

TRIPLE-ASPECT MONISM AND NAGARJUNA'S APPROACH TO MEDITATION

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Abstract

We review the variety of meditation practices and discuss the non-dual view of the mind and the body, proposing the concept of a *Feeling Self*, which is empty of essence and constituted by the dynamics of experience. This concept is consistent with the principles advanced by Nagarjuna in the Buddhist *Mahayana* tradition and the interdisciplinary ontology of Triple-Aspect Monism. The principles of *co-origination* and *interdependence*, advanced by Nagarjuna, suggest that the conscious Self is integrated in the whole of reality. The *Feeling Self* results from habits developed during the life history of a person, anchors in brain functions (attention, learning, memory) and persists during a lifetime.

Key-Words: Feeling Self, Triple-Aspect Monism, Meditation.

1 - Introduction

In this paper we relate practices of meditation with the recently proposed interdisciplinary ontology called “Triple-Aspect Monism” (PEREIRA JUNIOR, 2013). Ancient Chinese practices of meditation reported in Acharya Nagarjuna’s work and Buddhist traditions seek to overcome logical problems by means of the deconstruction of metaphysical prejudices, as the illusion of separation, moving towards the goal of overcoming human suffering. The emphasis on the purpose of this goal places meditation in the TAM philosophical family, as a practice that focuses on the improvement of the temporal dynamics of feeling, rather than paying attention to reified cognitive contents.

Meditation practice is conceived as a dynamical process having progressive phases towards an increased awareness of the Self. When a person introspects and attends to herself, what she finds is not a static picture of a fixed entity, but a dynamic process empty of essence. This experiential finding has led interpreters of meditation to propose the concept of a “Non-Self”, the identification of the subjective and objective components of consciousness at the final stages of the meditation process.

Instead of the common interpretation of meditation in non-dual views of the mind and the body as implying a “Non-Self” concept at the “enlightenment” phase, we propose a *Feeling Self* constituted by the dynamics of experience.

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Conscious activity is understood, in the tradition of Phenomenology, as the rapport of two components: objective contents (intentional objects; mental representations as symbols, maps and images) and subjective temporality. Meditation can be regarded as a pathway towards increased awareness of the temporality of existence, in which the Self is the dynamical bearer of feelings.

In traditional practices, the meditating person changes his/her focus of attention from cognitive contents (mental representations; images, maps, symbols) to the inner reality of consciousness, which is - according to our proposal - composed of a temporal dynamics of *feelings*. The *Feeling Self* results from habits developed during the life history of a person. It anchors in brain functions (attention, learning, memory) and persists during a lifetime. Our approach share some features with the phenomenological approaches of Dan Zahavi and Evan Thompson, while diverging on others.

2 - Varieties of Meditation

Often Meditation is seen as a mystical experience associated with spirituality or religious faith. Its practice is millenarian and found in many different cultures around the world. Due to the variety of practices, approaching the topic is a great challenge. Besides diversity, there is not a corresponding term between different cultures and languages that enables the equivalency within practices or some homogeny, harshening the settling of a conceptual definition well accepted by practitioners and researchers (WALACH, 2014, 2015; SCHMIDT, 2014; NASH e NEWBERG, 2013; LUTZ et al., 2008a,b; PETITMENGIN, C. et al., 2017).

Briefly, the *practice* of meditation is considered to be secular, since it is found in different cultures and continents. It is oriented and kept by *different traditions*, each one with its own meanings and goals. There is a multiplicity of *different approaches* and *different techniques* encompassing specific peculiarities, from tradition to tradition, which are apparently distinguished mainly by their effects. The subjacent *ontological conception of the body-mind* nature also guide, influence and shape each tradition and technique (LEITE, 2017).

Contemporary researchers' interest in meditation has been mostly related to physical and mental health benefits obtained by practitioners, such as improving the immune system, reducing stress or anxiety and chronic pain, increasing blood flow and mental control, preventing cardiac malfunction, and favoring mental states of compassion and positive feelings (SCHMIDT and WALACH, 2014; MASSION et al., 1995; KABAT-

ZINN et al., 1982, 1984,1985; BRUCKSTEIN, 1999; MORGAN et al., 2014; DAVIS e HAYES, 2011).

The results of research in meditation, particularly in neuroscience, have been remarkably contributing to advance debates about attention, perception and consciousness. On the other hand, meditation research is also becoming increasingly relevant because it modifies assumptions of Western research paradigms based on the third-person perspective, as it challenges the idea that standard procedures will affect all subjects equally. Thus, meditation opens up possibilities for methods based on first-person perspectives, which are able to promote beneficial changes in meditators (SCHMIDT e WALACH, 2014; LEITE, 2017).

Currently, meditation is being explored and researched by many fields. We can systematically approach it by addressing the *concept* and the *practices*. As the term *meditation* refers to a very wide variety of procedures, its use is considered analogue to the term “sport”, as it is generic and implies the existence of a common nucleus in all types of practice. Many attempts were conducted trying to grasp this nucleus (WALACH, 2014, 2015; SCHMIDT, 2014; LUTZ, 2008b).

In the last century, an important movement raised the hypothesis that meditation preferentially activates Alpha/Gamma brain waves, suggesting that this neurological finding was the mark of meditation (LUTZ et al., 2004). Despite this trend, other findings indicate that meditation does not strictly relate to some specific brain waves (LEITE, 2017).

Meditation also depends upon abilities and individual capacities, the way methods are used, subjective motivation and individual history; all these factors play a role in the results (SHAPIRO, 1992). Therefore, in a scientific laboratory there is no categorical assurance that results display fidelity to a well-defined practice (LEITE, 2017).

Because there isn't a consensual concept of the term *meditation* recognized by the scientific community, neither an equivalence between terms used in classical oriental (as *Zen*, *Ch'an*, *Sgom*, *Dhyāna*) and modern occidental approaches (as from the Latin *Meditare*, which invokes *to consider*, *to think about*, and was used in Middle age to describe ruminating mental states in spirituality), authors of empirical research rely on the use traditional terms in which meditators claim they were trained (SCHMIDT and WALACH, 2014).

Whilst there is this multiplicity of differences in approaches, practices, traditions, techniques, meanings and goals, we can have as well many branches in the same tradition

(e.g., *Buddhism, Yoga*). Furthermore, we find differences between masters and apprentices (in the same classroom, an experienced person may achieve results very different from his next side apprentice) and each person's own experiences, since they aim to modify their practices in each experience of meditation (GARD, 1964; SCHMIDT and WALACH, 2014).

Intending to overcome the issues about diversity within the practices and concepts, some authors proposed systems of classification for meditation, such as defining it by means of operational parameters (CARDOSO et al., 2004):

- (1) Muscle relaxation:
- (2) Mental relaxation;
- (3) Generating a self-induced state that can be reproduced later without an instructor;
- (3) Using a self-focus artifice, known as "anchor".

Other systems describe the technical procedures being used by the meditator, like: sitting postures, body activities, movements and the context of the practice (SCHMIDT, 2014). These approaches are interesting and helpful for communication between researchers; however; they do not solve the terminological ambiguity we face when looking and comparing the varieties of practices available out there in the world (LEITE, 2017).

Among these many practices we can briefly review some traits. Starting from the Chinese origins, we have the *Tai Chi Chuan*, a martial/therapeutic art from the roots of Taoism that uses the knowledge of the *I Ching*. Using body movements inspired by animals and the elements of nature - water, fire, air, metal and earth - it explores breathing techniques and sounds, jointly varying the intensity of energy (*yin - yang*), force and velocity applied.

The concept of "Axis" is fundamental; Cherng (1998) claims that this practice aims reaching harmony and balance, widening it to all that resonates in the cosmos, in a process of energy integration overcoming duality. It starts with the physical, mental and emotional balance in humans beings, which are understood as a miniature of the cosmos (LIANG and WU, 2014). Attention in this practice is direct to the Axis, considered as the unique consciousness of the Cosmos. This approach is not conceptual, but a lived experience of non duality (CHERNG, 1998, p. 14-15).

In Chinese Philosophy, says Hordwood (2002), the heart is the home of consciousness and is connected with mental alert and laugh, while in occidental traditions

it is linked to emotion control, love, passion and sexual desire. Moreover, the *Tai Chi Chuan* positions focus on the energies of the heart's meridians and incorporates techniques of meditation that optimize individual evolution.

A very important tradition is *Buddhism*, a movement including technics of meditation, yoga, diets, and theoretical foundations as the "Four Noble Truths". The term "Buddhism" comes from *Buddha*, frequently being associated to Prince Siddhartha Gautama's name. Although, the cult of Buddha came from Gautama veneration and the Buddhist's doctrinaire affirmation and scholastic interpretation comes from him, the term means, in Sanskrit, "Awaken", "Illuminated" and "Enlightened", and equals to the "discovering of the path to freedom from suffering" (HIRAKAWA, 1990; GARD, 1964).

Buddhism started in India, but spread to China, Japan, Korea and some regions of Tibet. Twenty centuries after, more than thirty Asian countries had shown interest in Buddhism, and, furthermore, approximately twenty and two languages gave designation to the term *Buddha* (GARD, 1964; HIRAKAWA, 1990). Due to nature of Buddhism's dispersion, it gained many expressions and ethnics-cultural characteristics. In order to achieve the goal of enlightenment, many means and modes were instituted and formed, from which the unfolding of several Buddhist schools occurs. Early texts about Buddhism already mention the existence of eighteen schools. Gard suggests that the divergence between the schools concerns the orientation towards enlightenment (GARD, 1964). Among the most important schools are the *Theravada*, *Mahayana* e *Vajrayana*.

The Buddhist doctrine is very rich. The *Theravada* school focus more on Siddhartha's teachings, following his discipline and orthodox doctrine; using memorization and recitation. Some schools have social engagement, emphasising the spirit and order of community life. In other traditions, the concept of Buddha and the cults had evolved, leading to the development of the Buddhist pantheons and complex rituals. *Mahayama* and *Vajrayana* evolved in conjunction with non-Buddhist beliefs and practices. The *Vajrayana school* has Vedic and Tantric influences; part of the school was incorporated by exoteric Chinese (Mi-chiao), Korean (Milgyo) e Japanese's (Mikkyo) currents. The schools influenced by Tantric are considered to be more mystic, exoteric and often associated with Shaivism (Shiva's cults and the Gods of yogis). In certain traditions, we see advanced meditative practices - including the use of special vehicles, such as Mandalas (visual symbols), Mantras (sounds), Mudras (gestures) and tantric elements (GARD, 1964; FONTANA, 2002; HIRAKAWA, 1990).

Other important Eastern tradition is the *Zen*, derived from the Mahayana tradition. "Zen" is the Sino-Japanese verbalization form of the Chinese ideogram "Cha'n", an abbreviation of the Sanskrit "Dhyana" concept. *Zen* became very popular in Japanese schools and better known for being practiced by simply sitting in silence. Sometimes it is associated with other practices as martial arts, such as *Aikido* and *Judo*; or *Ikebana*, the art of floral arrangements; *Chado* or *Chanoyu*, referring to the art of serving and enjoying teas; or *Shodo*, referring to the art of writing. *Zen* traditions also make use of *Koans* (paradoxical phrases or oral anecdotes) and *Zazen* or *Shikantaza*, which refers to meditation by means of "only sitting" - understood as the strict act of sitting, not even thinking about sitting. The *Zen* places great importance on feelings as an ultimate solution to overcome logical problems and moral dilemmas, as a way for meditators to grasp their path towards *Intuition* (SUZUKI, 1969, 2000; FREKE, 2005; BRINKER, 1985).

Another Eastern practice, originally from India, for which the registers suggest an existence from approximately 5.000 years b.C., is the *Yoga*. The term means 'Union', and in an expanded sense is seen as a method to "dissolve the absolute" and to cease the "whirling of the mind". Patanjali elaborated one of first text about the theme in century II a.C., the *Yoga Sutra*. The *Yoga* version popularized in the West is a late and remote version of the ancestral and mystical *Yoga*. The *Hatha Yoga*, a version of *Yoga* founded in XI century, is based on the Tantric texts (which describes the practices of the Classical *yoga* ritual and its theory). It is considered to be a vigorous bodily practice, and became popular in the West for its effects on physical fitness. It constitutes of eight *angas* or parts, from the *Yôga Pátañjali's* work: *Yama* (moral restrains); *Niyama* (recommended behaviours); *Asana* (body posture); *Prānyāma* (breath enrichment); *Pratyahara* (sensual energy withdrawal); *Dhāranā* (linking of the attention to higher concentration forces or persons); *Dhyāna* (effortless linkage of the attention to higher concentration forces or persons) and *Samādhyāna* (continuous effortless linkage of the attention to higher concentration forces or persons); (see DeROSE, 2011; FONTANA, 2002; ELIADE, 1978).

Finally, we can cite *Western Meditation* approaches, which might contain elements of various traditions and can be found in many common domains as within Christianity³, Kabbala and Judaism, Islam or even in Shamanic traditions, New Age and Pagan traditions as well (FONTANA, 2002). Between the Western traits we see use of prays in silence or orally, practices involving the Rosary, contemplation of Christ or saints and relics; the

³Fontana dares to say there is in the Bible even a metaphor of emptiness, as in the Buddhist concept, in the parable of a woman with a jar of meal(2002).

Salah daily practice, fasting practices, the use of tambours and medicines of the forest, body cleaning technics, symbols and so on. The numbers of traits are so wide that is unfair to attempt to list all in the rough introduction we bring here.

Fontana (2002) points out some general distinctions between foundations of East and West meditation traditions, but we cannot forget there are some exceptions. The first one is the relationship with God: the symbols and the practices focus on communication and experiences with God, rather than on Enlightenment itself. The second characteristic relates to how the body is seen. Looking at how the West addresses physical exercise, it is conceived primarily as a way of developing the body and using muscles and joints, not recognizing normally the mental or spiritual dimensions attached to it. Partially this is consequence of the Western's materialist view of reality, and the religious belief that the body was an obstacle for spiritual development in such a way that it *must be rigorously subdued through ascetism, denial, and even the excesses of self-flagellation and mortification* (FONTANA, 2002). Thus, the body is not addressed in Western meditations approaches the same way it is in the East. Some authors will even see meditation as a purely mental practice (NASH e NEWBERG, 2013).

One contemporary characteristic of the Western's way of approaching meditation is the attempt of psychologists to separate meditation from spirituality, religion and cultural background; some even bet on a restriction to the objective perspective. In other words, if it is claimed that meditation enhance serenity or induce enlightenment, the Western psychologist will look out for clues whether meditation produces the physiological changes that usually accompany this states or conditions. Rather than relying on what the meditators say about how they feel, they focus on physiological aspects, *as what is going in the system in terms of blood pressure, electrical activity of the brain, and chemicals such as adrenalin and noradrenalin in the bloodstream*. Nevertheless, many authors, such as Carl Jung, address consciousness and look seriously to meditation, enhancing the value of introspection (FONTANA, 2002).

If we attempt to grasp all this practices as types of introspection, we would say that meditation is about taking the time to be with yourself and feel what is like to be an embodied and embedded being, very close to Socrates recommendation: "To know thyself is the beginning of wisdom". However, some authors emphasized that "meditation" can be regarded as an umbrella concept, because each element of a practice of meditation can create different types of physiological effects. For neurobiology researchers, knowing the

brain and body changes that come from staring at a mandala image or listening to a mantra is the focus of interest.

The taxonomy of the technics is necessary for dealing with the many different types of meditation or so-called "contemplative practices". The current research on meditation goes beyond focusing on the effects of meditation on health, investigating the impact of it on more basic psychological processes. In the neurophenomenological approach, meditation can even be regarded as a tool that can guide scientific research. The variety of concepts on meditation can be found in the work of Gethin (1998); Varela and Shear (1999); Lutz et al. (2008a,b; 2015); Hölzel et al. (2011); Sedlmeier et al. (2012); Nash and Newberg (2013); Britton et al. (2014); Davidson and Kazniak (2015).

Furthermore, scholars from psychology, philosophy and contemplative traditions have already introduced links between meditation and introspection; for instance, Varela brings the idea that contemplative techniques can be used to improve the ability to introspect and thus gain deeper insights of one's inner experiences (see VARELA, 1996; VARELA AND SHEAR, J., 1999; WALLACE, 1999; SPARBY, 2015; BITBOL and PETITMENGIN, 2017).

3 - Meditation and Introspective Knowledge

Could meditation offer a methodology for systematic introspection? Or be explored to access some knowledge as has been already used in the Orient for thousands of years unrelated only to mysticism? Walach (2014) claims that contemplative methods can lead to states of consciousness, which enable insights about reality. In the same way we use our sensory organs to contact with the physical world, affording our understanding and apprehension of its features, our consciousness can focus on "inner experiences" to gain an ontologically valid knowledge about reality.

Roger Bacon calls the knowledge of the first-person perspective gained through systematically training of the mind and looking inwards as "divine inspiration" or "inner science". This notion comes from the ancient Franciscan tradition of mystical inner experience, presented in seven steps; the last one would be equal to illumination, also known as "*raptus*". This is a state of complete ecstatic absorption, from within the person would receive insights that could not be gathered only through sense experiences (WALACH, 2014).

Nagarjuna, one of the founders of the Madhyamaka School, from Mahayana Buddhist tradition, shows that enlightenment can be addressed not only spiritually or

mystically, but also as an epistemological problem. In the text *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* he claims that the object of enlightened knowledge is the understanding of the emptiness of essence of the existent. Two truths are proposed to emerge from meditation practices: emptiness (in the sense of reality being not constituted by essences), and the co-origination/interdependence of all phenomena (NAGARJUNA, 1995; GARFIELD, 2009). Because of the co-origination/interdependence of all reality, the meditator that experiences the void of emptiness understands that both, a substantial Self and a purely objective matter are illusions. The epistemological status of the two truths is central to our argument and the reason why we focus our analysis of meditation as a method of self-introspection.

The Zen tradition derived from the Mahayana conceives meditation as the breaking of rational dual logic thinking that separates mind and body, subject and object. Nargajuna's metaphysical and epistemological treatises points the view, which is expressed in three ways in Mahayana:

(i) All phenomena are dependent for their existence on complex networks of causes and consequences;

ii) The whole is dependent on the parts and reciprocally the parts are dependent on the whole;

iii) All phenomena are dependent for their identities on conceptual imputations (NAGARJUNA, 1995).

Therefore, the lesson of meditating would be that to exist reliantly is to be essentially empty; the emptiness of essence is the final mode of existence of any phenomenon and the ultimate truth of reality, which surpasses the appearance of phenomena, and the illusion (NAGARJUNA, 1995; GARFIELD, 2009). The ultimate reality is the object of enlightened knowledge, while the conventional is apprehended by people through mundane cognitive processes (GARFIELD, 2009, p. 27). The understanding of the emptiness of the nature of things leads in practice to an emphasis of the middle way to overcome of the logic of dual thought, leaving the mind free and unobstructed.

This “de-substantialization” has implied for some viewers the denying of a Self, or the suggestion that the image of a Self that one holds is one illusion that must be let apart. However, what we have personally found in our (LEITE, 2017) practice of meditation is that attention to one’s Self leading to an increased awareness, and the corresponding experience that is carried out with the flavours of this reflexive state, shapes up the

structure of the being and restricts in a wider way how one enacts oneself and the world. Therefore, instead of the destruction of an illusory Self, the meditation experience results to be constructive, leading to changes of habits and access to new knowledge. The negation or detachment, of a certain view or image of oneself follows up by a constructive process that reveals a different concept of a Self as a dynamic experiencing process, not as a static entity that could be catch up in a mental representation (map, symbol, or image).

In other words, the view of an essential Self can block the dynamics of experience, leading the person to do not break through from some habits and from knowing herself and the cosmos as a unity that we are part of. Therefore, the lived experience of emptiness of oneself is a crucial methodic step for increasing self-awareness, but does not imply a nihilist view of the Self.

In search of an approximation, we interpret Nagarjuna's truths as implying a *non-substantive concept* of the subjective component of conscious activity, not as a negation of the dynamical reality of this component. Kapstein (2009) also criticizes the interpretation of the Chinese tradition as implying a "Person without Self". This issue continually generates much controversy in India, being the most contested philosophical topic for over a millennium. Against this view of Abhidharma Buddhism, the Brahmanian tradition would have advanced significantly in its own conceptions of the Self (the Atman). A defense of the existence of the Self was formulated by the philosopher Aksapada Gautama (II century) in the text (English translation) *Aphorisms of Reason*, as follows: "Desire and hatred, willful effort, pleasure and pain, and knowledge, are the marks of the self" (NYAYASUTRA apud KAPSTEIN, 2009, p. 321).

The debate about the nature of phenomena and how the cognitive agent progresses toward awakening reaching Enlightenment extends for centuries. Two assumptions have been established:

i) Knowledge about the nature of reality or about the experience of a subject is only known from the first-person perspective, by means of the investigation and experiences of the subject, and that;

ii) This knowledge is useful for the path of liberation (EDELGLASS and GARFIELD, 2009).

The path to enlightenment in Buddhism can be roughly segmented in five steps:

1. Sila-magga/Sila-marga is the path of discipline and virtuous conduct;

2. Jhanamagga/Dhyana-marga is the path of meditative concentration (jhana/dhyana) consisting of attention, concentrated absorption and focused attention on two aspects of tranquility and mental fixation: introspection and intuition;

3. Pannamagga/Prajna-marga is the path of transcendent understanding and understanding for enlightenment, subdivided into three types sutamayapannashruta-maya-prajna (understanding gained by oral tradition), cintamayapanna/cintamayi-prajna (understanding gained by pure thought) and vhamaya-panna (understanding gained by cultivated thinking);

4. Bhattimagga/Bhakti-marga is the path of devoted practice, with some expectation of receiving spiritual help in return, through the veneration of Buddha, or school's founders and the Dhamma/Dharma of Buddha;

5. Buddhanusmriti-marga is the path of complete trust in the effectiveness of saving grace, Karuna. This path is strongly linked to faith and devotion to the Buddha and in some schools is based on the vows or decisions of the Bodhisattva Dharmakara (GARD, 1964, p. 28-32).

The Abhisamayalamkara of Arya Maitrea of approx. 270-350 a.d. claims that it is through constant meditation that the understanding of the real aspect of existence and liberation can be achieved. Three types of individuals appear in the text: skyes-madhyapurusha, skyes-bu-hbrin-pae or skyes-bu-chen-po. The first is considered to be ordinary; the highest degree he can possess is happiness in a future life; for the second, the hinayanist, and the third, the bodhisattva mahayanist, the mundane world represents disgust and sadness, and their highest goal is to get rid of the suffering. The path of the last two types passes through three forms of knowledge of the Truth:

The knowledge of the Shraravaka is that of the unreality of the Ego, or individual, as all independent [pudgala-nairatmya]. The pratyekabuddha arrives at the intuition of the objective unreality of the outer world without freeing himself from the imputation relative to the reality of the perceiving subject. Finally, the bodhisattva in his path knows the unreality of all the separate elements of existence [dharma-nairatmya], which are intuited by him as merged into the odd and undifferentiated Absolute.(GARD, 1964, p. 31).

For this reason, the common path in the tradition for the three types of individuals is "the intuition (abhisamaya) of the Truth, which leads to Enlightenment, Nirvana, and to the liberation of the bonds of the Phenomenal Existence." (GARD, 1964, p. 31). In addition to these three forms, the bodhisattva assumes an altruistic attitude of dedication to

the enlightenment of other sentient beings as well, while the first two have a selfish goal of liberation alone. The suffering with respect to the mundane is one of the points of convergence of Buddhist traditions, inspiring the Four Noble Principles:

1. *Dukkha-sacca/Duhjha-satya*: The nature of existence is characterized threefold by that state of ordinary suffering (of physical pain and mental anguish), as that state caused by transformation (for worse) and as that state of conditioning (in which there is no freedom), and must be transcended because of its imperfect nature;

2. *Samudaya-sacca/Satya*: The plural nature of causation relates to existential conditioning, as a result of all inanimate and animate phenomena being composed of interrelated elements;

3. *Nirodha-sacca/Satya*: The ultimate freedom in the Perfect Existence is the interruption of the second principle, of the conditioning cycles, and the disappearance of the first principle, of the diverse types of suffering, through the fourth principle.

4. *Magga-sacca/Margasacca*: The Middle Way and the Eightfold Path allow the perception and recognition of the first principle, knowledge and understanding of the second principle and making effective the third principle (NAGARJUNA, 1995; GARD, 1964; HIRAKAWA, 1990).

In Suzuki's Introduction to Zen-Buddhism, a tradition which emerges from the meeting of the Mahayana tradition with Taoism, the author states that Zen can be understood as alogical, and points out that feeling is the key to the meditator's liberation (Suzuki, 2002). The Zen does not ask for concentration on any idea, because if it does so it is giving itself up to a defined system of philosophy and ceases to exist. Suzuki synthesizes:

The feeling is everything in everything, as Faust states. All our theorization fails to touch the reality, but the feeling must here be understood in the deepest sense or in the purest form. Even when saying "this is the feeling" it indicates that the Zen is no longer present. The Zen challenges the making of concepts. This is the reason why it is difficult to grasp the Zen. (SUZUKI, 2000, p. 62)

Zen meditation cannot make things into something that they are not, nor can it be considered a concentration of the mind on generalized propositions that distances the intimate nature in which things are connected and the concrete facts of life. The Zen perceives or feels, and provides the liberation of the individual from any systematization of the nature of the things.

4 – Phenomenology

The primordial element of Enlightenment's experience of meditation is to have access to a conscious mental state in which the subject feels the emptiness of essence (the substantial void of the Self) and senses the principles of unity and interdependence of all reality. In this context, it is perfectly understandable why there is practically no concept or the term "Self" in the tradition. As we propose, this anti-metaphysical claim can be interpreted as implying the negation of the Self as a separated "Thinking Substance" (Descartes), but not necessarily as an absolute negation of the existence of a personal identity.

The ancient concept of a Soul that precedes individual life and survives the death of her body, present in Idealist and Dualist philosophies and related to religious doctrines, historically raised a strong reaction of negation. Materialists, Empiricists and Skeptics denies the existence of such a substantial Self and in some cases the denial of any ontological conception of Self. A spectrum of middle way positions between those radical classical views has been elaborated in Phenomenology (a good review of the nuances of phenomenological positions can be found in Zahavi, 2017).

The phenomenological approach can be traced back to the rationalist tradition of Kant and Hegel. In Kant (*Critique of Pure Reason* book), the Self is related to the unity and perspectiveness of perception, being inferred as a condition of possibility of the experience of the phenomenal world. Hegel (*Phenomenology of Spirit* book) refers to the conscious entity (the Spirit) that develops in human history by means of a dialectical process. This process moves step by step, making actual the fundamental Ideas that constitutes the ultimate reality.

Husserl inherits part of this tradition, but progressively moves to the existential approach made explicit in the book *Cartesian Meditations*. Phenomenal experience is no longer conceived as a purely mental activity, but as a relation of the Self with the Other in the context of the "world of life" (*Lebenswelt*), a conception that was further developed by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and in parallel to Wittgenstein in his last writings (corresponding to his conception of "forms of life").

Contemporary phenomenologist Dan Zahavi considers that all experiences - regardless of their object and their act-type - entails a necessary subjective dimension, in the sense that experiences "feel like for someone". He defends the concept of a "Minimal Self", which he identifies with the imbued fundamental subjectivity and the irreducible

first-person character, or experiential *for-me-ness* that is interdependently and interconnected with experience (ZAHAVI, 2017).

Howel and Thompson's *Unreflective Naïve Transparency* thesis (ZAHAVI, 2017) states that *for-me-ness* is real, but exceptional. The presence of it changes the overall phenomenal character of experience; in this case – not representative of all experience - the sense of ownership or a Self depends on a meta-cognitive operation. This leads to questions about whether the presence of a Self – even in the minimal version - constitutes a necessary feature of phenomenal experience. They claim that in pre-reflexive states there is no difference between what belongs to me and to others, implying that there is no phenomenal *for-me-ness* in the epistemologically pre-reflexive level (ZAHAVI, 2017). Furthermore, Dainton (also according to Zahavi, 2017) points that what confers the feeling of ownership to experience is being embedded within an inner background. When such a background is present, it does largely constitute *what it feels like to be me* (ZAHAVI, 2017).

Against the Modern view of the Self, formulated by Descartes, Zahavi claims – and we agree – that what is pretty clear for contemporary positions (as stated by some Buddhist philosophers) is that a Self does not exist as separated from conscious experience, or as the “owner” of consciousness. Therefore, the concept of Self as a substantial entity separated from experience can be easily eliminated without damage (ZAHAVI, 2017). The truth about the Self, according to Zahavi (with our agreement) would, therefore, lie between the Modern view of a substantial Self separated from natural experiences, and the Non-Self view present in ancient traditions and in contemporary nihilist currents of thought.

Some authors within contemporary Neurophenomenology consider cognition as an embodied and embedded process and looks for neuroscientific support for phenomenal experience, as in the case of the meditation practices we focus here. Evan Thompson's Tibetan Buddhism and relating ‘embodied and embedded’ views in Neurophenomenology brings on a concept of Self in which mind and body are taken as an unity, contradicting Descartes's conclusion that we are thinking substances. They suggest that the mind enacts a meaningful world through embodied action, in which it relies upon perceptual and motor capacities of our body intertwined with the environment. Human consciousness then is not located in the brain, but rather immanent to the living body, the interpersonal and the social world (Varela et al., 1993).

There is another problem to be addressed, since both Modern philosophers and contemporary neuroscientists tend to reduce phenomenal experience to a cognitive process

without a clear involvement of feelings. The “world of life” is the phenomenological concept more likely to include feeling as a central feature, but this inclusion should be made explicit, as we do in the next section.

5 - Triple-Aspect Monism and the Self

TAM is an ontological theory based on the interpretation of interdisciplinary scientific results; it is not a Materialist, Idealist or Dualist philosophy, but attempts to account for the partial truths that can be found in all traditional positions on the Mind-Body Problem. TAM represents reality as exhaustively describable in three overlapping aspects:

- 1) Matter/Energy,
- 2) Form/Information and
- 3) Feeling/Consciousness (PEREIRA JUNIOR, 2013, 2014).

In the conceptual framework of TAM, human experience contains three superposed aspects: the Physical, the Informational and the Conscious ones. The conscious aspect involves the other aspects (we have a physical body and we process information not-consciously), having also another ingredient: *the feeling*. The first-person perspective of conscious systems and respective phenomenal experience are conceived as ways of *feeling*, including the *feeling of knowing* (BURTON, 2008). Besides having a living body and processing information, a conscious system also *feels the content of the information*, and has his/her body *affected by the feeling*.

Reality is conceived as being in movement and transformation, moving from potentialities to actualities, in a self-organizing process. A primitive neutral substrate composed of "Elementary Energy Forms" (EF) is assumed. The EF interacts and self-organizes, composing the Fundamental Reality that generates us and the phenomena we experience. The evolution of reality is a process in which EF recombines, allowing the emergence of new combinatory patterns. We do not have direct experience of the EF, but of their combinations.

The immediate manifestation of the process is the physical aspect of reality, composed of material particles, bodies and fields in the four-dimensional space-time, as studied by the physical and chemical sciences. However, reality does not reduce to the physical aspect; it unfolds progressively in time, with the emergence of new phenomena that can be classified in two main categories: Informational and Conscious. The emergence of informational processes depends on the interaction between physical systems, allowing

the emergence of living systems that use information in their structures (e.g. the genome) and functions (e.g. electrical and chemical signaling).

The informational processes are an emergent aspect of reality, depending on the interaction of physical systems. It is closely related to the emergence of living systems that use information in its structure and to execute functions. The informational aspect is present both in the Aristotelian *Form* and in the Aristotelian formal causation between systems, which is closely related to the contemporary concept of information transmission.

The informational aspect is necessary, but not sufficient to account for the third aspect of reality, the conscious one. Conscious systems not only process information and attribute meaning to it, but also experience feelings about the content of the processed information.

The concept of *qualia* (CRANE,2000) is a good example for discussion of the "unity in diversity" implied by TAM, since it involves the three aspects: a physical qualitative pattern of the stimulus that reaches sensory receptors; an informational pattern that occurs in the transmission of the stimulus pattern to the central nervous system and its syntactic processing in neural networks; and the conscious experience (feeling) of the meaning of the (physical and informational) patterns for the cognitive agent.

In the case of color *qualia*, for instance, the first two aspects are not arbitrary; they are necessary for the third to occur. At the origin of the phenomenon is necessary to have the photonic wave (which can come in several modalities, depending on the contexts). There is a need for exposure to a particular photon waveform for the person's brain constructs the conscious experience of a particular color. Once the person learns, she can reproduce the bioelectric pattern without the external stimulus, e.g. in dreams. The informational pattern corresponding to a color that is instantiated in the bioelectrical activity of the brain can be detected and recorded from the perspective of the third person, and is not conscious. The determinant waveform of the color seen in a particular part of the visual field is not simply the wave frequency reflected by the object seen, but rather the resulting form of the interactions of all environmental light waves reaching the respective receptor in the retina. The objective, biophysical, aspect of colors is the way the brain encodes the photon wave patterns detected by the retinal and primary visual cortex receptors. To determine the color consciously perceived, it is necessary to take into account the patterns received by the whole system of recipients, because there are reciprocal interferences.

The physical and informational pattern that is determinant of a certain color in a given context - for example, *red* - is unconscious. What is consciously perceived is the *feel* of red. The "what it is like to be" is the feel of the red. How does the generated red in the central nervous system "glue" to the object that reflects the light? The idea of "projection" by Velmans (2009) addresses this issue, which will not be further discussed here.

According to TAM, it is necessary to distinguish between the qualities of things ("primary" or "secondary"), and the "what it is like to be," which corresponds to the *feel* attributed to the quality. The qualities of things (such as the chemical properties of NaCl) exist in things themselves, but subjective experience (as it is for someone to taste salt) exists in consciousness, that is, it concerns the third aspect.

Much of the trouble about Mary (JACKSON, 1986) derives from this situation, for Mary's *knowledge* of the concept of red does not imply that she has experienced the *feel* of red. All conscious experience implies a certain degree of unity of the three aspects, physical, informational and sentimental. In the case of visual perception, the conscious color corresponds to the experience generated by the fundamental reality underlying brain activity, when receiving the information specified by the stimulus (a photonic field characterized by certain wavelengths). The feel emerges in the context of the dynamical relations between the physical stimulus, our receptors and the fundamental reality underlying the activity of our brains. The felt color is not in the objects; it is the person's brain that projects colors into objects, so that's where we see them. Therefore, from knowing the first two aspects, which are objective (or inter-subjective), we can know something - but not everything - about the kind of subjective experience a person is experiencing.

Philosophically speaking, TAM (PEREIRA JUNIOR, 2013, 2014) uses the Husserlian concept of the structure of consciousness as a Noetic-Noematic dialogue between subjective and objective components. It also shares with Kant and Heidegger the idea that the ultimate nature of conscious activity is temporal, and agrees with Merleau-Ponty on assuming experience (but not only perceptual experience) as the epistemological basis of philosophical theorizing.

According to TAM, the Self has three aspects:

- A) Physical: the living body and the environment (physical-chemical-biological-social) with which it interacts;
- B) Informational: Forms associated to the subject in her life history, from the molecular plane (e.g. genes) to the cultural plane (e.g. memes);

C) Conscious: When the informational content of cognitive processes is felt, consciousness occurs. Feelings are unique to the first person's perspective, but one can infer (inductively) the presence of certain feelings from the physical aspect (behavior, physiological processes) or informational (e.g., electroencephalographic waves).

Also according to TAM, "minds" are physical systems that process information systemically (by means of cognitive, semiotic and linguistic processes) and guide their actions using the products of this information processing. Mental processes may be unconscious. As far as they are conscious, they include two poles: subjective (the Feeling Self) and objective (the contents of consciousness, composed of cognitive entities as mental representations, images, maps and/or symbols).

Feeling can be defined as the subjective sensation of experiencing a temporal pattern. Energy waves in living tissue are psychophysical phenomena, with physical as well as mental aspects; e.g the feelings of low energy in depressive states and high energy in euphoria. In both cases there are physical and mental features involved in the phenomenon. Feelings happen in perception-action cycles, but are neither perceptual nor behavioral processes. All sensory qualities of conscious experiences (*qualia*) are feelings, but many kinds of feeling are not *qualia*, since the spectrum of feeling also includes basic sensations (as hunger and thirst), individual conscious emotions (as pain and pleasure), social conscious emotions (as loving and hating), beliefs, ethical and aesthetic appreciation, etc. Feelings are associated with mental representations (maps, images or symbols), but they are not identical to them, in the same way that "the map is not the territory": feelings are *the lived experience* (or the *presentational* aspect) of representations, images and symbols. Pereira Junior (2014) suggests that the physical/informational correlates of feelings would be continuous wave phenomena, in which the distribution of energy in space-time is modulated, composing a waveform. Each type of feeling would correspond to a type of waveform. Feelings are "like a wave" modulated by variations of energy amplitude in time. Pereira Junior (2014) also proposed that variations of amplitude in time define the quality of the feel, in the same way as the waveform of an audio signal defines the timbre of a musical instrument.

Feeling is also a mode of focusing attention in one's own Self; by means of feeling, the subjective pole of consciousness apprehends itself, rather than cognitively focusing on an objective content. When a person feels, she experiences what it is like to be herself. In this sense, meditation (at least in some of its varieties) would be a technique for partially

inhibiting reified cognitive processes and allowing self-apprehension in the sense of the person feeling herself.

6 - Concluding Remarks

Although encompassing a large variety of forms of life, the physical and informational aspects are necessary, but not sufficient, to account for the third aspect of reality, the conscious one. Conscious systems do not only have a living body, process information and attribute meaning to informational contents, but also *experience feelings about the content* of the processed information, and modulate their physiological processes and behaviors according to the valence of the feelings. Feelings result from cognitive processes, but cannot be reduced to such processes; in order to have feeling, the products of information processing must *affect* the material structure of the system in a global way, and often they propel changes in actions.

In TAM, feeling experiences define the state of the Self. The *Feeling Self* is the system constituted by temporal feeling experiences. Two classic lemmas of philosophy can be translated as: "Feel yourself"; "I feel, therefore I am". The interaction with the environment and the resulting perceptual and behavioral processes are conceived as triggers, but not determinants, of the quality of feelings. The temporal experience of feeling results from the self-organization process intrinsic to the conscious system.

In the TAM framework, meditation practice is conceived as attending to the subjective side of consciousness. In this perspective, it consists of attending to the temporal existence of a dynamic, embodied and embedded *Feeling Self*. The target is improving the apprehension of lived experiences, which includes the process of suffering and overcoming pain. The introspective or meditating subject is not conceived as the cognitive subject of philosophy, traditionally separated from the living body and the environment, but the dynamic subjectivity that is built in the temporal experience. In these practices, the subjective component of consciousness apprehends itself, rather than cognitively focusing on an objective content. In this sense, meditation (at least in some of its varieties) would be a technique for partially letting go reified cognitive processes and allowing the person feeling what it is like to be herself.

Both the feeling dynamics in TAM and the effects of meditation can be addressed by means of their brain embodiments. This is the reason why the rhythm of respiration, and related brain and cardiac rhythms are central to meditation. In some practices, breath rhythm is intentionally addressed, because these rhythms modulate the temporal pattern of

the brain waves of feeling. For instance, breath regulates the amount of energy available to the body and cardiac rhythm regulates blood flow and distribution of the energy (ATP and metabolic process related to energy flows). The effects of meditation - although being diverse, according to the technique that is used and the person that meditates - can be measured by EEG, leading to changes in the same brain waves that - according to TAM - altogether with the whole, embody our feelings.

We can conceive the embedding of a conscious system in the environment in terms of an expanded functional cycle. The original idea of the functional cycle dates back to Jakob von Uexkull (UEXKULL, 1957). For this author, an "inner world" - presumably the mental or conscious activity of the living being - is constituted by interactions with the embedding environment through effectors - responsible for the adaptive actions of the living being - and receptors - responsible for detecting environmental events of interest to the living being. During a person's life history, her Self is progressively constituted by a sequence of cycles, in which she forms *habits of feeling*. According to the results of her actions in the environment, and her respective feelings, the person constructs a system of values. From the formed personality and respective value system, the person projects desirable experiences for her future. Contrasting these desires with the present state of things, a tension is formed between desires and what appears to be the actual reality. All these phases of interaction of the person with the environment are constitutive of her dynamical, embodied and embedded Feeling Self.

The principles of *co-origination* and *interdependence* are assumed as more than metaphysical statements; they express the assumptions of the method of introspection. If each person has the same origin of the rest of reality, then "knowing yourself" is one pathway to grasp the principles of the totality of reality. If the mind and the body are interdependent, then the rhythm of respiration modulates both the temporal patterns (e.g., frequency range) of brain waves and the respective patterns of feeling.

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