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THE PHILOSOPHY OF CONSCIOUSNESS WITHOUT AN OBJECT

The philosophy of consciousness without an object represents a profound inquiry into the nature of consciousness when divorced from its typical objects of thought, perception, or attention. This paper examines the theoretical underpinnings, implications, and philosophical challenges of a consciousness that does not necessarily tether itself to an object. Drawing from classical and contemporary sources, including Eastern philosophies and Western phenomenology, this study explores the conceptual and existential dimensions of such a state of consciousness, providing insights into its potential impacts on understanding self, awareness, and the nature of reality.

Key words: *consciousness without an object, spirituality, mind, reason, Zen Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta, Taoism, phenomenology, existentialism.*

Problem statement. The concept of consciousness without an object challenges conventional theories of consciousness, which typically define it in relation to objects of experience, whether sensory, cognitive, or emotional. This paper seeks to unpack the philosophical implications of a consciousness that exists independently of these objects, exploring its foundations in both historical and modern philosophical discourse.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The problem of consciousness, as one of the fundamental questions of philosophy, arouses the interest of a significant number of scientists. Who are trying to get deeper into its foundations, but the question of consciousness without an object is a topic that has not been researched much and is still relatively little studied, but there are a number of scientists who have made attempts to delve into this phenomenon, in particular: S. Gallagher [1], D. Zahavi, L. Kohn, D. T. Suzuki [2], D. Vliegthart [3], A. Watts. Regardless of the availability of research data, this phenomenon requires further, detailed study. So **the purpose** of this study is to try to fill the existing gaps. To achieve the goal, it is necessary to analyze the phenomenon of consciousness without an object through the prism of religious, philosophical, worldview systems and teachings.

Presentation of the main material. *To begin with, we must clarify what is meant by “consciousness without an object.”* Traditional views of consciousness often posit it as a directed experience, where awareness is always of something – whether an external object, an internal thought, or an emotional state. In contrast, the idea of consciousness without an object implies a state of awareness that is not anchored to or defined by any specific object of experience.

Historically, various philosophical and spiritual traditions have touched upon the notion of consciousness that transcends specific objects. In Eastern philosophies, particularly in Zen Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta, there are references to a state of pure awareness that is not attached to specific thoughts or sensory inputs. This state is often described as a fundamental, formless awareness that underlies all experiences.

In Western philosophy, phenomenology and existentialism offer frameworks that can be applied to this concept. For example, E. Husserl’s idea of “pure consciousness” [4] and M. Heidegger’s exploration of “being” touch upon aspects of awareness that are not strictly defined by objects [5].

Exploring consciousness without an object invites us to reconsider the nature of experience itself. Traditional views often hold that experience requires an object of consciousness – something to be aware of. However, the idea of consciousness without an object suggests that experience might be more fundamental or primordial.

The ontological status of consciousness without an object raises important questions about the nature of reality [1]. If consciousness can exist independently of objects, what does this imply about the relationship between consciousness and the external world? It suggests that reality might be understood not merely as a collection of objects and their interactions but as a dynamic interplay involving consciousness itself. This perspective aligns with certain interpretations of quantum mechanics.

A number of Eastern philosophical teachings were interested in this phenomenon in detail, in particular in Zen Buddhism, objectless consciousness refers to a state of awareness that is not directed toward or defined by particular objects of experience, whether sensory, cognitive, or emotional. This state is often described as a pure, unconditioned awareness that transcends the duality of subject and object.

The concept of objectless consciousness in Zen Buddhism can be traced back to early Chan teachings and later developments in Japanese Zen. Influential Zen masters such as Dajian Huineng, Linji Yixuan, and Eihei Dogen have contributed to the understanding of this concept through their teachings and practices.

The *Platform Sutra* of D. Huineng, the Sixth Patriarch of Chan Buddhism, provides foundational insights into Zen’s approach to consciousness. D. Huineng emphasizes the nature of “original mind” or “true mind” (本心, benxin) as a fundamental awareness that is free from conceptualization and objectification[6].

This original mind is seen as the true nature of consciousness, which is not attached to specific objects or thoughts.

Linji Yixuan, a prominent Chan master, is known for his direct and often paradoxical teaching style. His teachings on “emptying the mind” and “direct pointing” emphasize a form of awareness that is not bound by objects or concepts. Linji’s approach encourages practitioners to transcend ordinary perception and realize a state of pure awareness [7].

Eihei Dogen, the founder of the Soto school of Japanese Zen, offers a profound exploration of objectless consciousness through his teachings on “shikantaza” (just sitting). E. Dogen’s writings, particularly in the *Shobogenzo*, address the nature of “shin” (mind) as a state of pure presence that is not grasped by objects[8]. For Dogen, zazen is not merely a practice but an expression of this objectless awareness.

Zazen, or seated meditation, is central to Zen practice and serves as a means to experience and embody objectless consciousness. During zazen, practitioners aim to let go of attachment to thoughts, sensations, and perceptions, allowing them to access a state of pure awareness [2]. The practice of zazen is not about achieving a specific mental state but about aligning oneself with the inherent, objectless nature of consciousness.

Koan practice, another vital aspect of Zen training, involves contemplating paradoxical statements or questions designed to transcend ordinary conceptual thought. Koans like “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” are used to disrupt the habitual objectification of experience and guide practitioners toward an experience of awareness that is not dependent on specific objects or thoughts. The resolution of a koan is seen as a direct encounter with the objectless nature of consciousness.

The Zen Buddhist notion of objectless consciousness challenges conventional understandings of the self. In Zen, the self is not seen as a fixed, substantial entity but as a dynamic process of awareness that transcends individual objects and experiences. This perspective aligns with the Zen view of non-self (anatta) and emphasizes a fundamental unity that underlies apparent distinctions.

Objectless consciousness also raises questions about the nature of perception and reality. In Zen, perception is not a passive reception of external stimuli but an active process that can be transcended to reveal a deeper, non-dual awareness [9]. This view challenges dualistic notions of reality and perception, suggesting that true understanding lies beyond the object-based framework of ordinary experience.

The concept of objectless consciousness presents a philosophical paradox. If consciousness is defined as awareness, and awareness typically involves being aware of something, how can there be consciousness without an object? This

paradox highlights the limitations of conventional linguistic and conceptual tools in capturing the essence of such a state. Zen teachings often use paradox and non-conceptual methods to point beyond these limitations.

The concept of consciousness without an object in Taoism presents a unique perspective on awareness that diverges from traditional Western notions tethered to specific objects or phenomena.

Taoism, an ancient Chinese philosophical and spiritual tradition, offers a distinctive view of consciousness that emphasizes non – objectified awareness. In Taoism, consciousness without an object refers to a state of awareness that is not dependent on or defined by specific objects, thoughts, or experiences. This notion implies a form of consciousness that transcends conventional distinctions and conceptualizations, reflecting a pure, unconditioned awareness.

The concept of objectless consciousness in Taoism is rooted in early Taoist texts and practices. Key Taoist figures such as Laozi and Chuang Tzu have contributed to this understanding through their writings and teachings, which emphasize aligning with a fundamental, formless reality.

The *Tao Te Ching*, attributed to Laozi, is a seminal text in Taoist philosophy. Laozi's teachings emphasize the concept of "Tao" (the Way) as an underlying principle that transcends specific phenomena. The Tao is described as "nameless" (無名, wuming) and "formless" (無形, wuxing), suggesting a form of awareness that is not limited by objects or concepts [10]. Laozi's emphasis on "wu wei" (non-action) also reflects the idea of aligning with a fundamental, objectless awareness.

Chuang Tzu, another key Taoist figure, further explores the idea of objectless consciousness through his concept of spontaneity (自然, ziran). In the *Zhuangzi*, Master emphasizes the importance of flowing with the natural course of events and letting go of rigid conceptualizations [11]. This approach reflects a state of awareness that is not bound by specific objects or thoughts but is instead characterized by fluidity and spontaneity.

Taoist meditation and contemplation practices aim to cultivate a state of objectless consciousness. Techniques such as "zuo wang" (sitting and forgetting) encourage practitioners to transcend attachment to specific thoughts or sensations, aligning with the Tao and experiencing a form of pure, unconditioned awareness. These practices highlight the experiential aspect of Taoist philosophy and its focus on direct realization [10].

The Taoist concept of objectless consciousness challenges traditional notions of self and identity. In Taoism, the self is not seen as a fixed entity but as a dynamic process that aligns with the flow of the Tao. This perspective emphasizes a fundamental unity that transcends individual objects and experiences, reflecting the Taoist view of non-self and interconnectedness.

The notion of consciousness without an object also influences Taoist views on perception and reality. In Taoism, perception is not merely a passive reception of external stimuli but an active engagement with a deeper, formless reality. This view challenges dualistic distinctions between subject and object, suggesting that true understanding arises from aligning with the underlying Tao rather than focusing on specific phenomena.

The concept of objectless consciousness presents a philosophical paradox. If consciousness is inherently linked to awareness of something, how can there be consciousness without an object? This paradox highlights the limitations of conventional conceptual frameworks and underscores the Taoist emphasis on transcending ordinary distinctions to access a more fundamental awareness.

Advaita Vedanta, a non-dualistic school of Hindu philosophy, presents a distinctive conception of consciousness that fundamentally challenges object-oriented perspectives. Central to Advaita Vedanta is the idea of consciousness as the ultimate reality, Brahman, which transcends specific objects and phenomena.

Advaita Vedanta, developed by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century CE, asserts the non-duality of existence, where the ultimate reality (Brahman) is pure consciousness beyond all forms and distinctions.

In Advaita Vedanta, objectless consciousness refers to the idea that ultimate consciousness, or Brahman, is not dependent on or defined by any particular objects, thoughts, or experiences. This form of consciousness is considered an intrinsic, unconditioned awareness that is distinct from the ordinary, object-oriented experiences of everyday life [12].

The notion of objectless consciousness in Advaita Vedanta is rooted in the Upanishads, the ancient texts that form the basis of this philosophical tradition. Adi Shankaracharya's commentaries on these texts further elucidate this concept [13]. By exploring the historical development of these ideas, we gain insight into how Advaita Vedanta conceptualizes consciousness as an ultimate, non-objectified reality.

The Upanishads are crucial in shaping the Advaita Vedanta view of consciousness. Key texts such as the *Chandogya Upanishad* and the *Mandukya Upanishad* describe Brahman as an all-encompassing, formless consciousness. For instance, the *Chandogya Upanishad* declares, "Tat tvam asi" (That art thou), indicating the non-dual nature of reality and consciousness [13].

Adi Shankaracharya's commentaries on the Upanishads and the *Brahma Sutras* elaborate on the concept of Brahman as pure consciousness without objects. In his commentary on the *Mandukya Upanishad*, Shankara describes Atman (the self) as "satchidananda" (existence, consciousness, bliss), emphasizing that this self is beyond all specific objects and phenomena [14].

The concept of Maya, or illusion, is integral to understanding Advaita Vedanta's view of consciousness. Maya refers to the illusory nature of the phenomenal world, which creates the appearance of multiplicity and objectification. According to Advaita Vedanta, Brahman remains unchanged and undifferentiated despite the illusory appearances imposed by Maya [15].

Advaita Vedanta challenges conventional notions of the self by asserting that the individual self (Atman) is not distinct from the ultimate reality (Brahman). This understanding negates the idea of a fixed, substantial self and emphasizes a fundamental unity that transcends individual objects and experiences [12].

In Advaita Vedanta, perception is viewed as a temporary construct imposed by Maya. The true nature of reality is revealed through the realization of Brahman as the underlying, non-objectified consciousness. This perspective shifts the focus from the empirical world of objects to the unconditioned awareness that underlies all experiences [16].

The concept of objectless consciousness presents a philosophical paradox: if consciousness is generally associated with awareness of something, how can there be consciousness without an object? Advaita Vedanta addresses this paradox by asserting that Brahman is the fundamental reality that is not bound by objects or distinctions. This pure awareness is constant and unconditioned, transcending the realm of duality.

Consciousness has been characterized in numerous ways, from a mere state of awareness to a complex tapestry of cognitive processes. Philosophers such as R. Descartes and I. Kant have posited consciousness as fundamentally tied to self-reflective thought, whereas phenomenologists like E. Husserl, emphasizes the study of structures of consciousness and their intentionality. Intentionality refers to the quality of consciousness to direct itself toward an object. However, Husserl's later works introduce the idea of "pure consciousness," a state wherein consciousness is examined without the necessity of an object. This pure consciousness allows for a more profound engagement with the essence of experience itself, revealing an intrinsic dimension of awareness that exists beyond mere objects [4].

In this context, the epoché, or phenomenological reduction, serves as a methodological tool. By suspending judgments about the existence of external objects, one can focus on the immediate experience of consciousness. This reduction opens pathways to understanding how consciousness operates in a realm devoid of objects, leading to insights into the nature of subjectivity itself.

In existentialist thought, particularly in J.-P. Sartre's philosophy, consciousness is characterized by its fundamental freedom and the burden of choice. J.-P. Sartre famously posits that "existence precedes essence," suggesting that individuals are not defined by any external essence or object but rather by their actions and choices.

This perspective aligns with the notion of consciousness without an object: consciousness is not tethered to predefined meanings or entities but is free to engage with the world on its own terms.

J.-P. Sartre's concept of "nothingness" plays a crucial role in this exploration. He argues that consciousness is nothingness, a void that allows for the emergence of meaning and existence. In this light, consciousness transcends mere awareness of objects, becoming an active force in shaping one's reality [17]. This existential freedom can lead to anxiety and absurdity, but it also provides a fertile ground for authentic existence, independent of external validation.

M. Heidegger's fundamental ontology presents a further dimension to understanding consciousness without an object. M. Heidegger argues that the question of being is central to philosophy, emphasizing "Dasein" (being-there) as a mode of existence that is aware of itself and its surroundings. Unlike traditional ontological inquiries that focus on entities, M. Heidegger encourages a more primordial investigation into the nature of being itself.

In "Being and Time," M. Heidegger explores the notion of "thrownness," which emphasizes the individual's existence in a world that is not fully graspable. This existential condition reflects a form of consciousness that is not limited to specific objects but is always already engaged in the process of becoming. By embracing the notion of consciousness as a relationship to being, we can understand how consciousness operates in an open field of possibilities, devoid of fixed referents [5].

The exploration of consciousness without an object challenges several assumptions in contemporary philosophy of mind. It calls into question the objectivist paradigms that dominate discussions about consciousness and perception. By recognizing the non-objective aspects of consciousness, we can better appreciate the fluidity and dynamism of human experience.

Furthermore, this investigation has profound implications for existential considerations of authenticity and freedom. In acknowledging that consciousness is not merely about encountering objects, we can cultivate a more profound sense of agency in shaping our lives and realities.

The most interesting, detailed and original researcher of phenomenon of the consciousness without an object is Franklin Merrell-Wolff. F. Merrell-Wolff was an American philosopher and mystic whose work has provided a bridge between Eastern and Western philosophies. His writings, particularly "Experience and Philosophy" [18] and his "Mathematics and the Philosophy of Consciousness," offer an in-depth exploration of consciousness beyond traditional object-oriented frameworks.

F. Merrell-Wolff's concept of objectless consciousness challenges traditional definitions of consciousness that are tied to specific objects or experiences.

By proposing that consciousness can exist independently of objects, he redefines awareness as a fundamental, unconditioned reality [3].

The notion of objectless consciousness also impacts our understanding of the self. F. Merrell-Wolff's work suggests that the self, as conventionally conceived, is a construct that arises from object-oriented awareness [19]. True self-realization involves recognizing the self as part of a more fundamental, non-objectified consciousness.

The paradox of objectless consciousness – how consciousness can be aware without objects – poses a significant philosophical challenge. F. Merrell-Wolff addresses this paradox by arguing that objectless consciousness is not an absence of awareness but a form of awareness that transcends all particular objects and distinctions.

The investigation of consciousness has traditionally been linked to the idea of objects – thoughts, perceptions, or experiences that fill our conscious awareness. However, Franklin Merrell-Wolff introduces a radical rethinking of this relationship by positing a form of consciousness that exists independently of any object.

F. Merrell-Wolff challenges these conventional views by arguing for a form of consciousness that is not necessarily directed at an object. His approach suggests a primary consciousness – a state of awareness that exists prior to the differentiation of subject and object[3]. This perspective aligns with certain Eastern philosophical traditions, such as Buddhism, which emphasize a non-dual experience of awareness.

F. Merrell-Wolff proposes that consciousness can exist in a pure, unconditioned state, devoid of any particular content. He contends that this state allows for a direct experience of reality that transcends ordinary perception. This raises profound questions: What does it mean for consciousness to exist without an object? How does this understanding impact our perception of the self and the world?

One significant implication of F. Merrell-Wolff's theory is its challenge to the conventional notion of self-identity. If consciousness can exist without an object, then the ego – the constructed sense of self that is often tied to our thoughts and experiences – may be seen as an epiphenomenon rather than an essential aspect of consciousness[19]. This view resonates with existential and post-structuralist theories that critique the notion of a stable, unitary self.

F. Merrell-Wolff's exploration of consciousness can be seen as a phenomenological endeavor. By focusing on the structures of experience, he allows for an examination of how consciousness operates in its most fundamental state. This approach emphasizes the pre-reflective experience, a notion championed by phenomenologists like M. Merleau-Ponty.

In F. Merrell-Wolff's view, introspection plays a crucial role in accessing consciousness without an object. Through meditative practices and reflective inquiry, individuals can attain insights into the nature of their consciousness [19].

This introspective method highlights the experiential basis of his philosophy, inviting practitioners to explore the depths of their awareness.

One potential critique of F. Merrell-Wolf's position is its reliance on subjective experience. Critics may argue that focusing on consciousness without an object risks falling into solipsism – the idea that only one's own mind is certain to exist. This raises questions about intersubjectivity and the shared nature of human experience.

One of the major implications of consciousness without an object is its impact on the concept of self. If consciousness can exist independently of any object, it challenges the notion of a fixed, self-contained ego. Instead, it suggests a more fluid, expansive understanding of self that is not limited by specific experiences or perceptions.

The notion of a consciousness without an object also raises questions about the nature of knowing and awareness. If consciousness can exist without an object, how does it relate to knowledge and understanding? This challenges traditional epistemological views that rely on the interaction between a knower and an object of knowledge.

From an ontological perspective, the idea of consciousness without an object prompts a reevaluation of the nature of reality. If consciousness can be independent of objects, it suggests that reality might be understood as a dynamic interplay between consciousness and objects, rather than a static, objective entity [1].

One of the primary challenges in discussing consciousness without an object is the difficulty of conceptualizing a state that fundamentally defies objectification. Language and thought are inherently geared toward objectifying experience, making it challenging to articulate or grasp the essence of an object-free consciousness.

The concept of consciousness without an object can also be critiqued as veering into mystical or esoteric territory. Critics may argue that such discussions lack empirical grounding or practical application, making them difficult to engage with from a rigorous philosophical standpoint [1].

Another philosophical challenge is the paradox of awareness itself. If consciousness is defined as awareness, then by definition it must be aware of something. The idea of consciousness without an object seems to imply an awareness that is both present and absent of any specific content, creating a paradoxical situation.

Conclusion. The philosophy of consciousness without an object offers a profound and challenging perspective on the nature of awareness and experience. By exploring historical, theoretical, and practical dimensions, this paper has outlined the implications and potential applications of a consciousness that transcends the usual objects of experience. While significant challenges remain, the concept provides valuable insights into the nature of self, awareness, and reality, encouraging further exploration and interdisciplinary dialogue.

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ФІЛОСОФІЯ СВІДОМОСТІ БЕЗ ОБ'ЄКТА

Філософія свідомості без об'єкта являє собою глибоке дослідження природи свідомості, якщо даний феномен відокремлений від його типових об'єктів мислення, сприйняття або уваги. У цій статті розглядаються теоретичні основи, наслідки та філософські виклики свідомості, яка не обов'язково прив'язує себе до об'єкта. Спираючись на класичні та сучасні джерела, включаючи східну філософію та західну феноменологію, ця праця досліджує концептуальні та екзистенційні виміри такого стану свідомості, надаючи розуміння його потенційного впливу на розуміння себе, усвідомлення та природу реальності.

Ключові слова: свідомість без об'єкта, духовність, розум, розсудок, дзен-буддизм, адвайта-веданта, даосизм, феноменологія, екзистенціалізм.

