

On Realizing There is Only The Virtual Nature of Consciousness

Vijñapti Matratā Siddhi

成唯識論

Source text by Vasubandhu (天親)

Commentaries on it by Dharmapāla (護法) and others

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Dedicated to An Lạc

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The Conclusion On There Only Being the Virtual Nature of Consciousness

(vijñapti matratā, 唯識)

The imagined component of consciousness (nimitta bhāga, 相分) based on the manifestations of its various different configurations (vikurvaṇa, 變現) is unlike its real nature that is a perfect comprehension (pariṇiṣpanna svabhāva, 圓成實性) dependent on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他). If this were not so (and the imagined component was considered to be real on its own), the principle of there only being the virtual nature of consciousness would not be valid because it would mean that consciousness and its object had a real existence apart from one another.

Others express this by saying that the imagining and imagined components of consciousness both arise from conditions that directly cause consciousness (hetu pratyaya, 因緣), both depend on the arising of an 'other' (paratantra, 依他起) and both are only as real or false as the virtual nature of consciousness itself.

The term 'only' (matra, 唯) here is meant to dismiss a real, separate existence that is external to consciousness and based on speculations that are entirely imagined (parakalpita, 遍計所執). It is not intended to deny the real existence of the internal objects of consciousness (such as the imagining and imagined components of the mind). If this were not so, the word 'only' here would also dismiss the transcendental nature of life's purpose (bhūta tathatā, 真如) and it too would then be deemed to be unreal.

Question: If the inner objects of consciousness are not false, why is it said that there is only the virtual nature of consciousness but not, say, the virtual object of consciousness?

Answer: This is because:

- Consciousness is only internal while objects can be both internal and external. Lest external objects also be deemed to be real, the Buddha only spoke of there only being the virtual nature of consciousness.
- Some are foolish and mistakenly cling to external objects, bringing about actions (karmas, 諸業) that result in them being tainted by emotional disturbances (kleśas, 煩惱), causing them to sink further into the stream of life and death (saṃsāra, 生死). They do not vigorously (turn inward to) observe the mind in seeking the deliverance of spiritual freedom. Out of compassion for these sentient beings, the Buddha taught about there only being the virtual nature of consciousness (vijñapti matratā, 唯識) and exhorted them to look inside and observe their own hearts in order to attain this deliverance from attachments to life and death. This is a reference to the fact that these inner objects are not without an existential nature, unlike those that are external.
- Some (like Sthiramati) asserted that only the self-awareness (sva saṃvitti bhāga, 自證分) found in the imagining component of consciousness has a real existential nature and the various different components of consciousness only appear to arise through the power of conditioning (the power of perfuming - vāsanā bala, 熏習力).
- With the real existential nature of consciousness also being endowed with the transcendental nature of life's purpose (bhūta tathatā, 真如), there is no purpose that is distinguished apart from it.
- Consciousness here is also a reference to its mental states (caitta, 心所), because the mind and these states are necessarily associated with each other.

A Recap of this Discourse on Vasubandhu's Thirty Stanzas of Verse

This Discourse on Vasubandhu's Thirty Stanzas of Verse is organized into three parts.

One interpretation of this:

1. Stanzas 1 through 24 are on the characteristics found in the virtual nature of consciousness
2. Stanza 25 is on there only being the virtual nature of consciousness
3. Stanzas 26 through 30 are on the stages of putting this state of grace called 'there only being the virtual nature of consciousness' into practice.

A second interpretation:

1. Stanzas 1 through 2A are an introduction to the nature of identity, purpose & consciousness.
2. Stanzas 2B through 25 are an elaboration on the nature of identity, purpose & consciousness.
3. Stanzas 26 through 30 are on the noble path to realizing that there is only the virtual nature of consciousness.

Because it establishes that there is only the virtual nature of consciousness, it is entitled The Discourse on Realizing There is Only the Virtual Nature of Consciousness (*Vijñapti Matrātā Siddhi Śāstra*, 成唯識論). It is also called The Discourse on the Purity (Non-Afflicted Nature) of There Only Being the Virtual Nature of Consciousness (*Vijñapti Matrātā Viśuddhi*, 淨唯識) because it reveals the principle of there only being the virtual nature of consciousness with ultimate clarity and purity.

The source of this discourse is Vasubandhu's Thirty Stanzas on There Only Being the Virtual Nature of Consciousness (*Vijñapti Matrātā Trīṃśikā Kārikā*, 唯識三十頌) which perfectly reveals this principle in a mere thirty stanzas, no more and no less.

Concluding Prayer of Dedication

Having relied on the holy teachings and proper reasoning,
The nature and the characteristics found in there only being the virtual nature of
consciousness have now been distinguished.
May the merits found in this work be offered up to all living beings, and
May we all quickly ascend to the supreme awakening together.

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

Vijñapti Matrātā Siddhi Śāstra, 成唯識論

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