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A Buddhist Typology of Inherent Values

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A Buddhist Typology of Inherent Values

Eran Laish¹

Abstract

Intentions and actions are basic elements in Buddhist ethical models. Yet, how are the values of those decided? This article asserts that some of the inherent qualities of lived experience are the basic factors that determine the value of ethical motives and ethical behavior. The examination of Buddhist descriptions of lived experience reveals two complementary types of inherent values—values that accompany individual phenomena and values that indicate structural aspects of human consciousness. Both types manifest certain inherent possibilities of awareness that are necessary for the appearance of ethical values. The first kind of inherent values consists of distinct feelings and volitions, while the second kind includes dualistic and non-dualistic aspects of awareness. By considering these two kinds, it becomes possible to understand how ethical

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differences are based on distinctions between felt qualities, and how some of these qualities lead to the culmination of the Buddhist path—abiding in non-dual awareness without affective and cognitive afflictions.

Introduction

According to the Buddha, human lives are characterized by intentions (*cetanā*) that direct particular behaviors and actions (S. *karma*; P. *kamma*). The various intentions disclose the presence of diverse attitudes toward distinct phenomena. At the most basic level, intentions combine between desires to achieve certain phenomena, whether experiential, social, or physical, and wishes for discarding or avoiding others. Hence, all intentions necessarily include an element of valuation, which is expressed as the differentiation of phenomena from one another according to their worth in the particular context of the specific intention. Without such a differentiation, intentions lose their directive power, because they no longer include any inclination towards certain phenomena and not others. At the same time, even a brief examination of different intentions already reveals to us that valuations may greatly differ from one another up to the point of contradiction. However, they all share the basic quality of positioning phenomena on a specific continuum of worthiness or, better said, the positioning is the creation of such a continuum.

The presence of valuation in each intention is the base for the formation of encompassing values, which signify overarching preferences that extend beyond particular intentions, while being expressed through them. Consequently, when speaking about values we actually bring together several distinct elements—a basic preference that is the ground for different degrees of worthiness, an evaluation of particular

phenomena according to their inherent and external worth, and overall values that are shared by multiple intentions. Owing to the complex nature of values, we need to examine what determines preferences, degrees of worthiness, and evaluation of specific phenomena when considering how values of particular intentions and overarching values are shaped. In a Buddhist context this means that when we try to understand what constitutes the categories of wholesome (S. *kuśala*; P. *kusala*) and unwholesome (S. *akuśala*; P. *akusala*) intentions/values we need to clarify how the distinction between the two arises on the level of basic preferences and how their distinctive worthiness is determined and identified.

In what follows, I would like to argue that the Buddhist *Dharma* grounds its main ethical categories in the inherent values of experiential states and the general characteristics of Mind-itself (S. *cittatā*; T. *sems nyid*). By advocating this relation, it provides a shared basis, in the form of our (human) consciousness, for explaining the recurrence of different ethical attitudes in distinct times and places. Additionally, the relation reveals a common ground for evaluating the existential and soteriological implications of the various attitudes. Simultaneously, the Buddhist teachings are well aware of the conditioned arising of distinct ethical principles and views, which are expressed through particular social, cultural, and political contexts. Hence, they do not lack a historical perspective (although only an implicit or a pre-thematic one) that is able to explain broad ethical alterations, even if these ultimately stem from basic aspects of (human) consciousness and their numerous phenomenal expressions. Yet, before discussing these aspects and their inherent values, we need to examine how the assertion of the latter in several Buddhist descriptions of human consciousness is compatible with affirming an emptiness of self-nature.

Eidetic Nature and Emptiness

The lack of a subsisting self is a common motif in most, if not all, Buddhist traditions. However, the exact nature of this lack and its extension are matters of dispute between the different traditions. In brief, we can roughly divide the distinct views regarding the presence of self-nature (S. *svabhāva*; P. *sabhāva*) to two main groups, one that affirms it in the context of certain basic phenomena and another that perceives it as a conventional construction, which arise from misidentifying or misperceiving the true nature of phenomena. It is important to notice with regard to the first group that the precise phenomena that have a self-nature, as well as the characteristics of it, vary to a large degree from one view to another. For example, the Abhidharmic Sarvāstivāda asserts the self-nature of fundamental *dharma*s (Vasubandhu *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya* 206) while the proponents of “Other-nature” (T. *gZhan stong*) theories advocate the self-nature of liberated awareness while resisting the attribution of self-nature to other phenomena (Mathes 187). Nevertheless, although distinct from and even opposed to one another, the various views that form this group share an understanding that a sense of self-nature, in whatever dimension of being, is necessary for the dependent arising of phenomenal reality. That is to say, the mere arising of phenomenal reality inevitably manifests self-natures of distinct phenomena.

In contrast to the views that assert a self-nature of one sort or another, the views that deny it completely claim that phenomenal reality can be fully accounted for through the processes of “Dependent Arising” (S. *pratītyasamutpāda*; P. *paṭiccasamuppāda*). Perhaps the most noted example for this stance is found in Nāgārjuna’s “Verses of the Middle” (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), in which he argues “Dependent origination we declare to be emptiness. It [emptiness] is a dependent concept; just that is the middle path” (24.18, Nāgārjuna, Siderits, and Katsura). According

to this verse, the emptiness of all phenomena from a subsisting self-nature is equivalent to their dependent arising, which incorporates a plethora of causes and conditions. The different causal factors apply to both spatial and temporal dimensions. For example, the mutual relation between parts and whole occurs in a single moment but within distinct spatial resolutions, while the classic relation of cause and result happens in different temporal moments yet in a single spatial location, at least in some of the cases.

Although distinct in their exact type of dependency, the different relations that comprise the overarching category of “Dependent Arising” are based on a basic presupposition—they all take as granted the occurrence of individual phenomena that are qualitatively distinct from one another.² Without the individual phenomena already intuitively given, it is not possible to even consider the presence of a relation, because there are no distinct phenomena that can come into relation. At this point, one can claim that this presupposition is necessary only as long as we affirm relations. However, even if we claim that all relations are in themselves empty of a self-nature, as is done by many Madhyamaka proponents, the presupposition still stands, as there is still the occurrence of immediate/atemporal elements of lived experience. Without these elements it would not have been possible even to utter the view that all phenomena are dependently arisen and empty of a subsisting self-nature, because there would not be any difference that enables meaning. That is to say, the very act of asserting a denial of self-nature is an evidence for the intuitive presence of distinct experiential elements.

As just noted, the assertion of an emptiness that totally excludes self-nature is inconsistent, due to its implicit presupposition of individu-

² A concise and accessible description of the three main relations of dependent arising is found in Cummiskey and Hamilton 7–16.

al phenomena that are essential for the very claim of dependent arising. Nevertheless, even when admitting the necessity of individual phenomena that are distinct from one another, we still lack a precise account of these phenomena, such that they withstand the correct critiques of those who claim that all phenomena are dependently arising. Quite naturally, we cannot return to a naïve conception of individual existence that is based on temporal extension and spatial cohesiveness as these are indeed refuted in an extensive manner by the proponents of pervasive emptiness. Instead, we need to provide a description of a mode of being that retains individuality while surpassing temporality and spatiality.

The primacy of lived experience in the Buddhist accounts of reality directs us to the realm in which the description of such a mode of being is to be found. The affirmation of such a primacy, which is implicit in early treatises and fully explicit in later traditions, most notably the various Yogācāra strands, is based on the immediate observation that the entire range of human reality, subjective and objective alike, is given in the realm of lived experience (Lusthaus 1; Coseru 291). In other words, what is usually conceived as experiential/subjective and what is commonly accepted as material/objective appear as elements of lived experience before they are conceptualized as independent realms of being. Owing to the primacy of experience, it is only reasonable that we examine the exact characteristics of lived experience for the sake of understanding the original qualities of phenomena.

Additionally, because ethical and other kinds of human values are dependent phenomena just like other objects of perception and conception, the examination of lived experience can reveal the origins of their distinctive characters and the sources for their approval or disapproval. Put differently, the examination of lived experience can reveal what gives values their value—what provides them a changing degree of importance and makes them meaningful. For example, in a Buddhist con-

text, we can examine the experiential qualities that accompany leading ethical models, such as virtue ethics (Keown), in order to find out the inherent values that give the ethical perfections (S. *pāramitā*; P. *pāramī*) their basic importance.

As their name already indicates, the basic quality of all experiences is their experiential manifestation. Yet, what do experiences manifest? This question is crucial for understanding the being-ness of experiences, because it directs our attention to the primordial sources of experience. On a first look, it seems that the answer to this question is quite straightforward—experiences manifest perceptual and conceptual objects that arise in individual mind-streams. This answer forms the ground for theories of representation, as it enables us to assert that experiences reveal objects, which exist in a world that is distinct from it.

However, even if we accept such a claim, and most certainly if we suspend or deny it completely, the presence of experiences cannot be fully accounted for by relating it to non-experiential objects.³ The basic reason for this inability is that experiences *are* experiences and, as such, they present qualities of experience and not qualities of objects. These qualities were referred to by Edmund Husserl as “Eidetic” qualities, because they indicate the essential qualities of phenomena without which they are no longer themselves (Husserl *General* 7; Zahavi 38). At the same time, these qualities actually determine the being-ness of different types of objects as given in human consciousness, because they are from a strict perspective the only qualities that are intuitively known (Husserl *Crisis* 112). In this sense, the qualities do not construct a solipsistic and

³ The clearest example for investigating lived experience without trying to determine the ontological status of experiential objects is the work of Edmund Husserl, who is considered the founder of the phenomenological approach.

isolated world, but rather they constitute the various realms of human life that are shared by all of us.

Even though the experiential/intuitive qualities are primordial, consciousness tends to overlook their original necessity and instead leaps to the manifested objects of experience, because it is so used to the experiential medium to the point that it becomes transparent. Owing to this double-ness, a penetrating examination of experience asserts two intertwining realms of being; on the one hand, the possible experiential qualities of manifesting awareness and, on the other hand, the different characteristics of their respective objects, which comprise the numerous human worlds, such as the mental and the physical ones. For example, when considering a perceptual object, we can examine it through its experiential characteristics, which indicate eidetic possibilities of manifested awareness, or we can investigate it as the actual presentation of an external object. At the same time, it is imperative to acknowledge the primacy of the first mode of examination, because it does not depend on the real existence of the object, while the second mode cannot be considered without an experiential manifestation (of itself or of other phenomena from which its existence is assumed, i.e., elementary particles, submicroscopic being, and so forth).

The primacy of experiential features suggests an authentic mode of being that is not confined to the causal continuum of a spatio-temporal reality. Unlike the individual phenomena that arise within a space that is characterized by spatial distinction and temporal gradations, the experiential features appear in a spontaneous manner as immediate expressions of awareness. Yet, these features constitute together the individual phenomena and, hence, they are conceived as being part of the causal chain. For example, when perceiving a landscape, we may claim that the experiential sight is the result of the eyes looking at the physical site when it is bright enough to see. In a certain sense this is

indeed a correct description, but it does not address the origin of the experiential qualities in themselves. The reason for this is that the experiential qualities of color, hue, and even shape manifest eidetic possibilities of awareness. Consequently, the qualities can be considered through two complementary perspectives—as elements of experiential phenomena that arise due to particular causes and conditions and as actual manifestations of the eidetic possibilities of awareness. The first perspective signifies a mode of being that is grounded in the occurrence of individual phenomena that are spatially and temporally related, while the second perspective marks a mode of being in which actual qualities of experience manifest essential possibilities of awareness. Therefore, it is possible to claim that while the occurrence of individual phenomena is a result of causes and conditions, their experiential qualities express trans-temporal possibilities of manifested awareness.

The realm of experiential qualities is usually referred to as the sphere of *qualia* (Tye) because it consists of the numerous felt aspects of experience, most notably experiential features of the senses including the mental one. Yet, it is crucial to notice that in the context of this paper, these aspects are not viewed as (general) objects to be known, but as the intuitive elements that form together the appearance of perceptual and conceptual objects.⁴ In a manner similar to the necessity of these

⁴ In this sense, Garfield (206) is right to claim that when *qualia* are considered as objects of perception it is difficult to justify their self-existence. However, when approached through their immediate felt presence, they are revealed as the necessary intuitive aspects of all perceptions/conceptions. That is to say, it is not possible to perceive without an intuitive presence of certain *qualias*. At the same time, consciousness does not perceive the distinct *qualias*, but the objects that are disclosed by their intuitive appearance. Put differently, *qualias* are intuitively essential for any form of phenomenal life as its inherent elements, and not as subsisting and distinct objects of perception. As such, they are neither true nor false, neither correct nor incorrect, because they are the

elements for the occurrence of perceptions, conceptions, affections, and so on, the different values that characterize these phenomena need to have a felt presence. The status of experiential qualities in general, and values in particular, as actual manifestations of eidetic possibilities indicates their double mode of being—the basic units from which phenomenal reality is constructed and the realized elements of awareness. If we consider the different kinds of value in the light of this double mode, we find out that values are not only qualities of phenomena, but also felt aspects of awareness. That is to say, the values in their most basic form present possible features of manifested awareness as much as they refer to specific phenomena. Moreover, it would not be unreasonable to claim that the fundamental form of values solely presents potential shapes of awareness, because we cannot find any discrete phenomenon that is completely unchanging in its accompanying values. Thus, values are not intrinsic to individual phenomena but they are inherent to the distinct potentials of awareness that they actualize in their felt manifestation.

However, this basic inherence is most often disregarded and, instead, values are perceived through their relation to specific objects, behavioral patterns, and so forth. Once we recognize the values within the manifested contents of awareness, we are able to comprehend that values, at their base, express inherent possibilities of awareness on which the relation with individual phenomena is established. Consequently, although the eidetic qualities of inherent values are trans-temporal, their relative worth/importance when assessed in individual contexts can fluctuate. As such, they cannot be described as intrinsic, in the sense of characterizing individual phenomena in an absolutely unchanging manner. For example, the inherent values of *jhānic* states mark beneficial qualities, yet their exact degree can change with the unfolding of

intuitive elements that constitute the objects that are to be judged according to these categories.

what is considered a higher state. That is to say, the inherent value of each jhānic state is essential for characterizing it as beneficial, but the precise worth of each value is decided by its position in a matrix of relations with other states.⁵

As we will show later on, the realm of experiential presence also encompasses general aspects of awareness that serve as the transcendental background for the arising of individual experiences. These aspects carry their own felt values and, as such, they manifest a second dimension of values that is present along with the dimension of individual values. Given the fundamental role of these two dimensions of felt values in differentiating phenomena and establishing their worth, it is essential to ask whether they are described within the various Buddhist accounts of consciousness and its experiential contents. If this is indeed the case, then what is their exact nature and what are their main types of value?

Inherent Values of Temporal Experiences

Values in their more encompassing form indicate differences between individual phenomena that consist of affective and conative qualities, at the very least. Thus, when looking for the origins of values, we need to find the experiential aspects that enable such differences. Although experiential phenomena are distinct from one another due to their mere recognition, not all distinctions are necessarily value-laden. For example, sensual contents may lack a noticeable value, unless they are associ-

⁵ By differentiating between inherent and intrinsic values we are able to transcend the usual division into intrinsic and extrinsic values (Korsgaard; Cumiskey and Hamilton), due to the change of focus from the qualities of individual phenomena to the eidetic possibilities of human awareness.

ated with favored or un-favored experiences or with a repeated preference in the psycho-physical complex. Because not all experiential distinctions entail differences in value, we should first of all discern the experiential elements that carry inherent values and serve as the basis for values with a broader extension. In order to identify these elements, we have to examine the various models of (human) consciousness that were introduced by different Buddhist traditions.

Early Buddhist Descriptions of Consciousness

To begin with, the early Buddhist descriptions of consciousness focused on its temporal being and the incessant alterations of its contents.⁶ According to these descriptions consciousness consists of six complementary areas of experience: eye-, ear-, nose-, tongue-, body- and mind-consciousness. The first five types of consciousness encompass what we usually refer to as sensual consciousness, while the sixth type includes mental phenomena, such as intentional attitudes, thoughts, motivations, and so on. Even though the different types of consciousness are distinguished by their particular contents, they share a mode of temporal dynamism. That is to say, all of them are characterized by incessant changes of individual contents, which undermine any attempt to attribute a permanent identity to a single phenomenal being/complex. Although the distinct contents of each type of consciousness change from moment to moment, they can carry stable values, such that we come to prefer certain contents over others. Yet, for the sake of revealing which factors ensure the value of phenomenal contents, we need to consider a com-

⁶ For a lucid examination of the early Buddhist descriptions of human consciousness, see Hamilton.

plementary account of those—the five aggregates (S. *skandha*; P. *khandha*).

The division of the human psycho-physical complex into five aggregates is meant to provide an exhaustive account of phenomenal life, in their material, cognitive, affective and conative aspects. The five aggregates are form (*rūpa*), feeling (*vedanā*), perception (S. *saṃjñā*; P. *saññā*), volition (S. *saṃskāra*; P. *saṅkhāra*) and consciousness (S. *viññāna*; P. *viññāṇa*). The aggregate of form encompasses the corporeal beings that are comprised of the four great elements. These beings function as the objects of the various kinds of sensual consciousness. The other four aggregates signify the non-corporeal aspects of human consciousness, including the perceptions of objects, their evaluation, the possible intentional attitudes towards them and the intending element of consciousness itself. Because the aggregate of form is solely concerned with the material characteristics of sensual objects (or, at least, what appears in consciousness as material), it is quite reasonable to claim that the values of beings arise in the domain of the other four aggregates. When examining the descriptions of those, we can identify two aggregates that are likely candidates for serving as the sources of value—feeling and volition.

First, feelings mark the multiple degrees of pleasantness, painfulness, and neutrality (neither-painful-nor-pleasant) that characterize mind-states (SN IV.240, Bhikkhu Bodhi 1260). The feelings are also divided by their main experiential field, such that there are pleasant and painful bodily feelings, mental feelings of joy and displeasure, and either bodily or mental feeling of equanimity that signify the quality of neutrality (SN V.210, Bhikkhu Bodhi 1681).

The division into bodily and mental feelings is paramount for delineating the difference between the feelings of ordinary/uninstructed and noble persons. While ordinary persons experience both bodily and

mental feelings due to not knowing the impermanent nature of phenomena, noble persons experience only bodily feelings because they do not nurture mental feelings by becoming attached or aversive to the somatic expressions of feeling (MN III.217-219, Bhikkhu Bodhi and Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli 1067-1069; SN V.209-210, Bhikkhu Bodhi 1264-1265). However, it should be noted that the lack of mental feelings in the case of the noble person applies to those that arise from sense contact and not to those that are integral elements of jhānic states, because the latter leave experiential impressions in the consciousness of the noble person (Hamilton 48-50). Therefore, we have to acknowledge that the range of mental feelings includes more than the feelings of ordinary persons, because it also encompasses jhānic qualities, most notably joy. Thanks to the rich classification of feelings, which was only partially described here, we can recognize the wide range of possible feelings that is more nuanced than a simple division into the general categories of pleasant and unpleasant. Therefore, when considering the feelings as the experiential roots of values, we should acknowledge the numerous possibilities that the former offer for differentiating individual experiences, as well as structural aspects of consciousness.

According to Buddhist accounts, the pleasant and/or joyful *are* desired by most individual consciousness, the painful and/or unpleasant *are* turned away from, and the neutral *is* without any apparent value. That is to say, feelings fulfill by their very nature the basic requirement from values, which is the capacity to provide phenomena with distinct degrees of worthiness. Thus, the distinct feelings are already value-laden or, better said, their experiential appearance manifests basic values. For example, pleasant feelings draw consciousness by their very pleasantness and not because of a separate judgment, even if such a judgment later appears and supports the worthiness of the feeling. Consequently, the pleasant feelings entail the (immediate) desirability of the mind-state of which they are part. At the same time, the pleasantness of indi-

vidual mind-states does not determine on its own their conclusive value or desirability, because there are other factors that take part in shaping it, including the feeling tones of related states and the feeling tone of comparative states. As an illustration for the first factor, we may consider a pleasant mind-state that regularly leads to unpleasant states, thus making it less valuable, and as for the second factor we can think about a mind-state whose quality of pleasantness is inferior to the quality of other achievable states, hence its value is diminished.

Although feelings are, in a strict manner, a quality of mind-states, they are related to external phenomena and once their association is stable enough they are experienced as properties of the objects. Furthermore, since humans share similar embodied apparatuses of sense-organs, patterns of cognition, and types of affections, as well as collective life-worlds, the association of felt values with external objects can become a topic of common agreement in the public sphere. Put differently, our shared embodied apparatuses and life-worlds assure that most of us will experience similar felt values concerning comparable phenomena. This similarity guarantees a possible wide-scale acceptance of certain beliefs, dogmas, and views, in a synchronic and diachronic manner alike. As such, the factual broad acceptance of certain views can be grounded in (parts of) our human nature, because only a shared nature can explain the very possibility of affirming any belief in an enduring manner.

As a complementary element to feelings, volition indicates the different intentional attitudes of consciousness towards its sensual and mental objects, including desire, judgment, appreciation, and so forth (SN III.66, Bhikkhu Bodhi 896). These attitudes arise as an intersection between basic experiential elements and dynamic processes of karmic accumulation (Hamilton 72). That is to say, the volitions function as the linkage between two dimensions of value; on the one hand, inherent

values of manifested awareness (in the form of feelings) and, on the other hand, constructed values, which arise through temporal-associative processes that contextualize the inherent values in unique histories, both personal and collective. As such, the volitions construct the personal values of human individuals, which are based on the inherent qualities of feelings, but also involve the idiosyncratic history and current state of each individual. In this sense, we may claim that the volitions are crucial in turning inherent values of lived experience to personal values that direct human judgments and human actions, as well as collective rules, laws, customs, and so on.

Although playing a fundamental role in contextualizing the inherent values of feeling, we can still ask whether the volitions in themselves carry inherent values or are they only the elements that condition the specific identity of inherent values in human individuals. Perhaps the most compelling reason to affirm inherent values for volitions is entailed by the distinction between worldly phenomena, which are conditioned by the volitional formations, and the state of liberation that is unconditioned (SN I.136, Bhikkhu Bodhi 231; AN I.133, Bhikkhu Bodhi *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* 229).

That is to say, the difference between a life of dis-ease and a life of freedom is whether or not the volitions are present, both as an active factor and as conditioned patterns of reactivity, interpretation, and so forth (Bhikkhu Bodhi *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* 45–47). As such, it seems that volitions are central in determining the basic experiential tone of individual life. At the same time, it is necessary to distinguish between the basic inherent value of volitions, which involve dis-ease, and particular values that can span both beneficial and unbeneficial qualities. For example, a practitioner may desire to attain the state of liberation and through it he might experience aspiration, resolve, and other uplifting qualities of mind. However, the desire in itself is an ob-

stacle to the complete attainment of liberation and, thus, its basic value is still problematic (Hamilton 76). In this sense, we can discern two dimensions of inherent values; on the one hand, inherent values of individual qualities of experience and, on the other hand, inherent values that manifest structural aspects of human awareness.

The Yogācāra Model of Consciousness

The early Buddhist model of momentary phenomena encounters several fundamental difficulties in the face of temporal continuity and karmic causality (Waldron 55–57). In brief, if we accept the assertion regarding a momentary mode-of-being, it becomes quite difficult to explain other Buddhist tenets, such as the continuous chain of karmic causality, states of deep absorption after which personal consciousness is regained, and the transference of individuality from one life-form to another. For the sake of reconciling the diverse principles, various Buddhist traditions have proposed distinct models of human being that try to account for the simultaneity of momentary existence and temporal extension (Waldron 70–85).

Among those, the model proposed by the Yogācāra added two types of consciousness to the accepted six—the ground consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and the afflicted mind/mentation (*kliṣṭa-manas*). As its name indicates, the ground consciousness serves as the base for the continued fruition of karmic seeds within a single stream of individual mind.⁷ Thus, this consciousness contains contents whose fruition can carry favorable and unfavorable inherent values alike. At the same time, the reversal of this consciousness (*āśraya-paravṛtti*) during the attain-

⁷ A detailed analysis of this kind of consciousness is provided by Lusthaus, Schmithausen, and Waldron.

ment of liberation indicates another dimension of inherent values, because without such a dimension there is no reason to assume that the ground consciousness has to be transformed for the sake of achieving freedom. This dimension can be referred to as the dimension of structural aspects of human consciousness, on account of its inclusion of general facets of consciousness that are shared by individual moments of experience. Yet, due to its subtle or background presence in the actual mind-stream, the inherent values of this dimension in general, and those of the ground consciousness in particular, are difficult to recognize (Schmithausen 93). Therefore, they become evident only once awareness gains a certain level of clarity and peacefulness, because then the more noticeable inherent values of individual experiences are somewhat pacified.

According to the canonical Yogācāra accounts, the afflicted mind signifies the deluded perception of the ground consciousness as an independent self (Xuanzang and Vasubandhu 129). In other words, this consciousness has the ground consciousness as its object of perception, and owing to the stable nature of the latter it perceives it as the core self of the individual. As such, the afflicted mind marks the basic principle of pollution (*saṃkleśa*), which is the grasping at a self (Schmithausen 152). The afflicted mind is also associated with four afflictive states that take the supposedly core self as their object—view of self (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*), delusion about self (*ātma-moha*), self conceit (*ātma-māna*), and self-love (*ātma-sneha*)⁸ (Vasubandhu “Triṃśikākārikā” 6; Xuanzang and Vasubandhu 131). While the basic act of perceiving the ground consciousness by

⁸ I’ve followed in this paper the translation suggested by Dan Lusthaus (280) and Francis H. Cook (Xuanzang and Vasubandhu 131), although the literal translations of *sneha* according to the Monier-Williams dictionary are somewhat different, and include “oiliness,” “attachment to,” and “fondness or affection for.” I would like to thank Oren Hanner for informing me about the possible meanings of this term.

the afflicted mind is morally undetermined, the four afflictive states pollute the stream of experience by their very nature (Asaṅga 15–16; Xuanzang and Vasubandhu 131). That is not to say that the afflicted mind is not problematical in itself; the mere grasping of an “I,” regardless of the specific contents of the experiential state, introduces a subtle condition of dis-ease (Asaṅga 15; Xuanzang and Vasubandhu 130, 150).⁹ In other words, even the most subtle grasping of an “I” is inherently problematic, and thus it should be transmuted along with the grosser states of self-attachment, self-love, self-pride, and so on.

The distinction between the afflicted mind and its accompanying states demonstrates, once again, the different dimensions of inherent values, because it separates the subtle intentionality of the afflicted mind from the more palpable presence of the four afflictive states. Owing to its subtle presence, the afflicted mind does not necessarily lead to unfavorable intentions, unlike the four states. However, by its very constitution of a core “I” the afflicted mind carries an inherent value of subtle dissatisfaction. This sense of “I” is present within all states of *saṃsāra* or, better said, it is the basic condition for their manifestation. In this respect, the afflicted mind is qualitatively different from its associated states; it is present as a structural dimension that pervades all *saṃsāric* mind-states while they manifest as individual phenomena, which actualize distinct attitudes towards the intended “I.” Finally, because the afflicted mind can go through a transmutation of its own, which manifests

⁹ The problem in experiencing the notion of “I,” even without identifying it with individual phenomena, is already recognized in the early suttas (SN III.126-130, Bhikkhu Bodhi *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* 942–944). The early distinction between the five aggregates and the notion of “I” already indicates that the basic constitution of an “I” cannot be reduced to those. Thus, this distinction can be viewed as a precursor for adding a distinct kind of consciousness, whose function is to constitute a sense of a core “I.” Furthermore, the distinction indicates the inherent problematic of a sense of intended “I,” even when it is no longer identified with any phenomenal element.

by perceiving an absence of “I,” it is possible to claim that mentation-as-such is not inherently problematic (Xuanzang and Vasubandhu 130). Only when it is based on intending the ground consciousness as “I” does it acquire its unfavorable presence. In other words, when structural inherent values are purified the individual unfavorable values go through a radical transformation and lose their harmful tone.

The Inherent Values of Liberated Awareness

The inherent values that have been discussed characterize either individual phenomena or structural elements of a dualistic consciousness. However, because many of the Buddhist visions of liberation, if not all, identify it with a mode of non-duality, we may rightfully ask whether there is another set of inherent values that typify such a mode.¹⁰ Owing to the clear advocacy of a liberated awareness by these visions, it is only reasonable to accept that such a set of inherent values is potentially accessible. Without it there is no sense in initiating a process of transformation through contemplative exercises and ethical commitments, because there is no difference in the inherent values of a dualistic consciousness that is conditioned and a non-dual awareness that is unconditioned. Yet, what is the precise nature of these inherent values and how do they relate to the inherent values that are associated with dualistic consciousness, if at all?

Due to the emphasis on transcending the duality of perceiving subject and perceived objects when describing the state of liberation, it

¹⁰ The identification of liberation with a state of non-dual awareness appears already in the early suttas (Arbel; Harvey). The various traditions of the “Great Vehicle” (Mahāyāna) expanded the early visions of non-duality, and based their entire soteriological horizon on them (Gómez; Loy).

is obvious that the inherent values that are elements of this state do not refer to individual phenomena. If this were the case, the state of liberation would become another individual phenomenon within dualistic consciousness, not a radical alteration of its basic structure. Furthermore, if the state of liberation were an individual phenomenon, it would exclude other individual phenomena from occurring. However, according to the non-dual visions of the “Great Vehicle” (Mahāyāna) the state of liberation and the state of temporal becoming are interfused and not separate. Hence, the former state cannot be considered as a special phenomenon that still appears in the experiential structure of the latter state. Instead, we need to regard the state of liberation as manifesting novel structural characteristics. By adopting such a perspective we might also explain several basic questions concerning the mere possibility of an unconditioned state of liberation, such as: (1) how a transition from a temporal to a permanent mode of experience is possible without reverting to a causal account that defies the unconditioned status of the latter; and (2) how we know that the experience of liberation is indeed permanent, in the sense of extending indefinitely without change.¹¹

The examination of the structural aspects of human consciousness demands a turning of our gaze to what is usually transparent to us, because these aspects comprise the experiential medium through which and in which we live. As such, the structural aspects of human awareness are shared by all experiential moments, irrespective of their particular phenomenal content. One group of these aspects has been briefly discussed when considering the Yogācāra model of consciousness. Nevertheless, as already clear from asserting the possibility of fundamentally reversing the ground consciousness and the afflicted mind, the state of

¹¹ These questions also apply to descriptions of the liberated state that appear in the suttas (Ajahn Pasanno and Ajahn Amaro 26–31). As such, they may also benefit from a non-dual perspective, but that is an issue for a future inquiry.

liberation is characterized by a distinct array of structural qualities. At the heart of this array lies the principle of non-duality, which asserts that the liberated mode and the mode of temporal becoming are not distinct in their actual presence, even if they can be distinguished for analytical purposes.

In order to recognize the aspects through which such a non-dual presence manifests as an actual felt experience, we can look at the Tibetan non-dual tradition “The Great Perfection” (*rDzogs pa chen po*), which provides an elaborate account of non-dual awareness (Guenther *Meditation*; Higgins). According to the most prevalent strand of this tradition—the “Instruction Section” (*Man ngag sde*)—the authentic nature of awareness, which is shared by Buddhas and unenlightened human beings, includes three general characteristics—the open space of awareness, the shining manifestation of individual phenomena, and their inter-relatedness in the wholeness of awareness (Guenther *Matrix*; Thondup). By exploring these three aspects it becomes possible to understand how the inherent values of an authentic liberated awareness are subtly present in the background of our everyday consciousness, and how they do not exclude other kinds of inherent values, but rather embrace them and even serve as their basic conditions of possibility.

First, space signifies, in this context, the intuitive sense of spaciousness and openness that precedes the perception of a physical space, which is divided between an embodied subject and corporeal objects. As such, the primordial sense of space endures whether sensual perceptions appear or not. Likewise, it remains throughout distinct experiences of embodied dimensionality, such as changes in the perceived size of the body, distinct tactile sensations, differing locations of cognitive/affective acts, and so on. Because this original sense of space envelops all manifested phenomena without being bound by any, it is beyond spatial directionality and temporal alterations. At the same time, it is

most often covered by the gross distinction between a center of embodied presence and a periphery of objectified phenomena. This distinction manifests as an attitude of “Clinging” (*Upādāna*), which is the fundamental element in the constitution of an enclosed subject which overshadows the intuitive sense of an unbounded space (Fink 18). In this sense, the disparaged value of clinging is due to its covering of the authentic openness of awareness. That is to say, the felt inherent value of clinging arises from its experiential covering of what is truly intrinsic to the nature of awareness. Owing to the covering, we do not recognize the true nature of awareness and we keep on living in a state of incessant change, which has a subtle inherent tone of dis-ease. Nevertheless, the sense of unbounded openness is at the edges of daily consciousness, and it provides an underlying intuition about the insubstantial nature of subjective and objective identities.

Second, the event of individual manifestation is the basic occurrence that is shared by all phenomena, regardless of their differing qualities. This event takes place through the inherent values of individual phenomena, together with other phenomenal qualities, but it is not limited to any of these values. The reason for this is that the event in its shining-forth immediacy has an inherent value of its own, which may be (partially) described as a sense of vitality and clarity. Therefore, this kind of value can be disclosed even in the context of individual phenomena with painful or unpleasant inherent values, including afflictive emotions and obsessive thoughts. That is to say, although the specific content of an experience may be deemed as unpleasant, morally reprehensible, and so forth, its basic quality of clear manifestation is in itself vital and enlivening. The recognition of this basic quality is one of the main principles of Tantric practice, which enables a direct access to the general dimension of awareness and it is widely endorsed in “The Great Perfection” as the most excellent method to recognize the authentic nature of phenomena as shining manifestations.

Third, the wholeness of awareness signifies the basic unity of individual phenomena within a single space. Even though phenomena are distinct in their individual characteristics—cognitive, affective or material, internal or external, and so on—they always arise in a unified space of awareness. The same goes to the realms of subject and object, which form a duality that is possible only because both are discrete elements within a single embracing field.¹² As noted, the unity does not imply lack of experiential differences. Rather, it indicates that all phenomena arise as an element within a comprehensive whole. Without the underlying wholeness all spatial and temporal perspectives would not be possible, because there is no unifying ground that brings together individual manifestations. Thanks to its unitary nature, the basic wholeness reveals itself through the attitude of compassion, which actually marks the recognition of inter-connectedness that culminates in care and wish for well-being. That is to say, the wholeness of awareness is the authentic nucleus of compassion, which saturates human life with an intrinsic sense of meaning and purpose. Consequently, when human consciousness is separated from actual compassion, such as in the case of continuous competition or hostility, it loses sight of its authentic inherent value. In order to compensate for this loss, it seeks inherent values of individu-

¹² By differentiating the primordial field of experience and the subjective center that is part of the subject-object duality, we are able to offer a novel meaning for “Subjectivity” (S. *ātman*; T. *bDag nyid*), which is not to be conflated with the common meaning that opposes it to a realm of objects. Such a meaning also enables us to explain how a conscious subjective center arises as an enclosed embodied “I” who experiences objects, because it reveals the primordial nature of experience before a division into a subjective center and peripheral objects (Laish 13). Therefore, the distinction between “Subjectivity” and “Subject” allows a more nuanced presentation of the former (unlike the one offered, for example, by Garfield [209–210]), without the danger of ignoring the intuitive necessity of lived experience for any account of (human) reality, whether mental or physical.

al phenomena, yet those cannot fully offset for the actual absence of its basic wholeness.

The uninterrupted presence of the three basic aspects of human awareness compels us to ask why is it that their inherent values are not experienced in a continuous manner as well. Put differently, why is it that only a liberated awareness is saturated by these values, and not the consciousness of all individuals? The essential reason for this is that although the three aspects are the basic intuitive elements of each experiential moment, they are not recognized in their pure nature by most of us, due to their subtle presence as the background of individual experiences. As such, their inherent values are overshadowed by those of individual phenomena or by the felt tones of dualistic aspects, which are encouraged through ingrained habits, group identities, consumerist indoctrination, and so forth. Yet, once the authentic non-dual aspects of (human) awareness are directly recognized, their inherent values are immediately appreciated, and these values manifest the ease, clarity, and care of liberation.

The covering of the non-dual structural aspects of awareness by individual phenomena may give the impression that the latter are somehow disconnected from the former and, as such, are able to exclude it from self-recognition. However, as is well evident in non-dual views, this is actually not the case. Rather, individual phenomena express the basic qualities of awareness, and their inherent values are aligned with them. That is to say, the inherent values of individual phenomena disclose the degree of alignment between them and the basic aspects of human awareness. An example that was already mentioned is the problematical value of clinging, owing to its incompatibility with the unbounded openness of awareness and its original wholeness.

At the same time, many phenomena have complex relations with the authentic aspects, such that they may be aligned with some while

opposing others. In these cases, it is certainly possible that the inherent values of those phenomena will manifest in an ambiguous manner, because they clearly express certain aspects while negating others. If we examine our modern culture, we can claim that the emphasis on creativity, entrepreneurship, and competition expresses quite well the qualities of clarity, spontaneity, and, to some degree, openness, while opposing wholeness and restfulness. Hence, such a culture nourishes inherent values that are characterized by sharpness, vitality, concentration, and immediacy, but lack a proper balance with compassion, peacefulness, and spaciousness.

Finally, the grounding of individual phenomena in the non-dual structural aspects raises a fundamental question about the relation between the inherent values that are commonly perceived as negative/unwholesome/bad and the authentic nature of awareness. If this nature is indeed the primal origin for beneficial inherent values, how is it possible that it also includes unbeneficial values as potential eidetic qualities of felt experience? In other words, how is it that the authentic nature of awareness, whose self-recognition actualizes the perfection of human life, is also the source for destructive values on the primordial level of felt experience?

Conclusion

The presence of values in human lives indicates conscious differences, because only through these can distinct degrees of importance and preference arise. Therefore, in order to comprehend the nature of values we have to examine those differences as they are disclosed in felt experience. The Buddhist models of human consciousness indeed present several groups of differences that give values their experiential value. The first group is the one that addresses individual phenomena in their mo-

mentary presence. The two main constituents of this group are feelings and volitions, which carry their own inherent values that manifest potential qualities of awareness. That is to say, the different sets of values, including ethical and moral ones, are grounded in felt qualities that actualize inherent phenomenal possibilities of (human) awareness.

The second group of differences consists of structural aspects that are present as the general characteristics of lived experience. In other words, these aspects serve as the background qualities of consciousness and they pervade the distinct experiential moments. The main division in this group is between aspects of dualistic and non-dualistic modes of awareness. The clearest aspect of dualistic awareness is clinging, whose very occurrence is the arising of separated perceiver and perceived. Although aspects of dualistic consciousness seem fundamental to most of us, they are actually only derivatives of a non-dual primordial awareness according to numerous Buddhist traditions. In the main strand of “The Great Perfection,” a Tibetan non-dual tradition, this mode of awareness is characterized by three basic aspects—the open space of awareness, the shining manifestation of individual phenomena, and their inter-relatedness in the wholeness of awareness.

Owing to their primal nature, the non-dual aspects are the original determinants of all other inherent values. Consequently, we can better understand why the structural aspects of dualistic consciousness carry problematical inherent values, as is so often described in Buddhist treatises. These aspects cover the open, spontaneous, and whole-some nature of primordial awareness and, as such, they *are* (characterized by) subtle dis-ease and friction. At the same time, their experiential presence is one possible mode of manifested awareness, just like the mode of non-dual awareness. In this sense, it is possible to claim that the inherent values of awareness manifest in a way that provides us direction toward a self-recognized realization of our authentic nature. This observa-

tion has profound effects on our understanding of different ethical visions and their underlying origins of meaning, but that is a topic for another discussion.

Abbreviations

AN *Āṅguttara Nikāya*

MN *Majjhima Nikāya*

SN *Saṃyutta Nikāya*

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