

YOGACARA PART THREE

(15.09.24)

Note:

Please be aware that this discussion will be **audio-recorded** and placed on the OzZEN website **Study Guide** along with the text. Therefore, it is implied that you give your consent to be recorded if you participate in the discussion.

I will pause throughout the lecture for questions and/or comments, like we do in the reading group on Friday mornings. I prefer a more participatory style of interaction rather than a “lecture” followed by Q&A. If there are no questions and comments I will read the next paragraph and so on.

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Before we start let's remind ourselves of our motivation for practice - In Mahayana Buddhism our motivation to practice is the aspiration to awake in order to liberate all beings.

The teaching always comes back to ethics and compassion:

“Every syllable of Buddha Dharma is about ethics” (Jay Garfield).

I would also like to acknowledge the work of Jay Garfield that has informed much of my presentation for today. And as Jay would say, tongue in cheek, the only ground rule is to feel free to interrupt me at any time to make a comment, or contribution or to ask a question otherwise it gets boring listening to me talk all the time.

The reason why we practice Philosophy is that it helps to understand the second truth:

The second truth is: The origins of suffering: which are

Attachment and aversion - and primal confusion is the root cause of attachment and aversion.

Buddhist philosophy is all about alleviating primal confusion or ignorance.

Have you ever read a book on Buddhism – dharma talks or philosophy and as you are reading the book you feel like you are understanding most of it as you read along. However, a few weeks later, or a few months later, you find it hard to really recall what it was you learned?

The main purpose of our discussions this year on Buddhist philosophy has been to gain some appreciation of the

DIFFERENT UNDERSTANINGS OF EMPTINESS

REFERRED TO METAPHORICALLY AS THE THREE TURNINGS OF THE WHEEL

1. First Turning: Lack of an inherently existing self (we mistake the skandhas for a permanently existing, separate self)
2. Second Turning: Emptiness is the lack of intrinsic essence in *all* phenomena.
3. Third Turning: Emptiness is the absence of Subject and object duality.

Turning the wheel - setting things in motion.

There could be more turnings.

First turning - a broad and general picture of samsara nirvana

The second turning explains emptiness from the side of the object - the emptiness of phenomena- interdependent co-arising. Phenomena have no

essence or independent nature of their own. The second turning is grounded in the prajna paramita sutras.

The third turning teaches emptiness from the side of the subject.

The philosophical literature are commentaries on the sutras:

1. Pali suttas (The First Turning of the Dharma Wheel Discourse – The Dhamma-cakka-pavattana Sutta; The Discourse on the No-Self Characteristic - Anatta-lakkhana sutta) followed by Abhidharma Philosophy.
2. Prajna Paramita Sutras (Diamond Sutra; Heart Sutra) followed by Nagarjuna and others forming the Madhyamaka School.
3. Yogacara Sutras (Lankavattara Sutra; Samdhinirmocana Sutra) followed by Asanga and Vasubandhu and others. Samdhinirmocana means “setting forth, unfolding of the real, fundamental explanation”.

Another way of understanding “emptiness” is to use the common analogy of an illusion. We can ask the question, how is it that we continuously create the illusion of an inherently existing, substantial reality? We will return to this question soon.

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Yogacara philosophy is vast. We are only going to try to understand two core teachings: the three natures and the foundational consciousness (or Alayavijana) sometimes referred to as the Buddhist unconscious.

So today we will review the three natures once again and then apply our understanding of the three natures to a talk given by Joko Beck. I think applying the three natures to Joko's teaching serves to amplify the points she is making, even though (as far as I am aware) Joko never explicitly refers to the Yogacara teachings. Next month we will hopefully cover the foundational consciousness or the Buddhist unconscious.

The Three Natures [[Share Screen](#)]

The three natures are like a map to awakening – practice in an abbreviated form – like the four Practice Principles. The three natures are:

1. **The Imaginary Nature (Imputation; constructed).** That which is imagined. To “impute” means to put on top of, to superimpose. The root of the word *impute* means “to say.” We need to say something about phenomena in order to grasp them (Anderson 2012). And of course, this is where we run into trouble. How do we talk about things without imputing an independent existence to them?
2. **The Dependent Nature: that which is (Interdependence and Impermanence).** In the Samdhinirmocana Sutra the Buddha says the dependent nature is “simply the dependent origination of phenomena. It is like this: because this exists, that arises; because this is produced, that is produced”. Everything we experience is dependently arising – no things have independent existence and perhaps the most universal dependency is mind and environment. Our mind or consciousness is embodied and embedded in our world – hence the world we experience is inseparable from our mind and our mind is inseparable from our world.
3. **The Consummated Nature.** That which is consummated – the consummation is perceiving the dependent only, without the superimposition of the imaginal. Or we could say the consummate can be understood as insight into *emptiness* from the side of the subject.

The whole point of the teachings is to transform our subjectivity. To transform the way we experience the world, other sentient beings and ourselves.

Yogacara is concerned with the question, what is it about the structure of our subjectivity, human subjectivity, that gives rise to our primal confusion about the world and ourselves and others?

Yogacara explores the structure of subjectivity in a way the Madhyamaka texts don't. How we project inherent existence onto an empty world.

Understanding how we do this is what helps us to transform samsara.

The main problem is the superimposition of intrinsic nature onto the empty world.

What we want to practice is undoing the superimposition of intrinsic substantial existence onto reality. The superimposition of intrinsic substantial existence onto reality is what is known as the imaginary nature.

For now, we will take the dependent nature to be reality as it is - interdependence and impermanence.

We will understand the consummated nature to be how we experience reality when we see through the illusion of the imaginary nature.

What does the object as perceived, for example an apple, look like for a human being, a dog or a fly?

To then ask, What does the object really look like?

Is a stupid question because it doesn't make any sense to ask what it looks like independently of some being looking at it.

Reality therefore is never independent of our experience of it.

Human consciousness is what it feels like to interact with our environment- dog consciousness is what it feels like for a dog to interact with its environment and fly consciousness is what it feels like for a fly to interact with its environment.

We might also say, plants and mountains interact with their environment and this is what we call sentience.

Our experience of this primal conscious engagement with our environment is nondual – there is no mind v body dualism.

Dualism is superimposed through language and our conceptual consciousness. This is another way of talking about the imaginary nature.

Our self and our world are inseparable – they co-arise. This is the dependent nature.

We are always embedded in the world with others – before we develop language.

However, socialisation takes over we learn language and we become inducted into subject and object duality and the perception of intrinsic essences with an inside and an outside.

The founder of modern phenomenology, Edmund Husserl called this the “natural attitude”.

End the share screen

So how do we get rid of the natural attitude?

We can ask, how does my sensory-motor and mental apparatus determine how I experience the world? This question challenges the natural attitude. We begin to see that we are constructive beings.

Let us now return to the second noble truth and the Yogacara insight. The origin of suffering - attraction and aversion which are conditioned by primal confusion.

From a Madhyamaka view – we are confused because we take an empty world as non-empty and superimpose intrinsic identity upon it - a metaphysical view.

From a Yogacara perspective it is to confuse a world that we made with a world that we found.

The Myth of the Given

The world doesn't exist independently of my perception. I construct it and the world constructs me.

The only things I ever experience are things I have constructed.

When I confuse something I have constructed, with something I have found, I am introducing subject and object duality. I make the mistake of thinking of my mind as like a mirror that is representing what I see out there.

This is what Husserl called the natural attitude.