objects and the faculty of mind (*mano-dhātu*) in the same ways the five sense-consciousnesses depend on their respective sense-objects and senses (these are the 18 *dhātus*). These elements are the components of the stream of life. They are aggregate things, never separate elements, nor are they entities forming aggregations. If one seeks to understand reality (ontology), one needs first to understand how knowledge comes about, how it is possible, and how it may progress. It was not until Kant that Western philosophy understood the role of the mind in sense-perception (*Book of Lemmas*, 2016). The mind does not just receive but interprets and synthesizes what is perceived.

At least since the time of Buddha, Indian philosophy (*ātman*-based or not) was aware of this critical distinction. The role of conception in perception (and in what is finally experienced, sensation) is affirmed by introducing the difference between ‘*savikalpa*’ and ‘*nirvikalpa*’ perception, or perception with and without thought-construction (*kalpanā*, to construct mentally). In the *Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali*, this distinction is drawn between *saṃprajñāta* and *asaṃprajñāta* (*The Yoga Sūtra of Patañjali*, 2016), whereas in Early Buddhism perception with and without thought-construction is found in the *Bāhiya* instruction (*Samyutta Nikāya* 47 – *Satipaṭṭhāna samyutta*, 15 and also in the *Udāna*).

‘O Bāhiya, whenever you see a form, let there be just the seeing ; whenever you hear a sound, let there be just the hearing ; when you smell an odor, let there be just the smelling ; when you taste a flavor, let there be just the tasting ; when a thought arises, let it be just a natural phenomenon arising in the mind. When you practice like this, there will be no self, no “I.” When there is no self, there will be no running that way and no coming this way and no stopping anywhere. Self doesn't exist. That is the end of suffering. That itself is “nirvāṇa.”’ – *Bāhiya-sūtra, Udāna* 1.10

Common perception is savikalpa and, therefore, dualistic, whereas yogic and enlightened perception is *nirvikalpa* and nondual. The latter is unassociated with name, whereas the former is well-defined by association with language. Hence, *nirvikalpa* is bare, direct, undifferentiated, non-relational, etc. Thought-constructions are not just 'added on' to bare perception, but they determine how the world appears to deluded beings.

What counts as reality is a matter of categories imposed on the world. So what suffering beings call 'reality' always depends on their linguistic categories.

Kant, (neo-Kantian) criticism and observational psychology doubt whether, apart from the categories of our thinking mind, the thing-in-itself (Ding-an-sich, *svalakṣaṇa*) can be experienced. Accordingly, these superimpositions (*āvarṇas*) cannot be 'unlearned.' The Buddhadharmā, Taoism, and Hindu Yoga disagree. Cognitive activity beyond conceptual reason is possible. Moreover, such nondual perceiving, acting, and thinking are the case when awakening is actualized.

Yoga intends to eliminate the overlay and make direct yogic perception possible. Consciousness has to be purified from the tendency to superimpose concepts on naked and natural perception. Consciousness is not to be confused with thoughts, nor can it be eliminated. Indeed, take away consciousness, and no cognitive act or knowledge is viable. Knower (self) and known (nature) have no meaning outside consciousness. It is the case for mental objects but also holds for sensate facts.

Whatever is observed (in a given conscious sensation) is always already an interpretation of perception, i.e., what happens on the sensitive surfaces of the five sense organs (*A Neurophilosophy of Sensation*, 2003). Experiences and the mental structures on which they co-depend rise together (Popper, Feyerabend). Conceptualizing, we never face nature as it ultimately is, but merely nature as it conventionally appears (*Book of Lemmas*, 2016).

Epistemological idealism can not be refuted. If one tries, one merely affirms it (*contradictio in actu exercito*). To assert the object owes nothing to its being perceived by a subject (naive realism) implies we must know what the object was before being perceived, i.e., we must know something without knowing. It is self-refuting. Likewise, to assert the knowing subject owes nothing to the perceived object (naive idealism) implies we can know some real thing without an actual, extra-mental object present. It, too, is absurd. Indeed, for knowledge about objects to be possible, the concept of a thing-in-itself cannot be avoided. It must, in some way, be integrated into critical thinking, and this without reintroducing a self-sufficient ground outside knowledge (an absolute object or an absolute subject). Consciousness, to delve into its own dynamical, ever-evolving continuum, stays with itself. So the practice of yoga requires a deep study of all possible states of consciousness.

Mind, the capacity to cognize or know, is not a passive registrar merely taking note of the sense-data registered by the senses (as naive realism proposes). On the contrary, it is an active agent that transforms what it receives (from the senses and itself). It is affirmed by Western criticism (the so-called theory-ladenness of observation) and as well by Yogācāra.

Consciousness has its structure, form, organization, or content (*sākāra*). It causes the difference between the thing-in-itself and the thing-for-us. Suppose consciousness was contentless (*nirākāra*), then it would add nothing of its own, and what is 'observed' would be the thing-in-itself ; in other words, the object observed would owe nothing to the fact of it being known by a subject of knowledge. It happens when the mind is fully awake (and *nirvikalpa samādhi* is a permanent condition). Suppose sensation is the actual conscious apperception (mental representation, labeling, naming, designation, or *prajñāpati*) of a sensuous object (*viśayas*). In that case, this sensation is the product of (a) a sensuous perception by the senses (*indriyas*) and (b) conceptual interpretation (mentation).

S(ensation) = P(erception) times I(nterpretation), with $I \neq 1$

The sensate objects appearing to the mind are already designated and co-dependent on mental objects and perception. Mental objects are always part of the mind. But although naive realism cannot be rationally upheld, it cannot be the case that because we need an instrument to perceive an object (which has to be accepted), the object cannot exist from its own side without the instrument (which –in the case of consciousness itself– cannot be proved). Both realism and idealism have a truth-core : idealism is correct in identifying the epistemological fact knowledge is impossible without an active, categorizing knower, and realism is correct in stating, to be knowledge, sensate objects must have received the ‘letters of credence’ from extra-mental reality.

Following the principles of criticism (*Book of Lemmas*, 2016, *Regulae*, 2016), we must, insofar as the actual act of cognition itself is at hand, divide the act of cognition into knower and known. But this is impossible outside a given consciousness intending to know. The pre-conceptual intention to know comes logically first. This intention is non-conceptual.

Once this intention to know engaged, subject and object rise as the bipolar unity of that which perceives (*darśanabhāga*) and that which is perceived (*nimittabhāga*). Within consciousness, the object is announcing itself with strong, natural tenacity as an obstruction, as a resistance bringing about a sense of something arriving from ‘outside’ the mind.

As an object, we must consider it as if to exist from its own side (although we never can conceptually know for sure this is the case or not). Simultaneously, a definite stable sense of a knowing ‘I’ or ‘self’ emerges.

‘Since the idealist has no other reality but consciousness, the forms perceived must pertain to consciousness alone, there being no external object. Consciousness creates its own forms. The content of consciousness is not imported from outside, but is inherent in the states of consciousness themselves.’ – Chatterjee, 2007, p.50.

Yogācāra is often called an example of idealism, meaning Mind-Only would adhere to the view the objective world exists because of the mind (classical idealism or metaphysical idealism). It means the creativity of consciousness makes up real physical objects, a truly self-defeating notion, rejecting the extra-mental. Let me first clarify the term 'idealism.' Idealism puts forward the ideal, realism the real. Both possess a truth-core and are regulative ideas of reason. The 'ideal' of the universal consensus among all involved sign-interpreters and the 'real' as the correspondence with an extra-mental reality. Together, these regulate the production of knowledge.

In this sense, to make knowledge possible, both are necessary. But divorced from one another and used to constitute knowledge (the object generating knowledge without a subject or the subject engendering knowledge without an object), they lead to ontological (transcendental) illusion, the 'scandal of reason' (Kant).

Five variations on the theme of idealism :

1. **Classical or ontological idealism** : only consciousness exists (monism), so consciousness is the foundation of the existence of objects. Criticism argues against and rejects this form of idealism. There are no valid reasons to suppose objective reality does or does not exist outside consciousness. We can never be sure this to be the case or not. Judgment about consciousness-independent reality has to be suspended.

2. **Absolute (metaphysical) idealism** (cf. *leges cogitandi sunt leges essendi*) : the laws of thinking are the laws of reality (cf. Spinoza). The ultimate understanding of the logical structure of the world is an understanding of the logic of the absolute mind. This structure of the absolute mind, or ultimate reality, can be known (cf. Hegel). Absolute idealists are always ontological idealists and monists, for ultimately, the One Absolute Spirit lays the groundwork for Nature, making the extra-mental non-existent. By knowing the truth, the knower constitutes the known. Ultimate reality is always mind-dependent.

Absolute idealism transgresses the boundaries of conceptual knowledge. Its claims are made from an absolute vantage point. Such a position cannot be reasonably argued.

3. Pluralistic (metaphysical) idealism : a plurality of individual consciousnesses together is the grounding substratum underlying the existence of the observed world. It makes possible the existence of the universe (cf. Leibniz). It is the substantialist (essentialist) format embracing ontological idealism. Weaker forms are possible, integrating relativity, quantum, and chaos. If conventional propositional statements are required, we must affirm the possibility of extra-mental, external objects. This form of idealism may or may not embrace ontological idealism.

4. Subjective idealism : the perceptual experiences of the knowing subject are the only epistemic validators for claims about the external world, i.e., no cognition of any reality existing independently of consciousness is possible.

Cognitive states occur as part of a set of other cognitive states and within a cognitive system (Searle, 1996). Subjective idealism includes epistemological idealism, affirming all we experience and know is mental. Subjective idealism cannot be avoided. Our experiences are always our own, be they individual (First Person), shared (Second Person), or communal (Third Person). Sensate objects are co-dependent on the content of consciousness.

Such idealism, found in Kant, neo-Kantianism, and contemporary criticism, must embrace critical realism, i.e., the affirmation that the extra-mental must back objective objects if knowledge is possible. Transcendental (epistemological) idealism is a more systematized and epistemological version of subjective idealism.

5. Transcendental idealism : by reflecting on itself, consciousness discovers the principles, norms, and maxims ruling knowledge, i.e., rules defining how knowledge is possible and may advance. Knowledge, or what a certain knower knows about a certain

known, is also the result of a creative, constructive, content-producing activity or perspective from the side of the knowing subject (*kalpanā*). Consciousness is not merely a passive registrar but active, creative, and constructive (perspectivism). In terms of the epistemic status of objects, we must (as a norm) assume or act as if objects extra-mentally stimulate the sensitive areas of our senses, and this while we know it is impossible to step outside our cognitive apparatus to then conceptually check whether this is indeed the case or not. Attributing any causation between such a stimulating agent and the sensitive areas of our senses (as Kant tried) is also impossible, for this calls for the categorial scheme determining causation to be allegedly fired-up by these quasi-causal objective stimuli.

After centuries of descriptive criticism, a normative stance is left. If knowledge is to be possible, we must assume an external, extra-mental object exists and somehow persistently confronts the active subject of knowledge. But, at least insofar as conceptual reason goes, it could be possible this is not the case. Kantian transcendental idealism was still descriptive and tried to define synthetic judgments *a priori*.

Contemporary criticism is normative, no longer aiming to eternalize knowledge but merely trying to understand knowledge and its production. What the conceptual mind knows to be true is always conventional, historical, fallible knowledge all involved sign-interpreters consider valid for the time being.

‘Critical epistemological idealism, as opposed to metaphysical idealism, need not insist on metaphysical or ontological implications, but merely claims that the cognizer shapes his/her experience to such an extent that s/he will never be able to extricate what s/he brings to an experience from what is other to the cognizer. Like can only know like, so what is truly other is essentially and decisively unknowable precisely because it is other, foreign, alien, inscrutable.’ – Lusthaus, 2006, p.5. Xuanzang, turning Yogācāra into an absolute idealism, nevertheless points out that :

- a) The existence or reality of 'self' and 'nature' cannot be ascertained independently of consciousness and
 b) Despite this, there might or might not be *dharmas* exterior to the mind !

These are two strong points to be retained.

Critical epistemology avoids describing what cannot be reasonably objectified (namely the extra-mental). Taking a normative stance clarifies that if we want to rationally (logically) guarantee the possibility and development of knowledge, we must accept mental exteriority, which we are continually doing anyway. Realism and idealism are merely regulative ideas used in the methodology of applied epistemology to solve actual problems. Methodological realism teaches us to act 'as if' the object exists from its own side. Methodological idealism teaches us to act 'as if' intersubjectivity constitutes (by way of theories) observed objects. As metaphysical positions, they cannot be validated.

Entirely, on the contrary, only the critical (demarcating) integration of both is a viable road. Ontological realism suffers from repressing subjectivity, and ontological idealism suffers from a lack of the extra-mental. Criticism understands 'the real' and 'the ideal' as regulative ideas only, not constituting knowledge but merely regulating it so it may expand.

As we cannot –to know any object– step outside the knower (assume an Archimedean vantage point overseeing all), it remains possible that all of our conceptual knowledge (*savikalpa*) is merely a universal illusion (*māyā*). On this, the conceptual, thinking mind (*mano-vijñāna*) cannot reasonably decide. So whether exterior *dharmas* exist or not, cannot be conceptually answered ; all possible answers belonging to the communicative (linguistic) activity of intersubjective sign-interpreters are intra-mental.

However, we must accept the theory-laden facts regarding the objective state of affairs (put down in propositional statements) also

possess a theory-independent side (can produce the letters of credence of reality-in-itself), but we cannot possibly conceptually know for sure whether this is the case or not. The extra-mental must be assumed to manifest via facts, and without the latter, no conventional knowledge is possible. But facts are not one-to-one representations of reality, but *Janus*-faced hybrids, turned towards our theoretical constructs, and, so must we assume, reality-in-itself. It is the neo-Kantian, critical version of transcendental idealism, retaining elements from subjective idealism and epistemological idealism. We cannot affirm a quasi-causal relationship between the 'Ding-an-sich' and the categorial scheme (as Kant did). Such a description of the cognitive act is self-defeating. But we can do nothing else but affirm we must, for knowledge to be possible, accept the extra-mental to exist. In general, classical idealists do not grasp the importance of this, and even Xuanzang (who claimed there might or might not be dharmas exterior to the mind) writes : 'On the basis of the manifold activities of inner consciousness that serve as conditions for one another, the cause and effect are differentiated. The postulation of external conditions is not of any use.' – *Cheng wei shih lun*, 574.

Another Yogācāra originality lies in its introduction of two consciousnesses lying outside the realm of the ordinary thinking mind. Ordinary, nominal consciousness is not aware of these (they are subliminal), and only spiritual emancipation allows one to gain awareness of them. It means Yogācāra introduced the subliminal (unconscious) mind nearly two millennia before Freud, Jung, and Assagioli. However, a crucial difference pertains to Western depth psychology : the unconscious cannot be made conscious ; it largely stays subliminal. For Yogācāra, the structure of consciousness does not preclude the complete awakening of consciousness.

On the contrary, the soteriology explicitly aims at the complete illumination of consciousness, and human suffering is understood precisely as the absence of this. 'Human consciousness is by nature the processive advance to an ever more perfect self-consciousness in which it finally awakens to the plenitude of its identity with the

Ālaya-vijñāna. That the latter grounds and posits the phenomenological mind with seeds (bījas) of both ignorance and wisdom, specifies the minds active self-emergence as the necessary opposition between the two. Only in the expansive illumination of wisdom, gradually dilating the restrictive vision of ignorance, does human consciousness attain the awareness of its own universality.’ – Brown, 2004, pp.225-226.

Two other subliminal types of consciousnesses were added to the Abhidharmic six-fold to explain *karma* (touching morality and rebirth), as well as selfhood in the light of the interrupted nature of the ordinary mind (*mano-vijñāna*) : *manas* (the seventh) and *ālaya-vijñāna* (the eighth). Indeed, how can ‘I’ be responsible for ‘my’ afflicted and afflicting deeds if this ‘I’ is merely a process ? How can the next tenant of this mindstream ‘I’ call ‘my own’, experience the consequences of what ‘I’ do if this ‘I’ does not exist as a self-powered entity (*ātman, puruṣa*) ? How to conceptualize a process-self ?

Whereas the coarse, sense-centered thinking mind (*mano-vijñāna*) appropriates the coarse, external objects of the five senses (*viśayas*) –directing the attention of sense organs toward their objects–, and has a crude, unstable deliberative function, interrupted in certain states (like in dreamless sleep), the suffering mind (*manas*), the seventh consciousness, is an uninterrupted, subtle mind related to the view of the existence of self and deliberating all the time. The delusion of a substantial self-generated by this *manas* is due to an ignorance unique to it, namely the sense of being disconnected from everything else (independence). This *āveṇīkī avidyā* is the root-cause of all of our suffering.

Manas, an uninterrupted continuum, is very resistant to being transformed. It knows no end and can only be turned when the mind is changed from the base. Whereas the thinking mind works with the senses and cognizes their objects, *manas* attaches itself to and identifies with *ālaya-vijñāna* since beginningless times, regarding this root-consciousness as its inner self (i.e., identifying with it). In other words, *manas* clings to *ālaya-vijñāna*, leading to the misidentification

of the conscious dynamical continuum as a static substance. A subliminal continuum is mistakenly cognized as a substratum or substantial identity (as in the upaniṣadic version of the *ātman*). At this point, the empirical, momentary ego of the thinking mind (*mano-vijñāna*) is turned by *manas* into a solid, enduring identity, selfhood, or identity, mistakenly grasped at as if disconnected from the rest, from the others. This mind then cherishes itself (self-love), considering number one as of first importance. As long as this unique ignorance of *manas* has not been altered (by turning or revolutionize it), it is always *kleśā-manas*, a suffering mind.

In Sanskrit, *ālaya* means house, storehouse, or receptacle. This base-consciousness or root-consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*) is also called ripening or retributive consciousness (*vipāka-vijñāna*), for all content deposited there dynamically generates future effects. It does not depend on any specific object, and so it is the base, or foundation of the fifth aggregate as a whole, grounding the other seven consciousnesses. It does not deliberate, or judge and so is morally neutral (accepts wholesome and unwholesome alike).

Ālaya-vijñāna includes *manas* as one kind and *mano-vijñāna* as another kind. Because *ālaya-vijñāna* does not deliberate at all, it is not a *vijñāna* in the strict sense of the word, but as it is the base of the others, it is included as one. Unlike Western depth psychology, Yogācāra is not interested in ceasing mental suffering happening in the thinking, empirical, coarse (ego) mind due to supposed unconscious processes like repression causing complexes, neurosis, or psychosis. Depth psychology rose to eliminate the effect of these disturbing relationships with the unconscious. The latter was a hypothetical construct invented to end this supposed effect.

For Freud, sexuality, in its most extended sense (as *libido sexualis*), lay at the root of these disturbances. Psychoanalysis was intended to restore the natural position of the ego, enhance its common sense when facing reality. Freud was a realist. For Jung, a vast storehouse of archetypes was called in to accommodate the process of individuation or optimal maturation of the ego. Jung is rather an idealist.

For Assagioli, the root cause of egoic suffering was the disrupted communication with the super-conscious higher self. He was a transcendentalist. In each case, the ego (or thinking mind) remained the focus of attention.

The Buddhadharma wants to eradicate suffering once and for all. Its target is not the well-being of the empirical ego only, but the total awakening of consciousness (the moment of *mahābodhi*). In other words, the goal is to make the totality of the unconscious permanently conscious ! The well-being of the ego is merely the outcome of this total illumination, for only this supreme state ends suffering irreversibly.

The cause of all possible suffering is ignorance, and according to the yogācārins, its manifestation assumes two forms : (a) the tenacious conviction the ego exists independently and autonomously (*ātma-grāha*) and (b) the adherence to the false idea objects exists substantially (*dharmagrāha*). The first causes the vexing passions (*kleśāvarana*), associated with self-cherishing, the second is a barrier hindering ultimate knowledge (*jñeyāvarana*), and is based on the phenomenology of failing to perceive the mutual interdependence of all phenomena in their ultimate dependence on root-consciousness, superimposing the false imagination (*parikalpita*) of substance, misapprehending dependent reality (*paratantra*).

Fundamentally, these two causes of suffering, independent self (subject) and independent nature (object), originate in (a) intellectual or acquired self-grasping, i.e., the extrinsic impact of wrong views and teachings (about self and nature) infecting the conceptualizations of the thinking mind (*mano-vijñāna*) and (b) innate self-grasping, i.e., the intrinsic, natural or innate belief in the substantial reality of self and nature. The latter is ignorance and rooted in *manas*. It hinders the wisdom of egolessness (*nairātmya*), causing *manas* to attach itself to the *ālaya* as the substantial core of personal identity or personhood. Due to this belief in self (*ātmadrṣṭi*), there is a self-conceit (*ātmamāna*) and self-love (*ātmasneha*), whereby *manas* considers itself as better than all others, causing a deep attachment to unique selfhood.

Given *manas* is the support (*āśraya*) of the thinking mind and the five sensory consciousnesses, its persistent misapprehension of the root of consciousness causes their own functions to falter too. Especially *ātmagrāha* dominates consciousness as a whole.

So even if intellectual self-grasping ends, awakening is not the case. Moreover, because *manas* supports *mano-vijñāna*, intellectual self-grasping is likely to return if innate self-grasping has not finished. So foremost, one needs to tackle innate self-grasping. Knowing how to stop intellectual self-grasping is a preparatory exercise.

Yogācārins seek the fruit, Buddhahood. So epistemology, phenomenology, and psychology serve soteriology, the direct recognition of the ultimate. Buddhist philosophy is fine. Its right view is based on excellent understanding (*prajñā*, still dualistic and *savikalpa*), ending the intellectual self-grasping of the thinking mind (*mano-vijñāna*), sustained by the subliminal identification (*manas*). But only yoga and the direct experience of what is the case (*jñāna*, nondual, and *nirvikalpa*) will ‘turn’ the mind and end suffering (cancel *manas*).

The process of spiritual emancipation implies a steady advance from the thinking mind to full mind-capacity, leaving not a single consciousness out in the process. The crucial factor in this being *manas*. It needs to be transformed from impure and affliction-bound (ego-affirming) into pure and non-afflicted egolessness (equalizing ‘I’ with ‘others’).

‘Evolving out of and grounded upon it, the *manas* has a constant and spontaneous awareness of the Ālaya-vijñāna. But instead of recognizing it as the unconditional reality, the universal absolute consciousness, the generic animating principle of all sentient beings, the *manas* appropriates it as the determinate center of its own, discrete self-identity (the *ātman*). It does so through the influence of an ignorance unique to it (*āveṇikī avidyā*) and perpetually continuous (*nityācarini*) with it since beginningless time.’ – Brown, 2004, p.215.

In the *Triṃśikā-Kārikā-Vijñaptimātratā*, this seminal work written centuries before Willem of Ockham (1285 – 1347) and Kant (1724 – 1804), the following factors emerge :

1. **Epistemological** : what theory of knowledge did Vasubandhu and Early Yogācāra espouse ? In my reading, transcendental idealism is the case, i.e., knowledge implies a knower, and a known and both are always part of consciousness (epistemological idealism) ;

2. **Psychological** : to identify the causes of wrong ideation (mistaken view), causing ongoing suffering, the study of the mind is necessary. Two leading causes : mental obscuration and emotional affliction, whereby the former underpins the latter.

To end afflictive obscurations, the study of afflictive and non-afflictive states of mind becomes necessary. It is the first of the two cessations resulting from meditative practice (*bhāvana*) or yoga. It is followed by ending mental obscurations, understood as the cessation of a non-existing (illusionary) conceptual superimposition of substance-obsession on subjective and objective reality ;

3. **Phenomenological** : study of and return to the momentary nature of the phenomenon of knowledge hic et nunc was an Abhidharmic preoccupation Vasubandhu took over. Going back to what is at hand or to the things themselves brings in epistemological themes also found in Western phenomenology, in particular, the reductions of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938) and ‘truth as unconcealment’ in the work of Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976) after ‘die Kehre’ ;

4. **Soteriological** : the Yogācāra edifice serves spiritual emancipation, nothing else. So the Yoga Practice School advanced logical, epistemological, and psychological teachings to help the salvic purpose of ending the suffering of sentient beings.

It wants to alleviate the existential conflicts we all face. Hence, this is religious philosophy in the experiential sense of the word, a view leading to a life embracing true peace. Note the ‘experience’ referred to is not the ‘common’ experience of humanity (*savikalpa*),

but the direct observation of those who practice meditation (*nirvikalpa*), which is (still) only a few. To end ignorance, the direct experience of that what is the case is necessary. As a sentient being endowed with the power of choice, the yogi's thinking mind (*manovijñāna*), by making sure the suffering mind (*manas*) equalizes 'I' with 'others,' initiates the 'turning of the base' (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*).

Experiencing base-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) all at once, i.e., cognizing without any reifying activity of the afflictive mind (*manas*), nonduality is entered ; the experience of the absence of the distinction between subject and object. When all reification is wiped away, the irreversible cessation of all suffering or Buddhahood ensues.

1. **Epistemology** : knowledge implies a knower and a known, and these are always part of consciousness (epistemological idealism).
2. **Phenomenology** : the study of and return to the momentary nature of what happens underpins the yogic approach.
3. **Psychology** : the study of afflictive and non-afflictive states of mind aims to end the afflictive obscurations caused by *manas*.
4. **Soteriology** : the 'turning of the basis,' allowing the practitioner to experience base-consciousness directly (i.e., unclouded by any reification by *manas*), is the uninterrupted and direct experience of the perfect nature of all phenomena, resulting in awakening.

Maturing, Yogācāra integrated Buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*). Along these lines, 'turning the base' and the instruction to 'recognize the nature of mind' (cf. Ch'an, Zen) may seem synonymous, bringing Mind-Only close to Chinese and Japanese suddenism, adding ontological idealism to the mix (Xuanzang).

Yogācāra, *sūtra*-based, is gradualist and perfect nature nondual. 'the gradual teaching takes the position that our tenacious attachments to self and dharmas are things that cannot be instantly severed, and can only be gradually eliminated by sustained exertion, and therefore the accomplishment of buddhahood is something that requires training over a vast period of time. Here Yogācāra Buddhism takes the gradualist position.' – Shun'ei, 2009, p.120.

The *Thirty Verses* retains a qualified transcendental idealism. This qualification was identified by Xuanzang when he wrote there might or might not be *dharma*s exterior to the mind (*Cheng wei shih lun*, 88). Criticism contents we must think such objects exist. It is a call for epistemological idealism in psychology and soteriology.

‘Thus the key Yogācāra phrase vijñapti-mātra does not mean (as is often touted in scholarly literature) that consciousness alone exists, but rather that all our efforts to get beyond ourselves are nothing but projections of our consciousness. Yogācārins treat the term vijñapti-mātra as an epistemic caution, not an ontological pronouncement. Having suspended the ontological query that leads to idealism or materialism, they instead are interested in uncovering why we generate and attach to such a position in the first place. Insofar as either position might lead to attachment, Yogācāra clearly and forthrightly rejects both of them.’ – Lusthaus, 2002, pp.5-6.

The *Triṃśikā* can be read without any reference to classical idealism (ontological idealism). Ontological issues like the manifestation of the objective world based on subliminal seeds need not be attended to. The focus lies on the phenomenological, epistemological, existential, and salvic aspects, assisting in understanding the principle of Buddhist Yoga : consciousness.

The *Thirty Verses* is extant in Sanskrit. Sthiramati (510 – 570) wrote a commentary on it (*Triṃśikā-vijñapti-bhāṣya*).

In 1922, Lévi found it in Nepal and was first to edit it :

- Lévi, Sylvain : *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi : Deux Traités de Vasubandhu*, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion – Paris, 1925, pp.1-11.
- Lévi, Sylvain : *Un système de philosophie bouddhique. Matériaux pour l'étude du système Vijñaptimātra*, Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion – Paris, 1932, p.175 : Corrections au Texte Sanscrit.

The former translations ‘no longer satisfy the contemporary philological requirements for a text to be considered reliable.’ – Buescher, 2007, p.2.

The critical edition of the text used here was published by :

- Buescher, H. : *Sthiramati's Trimśikāvijñaptibhāṣya*, Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften – Wien, 2007. The transliteration of the text of the *Trimśikā* can be found on pp.133-135.

It is the text used and translated here.

Additional versions used :

- Wood, Th.E. : *Mind-Only*, Motilal – Benares, 2009, pp.49-56.
- Lusthaus, D. : *Buddhist Phenomenology*, Routledge – New York, 2006, pp.275 -304.

Regarding variations, we find :

‘In the present edition, these various inconsistencies have been silently homogenized : no anusvāra will occur in pausa, no gemination of consonants after r, no avagraha to interfere with ā-sandhi ; but avagrahas and doubled consonants will be found, where they should be placed, and sibilants will be emended according to common standards ...’ – Buescher, p.15.

The metaphors self and nature,
functioning in so many ways, take place
in the transformation of consciousness.

Triṃśikā, Verse 1.

Short Biography of Vasubandhu



Vasubandhu
as Gandhāran monk and Yogācāra Ch'an Patriarch

Some of the details of Vasubandhu's life were recorded in Chinese and Tibetan biographies. The earliest, complete account, the so-called *Biography of Master Vasubandhu*, was compiled into Chinese by Paramārtha (499 – 569) when in China. The earliest Tibetan is that of the Sakya Butön (1290 – 1364). References are also found in the works of the Jonangpa Tāranātha (1575 – 1634) and other writers (Xuanzang, Vāmana). A lot of myths too.

Vasubandhu (ca. 316 – 396) was born in Puruṣapura (the City of Man, present-day Peshawar), in the Kingdom of Gāndhāra. No longer the heart of a vast empire, it had become a borderland in decline. According to Paramārtha, his father was a Brāhmana of the Kauśika *gotra*, a court priest. So no lack of Vedic culture there. Vasubandhu's mother was called Viriñcī. The couple had a previous son, Asaṅga. According to Tāranātha, Vasubandhu was born one year after the latter became a Mahāyāna monk. In his youth, Vasubandhu received the Brahminical lore, in particular, Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika, both *āstika*, orthodox schools of Hinduism.

Nyāya is syllogistic logic. Vaiśeṣika an atomistic ontology. These influenced his logical thinking and style. Upon entering the Lesser Vehicle Sarvāstivāda order, Vasubandhu did not change his name (it means 'the kinsman of abundance').

In the 3rd-century BCE, under the reign of king Aśoka, the Sarvāstivāda School, prevailing primarily in Kaśmir, questioned the status of the Arhat and, like the Mahāsāṃghika before them, maintained the possibility of his regression. The school's name was probably derived from the phrase '*sarvaṃ asti*' or 'all exists,' pointing to the notion past *dharma*s still existed, albeit in the past 'mode.' As such, they were able to exert influence at a later time.

This school constitutes a *transitional stage* between the Foundational Vehicle and the Great Vehicle. The fact Arhathood is again questioned should be noted. It points to a felt need to expand the salvic horizon, moving beyond the Lesser Vehicle.

The Sarvāstivāda comprised two subschools, the Sautrāntika and the Vaibhāśika.

The Vaibhāśika adhered to the *Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra*, comprising the orthodox Kaśmiri branch of the Sarvāstivāda. They upheld a fascinating and very comprehensive doctrinal system. The Sautrāntika or 'those who uphold the *sūtras*,' did not enforce the *Mahāvibhāṣa Śāstra*, but the Buddhist *sūtras*. A later compendium of teachings inspired them, the *Seven Treatises of Manifest Knowledge*, believed to be spoken by the Buddha.

Vasubandhu's commentary on the *Abhidharmakośa* (presenting the view of the Vaibhāśika), the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, criticizes the Vaibhāśika by upholding the tenets of the Sautrāntika School. At first, Vasubandhu's sharp mind was impressed by the comprehensiveness of the Vaibhāśika scholastic system, the late phase of the Sarvāstivāda School, bringing to life the Kaśmiri Sarvāstivāda orthodoxy. Starting around 150 CE, the Sautrāntikas began to criticize Vaibhāśika, the establishment of the day overtly. They ridiculed the

elaborate scholastic construction and posed pertinent questions about providing a coherent account of the Buddha's core teachings, namely impermanence (*anitya*), dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*), action (*karma*), and no(t)-self (*anātman*).

When Vasubandhu came into contact with these Sautrāntikas, he was so impressed he went to Kaśmir to study the Vaibhāśika in-depth and stayed there for four years (342 - 346). He got doubly convinced the Vaibhāśika failed !

After having to fake lunacy to return home, he lived as an independent monk, yogi, philosopher, and orator and publicly lectured about Vaibhāśika (brought together as the *Abhidharmakośa*). But off the record, he wrote a commentary on this text, the famous *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam*, in fact, a harsh critique of Vaibhāśika dogma from a Sautrāntika perspective !

This commentary became 'the standard Abhidharma work for the *unorthodox* in India' (Anacker, 2013, p.18, *my italics*). Vasubandhu traveled around, lectured and had, up to this time, little to no regard for the Yogācāra School of his half-brother Asaṅga, a Mahāyāna mystic, yogi, scholar and inspired author of the seminal *Five Treatises of Maitreya* (this authorship is however disputed – Brunnhölzl, 2014, p.81) :

1. *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*
(Ornament to the Scriptures of the Great Vehicle)
2. *Abhisamayālaṅkāra* (The Ornament to the Realization)
3. *Madhyānta-vibhāga* (Distinguishing the Middle from the Extremes)
4. *Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga*
(Distinguishing Dharma and Dharmatā) and
5. *Ratna-gotra-vibhāga* (Analysis of the Lineage of the [Three] Jewels), also called 'Uttaratantraśāstra.'

Vasubandhu told people he deemed the system of his brother too tricky and burdensome it could only be carried by an elephant (Butön).

As always, his take was zealous, brilliant, sharp, and astute. But his integrity became apparent when his brother's students challenged him. He found both theory and practice of the Mahāyāna well-founded and so immediately regretted his former boastful disregard for it. The story goes, he wanted to cut off his tongue. Instead, he converted to Mahāyāna ! The brothers worked together. Asaṅga asked Vasubandhu to use his higher mental consciousness to advance the Great Vehicle, which he did.

Vasubandhu read and wrote extensively, writing new treatises every year. Both brothers are considered to be the founders of the Yogācāra School, the second branch of the Mahāyāna. So vast was Vasubandhu's output that some conjectured many Vasubandhus must have existed. But recent scholarship makes this very unlikely.

'The "personality" of Vasubandhu which emerges from his works and his biographies shows him as a man filled with great compassion for the mental afflictions of others, and with a concern for their physical well-being, as well. The monetary rewards which he received for his teachings and his debating victories he did not keep (...) but utilized to build monasteries, hospitals, rest-houses, and schools.' – Anacker, 2013, pp.23-24.

In 1922, Sylvain Lévi discovered a Sanskrit version of the *Triṃśikā* in Nepal. It had thirty verses (*kārikās*) and was an exposition of the fundamentals of the Yogācāra School, '... an integral and highly influential presentation of the essential thought of *Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda* presented in 30 stanzas.' – Buescher, 2007, p.VII.

The earliest Chinese translation of the *Triṃśikā* is the *Chuan shih lun* or *Evolution of Consciousness* of Parāmartha (499 – 569).

Vasubandhu's treatise was so crucial in terms of its authority, precision and succinctness, that it became the core of the *Cheng wei shih lun* or *Treatise on the Establishment of the Doctrine of Consciousness-Only*, a significant text of the Chinese traveler, scholar, translator, and yogācārin Xuanzang (Hsüang-tsang, 602 – 664).

Placing the *Trimśikā* at the heart of his vast edifice of ontological idealism, Xuanzang paid tribute to the importance of these verses.

The *Thirty Verses* may be regarded as summarizing Vasubandhu's take on the principles of the Yoga Practice School. They are foundational in our understanding of the way of yogic experience, i.e., of right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditation.

'According to the Tibetans, his favorite sūtra was either the *Śatasānasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā*, or the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*. That these texts should have pleased a man who so loved argument, and who in addition had such a great sense of humour, is hardly suprising, as they reveal the most profound insights through mind-boggling dialogues that are never far from laughter.' – Anacker; 2013, p.19.

We are as drunk with our own god-like power of self-an world-creation, inebriated by a hubris which dares to call itself *homo sapiens*, the wise one. We have, in this way, bound the bonds of our own, bounded, worldly existence.

Waldron, W. S. : *The Buddhist Unconscious*, 2003, p.4.

Remarks on Depth Psychology

To explain the continuity of consciousness and *karma*, the Mind-Only School introduced the idea of two uninterrupted subliminal strata, the afflictive mind (*manas*) and the storehouse-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*). This 'Buddhist unconscious' is launched for reasons, unlike Western depth psychology, emerging as a clinical model to tackle egoic disorders. What do these psychologists say about the unconscious about (in)sanity and spirituality ?

In the West, conventional clinical psychology and psychiatry, driven by a materialist metaphysical research program (*The End of Physicalism*, 2015), do define insanity, but only rarely insofar as the field of spirituality is concerned, and if so, then mostly pejoratively. Indeed, in the last century, it was the custom to understand altered states of consciousness not as *alternative* states but as *abnormal* conditions of the mind (statistically, normatively, and evolutionary). Was Plato's ontological model, opposing 'being' and 'becoming,' proof of his schizophrenia ? Was doubting the truth of naive realism not tantamount to a symptom of pathology ?

'The hardest of hard data are of two sorts : the particular facts of sense, and the general truths of logic. (...) Real doubt, in these two cases, would, I think, be pathological. At any rate, to me they seem quite certain, and I shall assume that you agree with me on this. Without this assumption, we are in danger of falling into that universal scepticism which, as we saw, is as barren as it is irrefutable.'
 – Russell, B. : *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Mentor - New York, 1956, p.60.

The study of mysticism was crippled by an incomplete model of the mind, presupposing trance and ecstasy were, in various degrees, pathological. In such a mindset, real advances in understanding what altered states of consciousness were could not be made. Nor could mystics, yogis, and spiritual teachers be taken seriously. The model of reality was physicalist, reducing information (software) and consciousness (userware) to matter (hardware).

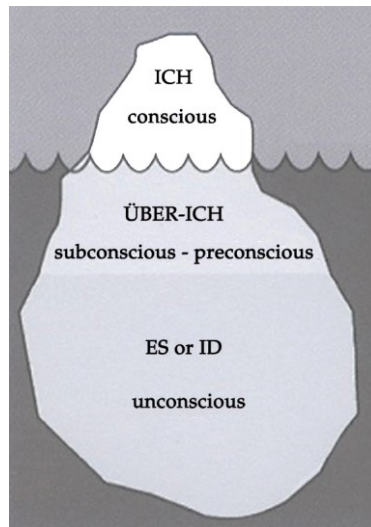
Transpersonal psychology, at work in the last half of the XXth century, but also comparative religious studies, cultural anthropology, and the rise of Yoga in the West, dramatically changed this. Moreover, in quantum physics, the role of consciousness in ending the measurement chain was affirmed by giants like Bohr, Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Planck, Pauli, von Neumann, Wigner, Wheeler, Stapp, Penrose, and Kafatos. Despite this, it remains a minority opinion within contemporary physics ... This evolution, from a physicalist prejudice to a genuine interest *not* taking the downward causation by consciousness as a *a priori* proof of insanity, can also be found in the history of depth psychology. What did these psychologists of the unconscious have to say about spirituality and mental disorders insofar as they relate to spirituality ? Summarizing the salient points, Freud, Jung, and Assagioli are my chief spokesmen.

Let me first clarify how the 'unconscious' got introduced in the West. Two stages are to be noted : firstly, the unconscious was introduced to explain specific *problematic symptoms* occurring consciously. A good example, to mention only one of her symptoms, was the rigid paralysis of Bertha Pappenheim (alias Anna O), treated by Freud. He discovered that the various symptoms of his 'hysterical' patients were *not* caused by any physiological issue but were residues and mnemonic symbols of a particularly traumatic experience stored in the unconscious (called 'Es' or 'Id'). Hypnosis and later free association would bring this trauma to the surface. Thus, *becoming conscious of it*, shedding the light of consciousness on it, brought the associated symptoms to an end. So in psychoanalysis, the 'unconscious' was introduced to explain how these traumas may be cured and how they operate negative consequences in conscious life (neurosis and psychosis, the standard insanities, are likewise symptoms of unconscious processes).

Secondly, modeling (mapping) this conjectured unconscious activity gave rise to an *objectification of the unconscious*. Instead of being a hypothesis explaining errors in conscious functioning, 'the unconscious' became a *stratum* of the mind, albeit one not ordinarily accessible by the conscious ego (or 'Ich').

As soon as this theoretical activity is on the go, the unconscious workings receive a life of their own, one in principle distinguishable from any possible pathological impact on conscious life. The unconscious can then be invoked in the absence of any known pathology and be used for various purposes (as in the work of Jung). Even Freud, who claimed to be a hard-core empiricist, developed extensive psychoanalytical speculations on the 'Id' and the pair *Eros* versus *Thanatos*.

The unconscious is a construct to explain and treat unwanted conscious activity or, more extensively, to understand conscious life. The moment it is used for something else, the idea becomes more speculative and elusive. It means the West mostly holds a clinical perspective focused on conscious well-being. The East is more interested in *ending the suffering of the mind as a whole*.



Freud's Iceberg Model of the Psyche

Sigmund Freud and Psychoanalysis

'Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis.' – Freud, S. : *The Future of an Illusion*, 1927.

'Religion is an illusion, and it derives its strength from the fact that it falls in with our instinctual desires.' – Freud, S. : *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, 1933.

To cure conditions not determined by physical causes, Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939), the father of psychoanalysis, developed the first depth psychological model. In the course of his work, he wrote several books about religion : *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1938). As a materialist, his take on what transcends the physical realm was cynical.

Indeed, for Freud, religion, religious experience, and mysticism were an expression of : a) an underlying distressful neurosis, b) an attempt to control the Oedipal complex, c) a means of giving structure to social groups, d) wish-fulfillment, e) an infantile delusion, f) due to remembering the 'oceanic feeling' in the womb, or g) an attempt to control the outside world. As an atheist, Freud deemed religion as *something to overcome*. A healthy, mature individual cannot be religious or experience altered states of consciousness. Freud's thought was rooted in 19th-century physicalism. To be an atheist was to be a materialist. Atheist spirituality (as in Buddhism) entailed a *contradictio in terminis*.

In this view, any kind of spiritual intention is problematic. Hence, per definition, such a prejudiced position cannot help us to understand spiritual teachers, masters, and gurus truly. In fact, for Freud, the term 'spirito-pathology' is a misnomer, for *spirituality is folly ; illusionary, and pathological*.

This approach is in tune with his materialist metaphysical research program, which also impacted his ideas concerning parapsychology (as his conflict with Jung reveals). How wrong he was.

'The evidence for Extra Sensoric Perception (ESP) and Psychokinesis (PK) –and I have presented only brief summaries of a few examples of it– seems to be adequate. Serious attention to the evidence should be convincing to all except those who are irreversibly committed to the worldview of materialism and sensationalism, according to which ESP and PK are impossible in principle.' – Griffin, D.R. : *Parapsychology, Philosophy and Spirituality : a Postmodern Exploration*, State University of New York Press – New York, 1997, p.89.

It contrasts with his own 'psychoanalytical pessimism,' the fact that Freud concluded that his psychoanalytical therapy does not cure mental disorders most of the time. So, may we ask whether Freud's model was not too reduced and narrow ? Traditional psychoanalysis is. Neo-Freudian models are less restrictive, but they also do not offer a constructive perspective on religious, yogic, and mystical experiences. The conclusion ? Rejecting spiritual experience based on psychoanalytical theory alone is *ad hoc* and questionable indeed.

Carl Gustav Jung and Analytical Psychology

'I want to make clear that by the term 'religion,' I do not mean a creed. It is, however, true that every creed is originally based on the one hand upon the experience of the *numinosum* and on the other hand upon *pistis*, that is to say, trust or loyalty, faith and confidence in a certain experience of a numinous nature and in the change of consciousness that ensues ... We might say, then, that the term 'religion' designates the attitude peculiar to a consciousness which has been changed by experience of the *numinosum*.' – Jung, C.G. : *Collected Works*, vol.11, § 9. Carl Gustav Jung (1875 – 1961) experienced the Divine. Early on in life, he recognized the centrality of such experiences to create a sense of *meaning and purpose* in life. So, for him, 'religion' was not foremost a belief in God or gods or an adherence to a particular system of religious beliefs and subsequent worship, but : '.. a careful observation and taking account of (from *relegere*) the numinous.' (CW, 11, § 982).

Jung rejected Freud's view regarding the pivotal role of the *libido sexualis* as too limited and his self-declared role as pontifex of the psychoanalytical movement as too authoritarian. The fact Freud was so opinionated as to refuse to investigate the full gamut of psychological processes Jung deemed unreasonable. Because Jung included *all* possible psychological phenomena in his work, he defined the real dangers of spiritual experiences. In Jung's analytical psychology, so-called 'ego-inflation' was the potential pitfall for anyone practicing a 'spiritual path.' Without humor, honesty, and humility, this danger only increases as one advances towards the 'higher' stages. Jung hit the nail. The fundamental threat was *ego-identification* with the archetypes of the collective unconscious.

'Identification with the collective psyche (...) amount(s) to an acceptance of inflation, but now exalted into a system. That is to say, one would be the fortunate possessor of the great truth which was only waiting to be discovered, of the eschatological knowledge which spells the healing of the nations. (...) Now this is identification with the collective psyche that seems altogether more commendable : somebody else has the honor of being a prophet, but also the dangerous responsibility.

For one's own part, one is a mere disciple, but nonetheless a joint guardian of the great treasure which the Master has found. One feels the full dignity and burden of such a position, deeming it a solemn duty and a moral necessity to revile others not of a like mind, to enroll proselytes and to hold up a light to the Gentiles, exactly as though one were the prophet himself. And these people, who creep about behind an apparently modest persona, are the very ones who, when inflated with identification with the collective psyche, suddenly burst upon the world scene. For, just as the prophet is a primordial image from the collective psyche, so also is the disciple of the prophet.' – Jung, CW, 11, chapter 4.

When the ego identifies with the archetypes of the collective psyche and their functions, it loses boundaries. It causes the natural frontier between conscious and unconscious to become too thin, resulting

in strong re-equilibrations or compensations (the psyche always strives for balance).

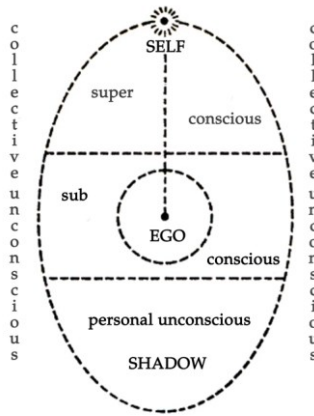
These compensations may lead to neurosis or, worse, the breaking up of the psyche or psychosis. This mental disorder is a way for the psyche to cope with insistent wrong identifications and leads to further problems. Not assessing the world correctly, one slips into madness, considering the projections of the mind as the real thing 'out there.' So here we have our first criterion : spiritual insanity is directly related to *the patterns of identification of the ego*. In the process of individuation (the Jungian term for the path to full psychological maturity), the archetypes called 'Shadow,' 'Anima,' 'Animus,' and 'Self' need to be integrated. At each step, this process harbors the danger of ego-identification with each of these, which should be avoided at all costs.

After having integrated the contents of the *personal* unconscious (or the Shadow) and after having assimilated the energies of the complementary gender aspect of the mind (the Anima for a man and the Animus for a woman), Jung identified the Self, the archetype of the psyche *as a whole*.

His analytical views on this synthetic aspect of the mind were not as bright as his views on the other archetypes. In particular, he placed the Self in the unconscious and did not want to attribute a superconscious nature to it. When dealing with the Self, Jung was always cautious, probably because he knew its integration possibly entailed an exceedingly dangerous kind of identification, leading to an ultimate type of ego-inflation, namely the 'I am God'-syndrome found in some insane type of gurus (in the Advaita Vedānta, the soul or 'ātman' identifies with the Absolute Being, 'Brahman') ... It became the task of Assagioli to deal with the superconscious in a more balanced way.

Roberto Assagioli and Psychosynthesis

'Psychosynthesis is a method of psychological development and self realization for those who refuse to remain the slave of their own inner phantasms or of external influences, who refuse to submit passively to the play of psychological forces which is going on within them, and who are determined to become the master of their own lives.' – Assagioli, R. : *Some Collected Works*, Satsang Press - Ghent, 2010, p.12.



Assagioli's Map of the Mind

Roberto Assagioli (1888 – 1974), closer to Jung than Freud, emphasized that depth psychology should not only be concerned with depth (the unconscious, be it personal or collective), but also with *height* (the superconscious). Just as the ego is the focal point of the personal field of consciousness, so is the Self, the coordinating focus of superconsciousness. More than Jung, who maintained a psychiatric outlook throughout his life, Assagioli fully recognized the fundamentally spiritual nature of humans.

Only by integrating *all* elements of the personality (by way of psychosynthesis) can this spiritual enfoldment successfully happen. If

this lacks, a mental disorder may be the outcome. If such a severe condition is avoided, the psyche remains stuck in faint-heartedness, unwilling to really 'get the job done,' causing constant anxiety, fear, or delusional thinking ...

The measure with which the ego succeeds in releasing itself from mistaken identifications at the personal level defines its capacity to spiritually mature and ascent, by way of the superconscious or transpersonal realm, towards the Self. This 'higher' Self needs the superconscious as its vehicle of expression, just as the ego needs the personality as its instrument in the world.

Such a 'bimodal' view on consciousness was also identified by others (Deikman, 1971, 1976). It posits an ongoing pendulum-swing from the best conceptual understanding or *sophia* to direct non-conceptual cognition or *gnosis*, allowing consciousness to operate both modes.

If, in the ascent towards the Self, the superconscious is consistently neglected, then at some point, time and effort will have to be put in to explore and develop it. But when the superconscious is not sufficiently developed, an intense experience of the Self may produce ego-inflation and disorientation. If, however one drifts into the superconscious without having developed an adequate sense of ego-identity, one runs the risk of getting lost and eventually regressing to the level of undifferentiated 'mass consciousness.'

Worse, when these two levels are confused, one believes, after the spiritual experience is over, one is still identified with the Self. At the same time, one has actually 'descended' once again to the level of the ego. It may again cause ego-inflation, feelings of omnipotence, and in extreme cases, the individual who, speaking from the personal self, says : 'I am God', thus ascribing to the 'I' a spiritual nature that rightly belongs to the Self. Assagioli discovered additional criteria of a healthy spiritual practice : first, the ego needs to be strong enough to make the spiritual ascent, and secondly, the egoic and superconscious levels need never be confused.

Hence, the ego is necessary and should not be destroyed or neglected. Before trying to experience the Self (the transpersonal psychosynthesis), one must first deal with one's own issues (or personal psychosynthesis), not before.

Conclusion

In the West, a large part of the unconscious remains unconscious forever. While consciousness may be enlarged to encompass the subconscious, the personal unconscious, and the superconscious, the collective unconscious remains *outside* the realm of consciousness.

Moreover, consciousness, according to Freud and Jung, is constituted by duality, by the division between subject and object, between conscious and unconscious. Nondual, fusional consciousness has no place in this. In the Western approach, consciousness cannot exist without the tension, the energy born out of differences.

In Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943), non-intentional consciousness is acknowledged, but this pre-reflective state *co-exists with intentionality*. Pure consciousness, an absolute state devoid of intentionality, does not fit in.

As language and the reach of conceptuality are crucial in the Western definition of mind, mental states born out of yogic practice and devoid of concepts but lucid and cognizing remained unexplored by mainstream culture.

Awakening, so Yogācāra explains, happens when base-mind 'turns,' thereby purifying all other layers of consciousness. As long as suffering exists, sentient beings are trapped by their self-grasping, causing ignorance, hatred, and craving.

The culprit is the unconscious egoism of the pain-mind, misusing base-mind by identifying with a part of it, obstructing storehouse-consciousness to become wisdom-consciousness, fixating 'I' and 'mine.'

The unconscious explains the interrupted nature of the thinking, conceptual, conscious (waking) mind, making it possible to understand *karma* (in this life and terms of rebirth). In wisdom-mind, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* 'happen' in the uninterrupted 'space' of this base-mind turned perfect. The end of suffering is not the cessation of *conscious* woe, but *all* possible causes of dissatisfaction, rooted in the conscious mind or the unconscious.

'One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The latter procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular.' – Jung, *Collected Works*, Alchemical Studies, vol.13, § 335.