

TADEUSZ SKORUPSKI

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The Buddhist Perceptions of Consciousness

Abstract

This paper offers a general but wide ranging survey of the Buddhist analysis and interpretation of consciousness. The paper does not aim to formulate any particular theory, but limits itself to ascertaining the ways in which Buddhist masters of all periods attempted to explain the nature and function of consciousness.

After establishing the basic terminology, the paper proceeds to ascertain the Abhidharma treatment of consciousness. The Abhidharma masters mainly focus on consciousness in its cognitive and karmic conditions.

Their ultimate aim is to demonstrate how to disentangle consciousness from the bondage of phenomenal existence. By contrast the Mahayana and Vajrayana masters concentrate on the pure or luminous nature of consciousness. Although they recognise the necessity of purifying consciousness, their primary goal is to demonstrate how consciousness can achieve its full potentiality, in the sense of attaining the state and qualities of buddhahood. Viewed as a whole, the Buddhist interpretations of consciousness offer a formidable range of insights into its nature and functions. However, there is no agreed interpretation on some crucial issues, such as the continuity or latent functions of consciousness.

The Buddhist perceptions of consciousness do not represent a kind of objective or scientific analysis, but they are underpinned by the Buddhist doctrinal assumptions about the nature of existence, and by the Buddhist soteriological theories.

The underpinning doctrinal assumptions assert that the entire existence (*samsāra*) is permeated by three all-pervasive characteristics, namely impermanence (*anitya*), suffering (*duḥkha*), and insubstantiality or selflessness (*anātma*). In this context the primary concern of the Buddhist teachings is to demonstrate that the consciousness is a stream of momentary

mental experiences, that it is the source of suffering by producing and being produced by karma, and that it has no permanent status of any kind.

In terms of soteriological theories, the Buddhist teachings devise the eightfold path of liberation, which leads to the cessation of suffering, and the attainment of a state which is immune to suffering, and is epitomised by such terms as arhatship, *nirvāṇa*, and enlightenment (*bodhi*). In this context the Buddhist teachings postulate the purification of consciousness from its existential or karmic entanglement, which is entirely due to defilements (*kleśa*) and ignorance (*avidyā*). The teachings also explain how the flux of consciousness must be brought to a complete cessation and non-recurrence in phenomenal existence.

This paper aims to survey the Buddhist interpretations of consciousness as an integral component of the various taxonomies of animate life, and as it evolves in its karmic or mundane and its purified or supramundane conditions.

The technical terms for consciousness

In Buddhism the consciousness does not have one single name, and it does not include the totality of all conscious activities. Essentially it is classed as one single entity or element (*dharma*) that functions in association with its mental concomitants, which influence its behaviour and ethical qualities.

Among several terms that are used in Buddhist texts to denote consciousness, three terms occupy a primary position, namely *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna*.¹ It is said in the canonical texts and reaffirmed in the Abhidharma sources that these three terms refer to one and the same thing or are synonyms (*ekārtha*).² However, although they refer to the same thing, namely consciousness, their interpretations as given in different contexts and taxonomies are not consistently the same.

The *Kośa* and its commentaries say that the terms *citta*, *manas* and *vijñāna* refer to the same thing, but have different etymologies (*nirvacana*). Thus in terms of their etymologies: *citta* accumulates (*cinoti*), *manas* thinks (*manute*), and *vijñāna* cognises (*vijānāti*). Next the *Kośa* explains that when *citta* serves as a support it is *manas*, and when it is supported it is *vijñāna*. Then it further clarifies that *citta* accumulates wholesome and unwholesome *dharma*s, and that it is accumulated (*cita*) by the pure and impure elements (*dhātus*). When it acts as a support (*āśraya*) it is *manas*, and when it is supported (*āśrita*) it is *vijñāna*s;³ this is explained more fully later on.

¹ In western studies the term *citta* is often rendered as consciousness or mind, *manas* as mind, and *vijñāna* as consciousness. In this paper we frequently retain the Sanskrit terms for the sake of clarity and precision. For a philological and linguistic study of these three terms in the Pāli and Brahmanical sources, see D. P i y a n a n d a, 1981.

² For example Samyutta, II.95; *Visuddhimagga*, chapter XIV, paragraph 82; *Kośa*, chapter II, page 208.

³ *Kośa*, II.208.

The Pāli sources also affirm the synonymy of these three terms, and explain their etymologies in similar ways to the *Kośa*. Here we present two definitions of *citta* which neatly encapsulate the Abhidhamma perception of the basic character and function of consciousness.

In its evidently cognitive process, the term *citta* is explained in three specific ways: as agent, instrument and activity. As agent, it cognises (*cinteti*) in the sense that it knows objects (*viñānāti*). As instrument, it serves as a medium through which its concomitants (*cetasika*) cognise objects. As activity, it constitutes a process of thinking or cognising (*cintana*). It is this process of cognising that is emphasised as the primary characterisation of *citta*.⁴ In the second description which largely reflects its latent process, the term *citta* is also defined in three ways. *Citta* is so called because it is the cause of diversification (*vicitta*), or because it is itself diversified. Secondly, it is amassed or heaped up (*cita*) by kamma and defilements, or it shelters what has been amassed. Thirdly, *citta* is said to accumulate (*cinoti*) its own mental stream or continuity (*santāna*), and to have a diversity of objects.⁵

The above definitions of *citta*, *manas* and *viñāna* are not comprehensive, but they are fairly indicative of how the Abhidharma works understand their basic character and function.

Invented types of consciousness

Taking into consideration the Buddhist theories of momentariness, some Buddhist schools invented certain *dharma*s or types of consciousness in order to explain the continuity of the evanescent flux of consciousness and the accumulation of karma. In the Pāli sources, the continuity of consciousness is attributed to one of the fourteen functions of the *citta* called life-continuum or subliminal consciousness (*bhavaṅga-citta*).⁶ The Vaibhāṣikas invented two *dharma*s called non-intimation (*avijñapti*)⁷ and acquisition (*prāpti*)⁸ to account for the karmic dispositions and the overall cohesion of the individual stream of consciousness. They also introduced the concept of an intermediate being (*antarābhava*),⁹ to serve as a link between death and rebirth. The Mahāsāṅghikas are said to have postulated the existence of a root-consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*), which was metaphorically compared to the roots sustaining a tree.¹⁰ Some Sautrāntika masters affirm the existence of a subtle consciousness (*sūkṣmacitta*), which passes from one existence

⁴ *Vibhāvinī*, 57; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 27.

⁵ *Vibhāvinī*, 57, quoting *Abhidhammāvatāra*.

⁶ or in some sources *bhavaṅga-viññāṇa*.

⁷ *Kośa*, I37; IV.568, 578, 593, 605.

⁸ *Kośa*, II.209-20.

⁹ *Kośa*, III.405, 410, 419, 423, 426.

¹⁰ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, vol. II, 26-28; *Siddhi*, 178.

to another, until it discontinues upon the final realisation of *nirvāṇa*.¹¹ According to *Vasumitra*, the Mahīśākas postulated an aggregate that endures till the end of *saṃsāra*.¹² The controversial Pudgalavādins asserted the existence of a person (*pudgala*), which persists throughout all existences in the course of *saṃsāra*. Finally the Yogācāra school postulated the store consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) as the subliminal repository of all pure and impure *dharmas*.¹³

Although the above types of consciousness are attributed varied degrees of durability, most of their proponents maintained that they are not permanent but constantly evolve, and that ultimately they cease to exist. Ironically, in spite of asserting the evanescent character of consciousness, at least some of the above types of consciousness were criticised as being the *ātman* in disguise. Even if one accepts any of the above explanations as plausible, ultimately the precise mechanism of the continuity of consciousness remains unresolved.

Existential configurations of consciousness

From the Buddhist perspective, human and other living beings are not perceived as being endowed with some permanent entity dwelling in a perishable body, but rather as conglomerates of specific components that function together as one integrated whole governed by the law of dependent origination. The Buddha and his successors devised several taxonomies of animate entities such the five aggregates (*skandha*) or the eighteen elements (*dhātu*). In this section we survey the character and function of consciousness as part of these two and other taxonomies.

In the group of the five aggregates, it is the term *vijñāna* that denotes the aggregate of consciousness. The *Kośa* briefly defines this *vijñāna* as a recognition (*prativijñāpti*) of each object, and as an apperception (*upalabdhi*) in the sense of apprehending the object alone (*vastumātra*); the specific character (*viśeṣa*) of the object is grasped by the sensation and other concomitants (*caitta*).¹⁴ This aggregate is said to include the same six *vijñānas* which are specified in the eighteen elements below. Buddhaghosa says that everything that has the characteristic of cognising should be understood as appertaining to the aggregate of consciousness. After this brief characterisation of this aggregate, he states that *vijñāna*, *citta*, and *manas* are one in meaning, and then promptly proceeds to analyse the aggregate of consciousness into eighty-nine *cittas*,¹⁵ which will be explained later on.

¹¹ *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, 31, 59. E. Lamotte, 1988, 608.

¹² *saṃsārakoṭiṇiṣṭha-skandha*, or *asaṃsārika-skandha*. This sect postulated three kinds of *skandhas*: momentary aggregates in the form of *dharmas* that arise and perish from moment to moment; aggregates that persist for one lifetime (*ekajanmāvadhi*); and an aggregate that endures until the end of *saṃsāra*. A. Bureau, 1955, 187.

¹³ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.12-26.

¹⁴ *Kośa*, I.50.

¹⁵ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.82.

In the group of the twelve bases (*āyatana*), it is the mind-faculty (*mana-indriya*) that denotes the consciousness. In this group the *manas* is basically arranged as a cognitive faculty along with the five material sense faculties, but at the same time it is said to include the same six *viññānas* as the aggregate of consciousness. Commenting on the *manas* as one of the twelve bases, Buddhaghosa explains that it is the *bhavaṅga-citta* that constitutes the *manas* which arises at the initial phase of the cognitive process. Then later on he states that if *manas* is classified as wholesome, unwholesome and undetermined, it amounts to the same eighty-nine *cittas* as mentioned in the previous paragraph.¹⁶

In the group of the eighteen elements, the consciousness is divided into seven elements: the mind-element (*manodhātu*), the five sense *viññānas*, and the mind-consciousness (*manovijñāna*). In connection with this classification, Buddhaghosa explains these seven kinds of consciousness in terms of their respective capacities in the process of cognition,¹⁷ which is explained later on in this paper.¹⁸ The *Kośa* also explains their respective functions in the process of cognition, and clarifies the relationship between the *manodhātu* and the six *viññānas*. It asserts that there is no *manas* or *manodhātu* apart from the six *viññānas*. It explains that whenever any of the six *viññānas* ceases, it serves as an immediate support of the *viññāna* that follows it. Just as the sense faculties support their respective kinds of sense consciousness, in the same way the vanishing *viññāna* serves as the support of the subsequently arising *viññāna*. Although the six *viññānas* constitute *manas*, and although the *manas* is not different from them, it is classed as being separate in order to serve as a support of the mind-consciousness; in this way there are six supports and six *viññānas*.¹⁹ According to the Pāli sources it is not the *manas* but the material heart-base (*hadayavatthu*) that serves as the physical support for the mind-element and for the mind-consciousness.²⁰ As we will see the *manas* or *manodhātu* cognises objects and serves as the mind-portal through which the cognised objects are conveyed to the mind-consciousness.²¹

In the context of the twenty-two faculties (*indriya*), the *Kośa* explains that the mind-faculty (*mana-indriya*) has the sovereignty over the process of rebirth (*punarbhava*), and over all *dhammas*. As evidence it quotes a canonical text which says that the *citta* (!) dominates and manipulates the world, and that all *dhammas* are subject to it.²² Similarly Buddhaghosa explains that the function of the mind-faculty is to exert control over the conascent *dhammas*.²³ According to the *Vibhaṅga* the mind-faculty includes the same *viññānas* as the aggregate of consciousness.²⁴

¹⁶ *Visuddhimagga*, XV.3, 10, 14.

¹⁷ *Visuddhimagga*, XV.36, 37, 42.

¹⁸ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 125.

¹⁹ *Kośa*, I.50-51.

²⁰ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.60, 78, 108.

²¹ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.97.

²² *Kośa*, II.138.

²³ *Visuddhimagga*, XVI.10.

²⁴ *Vibhaṅga*, 220.

The Pāli Abhidhamma sources identify eighty-one conditioned *dhammas* and one unconditioned *dhamma*, which are divided into four categories: matter (*rūpa*), consciousness (*citta*), mental concomitants (*cetasika*), and *nibbāna*. In this configuration the consciousness is classed as one single *dhamma*, and all other sentient or mental states are classed as mental concomitants numbering fifty-two. Thus we have here altogether fifty-three *dhammas* that cover all conscious or mental states.²⁵ The Sarvāstivāda school identifies seventy-two conditioned and three unconditioned *dharmas*, which are divided into five categories:²⁶ matter (*rūpa*), consciousness (*citta*), concomitants associated with consciousness (*caittas*),²⁷ concomitants dissociated from consciousness (*citta-viprayukta*), and three unconditioned *dharmas*.²⁸ In this classification the consciousness is also classed as one single *dharma*, and all other mental states are included among the forty-six associated and fourteen dissociated concomitants. In this classification we have sixty-one *dharmas* that account for all mental states.²⁹

According to the Pāli Abhidhamma the consciousness cannot arise separately from the mental concomitants, and conversely the concomitants cannot arise without the consciousness. They always arise and cease together, and they have the same object. The function of the mental concomitants is to assist the consciousness in their respective capacities. Some concomitants such as contact, sensation, perception and volition assist the consciousness in the process of cognition and in the interaction with the cognised objects. The contact and sensation are considered as mental factors through which the consciousness comes into contact and experiences the object. The perception perceives and interprets the object. The volition is concerned with the volitional aspect of cognition, and its function is to accumulate kamma. The ethical quality of the above four concomitants is variable, depending whether they arise in conjunction with the wholesome or unwholesome *cittas*. Some twelve concomitants are classed as unwholesome and some twenty-five as wholesome. The unwholesome concomitants endow the consciousness with ethically negative qualities, and they include greed, hatred, delusion, wrong views, and conceit. The wholesome concomitants endow the consciousness with ethically positive qualities, and they include non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion, faith and mindfulness.³⁰

Although the Sarvāstivāda classification is different, it basically comprises the same categories of mental concomitants which assist the consciousness in the process of cognition and influence its ethical qualities. The fourteen dissociated concomitants are an innovation, and they include such factors as the homogeneity of the different types

²⁵ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 23, 76.

²⁶ *Kośa*, II.180.

²⁷ or *citta-saṃprayukta*.

²⁸ space (*ākāśa*), cessation through knowledge (*pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*), and cessation without knowledge (*apratisaṃkhyā-nirodha*). The disjunction from the impure (*sāsrava*) *dharmas* is called *pratisaṃkhyā-nirodha* or *nirvāṇa*. The cessation without knowledge essentially consists in the obstruction of the arising (*utpada*) of the *dharmas* in the future. It is not gained through the knowledge of the four noble truths, but because of the insufficiency of the causes of rebirth (*pratyayavaikalya*). *Kośa*, I.19-22.

²⁹ *Kośa*, II.185, 209.

³⁰ For a detailed exposition of the fifty-two *cetasikas* see *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, chapter two.

of living beings, the life-force, and the four characteristics of the conditioned *dharmas*: origination, persistence, decay and disappearance.³¹

In terms of correlations, the Abhidharma masters say that the aggregate of consciousness is the same as the mind-faculty in the twelve bases, the mind-element and the six consciousnesses in the eighteen elements, the mind-faculty in the twenty-two faculties, and the *citta* in the *dharma* classification. According to the *Kośa* the aggregates of feeling (*vedanā*), perception (*saṃjñā*) and formation (*saṃskāra*), and the *asaṃskṛta dharmas* are included in the twelfth base (*dharmāyatana*) and the twelfth element (*dharmadhātu*).³² Allowing for minor modifications the above correlations are the same in the Pāli sources.³³ When explaining the aggregate of formation, the *Kośa* says that it includes all the formations (*saṃskāra*) except for those that are assigned to the other aggregates, notably sensation and perception. However, after a refined discussion it is stated that all the associated and dissociated concomitants must be included in the aggregate of formation.³⁴ In the Pāli classification into the four categories of *dhammas*, the aggregates of sensation, perception and formation are included among the fifty-two concomitants.³⁵

As a ṅga disagrees with the Abhidharma affirmation that *citta*, *manas*, and *viññāna* are one and the same things, and argues that since *manas* and *viññāna* are two different things, the *citta* also must be a separate thing.³⁶ In his system the aggregate of consciousness includes all three. He identifies *citta* with the store consciousness (*ālayaviññāna*), which basically serves as the subliminal continuity of consciousness. This consciousness is said to have no starting point (*anādikālīka*) and to flow in an uninterrupted succession throughout all existences. It abandons the body at death, appropriates a new body at conception, and sustains the conscious activities during the lifetime. From the perspective of karma, it is a repository of all karmic potentialities (*bīja*) deposited in it by the cognitive consciousness. Conversely by maturing these karmic potentialities the store consciousness acts as a generative cause that gives rise to the cognitive consciousness. The second component, *manas*, is differentiated into two: mind-element (*manodhātu*) and stained mind (*kliṣṭa-manas*). The first *manas* is equated with the mind-element of the *Kośa* as explained above. The second *manas* is stained with four defilements (*kleśa*),³⁷

³¹ Once again for a detailed exposition of the Sarvātivāda concomitants see *Kośa*, II.185-95. A convenient listing of the Sarvātivāda classification of *dharmas* is compiled in Th. Stcherbatsky, 1979, 96-107.

³² *Kośa*, I.50.

³³ *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, paragraphs 6, 17; *Vibhaṅga*, page 167.

³⁴ The Buddha defined the aggregate of formation as six kinds of volition (*cetanā*): volitions for forms, sounds and so on. *Samyutta*, III.60. As this definition excludes all other formation, the *Kośa* argues that since the Buddha said that all *dharmas* must be known in order to gain emancipation, the associated and associated concomitants must be included in this aggregate. *Kośa*, I.48-49.

³⁵ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 26.

³⁶ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, vol. II, 15, 29.

³⁷ *Manas* is associated with the following defilements: the erroneous view of personality (*satkāya-dṛṣṭi*), pride of I am (*asmimāna*), attachment to the self (*ātmasneha*), and ignorance (*avidyā*).

and it serves as the support of the contamination (*saṃkleśa*) of the *viññānas*. The third component, *viññāna*, is identified with the five sense *viññānas* and the *manoviññāna*, which Asaṅga jointly calls the cognitive consciousness (*pravṛttiviññāna*). In terms of their combined functions, *manas* and *viññāna* essentially cognise and experience things, and deposit their karmic permutations (*vāsanā*) into the store consciousness.³⁸

It is apparent from the above discussion that when the terms *citta*, *manas* and *viññāna* are employed individually, they do denote the consciousness alone, but not all other mental states which are classed as separate aggregates or elements. Thus in the scheme of the five aggregates, the *viññāna* denotes consciousness, and the sensation, perception and formation are classed as separate aggregates. In the schemes of the twelve bases, it is the *manas* that denotes consciousness and all other sentient factors are included in the *dharma*-base as its object, and in the Abhidharma scheme the *citta* stands for consciousness as one *dharma*, and all other mental factors are classed as its concomitants. When they are employed in conjunction, their synonymy is rather tenuous, because they are clearly assigned different functions. In the scheme of the eighteen elements, the mind-element and the six kinds of consciousness are definitely assigned different functions, although the *Kośa* insists that they are the same. Asaṅga asserts that *citta*, *manas* and *viññāna* are three different things and duly assigns to them three different functions. However, he also agrees with the *Kośa* that *manas* and *viññāna* are the same, and yet he assigns to *manas* two specific functions. Finally in the Pāli sources, as part of the cognitive process, the *manas* performs the function of cognising objects and of conveying them to the mind-consciousness.

The existential levels and ethical permutations of consciousness

Although the Abhidharma sources class the *citta* as one single *dharma*, they distinguish a variety of *cittas* when they analyse the consciousness in relation to other factors, such as the three existential spheres (*traidhātuka*) and the wholesome and unwholesome concomitants.

Taking into account its occurrence or non-occurrence in the three existential spheres, The Pāli sources distinguish four levels (*bhūmi*) of consciousness: three mundane and one supramundane. The three types of consciousness that occur in one of the three existential spheres are classed as mundane consciousness (*lokiya-citta*), and the one type of consciousness that does not appertain to any of these three existential spheres is classed as supramundane (*lokuttara-citta*).³⁹

Taking into account its ethical qualities (*jāti*) acquired under the influence of its concomitants, the consciousness is also classified into four categories: unwholesome

³⁸ *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 11–12. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, vol. II, 12–22, 46, 80.

³⁹ *Kāmaśāstra-citta*, *Rūpāvacara-citta*, *Arūpāvacara-citta*, *lokuttara-citta*. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 29–31.

(*akusala*), wholesome (*kusala*), undetermined (*avyākata*), and supramundane (*lokuttara*).⁴⁰

The consciousness is classed as unwholesome when it arises in association with the three unwholesome roots (*akusalamūla*): greed, hatred, or delusion. This type of consciousness is said to be mentally sound, ethically defiled, and productive of negative results in the *Kāma*vacara. When it is associated with the three wholesome roots (non-greed, non-hatred, non-delusion), it is classed as wholesome, and it is morally blameless and productive of pleasant results. In relation to the existential spheres, the unwholesome consciousness is classed as mundane, and it arises only in the *Kāma*vacara. The wholesome types of consciousness are classed as mundane or supramundane. The kammically wholesome consciousness is mundane, and it can occur in all three existential spheres. The wholesome consciousness that is purified from defilements and kamma is classed as supramundane, and it does not appertain to any of the three existential spheres.⁴¹

The undetermined category is further subdivided into resultant (*vipākacitta*) and functional (*kriyācitta*) types of consciousness. The resultant types of consciousness are classed as undetermined in order to distinguish them from their causes, which are either wholesome or unwholesome. When they occur in the existential spheres, they are classed as mundane, and when they occur as the fruit of the four transcendental paths, they are classed as supramundane. The functional types of consciousness are classed as undetermined, because they are merely mental activities without any kammic potency, and they occur in all three existential spheres.

The Abhidhamma sources identify twelve types of unwholesome consciousness, which occur in association with one of the unwholesome roots, sensations of either mental joy or equanimity, in association or dissociation with wrong views, and motivated by spontaneous or instigated volitions.⁴² Instead of discussing all of them individually, we give here two examples to illustrate the above taxonomic principle. When a man is in a state of mental joy, holds wrong views of not seeing evil in sense pleasures, and spontaneously indulges in sense pleasures, then his unwholesome deed is accompanied by mental joy, associated with wrong views, and spontaneous. When the same man is in a state of mental indifference, does not place in the foreground of his mind the wrong views about sense pleasures, and indulges in sense pleasures with some effort or by instigation, then his unwholesome deed is accompanied by equanimity, dissociated from the wrong views, and instigated.⁴³

The twelve unwholesome types of consciousness yield seven resultant types of unwholesome consciousness.⁴⁴ During the lifetime, these seven types of resultant

⁴⁰ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.82, 88; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 29.

⁴¹ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 31.

⁴² The terms spontaneous and instigated respectively render the Pāli terms *asankhārika* and *sasankhārika*. The spontaneous volitions arise as it were habitually or naturally, while the instigated volitions are induced by oneself or others.

⁴³ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.89-93; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 32-39.

⁴⁴ *akusala-vipāka-citta*.

consciousness occur in the cognitive process as the five kinds of sense consciousness, the mind-element, and the mind-consciousness.⁴⁵ At the time of conception, they occur as the rebirth-linking consciousness in one of the unhappy destinies.⁴⁶

In the Kāmāvacara there arise eight types of wholesome consciousness. They are associated with one of the three wholesome roots, accompanied by sensations of either mental joy or equanimity, associated with or dissociated from the correct knowledge, and assisted by spontaneous or instigated volitions. The explanations of producing these types of consciousness are mostly given in connection with the ways of merit making (*punya*). Thus for instance when a person is happy upon seeing a suitable item to give, holds the view that there is merit in giving, and gives away the item without any hesitation, then his wholesome deed is accompanied by mental joy, associated with the right knowledge, and spontaneous. These eight types of wholesome consciousness are also called meritorious, because they produce good results and inhibit the force of defilements. They arise in good ordinary people, and in the three lower grades of trainees or noble persons.⁴⁷ They do not arise in *arhats* and Buddhas, because they have transcended the cycle of kamma and future rebirths.

The above eight types of wholesome consciousness yield eight resultant types of consciousness, which occur in the cognitive series during the lifetime, and in the latent series at the time of conception as the rebirth-linking consciousness in the happy places of the Kāmāvacara.⁴⁸ These eight types of resultant consciousness do not arise in *arhats* and Buddhas. However, in their case there arise eight types of corresponding consciousness, which are classed as functional, because they perform their respective functions without leaving any kammic deposits.⁴⁹

In the Rūpāvacara there are five types of wholesome consciousness that occur in one of the absorptions.⁵⁰ In the first absorption, the consciousness is associated with five meditational factors: initial application, sustained application, zest, happiness, and one-pointedness. In the second absorption, the initial application is absent, and in the third absorption, the initial application and sustained application are absent. In the fourth absorption, the consciousness is accompanied by happiness and one-pointedness, and in the fifth it abides in equanimity and one-pointedness. These types of wholesome consciousness can be gained and experienced by advanced meditators who are capable of entering the absorptions.⁵¹

In the Arūpāvacara there occur four wholesome types of consciousness, which respectively take as their object the plane of the infinite space and the three higher

⁴⁵ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.101, XVII.127.

⁴⁶ *Visuddhimagga*, XVII.180.

⁴⁷ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.83-85; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 46-47.

⁴⁸ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.95-10, XVII.134. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 48.

⁴⁹ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.106, 107-09. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 49.

⁵⁰ While in the Pāli *suttas* there are four basic absorptions (*jhāna*), the Abhidhamma texts distinguish five absorptions by dividing the second absorption into two.

⁵¹ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.86; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 52.

planes. They occur in the beings reborn in these existential planes, and in accomplished meditators who are capable of gaining the four formless attainments.⁵²

The wholesome consciousnesses of the Rūpāvacara yield their corresponding types of resultant consciousness, which occur in the same sphere in the beings reborn there as a consequence of developing the absorptions. In an existence they occur as the rebirth-linking, *bhavaṅga*, and death types of consciousness.⁵³ The four types of resultant consciousness of the formless sphere occur in the same way as the resultant consciousness of the previous sphere.⁵⁴ The resultant types of consciousness of these two spheres are classed as functional for the same reason as the resultant consciousness in the Kāmāvacara.⁵⁵

There are eight types of supramundane consciousness, which comprise four types of wholesome consciousness and four types of resultant consciousness. These types of consciousness appertain to the process of liberation from *saṃsāra*, and to the attainment of *nibbāna*. All eight types are expressive of the four stages of spiritual attainment: stream-entry, once-return, non-return, and *arhatship*. The four types of wholesome consciousness constitute the four transcendental paths (*maggacitta*), and the four resultant types of consciousness constitute their fruition called the fruition-consciousness (*phalacitta*). The object of these eight types of consciousness is the same, namely *nibbāna*, but their functions are different. The function of the wholesome consciousnesses associated with the four paths is to eradicate specific defilements and impure mental states, and the fruition-consciousnesses perform the function of experiencing the four corresponding degrees of liberation. The four paths and their fruitions occur in the cognitive series of consciousness. The four transcendental paths and their fruitions are gained through the purification from defilements, and through the development of wisdom. The differentiation into these four paths is largely determined in relation to the levels of purification, and also to the degree and intensity of concentration in which the consciousness is purified into these four grades.⁵⁶

In summary there are eighty-nine types of consciousness: eighty-one mundane and eight supramundane. Fifty four occur in the Kāmāvacara, fifteen in the Rūpāvacara, and twelve in the highest sphere. The eight types of supramundane consciousness are also classed as wholesome, and they do not appertain to any of the three existential spheres. Thus twenty-one types of consciousness are wholesome, twelve unwholesome, thirty six resultant, and twenty functional.⁵⁷

Prior to a brief overview of consciousness as found in the *Kośa*, we present the Sarvāstivāda fourfold principle that determines the ethical character of *dharmas*. In

⁵² *Visuddhimagga*, X.1, 12, 16, 20, 23, 25, 32, 40, 49; XIV.87; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 60-64.

⁵³ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 52; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.103.

⁵⁴ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.104; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 51, 52, 60, 68.

⁵⁵ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.109.

⁵⁶ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.88, 105; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 65-68, 72.

⁵⁷ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.110; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 51, 68. For the three functional *cittas* that are not explained in this paper, see *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.106-08.

chapter four which deals with *karma*, it is explained that the *dharma*s are wholesome or unwholesome in four ways (*prakāra*): ‘in reality’ (*paramārtha*), by nature (*svabhāva*), by association (*saṃprayoga*), and by instigation (*samutthāna*).

From the perspective of the ultimate reality, the state of emancipation (*mokṣa*) or *nirvāṇa* is wholesome ‘in reality’, because it constitutes a complete appeasement of all suffering.⁵⁸ The three wholesome roots, shamefulness (*hrī*) and modesty (*apatrāpya*) are wholesome by their nature, independently of their association or cause. The sensation and other concomitants are wholesome by association when they are associated with the wholesome roots. When they are not associated with the wholesome roots, they do not have the character of wholesomeness (*kuśalatvābhava*). The bodily and verbal actions are wholesome by instigation when they are induced by the wholesome roots and by the *dharma*s that are wholesome by association.

The phenomenal existence (*saṃsāra*) is unwholesome ‘in reality’, because it is essentially the process of suffering (*duḥkha-pravṛtti*). The unwholesome roots and the absence of shame and modesty are unwholesome by nature. The *dharma*s associated with the unwholesome roots are unwholesome by association. The bodily and verbal actions caused by the unwholesome roots are unwholesome by instigation.

Space and the cessation without knowledge are classified as undetermined *dharma*s. Finally, the *Kośa* says that although *saṃsāra* is ultimately unwholesome, certain categories of *dharma*s are classified as wholesome and undetermined. When one takes into account the nature of retribution (*vipāka*), the impure (*sāsrava*) *dharma*s which produce desirable results (*iṣṭavipāka*) are classed as wholesome, and the impure *dharma*s which are undetermined prior to being retributed are classed as undetermined.⁵⁹

While the Pāli sources identify eighty nine types of consciousness, The Sarvāstivāda masters identify only twelve types: four in the Kāmadhātu, three in the Rūpadhātu, three in the Ārūpyadhātu, and two types of pure consciousness.⁶⁰

The wholesome consciousness of the Kāmadhātu is accompanied by twenty two concomitants: the ten universals which include sensation, perception, and volition, and the ten wholesome concomitants which include non-greed and non-hatred.⁶¹

The unwholesome consciousness occurs only in the Kāmadhātu, and it is of two types. The first type is associated with ignorance (*avidyā*), or with one of the three

⁵⁸ In the Pāli sources *nirvāṇa* is classified as undetermined; e.g. *Katthāvatthu*, XIV.8.

⁵⁹ *Kośa*, IV.597-599. For Aśaṅga’s classification of wholesome and unwholesome *dharma*s see his *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 22.

⁶⁰ Kāmadhātu: 1. wholesome (*kuśala*), 2. unwholesome (*akuśala*), 3. tainted-undetermined (*nivṛta-avyākṛta*), 4. untainted-undetermined (*anivṛta-avyākṛta*); Rūpadhātu: 5. wholesome, 6. tainted-undetermined, 7. untainted-undetermined; Ārūpyadhātu 8. wholesome, 9. tainted-undetermined, 10. untainted-undetermined; pure (*anāsrava*): 11. trainee (*śaikṣa*), 12. arhat (*aśaikṣa*). *Kośa*, II.195, 357. We can only mention here that these twelve *citta*s are further subdivided into twenty. *Kośa*, II.362.

⁶¹ *Kośa*, II.195. All the Kāmadhātu *citta*s are associated with the initial application (*vitarka*) and the sustained application (*vicāra*), which as such are classed among the undetermined (*anīyata*) *dharma*s.

erroneous views.⁶² In both cases the consciousness is accompanied by the ten universal concomitants, the six major defilements (*kleśa*) which include carelessness (*pramāda*) and indolence (*styāna*), and by the two universally unwholesome defilements: shamelessness and immodesty. The second type is associated with one of the major defilements such as greed or pride, and with the same concomitants as the first one.⁶³

Out of the two types of undetermined consciousness in the Kāmadhātu, the tainted-undetermined consciousness is associated with the false view of personality (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) or with one of the extreme views (*antaḥgrāhadr̥ṣṭi*).⁶⁴ This consciousness is associated with the ten universal concomitants and the six major defilements. The untainted-undetermined consciousness is associated with the ten universal concomitants.⁶⁵ These two types of consciousness essentially arise as results or retributions (*vipākaja*). In this context the term retribution denotes the *dharma*s which arise as results in the mental series of living beings (*sattvasantāna*).⁶⁶

The types of consciousness in the spheres above the Kāmadhātu are progressively more refined and subtle. They are associated with the wholesome concomitants, and a limited number of defilements which are classed as undetermined.⁶⁷ In these spheres the quality and content of consciousness are essentially determined in relation to the meditative absorptions and attainments.

The two types of consciousness appertaining to the trainees and *arhats* are not explained as part of the twelve types of consciousness, presumably because the mental training and the acquisition of those grades of mental purity are explained in detail in chapter six of the *Kośa*.

The above survey of the Sarvāstivāda classification of consciousness is rather succinct, but hopefully it is adequate to realise that it is considerably different from the classification given in the Pāli sources.

The dynamic flow of consciousness

In the Pāli sources the stream of consciousness as it evolves from conception to death is differentiated into two distinct but interlinked series: cognitive series,⁶⁸ and latent series.⁶⁹

⁶² Namely adherence to views (*dr̥ṣṭiparāmarśa*), adherence to observances and rituals (*śīlavrataparāmarśa*), and false views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*).

⁶³ For more details see *Kośa*, II.197-98.

⁶⁴ In the Kāmadhātu the view of personality, the two extreme views and ignorance associated with them are classed as undetermined, because they do not oppose the practice of good deeds such as generosity and morality. *Kośa*, V.794.

⁶⁵ *Kośa*, II.195, 198.

⁶⁶ For a fuller exposition of the terms *vipākaja* and *vipākahetu* see *Kośa*, I.11; II.320, 327, 330.

⁶⁷ *Kośa*, II.199; V.793.

⁶⁸ *vīthiccitta*, literally process-consciousness, or *cittavīthi*, consciousness-process.

⁶⁹ *vīthimuttaccitta*, process-free-consciousness.

These two series do not evolve concurrently, but they alternate in a subtle and intricate way. As such the consciousness does not arise at random, but it evolves in a consistent sequence, which is referred to as the fixed order of consciousness (*cittaniyāma*). During the cognitive and latent series, the consciousness performs fourteen functions (*ākāra*), eleven in the cognitive and three in the latent series.⁷⁰ In its cognitive series the consciousness performs the functions of cognising, experiencing, and responding to the encountered world of objects and ideas. In the latent series it performs the functions of rebirth-linking, life-continuum, and death. It is during these two series that the eighty nine types of consciousness occur in specific circumstances.

The eleven functions of the cognitive series basically constitute one single process of perception and interaction with the cognised object. It is during this process of the sensorial and mental experiences that the karmically predisposed consciousness is prone to exhibit volitional responses that yield wholesome or unwholesome actions.

In order to account for the momentary flow of existence, the Abhidhamma masters postulate that one moment of material phenomena is seventeen times longer than one mental moment. It is thus during one moment of material impingement on any of the five organs that one sense perception is executed in seventeen mind moments. They further postulate that the *bhavaṅga-citta* is the factor from which the cognitive series arises, and into which it lapses once the activity of perception is completed.

There are basically seven functions during one single cognition of material objects. However, the Abhidhamma masters list eleven functions by assigning separate functions to each of the five sense consciousnesses.

When a material object impinges on one of the five sense organs, there occurs and vanishes one mind moment characterised as the past *bhavaṅga*. Then the *bhavaṅga* vibrates for two moments called *bhavaṅga*-vibration and *bhavaṅga*-interruption. After that the proper cognitive process arises and evolves in the following seven phases. 1. Once the *bhavaṅga* is interrupted, the mind-element directs itself towards the impinging object for one moment, and performs the function called adverting, namely it directs its attention towards the impinging object.⁷¹ 2. In the fifth moment, there arises the respective sense consciousness and intercepts the impinging object. It is a rudimentary sensation of the object in its simplicity, and it has no conceptual content. When the object is undesirable, then this consciousness, as well as the receiving, investigating and registering types of consciousness are unwholesome, and when the object is desirable they are wholesome. 3. In the next moment there arises the mind-element and performs the function of receiving the object. In this phase the object enters the focus of the mind-element and is distinctly

⁷⁰ The eleven functions in the cognitive series (3-13) and the three functions in the latent series (1, 2, 14) are as follows: 1. rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*); 2. *bhavaṅga*; 3. adverting (*āvajjana*) to an object; 4-8. seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching; 9-11. receiving (*sampaṭicchana*), investigating (*sanṭirāṇa*), and determining (*voṭṭhapana*) the object; 12. seven impulses (*javana*) that sweep over and apprehend the object; 13. registration of the object (*tadārammaṇa*); 14. death consciousness (*cuti*). *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 122-29; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.114-24.

⁷¹ When an immaterial object presents itself to the mind-element, it is the mind-consciousness that performs the function of adverting.

recognised. 4. In the next moment there arises the mind-consciousness without the root-cause (non-greed) and performs the function of investigating the object received by the mind-element. 5. During the eighth moment, the functional mind-consciousness without the root-cause performs the function of determining the object. 6. In the sixth phase there occur seven consecutive impulsions, which perform the function of apprehending the object. These seven impulsions, all of the same kind, swiftly sweep over the object in a way of apprehending it. The term impulsion (*javana*) essentially denotes all types of consciousness that can arise in this phase. Generally speaking, from the ethical perspective, this phase is the most critical, because it is during this phase that all wholesome, unwholesome, functional and path *cittas* arise.⁷² In the case of ordinary people, these impulsions are either wholesome or unwholesome, and in the case of *arhats* they are undetermined. While the ethical quality of the sense consciousness and some types of resultant consciousness are governed by the quality of the experienced objects, the impulsions are not governed by the quality of the objects. When desirable or undesirable objects come into focus, the ethical quality of the impulsions varies in conformity with the dispositions of the perceiving agent. Upon perceiving a desirable or undesirable object, some people produce wholesome and some produce unwholesome states of consciousness. This, as it were, wholesome or unwholesome reaction to the experienced object is largely determined by the relevant concomitants that accompany the consciousness. From the perspective of kamma, it is the good or bad kamma that influences the response. 7. Once the phase of the impulsions is completed, the apprehended object is duly registered in two mind moments, and the cognitive process lapses into the *bhavaṅga*.⁷³

The latent series of consciousness is also explained in relation to the existential spheres and in terms of the kammic quality of consciousness. The existential spheres are not merely perceived by consciousness, but they are constantly reproduced by and correspond to the levels of consciousness. The living beings are reborn in particular planes of existence, because in their previous lives they have generated the kamma or volitional actions leading to rebirths in those planes. Thus ultimately the existential spheres are formed and sustained by the mental activities of living beings. At the same time they provide the platform for the consciousness to persist and evolve in new personalities and circumstances. All the existential spheres are connected with particular types of rebirth-linking consciousness, which occurs as the *bhavaṅga* during the lifetime, and as the death-consciousness at the moment of dying. The kamma that matures in any of the existential spheres generates the rebirth consciousness that arises in the same sphere. It is essentially the kamma potentiality that determines the place where the consciousness arises at conception.⁷⁴

⁷² *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.121.

⁷³ *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.115-22; *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 122-25; 149-67.

⁷⁴ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 188.

In connection with the latent process of consciousness, the Pāli sources distinguish four planes (*bhūmi*) of rebirth: one unhappy,⁷⁵ and three happy planes.⁷⁶ In relation to these four planes, the sources distinguish four major types of rebirth-linking consciousness, which are further subdivided into nineteen specific types. In the case of rebirths in the unhappy plane, the unwholesome types of resultant consciousness occur as the rebirth-linking consciousness at the moment of descent into this plane. Once its function is completed, this consciousness lapses into the *bhavaṅga*, and becomes the death-consciousness at the end of an existence in this plane.⁷⁷ The eight resultant types of wholesome consciousness occur as eight types of rebirth-linking consciousness in the happy plane of the *Kāma-vacara*.⁷⁸ Similarly the nine types of resultant consciousness of the two higher existential spheres arise as the rebirth-linking, *bhavaṅga*, and death consciousness.⁷⁹

The function of the rebirth-linking consciousness is to connect the new existence with the past existence. Once it accomplishes this function at the moment of conception, it is followed by the *bhavaṅga* consciousness, which is the resultant type of consciousness of the same type as the rebirth-linking consciousness, but performs a different function, namely it preserves the continuity of the individual existence. The *bhavaṅga* arises and disappears every moment during lifetime when the cognitive process is inoperative, and in the states of dreamless sleep. When the cognitive process arises, the *bhavaṅga* is arrested, and when the cognitive process is completed, the *bhavaṅga* supervenes and flows until the next cognitive process intervenes.⁸⁰

The death-consciousness arises and passes away in the manner of dying. Basically it abandons the body and departs. It is said that at the moment of death, the consciousness is confronted by a particular kind of powerful kamma, a sign of kamma, or a sign of destiny. The powerful kamma consists of a good or bad deed accomplished during the lifetime. The sign of kamma consists of an object or a token reminiscent a good or bad deed, and the sign of destiny appears as a vision indicative of a particular destiny. Any of these three objects appear in the impulsion phase of the cognitive process. The death consciousness grasps this object and passes away. Once the dying event is completed, the rebirth-linking consciousness arises and becomes established in a new existence, either in the same or a different destiny. Finally, it is pertinent to indicate that these three types

⁷⁵ The unhappy plane (*apāya*) includes four realms: hell, animal, tormented spirits (*peta*), titans (*asura*). *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 189-90.

⁷⁶ 2. humans and the six classes of the *kāmadevas*, 3-4. the two higher spheres. *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 191-92.

⁷⁷ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 194; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.113.

⁷⁸ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 195; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.111. One additional rebirth-linking consciousness is specified in the case of those reborn as deformed or handicapped humans.

⁷⁹ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 197-99; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.112. The *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 197, specifies one more type of rebirth-linking consciousness in the case of the unconscious beings (*asañña-sattva*).

⁸⁰ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 122-23, 228; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.114. For different opinions on the concept of *bhavaṅga*, see R. Gethin, 1994, 11-35.

of consciousness are essentially the same, and that the rebirth-linking and *bhavaṅga* take the same object which appears at the moment of dying.⁸¹

The exposition of the dynamics of consciousness in the *Kośa* is complex and it is given mainly as part of the analysis of the five aggregates and other taxonomies, in particular the eighteen elements. The consciousness is not differentiated into cognitive and latent series like in the Pāli sources, but it is mostly treated as one coherent and integrated flow of conscious experiences.

The stream of consciousness of an individual being is referred to as one's own stream (*sva-saṃtāna*) in distinction to the streams of consciousness of other beings (*para-saṃtati*). The first six bases (*āyatana*) are identified as the basic nucleus of a living being (*maula-sattva-dravya*), and are classed as internal or personal bases (*ādhyatmika*). Similarly the first six elements (*dhātu*) and the six types of consciousness are also classed as being personal. The remaining bases and elements are classed as external. In order to clarify the term 'personal', it is explained that since the consciousness (*citta*) is the support of personal conceit (*ahaṃkāra*), it is metaphorically called *ātman*.⁸²

The Vaibhāṣikas postulate the existence of the *dharma*s called acquisition (*prāpti*) and non-acquisition, which as it were keep the record of all the *dharma*s that are included or excluded from the individual stream of consciousness, and thus maintain its distinctive content and identity.⁸³ They also maintain that the stream of consciousness evolves through four consecutive existences: death, intermediate state (*antarābhava*), birth or conception, and lifetime.⁸⁴ In this connection we can only afford to indicate that the Vaibhāṣika inventions of the above *dharma*s and the intermediate state were disputed and rejected by the opponent schools.

As the *Kośa*'s exposition of consciousness and its concomitants is complicated and tenuous, we sketch here only the basic patterns that contribute towards the understanding of the overall content and dynamics of conscious experiences.

In terms of their mutual interaction (*kāritva-bhājana*), the senses, the objects, and the *viññānas* are said to perform the following activities. The eye and the other senses perform the activities of seeing, hearing and so on. The activity of the objects is to appear as objects of the *viññānas*, and the activity of the *viññānas* is to cognise (*viññātriva*).⁸⁵

The internal co-ordination between the consciousness (*citta*) and its concomitants (*caitta*) is explained in the following way. They have supports (*sāśraya*), namely the sense faculties. They have a leaning (*sālambana*) because they grasp their object (*viṣaya*). They have aspects (*sākāra*), because they grasp the aspects of the object. Finally they are associated in five identical ways (*samatāprakāra*).

⁸¹ *Abhidhammattha-saṅgaha*, 219-24; *Visuddhimagga*, XIV.123; XVII.163-164.

⁸² *Kośa*, I.57, 104-05.

⁸³ For more details on *prāpti* see *Kośa*, II.210-26.

⁸⁴ *Kośa*, III.405.

⁸⁵ *Kośa*, I.108.

In terms of their respective functions, the consciousness (*viññāna*) cognises (*viñānāti*) the object (*vastu*), for instance blue or yellow. The meaning is it apprehends (*upalabhate*). The sensation (*vedanā*) experiences that object, the perception (*saṃjñā*) determines it (*paricchinatti*), and the volition (*cetanā*) duly assesses it (*abhisamkaroti*). Alternatively, the consciousness grasps the object's general form (*sāmānyarūpa*), the sensation experiences its distinctive character (*viśeṣarūpa*), and the perception grasps its particular character (*paricchedyatārūpa*).

As for their five identical associations, they are associated in terms of the same support, object, aspect, time, and stuff (*dravya*). Whichever support gives rise to the consciousness (*citta*), the same support gives rise to the sensation and the other concomitants. The same is said about their object. When the consciousness (*citta*) assumes its aspect of the blue (*nīlākāra*), the concomitants assume their aspects of the same blue. They always arise at the same time but never at discordant times. As for their stuff, it simply means that there arises only one single kind of consciousness (*cittadravya*), and a single kind of each concomitant: one *citta* but not two or three, one sensation but not two or three.⁸⁶

As one of the concomitants, the contact (*sparsā*) is described as a touch (*spr̥ṣṭi*) or a collision (*saṃnipāta*) between the sense faculty, the object, and the corresponding *viññāna*. As a concomitant the sensation is classed as threefold: pleasant, unpleasant and impartial. As one of the aggregates, it is classified as threefold as above, and as sixfold. The six sensations arise from the contact (*saṃsparṣaja*) between the five sense organs, the *manas*, and their corresponding objects. They are said to be the experience or enjoyment (*anubhūti*, *upabhoga*) of the consciousness (*citta*) or a person (*pudgala*).⁸⁷ In the group of the twenty two faculties, we find five sensations classified as: bodily pleasure, bodily pain, mental contentment, mental dissatisfaction, and impartiality.⁸⁸ As a concomitant the perception is said to grasp the mark (*nimitta*) or the distinct character (*viśeṣarūpa*) of an object. As an aggregate it is said to grasp the mark (*nimitta*) or the distinctive condition (*avasthāviśeṣa*) of an object, such as blue, long, man, friend, happy, or painful.⁸⁹ As a concomitant the volition is described as a mental action (*manaskarma*), and as the trembling of consciousness (*cittapraspanda*).⁹⁰

The above expositions of mental experiences are defined in fairly consistent ways in the context of the different taxonomies, but when considered together, it is apparent that there is a diversity in their numbers and functions.

How are the external objects perceived or cognised? The Vaibhāṣikas say that the eye sees shapes and colours, but not the eye consciousness, although they concede that the eye sees when it is associated with the eye consciousness. They argue that if the eye consciousness sees the external objects, then since it cannot be obstructed by physical

⁸⁶ *Kośa*, II.208-09.

⁸⁷ *Kośa*, I.48.

⁸⁸ I.132; It is explained in another place that as triple, the pleasant sensation induces greed (*rāga*), the unpleasant sensation induces hatred (*pratigha*), and the impartial sensation induces ignorance (*avidyā*). *Kośa*, II.141.

⁸⁹ *Kośa*, I.48.

⁹⁰ *Kośa*, II.187.

objects, it should also see objects hidden behind other objects. The same is said about the other four senses. Their opponents disagree and postulate that it is the eye consciousness that perceives visible objects; and a protracted debate ensues.⁹¹

The Vaibhāṣikas assert that the eye sees, the ear hears and so on, and the *manas* discerns (*viśānati*).⁹² They further assert that the eye, ear and *manas* perceive their objects but without actually attaining them (*aprāptaviśaya*). The eye sees objects from a distance, and the ear too hears sounds from a distance. The *manas* is incapable of attaining its objects because it is immaterial (*arūpitva*). The three remaining senses come into a direct contact with their objects.⁹³

The five sense consciousnesses and their corresponding objects (*viśaya*) are present simultaneously at the same time (*vartamāna*). The supports (*āśraya*) of these consciousnesses are also co-extensive (*sahaja*) with them, and they are of two kinds, namely the five senses and the *manas*. Thus the five sense consciousnesses have two supports. The mind-consciousness is supported only by the past mind-element (*manodhātu*) as already discussed in the relevant sections above. As for its objects they can be past, present or future.⁹⁴

The five sense consciousnesses are supported by their respective senses but not by their objects. It is the case because they become modified (*vikārin*) in conformity with the modifications of the senses. When the senses are alert or feeble, in pain or in comfort, their corresponding consciousnesses duly become alert or feeble, and are associated with painful or pleasant sensations. The sense consciousnesses are named after the senses, precisely because they are sustained by them. The senses and their corresponding consciousnesses have a unique character (*asādhāraṇatva*), in the sense that they are included in the streams of consciousness of individual beings. By contrast the external forms and other objects have a common character, because they can be also perceived by other beings.⁹⁵

Out of the eighteen elements (*dhātu*) the five external elements (forms, sounds and so on) are cognised (*viññeya*) by two types of consciousness (*viññāna*). They are experienced (*anubhāva*) by their respective sense consciousnesses, and cognised by the mind-consciousness (*manoviññāna*). The remaining thirteen elements are not objects of the five sense consciousnesses, and they are cognise solely by the mind-consciousness.⁹⁶

The above discussion does not cover the full treatment of consciousness as given in the *Kośa*. However, it does endeavour to encapsulate the major aspects of the Sarvāstivāda analysis of the dynamics of consciousness, which is considerably different from the analysis of the Pāli sources.

⁹¹ *Kośa*, I.113-17.

⁹² *Kośa*, I.118.

⁹³ *Kośa*, I.119-20.

⁹⁴ *Kośa*, I.124-25.

⁹⁵ *Kośa*, I.126-27.

⁹⁶ *Kośa*, I.131-32.

Luminosity and other similes of consciousness

While the Abhidharma sources largely analysed the character of consciousness in terms of its ethical qualities, the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna pay more attention to the inner propensities of consciousness. In its innate condition, the consciousness is understood as being pure or luminous irrespective of the ethical qualities that it may acquire. Considered on its own and without its associations, the consciousness is said to abide in a state of non-duality, but when it is defiled, it arises and functions in the form of duality. Its appearance in a dual form is attributed to ignorance (*avidyā*) as the main source of defilement and misconceptions. The ultimate goal is not just the purification of consciousness from defilements, but also the attainment of omniscience by awakening its pristine potentialities. Doctrinally the state of omniscience is largely understood as the elimination of all conceptual polarities, and as the attainment of the buddha-attributes (*buddhadharma*) in order to benefit all living beings.

Let us begin our exploration of the innate character of consciousness by quoting a canonical passage, which has certainly influenced the Mahāyāna interpretations of consciousness.

Monks, this mind is naturally luminous (*prakṛti-prabhāsvara-citta*), but sometimes it is contaminated by the adventitious defilements, and sometimes it is free from them.⁹⁷

Although this statement of the Buddha is recorded in the canonical sources, the Abhidharma masters did not seem to pay much attention to it. There is just one isolated passage in the *Atthasālinī* which says that the mind is pure and clear (*pañḍara*) with reference to the *bhavaṅga*, and that even when it is unwholesome, it is called clear, because it arises from the *bhavaṅga*, just as a tributary of the Ganges is like the Ganges.⁹⁸ However, apart from this identification with the *bhavaṅga*, one does not find in the Abhidharma works any theoretical formulations. By contrast the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna theories of consciousness are largely based on the affirmation of its natural luminosity. Let us see how some of the Mahāyāna texts interpret the luminosity of the mind.

In the *Pañcaviṃśati* the mind's luminosity is explained in the following way.

This mind (*citta*) is no-mind (*acitta*), because its natural character (*prakṛti*) is luminous. What is this state of luminosity (*prabhāsvaratā*) of the mind? When the mind is neither associated with nor dissociated from greed, hatred, delusion, obstacles (*āvaraṇa*), proclivities (*anuśaya*), fetters (*samyojana*), or false views (*dṛṣṭi*), then this constitutes its luminosity. Does the mind exist as no-mind? In the state of no-mind (*acittatā*),

⁹⁷ Aṅguttara, I.10.

⁹⁸ *Atthasālinī*, 140.

the states of existence (*astitā*) or non-existence (*nāstitā*) can be neither found nor obtained... What is this state of no-mind? The state of no-mind which is immutable (*avikāra*) and undifferentiated (*avikalpa*), constitutes the *dharma*-nature (*dharmatā*) of all *dharma*s. Such is the state of no-mind. Just as the mind is immutable and undifferentiated, in the same way the five aggregates, the twelve bases, the eighteen elements, the dependent origination, the six perfections, the superknowledges (*abhiññā*), the thirty seven limbs of enlightenment (*bodhipakṣika*), the attributes of the Buddha (*buddhadharma*), and the supreme and perfect enlightenment, are immutable and undifferentiated.⁹⁹

In this quotation, the mind's luminosity is explained not just as the mere absence of thought, but it is suggestively equated or perhaps paired with the *dharma*-nature as the ultimate reality, and with the Buddha attributes.

In the *Bhadrāpāla-sūtra*, the consciousness is compared to the wind element and the sun rays. Although formless and imperceptible, the wind element exists and manifests itself when it shakes trees or blows cold or warm air. It carries pleasant and unpleasant fragrances, but as such it remains stainless and formless. Similarly, although it is formless, the element of consciousness (*vijñānadhātu*) accomplishes all forms and penetrates all things. Due to its power there arise sensations and volitions, and through them the realm of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*) classified as wholesome and unwholesome. However, as such the consciousness is pure, and although it penetrates all things, it is not clad in them. While it operates through the sense faculties and the five aggregates of clinging, it is perceived as defiled, but as such it remains unaffected by bad karma, just as the stainless sun rays remain undefiled by any impurity.¹⁰⁰

In the *Kāśyapaparivarta*, the mind (*citta*) is compared to several things, three of which are presented here. It is like a flash of lightning, because it is momentary and unstable. It is like a polluted sky, because it is marred by adventitious defilements. It is like a dream because it imagines the non-existent things as existent. Next it is said that wherever one searches for the mind, one does not find it. That which cannot be found, cannot be conceived. That which is not conceivable, is neither past, present or future. What is neither past, present or future, is beyond the three times. What is beyond the three times, is neither existent nor non-existent. What neither exists nor does not exist, is unborn (*ajāta*). What is unborn, has no self-nature (*svabhāva*). What has no self-nature, has no origination (*utpāda*). What has no origination, has no cessation (*nirodha*). What has no cessation, is without change (*vigama*). What is without change, is without movement, stoppage, falling, or arising. Wherever there is no movement, stoppage, falling or arising, there are no mental activities (*saṃskāra*). That which is

⁹⁹ *Pañcaviṃśati*, 121-122. For insightful comments on this passage see Haribhadra, 37-40.

¹⁰⁰ *Bhadrāpālaśreṣṭhipariprcchā-sūtra*, T.T.P., vol. 24, 169.5.4-170.4.2. This *sūtra* deals mainly with the pure and defiled states of consciousness, and the process of rebirth.

without mental activities is unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*). What is unconditioned, is the lineage of the noble ones (*āryagotra*).¹⁰¹

The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* equates the buddha-nature (*tathāgagarbha*) with the store consciousness. It says that the buddha-nature is luminous and pure, and that it is endowed with the thirty-two major marks (*lakṣaṇa*). It is however disguised in the body of all beings, like a gem wrapped in a dirty piece of cloth. It is enveloped by the aggregates, and stained with the impurities of greed, hatred, delusion, and false imagination.¹⁰² It holds within itself the cause (*hetu*) of the wholesome and unwholesome things, and it produces all forms of existence (*janmagatī*). Since it is covered with the latent permutations (*vāsanā*), it is identified with the store consciousness and its retinue of the seven *vijñānas*.¹⁰³

According to the Yoga *tantras*, Śākyāmuni Buddha as Siddhārtha has attained the supreme enlightenment through the visualisation of his mind as a lunar disc (*candra*), and through a set of five mystical realisations (*abhisambodhi*).¹⁰⁴ Commenting on Siddhārtha's enlightenment, *Indrabhūti* provides the following interpretation of the mind as a lunar disc.

Being luminous by nature, this mind is similar to the moon's disc. The lunar disc epitomises the knowledge (*jñāna*) that is luminous by nature. Just as the waxing moon gradually becomes full, in the same way the mind-jewel (*cittaratna*), being naturally luminous, also becomes fully perfected. Just as the moon becomes fully visible, once it is freed from the accidental obscurations, in the same way the mind-jewel, being pure by nature (*prakṛti-pariśuddha*), once separated from the stains of defilements (*kleśa*), appears as the perfected buddha-qualities (*buddha-guṇa*).¹⁰⁵

It is evident that in the above texts, the mind's natural luminosity is not seen as a mere metaphor, but it is interpreted as its innate state, and equated with the buddha-nature and qualities.

Consciousness as *bodhicitta*

The concept of *bodhicitta* is central to the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna theory and practice in terms of its paramount importance for the realisation of enlightenment. Fundamentally the *bodhicitta* is the seed of buddhahood, that is brought to its efflorescence during the Bodhisattva career.

¹⁰¹ *Kāśyapaparivarta*, 145-149.

¹⁰² *Laṅkāvatāra*, 77-78.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 220-24.

¹⁰⁴ *Sarvatathāgatattvasaṃgraha*, 7-8.

¹⁰⁵ *Indrabhūti's Jñānasiddhi*, 82.

In the Mahāyāna sources the concept of *bodhicitta* incorporates a pair of complementary factors, such as aspiration for enlightenment (*bodhipraṇidhi*) and its implementation (*bodhiprasthāna*), emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and compassion (*karuṇā*), wisdom (*prajñā*) and means (*upāya*), and conventional (*saṃvṛti*) and absolute (*paramārtha*).¹⁰⁶

The above pairs are said to incorporate all the requisites that are necessary to attain the state of buddhahood. Commenting on the first pair, the texts explain that the *bodhicitta* as an aspiration for enlightenment consists of an intense volition (*cetanā*) to become a Buddha and to benefit living beings. Essentially this aspirational thought (*praṇidhicitta*) encapsulates the seminal cause, potentiality, and outcome of enlightenment. It is the mind that arouses its pristine potentialities and energies that are necessary to gain buddhahood. The implementation basically amounts to the gradual maturation of enlightenment during the Bodhisattva career. In connection with this pair the texts identify twenty-two varieties of *bodhicitta*. The twenty second and final *bodhicitta* is said to be associated with the absolute body (*dharmakāya*), which reveals itself as the manifested body (*nirmāṇakāya*) in order to benefit living beings.¹⁰⁷

In the next two pairs, the components of emptiness and wisdom denote the perfection of wisdom, and the components of compassion and means incorporate the other five perfections. The texts also speak of the Bodhisattva's accumulation of merit and knowledge (*punya-jñāna-saṃbhāra*). In this configuration the accumulation of merit consists in the practice of the first five perfections, and the accumulation of knowledge focuses on the perfection of wisdom. The conventional and transcendent forms of *bodhicitta* have variant interpretations, but in terms of the Bodhisattva path, the conventional *bodhicitta* accumulates merit, and the transcendent *bodhicitta* denotes the transcendental insight into the state of all things.¹⁰⁸

Which type of consciousness occurs at the time of *cittotpāda*? According to Vimuktisena, it is the *manovijñāna* that grasps all the pure *dharma*s, and becomes aware of the mind's ultimate realisation (*cittādhigama*).¹⁰⁹ Asaṅga says that *cittotpāda* is a volition of mighty enthusiasm, initiative, purpose, outcome, and a double objective (*dvayārtha*): the supreme enlightenment and the benefit of other beings.¹¹⁰ Commenting on Asaṅga's statement, Haribhadra explains that *cittotpāda* denotes the *citta* grasping a pre-eminent object (*viśiṣṭa-viṣaya*) in association with volition as a concomitant consisting

¹⁰⁶ In some texts the *bodhicitta* is said to be fourfold: all the *saṃayas* are comprised in the *bodhicitta* which is fourfold, namely *bodhicitta*, *anuttara bodhicitta*, Samantabhadra's *bodhicitta*, and *vajrabodhicitta*. *Sarvasaṃayasamgraha* by Dīpaṅkaraśrījñāna, TTP, vol. 81, 211.3. The benefit of the monastic vows is said to be arhatship, that of *bodhicitta* the attainment of buddhahood, and that of the *vidyadhara* vow the attainment of buddhahood in this very life. *Trisaṃvaraprabhāṃalā* by Vibhūticandra, TTP, vol. 81, 215.3.6.

¹⁰⁷ For more details see Haribhadra's *Ālokā*, 16-27, and Prajñākaramati's *Pañjika*, 11-13.

¹⁰⁸ *Samvṛtibodhicittabhāvanopadeśa* by Aśvaghōṣa, TTP, vol. 102, 18.3.1-19.1.7; *Paramārthabodhicittabhāvanākrama* also by Aśvaghōṣa, TTP, vol. 102, 19.1.8-19.4.7; Second *Bāvanākrama* of Kamalaśīla, TTT, vol. 36, 459.87.2-7; *Kramapraveśikabhāvanāpāda* by Vimālamitra, TTP, 102, 172.2.8-172.3.8.

¹⁰⁹ Vimuktisena, 31.

¹¹⁰ *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, IV.1.

of zest (*chandaś-caitasika*). He further explains that it is the *citta* grounded in an earnest wish characterised by zest for all the wholesome *dharma*s.¹¹¹ *Prajñākaramatī* says that the aspirational *citta* is a volition in the form of a wish for buddhahood and the benefit of other beings, and that its implementation is the progress towards buddhahood.¹¹²

The above sources firmly stress that *cittotpāda* is the mind unwaveringly set on buddhahood. When one takes into consideration the two components of *bodhicitta*, they seem to broadly correspond to the cognitive and latent aspects of consciousness. Ultimately emptiness denotes the attainment of enlightenment and *dharmakāya*, and the practice of compassion accumulates the merit for the attainment of a physical buddha-body (*rūpakāya*). Thus while the defiled consciousness erroneously perceives the nature of existence and produces *karma*, the *bodhicitta* abides in wisdom and compassion, and strives to mature them in the form of omniscience and buddha-attributes. It is the transcendent merit and knowledge that supplant the workings of mundane *karma* and ignorance.

In the *tantras*, the *bodhicitta* is predominantly interpreted as a mystical experience, consisting in the union or commingling (*saṃyoga*) of wisdom and means. In the *tantras*, the pair of wisdom and means is identified with a number of specifically *tantric* pairs such as *vajra* and bell, male and female. The *bodhicitta* is also described as the melting of the male and female deities, or hypostasised in the form of Vajrasattva as the supreme deity epitomising the ultimate reality. The consciousness as *bodhicitta* is also identified with the innate forces circulating within the body, such as psychic channels (*nāḍī*), centres (*cakra*), or semen (*bindu*). Essentially the *tantras* emphasise the yogic experience of *bodhicitta* within the body. The ultimate character of *bodhicitta* is described as the inexpressible reality, beginningless and endless, neither existent nor non-existent, non-substantial like emptiness and space, as the essence of the Tathāgatas or Samantabhadra.¹¹³ Since there is the non-substantiality and sameness of all *dharma*s, the *bodhicitta* is unborn, devoid of existence, nondual, *vajra*, luminosity, enlightenment, and Vajrasattva.¹¹⁴

The above discussion of *bodhicitta* basically shows how the innate energies and potentialities of consciousness can be activated and directed towards the attainment of the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna forms of enlightenment.

Duality of consciousness

The concepts of duality and nonduality in Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna are rooted in the doctrinal assumptions, which assert that all differentiations into polarities such as impurity and purity, subject and object, or *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are defective, because they do

¹¹¹ Haribhadra, 24.

¹¹² *Prajñākaramatī*, 11-12.

¹¹³ For the various descriptions of *bodhicitta* see chapter two of *Guhyasamāja*.

¹¹⁴ *Anāgavajra's Prajñopāyavinīśayāsiddhi*, chapters II.29 and IV.17. See also *Indrabhūti's Jñānasiddhi*, in particular pages 82–84 where he quotes a number of sources.

not accurately reflect the true state of existence or consciousness. It was Nāgārjuna who consolidated the concept of nonduality in his famous equation of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* by asserting that they are not different in essence, because ultimately they have the same flavour (*ekarasatva*), and remain in the natural state of tranquillity (*prakṛti-śāntatva*).¹¹⁵ In the *Hevajra-tantra*, the nonduality of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is explained in a more readily comprehensible manner. This *tantra* says that *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are the same, and that there is no *nirvāṇa* other than *saṃsāra*. *Saṃsāra* consists in form, sound and so on, in sensation and the other aggregates, in hatred and delusion. All these *dharmas* are essentially *nirvāṇa*, but due to delusion they have the form of *saṃsāra*. The person who is not deluded continues in *saṃsāra*, but in his case this *saṃsāra* is transformed into *nirvāṇa* through the process of purification. This *nirvāṇa* is *bodhicitta*, and it is relative and absolute in form. In its relative form, it is white like white jasmine, and in its absolute form, it is bliss (*sukha*).¹¹⁶

In chapter one of the *Samdhinirmocana* the Buddha states that all things are without duality, and then proceeds to explain the relationship between the ultimate reality (*paramārtha*) and the mental formations (*saṃskāra*). All distinctions of things into conditioned and unconditioned are imaginary, and do not correspond to the true state of things (*dharmatā*), which is ineffable (*anabhilāpya*) and undifferentiated (*animitta*). As the absolute reality is profound and undifferentiated, it is erroneous to assert that its character is identical or different from the character of the mental formations. If they are identical then all profaners would perceive the truth and gain *nirvāṇa*. If they are different then the truth seekers would never become separated from wicked dispositions (*dausṭhulya*), and consequently would not become enlightened. Then again, if the absolute reality and the formations are identical, then the absolute reality would be classed among defilements along with the formations, and conversely the formations would be classed as undifferentiated, just as the absolute reality is undifferentiated in the formations. Consequently the absolute reality and the formations are neither identical nor different.¹¹⁷

The duality and nonduality of consciousness are explained with reference to either *citta* and *caittas*, or *citta*, *manas*, and *viññāna*. As already mentioned, the duality of consciousness is attributed to its contamination by defilements (*kleśa*) and ignorance (*avidyā*), and the attainment of its nonduality is seen in the purification from these two things. In Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna the ultimate purification is frequently explained as the fusion or union of all dualities such as emptiness and compassion, wisdom and means. The state of nonduality essentially consists of a total dissolution of all mental polarities. We sketch below the exposition of duality and nonduality as propounded in the Yogācāra works, which reflects the teaching of the *Samdhinirmocana*.

We consider the notion of deceptive ideation (*abhūtaparikalpa*), which in the case of ordinary beings is synonymous with the defiled stream of consciousness (*saṃtāna*), and

¹¹⁵ *Mūlamadhyamaka-kārikā*, XXV.19-22, and Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, 536-537.

¹¹⁶ *Hevajra-tantra*, II.iv, verses 32-35.

¹¹⁷ *Samdhinirmocana*, 169-177.

in the case of the entire existence, it is *saṃsāra*. The deceptive ideation is concurrently analysed on different levels and in different configurations. In terms of consciousness it includes *ālayavijñāna*, *manas* and *vijñāna*. The store consciousness constitutes the subliminal aspect of consciousness, and serves as the foundation of all karmic potentialities, which give rise to *manas* and *vijñāna*. The *manas* plays a double function as already discussed above. From the perspective of karma it is called the stained mind (*kliṣṭamanas*), because it perceives the store consciousness as the *ātman*.¹¹⁸ From the perspective of perception it is the mind-element (*manodhātu*) which serves as the support of the six *vijñānas*. The six *vijñānas* essentially cognise the empirical world and, jointly with *manas*, they produce karmic propensities (*vāsanā*). In terms of its existential permutations, the deceptive ideation is said to encompass three natures (*svabhāva*): perfected (*pariṇiṣpanna*), dependent (*paratantra*), and imagined (*parikalpita*). In this configuration the deceptive ideation corresponds to the dependent nature. The perfected stands for emptiness, *nirvāṇa*, and the *dharma*-nature of consciousness (*cittadharmatā*). The dependent basically denotes the stained *manas* as a living entity obscured by ignorance and controlled by the law of dependent origination. The imagined denotes the empirical world which is illusory. As for duality, it is the deceptive ideation that appears in the form of subject and object. The dependent is the ego-centric subject, and the imagined is its unreal and imaginary object. This apparent duality does not exist, but emptiness exists in the deceptive ideation, and conversely the deceptive ideation exists in emptiness. In some contexts it is said that the deceptive ideation corresponds to the defiled process (*saṃkleśa*) and *saṃsāra*, and emptiness to the purification process (*vyāvadana*) and *nirvāṇa*. In some other contexts, it is said that the dependent in its conditioned state is the imagined or *saṃsāra*, and in its unconditioned state it is the perfected or *nirvāṇa*.¹¹⁹

According to some other explanations, the nonduality of the three natures is explained as consisting in the expulsion of the imagined from the dependent, and the transmutation of the dependent into the perfected. More detailed expositions of their noduality are given with reference to the ultimate reality itself (*paramārtha*), which is said to be nondual (*advaya*) in five ways. In terms of existence and non-existence, it is not existent from the perspective of the dependent and the imagined natures, and it is not non-existent from the perspective of the perfected nature. In terms of oneness (*ekatva*) and plurality (*nānātva*), it is not one because there is no oneness of the perfected with the dependent and the imagined, and it is not varied because the perfected is not different from the other two. In terms of production and cessation, it is neither produced nor destroyed, because the absolute realm (*dharmadhātu*) has no characteristic of creativity (*anabhisaṃskṛtatva*). It is neither increased nor decreased, because it remains as it is amidst the production and

¹¹⁸ *Manas* denotes the sense of selfhood and is associated with four defilements: view of self (*ātmadṛṣṭi*), delusion of self (*ātmanamoha*), pride of self (*ātmanāna*), and attachment to self (*ātmasneha*). *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.16; *Siddhi*, 225.

¹¹⁹ Aśaṅga's *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.87-125; Vasubandhu's *Madhyāntavibhāga*, chapter one; *Siddhi*, 90, 225, 514-533.

cessation of defilement and purification. Finally, it does not become purified, because of its naturally stainless nature (*prakṛty-asamkliṣṭatva*), and yet it is not entirely without purification, because it is released (*vigama*) from the adventitious defilements.¹²⁰

The nonduality as one of the attributes of the absolute body (*dharmakāya*) is explained in three ways: with reference to existence, conditionality, and diversity. The absolute body is not existent because the *dharmas* do not exist, and it is not non-existent, because the emptiness as the ultimate reality does exist. It is not conditioned because it is not produced by *karma* and defilements, and yet it has the power to manifest itself in the guise of the conditioned *dharmas*. Thirdly, as the support of all the Buddhas, it is undivided (*abhinna*), and yet countless streams of consciousness (*saṃtāna*) gain the state of enlightenment.¹²¹

The realisation of nonduality is also described as the transmutation of the foundation of consciousness (*āśrayaparāvṛtti*), which occurs in its dependent nature, and it essentially consists of the expulsion of the defiled process (*saṃkleśa*) and the transformation into its undefiled state (*vyavadāna*).¹²² All the conditioned *dharmas* are the dependent nature, and the store consciousness is the support of both the defiled and undefiled *dharmas*, which respectively correspond to the imagined and perfected natures. The transmutation of the support consists of double operation: the expulsion of the imagined and the acquisition of the perfected. It is through the assiduous repetition of the non-conceptual knowledge (*nirvikalpaka-jñāna*) that one removes the wickedness (*dauṣṭhilya*) of the two obstacles¹²³ from the root consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*). Thus it is the non-conceptual knowledge that transmutes the foundation of consciousness through the removal of the imagined which is in the dependent, and through the acquisition of the perfected which is also in the dependent. Through the removal of the obstacles of defilements, one acquires the *mahāparinirvāṇa*, and through the elimination of the obstacles to knowledge, one realises the supreme enlightenment (*mahābodhi*).¹²⁴

In the *tantra* the state of nonduality is gained through the mystic union of wisdom and means, as briefly discussed above in the section on *bodhicitta*. Here we only provide two short quotation, which aptly encapsulate the spirit of the *tantras*.

One's mind (*svacitta*) is primordially unborn and empty by nature, because due to its sameness with the selflessness of *dharmas*, it is immune from all existences, and divested of the aggregates, bases, elements, subject and object.

¹²⁰ *Mahāyāna-Sūtrālaṃkāra*, VI, verse 1 and the commentary.

¹²¹ *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.271-272.

¹²² *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.259-261, 268.

¹²³ the obstacle of defilements (*kleśavaraṇa*), and the obstacle to knowledge (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). *Siddhi*, 566-574.

¹²⁴ *Siddhi*, 610-612; 661-667.

These existences are unarisen, there are no *dharmas* and no *dharmatā*. Selflessness is similar to space, and this is the unwavering course of enlightenment.¹²⁵

The union of wisdom and means denotes the union of *citta* and *caittas* undifferentiated into internal and external.¹²⁶ It is the union of emptiness and compassion, the union of *vajra* and lotus, the union of diffusion (*prapañca*) and fusion (*saṃgraha*), and the union of Heruka and Nairātmyā. It is the undivided reality of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, and it does not have the dual form of man and woman. It is the unity of the conventional and ultimate realities, and the knowledge that is naturally luminous (*prakṛti-prabhāsvara-jñāna*).¹²⁷

Conclusion

In the course of this paper no sustained effort is made to provide a critical assessment of the presented research material, mainly because the salient aim of this paper is to understand rather than to critically assess the Buddhist perceptions of consciousness. At any rate the learned reader can reflect on the read material and evaluate it in conformity with his or her personal understanding and appreciation of Buddhism.

In terms of conclusion, I wish to offer just one general reflection on the Buddhist perceptions of consciousness. I think that within the Buddhist doctrinal parameters, the Buddhist masters have explored a great variety of theoretical and mystical venues, and produced a number of formidable and refined interpretations of the inner permutations of consciousness. One certainly learns many things about its defiled and enlightened conditions. However, one also finds a fair number of variant opinions and disagreements on specific and often crucial issues, such as the continuity of consciousness or the process of cognition. This would suggest that there are certain aspects of consciousness which still remain unresolved, and that the Buddhist teachings as a whole do not offer one doctrinally agreed interpretation of consciousness.

¹²⁵ *Guhyasamāja-tantra*, II.4-5.

¹²⁶ In his *Pañcakrama*, II.47, Nāgārjuna says that it is through the union of the moon and the *vajra* that the *citta* and *caittas* become united. He also explains the nonduality of the *paratantra*, *parikalpita* and *pariṇiṣpanna* in terms of three kinds of radiance (*āloka*) matched with three kinds of emptiness. Once the consciousness evolves through these three radiant lights, there results the state which he defines as luminosity (*prabhāsvara*). It is the realm of universal emptiness (*sarvaśūnya-pada*): the ultimate reality (*tattva*), and omniscience (*sarvajñātva*). It is immutable (*nirvikāra*), nondual (*nirdvanda*), supreme, and beyond verbal discourses. See also verses 7, 15, 23, 50, 51.

¹²⁷ Indrabhūti's *Saṃpūṭatilakāṭikā*, TTP, vol. 55, 5.2.3-5.2.5.

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