

# **On Realizing There is Only The Virtual Nature of Consciousness**

**Vijñapti Matratā Siddhi**

成唯識論

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Commentaries on it by Dharmapāla (護法) and others

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Dedicated to An Lạc

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**The Discourse on Realizing There is Only the Virtual Nature of Consciousness**  
*Vijñapti Matratā Siddhi*, 成唯識論  
Volume Eight

**On The Three-Fold Existential Nature of Consciousness** (tri svabhāvatā, 三自性) &  
**The Absence of an Existential Nature** (niḥsvabhāvatā, 無自性) **in Identity and Purpose**

**On The Three-Fold Existential Nature** (tri svabhāvatā, 三自性) **of Consciousness**

*Question:* If there is only the virtual nature of consciousness, why did the Blessed One teach about a three-fold existential nature in various places throughout the scriptures?

*Answer:* One should understand that these three aspects of the existential nature are also inseparable from the virtual nature of consciousness.

*Question:* How can this be so?

*Answer:* On this, there are three stanzas (the twentieth through the twenty-second) that say:

**20a** By speculating (vikalpena, 遍計) this way or that (yena yena, 彼彼), there are the various different things (yad yad vastu, 種種物) that are imagined (vikalpyate, 遍計).

**20b** In clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執), there is the existential nature (svabhāva, 自性) of attachment to that which is not real (na sa vidyate, 無所有).

**21a** With there being the existential nature that is dependent on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra svabhāvatā, 依他起自性), there are speculations about distinctions (vikalpaḥ, 分別) in the conditions of consciousness (pratyaya, 緣所) that arise (udbhavaḥ, 生).

**21b** The essential difference between perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality (niṣpanna, 圓成實) and depending on the arising of an 'other' (tasya, 於彼) is that the nature (tā, 性) of the former (pūrveṇa, 前) is always (sadā, 常) completely free (rahita, 遠離) from clinging to any speculations about its distinctions (vikalpaḥ, 分別).

**22a** Therefore the existential nature of perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality (pariniṣpanna svabhāvatā, 圓成實) is neither the same as nor separable from (naiva anyo na anyañ, 非異非不異) dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra svabhāvatā, 依他起性).

**22b** Just like impermanence (anitya, 非常) and the other characteristics that are found in the transcendental nature of life's purpose (anityatādivad, 無常等性) such as selflessness (anātma, 無我), suffering (duḥkha, 苦) and emptiness (śūnyatā, 空), it is said (vacyo) that one does not see any one of them without seeing them all (nādr̥ṣṭe'smin sa dr̥śyate, 非不見此彼).

<b>20a</b>	由彼彼遍計，遍計種種物，	yena yena vikalpena yad yad vastu vikalpyate
<b>20b</b>	此遍計所執，自性無所有。	parikalpita evāsau svabhāvo na sa vidyate
<b>21a</b>	依他起自性，分別緣所生。	paratantra svabhāvastu vikalpaḥ pratyaya udbhavaḥ
<b>21b</b>	圓成實於彼，常遠離前性。	niṣpannas tasya pūrveṇa sadā rahita tā tu yā
<b>22a</b>	故此與依他，非異非不異，	ata eva sa naiva anyo na anyañ paratantrataḥ
<b>22b</b>	如無常等性，非不見此彼。	anityatādivad vācyo nādr̥ṣṭe'smin sa dr̥śyate

On this, The Discourse on Realizing There is Only the Virtual Nature of Consciousness says:

There are three aspects in this existential nature (svabhāvatā, 自性) of consciousness:

1. Clinging to entirely imagined speculations  
(parikalpita svabhāvatā, 遍計所執自性)
2. Depending on the arising of an 'other'  
(paratantra svabhāvatā, 依他起性)
3. Perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality  
(pariniṣpanna svabhāvatā, 圓成實性)

These three correspond with the three ways that consciousness manifests identity and purpose:

1. Clinging to entirely imagined speculations corresponds with the mind that distinguishes imagined objects (mano vijñāna, 意識).
2. Dependence on the arising of an 'other' corresponds with the mind that deliberates and calculates self-interest (manas, 末那).
3. Perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature of reality corresponds with the subconscious store of memory (ālaya vijñāna, 阿賴耶識).

### 1. *On the existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculations*

(parikalpita svabhāvatā, 遍計所執自性)

- a. According to a thesis from Nanda, the twentieth stanza speaks about 'entirely imagined speculations' (parikalpita, 遍計) because all speculations about distinctions are invented by the mind (abhinirūpaṇā vikalpa, 計度分別). Because there are so many kinds and so many variables, the stanza says that they can go 'this way or that' (yena yena, 彼彼). This means that all these imaginings are speculations about distinctions that are ultimately unreal. In going 'this way or that', they are said to be entirely imagined. This includes clinging to falsehoods about the projections (skandha, 蘊), alignments (āyatana, 處) and spheres (dhātu, 界) of identity (ātma, 我) of purpose (dharma, 法) as well as all the different distinctions that are made about their existential nature (svabhāvatā, 自性). This is a general explanation of the existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita svabhāvatā, 遍計所執自性). Because people cling to distinctions of reality that are 'not real' (na sa vidyate, 無所有) when they examine teachings about the nature of purpose and its transcendental principles, they are unable to properly comprehend them (anupalambha, 不可得).

According to a thesis from Dharmapāla:

- \* The first line of this twentieth stanza ("by speculating this way or that") is about the subjective component of consciousness that imagines (darśana bhāga, 見分), while the second line ("there are the various different things that are imagined) is about the objective component of consciousness that is imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分).
- \* The last two lines ("in clinging to entirely imagined speculations there is the existential nature of attachment to that which is not real") explain that the existential nature of clinging to identity and purpose is entirely imaginary. Because it is attached to that which is false, it is unable to comprehend (anupalambha, 不可得) that which is real.

Now the following will be examined:

- a. Which projections of consciousness can imagine?
- b. On what objects does the imagination project itself?
- c. The different positions of Sthiramati and Dharmapāla on the division of consciousness into an imagining component (darśana bhāga, 見分) and an imagined component (nimitta bhāga, 相分)

a. Which projections of consciousness can imagine?

On this, the first half of the twentieth stanza says:

“By speculating this way or that” (yena yena vikalpena, 由彼彼遍計)

This is a reference to the imagining portion of consciousness (darśana bhāga, 見分).

*Question:* First, which of the eight projections of consciousness are capable of this existential nature of having entirely imagined speculations?

*Answer:* There are two theories on this:

1. *There is a thesis from Sthiramati that all eight projections of afflicted consciousness and their associated mental states are capable of entirely imagined speculations because:*
  - a. False speculation about distinctions is the existential nature of afflicted consciousness.
  - b. Everything that appears in consciousness is a duality between a beholder (grāhaka, 取能) and that beheld (grāhya, 所取).
  - c. As volume fifty-one of The Discourse of the Masters on Grounding in the Practice of Engaged Meditation (Yogācāra Bhūmi Śāstra, 瑜伽師地論) and the sixteenth volume of Asaṅga’s Exposition of the Holy Teaching (Āryadeśanā Vikhyāpana 顯揚聖教論) say, through the nature of entirely imagined speculation (parikalpita svabhāva, 遍計所執自性), the subconscious mind clings to seeds of falsehood about the objects before it (ālambana, 所緣).
2. *There is another thesis (from Dharmapāla, which is deemed to be correct) that only #6 the consciousness distinguishing imagined objects (mano vijñāna, 意識) and #7 the consciousness deliberating and calculating self-interest (manas, 意) (and their associated mental states) are able to make entirely imagined speculations about identity and purpose. These two projections of consciousness can imagine them because:*
  - a. As Asaṅga’s Summary of the Greater Vehicle Doctrine (Mahāyāna Saṃgraha, 攝大乘論) says, only #6 the mind that distinguishes imagined objects (mano vijñāna, 意識) is able to imagine them. However, through a thorough reading of the text it is clear that, in saying this, it is also referring to #7 the deliberations and calculations of self-interest (manas, 意).
  - b. There are only speculative calculations about distinctions (abhinirūpaṇā vikalpa, 計度分別) because of the ability to imagine them.
  - c. Clinging to identity (ātma grāha, 執我) and purpose (dharma grāha, 執法) presumes a discernment (dhī, 慧) that is lacking in the subconscious store of memory (ālaya vijñāna, 阿賴耶識).
  - d. These two kinds of clinging presume that there is ignorance (avidyā, 無明) of the nature of a greater, transcendent reality.
  - e. As The Discourse of the Masters on Grounding in the Practice of Engaged Meditation (Yogācāra Bhūmi Śāstra, 瑜伽師地論) says, by definition the nature of ignorance is not wholesome or virtuous.
  - f. Delusion (moha, 癡) and non-delusion (amoha, 無癡) are mutually exclusive.
  - g. Clinging to (false) beliefs does not lead to a transcendental knowledge (jñāna, 智) of the empty nature (śūnyatā, 空) of identity and purpose.
  - h. Clinging to the existence and the non-existence of identity and purpose do not arise at the same time.
  - i. There is no clinging that is incapable of perfuming the seeds of subconscious memory, and the store of subconscious memory does not perfume its own seeds.

Because the afflicted mind and its states do not directly discern transcendental reality, all projections of consciousness are said to make false speculations about distinctions. Although this afflicted mind appears as a duality between subject and object, a beholder (grāhaka, 取能) and that beheld (grāhya, 所取), this does not mean that all of its speculations are *entirely* imagined (parikalpita, 遍計所執). Nor should it be assumed that the unafflicted mind also clings to identities (ātma, 我) and purposes (dharma, 法), because that would mean that the knowledge attained by the enlightened beings that descend into this world (tathāgataḥ, 諸如來) subsequent to realizing the transcendental nature of reality (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智) also clings to these dualities. The Scripture on the Levels of Grounding in Enlightenment (Buddha Bhūmi Sūtra, 佛地經) says that the transcendental knowledge of a buddha manifests the different reflected images of spiritual lives and pure lands as if they were in a mirror. In fact, if there were no such objects of conditional knowledge to be reflected, there would be no use for this transcendental knowledge.

- a. Although the subconscious store of memory (ālaya vijñāna, 阿賴耶識) is said to be connected with the seeds of the imagination, it is not said that it only has these for an object. Therefore, the text is not conclusive on it being capable of entirely imagined speculations by itself. It is therefore concluded that only #6 the distinguishing of imagined objects (mano vijñāna, 意識) and #7 the deliberations and calculations of self-interest (manas, 末那) (and their associated mental states) are definitely able to imagine them.
- b. Although only these two projections of consciousness and their associated mental states are definitely capable of these entirely imagined speculations, there can be two, three, four, five six, seven, eight, nine, ten and even more ways of imagining them that are not the same (there are said to be up to sixty-two different kinds of false views about identity and purpose<sup>13</sup>). Because of this, the stanza speaks of “speculating this way or that” (yena yena vikalpena, 彼彼遍計).

b. On what objects does the imagination project itself?

On this, the second half of the twentieth stanza says:

“The various things that are imagined’ (yad yad vastu vikalpyate, 遍計種種物)”  
Asaṅga’s Summary of the Greater Vehicle Doctrine (Mahāyāna Saṃgraha, 攝大乘論) speaks of these all being dependent on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起), something serving as an objective condition (ālambana pratyaya, 所緣緣) before the mind imagining them, the imagined portion of consciousness (nimitta bhāga, 相分).

*Question:* Should not the existential nature of the perfect comprehension of reality (pariniṣpanna svabhāvatā, 圓成實性) be its object instead?

*Answer:* The transcendental nature of reality (tathatā 真如) is not really an object of false clinging, but it is something that can be imagined when one tries to interact with it. Although one may cling to an object of transcendental reality that is entirely imagined (parikalpita, 遍計所執), it is not really the objective condition (ālambana pratyaya, 所緣緣) of this state of mind because the false clings of the imagination do not in fact directly and immediately penetrate this reality.

Kuīji: added: In terms of the imagining mind, transcendental reality is only an objective condition (ālambana pratyaya, 所緣緣) that is indirect and remote (vidūra, 疏). That which is really being imagined is but a mental image (nimitta, 相), a more direct and immediate (jñāti, 親) objective condition that is dependent on the arising on an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起).



- c. Distinguishing between the existential nature that clings to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita svabhāvatā, 遍計所執自性) & the existential nature that depends on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra svabhāvatā, 依他起自性):

*Question:* What are the characteristics of clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執) and how is it distinguished from the existential nature dependent on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra svabhāvatā, 依他起自性)?

*Answer:* In answering this, there are the different theories of Sthiramati and Dharmapāla about the divisions of consciousness into an imaginer (darśana bhāga, 見分) & that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分)

1. *There is a thesis* from Sthiramati that, since the very beginning of time, the mind and its associated mental states in the three-fold sphere of sentient existence<sup>4</sup> have been perfumed by the making of false distinctions. Although there is but one existential nature, there are seeds in the subconscious mind that cling to identity and purpose, manifesting themselves as the dualities of an imaginer (darśana bhāga, 見分) & that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分), a beholder (grāhaka, 取能) & that beheld (grāhya, 所取). *These dualities of sentient existence ultimately do not exist and any clinging to their characteristics are said to be entirely imagined speculations* (parikalpita, 遍計所執). They are built into the existential reality inherent in self-awareness (sva samvitti bhāga, 自證分) and arise as the conditions of consciousness (pratītya samutpada, 緣起) & the twelve links in the continuous existence of its affliction (bhavāṅga, 有支). This self-centered nature is said to not exist without arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) and, because of this, there are all of the false speculations about distinctions (vikalpa, 分別) that are made about objective conditions that are imagined.

*Question:* How does one know this from the holy teachings?

*Answer:* The scriptures explain that false distinctions (abhūta parikalpa, 虛妄分別) depend on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起), but clinging to these dualities is speculation that is entirely imagined (parikalpita, 遍計所執).

2. *There is a thesis* from Dharmapāla (deemed correct) that *all projections of consciousness & their associated mental states are necessarily transformed into dualities* through the power of perfuming (vāsanā bala, 習力) seeds in the subconscious and the arising of conditions (pratītya samutpada, 緣起) in the conscious mind. *They all depend on this partitioning into self-awareness* (sva samvitti bhāga, 自證分) & *dependence on the arising of an 'other'* (paratantra, 依他起). *There is no consciousness without it.* However, the imagination may falsely cling to there being certain realities such as those of:
  - a. There being either an existence or a non-existence (of identity and purpose)
  - b. Their existence and non-existence being either identical or different
  - c. Them being both existent and non-existent
  - d. Them being neither existent nor non-existent, etc.

These dualities are all said to be among the entirely imagined speculations that are subject to this clinging (parikalpita, 遍計所執). In support of this, the holy teachings say that dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) is:

- a. The only means of knowing (pramāṇa mātra, 唯量) that which is known (prameya, 所量)
- b. Only divided into dualities (dvaya mātra, 唯二) (of knower and known, etc.)
- c. Only diversified into more and more kinds of distinctions (vikalpa mātra, 唯種種) through its further divisions into dualities



Furthermore, in The Scripture on the Levels of Grounding in Enlightenment (Buddha Bhūmi Sūtra, 佛地經), it is said that four of the five levels of grounding in enlightenment (the four kinds of transcendental knowledge) depend on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起):

These four kinds of transcendental knowledge are:

1. Knowledge of the perfect mirror of life’s greater purpose (mahā ādarśa jñāna, 大圓鏡智)
2. Knowledge of this purpose with the nature of equanimity (samatā jñāna, 平等性智)
3. Knowledge of its observation with subtly compassionate discernment (praty avekṣana jñāna, 妙觀察智)
4. Knowledge of accomplishing its purpose (kṛtya anuṣṭhāna jñāna, 成所作智)

The fifth, the transcendental principle (bhūta tathatā, 真如) that is the ultimate existential nature of life’s purpose (dharma dhātu svabhāva, 法界體性), is not said to depend on the arising of an ‘other’.

Asaṅga’s Summary of the Greater Vehicle Doctrine (Mahāyāna Saṃgraha, 攝大乘論) describes eleven ways consciousness is virtually framed (ekadaśa vijñapti, 十一識) which all depend on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起).

- a. The first nine arise through habitual forces verbalizing mental images (abhilāpa vāsanā, 名言熏習):
  1. The framing by the body (deha vijñapti, 身有表): the shaping of consciousness by the five sense faculties (pañca indriya, 五根)
  2. The framing by bodily ownership (dehi vijñapti, 身者有表) through calculations of self-interest (manas, 末那)
  3. The framing by experience itself (bhokṭṛ vijñapti, 受者有表) through mental capacity (mano indriya, 意根)
  4. The framing by that which experiences (tad upabhokṭṛ vijñapti, 彼能受有表): the consciousness of thought, hearing, sight, touch, taste and smell (ṣaḍ vijñāna dhātu, 六識界有表)
  5. The framing by that experienced (tad upabhukta vijñapti, 彼所受有表): mental objects, audible sounds, visual forms, physical contacts, flavors & scents (ṣaḍ bāhya dhātu, 六塵界有表)
  6. The framing by time (kāla vijñapti, 時有表) into a past, present and future
  7. The framing by place (deśa vijñapti, 處有表): relative size and location
  8. The framing by quantity (saṃkhyā vijñapti, 數有表)
  9. The framing by words & speech (vyavahāra vijñapti, 言說有表)
- b. The tenth arises through habitual forces of beliefs clinging to identity (ātma dṛṣṭi vāsanā, 我見熏習).
  10. The framing by distinction of self & other (sva para viśeṣa vijñapti, 自他差別有表)
- c. The eleventh arises through habitual forces of existential continuity (bhavāṅga vāsanā, 有支習氣).
  11. The framing by distinction of good & evil, karma & retribution, death & rebirth (sugati durgati cyuty upapatti vijñapti, 善趣惡趣死生趣有表), the sense of moral and existential purpose.

1. If that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分) was not dependent on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起), the two main kinds of transcendental knowledge (along with their mental states) would be said to only be clinging to speculations that were entirely imagined (parikalpita, 遍計所執).

These two main kinds of transcendental knowledge are:

- \* Knowledge of the nature of life’s purpose that is beyond any speculations about its distinctions (nirvikalpa jñāna, 無分別智). This is found in a transcendental vision of the noble path (darśana mārga, 見道)
- \* Knowledge of the nature of life’s purpose attained subsequent (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智) to this realization that is beyond any speculations. This is found in transcendental cultivation of the noble path (bhāvanā mārga, 修道).

Kuīji added: If that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分) was not dependent on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起), the enlightenment of a buddha and the spiritual manifestations of these two kinds of transcendental knowledge would just be figments of the imagination.

- a. Were this so, the transcendental knowledge that is noble and selfless would not arise in the face of the objective conditions before one and their mental states would not be connected with the truth of the noble path.
- b. One should understand that the afflicted mind is also like this (also arising with dependence on an 'other' and not just being entirely imaginary).
2. If the imager (darśana bhāga, 見分) & that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分) were only clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執):
  - a. They would both be without an objective reality (ālambana pratyaya, 所緣緣) like the horns of rabbits and the hair of turtles.
  - b. The existential nature (svabhāvatā, 自性) that clings to speculations that are entirely imagined (parikalpita, 遍計所執) would also not really exist.
  - c. The imager (darśana bhāga, 見分) and that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分) would not perfume or develop seeds (bījaḥ, 諸種) in the subconscious mind.
  - d. The knowledge that is attained subsequent to transcending afflictions (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智) would be without any duality whatsoever.
  - e. With habitual forces (vāsanā, 習氣) being part of that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分), how could they create conditions that directly cause the arising of consciousness (hetu pratyaya, 因緣) with purposes that do not really exist?
  - f. If these conditions producing the imager (darśana bhāga, 見分) and that imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相見) in the mind of self-awareness (sva samvitti bhāga, 自證分) did not depend on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起), the essential supporting basis for both would also not be dependent on the arising of an 'other', because they do not have different causes.

Through this line of reasoning by Dharmapāla, it is clear that the host of objective conditions arising in the mind and its mental states as well as the mind's partition into imagining and imagined components are all dependent on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起), whether the mind is with or without affliction. It is only because it depends on this host of other conditions that consciousness is able to arise.

## 2. *The existential nature of depending on the arising of an 'other'*

(paratantra svabhāvatā, 依他起)

- a. The first half of the twenty-first stanza speaks of 'the speculations about distinctions in the conditions of consciousness that arise'. It should be understood that it is only referring here to the dependence on an 'other' (paratantra, 依他) that is tainted with affliction, because dependence on something that is pure of affliction is also called 'perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature of reality' (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成).
- b. There are some who say that both afflicted and unafflicted minds and their associated mental states have speculations about distinctions because they both imagine objective conditions. Based on this understanding, all minds, whether afflicted or not, depend on an 'other' and therefore, when speaking about dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起), this stanza refers to all existential states of mind.

## 3. *The existential nature of perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality*

(pariṇiṣpanna svabhāva, 圓成實性)

With the two-fold nature of emptiness being fully realized, there is revelation of the true nature of all things that is called 'perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature'

(pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實). Its very name expresses this nature:

- a. It is *omnipresent* (sarvatraga, 遍).

Kuījī added: Because this existential nature is omnipresent (in all places), there is nowhere that it does not exist. This is the meaning here of perfect (pari or paripūrṇa, 圓滿)

- b. It is *always consistent* (samanvaya, 常).

Kuījī added: Because this existential nature is always consistent (at all times), it neither arises nor perishes. This is the meaning here of comprehension (niṣpanna, 成就)

- c. It is *without falsehood* (anavandhya, 非虛謬).

Kuījī added: Because its transcendental principle is found in all things, it is the very nature of life's purpose that is without any falsehood. This is the meaning here of the existential reality of the transcendental nature (bhūta tathatā svābhava, 實性)

This perfect comprehension of reality examines:

- a. The unique characteristics of all things (sva lakṣaṇa, 自相)

Kuījī added: Being omnipresent, the perfect comprehension of reality examines the unique characteristics of all things that narrow the nature of their purpose so that they do not pervade those of any others. If these characteristics pervaded those of others, they would not be unique. Because of this, the perfect comprehension of reality is able to examine the omnipresence of the transcendental nature that is only found in the unique characteristics of all things.

- b. The shared characteristics of all things (sāmānya lakṣaṇa, 共相)

Kuījī added: The perfect comprehension of reality is always consistent in examining the universal (shared) characteristics of all things. Although impermanence, emptiness and selflessness are found in all things (omnipresent), these shared characteristics do not have a nature of their own that exists apart from the mind. They do not have an existential nature or function that exists beyond all things or the existential nature of the mind that they pervade. In observing the mind and its existential nature, there are no such shared characteristics, only the unique characteristics already explained. Although this is so, there is nothing permanent and unchanging that is said to have its own existential nature. And so in speaking about that which is ever consistent in the transcendental nature, the perfect comprehension of its reality examines the universal (shared) characteristics of all things.

- c. False beliefs in the real existential nature of a self, the emptiness of space, and the like.

Kuījī added: And what is meant by the perfect comprehension of reality being without any falsehood? This means that it is without falsehood when examining the nature of empty space, self-centered existence and the like. Those on the lesser track of only seeking freedom from affliction (Hīnayāna, 小乘) and those who believe in the real existence of an abstract, external reality (Tīrthikas, 外道) cling to empty space and self-centered existence as also having an existential nature apart from the mind that is ever consistent and able to be found everywhere in all things and so teach falsely about things that do not really exist. The perfect comprehension of reality does not regard there to be any real, separate existence of empty space, self-centered existence or the like because of the false attachments to them that arise.

Kuījī also added: 'And the like' here is a reference to such theories as those of the universal categories of existence (padārtha, 句義) and inter-connectivity (samavāya, 和合) advocated by the School on the Definition of Reality (Vaiśeṣika, 衛世), the existential nature of a soul (puruṣa, 神我) advocated by the Numerological School (Sāṃkhyavāda, 數論) and others. Although these schools regard these universal categories to be omnipresent and have existential natures that are everlasting, now, in the perfect comprehension of reality, it is revealed that they are without any such certainty of existence.

Kuījī then added: Only the transcendental nature of reality (bhūta tathatā, 真如) is endowed with these three qualities of being omnipresent, always consistent and without any falsehood. Trying to attain a perfect comprehension of it is said to only be like assigning additional troops to an already existing unit.

'Perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature' (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實) here is also used for the unafflicted mind that depends on the arising of an 'other' and is engaged with conditional purposes but free from any illusions (viparyāsa, 離倒) about them, functioning everywhere with distinction. In fact, the second half of the twenty-first stanza of verse says: "The essential difference between perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality and this (dependence on the arising of an 'other') is that the nature of the former is always completely free from clinging to any speculations about its distinctions."

This describes the first kind of perfect comprehension, the one that is dependent on the arising of an ‘other’, not the second kind, the one that is unconditional. This perfect comprehension that is dependent on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起) is forever free from clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執). In being endowed with the two-fold nature of emptiness, emptiness of identity (ātma śūnyatā, 我空) and emptiness of purpose (dharma śūnyatā, 法空), the suchness of this transcendental nature (tathatā, 真如) is revealed. In analyzing this line of verse:

- \* ‘This’ (tasya, 彼) is a reference to perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature of reality (pariniṣpanna, 圓成實) being neither the same as nor separate from this dependence on the arising on an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起).
- \* ‘Always completely free’ (sadā rahita, 常遠離) means that the nature of false clinging to the duality of beholder and that beheld in principle never really exists.
- \* ‘The former’ (pūrveṇa, 前) here means that, when it is revealed, perfect comprehension of transcendental reality (pariniṣpanna, 圓成實) is not devoid of dependence on an ‘other’.
- \* ‘Nature’ (tā, 性) is reference to the fact that the two-fold nature of emptiness is not itself this perfect comprehension (pariniṣpanna, 圓成實) because the suchness of the transcendental nature (tathatā, 真如) is free from the natures of both existence and non-existence.

Through this reasoning it is clear that this perfect comprehension is neither different from nor the same as dependence on the arising of an ‘other’.

- \* If they were different, the transcendental nature of reality (tathatā, 真如) could not be found in the nature of dependence on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起).
  - \* If they were the same, the transcendental nature of reality would be impermanent.
- In these cases, the objects of these three aspects of the existential nature could be either afflicted or without affliction while the functions of the primary transcendental knowledge (mūla jñāna, 本智) of the nature of life’s purpose that is beyond any speculations about its distinctions (nirvikalpa jñāna, 無分別智) (which is unconditional) and the transcendental knowledge attained subsequently (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智) (which is dependent on an ‘other’) should be indistinguishable.

*Question:* Why are the natures of these two said to be neither the same nor different?

*Answer:* It is comparable to how the nature of suffering, impermanence, selflessness and emptiness are neither the same as nor different from this transcendental nature.

1. If the natures of impermanence, selflessness, etc., were different from, say, motive forces (saṃskāra, 行), they would not be impermanent, selfless, etc., because they would be unique characteristics (sva lakṣaṇa, 自相) that were distinguished from these motive forces (just as blue is not yellow because it is a unique characteristic that is distinguished from yellow).
2. If the natures of impermanence, selflessness etc., were no different from motive forces and the like, they would be shared characteristics (sāmānya lakṣaṇa, 共相) (just as how a color is a shared characteristic of many different visible forms).

This illustration reveals how perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature is neither identical with nor different from dependence on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起). The manifested purposes of the conscious mind (dharmaḥ, 諸法) and the transcendental principle underlying them (dharmatā, 法性) are also like this. And because of this, ultimate reality (paramārtha, 勝義) and the conventional truths of this world (saṃvṛti, 世俗) mutually support each other.

The Discourse then says:

“Just like impermanence and the other characteristics that are found in the transcendental nature of life’s purpose such as selflessness, suffering and emptiness, it is said that one does not see any one of them without seeing them all.”

One does not see with perfect comprehension of this transcendental nature without also being able to see the nature of dependence on the arising of an ‘other’ because, having not yet penetrated the empty nature of clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined, one does not really understand dependence on the existence of an ‘other’. With knowledge of the transcendental nature of life’s purpose that is beyond any speculations about its distinctions (nirvikalpa jñāna, 無分別智), there is a realization of the suchness of this nature (tathatā, 真如) as well as the knowledge that is attained subsequently (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智). The mind is then able to thoroughly penetrate this nature of dependence on the arising of an ‘other’ that is like a magical illusion. Although since the very beginning of time, the mind and its associated mental states have been able to connect to the unique characteristics (sva lakṣaṇa, 自相) of the imagining and imagined components of consciousness (darśana bhāga, 見分 & nimitta bhāga, 相分) as the objective conditions before them, because of their constant clinging to both identity and purpose (ātma grāha 我執 & dharma grāha, 法執) they do not really recognize the host of conditions that draw their minds and mental states into manifesting false distinctions. These distinctions do not really exist apart from the mind but seem to, just like the apparent manifestations that are found in magical illusions, mirages, the objects of dreams, the images in mirrors, the echoes from valleys and the reflections of the moon that are seen in bodies of water. Because of this, there is a stanza of verse in The Scripture on the Mysterious Array of Consciousness (Ghana Vyūha Sūtra, 大乘密嚴經 or 厚嚴經) that says:

“Without seeing the transcendental nature of reality

They are unable to perceive the true nature of motive forces,

With them all seeming to be magical illusions.

Although they appear to exist, they are not real.”

The intent of this stanza of verse is to explain that this three-fold existential nature is always inseparable from the mind and its states.

1. The mind, its states and all the manifestations that arise from the host of objective conditions before it are like magical illusions. They do not really exist but seem to, deluding those who are foolish. All of these are said to *arise from the existential nature that depends on the arising of an ‘other’* (paratantra svabhāva, 依他起性).
2. The foolish cling to identity and purpose in these conditions and incorrectly speculate about their existence, their non-existence, their sameness, their difference, them being both the same and different, them being neither the same nor different, etc. Like blossoms in the sky, these natures and characteristics are all unreal. All of this is *clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined* (parikalpita, 遍計所執).
3. All of these false attachments to identities and purpose that depend on the arising of an ‘other’ are endowed with the nature of emptiness (śūnyatā, 空). With the nature of this emptiness being revealed in the transcendental nature of consciousness and its states, there is said to be *perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature* (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實).

Because of this, this three-fold existential nature (tri svabhāvatā, 三自性) is said to be inseparable from the mind and its states.



## *The direct associations of this three-fold existential nature*

### a. The three-fold existential nature in terms of unconditional purpose

(asamskrta dharma, 無為)

*Question:* How is this three-fold existential nature involved with:

- \* Empty space (ākāśa, 虛空)
- \* The transcendence realized through spiritual discovery (pratisaṃkhyā nirodha, 擇滅)
- \* The transcendence that is not realized through spiritual discovery (apratisaṃkhyā nirodha, 非擇滅), and
- \* The other aspects of unconditional purpose?

*Answer:* It is involved with all of them:

1. The mind and its states manifest what appears to be empty space as well as the other characteristics of unconditional purpose. Adapting to the arising of these objects in the mind (nimitta bhāga, 相分) involves dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起).
2. With the foolish mistakenly clinging to the real existence of these objects (apart from the mind), it involves the existential nature of clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined (parikalpita svabhāva, 遍計所執性).
3. When the suchness of the transcendental nature of reality (tathatā, 真如) is hypothetically established to be empty space and the other aspects of unconditional purpose, it involves its perfect comprehension (pariniṣpanna, 圓成實).
  - a. When the mind and its associated mental states are endowed with affliction, these mental images (nimitta, 相) of unconditional purpose necessarily involve dependence on an 'other'.
  - b. When they are without affliction, they simultaneously involve two natures:
    - a. Upon arising from a host of conditions, they involve dependence on an 'other'.
    - b. In being without any illusions (aviparyāsa, 無顛倒), they incidentally involve perfect comprehension.

### b. The three-fold existential nature in terms of the seven-fold transcendental nature

(sapta vidhāḥ tathatāḥ, 七真如):

*Question:* How is this three-fold existential nature involved in the seven-fold transcendental nature that is described in The Scripture on Understanding the Deep Mystery (Saṃdhi Nirmocana Sūtra, 解深密經)?

*Answer:* The seven transcendental natures are:

1. *The transcendental nature found in the evolving stream of consciousness* (srota pravṛtti tathatā, 流轉真如): This is a reference to the reality that is revealed through the evolving stream of conditional purposes (the transmigration of the mind through the stream of life & death).
2. *The transcendental nature found in the characteristics of consciousness* (lakṣaṇa tathatā, 實相真如): This refers to the reality that is revealed through the selflessness of both personality (pudgala nairātmya, 人無我) and purpose (dharma nairātmya, 法無我).
3. *The transcendental nature found in there only being the virtual nature of consciousness* (vijñapti matratā tathatā, 唯識真如): This refers to the realities of both afflicted and unafflicted purposes only being found in the virtual nature of consciousness.
4. *The transcendental nature of the established reality on the ground* (saṃniveśa tathatā, 安立真如): This is a reference to the reality of suffering (duḥkha, 苦).

5. *The transcendental nature of mistaken conduct* (mithyā pratipatti tathatā, 邪行真如): This is a reference to the reality of the origination of this suffering (samudaya, 集).
6. *The transcendental nature of purification* (viśuddhi tathatā, 清淨真如): This is reference to the reality of transcending this suffering (nirodha, 滅).
7. *The transcendental nature of proper conduct* (samyak pratipatti tathatā, 正行真如): This is a reference to the reality of the noble path (ārya mārga, 聖道).

This seven-fold transcendental nature is involved in perfect comprehension (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實) because they are the objects of the two kinds of transcendental knowledge:

1. The primary transcendental knowledge (mūla jñāna, 本<sup>V</sup>) of the nature of life's purpose that is beyond any speculations about its distinctions (nirvikalpa, 無分別)
2. The transcendental knowledge that is attained subsequently (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智)

In accordance with their characteristics:

- a. Three involve clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執) and dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) because they involve improper attachments to that which is tainted and adulterated:
  1. The nature of the evolving stream of consciousness
  4. The nature of suffering that arises through the established reality on the ground, and
  5. The origination of suffering that arises through mistaken conduct
- b. The other four involve perfect comprehension of reality (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實):
  2. The transcendental (selfless) characteristics of consciousness
  3. There only being the virtual nature of consciousness
  6. The transcendence of suffering through the nature of non-affliction, and
  7. The noble path that is realized through proper conduct
- c. The three-fold existential nature in terms of the six mental images of conscious purposes (ṣaḍ dharma nimitta, 六法相)  
 Question: How is this three-fold existential nature involved with the six mental images of conscious purposes?  
 These six mental images of purpose are:
  1. Mental images of its physical forms (rūpa nimitta, 色相)
  2. Mental images of its emotional feelings (vedanā nimitta, 受相)
  3. Mental images of its mental associations (saṃjñā nimitta, 想相)
  4. Mental images of its other motive forces (saṃskāra nimitta, 行相)
  5. Mental images of its consciousness (vijñāna nimitta, 識相)
  6. Mental images of its unconditional purpose (asamskṛta nimitta, 無為相)

Answer:

All of these mental images (nimitta, 相) of conscious purposes involve its three-fold existential nature because they all can be associated with false clings of the imagination, the arising of conditions and the transcendental principle of reality.

- d. The three-fold existential nature in terms of the five constituents of consciousness that have a real karmic function (pañca vastuka, 五事)

Question: How is this three-fold existential nature involved with the five constituents of consciousness that have a real karmic function?

These five constituents of consciousness are:

1. Its mental images (nimitta, 相)
2. Its verbalizations, its names for mental images (nāman, 名)
3. Its speculations about distinctions (vikalpa, 分別)
4. The suchness of its transcendental nature (tathatā, 真如)
5. Proper knowledge of this transcendental nature (samyag jñāna, 正智)



*Answer:* The holy teachings do not all agree with each other on this.

1. Texts such as volume seventy-four of The Discourse of the Masters on Grounding in the Practice of Engaged Meditation (Yogācāra Bhūmi Śāstra, 瑜伽師地論) and volumes six and sixteen of Asaṅga's Exposition of the Holy Teaching (Āryadeśanā Vikhyāpana 顯揚聖教論) say:  
In the manifestations of the mind and its mental states expressed that are unafflicted:
  - a. *Mental images, verbalizations, speculations about distinctions & transcendental knowledge* all involve dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
  - b. *The suchness of the transcendental nature* involves perfect comprehension.
  - c. None of these five involve clinging to entirely imagined speculations.In expressing the manifestations of the mind and its mental states that are afflicted:
  - a. That simulation of its expressions (abhidheya, 所詮) are *mental images*.
  - b. That able to simulate these expressions (abhidāna, 能詮) are *verbalizations*.
  - c. That which is able to display the manifestations of the mind and its states are *speculations about distinctions*.
  - d. Only the unafflicted mind and its states are free from the sophistry of discursive thought. Because of this, only it is generally said to have *proper knowledge of the transcendental nature* beyond anything that is expressed or able to express it.All four of these arise from the conditions of consciousness and so involve dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
2. There is a stanza of verse in The Discourse on Distinguishing Between the Mean and the Extremes (Madhya Anta Vibhāga Kārikā, 辯中邊論頌) that says:
  - a. *Mental images & speculations about distinctions* involve dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
  - b. *Verbalizations* only involve clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined.
  - c. *The suchness of the transcendental nature & proper knowledge of it* both involve perfect comprehension.By this it means that:
  - a. In the afflicted mind and its states, *mental images & speculations about distinctions* involve dependence on the arising of an 'other':
    1. The component of consciousness that is imagined (nimitta bhāga, 相分) is said to involve *mental images*.
    2. The three other components of consciousness are said to involve *speculations about distinctions*.  
These three other components of consciousness are:
      - a. The imager (darśana bhāga, 見分)
      - b. Self-awareness (sva saṃvitti bhāga, 三自證分)
      - c. Awareness of self-awareness (sva saṃvitti saṃvitti bhāga, 證自證)
  - b. Because clinging to entirely imagined speculations involves an existential nature that is not real, its lack of reality is said to only be *verbalization*.
  - c. The last two (*transcendental knowledge & the suchness of the transcendental nature*) are without illusions (aviparāyasa, 無倒) and so involve perfect comprehension.
3. The Scripture on the Descent into Śrī Laṅka (Laṅka Avatāra Sūtra, 入楞伽經) says:
  - a. Dependence on the arising of an 'other' only involves *speculations about distinctions*.
  - b. Clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined involves *mental images* and *verbalizations*.
  - c. Perfect comprehension involves *the suchness of the transcendental nature & proper knowledge of it*.

By this it is meant that all components (bhāgas, 分) of the afflicted mind and its mental states generally involve *verbalizations & speculations about distinctions* because their existential nature is based on that which is not real. In clinging to entirely imagined speculations, that which expresses and that which is expressed are hypothetically established respectively as *verbalizations & mental images*.

4. Asaṅga's Summary of the Greater Vehicle Doctrine (Mahāyāna Saṃgraha, 攝大乘論) says that:

- a. *Verbalizations* (nāman, 名) involve dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
- b. *Meanings* (artha, 義) involve clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined.

By this it is meant that:

- a. The different components (bhāgas, 分) of the afflicted mind and its mental states exist through the power of verbalization because it is through verbalization that afflictions are entirely imagined. This is said to be the *verbalization of affliction*.
- b. In clinging to these speculations that are entirely imagined, there is an accommodation to these verbalizations in which they are incorrectly imagined to have a real existence. This is said to be the *meaning of affliction*.

Although all of these explanations from the holy teachings are different, their meanings do not really contradict each other. However, the first explanation from The Discourse of the Masters on Grounding in the Practice of Engaged Meditation is without any mistake or confusion so one should understand this as elaborated there.

e. The three-fold existential nature & the five characteristics that define consciousness  
(pañca lakṣaṇāni, 五相)

These five characteristics are:

1. That which is expressed (abhidheya, 所詮); meanings
2. That which is able to express them (abhidhāna, 能詮); words
3. The connection between them (saṃbandha, 相屬)
4. Clinging and attachment (abhiniveśa, 執著) to words, meanings and the connections between them
5. Non-attachment to them (anabhiniveśa, 不執著)

*Question:* How do the holy teachings explain the involvement of this three-fold existential nature in the five characteristics that define consciousness (pañca lakṣaṇāni, 五相)?

*Answer:*

- 1.-2. *That which is expressed* (abhidheya, 所詮) *and that which is able to express it* (abhidhāna, 能詮) are each endowed with the three-fold existential nature:
  - a. *False speculations about distinctions* involve clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined.
  - b. *Mental images, verbalizations & speculations about distinctions* in which there is an agreement between that which is being expressed and that which is able to express it involve dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
  - c. *In the suchness of the transcendental nature & proper knowledge of it* there is also an agreement between that which is expressed and that which is able to express it. This involves perfect comprehension when the transcendental knowledge attained after (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智) getting beyond the affliction of clinging to speculations is able to transform this realization into mental images that express the transcendental nature.
3. *The connection* (saṃbandha, 相屬) *between that being expressed* (abhidheya, 所詮) *and that able to express it* (abhidhāna, 能詮) only involves clinging to speculations that are entirely imagined because it entails false attachments to words and meanings.

4. *Clinging and attachment to them* (abhiniveśa, 執著) only involves dependence on the arising of an 'other' because its existential nature involves false speculations about its distinctions.
5. *Non-attachment to them* (anabhiniveśa, 不執著) only involves perfect comprehension because its existential nature is the knowledge that transcends affliction (anāsrava jñāna, 無漏智) and the transcendental knowledge attained subsequently (prṣṭha labdha jñāna, 後得智).

f. The three-fold existential nature and the four levels of transcendental principle (catur vidha tattvaḥ, 四種真實)

*Question:* And how do the holy teachings explain the involvement of the three-fold existential nature with the four levels of transcendental principle?

The four levels of transcendental principle are:

1. The conventional principles of this world (laukika tattva, 世間真實)
2. The principles of logical reasoning (nyāya tattva, 道理真實)
3. The principles of non-affliction (anāsrava tattva, 淨真實), the empty nature of identity (the nature of selflessness) that overcomes the obstacles of emotional disturbance (kleśa āvaraṇa, 煩惱障)
4. The principles of transcendental knowledge (jñāna tattva, 智真實), the empty nature of purpose that overcomes the obstacles of cognitive dissonance (jñeya āvaraṇa, 所知障)

*Answer:*

- \* *The conventional principles of this world & the principles of logical reasoning* involve dependence on the arising of an 'other' because they consist of mental images, verbalizations and speculations about distinctions.
- \* *The principles of non-affliction* that overcome the obstacles of emotional disturbance and *the principles of transcendental knowledge* that overcome cognitive dissonance involve perfect comprehension because they constitute true transcendental knowledge and the suchness of the transcendental nature.

The Discourse on Distinguishing Between the Mean and the Extremes (Madhya Anta Vibhāga Kārikā, 辯中邊論) explains that:

1. *The conventional principles of this world* involve clinging to entirely imagined speculations because they are the shared attachments that worldly people generally agree on.
2. *The principles of logical reasoning* involve all three aspects of the existential nature because there is logic in both attachment and non-attachment and it is found in both afflicted and unafflicted minds.
3. *The principles of non-affliction & transcendental knowledge* that overcome the obstacles of emotional disturbance and cognitive dissonance only involve perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature of reality.

g. The three-fold existential nature in terms of the four truths (catvāri satyāni, 四諦) & The four defining characteristics in the truth of suffering (catvāri satya lakṣaṇāni, 四諦相):

*Question:* How do the holy teachings explain the three-fold existential nature in terms of the four truths about life's purpose and the four defining characteristics found in the truth of suffering - impermanence, suffering, emptiness & selflessness?

*Answer:* Each of the four truths is endowed with the three-fold existential nature.

1. The three-fold existential nature & the truth of suffering (duḥkha satya, 苦諦):  
Each of the four defining characteristics found within the truth of suffering are also endowed with the three existential natures:
  - a. Impermanence (anitya, 無常) & the three-fold existential nature:

1. With impermanence there is the nature of *non-existence* because, with clinging to entirely imagined speculations, there is the nature of that which does not really exist.
2. With impermanence there is a *beginning & an end* because, with dependence on the arising of an 'other', there is arising and perishing.
3. With impermanence there is both *the corruption of affliction & the purity of non-affliction* because, with perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature of reality, all the different levels in the evolving manifestations of consciousness are revealed.
- b. Suffering (duḥkha, 苦) & the three-fold existential nature:
  1. With suffering there is *attachment* because, with clinging to entirely imagined speculations, there is attachment to the dualities of identity and purpose.
  2. With suffering there are *its very characteristics* because, with dependence on the arising of an 'other', there are the three characteristics of suffering:
    - a. The suffering of unpleasant feelings (duḥkha duḥkhatā, 苦苦)
    - b. The suffering of change and instability (vipariṇāma duḥkhatā, 壞苦)
    - c. The suffering of being conditioned by motive forces (saṃskāra duḥkhatā, 行苦) that are beyond one's control
  3. There is suffering through *association with it* because, with its perfect comprehension, there is association with the characteristics of suffering.
- c. Emptiness (śūnyatā, 空) & the three-fold existential nature:
  1. With emptiness there is *the nature of non-existence* because, with clinging to entirely imagined speculations, there are attachments to that which does not really exist.
  2. With emptiness there is *the nature of difference* because, with dependence on the arising of an 'other', there is the existential nature that is different from that which is falsely clung to.
  3. With emptiness there is *a distinct nature* because, with its perfect comprehension, the nature that is empty of identity and purpose is revealed.
- d. Selflessness (anātman, 無我) & the three-fold existential nature:
  1. With selflessness there is *the transcending of characteristics* because, with clinging to entirely imagined speculations, there are the characteristics of identity.
  2. With selflessness there are *the characteristics of difference* because, with dependence on the arising of an 'other', there are characteristics that are different from clinging to false identity.
  3. With selflessness there are *unique characteristics* (sva lakṣaṇa, 自相) because, with perfect comprehension, the unique characteristics of selflessness are revealed.
2. The three-fold existential nature & the origination of suffering (samudaya satya, 集諦):
  - a. The origination of suffering through *the seeds of habitual forces* (bīja vāsanā, 習氣): refers to habitual forces from the existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculations. It gets its name from clinging to these forces.  
Kuiji added: The habitual forces of clinging to identity and purpose may also be regarded as the existential nature of depending on the arising of an 'other'. However, from these habitual forces there are said to be the fruits of clinging to entirely imagined speculations.
  - b. The origination of suffering through *the arising of mutually dependent conditions* (samutthāna, 等起) refers to the mutually dependent relationship between actions made (karma, 業) and emotional disturbances (kleśa, 煩惱).

- c. The origination of suffering through *lack of disconnection from the fetters of attachment* (avisam̐yoga, 未離繫) refers to not yet being free from the obstacles of emotional disturbance (kleśa āvaraṇa, 煩惱障) & the obstacles of cognitive dissonance (jñeya āvaraṇa, 所知障). This prevents a *perfect comprehension* of the transcendental nature (tathatā, 真如).
3. *The three-fold existential nature & the transcendence of suffering* (nirodha satya, 集諦):
  - a. Upon getting beyond its existential nature, *clinging to entirely imagined speculations* no longer arises.
  - b. Upon getting beyond attachments to identity and purpose there is the transcendence realized through spiritual discovery (pratisam̐khyā nirodha, 擇滅) and *dependence on an 'other'* no longer arises.
  - c. Upon getting beyond the very nature of sentient existence (mūla prakṛti, 本性), there is *perfect comprehension* of its transcendental nature (tathatā, 真如).
4. *The three-fold existential nature & the truth of the noble path* (ārya mārga satya, 聖道諦):
  - a. Through the fully rounded knowledge (parijñā, 遍知) acquired from a transcendental vision of the noble path (darśana mārga, 見道) there is the ability to understand the nature of *clinging to entirely imagined speculations*.
  - b. Through cultivation of the noble path (bhāvanā mārga, 修道) there is a severing of all the obstacles of emotional disturbance and cognitive dissonance once and for all and the ability to sever *dependence on the arising of an 'other'*.
  - c. Through the noble path there is the ultimate realization of spiritual freedom and the ability to acquire *perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature*.

In fact, the fully rounded knowledge that comes from a transcendental vision of the noble path pervades the second and third as well.

The relationship between the three-fold existential nature and four noble truths has been explained here as seven iterations of the three-fold existential nature.

This involves:

1-4. Four iterations of three for the truth of suffering - this involves one set of three for each for its four defining characteristics of impermanence, suffering, emptiness & selflessness.

5-7. One iteration of three for each of the other three truths.

In associating this three-fold existential nature to them, some of the relationships are hypothetical while others are real. However, they should all be understood in accordance with the principles underlying them.

#### h. The three-fold existential nature in terms the three means of spiritual emancipation

(trīṇi vimokṣa mukhāni, 三解脫門)

*Question:* How do the holy teachings explain the three-fold existential nature in the practices and objectives of meditation that constitute the three means of spiritual emancipation?

*Answer:*

The three means of spiritual emancipation (trīṇi vimokṣa mukhāni, 三解脫門) are meditations on:

1. The nature of emptiness (śūnyatā mukha, 空門)
2. The transcendence of mental images (animitta mukha, 無相門) and
3. The transcendence of any longing or striving (apranihita mukha, 無願門)

In principle, these three all pervade the three-fold existential nature and are in accord with its characteristics. One should understand that, in being connected with this existential nature, they each produce an enduring observation of the nature of life's purpose that neither arises nor perishes (anutpattika dharma kṣānti, 無生法忍):



1. With an enduring observation of the nature of life's purpose that is endowed with the nature of emptiness (śūnyatā mukha, 空門), there is freedom from *the very nature of sentient existence* (mūla prakṛti, 本性). As a result, the existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculations neither arises nor perishes.
2. With an enduring observation of this nature that transcends any mental images (animitta mukha, 無相門), there is freedom from them having *an existence of their own* (svayambhū, 自然). As a result, the existential nature of dependence on the arising of an 'other' neither arises nor perishes.
3. With an enduring observation of this nature that transcends any longing or striving (apranihita mukha, 無願門) there is freedom from *both affliction & suffering* (kleśa ca karma ca, 惑苦). As a result, the existential nature of perfect comprehension neither arises nor perishes.

This three-fold existential nature is therefore the object of these three kinds of enduring observation.

i. The three-fold existential nature in terms of the two levels of truth (satya dvaya, 二諦):

*Question:* How is this three-fold existential nature associated in the two levels of truth?

*Answer:* One should understand that the conventional truths of this world (saṃvṛti laukika satya, 假世俗諦) are endowed with the three-fold existential nature while the truth of ultimate significance (paramārtha satya, 勝義諦) is only found in perfect comprehension.

1. *There are three levels in the conventional truth of this world* (saṃvṛti satya, 假世俗諦):
  - a. *The conventionally held hypotheses (theories) of this world* (prajñapti saṃvṛti 假世俗) correspond with the existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculations.
  - b. *The practices & observances of this world* (pratipatti saṃvṛti, 行世俗) correspond to the existential nature of dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
  - c. *The truths of this world that reveal the transcendental nature of life's purpose* (udbhāvana saṃvṛti, 顯了世俗) correspond to the existential nature found in perfect comprehension of reality.

One should understand the correspondences between the conventional truths of this world and the three-fold existential nature like this.

2. *There are three levels in the truth of the highest significance* (paramārtha satya, 勝義諦):
  - a. *The object of ultimate significance* (artha paramārtha, 義勝義) refers to that which is most transcendent. This corresponds with the existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculations.
  - b. *The realization of ultimate significance* (prāpti paramārtha, 得勝義) refers to that which leads to the highest level of spiritual freedom (nirvāṇa, 涅槃). This corresponds with the existential nature of dependence on the arising of an 'other'.
  - c. *The practice of ultimate significance* (pratipatti paramārtha, 行勝義) refers to the noble path (ārya mārga, 聖道). This corresponds with the existential nature of perfect comprehension.

When in accordance with the truth of the ultimate significance, they all correspond with perfect comprehension. The first two are unchanging (avicala, 無變), neither arising nor perishing, while the third is beyond any illusions (aviparyāsa, 無倒).

j. The three-fold existential nature in terms of the two arenas of transcendental knowledge (jñāna gocara, 智所行)

*Question:* How does the three-fold existential nature correspond with the two arenas of transcendental knowledge?

The two arenas of transcendental knowledge are:

1. The arena of overcoming the obstacles of emotional disturbance (kleśa āvaraṇa viśuddhi jñāna gocara, 煩惱障淨智所行真實)
2. The arena of overcoming the obstacles of cognitive dissonance (jñeya āvaraṇa viśuddhi jñāna gocara, 所知障淨智所行)

*Answer:*

1. *The existential nature of clinging to entirely imagined speculation* is not associated with either of the arenas of transcendental knowledge. Because these speculations are without their own existential nature, they do not really constitute objective conditions that are present before consciousness (ālambana pratyaya, 所緣緣). The foolish cling to their existence while those who are noble understand their non-existence. Nevertheless, they are hypothetically said to be objects of knowledge for both ordinary beings and those who are noble.
2. *The existential nature of depending on the arising of an 'other'* is associated with the arena of transcendental knowledge that overcomes the obstacles of emotional disturbance. It is an object of knowledge common to both ordinary and noble beings.
3. *The existential nature of perfect comprehension* is associated with the arena of transcendental knowledge that overcomes the obstacles of cognitive dissonance and is only an object of knowledge for noble beings.

k. The three-fold existential nature in terms of that which is hypothetical (prajñaptisat, 假有) & that which is real (dravyasat, 實有)<sup>2</sup>

*Question:* Among these three aspects of the existential nature, which are hypothetical and which are real?

*Answer:*

1. *Clinging to entirely imagined speculations* establish falsehoods that are said to have a hypothetical existence. However, with their characteristics not being based on a real existential nature, they can also be said to be *neither hypothetical nor real*.
2. *Depending the arising of an 'other'* is both hypothetical and real. It is said to have a hypothetical existence when three criteria are met:
  - a. A combination of factors (saṃghāta, 集) that are temporarily combined into a whole.  
Kuijī added: Like a vessel that depends on a combination of factors to have a purpose.
  - b. A continuous series (saṃtati, 相續) that lasts over a defined period of time.  
Kuijī added: Like that which only temporarily has an existence within the continuum of past, present and future
  - c. A temporary stage (āvasthika, 分位) that is dependent on a defined time & place.  
Kuijī added: Like the twenty-four kinds of motive force that are not directly associated with mental states (citta viprayukta saṃskāra, 不相應行)

Because form, the mind and its mental states all arise from conditions (pratītya samutpada, 緣起), they are said to really exist. If they were without a real purpose then they would also be without a hypothetical purpose. A proper hypothesis is based on reality, which is the reason for it to be established.

3. *Perfect comprehending the transcendental nature of reality* only has a real existence because it does not depend on any other conditions being established.



1. The difference or non-difference between the aspects of three-fold existential nature:

*Question:* Are the aspects of the three-fold existential nature different from each other or not?

*Answer:* It can be said that they are neither with nor without difference:

- \* They are not different because they are inseparable.
- \* They are not without difference because, in falsely clinging to imagined speculations about the arising of conditions, there is a difference from their real significance.

Like this, there are boundless meanings and contexts that can be applied to this three-fold existential nature. Lest we get too long-winded about this, there is just an outline here of these few points to reveal its essential principles.

**The Discourse on Realizing There is Only the Virtual Nature of Consciousness**

*Vijñapti Matratā Siddhi*, 成唯識論

**The End of Volume Eight**

**The Discourse on Realizing There is Only the Virtual Nature of Consciousness**  
*Vijñapti Matrātā Siddhi*, 成唯識論  
**The Beginning of Volume Nine**

**On the Absence of a Three-Fold Existential Nature** (tri vidhā niḥsvabhāvatā, 三無自性)  
**in Identity and Purpose & There Only Being the Virtual Nature of Consciousness**  
(vijñapti matrātā, 唯識)

*Question:* If there is this three-fold existential nature, why did The Blessed One teach that all things are without an existential nature (and so endowed with the nature of emptiness)?

*Answer:* On this, there are three stanzas of verse (twenty-three through twenty-five) that say:

**23a Based on this three-fold existential nature of consciousness** (tri vidhasya svabhāvasya, 三自性), **there is the three-fold absence of it** (tri vidhām niḥsvabhāvatām, 三無自性) **in identity and purpose.**

**23b Because of this, the Buddha taught** (deśitā, 說) **with secret intent** (saṃdhāya, 密意) **about the absence of an existential nature** (niḥsvabhāvatā, 無自性) **in all things** (sarva dharmāṇām, 一切法) **(the nature of emptiness).**

**24a 1. In the first** (prathama, 初), **clinging to entirely imagined speculations, there is the absence of any real existential nature** (niḥsvabhāvatā, 無性) **in identity and purpose by dint of this very defining characteristic** (lakṣaṇa, 相).

**2. In the next** (paraḥ punaḥ, 次), **depending on the arising of an ‘other’, there is the absence of any real existential nature** (niḥsvabhāvatā, 無性) **in identity and purpose because they do not exist on their own** (na svayaṃ bhāva, 無自然).

**24b 3. Finally** (aparā, 後), **in perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality, there is the absence of any real existential nature** (niḥsvabhāvatā, 無性) **in identity and purpose because it is completely free from the first** (itasya ity, 由遠離前), **any nature of attachment to entirely imagined speculations.**

**25a With there being the ultimate meaning of all things** (dharmāṇām paramārthaśca, 諸法勝義) **there is** (yatas, 即是) **also** (api, 亦) **the suchness of the transcendental nature** (tathātā, 真如).

**25b With it being so** (sa iva, 如) **at all times** (sarva kālām, 常), **there is the ultimate reality of this transcendental nature** (tathā bhāvāt, 實性), **that there is only the virtual nature of consciousness** (vijñapti mātrātā, 唯識).

23a	即依此三性，立彼三無性，	tri vidhasya svabhāvasya trividhām niḥsvabhāvatām
23b	故佛密意說，一切法無性。	saṃdhāya sarva dharmāṇām deśitā niḥsvabhāvat
24a	初即相無性，次無自然性，	prathamo lakṣaṇenaiva niḥsvabhāva ‘paraḥ punaḥ
24b	後由遠離前，所執我法性。	na svayaṃ bhāva itasya ity aparā niḥsvabhāvatā
25a	此諸法勝義，亦即是真如，	dharmāṇām paramārthaśca sa yatas tathātā api saḥ
25b	常如其性故，即唯識實性。	sarva kālām tathābhāvāt sa iva vijñapti mātrātā

On the absence of the three-fold existential nature, The Discourse on There Only Being the Virtual Nature of Consciousness says:

On the basis of the explanation of the three-fold existential nature of consciousness already described, there is the establishment of its non-existence in identity and purpose. This is a reference to their lack of an existential nature (their nature of emptiness) because of:

1. Their defining characteristic (lakṣaṇa, 相) of being unreal

By definition, in clinging to imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執), there are attachments to illusions (viparyāsa, 顛倒) that are not real.

2. Their arising and perishing (utpatti, 生)

That which is impermanent and depends on the arising of an 'other' is without a real existential nature of its own. This is a reference to the absence of an existential nature in anything that arises and then perishes.

3. Their ultimate meaning (paramārtha, 勝義)

Perfect comprehension of transcendental reality (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成自) is without any existential nature (paramārtha niḥsvabhāvatā, 勝義無性) that can be separately distinguished from all things.

Consequently, the Buddha taught with secret intent that all things are without an existential nature (niḥsvabhāvatā, 無自性). However, in reality this existential nature is not entirely without existence. The expression *taught with a secret intent* (sandhāya ... deśitā, 說密意) here means revealing a partial truth, one that is incomplete in meaning (anītārtha, 非了義). This is reference to the fact that the two latter aspects of this existential nature, those of perfect comprehension and its dependence on the arising of an 'other', are not in fact without a real existential nature. However, there are deluded people who falsely cling to their entirely imagined speculations about the real existence of identity and purpose. To free them from these attachments, the Blessed One spoke generally about transcending the natures of both that which exists (these latter two aspects of the existential nature) as well as that which does not really exist (entirely imagined speculations).

*Question:* How is this three-fold absence of an existential nature established on the basis of this three-fold existential nature?

*Answer:*

1. On the basis of the first, *clinging to entirely imagined speculations*, there is the absence of an existential nature by its very defining characteristic (lakṣaṇa niḥsvabhāvatā, 相無性). Because the nature and characteristics of identity and purpose are ultimately unreal, they are like mirages and blossoms in the sky.
2. On the basis of the next, *dependence on the arising of an 'other'*, there is the absence of an existential nature in conditions that arise & perish (utpatti niḥsvabhāvatā, 生無性). There are many different conditions of consciousness (pratyaya, 緣) that arise and perish (pratitya samutpada, 眾緣生). In seeming to have a real existence of their own (svayaṃ bhāva, 自然), identity and purpose are like magical illusions. In transcending false speculations about them having such an existential nature, they are said to only be hypothetical and not really exist on their own. However, this dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) is not entirely without an existential nature.  
This is a reference to conditions that directly cause the arising of consciousness (hetu pratyaya, 因緣).
3. On the basis of the last one, *perfect comprehension*, there is said to be the absence of any existential nature of ultimate meaning (paramārtha niḥsvabhāvatā, 勝義無性). This is a reference to the fact that perfect comprehension of the ultimate meaning of all things is completely free from any clinging to entirely imagined speculations about its identity or purpose. Because of this, it is conventionally said that it does not exist. However, it is also not entirely without a real existence. Like the greatness of empty

space, although it is everywhere and contains the multitude of forms (viśva rūpa, 眾色), it is only revealed by the absence of any existential nature of its own that can be found among them.

Distinguishing between dependence on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) & Perfectly comprehending the transcendental nature of reality (pariniṣpanna, 圓成)

That which is dependent on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) is not the ultimate meaning of all things. In fact, it can also be said to represent the transcendence of any existential nature of an ultimate meaning. However, to avoid confusion, this twenty-fourth stanza does not speak about dependence on the arising of an 'other' in this way to distinguish it from perfect comprehension (pariniṣpanna, 圓成) of the transcendental nature.

The four levels in the ultimate meaning of reality (paramārtha satya, 勝義諦):

With there being the perfect comprehension (of the transcendental nature of reality), there is the ultimate meaning of all things because it is in reference to the truth about *their* ultimate meaning. This truth can be summarized as being on four levels:

1. *The ultimate meaning in terms of this world* (loka paramārtha, 世間勝義): This is a reference to the reality of the projections of purpose (skandhas, 蘊), the alignments of subject & object (āyatanas, 處), the spheres of consciousness (dhātus, 界), etc., that are revealed through introspective meditation.
2. *The ultimate meaning in terms of the principles of the noble path beyond this world* (yukti paramārtha, 道理勝義): This is a reference to the four truths of suffering, its origination, its transcendence and the noble path.
3. *The ultimate meaning in terms of its realization* (abhisambodhi paramārtha, 證得勝義): This is a reference to realization of the transcendental nature of reality (tathatā, 真如) and its two-fold nature of emptiness, that is, the empty nature of its identity (ātma śūnyatā, 我空) and the empty nature of its purpose (dharma śūnyatā, 法空).
4. *The ultimate meaning in terms of ultimate meaning* (paramārtha paramārtha, 勝義勝義): This is a reference to the inconceivable unity of the spiritual realm, the transcendental sphere of life's purpose (dharma dhātu, 法界).

Among these, this last aspect of ultimate meaning is a reference to perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature of reality (pariniṣpanna, 圓成) because:

1. It is about the ultimate meaning of the noble path being put into practice.
2. It is distinguished from the first three.

On this, the twenty-fifth stanza of verse says:

“With there being the ultimate meaning of all things (dharmāṇām paramārthaśca, 諸法勝義) there is also the suchness of the transcendental nature (tathatā, 是真如).”

- \* ‘Transcendental nature’ (真, tā) here is a reference to this perfect comprehension being absolutely real, without any falsehood.
- \* ‘Suchness’ (如, tathā) here refers to this perfect comprehension always being unchanging and just as-it-is. This means that the nature of this reality always remains unchanging and just as-it-is through all the different stages of spiritual development. This is why it is called ‘the suchness of the transcendental nature’. The meaning of this is profound and never false or baseless.

The word ‘also’ (api, 亦) in this stanza conveys that this perfect comprehension has many other names as well. This refers to such names as ‘the spiritual realm’ or ‘the transcendental sphere of life’s purpose’ (dharma dhātu, 法界), ‘the ultimate bounds of reality’ (bhūta koṭi, 實際), etc., as elaborated in other scriptures and discourses.

On there only being the virtual nature of consciousness (vijñapti matratā, 唯識)

Perfect comprehension (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實) entails there being ‘the reality of this transcendental nature’ (tathā bhāvāt, 實性) and only a virtual nature of consciousness (vijñapti mātṛatā, 唯識). This virtual nature has two aspects:

1. *That which is false* (vitathatā, 虛妄) is a reference to clinging to entirely imagined speculations (parikalpita, 遍計所執).
2. *The suchness of the transcendental nature* (tathatā, 真實) is a reference to a perfect comprehension (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成) of its reality (tathā bhāvāt, 實性).

The term ‘reality of this transcendental nature’ (tathā bhāvāt, 實性) in the verse is meant to exclude that which is false.

Furthermore, this real existential nature (svabhāva, 有性) is two-fold:

1. *In terms of that which is worldly and conventional* (saṃvṛti, 世俗) there is its dependence on the arising of an ‘other’ (paratantra, 依他起).
2. *In terms of its ultimate meaning* (paramārtha, 勝義) there is perfect comprehension of the transcendental nature (pariṇiṣpanna, 圓成實).

The term ‘reality of this transcendental nature’ (tathā bhāvāt, 實性) in the twenty-fifth stanza is also meant to exclude that which is worldly and conventional.

These three stanzas (twenty-three through twenty-five) generally explain the teachings in the scriptures about the absence of this three-fold existential nature in identity and purpose (their nature of emptiness) but do not reveal the complete meaning (nītārtha, 了義) of the transcendental nature of life’s purpose (bhūta tathatā, 真如). Those with wisdom should not rely on them literally and be careful in properly understanding what is meant by ‘the absence of an existential nature’ (niḥsvabhāvatā, 三無自性).

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Volume Nine