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## A COMPARISON OF ĀLAYA-VIJÑĀNA IN YOGĀCĀRA AND DZOGCHEN

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How are we shaped by structures and processes outside our conscious awareness? To what degree are these processes bodily, emotional, or cognitive? How do they determine the way we react to or apprehend our world? Are they peculiar to each individual or also intersubjective? Are these structures largely fixed, or are they ongoing constructive processes? How can we bring these structures and processes into conscious awareness? How can reflexive awareness alter their character and influence? Are these processes pure or impure? If they were originally pure, how would deluded and distorted reactive patterns arise? Or if these processes were originally impure, how could they be purified? And if they were originally pure, how would such purity appear within deluded bodily, emotional, and cognitive experiences?

These questions have been raised by countless thinkers over the centuries and systematically addressed by mystics and philosophers alike. We will examine Buddhist responses to these questions in the Indian Yogācāra and Tibetan Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*) traditions as articulated through the concepts of “foundational consciousness” (S: *ālaya-vijñāna*, T: *kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*) and “foundation/ground” (S: *ālaya*, T: *kun gzhi*), respectively. Originally, the concept of *ālaya-vijñāna* arose in response to the attempt by Abhidharma Buddhists to express all the functions of consciousness (*vijñāna*) in strictly *dharmic* terms (see section Abhidharma: A Systematic Phenomenology of Experience). Our first section thus reviews the development of theories of consciousness in early Buddhism and their problematization within Abhidharma, before focusing on the notion of a “fundamental consciousness” operating outside of conscious awareness that was proffered by the Yogācāra school. These notions were transformed within the esoteric schools of Indian Buddhism from the seventh century on, which were rendered into systematic philosophical discourse in Tibet starting from the eleventh century. The second section will thus examine the foundational consciousness within the works of Tibetan scholar, Longchenpa, the great systematizer of

the Great Perfection tradition in the fourteenth century. This chapter thus sketches out the development of this central notion from Indian Buddhism into Tibetan esoteric discourse.

## *Ālaya-vijñāna* in Indian Buddhist thought

### *Early Buddhist analyses of mind*

#### *The arising of cognitive awareness*

The analyses of consciousness (*vijñāna*) found in the Pāli texts are simple but subtle enough to have invited centuries of later development. As classically expressed, perceptual consciousness arises when an appropriate sense object impinges upon the relevant sense faculty (*indriya*; “power”), with attention thereto. Types of perceptual consciousness are classified according to their respective sense base: the five faculties of vision, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and the sixth, mind. Mental consciousness is anomalous in that it arises in conjunction with both its “own” mental objects, such as ideas, thoughts, memories, etc., as well as with a previous moment of perceptual consciousness as an object. This is a reflexive consciousness *that* we have perceived something visual, etc. The mental mode of consciousness thus encompasses higher cognitive functions, such as abstract thought and language. Some important implications follow from these simple formulations:

- First, temporally, perceptual consciousness is a phenomenon that occurs in dependence upon specific supporting conditions; it is *not* a faculty that actively cognizes objects. Rather, consciousness automatically arises when an appropriate object impinges upon its respective sense base.<sup>1</sup> Note the passive, impersonal syntax.
- Second, constitutively, objects that induce perceptual consciousness are *necessarily* correlative with their respective faculties. And like their objects, the forms of ordinary perceptual consciousness reflect the structure of their supporting faculties. We can only ordinarily see things the way our faculties enable us to.
- Third, contextually, consciousness is also dependent upon the way sense faculties function. Like a spark, a stimulus must be distinctive enough from both its previous moment and its surrounding context in order to stimulate perceptual consciousness. In this sense, *vijñāna* *only* arises as a function of temporally effervescent yet contextually distinctive stimuli.

It follows that our ordinary awareness of the world has several crucial constraints. It depends upon the responsive structures of the faculties, which themselves only operate in relation to the distinctions that trigger them – distinctions which, like all contrasts, are relational, not stand-alone qualities. The phenomenal “world,”

our world, is thus both ephemeral and constructed at the same time – characteristics that will continue to beguile later Buddhist thinkers.

*Two aspects of vijñāna*

The constructed nature of experience is highlighted in the second way consciousness (S: *vijñāna*, P: *viññāna*) is portrayed in the Pāli texts. As the only process that continues uninterruptedly from one lifetime to the next, *vijñāna* is said to “descend” into the womb at conception, arise throughout one’s lifetime, and leave the body at the time of death. To contrast this with the aforementioned perceptual or “cognitive-consciousness,” Pāli scholar Wijesekera (1964: 259) designates it “*samsāric viññāna*,” insofar as it is “the basis for all conscious and unconscious psychological manifestations pertaining to individuality as it continued in Samsāra or empirical existence.” Although this sense of *vijñāna* is by no means a permanent or eternal self, since it always arises in dependence upon conditions,<sup>2</sup> it does not depend upon perceptual objects.

What this consciousness does depends upon are the psychological and physiological structures brought about by previous karmic actions, the “karmic formations” (S: *samskāra*, P: *saṅkhārā*).<sup>3</sup> This is seen in the twelve-limbed formula of dependent arising, where *vijñāna* arises not in dependence upon transient conditions as “cognitive consciousness” does, but upon enduring conditions, such as sense organs, faculties, dispositions, traits, etc. – that is, the *samskāra*. The distinction between these “aspects” of *vijñāna*, or more precisely between the conditions that support their arising, is clearly illustrated in these typical formulations:

Depending on karmic formations consciousness arises (SN.2.2).

Depending on eye and forms visual consciousness arises (SN.2.73).

What these analyses highlight are the continuous and discontinuous conditions for *vijñāna*, respectively. The conditions underlying the arising of “samsaric consciousness,” the karmic formations, are relatively continuous, while those evoking forms of “cognitive consciousness,” such as sense objects, are strictly intermittent.

It should be clear, however, that these consciousnesses are neither contradictory nor truly separable, for “samsaric” consciousness is a precondition for perceptual consciousness to arise. As philosopher John Searle has recently pointed out: “Perception . . . does not create consciousness but modifies a preexisting conscious field . . . the field was there before you had the perceptions. You had to be already conscious before you had the perceptual experience” (Searle 2005).<sup>4</sup>

These modes of consciousness are also interdependent. “Samsaric consciousness,” together with the karmic formations (i.e. sense faculties) that support it, constitutively influences the arising of cognitive consciousness. And the arising of cognitive consciousness, in turn, continuously modifies the responsive structures of the faculties and thus, by extension, the arising of samsaric consciousness.

This occurs both in the short term, in cognitive processes of learning, memorization, etc, as well as in the long term, in the evolutionary processes of the growth and development of sentient life over multiple generations (which in the Buddhist context includes rebirth).<sup>5</sup>

Hence, these two ways of analyzing the arising of consciousness pertain not so much to distinct forms of consciousness, but to distinct kinds of conditions that support consciousness, some enduring chronologically, others arising momentarily. These give rise, as Pāli scholar and psychologist Johansson (1979, 106) has observed, to “two layers of consciousness: what we called the momentary surface processes, and the background consciousness.” The Yogācārinś will exploit these distinctions in formulating their own conception of “a basis for all conscious and unconscious psychological manifestations,” namely, *ālaya-vijñāna*.

*Reciprocity between actions, effects, and afflictive dispositions*

These enduring conditions – the karmic formations comprising one’s sense faculties, cognitive schemas, affective dispositions, etc. – have not come about haphazardly. They have been brought together, “constructed,” through the causal effects of each individual’s activities, through their karma (SN.2.64).<sup>6</sup> This idea is not some antiquated artifact unearthed from another time or place, but a sophisticated understanding of the reciprocal relations between forms of consciousness, the actions they instigate, and the effects these lead to – effects which, in turn, tend to reinforce the very conditions that engendered them, creating a positive feedback loop between the constructed schemas and dispositions, actions, and their results.

We can see this in something we all experience: habit-formation. We do something enjoyable, like drinking caffeine or alcohol, which affects our bodies and minds in certain, mostly pleasurable, ways. In the process, these experiences create (or reinforce) specific neural pathways in the brain and body, whose very presence supports their repetition, just as storm runoff creates furrows in the ground that attracts further runoff.<sup>7</sup> As a result, we start to crave (S: *trṣṇā*, P: *taṇhā*), both physically and psychologically, the pleasures these actions bring and so tend to repeat them. In this way, our actions reinforce the conditions that lead to their repetition, creating neuro-psychological complexes we call dispositions.<sup>8</sup> In Pāli these are the *anusaya*, underlying tendencies.

These tendencies are the latent counterparts to the three afflictions of greed, hatred, and ignorance, which make actions *karmically* consequential, that is, actions that lead to effects that may be experienced in the future. They “are called *anusaya*, underlying tendencies,” a later Pāli commentary explains, “in the sense that they have not been abandoned in the mental continuum to which they belong and because they are capable of arising when a suitable cause presents itself” (MN 1995, 1241, n. 473). Such “suitable causes,” of course, are ubiquitous. Whenever some kind of feeling or sensation occurs, such as through sensual contact, these dispositions tend to arise: we tend to respond to pleasure with greed, to pain with aversion, and to neutral feeling with ignorance or indifference

(MN.1.303). These afflictive responses then tend to evoke actions whose long-term effects reinforce the conditions, the dispositional *samskāras*, that supported their arising – thereby perpetuating the patterns of cyclic behavior called *samsāra*.

This is well illustrated in a single passage describing the four “nutriments” that sustain cyclic existence: food, sensual experience, mental volitions (i.e. karma), and consciousness:

If, monks, there is lust for the nutriment edible food [for sensual experience, etc.], if there is delight, if there is craving, consciousness becomes established and comes to growth. Wherever consciousness becomes established and comes to growth, there is a descent of name-and-form. Where there is a descent of name-and-form, there is the growth of karmic formations. Where there is the growth of karmic formations, there is the production of renewed existence. Where there is the production of renewed existence, there is future birth, aging, and death. Where there is future birth, aging, and death, I say that is accompanied by sorrow, anguish, and despair.

(SN.2.101)

*The afflictive dispositions and liberation*

Human beings, of course, are complicated. Chief among our underlying tendencies “that have not been abandoned” is the tendency “I am” (*asmīti-anusaya*), our sense of ourselves as enduring entities, agents of our actions, subjects of our experiences and, of course, objects of attachment.<sup>9</sup> This sense of self is one of our most deeply rooted dispositions, the texts suggest, for “even though a noble disciple (*ariyasāvaka*) has abandoned the five lower fetters, still . . . there lingers in him a residual conceit ‘I am,’ a desire ‘I am,’ an underlying tendency ‘I am’ that has not yet been uprooted” (SN.3.131).

Not only are these tendencies not abandoned until far along the path toward liberation, but their presence virtually defines the boundaries of *samsāra* existence. As the Buddha himself said, it is “impossible” that “one shall here and now make an end of suffering without abandoning the underlying tendency to lust for pleasant feeling . . . to aversion towards painful feeling . . . to ignorance in regard to neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling” (MN.3.285). Until then, the ever-present possibility remains for these afflictions to reoccur.

These latent dispositions thus serve as continuing conditions for new afflictive responses to occur in much the same way that the consciousness that depends upon karmic formations serves as a continuing condition for new forms of consciousness to arise. Both cognitively as well as affectively, then, early Buddhism not only articulated the underlying conditions continuously supporting perceptual consciousness and active afflictions, but also recognized the indispensable roles they play in the feedback cycle of action, results and afflictive responses that constitutes *samsāra* existence. This cycle is therefore perpetuated not just through

manifest consciousness and overt afflictive behavior, but also – and even more intractably, through the continuing, underlying conditions that support them. Together, these effectively constitute, as Wijeskerā’s characterizes “*samsāric vijñāna*,” “the basis for all conscious and unconscious psychological manifestations pertaining to individuality as it continued in Samsāra or empirical existence.”

While early Buddhists clearly recognized the influence of these continuous conditions, they never systematically contrasted them with the transient conditions supporting perceptual consciousness, such as cognitive objects. Thus, although early Buddhists had articulated a sophisticated conception of the interrelation between distinct forms of consciousness, the actions they evoke and the phenomenal experience resulting from them, they left it to the Yogācārins in the third to fifth centuries CE to systematically distinguish the “basis” of samsaric existence in the form of *ālaya-vijñāna*. Their point of departure nevertheless remained the penetrating analyses of mind and experience bequeathed them by the Buddha and his early followers:

- Our experienced world both depends upon and is correlative with our cognitive faculties, which themselves only function in terms of temporally and contextually discrete stimuli.
- The receptivity to such stimuli is determined by the structure of our physiological and psychological complexes (*saṃskārā*), which thus serve as *constitutive* conditions for the formation of our “world.”
- These complex structures are themselves constructed through the reciprocal reinforcing relationships between actions, their results, and the afflictive dispositions,
- amongst which, the continuous, underlying latent dispositions, particularly the sense “I am,” play crucial roles in the arising and arousal of our perceptions and actions.
- Finally, it is the persistence of these latent afflictions, as with “samsaric” *vijñāna*, that demarcates samsaric existence and whose cessation is thus tantamount to liberation.

But this is not all. The Pāli texts also refer to a form of mind (*citta*) which “is luminous (*pabhassaram*), but defiled by adventitious (*āgantuka*) defilements” (AN.1.10). This, too, never became an object of systematic thought in the early texts, leaving both it and “the basis” of samsaric existence relatively unsystematized. That would require more analytic ambition, the impetus for which is found in the next stage of Buddhist thought, Abhidharma.

### *Abhidharma: a systematic phenomenology of experience*

These analyses of mind from the earliest Buddhist texts may have sufficed for the pragmatic aims of Buddhist practice – were no further questions asked. But questions arose. The Buddha’s disciples, facing a bewildering array of doctrines, texts,



and practices from his forty-five years of teaching, soon began sorting, classifying, and systematizing them according to topic, degree of difficulty, and internal consistency. In the process, they drove Buddhist thought in a productive but problematic direction that deeply influenced all later forms of Buddhism, especially Indian Mahāyāna. It was in this milieu of Abhidharma scholasticism (third century BCE to fifth century CE) that the concept of *ālaya-vijñāna* originated, for its most systematic treatments were couched in largely Abhidharmic terms – foremost of which, carrying its own host of problems, was the allusive concept of *dharmā*.

There is little doubt that *dharmā* is the most important concept in Abhidharmic analysis of experience, an analytic discourse still surviving in South Asia Buddhist traditions. There is considerable debate, however, over its ultimate meaning and ontological status, with different schools each proffering their own interpretations. One school, *Sarvāstivāda*, leaned toward pluralistic realism, another, *Sautrāntika*, toward nominalism, while yet a third, *Yogācāra*, toward mentalism. Despite such differences, Abhidharma analysis provided contemporaneous Buddhists with a common vocabulary, a common conceptual framework – and a common set of problems, as we shall see.

They also shared a common aim: eradicating the afflictions, the maleficent motives by which actions accrue karmic consequences. As the great fifth century scholar, Vasubandhu (AKBh I 3) states: “apart from the discernment of the *dharmā*s, there is no means to extinguish the afflictions, and it is by reason of the afflictions that the world wanders in the ocean of existence.”<sup>10</sup> In order to discern the presence of these afflictions, and thereby attenuate and eradicate their maleficent influences, Abhidharmists analyzed the arising of each moment of consciousness. Bhikkhu Bodhi (1993: 4) thus calls Abhidharma a “phenomenological psychology . . .” insofar as it focuses on “conscious reality, the world as given in experience.” This analysis of “conscious reality” self-consciously systematized the same basic terms, and their interrelationships, found in the earliest Buddhist texts. Only now this analysis was focused primarily upon those factors that could be *discretely identified* as influencing “the world as given in experience” from moment to moment. Moreover, it was claimed that these momentary factors – and these alone – were ultimately true (*paramārtha-satya*), ultimately effective in determining in one’s ongoing experience (AKBh *ad* I 2b). It is these factors that are called *dharmā*s, as each “carries” its own mark.<sup>11</sup>

This *dharmic* analysis has several significant characteristics: it is a *phenomenological* analysis of experience couched in *systemic* terms, terms that are mutually defined and distinguished from one another. It is therefore *metapsychological*, insofar as it self-consciously “deals with the various concepts and categories of consciousness as the primary objects of investigation” Piatigorsky (1984: 8). Finally, analysis in *dharmic* terms was considered an *ultimate* account of “how things really are” (*yathābhūta*).

In conjunction with concerted meditative practice, *dharmic* analysis of conscious experience provides a powerful tool for discerning one’s present states of mind and the patterns of behavior and experience that constitute our ongoing existence.

If the strictures of this analysis are strictly adhered to, however, they also create serious conceptual problems. For promoting the factors identifiably affecting one's momentary conscious experience simultaneously entailed demoting other, more subtle or more enduring factors to the status of mere conventionalities (*saṃvṛti-satya*). Moreover, if *dharmic* analysis is limited to what we are (or can be) consciously aware of, and these are the *only* factors accepted as real, then this analysis precludes a full account – in “real” terms – of the very thing it set out to discern: the afflictions that keep beings wandering in the “ocean of existence” until they are abandoned at advanced stages on the path. This engendered, in short, the Abhidharma Problematic.

### *The Abhidharma Problematic*

More specifically, if the afflictions were present and *active* in each and every moment then there would be no possibility of non-afflicted states, and hence no possibility of liberation. But they could not be both present and *inactive* at the same time because *dharmic* analysis only discerns what affects “conscious reality.” Nor could they be completely *absent* during non-afflicted states, for once the continuity of the afflictions is severed they would be destroyed altogether, since they have no real existence when they are not present, and this would be tantamount to liberation. The problem with *dharmic* analysis is that it could not readily account for latency,<sup>12</sup> for the persistence of the afflictive dispositions, as present yet ineffective, in the way the early *suttas* suggested.

The same kind of problem arose with the accumulation of karmic potential (*karmopacaya*), the potential for karmic results to come to fruition in the future. How could these persist within one's mental stream without constantly affecting one's conscious experience? And, like the dispositions, karmic potential also requires unbroken continuity between their originating actions and their ultimate fruition. But if these potentials are not discernibly affecting one's conscious experience, that is, if they are not *dharmas*, then how could they be present? Either they are not “real,” in which case they are irrelevant, or they are real and relevant but inexpressible in *dharmic* terms, in which case *dharmic* analysis is either incomplete or not completely ultimate. Simply put, other modes of “existence” had to be entertained.

Abhidharmists were well aware of these problems; it was, after all, the early *suttas*, with their clear account of samsaric continuities, which they were systematizing. Hence, they addressed them in various ways, the most relevant for our purposes being the notions of seeds (*bīja*) and “perfumations” (or “impressions, predispositions,” *vāsanā*). Vasubandhu used these metaphors from the early *suttas* to suggest how the potential for karmic fruition and the afflictions in a latent state could persist within one's mental stream without directly and discernibly affecting the moment-to-moment arising of mind – and hence evading *dharmic* analysis. But he also considered these metaphors (*prajñāpti-sat*; AKBh II 36), not real dharmas (*dravya-sat*) – a tacit admission, it appears, of the limitations of *dharmic* analysis.

Even if these problems were more conceptual than practical, they still disclosed two problematic assumptions:

- that the contents of consciousness were, in effect, homogeneous, that is, that mutually contradictory factors, such as latent afflictive dispositions and manifest meritorious states, could not coexist; and, crucially,
- that the relevant conditions of cognition and behavior were transparent to *dharmic* analysis. As Piatigorsky (1984, 202, n. 17) points out, “the Abhidharma does not deal with what is non-conscious, because the Abhidhamma is a ‘theory of consciousness’, and the rest simply does not exist in the sense of the Abhidhamma.”

But the Abhidharma Problematic undermined these assumptions, leading to the recognition, as Eliade (1973, xvii) put it, that “the great obstacles to the ascetic and contemplative life arose from the activity of the unconscious.” As we shall see, in its initial systematic treatments the concept of *ālaya-vijñāna* explicitly addressed this Abhidharmic Problematic in almost exclusively Abhidharmic terms.

### *The Yogācāra analysis of experience*

The early development of *ālaya-vijñāna* can profitably be seen as the gradual integration of the “samsaric” aspects of *vijñāna* found in the early *suttas* into the terms of *dharmic* discourse favored by the Abhidharmists. This was adumbrated in the third century CE *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*, but only fully systematized in the fourth to fifth century works of Asanga and Vasubandhu, which effectively define classical Yogācāra. We will briefly trace this evolution in several key texts.

#### *Two aspects of vijñāna revisited*

It is in an early section of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, a voluminous third to fifth century text attributed to Asanga, that the term *ālaya-vijñāna* probably first appears (Schmithausen 1987, 12, 18, n. 146). It is portrayed there as a basal consciousness that persists uninterruptedly in the material sense faculties during a meditative state (*nirodha-samāpatti*) in which all other mental processes cease. Yet this consciousness “embraces” (*parigrhītam*) the causal conditions, represented as seeds, for manifest forms of perceptual consciousness to reoccur. In an important terminological innovation, the traditional six forms of perceptual consciousness are characterized as “arising” or “manifesting” (*pravṛtti*) *vijñānas* insofar as they intermittently arise in conjunction with cognitive objects, in contrast to the uninterrupted stream of sentience newly coined “*ālaya-vijñāna*,” whose overlapping senses include “home, base, store” and “clinging.”<sup>13</sup> The distinction between discontinuous forms of cognitive consciousness and a continuous non-cognitive consciousness, which was merely implicit in the Pāli materials, is now terminologically explicit.

It is in a few short passages of the *Samdhinirmocana Sūtra* that a wholly new model of mind centered on *ālaya-vijñāna* is introduced. First (V.2),<sup>14</sup> *ālaya-vijñāna* is said, like “samsaric” *vijñāna*, to arise at conception and “grow, develop, and increase” based upon its enduring, supporting conditions (*upādāna*): the material sense faculties and, notably, “the predispositions toward proliferation of conventional images, names, and concepts.” *Ālaya-vijñāna* arises, that is, in dependence upon our cognitive schemas and the sense faculties that embody them, which are themselves constructed from past actions.

The text then (V.3) suggests the reciprocal relationship between these two kinds of consciousness: *ālaya-vijñāna* is “heaped up (*ācita*) and accumulated (*upacita*) by visual forms, sounds, smells,” etc., that is, by the objects of the traditional six “arising” *vijñānas*. The “arising consciousnesses,” in turn, now arise in dependence not just upon the sense faculties and their respective objects, as before, but also “arise supported by and depending upon (*saṃnīśritya pratiṣṭhāya*) the ‘appropriating consciousness’ (*ādāna-vijñāna*)” (a synonym of *ālaya-vijñāna*) (V.4–5). Moreover, they arise simultaneously with each other as well as *ālaya-vijñāna*, resulting in a model of multiple, distinct yet simultaneously occurring cognitive processes, each with its own object. The *Sūtra* (VIII.37.1) describes *ālaya-vijñāna*’s own object as the “indiscernible, stable, surrounding world (*asaṃvidita-sthira-bhājana-vijñapti*).”

*Ālaya-vijñāna* and the “arising consciousnesses” thus reinforce each other: *ālaya-vijñāna* arises based upon physiological and psychological structures (*saṃskārā*), that is, the sense faculties and linguistic and conceptual predispositions (V.2), which together support the simultaneous arising of manifest cognitive processes (V.4–5) (and thereby help determine the specific forms, *ākāra*, they take), the results of which, their specific objects, “heap up and accumulate” in *ālaya-vijñāna* (V.3).

This is another significant development. Perceptual consciousness now arises not only in dependence upon the sense faculties and their correlative objects, as before, but also upon another *kind* of consciousness, one that is itself dependent upon our embodied cognitive schemas, including linguistic distinctions and discriminations. Even simple perception, the text suggests, is inescapably conceptual.

It is in later portions of the *Yogācārabhūmi* that the *ālaya-vijñāna* complex is fully articulated in *dharmic* terms, addressing the Abhidharma Problematic described earlier. First, the *Pravṛtti Portion* depicts *ālaya-vijñāna* as a full-fledged *vijñāna* with its own cognitive object and associated (*saṃprayukta*) mental factors (*caitta*), all of which are “subtle” (*sūkṣma*) and “difficult to discern even by the wise ones of the world” ((1.b)B.1). Elaborating on *ālaya-vijñāna*’s “indiscernible” object, the text ((1.b)2) states that *ālaya-vijñāna* arises

through an outward perception of the stable surrounding world, whose aspects are not clearly delineated (*bahirdhā-apariccinnākara-sthira-bhājana-vijñapti*)<sup>15</sup>...based upon that very *ālaya-vijñāna* which has inner appropriation as its objective support ((1.b)A.2).

This subtle “outward perception” is possible, in other words, only insofar as *ālaya-vijñāna* itself arises conditioned by its two “inner bases” or “appropriations” (*adhyātmam upādāna*), the material sense faculties and the “predispositions of attachment to the falsely discriminated” (*parikalpita-svabhāvābhīniveśa-vāsanā*). This process is compared “to a burning flame which arises inwardly while it emits light outwardly on the basis of the wick and oil” ((1.b)A.3), that is, on the basis of our embodied cognitive schemas, which include names, concepts, and discriminations. It is telling that the term “base” or “appropriation” (*upādāna*) also means “fuel, supply, substratum by means of which an active process is kept alive or going” (PED 149).

What provides the “fuel” to keep *ālaya-vijñāna* going is, as before, its relationship with the six *pravṛtti-vijñānas* and their associated activities, which the *Pravṛtti Portion* explicitly portrays as continuous, simultaneous (*sahabhava*), and reciprocally conditioning (*anyonya-pratyayatā*). This is illustrated metaphorically by waves in a stream. While the ongoing stream of *ālaya* consciousness supports the “waves” of surface perceptual consciousness – insofar as it both continuously “appropriates” the underlying physical and mental cognitive structures as well as “embraces” the seeds, the causal potential, for future arising of perceptual consciousness – so, too, do the surface waves of perceptual consciousness incessantly effect this underlying stream of sentience, this *ālaya-vijñāna*, inasmuch as each wave is always both integral to and a transformation of the stream itself. Put in terms of the Yogācārins’ other preferred metaphor, just as the seeds of past karma are constantly coming into fruition in the form of mental processes that occur in nearly every moment, such as perceptual consciousness and feeling – so too does one’s intentional actions constantly infuse seeds and impressions (*vāsanā-paribhāvita*) into *ālaya-vijñāna* insofar as intentions (*cetanā*), the criteria for actions to be karmic, also occur in nearly every moment of mind. This is the import, and these are the images, of the new Yogācāra model of mind, portraying an intrapsychic dynamism between two inseparable, yet separately conceptualized,<sup>16</sup> aspects of mind in which the whole is greater than its parts.

This model of *ālaya-vijñāna* is fully compatible with the spirit, and the terminology, of contemporaneous Indian Buddhist analyses of consciousness. It is neither an agent nor a faculty, much less an “ātman in disguise.” It represents, rather, a conceptual rubric within which various continuous yet clearly subliminal processes – such as bodily awareness, subliminal perception, and the influences of language – are categorically subsumed. This is clearly not a singular entity. As the *Pravṛtti Portion* warns, “*ālaya-vijñāna* is momentary regarding its object, and even though it arises continuously in a stream of instants, it is not singular (*na ekatva; gcig pa nyid ni ma yin no*)” ((1.b)B.3). We ought not substantialize it.<sup>17</sup>

### *The affliction of “I am” revisited*

But, of course, this is exactly what we are wont to do.<sup>18</sup> Since *ālaya-vijñāna* has the most continuity and consistency of any of our mental processes,<sup>19</sup> and is most

closely associated with our embodied existence, our persisting dispositions and their continuing karmic potentialities – that is, our physical experience, emotional traits, and personal histories – it is precisely *ālaya-vijñāna* that we most identify with, that we most consider our “selves.” Thus, the Yogācārins posited a specific kind of “mentation” (*manas*), one

whose mode is conceiving (*manyānā*) “I-making” (*ahaṃkāra*) [and] the conceit “I am” (*asmimāna*), [which] always arises and functions simultaneously with *ālaya-vijñāna* . . . taking *ālaya-vijñāna* as an object, conceiving [it] as “I am [this]” (*asmīti*) and “[this is] I” (*aham iti*).

((4.b) A.1.(a))

This sense of “I am,” we remember, remained even in “a noble disciple” (*ariyasāvaka*) until far along the path, and its lingering presence persistently vexed Abhidharma theory. Yogācārins approached this problem much as they did the accumulation of karmic potential and the continuing, “samsaric” aspects of *vijñāna*: by conceptualizing a distinct, continuous,<sup>20</sup> and subliminal stream of afflictive dispositions (*manas*) which are karmically neutral and may thus occur simultaneously with, but not contradictory to, supraliminal processes of various kinds:

Know that until it is completely destroyed [this mentation] is always associated with the four afflictions that by nature arise innately (*sahaja*) and simultaneously: a view of self-existence (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*), the conceit “I am” (*asmimāna*), self-love (*ātmasneha*), and ignorance (*avidyā*) . . . These afflictions arise without impeding (*avirodha*) the [karmic quality] of skillfulness, etc.

((4.b)B.4)

This will be christened “afflictive mentation” (*kliṣṭa-manas*) in Asanga’s *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* and thereafter considered a seventh form of consciousness, with *ālaya-vijñāna* as the eighth.

But latent dispositions are just that: latent. In order to perpetuate cyclic existence they must be rendered into afflictive activity. This occurs through mental cognitive consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*), which, insofar as now arises moment-to-moment “based upon [afflicted] mentation,” is “not freed from the bondage of perception in regard to phenomena (*nimitta*)” ((4.b)A.2). That is, as long as our mental perceptual consciousness is accompanied by the deep-seated, subliminal ignorance, self-love, the conceit “I am,” etc., signified by *manas*, then we will never cease seeing phenomena in terms of self and other,<sup>21</sup> inviting all the maleficent and misguided actions such self-centeredness supports. And this, Yogācārins concur, persists even in Arhats who have attained the Path of Seeing.<sup>22</sup>

With the addition of affliction mentation (*kliṣṭa-manas*), the Yogācārins realized a radically new model of mind in Indian Buddhism in which subliminal cognitive,

affective, even afflictive, processes interact with and mutually reinforce supraliminal processes. Together, they construct our experience of the world (*loka*), which is ordinarily inseparable from its multiple supporting conditions – for consciousness arises moment-to-moment in relation to cognitive objects, simultaneously based upon our embodied faculties, informed<sup>23</sup> by subliminal linguistic and affective dispositions, and colored by an ingrained self-centeredness.

All this, however, serves to more fully describe the problem – the perpetuation of samsaric existence through habitual activities informed by selfishness and ignorance, etc. – or, rather, *transcribe* it into subliminal reaches where it is appears even more intractable. How then can we ever find a way out?

### *Eliminating Ālaya-vijñāna*

Since in this Yogācāra view *ālaya-vijñāna* is intimately associated with the conditions that contour our experienced world, it is considered both “the root of all that is defiled” (*saṃkleśa-mūla*) ((5.b)A.5) and “the constituent element (*dhātu*) of all kinds of karmic formations (*saṃskārā*)” ((5.b)C.1). As such, *ālaya-vijñāna* must be abandoned (*prahīṇa*) through the “cultivation of wisdom (*jñāna*) which takes true reality (*tathatā*) as its object” (ibid.), a gradual process of “transforming the basis” (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*).

But given the insidious influence of this “unconscious construction of reality,” how could we ever come to see “true” reality? And what would mind be after *ālaya-vijñāna* is abandoned?

These questions were addressed in Asanga’s *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha* (MSg). Although *ālaya-vijñāna* had heretofore been couched in Abhidharmic terms, befitting a concept addressing Abhidharmic problems, MSg introduced distinctively Mahāyāna perspectives, fundamentally changing the framework, and thus the import, of the concept.

The mind (*citta*) that has *tathatā* as an object is not an ordinary, mundane mind, based on bias and obscured by ignorance, nor is its object this-worldly. Rather, MSg. I.45 calls it a supramundane *citta* that “arises from the seeds of the impression of hearing [the Buddha’s teaching] which issue from the perfectly pure *Dharma-dhātu* (*suviśuddha-dharma-dhātu-niśyanda-śruta-vāsanā-bija*).”<sup>24</sup> These seeds for supramundane insight into reality can exist within *ālaya-vijñāna* “like milk and water” (MSg. I.46), because, though it is the “root of all defilements,” it is also a resultant consciousness (*vipāka-vijñāna*), a karmically neutral (*avyākṛta*) medium capable of “embracing” seeds of all kinds. By strengthening these impressions through hearing, contemplation, and meditative practice (*śruta-cinta-bhāvanā*), one gradually counteracts (*pratipakṣa*) the contents of *ālaya-vijñāna*, eventually eliminating it “in all aspects”<sup>25</sup> until, thoroughly “seedless” (MSg. I.48), only the “transformed basis” remains in its stead.

Since *ālaya-vijñāna* serves as “the constituent element (*dhātu*) of all kinds of karmic formations,” and yet still carries the seeds of its own destruction, it is the

common “element” connecting both bondage and liberation, as expressed in this famous verse from the *Mahāyāna-abhidharma-sūtra*:

The element (*dhātu*) since beginningless time is the common support of all dharmas;  
As this exists, so do all the destinies as well as the realization of Nirvana.<sup>26</sup>

### *Ālaya beyond Yogācāra*

Two interrelated questions remain, raised but not resolved in classical Yogācāra: If *ālaya-vijñāna* is the “the common support of all dharmas,” the basis or ground upon which the phenomenal world appears, what remains after it is abandoned? And what is the relation between its originally defiled and its subsequently purified state, that is, what, if anything, connects them?

Recall the idea of original purity found in early Buddhism. The Buddha proclaimed that “this mind (*citta*), O monk, is luminous (*pabhassaram*), but is defiled by adventitious defilements (*āgantuka*)” (AN.1.10), qualities preserved in Yogācāra sources which speak of “a *citta* that is pure and luminous in its original nature (*prakṛti-prabhāsvara-citta*)” but whose faults are “adventitious,” extraneous, added on (MSA XIII, 19; MAVBh. I. 22. c–d).<sup>27</sup> This perspective was developed by the third to fourth century CE *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which adamantly identified *ālaya-vijñāna* with the perfectly pure *tathāgata-garbha*, the “womb” or “matrix” of the *Tathāgata* – despite the fact that they are nowhere equated in classical Yogācāra treatises. Moreover, this *Sūtra* characterizes *ālaya-vijñāna* as “subsist[ing] uninterruptedly, quite free from the fault of impermanence . . . thoroughly pure in its essential nature” (Suzuki 1932, 190 [220]) – despite the fact that it is considered momentary, associated with the seven evolving consciousnesses (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*), and “the very root of the defilements” (*saṃkleśa-mūla*). The *Sūtra* handles these discrepancies hermeneutically: the teaching that “*Ālaya-vijñāna* evolves together with the seven *Vijñānas* . . . is meant for the Śrāvakas [Disciples], who are not free from attachment,” whereas the equation of *tathāgata-garbha* with *ālaya-vijñāna* is “meant for those Bodhisattva-Mahāsattvas who . . . are endowed with subtle, fine, penetrating thought-power” (192 f.). As Wayman (Wayman and Hideko 1974) rightly points out, this radically alters the original conception of *ālaya-vijñāna*.<sup>28</sup>

A different approach, one preserving the integrity of *ālaya*’s corruption, was taken by the sixth-century Indian translator, Paramārtha, who preserved *ālaya-vijñāna* as a defiled eighth consciousness that is eliminated upon awakening, and proffered the “transformed basis” as a ninth, “undefiled consciousness” (*amala-vijñāna*) that persists after *ālaya-vijñāna* ceases.

These tendencies are combined in some Tibetan schools, who, extrapolating upon Indian Yogācāra models, posited a primordial *ālaya* wisdom (*ālaya-jñāna*; *kun gzhi ye shes*) that is prior to and apart from defiled and discursive forms of *ālaya* consciousness, of which it is nevertheless the basis. This is the topic of our next major section.



***Ālaya in the great perfection***

*Philosophical Vajrayāna* One of the most interesting aspects of the historical development of Tibetan Buddhism is the way in which esoteric ritual, lexicons, motifs, and iconography drawn from Indian Buddhist tantra were utilized to shape an innovative and loosely coordinated philosophical movement. In India, Buddhist esotericism – the “adamantine vehicle” (*vajrayāna*) – tended to be focused elsewhere than philosophy per se. Its new terminology and ideas were encoded instead in the often radically distinct ritual and yogic systems, elaborate iconographic programs, cosmological narratives, behavioral codes and ethics, and narrative literature in the form of lineal accounts and hagiographies. Thus while Buddhist tantra in India was characterized by striking innovation and radical discontinuity with previous Buddhist norms, its ideological shifts and discursive transformations did not predominantly take the shape of distinctive philosophical discourses and systems. As non-institutional forms of Buddhist tantra emerged in the eighth and ninth centuries with the radical agendas of the yoginī tantras, they were rapidly domesticated back into the institutional and scholastic milieu of Buddhist monasteries. This process of domestication involved a process of coding Buddhist scholastic values and concepts back into the shocking rhetoric and imagery of these tantras, interpreting the radical behavioral calls as either metaphorical or as references to inner yogic processes. Monastic discourse systematically divorced esoteric traditions from the need to actually alter individual or communal social forms and practices. They tended to accomplish this by viewing esoteric movements as primarily about practice rather than theory, and treating esoteric practices as purely internal and yogic rather than social in character. Thus not only did these new religious forms not alter the social life of the institution or its individuals, but it also could be claimed to have left unaltered the fundamental intellectual forms and traditions that had preceded them – namely Mahāyāna scholastic traditions and their predecessors.

Throughout the efflorescence of Indian tantra from the sixth through eleventh centuries, philosophical discourse and exchange in Buddhist circles continued to be dominated by the nomenclature, concepts, and discourses transmitted under the rubrics of Abhidharma, Yogācāra, Madhyamaka, and Prajñāpāramitā. The greatest impact on such areas instead stemmed from the rise of Pramāṇa, that is, Buddhist logic and epistemology, which exerted an increasingly strong influence on the form and character of Buddhist philosophical discourse. Assimilation of tantric traditions into Buddhist philosophy was limited to fairly sterile discursive maps where anomalous or innovative elements of tantric discourse were explained away by monastic exegetes through identifying them with conventional philosophical notions from non-esoteric discourse. When one examines the philosophical discourses themselves, one finds relatively sparse citation of tantric literature, practices or ideas per se. The famed Kālacakra Tantra (late tenth to early eleventh centuries) stands out as an exception, as it does in so much else. Appearing as one of the last great products of Indian Buddhist intellectual and

literary civilization, its esoteric agenda is distinguished by a remarkably systematic approach which attempts to reassess the entire history of Buddhism, indeed in many ways Indian religions overall, within its own discursive boundaries. Whether this might have been the beginnings of a new era in Buddhist tantric thought and philosophical discourse in India is a historically moot point, since the decline of Buddhist thought, literature, and philosophical innovation was rapid from the eleventh century onwards in India. Thus despite the innovations and influential nature of tantra in India, and its plethora of new motifs and new models of consciousness, Vajrayāna in India never emerged as an important philosophical vehicle, and its influence on mainstream Buddhist philosophy was generally limited, at least in terms of explicit acknowledgment.

In Tibet, however, a brilliant renaissance of Buddhism began around the same time as the final flowering of Buddhist India, driven by a massive importation of literature, practices, and ideas from India across the Himalayas. Uniquely for Buddhist Asia, Tibetans imported and actively developed the full spectrum of tantric traditions from their early roots in the ritual life of Mahāyāna through their radicalization in yoginī tantras to their final systematization within the Kālacakra literature. One of the most interesting aspects of this was the emergence of esoteric Buddhism as a vehicle for vital philosophical discourses and innovations. From the eleventh to fourteenth, a series of thinkers and traditions in Tibet pursued central philosophical issues in a systematic and rigorous fashion within a specifically esoteric discursive terrain. Working within different evolving sectarian configurations across a huge geographical area, and often in quite marked disagreement, these thinkers developed a profoundly philosophical transformation of tantra that included distinctive positions on most of the great Buddhist philosophical motifs – consciousness, emptiness, purity, the nature of the path, the relationship between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and perception. This new philosophical literature at times was purely tantric in its citations and frame of reference, while at other times explicitly integrative through detailed references to exoteric literature and debates. While much of it in form explored the boundary between poetry and philosophy, other texts were formally characterized by the evolving norms of Tibetan scholastic literature, including syllogistic argumentation.

During the same time period in Tibet we witness an explosive growth of exoteric philosophical discourse which makes no reference to tantric motifs, including the rise of a Pramāṇa movement, the dominant Prāsaṅgika strand of Madhyamaka thought, extensive writings on Yogācāra and Prajñāpāramitā literature, and in general a thriving scholastic industry that covered the full range of Indian Buddhist literature, thought, and practice. Large bodies of Tibetan literature evolved that deal with the respective definitions and interrelations between “sūtra” and “tantra,” often in a general context, and at times in specialized topical treatments such as ethics and behavior – “the three vows” (*sdom gsum*) texts – or issues of path structure – the “stages of the path” (*lam rim*) and related types of texts. There gradually emerged a general polarization into two

broad trajectories: one which tended to keep these two discourse realms separate by treating tantra as innovative in “practice” but consonant with traditional exoteric “view” (philosophy and experiential realization); and one which tended to see these discourses as interpenetrating, and understood tantra to be profoundly philosophical and even superior to traditional exoteric intellectual discourses. Modern international scholarship has yet to adequately deal with this complexity, often continuing sectarian bifurcations in their tendency to deal with “philosophical” issues by looking exclusively at Mahāyāna philosophical discourse in traditional lines of Pramāṇa, Mahdhyamaka, and Yogācāra.

Some of the most innovative of these tantric movements were those loosely affiliated lineages that shared the rubric of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen*, pr. *dzokchen*), found especially within the Bön (*bon*) and Nyingma (*rnying ma*) traditions. The Great Perfection, along with the Great Seal (*phyag chen*, S: *mahāmudrā*) traditions, formed a particularly interesting set of movements that were often intensely philosophical, but were also involved in contentious relationships with mainstream Vajrayāna. Claiming to transcend other Vajrayāna traditions, they were critical of tantra’s complex ritualism and rhetoric of subjugation. Based on notions of pure awareness and the primacy of gnosis termed “primordial cognition” (*ye shes*, S: *jñāna*), these traditions ranged over a broad variety of exoteric and esoteric themes and problems. However, they had a particular interest in models of purity and consciousness found in Buddha-nature literature and Yogācāra scholastic thought. We thus find in these texts models and terminology clearly derived from those Mahāyāna literary corpuses, but often in quite different forms and unprecedented constellations with other doctrines and practices.

### **“Fundamental consciousness” in the Great Perfection**

One such reinterpretation of Yogācāra doctrines is the central role played within the Great Perfection by the notion of a “fundamental consciousness,” literally in Tibetan “universal ground consciousness” (*kun gzhi rnam par shes pa*, S: *ālaya-vijñāna*). Whereas many Tibetan authors addressed this notion in conservative, exoteric discourse which continued the form and content of Indian discussions in repetitive and innovative ways, authors in the Great Perfection were more innovative in their treatment of the concept, though often continuing and relying on standard Yogācāra nomenclature and motifs as well. At this stage in our scholarship of Tibetan thought, vast bodies of literature remain inaccessible, unedited, unanalyzed, and untranslated, while synthetic and detailed analysis of specific lineages and themes remain scarce during this earlier period. Thus I will contribute to an understanding of the Tibetan tantric development of the notion of fundamental consciousness by summarizing its role within the corpus of Longchenpa (*klong chen pa*, 1308–1363), one of the greatest philosophical figures in the history of Tibet and the most important scholar within the Seminal Heart (*snying thig*) variety of the Great Perfection.

The obvious point of departure is the literature's stock contrast between the "universal ground" and the "Reality Body" (*chos sku*, S: *dharmakāya*), which is linked to other such dyads: ordinary "mind" (*sems*, S: *citta*) and "primordial cognition"; "mind" and "awareness" (*rig pa*, S: *vidyā*); and, less often, "psyche" (*vid*, S: *manas*) and "insight" (*shes rab*, S: *prajñā*). While these four pairs are not synonymous, they all use contrasting models of consciousness and perception to articulate the basic Buddhist dualism of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, suffering sentient beings and liberated Buddhas, impurity and purity. We will focus on the relationship of the first two pairs: the universal ground and Reality Body form the basis for the operations and configuration of the mind and primordial cognition, respectively. The ordinary mind is the constellation of cognitive and emotive acts based upon the universal ground's unconscious substratum within ordinary beings, while primordial cognition is the constellation of cognitive and emotive acts based upon the Reality Body's non-manifest substratum in enlightened Buddhas. The mind and universal ground are thus impure, dualistic, fragmenting, and emotionally poisoned, while pristine cognition and the Reality Body are pure, non-dual, holistic, and emotionally healthy. It is a distinction between distorted and optimal experience, as well as the corresponding unconscious matrices. More typically, the focus is on the ordinary mind (*sems*) or ordinary consciousness (*rnam shes*) contrasted to pure awareness (*rig pa*) or primordial cognition (*ye shes*). The discussions are straightforward in terms of buddhology – namely, models of consciousness for Buddhas in contrast to sentient beings, or, in epistemological terms, the contrast of global, holistic, and reflexive modes of awareness to foetal, dualistic, and non-reflexive modes of awareness.

These discussions form a stock element of Great Perfection literature whether in the form of short essays such as Longchenpa's (1973a) *Precepts on Examining Mind and Primordial Gnosis* or Rangjung Dorjé's (*rang byung rdo rje*, 1284–1339) *A Treatise on the Differentiation of Consciousness and Primordial Cognition*,<sup>29</sup> or in standard sections of larger texts such as chapter four in Longchenpa's (1983c) *The Treasury of Words and Meanings*. The form generally has a relatively recognizable Mahāyāna-based structure, even if the overall agenda is distinctive. *Precepts on Examining Mind and Primordial Gnosis* (Longchenpa 1973a) focuses on mind and primordial cognition rather than the universal ground, and is only slightly esoteric; indeed, even the treatment in *The Treasury* (Longchenpa 1983c) a masterly summary of Seminal Heart esotericism, is mostly in and of itself fairly recognizable in an Indian exoteric context.

Longchenpa presents the universal ground in a distinctive fourfold formulation: the primordial universal ground (*ye don gyi kun gzhi*), the linking universal ground (*sbyor ba don gyi kun gzhi*), the universal ground of varied karmic propensities (*bags sna tshogs pa'i kun gzhi*), and the universal ground of the karmic propensities(-derived) body (*bag chags lus kyi kun gzhi*). This discussion provides an excellent depiction of the functional diversity of the concept in the Great Perfection as summarized in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* (Longchenpa 1983c, 234.6–235.1).

- 1 “The primordial universal ground” is the dimension that primordially from the very first innately arises upon awareness, like gold and tarnish; it is the non-awareness itself dependent upon awareness, and which serves as the initial foundation of all phenomena in cyclic existence.
- 2 “The linking universal ground” is the foundation of karmic factors, the morally indeterminate fundamental basis which individually links and impels us to either cyclic existence or transcendent reality (via our particular) karmic actions.
- 3 “The universal ground of varied karmic propensities” is the morally indeterminate dimension of the diverse latent karma which perpetuates the vicious cycle of our ordinary mind and its specific operations.
- 4 “The universal ground of the karmic propensities(-derived) body” is the base of non-awareness serving as the foundation for the respective manifestations of the following three types of bodies: a coarse body manifest in parts formed from atomic particles (i.e. the major limbs and their secondary appendages); a lucent body of light; and a body manifesting in accordance with one’s deep contemplation.

This quartet outlines cosmogonic, cosmological/existential, psychological, and somatic functions of fundamental consciousness as four devolutionary phases (the following cites alternative formulations by Longchenpa 1983b, vol. 2, 35. 6–36.6). (i) The primordial universal ground refers to a primordial ground’s own cognitive energy failing to self-recognize itself, such that this “non-awareness” operates as the transcendental condition for the entirety of cyclic existence. It is thus “the original stirring of cognitive processing being in conjunction with non-awareness.” (ii) The linking universal ground indicates how this cognitive energy’s deepest substratum operates as the unifying karmic mechanism linking, and impelling, personal continuity across many lifetimes and experiential worlds. The two broadest types of life-worlds are *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*: “that psychic energy links to cyclic existence if it is not self-aware, while it links-up to transcendence if it is aware.” Longchenpa elsewhere correlates the universal ground of primordial presence to “indeterminate non-awareness,” and the linking universal ground to our eightfold ordinary consciousness (the six perceptual consciousnesses, integrative psychic consciousness, and universal ground consciousness) (Longchenpa 1971b, vol. 1, 446.4ff.). (iii) The universal ground of varied karmic propensities operates as a repository for the network of psychic seed-potencies and karmic propensities that constantly influence our specific mental states, emotions, and modes of consciousness below the level of consciousness. Thus “this psychic energy functions as the exclusive foundation-source for all the impure karmic actions and propensities.” (iv) The universal ground of our karmic propensities-derived body signifies how its karmic propensities materialize into one of three specific body types with distinctive perceptual apparatus acting as unifying orientational points for our experience of the world. In summary, “this root psychic energy has the

karmic propensities for physical embodiment such that it manifests a flesh and blood, light, or psychic body.”

These are four aspects of the single wellspring of all cognitive processes from the primordial emergence of consciousness within the ground’s self-contained virtual reality up until the current moment. There is a developmental logic behind the specific sequence – an initial phase which sets the stage, a second phase which bifurcates into one of two broad trajectories of life-worlds, a third phase which is the actual morally infused interactional system sustaining our existence, and a fourth phase where this takes somatic form in one of three types. While these presentations are usually terse, they offer a useful platform to organize the diverse usages of fundamental consciousness, as well as to reflect on its broader contextualization within the Great Perfection. While the structured presentations of the universal ground in its own right are modestly distinctive, the truly innovative reinterpretation is revealed when they are fully contextualized within the wider discourses in which those sections are positioned.

### *Cosmogonic functions: the primordial universal ground*

The primordality of the universal ground points to its role in beginnings and creation. This is traditionally a problematic topic in Indian Buddhism with its anti-cosmogonic orientation rejecting a model of divine creation or even the topic of a specific temporal onset to the universe. Traditionally we find a “beginningless” ignorance (*ma rig pa*, S: *avidyā*) of *samsāra* stretching into an infinite past, creation impelled by emotionally infused activities (*karma*) and their traces-cum-propensities (*vāsanā*), and the divinity of enlightened Buddhas located on the *other side* of ordinary existence as the result of a long developmental trajectory. Despite this, there are precedents in Indian Buddhism for divine creation in terms of Buddhas creating pure lands and their own enlightened displays classified into “three Bodies” (*skugsuṃ*, S: *trikāya*), as well as the cosmological theme of vast Bodies of Buddhas containing billions of worlds. In addition, the motif of “a nucleus of enlightened movement” (*de bzhin gshegs pa’i snying po*, S: *tathāgatagarbha*) or Buddha-nature within all life points to a possible divinity that logically precedes ordinary existence. In esoteric forms of Indian Buddhism, we find these motifs intensified with the central yogic practice of “creating” (*bskyed*) deities in visualization practices, as well as creating entire divine worlds of beings, residences and grounds known as *maṇḍalas*. We also find Buddha-nature theory deepening with new somatic practices involving the presence of these *maṇḍalas* within the ordinary body, as well as an entire alternative subtle physiology with pure flows of divine energy. Tibetan Buddhists thus inherited a complex array of themes from India regarding creation, divinity, and primordality.

When we thus regard the universal ground in its “primordial” dimension, it is not surprising that there is tension and ambiguity as to the relative divinity or impurity of this foundational consciousness, as well as its role in beginnings – whether of time, life, *samsāra*, or *nirvāṇa*. A reoccurring question concerns its

relationship to ignorance/non-awareness on the one hand, and Buddha-nature on the other hand. Non-awareness is the grand progenitor and transcendental condition of *saṃsāra*, and is the first of the twelve links of interdependent origination describing the formation and persistence of *saṃsāra*, an early Buddhist existential and psychological diagnosis of the problem of existence. Such accounts were early on explicitly denied a cosmogonic cast, as non-awareness is described as without beginning. On the other hand, Buddha-nature emerges in some Mahāyāna discourses as the ultimate matrix and source of *nirvāṇa*, though important controversies swirled about whether to construe this as a passive potential for development, or as a more radical notion of a divine agent working from within ordinary being toward self-expression. The positing of a foundational consciousness, whatever the factors and motivations driving its original formulators, naturally raises the issue of its relationship to the formation of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, to impurity and purity, to ordinary being and enlightened being.

*The Treasury of Words and Meanings* (Longchenpa 1983c, chapter 2, 187.3–188.5) strictly defines the universal ground in all four aspects as exclusively the impure substratum of *saṃsāra*. Indeed, the entire rationale for the discussion is to draw a strict and rigid demarcation between “universal ground” and “Reality Body” as the ongoing matrices of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, respectively. Its first “primordial” dimension of fundamental consciousness is thus identified with the ancient Buddhist concept of ignorance. In the Great Perfection, ignorance or non-awareness is classified as having three primary aspects keyed to the sequential unfolding of ordinary existence (Longchenpa 1983c, chapter 2, 187.3–188.5): (i) single identity non-awareness (*rgyu bdag nyid gcig pa'i ma rig pa*), (ii) coemergent non-awareness (*lhan cig skyes pa'i ma rig pa*), and (iii) non-awareness of rampant reification (*kun brtags pa'i ma rig pa*). Longchenpa further details an accompanying “four conditions” (*ryen bzhi*) derived from normative Buddhist epistemology which are necessary for a perception to take place. In a broad manner, it is possible to correlate the “single identity non-awareness” with the “universal ground of primordial presence,” “coemergent non-awareness” with the “linking universal ground,” and the “non-awareness of rampant reification” with the universal ground’s final two aspects dealing with the network of karmic propensities.<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere, in his analysis of the twelve links of interdependent origination, Longchenpa describes the first link of “non-awareness” as “non-recognition (of appearances) as self-presencing,” the second link of “karmic conditioning” as stemming from “the non-awareness of rampant reification” clinging and fixating on objects, and the third link of “perceptual consciousness” as deriving from the universal ground, which is “awareness adulterated with karmic propensities” (Longchenpa 1971b, vol. 2, 175.3ff.). However, the discourse on non-awareness is chiefly epistemological and ideational in orientation, though applied equally to a cosmogonic and individual psychological scenario in describing the rise of distorted perception and thought processes. In contrast, the discussion of the foundational consciousness is intended to explain the working system of consciousness, including a plurality of processes operating at unconscious levels,

and embracing its role in emotions, embodiment, morality, and action. Both thus function to explain the inception, character and operations of consciousness within saṃsāra, yet diverge in terms of explanatory agendas therein.

The relationship of foundational consciousness and non-awareness is thus clear in these terms – non-awareness undergrids the very possibility of saṃsāric existence, and the foundational consciousness attempts to provide a model for how that basic lack of awareness can serve as a working basis for other emotions, cognitive acts, and personal continuity over many lifetimes. The other three dimensions of the universal ground are a natural extension offering details on how this unconscious substratum determines the health of one’s life world, shapes emotional and cognitive details across time, and constitutes one’s bodily structure. It does this primarily through acting as a repository for the trace impressions of past and present activities and emotions, and then furthermore acting as the operational basis for those trace impressions to subsequently ripen into active proclivities influencing present and future cognition, emotion, and activity. Yet how do these fundamental layers of unconscious processes relate to other unconscious dimensions in human beings described as divine, yet in ordinary existence equally far removed from introspection, reflexive awareness, and deliberate intention?

In order to assess this question, we must examine the standard Great Perfection distinction between the terms “universal ground” (*kun gzhi; ālaya*) and the “universal ground consciousness” (*kun gzhi’i rnam shes; ālayavijñāna*), a distinction Longchenpa locates in Indian Yogācāra literature. He cites a *Bodhisattvabhūmi* passage which defines the “universal ground” as “non-conceptuality uninvolved with objects” and the “universal ground consciousness” as “non-conceptuality involved with objects” (Longchenpa 1973b, vol. 1, 85b.2). He also cites Sthiramati’s commentary to the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*, where he characterizes the “universal ground” as the overall basis for the accumulation of karma in the manner of their house, while the “universal ground consciousness” is that which “opens up the space . . . for the increase, amassing, decline, and so on of these karmic forces” (84.5). Longchenpa himself describes the universal ground consciousness as the “unceasing brightness and clarity” of the universal ground’s radiation, such that the former signifies how the latter diffuses outwards to operate as the other seven aspects of typical consciousness-activity (Longchenpa 1971a, vol. 3, 120.1ff.). This subtle distinction, however, is of exceptional importance when one considers its broader discursive context within the *Seminal Heart’s* central interest in cosmogony and divine creation stemming from primordial cognition. The tradition posits an original, divine ground termed “the ground of all” (*kun gyi gzhi ma*), which in its contracted form leads us back to a “universal ground” (*kun gzhi*). This results in a fundamental ambiguity that extends throughout the system, namely whether “ground of all” with its cosmogonic primordially signifies all of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, or simply all of saṃsāra. Despite Longchenpa’s following the latter interpretative trajectory in *The Treasury of Words and Meanings* (Longchenpa 1983c), the term “primordial”



(*ye, ye don*) typically signifies the transcendent dimension of a Buddha and nirvāṇa, whether referring to a Buddha's knowledge as "primordial knowing" (*ye shes*) or describing the cosmogonic base as a "primordial ground" (*ye gzhi*). Indeed, Longchenpa's own corpus elsewhere explicitly uses the term "universal ground" to signify the innately pure primordial ground of all reality (Longchenpa 1983d, 89.7).

This divine ground is explicitly identified as "a nucleus of enlightened movement" (*de bzhin gshegs pa*, S: *tathāgatagarbha*) or Buddha-nature. While presented as a cosmogonic ground which ontologically precedes cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) and transcendence (*nirvāṇa*), it is also explicitly located within the human interior as an ongoing, deeply unconscious dimension. This dimension is engaged in a constant efflorescence that gives rise to both *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, leading to the stock formulation of a single ontological ground leading to two paths, that is, interpretative trajectories resulting in a bifurcation of life-worlds. The ground itself is described as threefold – empty essence, radiant nature, and all-pervasive compassion – in a model explicitly based upon a Buddha's three Bodies: the empty Reality Body (*dharmakāya*), the radiant Enjoyment Body (*sambhogakāya*), and the all-pervasive Emanational Body (*nirmāṇakāya*). The cosmogonic movement from the ground's deep interiority and potential into manifestation is modeled after the description of the divine creation of pure lands, a process bound up with the emergence of Enjoyment Bodies and their *maṇḍalas* out of the non-manifest matrix of the Reality Body. The completely interior and pure "ground" is described as undergoing a process of exteriorization and rupture resulting in this scenario, from which two paths (*lam*) extend: a path leading to enlightened transcendence (*nirvāṇa*) by means of the cognitive capacity recognizing the appearances as self, and a path leading to distorted cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) by means of a lack of such recognition. The former path is described as the mode of freedom (*grol tshul*) of the primordial Buddha All Good (*kun tu bzang po*, S: *samantabhadra*), while the latter path is described as the mode of deviation ('*khrol tshul*) of sentient beings (*sems can*, S: *sattva*). Furthermore, the latter path is termed "non-awareness," which is here identified as the "primordial universal ground," that is, the basic unconscious matrix for animate life in *saṃsāra*.

The inception of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is thus described as emerging in a bifurcated epistemological scenario in which an emergent cognitive capacity (*shes pa*, S: *vijñāna*) develops out of a deeply unconscious state to newly encounter a lighting-up or appearances (*snang ba*). The bifurcation hinges on what is termed "recognition," namely the reflexivity involved in this process of manifestation. In the case of transcendence, the interior and unconscious ground now infused with reflexive self-awareness becomes the Reality Body, the matrix of a divine creativity constituting the Buddha's prolific forms and activity. In the case of deviation, the ground remains, albeit in a state of deep unconscious latency, while a derivative cognitive formation termed the "universal ground consciousness" becomes the operational matrix of a distorted and tainted creativity

constituting a sentient being's embodiment and activities. In other words, Buddha-nature is the cosmogonic ground, and the Reality Body is its transformation with reflexive self-awareness, while the universal ground consciousness is a derivative unconscious matrix embedded within the even more deeply unconscious pure ground. In this manner, the relationship of the Buddha-nature/Reality Body and fundamental consciousness – wisdom and ignorance – is between two distinct unconscious domains in the body and mind that account for creation and agency beneath conscious reflection. The universal ground literally dissolves into the always already extant Buddha-nature, which then becomes an awakened Buddha. Thus foundational consciousness does *not* transform into a new type of unconscious process or cognitive constellation, but rather dissipates so that deeper movements can emerge into being, perception and emotions directly outside of its meditating and distorting influences.

***Cosmological and existential functions: the linking  
universal ground***

The foundational consciousness's "linking" function ensures unconscious continuity of personal trajectories in either distorted (i.e. *samsāra*) or optimal (i.e. *nirvāṇa*) worlds of experience and being. Each straying sentient being is linked to cyclic existence or transcendence through the universal ground's storing and preserving of karmic potencies as determined by that being's particular actions. It serves to coordinate all of this in a network of karmic traces stretching across individual life-tracks and impelling a given individual from one state of being to another, while in particular tightly "intermeshing" them with cyclic existence in their total physical, verbal, and mental being. *The Treasury of Reality's Expanse* (Longchenpa 1983a, 233.4) defines the linking universal ground as, "[T]he non-awareness operating as the basis for the accumulation of all karmic actions, such that it links us to all aspects of fictive existence (the psycho-physical components, etc.)."

The cosmogonic scenario discussed earlier is interiorized as well, so that a psycho-cosmogonic process unfolds within each individual's interiority throughout its life. The ground of their pure awareness unfolds, there is a lack of recognition and it thus devolves into the universal ground. This forms the matrix for specific perceptual cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, which in turn leave traces back on that ground leading in the future to propensities that ultimately lead one down the path toward *samsāra* or *nirvāṇa*. Great Perfection psychology thus utilizes the divine cosmogony, and its secondary process of deviation, as the basic model for describing the ongoing functioning of unconscious and conscious processes of each person's being. The unconscious dimensions thus occur in two distinct strata: a more deeply unconscious and ontologically prior matrix known as the "ground," "Buddha-nature," "awareness" (*rig pa*), "self-emerging primordial cognition" (*rang byung ye shes*), or even the Reality Body, and a shallower level that is developmentally dependent on the former matrix and known as the

“universal ground (consciousness)” or “single identity non-awareness.” The grand drama of the divine explosion followed by ignorance, deviation, and contraction is thus interiorized and existentialized as a daily and unconscious process that constitutes the depth psychology of sentient life.

This cosmological role also entails controversies pertaining to idealism, namely the extent to which foundational consciousness creates and structures the external world. A soft interpretation would be that the foundational consciousness is an unconscious array of dynamic and interdependent predispositions undergirding our patterns of emotions, conceptual projections, perceptual constructions, and even actual physical structures of our body which produce our *actual* life world. However, the literature clearly indicates that controversies over the idealistic implications of the theory were pervasive, namely, the stronger interpretation that foundational consciousness actually creates the external world and its appearances. This is a natural extension of older theories of the power of human action – karma – to literally create worlds, including relatively terse references to how karma can work in a coordinated fashion across communities and species. Since the foundational consciousness is essentially a way to account for the dynamic operations of karma beneath the level of consciousness and across lives, the role of human agency in the creation of the world is an inescapable issue. However, this creative agency becomes more personalized, focused on cognition rather than action, and systematized to a greater degree. Longchenpa explicitly rejects solipsistic idealism, namely the notion that ordinary “mind” or foundational consciousness creates the external world in which individuals find themselves, though the actual quality of that world is profoundly altered through our cognitive engagement with it. Thus the experience of material elements in their qualitative experience may well be a result of the foundational consciousness and its karmic propensities, but their essential energy as dynamic configurations of light remain outside of individual subject’s influence, while even their experiential character is a product of dynamic interaction between multiple beings. On the other hand, Longchenpa’s work is pervaded by evocative depictions of the creative function of consciousness *vis-à-vis* the world in terms of pristine cognition, the Reality Body and Buddha-nature, as indicated in the tradition’s divine cosmogony. In fact, the ancient Buddhist notion of interdependent origination, a process of cause and effect driven by human action (*karma*), has been displaced by the model of a magical web (*sgyu 'phrul drwa ba*), a process of complex causality transcending linearity driven by pristine cognition (*jñāna*). Thus the human unconscious leads, at its deepest levels, to a cognitive network that is understood to form a concealed, secret array of continuities driven by what is believed to be a fundamentally intelligent and divine dynamic. One of the consequences of this is a valorization of unconscious processes deeply linked to imagination, somatic processes, and non-conceptual experiences. This is a topic to which we will return in the following section in regard to contemplation.

***Psychological functions: the universal ground of varied karmic propensities***

The foundational consciousness's third aspect is the actual network of karmic propensities, namely the impressions left on the psychic substratum by physical, verbal, and mental actions (*karma*). Each action's conscious and unconscious motivation shapes one's ongoing existence by leaving corresponding seed-potencies in the substratum, which eventually flower into propensities to repeat such types of action in the future. As previous karmic impressions ripen into present emotions and mind-sets, one's current psychological state and action create new impressions, such that a vicious cycle perpetuates itself into the indefinite future. This network of karmic propensities is morally indeterminate in that while it is the effect of morally determinate actions, it is itself a latent, unconscious dimension beyond the personal volition that could be classified with such ethical valuations as "virtuous" or "non-virtuous." It can thus karmically influence one's future, but is not itself an intentional psychic factor capable of generating any new karmic energy. As a whole, this thus accounts for the specific dynamics of personal continuity, behavior, and dynamic interplay of the unconscious and conscious processes in cognitive and emotional life. This aspect is a fairly conventional discussion consonant with earlier Mahāyāna depictions of foundational consciousness accounting for personal continuity.

***Somatic functions: the universal ground of the karmic propensities-derived body***

Foundational consciousness's fourth function points to its interdependence with embodiment, namely the deeply somatic character of the unconscious. *The Treasury of Reality's Expense* (ibid.) describes the "universal ground-as-body" as the "beginningless karmic propensities for manifestation in terms of a body," which becomes the "basis for the constellation of factors making up our individual bodies." In general, the ordinary body is termed "ripened karmic propensities" (Longchenpa 1983b, vol. 2, 329.6) since it forms via the dynamics of karmic propensities from the moment of conception onwards:

When the mind, constellation of eight modes of consciousness, and fifty one mental factors manifest along with the karmic propensities, it is termed the "sheath" or "body" of the ripening karmic propensities. Furthermore, they are three in number – the flesh and blood body of the desire realm, the light body ripening in the four meditative states, and the psychic body which is latent in the formless realm.

(Longchenpa 1971a, vol. 3, 202.3)

The three bodies correspond to the three realms of cyclic existence: (i) the flesh and blood corporeal body of the sensual realm, with the major limbs (the two arms,

two legs, and head) and auxiliary appendages (the fingers, toes, chin); (ii) the luminous, etherealized bodies of the form realm corresponding to various levels of deities and rarefied states of meditation; and (iii) the “psychic bodies” of the formless realm, in which existence is attenuated to concentrated psychic energy without material physicality. In the third case, embodiment is limited to a ghost-like existence between lives in the intermediate process (*bar do*), a mere mental image deriving from the karmic propensities of eons of embodied existence. In this way, the lived body can manifest on three different levels, which can be understood as dimensions of experience accessible to us in this life – the coarse physical level enmeshed in material existence, a vibrant subtle body reflexively sensed in contemplation, and the experiential body in various states – dreams, post-death, rarified contemplative states, visions, various imaginative processes, and acts of cognitive modeling. The basic point is that the karmic traces constituting the unconscious dynamics of the foundational consciousness are deeply constitutive of all forms of embodiment:

Since the karmic propensities for a body are present within the root psychic energy (of the universal ground), the bodies of flesh and blood, light, and the psyche manifest, and hence (this division of the universal ground) is termed (the “universal ground of the karmic propensities-derived body.”

(Longchenpa 1983b, vol. 2, 36.2)

This somatic character of the foundational consciousness extends deeply into the body’s interior structure and processes, since the cosmogonic drama leading to it is not only interiorized within the consciousness and unconscious processes of sentient life, but is also somatically embedded within the body’s physiological detail. Earlier Buddha-nature literature in Mahāyāna was pervaded by evocative metaphors placing divinity (whether potential or actual) within the ordinary body, but details are sparse on how that might actually work. The rise of yogic physiology in yoginī tantras constituted a deeply somatic turn in Buddhist contemplation and discourse that focused on the intimate physiological detail of the human peripersonal space. At times this took the form of an abstract mapping of Buddhist doctrinal concepts and iconographic detail onto the human body, but contemplation also involved genuine attention to ordinarily unconscious physiological processes and intense physical sensations. This somatic discourse entailed that all important concepts had to be embodied in very precise manners.

Thus the heart forming one of the four main “wheels” (S: *cakra*) of Buddhist subtle bodies is the somatic residence of the divine ground of pure awareness. Its cosmogonic luminosity – technically termed the “presencing of the ground” (*gzhi snang*) – spills out from the heart into a series of “luminous channels” (*‘od rtsa*) extending throughout the body from a central channel running up the body’s torso. As complicated physical and mental human structures evolve based upon it, it remains within the human body’s central vitality channel as a radiation of the

heart's radiant light via the network of the latter's luminous channels. The foundational consciousness is understood as deriving from the luminous channels' "brightness" (*gdangs*), and is viewed as "clouds" which obscure the heart's pristine awareness and thus must be cleared away via contemplation. It is located within the "vitality channel" (*srog rtsa*), a term usually specifying the aorta or blood channel trunk, and often associated with the spinal cord (*rgyungs pa*) in these texts (Longchenpa 1971a). In Tibetan medical texts, the aorta is termed the "black vitality channel" and the spinal cord the "white vitality channel," clearly relating to the key role of blood and nervous energy. The luminous channel of transcendence remains located within this vitality channel, such that its somatic reality again reiterates the primacy and primordiality of Buddha-nature in terms of human being, and the secondary and derivative nature of the fundamental consciousness.

In summary, these unconscious processes – both mundane and divine – are deeply intertwined with somatic processes and realities. This entails both that our physical state is a direct function of our relationship to unconscious processes, and that the key to gnosis lies through a somatic engagement rather than a purely cognitive one.

### *Contemplative functions: the gnostic transformation*

These models of the unconscious dimensions of being as well as bifurcated models of creation and agency are clearly manifest in the *Seminal Heart's* contemplative traditions. The contemplative focus on the foundational consciousness is chiefly on its eradication through traditional practices of "calming" (*śamatha*) and insight (*vipāśyanā*). These function to deconstruct the foundational consciousness's sedimented patterns, while also opening up a clearing for the divine ground's effluence to emerge in the field of reflexive awareness. Similar practices include meditations on the sounds of the elements (wind, water, etc.) through cultivating calming based upon the sound of natural elements, as well as the "differentiation of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa" (*khor 'das ru shan*) practice in which people act crazily in an isolated valley until pure fatigue exhausts ordinary constructions of experience. This culminates in the breakthrough (*khregs chod*) contemplative praxis, which essentially is a form-free relaxed presence of mind immersed within the depth unconscious of the ground. However, the most distinctive contemplative practices are those focusing on a deeply somatic experience of creative imaginal processes termed "direct transcendence" (*thod rgal*). This core practice involves cultivating a spontaneous flow of images understood to be the effulgent flow of luminosity from the heart's universal ground through the eyes into exterior space. As this ordinarily unconscious process becomes reflexively self-aware, an alternative form of organization and patterning comes to the fore. Hence a dual tracked contemplative model is explicitly geared toward first eradicating the shallower layers of unconscious processes, and second bringing deeper processes into reflexive awareness.

## Conclusion

Explicit models of unconscious mental and physical processes arose within Indian Buddhism in response to the Abhidharma tradition's intensive analysis of consciousness, both in theory and practice. Yogācārin Buddhists subsequently discerned the limits of conscious awareness, and, in the process, the underlying conditions that must necessarily support all ordinary conscious experience. Until this point, the notion of a foundational consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) had largely remained a solution to an Abhidharmic Problematic concerning the relationship between different modalities and functions of consciousness. Once the notion of a foundational consciousness underlying all other forms of mind was fully articulated, however, it became an interpretive nexus inviting speculation on its relationship to other processes outside consciousness awareness and control. These included Buddha-nature and pure consciousness (*amala-vijñāna*), leading increasingly to speculation on older but as of yet poorly developed notions of original purity hidden within ordinary existence. This basic tension – namely whether fundamental consciousness is defiled or pure – came to be further developed in philosophical esoteric movements in Tibet. In at least one such tradition, the Great Perfection, we find a complex new synthesis elaborating both aspects into a deeply somatic portrayal of the unconscious as a dramatic unfolding of radically active divine and distorted processes with contrasting paradigms of creation and causality.

## Notes

- 1 There are, of course, active cognitive processes, such as apperception, but these are not consciousness.
- 2 In a famous passage the Buddha specifically denies this “heresy of Sāti”: “As I understand the Dhamma taught by the Blessed One, it is this same consciousness that runs and wanders through the round of rebirths, not another.” The Buddha responds: “apart from conditions there is no origination of consciousness” (MN.1.258. *aññatara paccayā natthi viññāṇassa sambhavo ti*).
- 3 Compounded of the prefix “*saṃ*,” “with” or “together with,” and a form of the verbal root “*kr*” “to do or make;” *saṃskārā* literally means “put or made together” or simply “formation.” In the psychological sense, *saṃskārā* refer to the volitions, dispositions, and actions that constitute human life, both insofar as these are *constructed* complexes formed from past actions and *constructive* activities formative of present and future experience.
- 4 See Johansson (1979, 106f.), Wijesekera (1964, 254–259).
- 5 For a longer discussion of this in Buddhist terms see Waldron (2003b).
- 6 “This body is not yours, nor does it belong to others. It is old kamma, to be seen as generated and fashioned by volition, as something to be felt.” The commentary (*aṭṭhakathā*) explains

*It is old kamma (purāṇam idaṃ kammaṃ):* This body is not actually old kamma, but because it is produced by old kamma it is spoken of in terms of its condition. It should be seen *as generated (abhisankhata)*, in that it is made by conditions; *as fashioned by volition (abhisāñcetaṃ)*, in that it is based on volition, rooted in volition and *as something to be felt (vedaniya)*, in that it is a basis for what is to be felt.

(SN 2000, p. 757, n. 111)

- 7 *Milinda's Questions* (Horner 1963–64, 79f.; I. vii.57) uses this same analogy for the habits and tendencies of mental processes.
- 8 The definition of disposition suggests both a result of previous actions and the tendency to repeat it: “a person’s inherent qualities of mind and character; an inclination or tendency” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1976).
- 9 MN. 1.8. “It is this self of mine that speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions; but this self of mine is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change, and it will endure as long as eternity.”
- 10 AKBh 1.3 (Shastri, 14; Pruden, 57). He continues: “So it is with a view to this discernment that the Abhidharma has been, they say, spoken [by the Master.]... without the teaching of the Abhidharma, a disciple would be incapable of discerning the *dharmas*.”
- 11 AKBh ad 1.2b (Shastri 12: *svlakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharma*). This definition exploits the etymology of *dharma*: “*dhr*,” “to hold, bear, carry, maintain, preserve, keep, possess, place, fix,” etc.
- 12 There are *ad hoc* categories for anomalous factors such as *saṃskārās* dissociated from mind (*citta-viprayukta-saṃskārā*), whose very existence belies the claims of *dharmic* discourse. See Jaini (1959b).
- 13 *Ālaya* is composed of the prefix “*ā*,” “near to, towards,” with the verbal root, “*h*,” “to cling or press closely, stick or adhere to, settle upon, etc.” (SED 154; PED 109).
- 14 See complete passage in Waldron, *The Coarising of Self and Object, Infra*.
- 15 It is indistinct or “unperceived” (*asaṃvidita*) the *Triṃśikā-bhāṣyam* (TBh 19.14–15) explains, inasmuch as one does not know “it is that, it is here” (*so 'smim idam tad iti pratisaṃvedanākāreṇāsaṃvidita ityatas tad asaṃviditakopādi iti ucyate*). See also Schmithausen (1987, 389f.).
- 16 These are two simultaneous, yet conceptually distinct forms of consciousness (ASBh 12.15: *dvayoḥ vijñānayoḥ yugapatpravṛtti bhaviṣyati*).
- 17 Freudian theorists faced the same challenge with its concepts: “Just because the [ego, id, and superego] have different names does not mean that they are separate entities... They are merely a shorthand way of designating different processes, functions, mechanisms, and dynamisms within the total personality” (Hall 1954, 34f.).
- 18 As *Samḍhinirmocana Sūtra* V.7 explained, the Buddha has “not taught [*ālaya-vijñāna*] to the ignorant, lest they should imagine it a self.”
- 19 It’s “perception (*vijñapti*) arises,” according to the text, “with a single flavor (*ekarasaṭvena*) from the first moment of appropriation [of the body at conception] for as long as life lasts” ((1.b)B.2).
- 20 Even “in states lacking mental activity” (*acittaka*; (4.b) A.1.a).
- 21 As MSg II.16.1 points out, “Mental perceptual consciousness is conceptual discrimination (*parikalpita*)... It arises from its own seeds of the impressions of language, and from the seeds of the impressions of language of all perceptions (*vijñapti*).” See also Waldron, *The Co-arising of Self and Object, infra*, n. 80.
- 22 ASBh. 62.3ff. *yām adhiṣṭhāyotpannadarśanamārgasyāpy āryaśrāvakasyāsmiṇānaḥ samudācarati*.
- 23 We use “informed” in the sense of effecting something coming into form, “to give shape to, fashion, impart quality to” (*Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1976).
- 24 ASBh. 35.26f concurs that the impressions leading toward liberation (*mokṣab-hāgīyānām vāsanā*) have supramundane causes (*lokottaradharmahetu*).
- 25 MSg 1.61’s argument that, “without the [partial elimination of *ālaya-vijñāna*] the gradual cessation (*kramanivṛtti*) of the defilements (*sajklewa*) would be impossible,” supports the interpretation of *ālaya-vijñāna* as a set of aggregated processes, not a singular entity.
- 26 MSg I.1. *anādikāliko dhātuh sarvadharmasamāwrayah/tasmin satī gatih sarvā nirvāna ādhigamo 'pi ca*. Sanskrit original in TBh 37.



- 27 (MSA XIII, 19; MVBh. I.22.c–d). See also Jaini (1959a, 249), Johansson (1979, 102), and especially Keenan (1982) for a lucid treatment of this question in early Yogācāra.
- 28 “It is plain that when the *Laikāvatāra Sūtra* identifies the two terms, this scripture necessarily diverges in the meaning of one or both of the terms from the usage of the term Tathāgata-garbhā in the earlier *Śrī-māla* or of the term *ālayavijñāna* in the subsequent Yogācāra school” (Wayman and Hideko 1974, 53).
- 29 See Michael Sheehy’s following chapter (Chapter 4) on this text.
- 30 Longchenpa’s (1971c, vol. 1, 445.3) *The Seminal Quintessence of the Profound*, does present only three classifications of the universal ground, through precisely such a consolidation of the last two features from the fourfold set.

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