



Intentional Features of Consciousness in Phenomenology and Shingon Buddhism

Angelique Coralie Kendall

Fundamental commitments in Western Phenomenology rest on the assumption that subjectivity and intentionality are unassailable features of conscious experience. The dyadic, subject-object structure of experience that results, is thus a necessary condition for conscious awareness. In sharp contrast, Buddhist thought emphasises the fundamental error of subjective and intentional modes of awareness, emphasising instead non-dyadic conscious states. In the Japanese Shingon Buddhist philosophy of Kūkai, such non-dyadic awareness is metaphysically construed as the ontological horizon of the field of consciousness-as-such, interpenetrating all phenomena. The embodied state is highlighted as the means through which such awareness is realised. This paper explores these two perspectives with two questions in mind: how can an enlightened person experience non-dyadic states, and how can they act in the world without subjective agency?

Keywords: Embodiment, Phenomenology, Intentionality, Buddhist Philosophy, Kūkai

Western Phenomenology gives a rich account of the subject / object, or dyadic structure of conscious experience, but does not develop the possibility of non-dyadic conscious states since its commitments to subjectivity and intentionality obviate that possibility. Buddhist thought holds the view that enlightened consciousness is non-dyadic, and that dyadic conscious states and the subjectivity necessary to them are fundamentally mistaken. In this paper I explore the tension between these views with two questions in mind; how can the enlightened person *experience* non-dyadic states, and how can they act in the world without subjective agency? I will argue that if the Buddhist view of non-dyadic consciousness is dependent upon its metaphysical commitments, which includes a conception of consciousness as an ontological horizon of experience, then subjectivity and intentionality are not necessary for a state to be conscious just so long as the non-dyadic state is authentic.¹ Since the metaphysical commitments rest upon the doctrine of the interpenetration of embodiment and consciousness, an enlightened person can enact their agency in their dyadic capacity, whilst simultaneously experiencing non-dyadic conscious awareness.

¹ I am using the term 'Authenticity' in this context to denote a particular type of non-dyadic non-spatiotemporal conscious state.

1. Phenomenology and the Relational Feature of Consciousness

The philosophical discipline of phenomenology sets about investigating the nature of phenomena as they appear to, and are experienced by, the first-person subjective consciousness.² Husserl, the father of the discipline, distinguishes between two modes of experience; the subjective mode is the intentional process of consciousness in its act of perceiving (*noesis*), and the objective mode, which is that which is grasped in any given act of perception (*noema*).³ An essential feature of consciousness in this view then, is its intentionality, which is precisely its capacity to orientate towards the objects of its perception, to be concerned with them, or to be *about* them.⁴ *Noesis* is directed towards *noema* in such a way that it bestows meaning to it,⁵ irrespective of the actual ontological status of the object perceived.⁶ For Husserl, we can bracket the question of the existence of the object *qua* object in order to better inquire into the structure of the subjective experience of the object-as-meant, or as intentioned.⁷ This subjective aspect is, for Jean-Paul Sartre, the very means by which states are conscious at *all*.⁸ He says that "Every conscious existence exists as consciousness of existing,"⁹ which entails that consciousness is indistinguishable from self-consciousness.

Self-consciousness is accounted for by either, the *Reflectionist* thesis, which posits a higher-order awareness taking the-act-of-being-aware as its object of awareness, or the *Reflexivist* thesis, which posits an innate awareness-of-oneself-as-being-aware that is coextensive with the act of awareness itself. I find the Reflectionist thesis unsatisfactory on two counts; firstly, because positing a higher-order awareness as *itself* conscious, requires an even higher-order consciousness to account for *it* and so on, leading to an infinite regress, and secondly, because positing a higher-order awareness as non-conscious raises concerns as to how that which is non-conscious is capable of revealing consciousness at all. Higher-order theories run into difficulties in either case of it's being conscious or non-conscious. Phenomenologist's hold the Reflexivist thesis and maintain that consciousness simply *is* self-consciousness.

For Sartre however, this self-consciousness is revealed *only* in relation to that object of which it is conscious. It is thus *positional* with regard to the object, and in reaching for it; it not only transcends itself but also exhausts itself.¹⁰ Sartre says that there can be no

² Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Winter 2013 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2013/entries/phenomenology/>>. (accessed October 17, 2016).

³ David Edward Shaner, *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism* (New York: State university of New York press, 1985), 15.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ David Edward Shaner, *The Bodymind Experience in Japanese Buddhism*, 15.

⁶ Jay L. Garfield, *Engaging Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 175.

⁷ Smith.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1943), 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

consciousness without this intentionally directed conscious act.¹¹ This makes the intentional act a necessary condition of conscious states, as Sartre says, “for consciousness there is no being except for this precise obligation to be a revealing intuition of something.”¹²

Positional consciousness is, however, just one aspect of what Sartre refers to as a full-blown act of consciousness, the other aspect being *non-positional* consciousness. This is the implicit *my-ness* of an experience, or the passive awareness of a state as being something *to me*, otherwise referred to as the non-dyadic self-acquaintance, or the “mode of apprehension” of something.¹³ For Sartre, the positional and non-positional aspects of consciousness are both necessary, and together they are sufficient for consciousness. “Every full-blown act of consciousness” he says, “is intentional – that is, it constitutively involved a positional aspect – *and* it is reflexive in that it constitutively involves a non-positional aspect. Indeed, each aspect is impossible without the other.”¹⁴ Focusing on one’s awareness of the state of being aware is only possible with the involvement of a *pre-reflective* non-positional awareness that enables its occurrence. It is this pre-reflective awareness that Sartre states is minimal self-awareness,¹⁵ and it is from self-awareness that subjective experience relates to the objects it encounters.

2. Relational Features of Experience in the Phenomenology of Time

Not only are our conscious states relational then, with regard to their objects of perception, they are also relational relative to the temporal past and future. For Husserl the temporal structure of conscious experience contains both a retentive aspect to the past state from whence it has arisen, and a protentive aspect to the future state that it anticipates.¹⁶ These two states are mediated by the temporal present which Husserl terms the *primal impression*. It is precisely through the capacity that pre-reflective self-awareness has in being aware of an experience as ongoing, that time appears to have seamless continuity.¹⁷ This is necessarily mediated by pre-reflective self-consciousness and not reflective consciousness, since there is a delay between directly perceived experiences and the attempt to cognise them,¹⁸ resulting in part of our lived experience remaining undisclosed to us.

For Sartre, pre-reflective consciousness is negated in the reflective act turned back upon itself. This is due to the dynamic nature of consciousness, which can only ever grasp its

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., xxvii

¹³ Ibid., 18.

¹⁴ Matthew D. MacKenzie, “The Illuminations of Consciousness: Approaches to Self-Awareness in the Indian and Western Traditions,” *Philosophy East and West* 57, no. 1 (January 2007), 50.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

temporally prior act, since its current state is the very act of reflection with which it attempts to reflect back. Sartre thinks that this amounts to a double objectification and results in consciousness dividing itself from itself, causing the loss of its *I-ness*, (or subjectivity), and resulting ultimately in self-annihilation.¹⁹ Since Sartre identifies consciousness with dyadic subject-object relations, the loss of a subject is also the loss of consciousness.

For Heidegger, the human being or *Dasein* (*being there*), is a relational being that has a sense of “what one is at any moment and what one will be at the temporally extended unfolding of life into a realm of possibilities.”²⁰ That one stands at the threshold of this as yet unrealised potentiality is of paramount importance for Heidegger, since our projections into the future are the means whereby we concern ourselves with our ultimate possibilities, and from that, construct our identity and furnish our current experiences with purpose. The relational aspect of existence is, on this view, a fundamental feature of not only conscious experience, but of existence itself.²¹ Heidegger emphasises that “we find ourselves *thrown* into a world and a situation not of our own making”, with our current prospects being constrained by our past experiences. The relational sense of our lived experience is between our *being-in-a-situation* and our striving or *anticipatory running-forward* toward the type of existence we aspire to.²²

3. Relational Features of Personal and Social Bodies in the Phenomenology of Space

Relational features of conscious experience also extend into the realm of space, since our existence is not isolated from the environment in which we find ourselves; we are necessarily situated in the world through the fact of our embodiment. Pre-reflective self-consciousness has a bodily component that accompanies every experience and situates it in the spatial realm in which we exist.²³ The first-person orientation realised through our embodiment “concerns not simply location and posture, but action in pragmatic contexts and interaction with other people.”²⁴ It is through the body that we may enact our agency in the world; through the tacit knowledge of our capabilities and limitations we may form realistic volitions, and through mobility we may explore our environment and engage with the worldly experiences that we encounter.²⁵

Bodily existence, as a point of origin in relation to the world, enables conscious experience to have an enacted spatial dimension. Bodily self-awareness then, just by virtue of

¹⁹ Ibid., 51, 52

²⁰ Varga, Somogy and Guignon, Charles, "Authenticity", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/authenticity/>>. Accessed 15 / 11 / 15

²¹ Ibid

²² Ibid

²³ Gallagher, Shaun and Zahavi, Dan, "Phenomenological Approaches to Self-Consciousness"

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

its extension in space, necessarily involves intentional activity. This is posited not only in relation to the world, but also in relation to the other embodied beings that one encounters in the world. It is through this that embodied beings find themselves enacting their agency in a public sphere of activity. Being part of a network of inter-subjective inter-relational exchanges with other sentient beings serves to, not only bind groups of subjects into social bodies that act in solidarity with common goals and intentions, but also to sever relations based upon disparate aims and concerns. Furthermore, the observation by others of my activities also affords me the opportunity for self-reflection, and if necessary, enables a modification of behaviour. For Husserl, "I become aware of myself specifically as a human person only in such intersubjective relations."²⁶

4. Subjectivity as an Authentic Point of Origin of Relational Experience

The experience of myself as an object of some other persons perception, greatly influences my behaviour, and by extension, the conceptual parameters with which I frame my experiences. For, Heidegger, if we blindly conform to pre-established norms and live our lives in a kind of "average everydayness", we run the risk of "falling" out of authorship with our own existence in what becomes an inauthentic lived experience.²⁷ We fail to attain our full capacity since the purposive orientation of our intentional agency, is directed by impersonal agents in the world; the others we encounter. *Dasein* in its inauthenticity is self-alienated.²⁸

In order to correct our destabilised orientation, we need to undergo a personal transformation that, for Heidegger, has three stages. Firstly, we experience anxiety fuelled by the unsettling collapse of our familiar world through a realisation of its lack of significance, which highlights our utterly isolated but steadfast individuality.²⁹ Secondly, we face up to our mortality by confronting the ultimate termination of all of our future-orientated concerns in death, which lends urgency to our actualizing them in the present. Thirdly, we must heed our call of conscience, which reinforces the debt we have to *own* our lives responsibly. We must move from a state of disowning our agency, through an unowned phase, into owning ourselves such that "we are obliged to take up the task of living with resoluteness and full engagement."³⁰ Authenticity is thus an executive virtue that enables ones agency in the world, and subjectivity, which is securely situated in the body, is the point of origin from whence all relations arise and around which they are posited.

The phenomenological understanding of consciousness, as has been shown, is necessarily dyadic, that is, it consists of a subject / object distinction within a relational structure. Subjectivity is the point of origin for not only self-awareness but also for the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Ibid

awareness of time. It is through embodiment that subjectivity is a point of origin for enacting agency in spatial environments and for engaging in inter-subjective social domains. Furthermore, being securely situated in one's subjectivity is vital to an authentic lived experience.

Buddhist notions of consciousness however, differ in two important regards. Firstly Buddhists maintain that there is no-self, as a subject or owner of experiences that endures through time. Secondly, Buddhists maintain that the ultimate nature of reality, as directly experienced in a state of enlightenment, is non-dyadic. Since a minimal sense of subjectivity is deemed necessary for conscious awareness on the phenomenological account, questions arise as to whether an enlightened person can actually *experience* non-dual states on the one hand, and if they can act in the world without the agency that subjectivity entails on the other.

These questions however, are based upon a presupposition that the phenomenological account of subjectivity and the intentional structure of consciousness is correct. Western phenomenologists have themselves presupposed that subjectivity is an unassailable feature of conscious experience, as is the dyadic relational structure that follows from it. The Buddhist view presents a challenge to this presupposition by offering an alternative account of consciousness that is non-dyadic. Since it gives a critical account of the dyadic structure of experience and offers a rich account of non-dual awareness, it is important that we take these perspectives into consideration in our investigation into the nature of consciousness.

5. Some Fundamental Features of Buddhist Thought

Buddhists are committed to both the doctrine of impermanence, according to which all things are in a state of flux and nothing is exempt from perpetual change, and the doctrine of dependent origination which states that all things arise dependant upon prior causes and conditions, (with each arising particular acting as a cause or condition to newly arising particulars).³¹ This commitment entails that nothing can be construed as independently existing and nothing has ultimate nature or intrinsic essence, since the very notion of essence entails both permanence and independence.

The human condition is characterised by *dukkha* (suffering). At the most surface level it is the suffering of the pain and disease experienced by a human being within their lifetime. At a more subtle level it is the suffering of the impermanence of that which we come to hold dear. At the most subtle level it is the suffering due to the conditions and causes which lead

³¹ Bina Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge and Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 92.

to birth, and death and rebirth and re-death.³² The perpetual cycle of existence, characterised as it is by impermanence and suffering, is *Sam̐sāra*, and the cause of this suffering is due to our fundamental ignorance of the true nature of reality exasperated by the desire and craving which compels us to grasp for ultimate essence and permanence. These compulsions generate volitions and actions, which set into motion the karma that informs this, and future existences. In this way we generate the cyclic perpetuity of *Sam̐sāra* over multiple lifetimes, which, without liberation, is without end.³³

Nirvāṇa then, is the liberation from this suffering due to the realisation and rectification of our fundamental ignorance. Accordingly, volitions and karma are no longer generated, resulting in an ultimate liberation from the cycle of *Sam̐sāra* into an enlightened state, which is the 'extinction' or the cessation of ignorance and suffering.³⁴ Coming to realise that our fundamental ignorance in ascribing an essential self and permanence to no-self, and that the state of impermanence is the cause and perpetuation of our suffering, the cessation of that suffering requires a radical change of perspective as regards the reality we perceive. *Nirvāṇa* then, is the ultimate truth that liberates one from the deception of *Sam̐sāra*, and the rich debate between various Buddhist schools aim to illuminate the true nature of that ultimate truth.

6. Buddhist Conceptions of Consciousness

Overcoming the error of our misapprehension of reality is, for the Buddhists, a process of coming to control the mind through the focusing of one's attention on the inner mental phenomena that underlie our relational experiences.³⁵ It is important to note that consciousness, for Buddhist philosophers, does not denote a single mental state. It is rather an unfolding of developing degree's or levels, in a seamless continuum from the most apparent surface and sensory realms to the deeper underlying substrate of experience.³⁶

Mahāyāna Buddhism says that the first five levels of consciousness are various aspects of sensory awareness; eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body consciousness.³⁷ The sixth level is consciousness *itself* in its intentional aspect; it is the means by which relational cognition occurs. The seventh level then, is the ego-consciousness which is the level of perceiving ones individual nature as an enduring self.³⁸ Beneath this is the eighth level storehouse consciousness, which has the nature, according to the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, of being like the ocean, with conscious episodes upon its surface like waves.³⁹ The storehouse

³² Mark Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy*, 20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pg 28

³⁵ Donald W. Mitchell and Sarah H. Jacoby, *Buddhism*, Third edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 124.

³⁶ Garfield, 131.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Mitchell and Jacoby, 126.

consciousness functions as the substratum of the mind with a repository of karmic seeds from past actions that germinate to cause newly arising conditions. In Phenomenological terminology, this is pre-reflective consciousness presenting as the foundational ground of experience.⁴⁰ For the Mahāyāna philosophers, especially for the Yogācāra Buddhists, the deepest level of consciousness responsible for giving rise to the appearance of subjectivity in the seventh level is the storehouse-consciousness.

Later developments in the East Asian Mahāyāna lineage postulate even deeper levels of consciousness. Japanese Shingon Buddhist philosopher Kūkai maintains that the ultimate state of non-dual awareness is realised in the tenth and deepest level of consciousness.⁴¹ Kūkai's view is that the storehouse consciousness is divided into a shallower, afflicted aspect, that clings to its own constructions and gives rise to unsavoury karmic conditions, and a deeper unafflicted aspect that is free of attachment and delusion and gives rise to purer experiences.⁴² This deeper ninth level aspect of the storehouse consciousness is also referred to as the unstained consciousness, *suchness* consciousness or true consciousness.⁴³ Kūkai finds this ninth level to be the highest exoteric level since it is "mind utterly without any nature of its own." It emphasises "the interpenetration of all phenomena as a substanceless flux,"⁴⁴ and is the realisation of "the field of many-as-one and one-as-many."⁴⁵

7. Indra's Net : A Buddhist Metaphysics of Interpenetration

Kūkai's views on consciousness are built upon a complex and rigorous metaphysical framework that is the culmination of a long lineage of philosophical speculation. The debate begins with the Mahāyāna Buddhist doctrine of emptiness, which places emphasis on the view that all phenomena lack essence.⁴⁶ When charged with the consequence of metaphysical nihilism, later Mahāyāna Buddhists move to defend the doctrine along two divergent streams. The Madhyamaka Buddhists state that the very concept of an ultimate reality, being itself an empty concept, entails that *only* the phenomenal world of conventional reality exists. In complete opposition the Yogācāra Buddhists maintain that phenomena do not exist at *all*,⁴⁷ save for their being the objects of our awareness, which on this view, are not in the least bit substantial but are rather cognitive and perceptual constructs.⁴⁸

A later Chinese development in the Mahāyāna lineage, Huayan Buddhism, combines

⁴⁰ Garfield, 130.

⁴¹ Taikō Yamasaki, *Shingon Japanese Esoteric Buddhism*, ed. Yasuyoshi Morimoto and David Kidd, trans. Richard and Cynthia Peterson (Boston: Shambala Publications Inc., 1988), 98.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 92.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Thomas P. Kasulis, John C. Maraldo James W. Heisig, ed., *Japanese Philosophy*, ed. Thomas P. Kasulis, John C. Maraldo James W. Heisig (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011), 71.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁴⁶ Siderits, 138, 139.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁴⁸ Garfield, 73.

both Madhyamaka and Yogācāra Buddhist philosophy in developing its own view.⁴⁹ Huayan Buddhism teaches that the totality of the cosmos, or the *Dharmadhātu*,⁵⁰ is interrelated and interdependent, with phenomena and emptiness interpenetrating.⁵¹ The *Dharmadhātu* is illustrated through the metaphor of Indra's net, the net being an intricately complex web of relational networks with a jewel at each intersection in which every single other jewel is reflected.⁵² Similarly, each phenomenon, by being constituted of dependence relations, is interrelated relative to all other phenomena.⁵³

Phenomena and emptiness are interdependent since "emptiness is only the emptiness of form", and form "is the way in which emptiness is manifest at a particular moment."⁵⁴ Phenomena are also related to each other through their mutual identification and mutual penetration. Mutual identification entails that *through* the fact of their emptiness, all phenomena lack difference,⁵⁵ and mutual penetration entails that all phenomena contain each other, arise simultaneously, and are mutually conditioned and conditioning.⁵⁶

Kūkai builds upon this Mahāyāna lineage, and takes the universal embodiment of the dharma (*dharmakāya*) as its highest expression. It is "a luminous reality of wisdom and compassion that penetrates and embraces all existence such that the *dharmakāya* is actually one's own innate Buddha-nature"⁵⁷ One's Buddha-nature then, is emptiness-as-such as it interpenetrates the form that is one's body. Kūkai's metaphysics consists of not only the traditional five elements in Buddhist cosmology, (earth, water, fire, wind and space), but also of a sixth element that permeates all five; mind.⁵⁸ These six elements constitute the Buddha body and mind pervades throughout, such that "Mind is none other than form and form is none other than mind. Neither precludes or obstructs the other."⁵⁹

What remained metaphysical in Huayan's notion of interpenetration has, in Kūkai's view, taken on more of a phenomenological quality; the interpenetration of emptiness and form has become an interpenetration of mind and body, where the Buddha's dharma-body "is being perpetually expressed *in* and *as* its embodiment in the phenomenal world, in its sounds, movements, and forms, and even in the thoughts of sentient beings."⁶⁰ As such, the realisation of the ninth level of the storehouse consciousness is a non-dual realisation since

⁴⁹ Ibid., 76.

⁵⁰ Dharmadhātu denotes the realm of truth or the dharmas as they truly are. It also denotes the totality of phenomena. Huayan Buddhism teaches that Dharmadhātu is the body of the Vairocana ("Shining Out") Buddha, the celestial Buddha associated with the totality of the cosmos. (Mitchell and Jacoby, 422, 238, 427).

⁵¹ Ibid., 238.

⁵² Garfield, 76.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁵⁵ Ibid., pg 76

⁵⁶ Mitchell and Jacoby, 240.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 319.

⁵⁸ Thomas P. Kasulis, John C. Maraldo James W. Heisig, ed., Japanese Philosophy, 59.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁰ Krummel, John, "Kūkai", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/kukai/>>. Accessed 05 / 10 / 15

both form and emptiness are mutually interpenetrating, as are parts and wholes.⁶¹

Yet Kūkai maintains that this level still falls short of fully grasping the truth of non-duality,⁶² since it expresses its metaphysical insights through dyadic verbal descriptions. For Kūkai, “one can know that reality not by verbally describing it but by directly engaging it,”⁶³ through unmediated and embodied experiential practice.⁶⁴ This level of consciousness is the “field of one-as-one outside all distinctions,” and is the quintessential expression of non-dual reality.⁶⁵ Since this realisation is grounded on the metaphysics of interpenetration expressed in the ninth level, the tenth level of direct participatory realisation is not ontologically beyond any of the prior levels but is rather the purity *within* all prior levels.⁶⁶

Pertinently then, the embodied condition is not only validated⁶⁷ but it is the medium whereby non-dual states can be realised.⁶⁸ The phenomenal world is the embodiment of the Buddha’s Dharma body; it is the creative and communicative activity of the truth as realised in each sentient being, it is the “imminent presence of the Buddha within, and *as* the body and mind of each and every one of us,” and as such it is directly preaching aspects of the Dharma through our every thought and deed.⁶⁹

8. Towards a Phenomenology of Non-Dyadic Consciousness

It is important to consider the fact that for phenomenologists, inquiry as to the nature of consciousness comes from the first person perspective. Subjective experience is the foundational basis for inquiry, but has no ontological status as a feature in the world apart from the individual subject. For the Shingon Buddhists, consciousness is ontological, it does not require the existence of subjects and objects, since it is the principle that permeates all such distinctions and unifies them. Since the universal embodiment of the dharma is imminently embodied in all phenomenal thing-events, every phenomenon teaches some aspect of the dharma to every other phenomenon.⁷⁰ It is only by aligning with the field of non-dual consciousness in its *suchness* as it *is*, beyond all discursive dualism, that one may embody the totality of the cosmos.⁷¹

David Shaner offers a phenomenological account of non-dual awareness in its cosmic *suchness*, as being a pre-reflective and pre-intentional neutral horizon from which

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Kasulis, et. al. 57.

⁶³ Ibid. 73.

⁶⁴ Krummel.

⁶⁵ Kasulis, et. al. 57.

⁶⁶ Yamasaki, 93.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Krummel.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kasulis, et. al. 57.

experience arises, which he refers to as *First Order Bodymind Awareness*.⁷² Since this mode of awareness lacks both the *noesis* and *noema* constituents, it cannot be subject to analysis within the framework of the western phenomenological tradition, which holds that such states are not conscious. Shaner's view is that this problem is overcome in part by stating that, "In the first order mode of experience, bodymind is primordially given and is experienced as the dynamic ground for all experience."⁷³ First Order Bodymind Awareness cannot be noematically grasped except reflexively, but since this mode of awareness is dynamic, any reflexive reflection would automatically be of a prior experiential event.⁷⁴ The mode of experiential awareness for First Order Bodymind Awareness, according to Shaner, is "the activity of "presencing" the horizon as it is given to consciousness."⁷⁵

It's a subtle distinction perhaps but an important one to make; for Kūkai the experience of the horizon is not *given to* consciousness, so much as conscious awareness is *embodied in* it. The individual upon enlightenment realises their Buddha-nature as emptiness, which is in seamless continuity with the totality of emptiness-as-such as it permeates the entire cosmos. Since this emptiness is the Buddha's luminous dharma body, the tenth level of non-dyadic consciousness entails an expansion of awareness from the particular manifestation of the conscious ground in the individual person, to the conscious ground that *is* the cosmic totality. Through the interrelatedness of consciousness and embodiment, the empty body, (as a jewel on Indra's net), is both situated in a spatiotemporal point of origin for *noesis / noema* phenomenal experience, as well as imminently situated in non-dual interrelatedness with the cosmos-as-such.

An enlightened being who has attained this non-dual state of consciousness is paradoxically, in a state devoid of both subjectivity and space and time, whilst being embodied within space and time. The non-spatiotemporal state is realised when the *noesis-noema* dyadic structure collapses, which it does in two instances. Firstly, Shaner emphasises that the spatiotemporal dimension of bodymind awareness is located in the point of origin from whence intentional experience arises.⁷⁶ Phenomenologically speaking, he maintains that we are "nothing more than the place through which dynamic experience flows."⁷⁷ If in ordinary perception, we become so focused on the noematic object that we are no longer aware of our surroundings or our subjective point of origin, we become detached from the experiential horizon and sink into a localised non-dual state.⁷⁸ Since this state is detached from the subjective point of origin however, it is a transient state of non-duality that is ungrounded in the place through which experience flows. It is thus an inauthentic temporary mode of non-dual awareness, which can do no more than afford us a glimpse of the

⁷² Shaner, 48.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

experiential horizon.

By contrast the state of non-dual awareness that occurs *through* the subjective point of origin and into the experiential ground of all phenomena is an authentic state. It can be understood as the outcome of introspective activities, such as meditation, that detaches awareness from the external noematic focus by placing attention on the subjective point of origin. Upon realising the emptiness of the subject, this point of origin collapses into emptiness-as-such, which as we have seen on Kūkai's account, can be understood as constituting the entire phenomenal horizon.

Since the subjective point of origin remains a site in the realm of space and time, ordinary cognition and interaction with other sentient beings continues. Yet an enlightened being, who has come to not only *know* the emptiness of all phenomena but *embody* all phenomena through emptiness-as-such, shares in the imminent ground of experience, and in this way has a heightened sensibility towards the objects of ordinary perception.

Insofar as we consider embodiment as the state of inhabiting a physical body in a spatiotemporal domain however, the notion of embodying the entire experiential horizon seems far-fetched at best. The jewel on Indra's net, even if it were to awaken and see all the other jewels upon the inter-related web, could surely not embody the perspective of all those other jewels. It also seems unsatisfying to resort to the statement that such an experience is ineffable. How can we make sense of what it is like to be enlightened?

In response, it is important to highlight that Kūkai places an emphasis on embodiment as the *vehicle* for ineffable experience. The claim that an enlightened person embodies the cosmic totality is simply the claim that such a person has open access to the underlying conscious state of the experiential horizon, which permeates all phenomena. It is through that permeation that an enlightened person partakes in the phenomenal experience of all sentient beings. Such a person acts in the world from their particularised, embodied position as a node or locus of experience, as a jewel on the net. The enlightened experience on this view is a state where both dyadic and non-dyadic conscious experience, are simultaneously available, but it can only occur through an authentic non-dyadic state.

This view does of course rely on the Buddhist notion that there exists such an underlying experiential horizon, which of course we have no way of determining in a manner that would satisfy our epistemic criteria. Kūkai himself states that such experiences cannot be known or articulated, but only directly experienced. At the very least the account offers an alternative conception of how to think about the phenomenology of consciousness that puts pressure on the presupposition that subjectivity and intentional structures are necessary for conscious experience. It also offers a metaphysical account of consciousness that is grounded in enlightenment phenomenology.

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