

A BUDDHIST DOCTRINE OF EXPERIENCE

A New Translation and Interpretation of the
Works of Vasubandhu the Yogācārin

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MOTILAL BANARSIDASS PUBLISHERS
PRIVATE LIMITED
DELHI

First Published: Delhi, 1982

Reprinted: Delhi, 1989

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ISBN: 81-208-0662-x

Also available at:

MOTILAL BANARSIDASS

Bungalow Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110007

Chowk, Varanasi 221001

Ashok Rajpath, Patna 800004

24 Race Course Road, Bangalore 560001

120 Royapettah High Road, Mylapore, Madras 600004

PRINTED IN INDIA

BY JAINENDRA PRAKASH JAIN AT SHRI JAINENDRA PRESS, A-45 NARAINA INDUSTRIAL
AREA, PHASE I, NEW DELHI 110028 AND PUBLISHED BY NARENDRA PRAKASH JAIN
FOR MOTILAL BANARSIDASS PUBLISHERS PVT. LTD., BUNGALOW ROAD,
JAWAHAR NAGAR, DELHI 110007.

CONTENTS

PREFACE	xi-xxii
ABBREVIATIONS	xxiii
CHAPTER	
ONE INTRODUCTION : A GENERAL STATE- MENT OF THE THESIS AND ARGUMENTS	1-26
1. Realistic Pluralism, Not Monistic Idealism	1
2. What is Denied is Duality, not Plurality	2
3. What is Imagined is the Graspable-Grasper Duality, Not the Thing-in-itself	4
4. A Theory of Experience, Not a System of Ontology	5
5. The Motive is Practical Rather Than Theore- tical	11
6. The Things-in-themselves Are Covered Up by Mental Constructs	14
7. The Same Old Realistic Pluralism	17
8. More Arguments from <i>Vimśatikā</i>	21
9. In the Light of the Later School of Logic	25
Two DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN MIDDLE AND EXTREMES (<i>MADHYĀNTA- VIBHĀGA</i>)	27-89
1. Introduction	27
2. The Imagination of the Unreal	29
Terms explained	29
Neither void nor non-void	41
Forms of the imagination of the unreal	45

The imagination of the unreal in relation to the three natures	58
The negative definition further explained	60
The store-consciousness and the active consciousness	65
The life-circle	67
The summary meaning of the imagination of the unreal	72
3. The Emptiness	72
THREE A TREATISE ON THE THREE NATURES (TRISVABHĀVA-NIRDEŚA)	90-126
1. Introduction	90
2. The Three Natures	91
3. The Other-dependent Nature	94
4. Different, yet Non-different	97
Existent and non-existent	99
Dual and unitary	100
Not mutually different in definition	104
5. How to Evaluate and Understand the Three Natures	107
6. How Real and Unreal Are the Three Natures	111
7. Towards the Realization of the Reality	119
FOUR A TREATISE IN THIRY STANZAS (TRISATIKĀ)	127-163
1. Introduction	127
2. Ātman and Dharma as Subjectivity and Objectivity	128
3. The Transformation of Consciousness	134
The store-consciousness (ālaya-vijñāna)	135
The thinking consciousness (manana-vijñāna)	136
The active consciousness (pravṛtti-vijñāna)	138
4. All Is Mere Representation of Consciousness	145
5. The Origin of Vikalpa and Ālaya-vijñāna	147
6. The Triple Nature of Reality	151
The imagined nature	151

The other-dependent nature	153
The absolutely accomplished nature	154
7. The Threefold Naturelessness	156
8. The Realization of Mere Representation of Consciousness	158
9. Conclusion	161
FIVE A TREATISE IN TWENTY STANZAS (<i>VIMŚATIKĀ</i>)	164-196
1. Introduction	164
2. Vasubandhu's Thesis	165
3. Argument from Illusory Experience	166
An objection	167
Vasubandhu's reply	167
4. Non-substantiality of <i>Ātman</i> and <i>Dharma</i>	170
5. Vasubandhu's Criticism of Realism	174
6. Refutation of the Correspondence Theory of Knowledge	181
7. Inter-action and Inter-relation Between Individuals	188
8. Conclusion	195
SIX IDEALISM OR REALISM ?	197-234
1. Introduction	197
2. The Meaning of <i>Vijñapti-mātra</i>	198
3. The Transformations of Consciousness	214
4. The Psychic Complex	219
5. The Imagination of the Unreal (<i>Abhūta-parikalpa</i>)	222
6. The Ineffable (<i>Anabhilāpya</i>)	224
7. Pluralism Rather Than Monism	227
8. <i>Vimśatikā</i> : Critique of the Correspondence Theory of Knowledge	228
9. The Doctrine of Three Natures (<i>Trisvabhāva-nirdeśa</i>)	231
10. Idealism or Realism ?	232

TRANSLATION OF THE TEXTS

APPENDIX I

The Verses on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes	235-246
---	---------

APPENDIX II

A Treatise on the Three Natures	247-253
---------------------------------	---------

APPENDIX III

A Treatise in Thirty Stanzas	254-259
------------------------------	---------

APPENDIX IV

A Treatise in Twenty Stanzas	260-275
------------------------------	---------

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

276-280

INDEX

281-287

CHAPTER TWO

DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN MIDDLE AND EXTREMES (MADHYĀNTA-VIBHĀGA)

1. Introduction

Having paid homage to the founder of this science,
Son of the well-gone,
And also to its expositor for people like me,
May I now endeavour to analyse its meaning.¹

This is how Vasubandhu opens his commentary (*bhāṣya*) on *Madhyānta-vibhāga-kārikā*. To begin a literary work with a prayer, or paying homage to one's teachers, or, at least, with a noble thought, is traditional in India. Accordingly, Vasubandhu right in the beginning of his commentary devotes this stanza to the honour of the founder (*praṇetṛ*) and the expositor (*vaktr*) of this science (*śāstra*). By the term *praṇetṛ* Vasubandhu means Maitreya,² who is generally accepted as the founder of the Yogācāra system. The same Maitreya is then qualified as "son of the well-gone" (*sugata-ātmaja*), an epithet of any Bodhisattva. "The well-gone" (*sugata*) refers to the Buddha himself, and therefore *sugata-ātmaja* means the son of the Buddha. According to Sthiramati, Maitreya is called "son of the Buddha" either because he shares the intuitive knowledge (*nirvikalpaka-jñāna*) of the Buddha, or because he is born in the latter's lineage.³

1. *Śāstrasya-asya praṇetāram-abhyarhya sugata-ātmajam Vaktāram ca-smad-ādibhyo yatīsyē'rtha-vivecane*. MVKB. (Introduction)
2. *Kārikā-śāstrasya-ārya-maitreyaḥ praṇetā*. MVKBT. (Introduction)
3. ... *nirvikalpaka-jñāna viśeṣa-ātmakaḥ sugataḥ, taj-janitatvānnirvikalpasya jñānasya. Tasmāt-tasmin vā jātaḥ sugata-ātmajaḥ. Athavā sugata-ātmanā jātaḥ iti sugata-ātmajaḥ. Yathā-uktam sūtra-antare jāto bhavati tathā-gata vampsē tad-ātmaka-vastu pratilābhād-iti*. MVKBT (Introduction).

By the expositor (*vaktr*) of this science is meant Vasubandhu's own brother Asaṅga. As legend has it, the Yogācāra system was revealed to Asaṅga by Maitreya, and the former then wrote it down in the form of verses.¹ Thus he is aptly called the *vaktr* (expositor or spokesman) of this science (*śāstra*), contained in the *Madhyānta-vibhāga-kārikā*. The central thesis of this text claims to be a middle position between the two extreme views, namely, the extreme realism of the *Sarvāstivādins* and the extreme relativism of the *Mādhyamikas*. Hence the title *Madhyānta-vibhāga-kārikā*, which means "The Verses on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes".

The various topics discussed in this book are stated in MVK I. 1:

- [MVK I. 1] The definition,
The coverings,
The truth,
Meditation of the opposite,
Its stages,
Attainment of result,
And the pre-eminence of the path.²

Commenting on this stanza Vasubandhu says:

These are the seven topics discussed in this science.

They are namely the definition, the coverings, the truth, meditation of the opposite, stages of that meditation, attainment of result, and, seventhly, the pre-eminence of the path.³

Of these seven topics the first one makes the subject-matter of the first chapter of *Madhyānta-vibhāga-kārikā*, entitled "A Chapter on Definitions".⁴ which, along with its commentary

1. *Vaktāram-iti . . . sa punar-ārya-asaṅgaḥ. Tasya hi-idam śāstram abhivṛyaktam, ākhyātam ca-ārya-maitreya-adhiṣṭhānāt-dharma-santānena.* Ibid.

2. *Lakṣaṇam hi-avṛtis-tattvam pratīpakṣasya bhāvanā*

Tatra-avasthā phala-prāptir-yāna-ānuttaryam-eva ca. MVK I.1.

3. *Iti-ete sapta-arthā hi asmin śāstra upadiśyante. Yad-ula—lakṣaṇam, āvaraṇam, tattvam, pratīpakṣasya bhāvanā, tasyām-eva ca pratīpakṣa-bhāvanāyām-avasthā, phalaprāptiḥ, yāna-ānuttaryam ca sapta-mo'rthah.* MVKB I.1

4. *lakṣaṇa-pariccheda.* The term *lakṣaṇa*, literally meaning a "sign", "mark" or "characteristic", is technically used to mean a "definition" or a "scientific description".

by Vasubandhu, I propose to analyse in the following pages. This chapter tries to define, or rather describe, reality in its phenomenal as well as absolute aspects. Consequently this chapter may be subdivided into two main sections:

- (i) *Verses 2-11*, dealing with reality in its phenomenal aspects. This section may be entitled 'the imagination of the unreal' (*abhūta-parikalpa*). The central theme of this section is that reality as it is experienced by one in the state of *samsāra* is there owing to 'the imagination of the unreal' (*abhūta-parikalpa*). In other words, it establishes that the form of subjectivity and objectivity, under which alone things are experienced, are 'imagination of the unreal'.
- (ii) *Verses 12-23*, dealing with reality in its absolute aspects. This section may be entitled 'the emptiness' (*śūnyatā*). The central theme of this section is that reality in its absolute state is empty (*śūnya*) of subject-object distinction, or rather that it is beyond subject-object characterization.

2. The Imagination of the Unreal

Terms explained

Verse 2, which opens the main discussion, makes a few crucial statements, which along with Vasubandhu's commentary on them, should be considered the key-stones of the whole system. "There, beginning with the definitions, [the text] says":

[MVK I. 2] There exists the imagination of the unreal,
There is no pair,
But there is emptiness,
Even in this there is that.¹

This stanza contains four clear statements which I consider to be the key-stones of the entire system. Those statements are:

1. *Abhūta-parikalpo'sti dvayam tatra na vidyate*
Śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra tasyām-āpi sa vidyate. MVK I.2

- (i) an assertion of the imagination of the unreal: *abhūta-parikalpo'sti*,
- (ii) a negation of duality: *dvayam tatra na vidyate*,
- (iii) an assertion of emptiness: *śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra*,
- (iv) an assertion of the co-existence of the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*) and the emptiness (*śūnyatā*): *tasyām-api sa vidyate*.

These four statements involve three key-terms, namely:

- (i) the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*),
- (ii) pair (*dvayam*), and
- (iii) emptiness (*śūnyatā*).

A correct understanding of these three key-terms leading up to a correct understanding of the above four key-statements will provide all necessary clues to the understanding of the entire system of Vasubandhu. Now Vasubandhu himself has explained those terms and statements in his subsequent commentary as follows:

There, the imagination of the unreal means the discrimination between the graspable and the grasper. The pair is the graspable and the grasper. Emptiness means that state of the imagination of the unreal which is lacking in the form of being graspable or grasper. Even in this [emptiness] there is that, namely, the imagination of the unreal. Thus, when something is absent in a receptacle, then one, [seeing] that receptacle as devoid of that thing, perceives that receptacle as it is, and recognizes that receptacle, which is left over, as it is, namely as something truly existing here. Thus, the definition of emptiness is shown to imply no contradiction.¹ I may now reconstruct verse 2 along with Vasubandhu's

1. *Tatra-abhūta-parikalpo grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ. Dvayam grāhyam grāhakam ca. Śūnyatā tasya-abhūta-parikalpasya grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena virahitatā. Tasyām-api sa vidyate iti-abhūta-parikalpaḥ. Evam yad yatra nāsti tat tena śūnyam-iti yathā-bhūtam samanupāśyati, yat punar-atra-avaśiṣṭam bhavati tat tad-iti-asti-iti yathā-bhūtam prajānāti-iti-aviparītam śūnyatā-lakṣaṇam-udbhāvitam bhavati.* MVKB. I.2.

commentary on it as follows:

There exists the imagination of the unreal,¹
namely, the discrimination
between the graspable and the grasper.²
However, there is no pair,³
such as the graspable and the grasper.⁴
There is instead emptiness,⁵
which means that state of the imagination of the unreal,
which is lacking in the form of being graspable or grasper.⁶
Even in such emptiness
there exists the imagination of the unreal.⁷
Thus, when something is absent in a container,
the latter is then perceived as such;
also, what is left over there, namely the container,
is then recognized as such,
namely, as uncontradictably existing there:
this indeed is the defining characteristic of emptiness.⁸

The meaning of the three terms, *abhūta-parikalpa*, *dvayam* and *śūnyatā*, is now unambiguously clear:

Abhūta-parikalpa, the imagination of the unreal, means the discrimination (*vikalpa*) between the graspable (*grāhya*) and the grasper (*grāhaka*). This implies that whatever Vasubandhu traces to imagination (*parikalpa*) is the discrimination (*vikalpa*) between the graspable and the grasper, and whatever he describes as mental construction (*kalpita*) and therefore unreal (*abhūta*), is primarily such discrimination, and the consequent

1. *Abhūta-parikalpo'sti*. MVK I.2.

2. *Tatra-abhūta-parikalpo grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ*. MVKB I. 2.

3. *Dvayam tatra na vidyate*. MVK I. 2.

4. *Dvayam grāhyam grāhakam ca*. MVKB I.2.

5. *Śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra*. MVK I.2.

6. *Śūnyatā tasya abhūta-parikalpasya grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena virahitatā*. MVKB I.2.

7. *Tasyām-api sa vidyate*. MVK I. 2; *tasyām-api sa vidyate iti-abhūta-parikalpaḥ*. MVKB I.2.

8. *Enam yad yatra nāsti tat tena śūnyam-iti yathā-bhūtam samanupāsyati, yat punar atra-avaśiṣṭam bhavati tat sad iha-asti-iti yathā-bhūtam prajānanti-iti-aviparītam śūnyatā-lakṣaṇam-udbhāvitam bhavati*. MVKB I. 2.

forms of graspability (*grāhyatva*) and grasperhood (*grāhakatva*). In other words, the distinction between graspable and grasper, and the forms of graspability and grasperhood, under which things are experienced,* are all mere imagination, and therefore unreal (*abhūta*), too. Then, ultimately what Vasubandhu will describe as "mere representation of consciousness" (*viññapti-mātra*) turn out to be the graspable-grasper forms and the distinction between them.

Dvaya, the pair, means the graspable and the grasper. Hence, wherever Vasubandhu uses the term *dvaya*, it must be taken to mean the duality between graspable and grasper. There are many instances in which Vasubandhu has used the term *dvayam* without giving any explanation.¹ In all such cases *dvayam* means the duality between grasper and graspable. Consequently, denial of duality (*dvayam* or *dvitva*) in Vasubandhu's system does not all mean denial of the multiplicity of beings, as is the case in Śāṅkara's *advaita*-system. In this latter system, for example, the statement *ekam-eva advitiyam* (one only without a second), means that there is only one being having no other being than itself. Here, therefore, the denial of duality, expressed by the term *a-dvitiya* amounts to the denial of the multiplicity (*bahutva*) of beings. But in Vasubandhu's system the denial of duality (expressed by terms like *dvayam tatra na vidyate* MVK I. 2, *advayatvena yac-ca asti* TSN 13, *dvaya-abhāva-svabhāva* TSN 16, *asaddvaya-svabhāva* TSN 18, etc.) means only that a thing in its absolute state of existence is devoid (*śūnya*) of subject-object duality, or that it is lacking in the forms of subjectivity and objectivity (*grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena virahitatā*). Śāṅkara is speaking about the absence of a second being (*advitiya-vastu*), while Vasubandhu is speaking about the absence of a dual nature (*asad-dvaya-svabhāva*) referring to each individual being. Incidentally, it might have been the tendency to read Śāṅkara's meaning of *advitiya* into Vasubandhu's use of *asad-dvaya-svabhāva* that led many later interpreters to understand Vasubandhu's system as monistic idealism.

Śūnyā, the emptiness, means basically the state of existence, which is empty of grasper-graspable characterizations. *Śūnyatā*,

1. For example, TSN 4, 10, 13. etc.

therefore, refers to the thing as it is (*yathā-bhūta*), and is otherwise called 'suchness' (*tathatā*). Thus, *śūnyatā*, meaning the thing unqualified by subjectivity and objectivity, is far from suggesting any kind of nihilism. Again, what is denied of reality in its absolute state of existence, is not plurality of beings, but only the duality between subjects and objects, or rather the dualistic mode of apprehension that is based on graspable-grasper characterization. Also, what is attributed to mental construction is this duality between subjects and objects, not the plurality of beings. Vasubandhu in his commentary has interpreted *śūnyatā* with reference to *abhūta-parikalpa*: "Emptiness means that state of the imagination of the unreal which is lacking in the form of being graspable or grasper."¹ But 'the imagination of the unreal' itself has been defined as "the discrimination between the graspable and the grasper."² Therefore, the state in which 'the imagination of the unreal' is lacking in the forms of the graspable and the grasper, would mean the cessation of the 'imagination of the unreal' itself. Thus *śūnyatā* ultimately means that state of existence which is empty of 'the imagination of the unreal' and of the consequent subject-object distinction. Therefore to realize the absolute state of existence, namely, *śūnyatā*, one has only to stop imagining (i.e. mentally constructing) the unreal forms of subjectivity and objectivity.

Let me now explain the meaning of the four statements mentioned above :

Firstly, there is an assertion of the imagination of the unreal: *abhūta-parikalpo'sti*. This in effect is a strong declaration of the fact that the imagination of the unreal is an undeniably real experience for one in the state of *saṃsāra*, namely that one in the state of *saṃsāra* is bound to construct mentally the unreal forms of subjectivity and objectivity, and then to see everything as endowed with those forms.

Secondly, there is an emphatic negation of duality: *dvayam tatra na vidyate*. This implies that the imagination of the unreal, which means the discrimination between the graspable and the

1. See note 6 on p. 31.

2. See note 2 on p. 31.

grasper,¹ has only phenomenal value, and therefore is real only on the level of *saṃsāra*. As long as one is in the state of *saṃsāra* one goes on discriminating between graspable and grasper, and treats things as if they are endowed with the forms of graspability and grasperhood. But in fact graspability and grasperhood are only subjective forms of experience, and therefore do not belong to things as such (*yathā-bhūta*), and for that matter there is no duality between graspable and grasper.

Thirdly, there is an assertion of emptiness: *śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra*. This refers, as already explained, to the suchness (*tathatā*) of things, which is empty of subject-object characterizations. While the imagination of the unreal, and the consequent subject-object duality are inevitable parts of *saṃsāric* experience, in the state of *nirvāṇa* one no more imagines the unreal forms of subjectivity and objectivity, and no more perceives things as grouped into subjects and objects. Thus in the absolute state of existence there is emptiness of subjectivity and objectivity.

Fourthly, there is an assertion of the co-existence of the imagination of the unreal and the emptiness: *tasyām-āpi sa vidyate*. A literal translation of this statement would be, "Even in this [emptiness] there is that [imagination of the unreal subjectivity and objectivity]". This is, as Sthiramati says,² an explanation of the "mystery" of *saṃsāra* as follows: that things in their pure nature are neither subjects nor objects is a fact; but in the state of *saṃsāra* the pure nature of things is obscured by the imagination of the unreal; therefore, even in this emptiness, i.e. in spite of the fact that things are empty of subject-object characterizations, there is that imagination of the unreal, which obscuring the real nature of things accounts for *saṃsāric* experience, namely the experience of things as discriminated into subjects and objects.

According to Sthiramati there are four ways of understanding the present stanza:

First of all, it is a refutation of the blanket-denial of everything (*sarva-apavāda-pratiśedhārtham*). The propounders of this

1. *Tatra abhūta-parikalpo grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ*. MVKB I.2

2. See below from the next paragraph onwards.

latter theory, whom Stcherbatsky identifies as the Mādhyamikas,¹ held that all elements are devoid of own-nature in all respects (*sarva-dharmāḥ sarvathā niḥsvabhāvāḥ*), just as the horn of a hare is devoid of own-nature.² Against this view the present stanza asserts the reality of 'the imagination of the unreal' and of 'the emptiness', both having own-nature in one way or another. The imagination of the unreal has own-nature,³ which will be later identified as *para-tantra svabhāva*;⁴ and the emptiness has own-nature in the absolute sense of the term,⁵ which will be later identified as *pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*.⁶ The emptiness though always present is obscured by the imagination of the unreal. Therefore one in the state of *saṃsāra* does not realize it, and this inability to realize it explains the bondage in which one is.⁷

Secondly, it is directed against those who held that colour etc. are substances (*dravyatvena santi*) existing independently of mind and mental factors (*citta-caittāḥ*).⁸ According to Stcherbatsky the reference here is to the Sarvāstivādins.⁹ Against them the first line of the stanza should be interpreted to mean that what substantially exists is the imagination of the unreal, not colour etc. Why? Because there is no pair of subjects and objects.¹⁰ Here Sthiramati is making a very

1. Th. Stcherbatsky, trans., *Madhyānta-vibhāga : Discourse on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes*, (Bibliotheca Buddhica XXX, 1936; reprint, Calcutta : Indian Studies, Past and Present, 1971), p. 41

2. *Kecit-virudhanti sarva-dharmāḥ sarvathā niḥsvabhāvāḥ śaśaviśāṇa-vad-ityataḥ sarva-apavāda-pratiṣedhārthamāha abhūta-parikalpo'sti-iti*. MVKBT I.2

3. *Abhūta-parikalpo'sti-iti. Svabhāvataḥ iti vākyaśeṣaḥ*. Ibid

4. *Abhūta-parikalpaḥ para-tantra-svabhāvaḥ*. MVKB I.6

5. *Paramārthataḥ svabhāvaḥ*. MVKBT I.2

6. *Grāhya-grāhaka-abhāvaḥ [= śūnyatā] pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāvaḥ*. Ibid

7. ... *yasmāc-cchīṇyatāyām-āpi-abhūtaparikalpo vidyate tasmād bhavanto na muktaḥ*. MVKBT I.2

8. *Citta-caitṭebhyo'nyatra rūpādayo dravyatvena santi iti yad darśanam tad-pratiṣedhārtham-āha* ... Ibid

9. Th. Stcherbatsky, trans., *Madhyānta-vibhāga : Discourse on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes*, (Bibliotheca Buddhica XXX, 1936; reprint, Calcutta: Indian Studies, Past and Present, 1971), pp. 42-43

10. ... *nāsti rūpam tad-abhūtaparikalpa-vyatiriktam dravyata iti. Kim kāraṇāt ? yasmāt "dṛṣyam tatra na vidyate"*. Ibid

important point : the forms of subjectivity and objectivity in which things are experienced, are mental constructions, and therefore are not substances existing independent of mind and mental factors. Colours etc., which are experienced as objects, are only different modes of objectivity under which things are experienced, and for that matter have no reality independent of mind and mental factors. Here what is to be particularly noted is that when Sthiramati says that colour etc. are not substances (*dravya*) other than mind and mental factors (*citta-caittebhyo 'nyatra*), by colour' etc. he means the different modes of objectivity under which things are experienced, and not those things themselves. That this is his meaning is clear from the fact that the reason he gives for saying that colour etc. are not substances existing independent of mind and mental factors, is that "there is no pair" of subjectivity and objectivity.¹ In other words, what he says is that colour etc., since they belong to the categories of subjectivity and objectivity, do not have any reality independent of mind and mental factors. To make the point clear I may formulate his argument as follows:

All forms of subjectivity and objectivity are but mental forms, and therefore have no reality independent of mind and mental factors.

Colour etc. are forms of objectivity under which things are experienced.

Therefore, they, too, do not have any reality independent of mind and mental factors.

In short, whenever reality is denied to something, it invariably refers to some of subjectivity or objectivity. So Sthiramati continues his explanation in the following manner. The imagination of the unreal is itself neither grasper of anything nor is grasped by anybody. On the contrary, objectivity and subjectivity are but abstract concepts. For colour etc. are not grasped outside consciousness. Just as a dream, consciousness produces the appearance of colour etc. . . . The graspable being absent there cannot be the grasper either, for in the absence of the

1. See note 10 on p. 35

graspable there is also the absence of the grasper. Therefore, colour as an object of experience does not exist apart from the imagination of the unreal. This does not mean that there is nothing apart from the imagination of the unreal. For there is indeed the emptiness which is the basis of purity. However, it is obscured by the imagination of the unreal forms of subjectivity and objectivity. Hence the state of bondage.¹

Thirdly, the stanza endeavours to portray the middle position between the above-mentioned extremes. On the one hand it is not an outright denial of everything (*sarva-apavāda*), for there is the assertion of the imagination of the unreal; on the other hand it is not an indiscriminate assertion of everything, for the pair of subjectivity and objectivity, which includes the sense-objects such as colour etc. has been denied. Further, the assertion of emptiness, which means the unreality of subject-object distinction, explains the meaning of non-substantiality (*nairātmya*). This latter theory does not mean "the absence of a person who acts from within" (*antar-vyāpāra-puruṣa-rahitatā*), but only the absence of subject-object characterization.² However, the state of emptiness is obscured by the imagination of the unreal, and therefore the state of bondage.³

Fourthly, the stanza brings home the distinction between the two realms of existence, namely the realms of defilement (*saṅkleśa*) and of purity (*vyavadāna*).⁴ The imagination of the unreal belongs to the realm of defilement, for it is characterized by illusion (*bhrānti*).⁵ That is, the imagination of the unreal is

1. *Na hi abhūta-parikalpaḥ kasyacid grāhako na-api kenacit grhyate. Kim tarhi grāhya-grāhakatvam bhāva-mātram-eva. Yato vijñānāt bahi rūpādāyo na grhyante. Svapna-ādivad vijñānam rūpādyaḥbhāsam-utpadyate. . . .Grāhya-abhāve grāhakasya-abhāvād grāhye'sati grāhako bhavitum na yujyate. Tasmān-narūpam-abhūta-parikalpāt-prthag-asti. . . . Śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra. . . śūnyatā hi viśuddhi-ālambonā. Sā ca grāhya-grāhaka-rahitatā. . . abhūta-parikalpa-āvṛtatvān-na grhyate. MVKBT I.2*

2. *Anyair-antar-vyāpāra-puruṣa-rahitatā dharmānām śūnyatā-iti-ucyate. Atah śūnyatā-apavāda-pratiṣedhārtham bhūta-nairātmya-khyāpanārthan-ca-āha : śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra iti. MVKBT I.2*

3. For full text see MVKBT I.2

4. *Lakṣaṇam saṅkleśa-vyavadānād-anyan-nāsti-iti-ataḥ saṅkleśa-vyavadāna-lakṣaṇa-pradarśanārtham-āha. MVKBT I.2*

5. *Abhūta-parikalpa-svabhāvaḥ saṅkleśo bhrānti-lakṣaṇatvāt. Ibid*

of illusory character in the sense that the forms of graspable and grasper (*grāhya-grāhaka-ākāra*) in which things appear (*prakhyāna*) do not belong to those things themselves (*sva-ātmani-avidyamāna*).¹ Emptiness of subject-object characterization, however, is the very form (*svarūpa*) of purity (*vyavadāna*).² Conversely, too, the very nature (*svabhāva*) of purity is such emptiness, for purity means the absence of subject-object duality (*dvaya-abhāva-svabhāva*).³ Thus, in short, *abhūta-parikalpa* and *śūnyatā* respectively stand for *saṅkleśa* and *vyavadāna*. Hence the following equation may be made :

abhūta-parikalpa = *grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpa* = *saṅkleśa* = *saṃsāra*.

śūnyatā = *grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpa-abhāva* = *vyavadāna* = *nirvāṇa*.

In the state of *saṃsāra* one is under the illusion that the subject-object duality is a genuine characteristic of things,⁴ and this exactly is one's bondage.

Sthiramati has drawn two analogies to help one understand the theory of *abhūta-parikalpa*, the imagination of the unreal. One is that of an illusory elephant made to appear by the working of *māyā*. He says: "the graspable-grasper discrimination is like the [unreal] form of an elephant in *māyā* in which there is no such form".⁵ That is, *māyā* produces the form of an elephant so that a piece of wood, for example, will appear like an elephant. *Māyā*, which is one's power to produce such illusory forms, as such is devoid of the form of an elephant (*hasti-ākāra-śūnya-māyā*), for as such *māyā* is the power to produce such forms, not those forms themselves, nor does it exist in such forms. However, such forms are within *māyā* (*...māyāyām-iva hasti-ākārah*), in the sense that their seeds (*bīja*) or rather the tendency (*vāsanā*) to create such forms, were already there within oneself. The form of an elephant does not belong to the piece

1. *Sva-ātmani-avidyamānena grāhya-grāhaka-ākāreṇa prakhyānād-bhṛānti-svarūpeṇa jñāyate*. Ibid

2. *Vyavadāna-svarūpa-pradarśanārtham-āha-Śūnyatā vidyate tu-atra-iti*. Ibid.

3. *Śūnyatā-svabhāvo hi vyavadānam dvaya-abhāva-svabhāvatvāt*. Ibid

4. *Yadi dvayam nāsti katham tasyām vidyamānāyām loko bhṛānta iti āha—tasyām-āpi sa vidyate—iti*. Ibid

5. *Grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpo hasti-ākāra-śūnya-māyāyām-iva hasti-ākāra-ādayaḥ*. MVKBT I.2

of wood, either, which appears as an elephant. In other words, the piece of wood does not exist in the form in which it appears to exist, namely in the form of an elephant.

Then, the working of *abhūta-parikalpa* should be understood on the above analogy. *Abhūta-parikalpa* is one's power to produce unreal forms, namely the forms of subjectivity and objectivity. "It is called the *abhūta-parikalpa*, [the imagination of the unreal,] because by it, or in it, is imagined [=mentally constructed] the unreal pair. By the term *abhūta* is meant that it [= *abhūtaparikalpa*] does not exist as it is imagined, namely in [terms] of subjectivity and objectivity. By the term *parikalpa* is meant that the thing does not exist as it is imagined, [namely in the form of a subject or object]. Thus its definition that it is free of subject-object characterization, is made clear."¹ Thus the theory of *abhūta-parikalpa* is meant to shatter one's belief in the subject-object characterization of things. About what comes under *abhūta-parikalpa* Sthiramati continues:

Abhūta-parikalpa includes the entire range of *citta* and *caitta* which are in accordance with *saṃsāra*. In particular, however, it means the graspable-grasper discrimination. There, the discrimination of the graspable refers to the consciousness which appears as non-living and living beings; and the discrimination of the grasper refers to the consciousness which appears as self and representation of consciousness.²

These words of Sthiramati may be explained as follows : The *abhūta-parikalpa* includes everything (*aviśeṣeṇa*) that is called mind and mental factors, under the influence of which one finds oneself in the state of *saṃsāra*. They cease to operate at the attainment of *nirvāṇa* (*nirvāṇa-paryavasānah*). All such *citta* and *caittas* can be subsumed under the forms of subjectivity, and objectivity, and, therefore, *abhūta-parikalpa* particularly

1. *Abhūta-asmin dveyam parikalpyate'nena vā-iti abhūta-parikalpaḥ. Abhūta-vacanena ca yathā-ayam parikalpyate grāhya-grāhakatvena tathā nāsti-iti pradarśayati. Parikalpa-vacanena tu-artho yathā parikalpyate tathā-artho na vidyate iti pradarśayati. Evam-asya grāhya-grāhaka-vinirmuktam lakṣaṇam paridīpitam bhavati. MVKBT I.2*

2. . . . *saṃsāra-anurūpaś-citta-caitta aviśeṣeṇa-abhūta-parikalpaḥ. Viśeṣeṇa tu grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ. Tatra grāhya-vikalpo' arthasattva-pratibhāsam. Grāhaka-vikalpa ātma-vijñāpti-pratibhāsam. Ibid*

means the *graspable-grasper* distinction (*grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ*). Graspable-discrimination (*grāhya-vikalpa*) refers to the form of objectivity under which consciousness appears as non-living and living beings (*artha* and *sattva*), and the grasper-discrimination refers to the form of subjectivity under which consciousness (*viññāna*) appears (*pratibhāsa*) as self and representations of consciousness (*ātma* and *viññāpti*).¹

Explaining the terms *grāhya* and *grāhaka* Sthiramati again says: "*Grāhya* means colour etc., and *grāhaka* means eye-consciousness etc."² This is an important clue to the understanding of the whole system. Colour etc., namely colour, taste, touch, smell and sound, are the forms under which things are experienced: they are mere forms of objectivity, and as such they are unreal (*abhūta*); eye-consciousness etc., namely the eight types of consciousnesses, are forms of an experiencing subject: they are mere forms of subjectivity, and as such they are unreal too. What I am trying to say is that unless colour etc. and eye-consciousness etc. are summarized respectively as forms of objectivity and subjectivity, their distinction into *grāhya* and *grāhaka*, and the subsequent denial of their reality will make no sense. Therefore Sthiramati's statement means:

Colour etc. being mere forms under which things become knowable (*grāhya*), are mere imagination (*parikalpa*) and therefore unreal (*abhūta*), too. Similarly, eye-consciousness etc. being mere forms under which one becomes a knower (*grāhaka*), are mere imagination (*parikalpa*), and therefore unreal (*abhūta*), too.

Thus, as I have already made it clear, whenever something is denied reality, it is treated under the aspect of being a knowable (*grāhya*) or a knower (*grāhaka*).

The second of the two analogies mentioned above is that of a rope appearing under the form of a snake. The message of this analogy is that what is unreal (*abhūta*) in this case is the nature of the snake (*sarpa-svabhāva*) while the rope as such is real. Similarly, the forms of subjectivity and objectivity, under

1. This point will be further explained under MVK I.4

2. *Tatra grāhyam rūpādi. Grāhakam cakṣur-viññānādi. MVKBT I.2*

which *abhūta-parikalpa* appear, are unreal, but not *abhūta-parikalpa* itself.¹ That is, *abhūta-parikalpa* as such, i.e. short of the forms of subjectivity and objectivity, is real. This statement has two meanings: (i) *abhūta-parikalpa*, namely, that one mentally constructs unreal forms, is an undeniably real fact of *samsāric* existence, although those forms are themselves unreal; (ii) what remains once the forms of subjectivity and objectivity have been negated, namely *śūnyatā*, otherwise called *tathatā*, is eternally (*sarvakālam*) real. Thus having exploded the myth of subject-object distinction two assertions can be made about any individual: (i) as long as he is in the state of *samsāra* he is subject to the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*); (ii) in the state of *nirvāṇa* he realizes the emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of subjectivity and objectivity.²

Neither void nor non-void

Thus all that can be said with reference to any individual in the state of *samsāra* can be reduced to two statements : (i) an assertion of the imagination of the unreal and of the absolute state of emptiness; (ii) a negation of subjectivity and objectivity. To understand any individual these two statements, one affirmation and the other negation, have to be put together. Nothing is exclusively void (*śūnya*) nor exclusively non-void (*aśūnya*).³ It is in avoiding these two extremes⁴ that the Yogācārins claim to be holding a middle position.⁵ Hence the next stanza says:

[MVK I.3] Neither void nor non-void :
So is everything described,
That indeed is the middle path,

1. *Grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena virahitatā vivikṭatā hi-abhūta-parikalpasya śūnyatā. Na tu-abhūta-parikalpo'pi-abhāvaḥ yathā śūnya rajjuḥ sarpa-svabhāvena-atat-svabhāvāt sarvakālam śūnyā, na tu rajju-svabhāvena tathā-īha-api.* Ibid

2. *Yat punar-avaśiṣṭam tat-sat. Kim-punariha-avaśiṣṭam ? Abhūta-parikalpaḥ śūnyatā ca.* Ibid

3. *Sarvam na ekāntena śūnyam na ekāntena aśūnyam.* MVKB I.3

4. *antaḥ*, as in the title of the book, *Madhya-anta-vibhāga*.

5. *Sā ca madhyamā-pratīpad yad sarvam na-ekāntena śūnyam na-ekāntena-aśūnyam.* MVKB I.3

For there is existence as well as non-existence,
And again existence.¹

Commenting on this stanza Vasubandhu says :

On account of the existence of emptiness, on the one hand, and that of the imagination of the unreal, on the other, it is not void. And on account of the non-existence of the pair of graspable and grasper, it is not non-void, either. This description applies to everything whether conditioned or unconditioned. The term 'conditioned' goes for what is called the imagination of the unreal, while the term 'unconditioned' goes for what is called the emptiness. That indeed is the middle path, for, on the one hand, there is the existence of emptiness within the imagination of the unreal, and, on the other, the existence of the imagination of the unreal within the emptiness. It is therefore neither exclusively void nor exclusively non-void. This reading is thus in accordance with the scriptures such as *Prajñā-pāramitā*, [where it is said]: 'all this is neither void nor non-void.'²

The statement, "So is everything described",³ deserves special attention. It implies that the description that it is "Neither void nor non-void" applies to every single being separately, not to reality in general. In other words, here there is an indication that the text is speaking about individual beings, not about a cosmic, monistic, reality. The Sanskrit term translated as "every" is *sarva*. It could also be translated as "all". In either case the term *sarva* stands for a multiplicity of beings. This observation of mine is confirmed by Vasubandhu's subsequent commentary. He says that the

1. *Na śūnyam na-āpi ca aśūnyam tasmāt sarvam vidhiyate*

Sattvād-asattvāt sattvac-ca madhyamā pratīpac-ca sā. MVK I.3

2. *Na śūnyam śūnyatayā ca-abhūta-parikalpena ca. Na ca-aśūnyam dwayena grāhyena grāhakena ca. Sarvam-saṃskṛtam ca-abhūta-parikalpākhyam, asaṃskṛtam ca śūnyatā-ākhyam. Vidhiyate nirdiśyate. Sattvād-abhūta-parikalpe, tasyām ca-abhūta-parikalpaśya sā ca madhyamā pratīpat. Yaś sarvam na-ekāntena śūnyam, na-ekāntena aśūnyam. Evam-ayam pāṭhaḥ prajñāpāramitātiṣu-anulomito bhavati—Sarvamidaṃ na śūnyam na-āpi ca-aśūnyam-iti. MVKB I.3*

3. *Tasmāt. sarvam vidhiyate. MVK I.3*

term *sarvaṃ* in the verse stands for everything whether “conditioned” (*saṃskṛta*) or “unconditioned” (*asaṃskṛta*). Division of the entire (*sarvaṃ*) range of elements (*dharmāḥ*) into “conditioned” and “unconditioned” goes back to the time of the Buddha. Therefore, Vasubandhu’s interpretation of the term *sarvaṃ* as covering both the conditioned and the unconditioned elements implies that he retains the original analysis of reality into so many individual elements. Then it is to each of those individual elements that the description “neither void nor non-void” applies. Therefore, every individual element is envisaged as having two aspects, one positive (*asūnya*) and the other negative (*śūnya*).

The terms *śūnya* and *asūnya*, here translated respectively as “void” and “non-void”, too, need explanation. Linguistically they are just opposites. However, in the present context they are not quite so. *Śūnya* evidently refers to the absence of subject-object characterizations. Then one could rightly expect *asūnya* to mean the presence of such characterizations. That is not the case, though. Instead, it refers to the existence of that to which the subject-object characterizations are denied. In other words, *śūnya* means that something is devoid of subject-object characterizations, while *asūnya* means that the same thing, although devoid of such characterizations, still exists. Similarly, according to the present stanza, everything (*sarvaṃ*) conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) as well as unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) is devoid of subject-object characterizations,¹ but still is an existing reality, either as *abhūta-parikalpa* or as *śūnyatā*. The conditioned elements exist as *abhūta-parikalpa* while the unconditioned ones exist as *śūnyatā*.² *Abhūta-parikalpa*, as has been explained in the previous stanza, exists as an undeniable factor of *saṃsāra*, although the forms of subjectivity and objectivity, in which it manifests itself, do not exist.³ Consequently, the conditioned elements,

1. *Na-śūnyam śūnyatayā ca-abhūta-parikalpena ca. Na ca asūnyam dvayena grāhyena grāhakena ca. Sarvaṃ saṃskṛtam ca-abhūta-parikalpa-ākhyam, asaṃskṛtam ca śūnyatākhyam.* MVKB I.3

2. *Sarvaṃ saṃskṛtam ca-abhūta-parikalpākhyam, asaṃskṛtam ca śūnyatā-ākhyam* MVKB I.3.

3. *Abhūta-parikalpo'sti, dvayam tatra na vidyate.* MVK I.2

too, which make up the realm of *abhūta-parikalpa*,¹ are undeniable factors of *saṃsāra*, although the forms of subjectivity and objectivity, in which they manifest themselves, do not exist, and therefore are unreal (*abhūta*). The point at issue will be clearer if one remembers that "the *abhūta-parikalpa* includes everything that is called *citta* and *caitta* under the influence of which one ~~finds oneself~~ in the state of *saṃsāra*, and which cease to operate at the attainment of *nirvāṇa*".² That is, what is presently treated as "conditioned" should be referred to the same *citta-caitta* complex. So ultimately it is those *citta-caittas* that are described as *saṃskṛta-dharmas* and as *abhūta-parikalpa* and finally as both *śūnya* as well as *aśūnya* : they exist (*aśūnya*) as undeniable factors of *saṃsāra*, but are devoid (*śūnya*) of the forms of subjectivity and objectivity in which they manifest themselves.

Similarly, *śūnyatā* exists in the absolute sense of the term, but is eternally devoid of subject-object characterizations. Consequently, the unconditioned elements, which make up the realm of *śūnyatā*,³ exist in the absolute sense of the term, but are eternally devoid of subject-object characterizations.

Thus everything (*sarvam*), whether conditioned (*saṃskṛta*) or unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), the former under the aspect of *abhūta-parikalpa* and the latter under the aspect of *śūnyatā*, is rightly described as "neither void nor non-void" (*na śūnyam na-api ca aśūnyam*).

Abhūta-parikalpa and *śūnyatā*, theoretically speaking, refer to mutually excluding modes of existence, namely *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. But in a concrete individual undergoing the *saṃsāra* experience those two modes co-exist, so to speak, *abhūta-parikalpa* overshadowing and obscuring (*āvaraṇa*) *śūnyatā*. An individual undergoing the state of *saṃsāra* combines in himself *abhūta-parikalpa* and *śūnyatā*, *saṃskṛta-dharmas* and *asaṃskṛta-dharmas*, *saṃkleśa* and *vyavadāna*, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. All *dharmas*, *saṃskṛta* as well as *asaṃskṛta*, which constitute his being, are each *śūnya* as well as *aśūnya*, as explained above. At the dawn of *nirvāṇa*,

1. *saṃskṛtam ca-abhūta-parikalpākhyam*. MVKB I.3

2. . . *nirvāṇa-paryavasānāḥ saṃsāra-anurūpāś-citta-caittā aviśeṣeṇa-abhūta-parikalpāḥ*. MVKBT I.2

3. *Asaṃskṛtam ca śūnyatā-ākhyam*. MVKB I.3

samskr̥ta-dharmas, which are the same as *citta-caittas* cease to exist, and for that matter so do *abhūta-parikalpa*, *saṅkleśa* and *samsāra*. It is this co-existence of *abhūta-parikalpa* and *śūnyatā*, a point already emphasized in stanza I.2, that Vasubandhu has in mind when he says: "On the one hand, there is the existence of emptiness within the imagination of the unreal, and, on the other, the existence of the imagination of the unreal within the emptiness."¹ Then by shedding the covering (*āvaraṇa*) of *abhūta-parikalpa* one attains the state of *śūnyatā*, which is the same as *nirvāṇa*.

Forms of the imagination of the unreal

The next stanza is a further inquiry into the particular forms of the imagination of the unreal. It has already been said that the imagination of the unreal expresses itself in two primary forms, namely the forms of subjectivity and objectivity. However, each of those primary forms may have different secondary forms. What are such secondary forms? This is the question discussed in the next stanza. Vasubandhu calls it the "own-definition" (*svalakṣaṇa*) of the imagination of the unreal. The previous two stanzas gave a positive definition (*sal-lakṣaṇa*) and a negative definition (*asal-lakṣaṇa*) of the same imagination of the unreal. Positively it was defined (or rather described) as an existing reality,² and negatively as not having within itself the pair of subjectivity and objectivity.³ However, what particular forms it takes was not clearly discussed, except that Vasubandhu in his commentary said that "the imagination of the unreal means the discrimination between the grasper and the graspable".⁴ Hence, "thus having stated the positive and negative definition of the imagination of the unreal, now [the author] gives its own definition."⁵ As for the distinction between the positive definition

1. See note 2 on p. 42.

2. *Idam sattvena lakṣyate iti sattvam-eva sal-lakṣaṇam. Abhūta-parikalpo vidyate iti-anena-abhūta-parikalpasya sattvam pradarśayati-iti-arthaḥ. MVKB I.4*

3. *Evam-asattvena lakṣyate iti asattvam-eva-asal-lakṣaṇam. Tat punar-yad grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena-asattvam-yasmād-abhūta-parikalpe dvayam nāsti tasmād-abhūtaparikalpo'pi dvayātmanā nāsti-iti-utkam bhavati. MVKB I.4*

4. *Tatra-abhūta-parikalpo grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ. MVKB I.2*

5. *Evam abhūta-parikalpasya sal-lakṣaṇam-asal-lakṣaṇam ca khyāpayitva svalakṣaṇam khyāpayati. MVKB I.4*

and the own-definition Sthiramati says that the former is only a general (*sāmānya*) assertion while the latter is a particular (*viśeṣa*) one,¹ implying that the positive definition was concerned with only a general assertion of the reality of the imagination of the unreal, while the own-definition is going to give more particulars about the same imagination of the unreal.

Now, the first part of the stanza reads as follows:

[MVK I.4] Under the appearance of things inanimate,
Living beings, self and representations of consciousness
Is born the consciousness.²

Commenting on these lines Vasubandhu says:

In the form of colour etc. the consciousness appears as inanimate things, and in that of five senses it appears as living beings. These five senses refer to one's own as well as others' streams of existence. The appearance of consciousness as self is the same as defiled thought, because it is associated with self-delusion etc. The representations of consciousness are otherwise called the sixfold consciousness.³

According to Sthiramati this passage answers two questions. The first one is concerned with the possibility of having sense-knowledge. It has been said in the previous stanzas that although there is the imagination of the unreal, there is no graspable-grasper duality. How then could there be sense-knowledge, which necessarily presupposes the duality between graspable objects and grasping subjects? This question, says Sthiramati, is answered by the present stanza saying that it is the *abhūta-parikalpa* itself which appears in the different forms of

1. *Ko viśeṣo'sti sal-lakṣaṇa-svalakṣaṇayoḥ ? Sal-lakṣaṇam hi sāmānyam. Svalakṣaṇam tu viśeṣaḥ.* MVKBT I.4

2. *Artha-sattva-ātma-vijñapti-pratibhāsam prajāyate Vijñāna. . .* MVK I.4

3. *Tatra-artha-pratibhāsam yad rūpādi-bhāvena pratibhāsate. Sattva-pratibhāsam yat pañca-indriyattvena-sva-para-santānayoḥ. Ātma-pratibhāsam kliṣṭam manaḥ, ātma-mohādi-samprayogāt. Vijñapti-pratibhāsam sad vijñānāni. Nāsti ca-asya-artha-iti artha-sattvapratibhāsasya-anākāratvāt, ātma-vijñapti-pratibhāsasya ca vitatha-pratibhāsatvāt. Tadabhāvāt tad-āpi-asad-iti yat grāhyam rūpādi, pañca-indriyam, manaḥ, śaḍ-vijñāna-sañjñakam caturvidham tasya grāhyasyābhāvāt tadāpi grāhakam vijñānam asat.* MVKB I.4

subjectivity and objectivity.¹ Here Sthiramati obviously means that the above said four appearances of consciousness, namely *artha*, *sattva*, *ātma* and *viññapti*, and the consciousness itself, are different forms of subjectivity and objectivity in which the *abhūta-parikalpa* expresses itself. I shall return to this point later.

The second question which Sthiramati thinks the present stanza answers is the following. It has been positively said that there exists the imagination of the unreal. But its own-nature remains to be explained. It has also been said that there is no subject-object duality at all. If so it remains to be explained how one has still the passion for making a distinction between the graspable and the grasper, and how one can be led to believe that there is no duality.² These problems are solved, says Sthiramati, by the present stanza as follows. The own-nature of *abhūta-parikalpa* is consciousness (i.e. the *abhūta-parikalpa* is of the nature of consciousness). The same consciousness is to be understood together with its associates. However, primarily it is consciousness. The same consciousness, which is bound up with the appearances of *artha*, *sattva* etc., is itself the passion for the graspable-grasper distinction.³ What Sthiramati says may be put in other words: *abhūta-parikalpa* for all practical purposes is the same as consciousness (*viññāna*), including its associates (*samprayoga*), namely, *citta* and *caittas*. This consciousness, or more specifically, the *citta* and *caittas*, is always the consciousness of something, either *artha*, or *sattva* or *ātma* or *viññapti*, and therefore appears as if split into two parts, one of subjectivity and the other of objectivity, and thus accounts for

1. *Yadi sva-lakṣaṇam-anākhyātam-atra kim syāt ? ... grāhya-grāhaka-rahitatā-abhūta-parikalpa-mātratā-iti-uddiṣṭam. Tasya-abhūta-parikalpa-mātratāyām-indriya-viṣaya-viññānam yathā-vyavasthitam (tathā) na jñāyate (iti). Abhūta-parikalpa-pratibhāsa-bhedena tad-vyavasthiti-jñāpanārtham-abhūta-parikalpasya sva-lakṣaṇam khyāpayati. MVKBT I.4*

2. *... abhūta-parikalpo'sti-iti-anena tat-sattva-mātram jñāyate, na tu tat-svabhāvaḥ. Dvaya-abhave'pi yad grāhya-grāhaka-abhiniveśa-kāraṇam na jñāyate, dvayam ca nāsti-iti yataḥ pratīyate tad-api na-uktam-iti-ataḥ-tat-pratipādanārtham-āha. Ibid*

3. *Tatra viññānasvabhāvo'bhūtaparikalpāḥ. Tac-ca viññānam sa-samprayogam-abhipretam. Pradhānena tu viññānam gṛhitam. Sa eva grāhya-grāhaka-abhiniveśo-artha-sattva-adi-pratibhāsa-nibandhaḥ. Ibid*

one's passion for graspable-grasper distinction (*grāhya-grāhaka-abhiniveśa*), and leads one to believe that there is really the distinction between the subjects and objects.

Before proceeding further I must make one point clear. That consciousness appears in the form of different objects is the basic contention of the present stanza. This should not be understood to mean that there are no things other than consciousness. On the contrary, it means only that what falls within the range of experience are different forms of consciousness, while the things-in-themselves remain beyond the limits of experience. For example, when a rope is mistaken for a snake, it is the form of snake, which is being experienced, that can be explained as a mental form, while the rope itself remains outside that experience. That just the same is the message of the present stanza is clear from a similar example cited by Sthiramati which is as follows. One may mistake a stump for a man. There, one is projecting one's past experience of man on to the stump before one, and thus making oneself unable to recognize the stump as such. Similarly, says Sthiramati, 'the ignorant people mistake the different forms of consciousness for things other than consciousness, just as people with bad eyes mistake their own mental images for hair, egg etc.'¹

- It is obvious that the present stanza is dealing with the ordinary categories of experience/thought, namely consciousness (*viññāna*), non-living beings (*artha*), living beings (*sattva*), self (*ātma*), and representations of consciousness (*viññapti*). Analyzing those categories the stanza says that they are different forms of subjectivity and objectivity, and as such being different appearances of consciousness itself they do not represent things in themselves. I shall now explain how those categories can be interpreted as different forms of subjectivity and objectivity. The central point is that they present themselves to thought/experience either as subject or as object of some experience. Thus, first there appears consciousness as the subject of all the

1. *Katham asati-arthādaṁ viññānaṁ tad-abhāsaṁ-udpadyate? Na hi puruṣe asati sthānuḥ bhavati-iti. Na eṣaḥ doṣaḥ. Artha-ādi-abhāsaṁ hi viññānaṁ bālāḥ vijñānāt prthag-artha-astitvena-abhiniviṣante taimirikasya keśāṇḍukādivat.* Ibid

other four categories.¹ That is, consciousness is invariably the consciousness of either self or ideas or living beings or non-living beings. Apart from being the subject of those other categories consciousness is nothing, and therefore it makes sense only as an experiencing subject. Again, self and the representation of consciousness are contrasted with living beings and non-living beings as subjects and objects. Self defined as defiled thought (*kliṣṭam manaḥ*, literally meaning impassioned thought)² is described as the subject of passions such as ego-delusion, ego-belief, ego-desire and ego-pride,³ all these passions having living and non-living beings as their objects.⁴ In other words, self is a bundle of passions which presuppose external beings as their objects. The representations of consciousness stand for the six-fold consciousness, namely the five sense-consciousnesses (*indriya-vijñānāni*) and the thought-consciousness (*mano-vijñānam*). Being consciousness none of them has any meaning without reference to the respective objects, either animate or inanimate. So they are essentially in the form of subjects. Finally, living and non-living beings are there as objects of either self, or one or another form of consciousness. By living being are meant those which are endowed with five senses. Such beings ultimately represent one's own as well as other people's streams of existence.⁵ What is important here is that those "persons" (or streams of existence) are experienced only as objects of one's consciousness and passions. Similarly the non-living beings, which can be reduced to sense-data (i.e., colour etc.), are presented to consciousness through the senses.⁶ As they appear, they, too, have the form of objects of consciousness, the latter appearing either as self or as representations of consciousness.

1. Cf. . . . *tad-grāhyam rūpadi, pañca-indriyam, manaḥ, ṣaḍ-vijñāna-saṅgīhakaṇ catur-vidham tasya grāhyasya . . . tadapi grāhakam vijñānam . . .* Ibid.

2. *ātma-pratibhāsam kliṣṭam manaḥ*. MVKB I.4

3. *Ātma-pratibhāsam kliṣṭam manaḥ, ātma-mohādi-samprayogād-iti kliṣṭasya manasa ātma-mohena-ātmadrṣṭyā-ātma-tṛṣṇayā-asmimānena ca nityam samprayuktatvāt, teṣām-ca ātma-āmbanāt-vād-yuktam ātma-pratibhāsatvam kliṣṭasya manasaḥ*. MVKBT I.4

4. Because underlying these passions (*kleśas*) is the I-consciousness as opposed to other objects.

5. *Sattva-pratibhāsam yat pañca-indriyattvena sva-para-santānayoḥ*. MVKB I.4

6. *Tatra artha-pratibhāsam yad-rūpādi-bhāvena pratibhāsatē*. Ibid

The remaining part of the stanza under discussion, and its commentaries by Vasubandhu and Sthiramati, evaluate those categories and show how, under the aspects of subjectivity and objectivity, they are false and unreal:

[MVK I.4 cont'd.] There is nothing as its [i.e. consciousness's] object,
And thus that object being absent
That [consciousness], too, is non-existent.¹

What the author says here could be differently put as follows:

Consciousness makes sense only with reference to its object (*artha*).

There are no such objects.

Therefore there is nothing called consciousness either. Vasubandhu now in his commentary on the above lines examines and explains the minor premise of the argument, namely that there are no such objects. The objects (*artha*) referred to are evidently the categories of self, representations of consciousness, living beings and inanimate things, all of which have been spoken of in the former part of the stanza as appearances (*pratibhāsa*) of consciousness itself. Now, then, what is meant by saying that there are no such objects? In what sense are those four objects absent? Here is the answer given by Vasubandhu:

The appearances of inanimate things as well as of living beings are devoid of form; likewise the appearances of self and representation of consciousness are not in the way they appear to be. This is why it is said that there is indeed nothing as its [i.e. consciousness's] object. That is, the four kinds of graspables—namely, (i) colour etc., (ii) the five senses, (iii) thought, and (iv) the sixfold consciousness—are absent. Thus the graspable being absent, the grasper, namely the consciousness, too, is non-existent.²

1. . . . *nāsti ca-asya-arthaś-tad-abhāvāt tad-āpi-asat*. MVK I.4

2. *Nāsti-ca-asya-artha itī artha-sattva-pratibhāsasya-anākāratvāt, ātma-vijñapti-pratibhāsasya ca vitatha-pratibhāsatvāt. Tad-abhāvāt tadapi-asat-iti yat tad-grāhyam rūpādi, pañca-indriyam, manah, śaḍ-vijñāna-sañjñakam catur-vidham tasya grāhyasya-abhāvāt tadapi-grāhakam vijñānam-asat*. MVKB I.4

The main concern of this passage is to show in what sense the five categories of experience are unreal. And the whole thrust of the argument derives from contrasting consciousness as the grasper with the other four categories as the graspables. And the argument itself may be summarized as follows: graspability being a fake concept, grasperhood, too, does not make sense. How is then graspability a fake concept?

First of all Vasubandhu distinguishes between inanimate and living beings on the one hand, and self and representations of consciousness on the other. Then he says that the former pair is absent/non-existent (*abhāva*) because they have no form. The Sanskrit term translated here as 'form' is *ākāra*. In the ordinary language it means 'form', or 'shape' or 'frame'. But in an epistemological context, such as the present one, it stands for the form in which a thing is perceived or grasped, and therefore can be better translated as 'objective frame' or 'objectivity'. That in the present context *ākāra* means 'objectivity' is clear from Sthiramati's subsequent commentary. He gives two interpretations:

(i) In the first instance, for him *ākāra* means 'the mode in which an object is grasped'.¹ In other words, for him *ākāra* means *prakāra*, this latter term being the one employed by Indian logicians to denote 'the way or mode in which an object is experienced'.² Sthiramati then says that both inanimate and living beings do not have such a *prakāra* (objectivity) in which they could be grasped. Why? Because they only appear in the form of graspables (*grāhyarūpeṇa prakhyānāt*).³ Here are Sthiramati's own words:

A form [*ākāra*] indeed is the mode in which an object [*ālambana*] is grasped, for example, as an impermanent thing etc. Neither of them [i.e. inanimate and living beings],

1. *grahya-prakārah*. See note 1 on p. 52.

2. For example Annambhatta's *Tarka-saṅgraha*, (Varanasi : The Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series, 1966), pp. 14-15, defines *true* experience as "that which presents the object in the form in which it really is" (*tad-vat tad-prakāraṇaḥ nūbhava yathārthah*).

3. *sa [ākārah] ca anayoḥ [artha-sattva-pratibhāsayoḥ] nāsti grāhya-rūpeṇa prakhyānāt*. MVKBT I. 4

however, has such a mode, because they only appear in the form of graspables. Therefore, the phrase 'because they have no form' means 'because they have no graspability'.¹

This denial of *ākāratva* has to be understood in the light of, and on the model of, the denial of the pair (*dvayam*) in the second stanza. In the light of it, for my analysis of the denial of *dvaya* showed that "whenever reality is denied to something, it invariably refers to some form of subjectivity and objectivity" (see above p. 36), or that "whenever something is denied reality, it is treated under the aspect of being a knowable (*grāhya*) or a knower (*grāhaka*)" (see above p. 40). Therefore in the present case, too, the denial of *ākāratva* has to be understood with reference to forms of subjectivity and objectivity, and, as I have already explained, it definitely refers to the form of objectivity. Again, on the model of the denial of *dvaya*, for denial of *dvaya* means that neither *abhūta-parikalpa* nor *śūnyatā* has within itself the duality between subjectivity and objectivity, and that such a duality is altogether illusory just as the form of a magical elephant. Similarly, the denial of *ākāratva* (i.e. the form of objectivity, which is one of the above-mentioned pair, *dvaya*), too, should be understood to mean that neither appearances of consciousness as living and non-living beings, nor the things (no matter living or non-living) in themselves have *ākāratva*, and that *ākāratva* is altogether illusory as the form of a magical elephant.

(ii) A Second interpretation of *ākāra* given by Sthiramati is that "*ākāra* is the experience of subject. But no such experience of either of them [i.e. inanimate or living beings] is there. Therefore, they are formless in the sense that there is no perception of them."² These words of Sthiramati imply a down-

1. *Ākāro hi-ālabhasya-anityādi-rūpeṇa grāhaka-prakārah. Sa anayor-nāsti grāhya-rūpeṇa prakhyānāt. Ato-anākāratvād-agrāhakatvād-iti arthaḥ.* MVKBT I.4. In this passage *agrāhakatvāt* has been translated as "because they have no graspability." *Grāhakatva* in normal situations would mean 'grasperhood' which does not fit in with the present context. As the suffix *ka* can also refer to objectivity it is here accordingly translated, as in the term *kāraṇaka*.

2. *Ālabhana-saṃvedanam vā ākārah. Tac-ca tayor nāsti iti upalabdhi-abhāvād-anākārah.* MVKBT I. 4.

right denial of experience of a thing, whether inanimate or living, as it is in itself. What is thought to be experienced is only the appearance (*pratibhāsa*) of consciousness (*viññāna*), which under the aspect of knowable (*grāhya*) is as illusory as the form of a magical elephant, and therefore does not altogether exist (*atyanta-abhāva* Cf. TSN. 11).

Thus the above two interpretations of *ākāra* amount to the same conclusion, namely that the form in which a thing is thought to be grasped is purely imagined (*parikalpita*), and therefore is no sure guide to the thing-in-itself. It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that Vasubandhu's system can be called idealism. It by no means implies that there is nothing apart from ideas or consciousness.

Now coming to Vasubandhu's evaluation of the categories of self and the representations of consciousness, he has said that they are 'false appearances'. The Sanskrit term translated as 'false appearance' is *vitatha-pratibhāsa*, which literally means 'appearance of something in a false manner'. That means, the appearance of self and the representations of consciousness as objects (*artha*) of consciousness is false. Why? Sthiramati explains: 'The other two objects, namely self and representations of consciousness manifest (*prakhyāna*) themselves as graspers (*grāhaka-rūpeṇa*), but take on the false appearance of graspables, and for that matter are absent (*abhāva*).¹ In other words self, and representations of consciousness stand for forms of subjectivity, as I have already explained above on pp. 48ff. Therefore, their appearance (*pratibhāsa*) as objects (*artha*) of consciousness (*viññāna*) is false (*vitatha*), and for that reason (*kāraṇam*) is said to be absent, too. How their manifestation as graspers (*grāhaka*), too, are illusory is already made clear, for all forms of subjectivity have been described as altogether non-existent. Further, for them to be graspers there should be some objects which they can grasp. Living as well as non-living beings could be such graspable objects. But it has already been said that the graspability of living and non-living beings just does not exist. As graspable objects the living and non-living beings

1. *Natu-anyayor-grāhya-rūpeṇa prakhyānād-anākārah; vitathapratibhāsatvam-eva-artha-abhāve kāraṇam-uktam.* MVKB 1.4

are altogether non-existent (*atyanta-abhāva*). Thus the graspable objects being absent, the term "grasping subjects" becomes meaningless and redundant. It is in this sense that self and representations of consciousness are said to be absent. Sthiramati says: "The graspable objects being absent, the appearances of both self and representations of consciousness, which manifest themselves as grasping subjects, are false."¹

Sthiramati has one more explanation for the false appearance of self and representations of consciousness as graspables. He says:

False appearance means the absence of the objects in the way they are imagined to be there by the consciousness. False appearance is thus owing to false basis [= object], just as a false rumour about the presence of a tiger etc. is owing to false basis.²

Thus there are things independent of consciousness, although they are not in the manner they are imagined by the grasping subject.

After having thus established the non-beingness (absence) of the categories of self, representations of consciousness, inanimate beings and living beings, the authors now call one's attention to consciousness, of which the former four are seemingly the objects. However, now that those objects (*artha*) are proved to be absent (*abhāva*), it is no longer sensible to call consciousness a subject.³ Hence consciousness as a subject, too, is so much absent. It does not get at anything other than its own forms. In a way its own subjectivity itself is one of its own constructions. Sthiramati says:

The objects being absent, there is no consciousness of them either. Consciousness is that which knows objects. Therefore in the absence of objects there cannot be the act of knowing as well. Thus, since objects are absent, consciousness, too, as a knowing subject, is non-existent.⁴

1. *Grāhya-abhāve dvayor-ātma-vijñapti-pratibhāsayor-grāhaka-ākāreṇa prakhyānāt vitatha-pratibhāsatvam.* MVKBT I.4

2. *Yathā vijñānena-arthaḥ parikalpyate tathā-arthasya-abhāvo vyāghrādi-śruti-iva vitatha-ālambanatvād-vitatha-pratibhāsatā.* Ibid.

3. *Artha-abhāvād-vijñātytvena vijñānam-asat.* MVKBT I.4

4. *Artha-abhāvāt-tad-vijñānam-asat. Vijñāti-iti-vijñānam grāhya-abhāve vijñānā-āpi anyuktaṁ. Tasmād-artha-abhāvād-vijñātytvena vijñānam-asat.* Ibid.

The above analysis could be summarized as follows. The categories of consciousness, self, representations of consciousness, living beings and inanimate beings, insofar as they fall within the range of experience, are all but subjective constructions, and for that reason unreal, too. Those categories are experienced as one or other form of subjectivity and objectivity, and as such do not represent the things-in-themselves (things in their suchness). The things-in-themselves (i.e. the things in their suchness) are beyond the range of experience, because they do not have the forms of subjectivity and objectivity, under which alone experience is possible. Those categories, subjective forms as they are, are experienced either as subject or as objects. Categories of inanimate and living beings, insofar as they are objects of experience are absent/unreal, because they do not have objectivity (*anākāratvāt*). Categories of self and the representations of consciousness insofar as they are objects of experience, are likewise only mentally constructed forms and are therefore unreal, having nothing to do with things-in-themselves. Self and representations of consciousness insofar as they are subjects of experience, too, are mentally constructed forms, and therefore unreal, and as such are false appearances of consciousness. Consciousness itself insofar as it is subject of experience is unreal and non-existent. Thus, in short, whatever is referred to as subject or object is mere subjective construction, and therefore unreal; things-in-themselves are neither subjects nor objects.

Summarizing the discussion so far stanza I.5 says:

[MVKI.5] Therefore its being the imagination of the unreal
Remains established.¹

For Vasubandhu the meaning of these lines are so clear that he does not bother to elaborate it. According to Sthiramati's commentary the term "its" (*asya*) stands collectively for the four appearances of consciousness mentioned in the previous stanza.² The term "therefore" (*ataḥ*) refers to what has been

1. *Abhūta-parikalpatvam siddham-asya bhavati-ataḥ*. MVK I.5

2. *Abhūta-parikalpatvam-ca teṣāṃ caturṇāṃ vijñānānāṃ siddham*. MVKBT I.5

said in the previous stanza, namely that 'the objects being absent, the knowing consciousness, too, is non-existent'.¹ Thus the meaning of the above lines turns out to be as follows :

On the basis of what has been said in the previous stanza
It becomes established that the four objective categories,
Namely, *artha*, *sattva*, *ātma* and *vijñapti*,
Insofar as they are thought to be objects,
Are but imagination of the unreal.

According to Sthiramati the term "therefore" (*atah*) may refer also to what is subsequently said in the same stanza, namely,

[MVK I.5 cont'd] For it is not so,
It is not altogether absent, either.²

commenting on which Vasubandhu says,

For its existence is not the way it appears to be. It is not totally absent, either, because there is the production of illusion only.³

Here the pronoun "it" evidently refers to the fourfold appearance of consciousness. It appears to be objects (*artha*) of consciousness, which it is not (*na tathā*). It is not altogether absent, either (*na ca sarvathā-abhāvaḥ*). Why not? "Because there is the production of illusion-only" says Vasubandhu. Illusion (*bhrānti*) does not mean the absence of the appearance of a particular form, says Sthiramati, but the absence of its essence (*āmatvena-abhāva*).⁴ For example, when a rope appears in the form of a snake, that it appears in that form is a fact, while it does not have the essence of a snake. Similarly that there are appearances of consciousness as objects is an undeniable fact, while they do not really exist as objects. In

1. *Ata iti anantaroktād-hetor-artha-abhāvāt-tadapi-asad-iti*. Ibid

2. *Na tathā sarvathā-abhāvāt*. MVK I.5

3. *Yasmān-na tathā-asya bhāvo yathā pratibhāsa utpadyate. Na ca sarvathā abhāvo bhrānti-mātrasya-utpādāt*. MVKB I.5

4. *āmatvena-abhāvo na tu yad-ākāreṇa pratibhāsatena bhrāntir-ucyate māyā-vat*. MVKBT I.5

other words, there is illusion of objects,¹ although there is no objectivity itself. Why should one recognize the existence of illusion at all? Vasubandhu himself has raised this question: "why not admit the absence of that illusion itself?"² His answer is, "For otherwise there would be neither bondage nor liberation, which would imply the denial of the facts of defilement and purity."³ This is, according to Vasubandhu, the interpretation of the final part of the stanza, which says,

[MVK I.5 cont'd.] From its cessation results liberation.⁴

The entire discussion can be summarized as follows: That there is the imagination of the unreal, which gives rise to the illusion that there are graspable, enjoyable, objects,⁵ is a fact. And this has to be accepted as a fact, so that the distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* may be explained: cessation of the imagination of the unreal, and of the consequent illusion of objectivity, explains *nirvāṇa/mukti*, and the non-cessation (*aparikṣiṇa*) of the same explains *saṃsāra/bandha*.⁶ Facts of defilement and purity, too, are similarly explained: state of *saṃsāra/bandha* is characterized by defilement (*saṅkleśa*) while that of *nirvāṇa/mukti* is characterized by purity (*vyavādāna*).⁷ "Therefore", concludes Sthiramati, "the imagination of the unreal as well as the absence of the pair [of subjectivity and objectivity] should necessarily be recognized".⁸

1. *Bhrānti-vijñānasya sad-bhāvān-na sarvathā-abhāva. Ibid.*

2. *Kim-artham punas-tasya [bhrāntimātrasya] abhāva eva na iṣyate ? MVKB I.5*

3. *Yasmād-anyathā na bandho na mokṣaḥ prasidhyed-iti saṅkleśa-apavāda-doṣaḥ syāt. MVKB I.5*

4. *..Tat-kṣayān-muktir-iṣyate. MVK I.5*

5. *grāhya-grāhakatvena bhrāntir-udbhāsītā. MVKBT I.5 grāhya-grāhaka-pratibhāsam-utpadyate. Ibid*

6. *Tat-kṣayān-muktir-iṣyate. Tasmin-ca-aparikṣiṇe bandha iti-arthād-uktam bhavati. Ibid*

7. *..evam sati nityaḥ saṅkleśa syāt. Tathā ca nirvāṇa-abhāvaḥ. Evam ca bhrānti-mātrasya-api-abhāve saṅkleśa-abhāvo nityam-ca vyavadānam prasajyate. MVKBT. I.5*

8. *Ata'vāśyam-abhūta-parikalpa-bhāvo'bhyupagantavyo dvaya-abhāvaś-ca. MVKBT. I.5*

Thus, observes Sthiramati, on the one hand denying the graspable-grasper duality, and, on the other, asserting the fact of the imagination of the unreal, the present stanza is simply restating what has already been said in MVK I.2: "There exists the imagination of the unreal; however there is no pair".¹

The imagination of the unreal in relation to the three natures

The next stanza relates the idea of the imagination of the unreal to that of the three natures, namely, the absolutely accomplished, the other-dependent and the imagined. According to Vasubandhu the very purpose of this stanza is to show that the idea of the imagination of the unreal includes that of the three natures. He says: "Thus having stated the own-definition of the imagination of the unreal, now the [author] states its inclusive definition. It shows, how, there being only the imagination of the unreal, there could be the inclusion of the three natures."² The stanza reads:

[MVK I.6] The imagined, the other-dependent,
And the absolutely accomplished,
Are derived respectively from
The objects, the imagination of the unreal,
And the absence of the pair.³

In other words, the imagined, the other dependent, and the absolutely accomplished natures refer respectively to the objects (*artha*), the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*) and the absence of the pair (*dvaya-abhāva*) of subjects and objects. So Vasubandhu has the following commentary on this stanza:

The object is the imagined nature, the imagination of the unreal is the other-dependent nature, and the absence of the

1. *Evam grāhya-grāhaka-abhāvāt-tat-pratibhāsa-vijñāna-sad-bhāvāc-ca yat-pūrvam praijñātam, abhūta-parikalpo'sti dvayam tatra na-vidyate* (I.2), *iti tat-prasiddham-iti-pradarśayan-āha-* MVKB I.5

2. *Evam-abhūta-parikalpasya sva-lakṣaṇam khyāpayitvā saṅgraha-lakṣaṇam khyāpayati. Abhūta-parikalpa-mātre sati yathā trayāṇām svabhāvānām saṅgraho bhavati.* Ibid. I.6

3. *Kalpitaḥ para-tantras-ca pariniṣpanna-eva ca. Arthād-abūta-kalpāc-ca dvaya-abhāvāc-ca deśitāḥ.* MVK I.6

graspable-grasper duality is the absolutely accomplished nature.¹

This is an explanation of the three natures in terms of the imagination of the unreal. Sthiramati puts it clearly as follows:

That the imagination of the unreal is lacking in the graspable-grasper duality has already been said. But it is not just the absence of such duality. The same imagination of the unreal is, moreover, the other-dependent, because it depends on causes and conditions. The same imagination of the unreal, again, is the imagined, because it manifests itself in the forms of graspables and graspers, forms which do not exist within the imagination of the unreal itself. Also, the same imagination of the unreal is the absolutely accomplished, because it is lacking in the graspable-grasper duality. Thus the three natures are included in the same imagination of the unreal. Thus, by referring to the imagination of the unreal, is shown that reality which should first be known, then abandoned, and finally realized.²

What the three natures stand for is now quite clear :

First, there is the fact of the imagination of the unreal, which in effect is the act of discriminating between subjects and objects. It is this act of discrimination between subjects and objects that is described as the other-dependent nature, "because", says Sthiramati, "its birth depends on causes and conditions".³ It means that one is forced to discriminate between subjects and objects because of the forces (*saṃskāras*) and

1. *Arthaḥ parikalpitaḥ svabhāvaḥ. Abhūta-parikalpaḥ paratantraḥ svabhāvaḥ. Grāhya-grāhaka-abhāvaḥ pariniṣpannaḥ svabhāvaḥ. MVKB I.6*

2. *Atra hi-abhūta-parikalpasya dvaya-rahitatā grāhya-grāhaka-abhāva uktāḥ. Na tu dvayasya abhāva-mātram. Evam-abhūta-parikalpa-eva hetu-pratyaya-pāratan-tryāt paratantraḥ. Sa eva grāhya-grāhaka-rūpeṇa sva-ātmani-avidyamānena prakhyānāt parikalpitaḥ. Sa eva grāhya-grāhaka-rahitatvāt pariniṣpannaḥ. Evam abhūta-parikalpe trayaḥ svabhāvaḥ saṅgrhitaḥ. Etena-abhūta-parikalpam-anūdyā parijñeyam, parijñāya prahatavyam, parijñāya sāksāt-kartavyam ca vastu sandarśitam bhavati MVKBT I.6*

3. *Para-tantraḥ, para-vaśaḥ, hetupratyaya-pratibaddha-janmakātvāt. MV-KBT I.6*

habits (*vāsanās*) of one's past deeds (*karma*), which function as the causes (*hetu*) and conditions (*pratyaya*) of the imagination of the unreal.

Secondly there are the appearances of the same imagination of the unreal as graspable and grasper (*grāhya-grāhaka-pratibhāsam*). It is such appearances of the graspables and graspers that are called the imagined nature. "For", says Sthiramati, "the graspable as well as the grasper are devoid of own-nature, and therefore unreal too. However, they are imagined to be existing, and therefore called the imagined. Again, although substantially non-existent, still they do exist from the practical point of view, and therefore are said to have own-nature."¹ What exactly, then is the imagined nature? It is the objects (*artha*),² or rather those which are thought to be objects of consciousness. Here the reference is clearly to the fourfold appearance of the consciousness referred to in stanza I. 4. Hence Sthiramati says, "Here *artha* stands for colour etc., eye etc., self and the representations of consciousness. They do not exist within the imagination of the unreal, and thus being non-existent they are called the imagined nature."³

Thirdly, there is that state of the same imagination of the unreal, which is lacking in the duality between subjects and objects. It is this subject-object distinctionless state that is called the absolutely accomplished nature, "because", says Sthiramati, "this state of existence is unconditioned and unchangeably accomplished".⁴

The negative definition further explained

The negative definition (*asal-lakṣaṇa*) of the imagination of the unreal, namely that it is lacking in subject-object duality,

Abhūta-parikalpāḥ para-tantra-svabhāvaḥ iti, parair-hetu-pratyayais-tantryate, jan-yate, na tu svayam bhavati iti paratantraḥ. Ibid

1. *Grāhyam grāhakam ca svabhāva-sūnyatvād-abhūtam-āpi astitvena iti parikalpyate ucyate. Sa punar-dravyato'san-āpi vyavahārato'sti iti svabhāva ucyate. Ibid*

2. *Arthaḥ parikalpitaḥ svabhāvaḥ. MVKB I.6*

3. *..artha'tra rūpādāyas-cakṣurādāya-ātma vijñaptayaś-ca kalpitena svabhāvena-abhūta-parikalpe nāsti-iti-āsan parikalpitaḥ svabhāva ucyate. MVKBT I.6*

4. *Yā-abhūta-parikalpasya dvaya-rahitatā sa pariniṣpanna-svabhāvaḥ, tasya-asamskṛtatvāt, nirvikāratvena pariniṣpannatvāt. Ibid.*

has already been stated. Now the question is how one can realize it. The next stanza answers this question. Introducing it Vasubandhu says, "Now is shown a definition which can be used as an instrument in comprehending the negative definition of the same imagination of the unreal."¹ Sthiramati further comments, "The imagination of the unreal, unaware of the negative definition, works in favour of the defilement of *kleśa*, *karma* and *janma*. Hence the present stanza to show an instrument of knowing the negative definition."² The stanza says:

[MVK I.7] Depending upon perception
There arises non-perception,
And depending upon non-perception
There arises non-perception.³

Vasubandhu interprets these lines as follows:

Depending upon the perception that there are only representations of consciousness, there arises the non-perception of knowable things. Depending upon the non-perception of knowable things, there arises the non-perception of the mere representations of consciousness, too. Thus one understands the negative definition of graspable and grasper.⁴

This is rather the intellectual process whereby one attains to the realization of the emptiness of subjectivity and objectivity. First, one realizes that what have been taken to be objects are only representations of consciousness. This realization of mere-representations shatters one's belief in objectivity. Then the realization that there is no objectivity makes one give up one's belief in subjectivity as well, for this latter term makes sense only with reference to objectivity. Absence of subjectivity means

1. *Idānim tasmīn-eva-abhūta-parikalpe'sal-lakṣaṇa-anupraveśa-upāya-lakṣaṇam paridīpayati.* MVKB I.7

2. *Aparijñāta-asal-lakṣaṇo hi-abhūta-parikalpaḥ kleśa-karma-janma saṅkleśāya sampravartate.* MVKBT I.7

3. *Upalabdhiṃ-samāśrītya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate*

Nopalabdhiṃ samāśrītya nopalabdhiḥ prajāyate. MVK I.7

4. *Vijñapti-mātra-upalabdhiṃ nīśrītya-artha-anupalabdhirjāyate. Artha-anupalabdhiṃ nīśrītya vijñapti-mātrasya api-anupalabdhirjāyate. Evam-asallakṣaṇam grāhya-grāhakayoḥ praviśati.* MVKB I.7

that there are not even mere-representations of consciousness, because consciousness is meaningful only as a knowing subject. Thus one finally realizes the emptiness of graspability and grasperhood.

Sthiramati, too, makes the same point in a different way:

It [i.e. the object] is mere-representation of consciousness. That is, the consciousness, which has no supporting object, due to the maturing of its own seeds, appears in the form of colour etc. There is no object like colour etc. actually existing. Depending on such perception of the grasper, one comprehends the non-perception of the graspable... Just as the mind, knowing that the imagined-graspable does not exist outside the consciousness, comprehends the absence of the graspable, so on the basis of the absence of the graspable, the absence of mere-consciousness, too, is obtained. In the absence of graspables, grasperhood does not make sense. For, the conception of grasper is relative to that of the graspable... For the graspable and the grasper are never independent of each other.¹

"Thus", concludes Sthiramati, "one comprehends the negative definition, not of the imagination of the unreal, but of the imagined forms, namely the forms of the graspable and the grasper".²

The next stanza is almost a repetition of the previous one in another fashion. The first half of the stanza reads:

[MVK I. 8] Therefore it remains established
That perception has the same nature
As non-perception.³

1. *Idam-vijñapti-mūtram-ālambana-artha-rahitam* *sva-bijaparipākād rūpādi-ābhāsam vijñānam pravartate na tu rūpādiko'rīho' sti-iti-evam grāhaka-upalabdhim niśrītya grāhya-anupalabdhim praviśati. Yathā na vijñānād bahiḥ parikalpitam grāhyam-asti-iti vijñapti-mātratā-balena mano grāhya-abhāvam praviśati, tathā grāhya-abhāva-balena vijñapti-mātrasya-api abhāvam-pratipadyate. Na grāhya-abhāve grāhakatvam yujyate. Grāhyam apeksya tad-grāhakasya vyapasthāpanāt. ..Grāhya-grāhakayoḥ paraspara-nirapekṣatvāt. MVKBT I*

2. *Evam-asal-lakṣaṇam grāhya-grāhakayoḥ parikalpita-rūpayoḥ praviśati, na-abhūtāparikalpasya-iti darśanam bhavati. Ibid*

3. *Upalabdhies-tataḥ siddhā nopalabdhī-svabhāvatā. MVK I.8*

Wherefore ? "Because", says Vasubandhu, "there being no perceivable things, there is no possibility of having perception either".¹ It must be particularly noted that Vasubandhu is speaking about the absence of "perceivable objects" (*upalabhyartha-abhāva*), not of things-in-themselves. There could well be things-in-themselves, independently of the perceiving subject, but they are not perceivable. And what are thought to be perceived are not things as they are, but only one's own mental constructions. Hence the second half of the stanza:

[MVK I. 8 cont'd.] Therefore the sameness
Of non-perception and perception
Should be recognized.²

Wherefore ? "Because", says Vasubandhu, "perception as such is not obtained".³ He means that a perception is properly so called (*upalabdhir-upalabdhitvena*) only when it reaches real objects existing independently of the perceiving subject. As there is no perception that reaches real objects, i.e. things-in-themselves, no perception can be properly so called. Hence what is usually called perception is in fact non-perception. Why then is it called perception at all ? Vasubandhu continues his commentary, "Though not having the own-nature of perception, still it is called perception because there are the appearances of unreal objects."⁴ That is, the so-called perceptions perceive the unreal objects (*abhūta-artha-pratibhāsa*), and thus the name 'perception' is somehow justified, too. What is ultimately conveyed by this stanza is that, as Sthiramati notes, "to say that one does not perceive objects is the same as to say that one perceives only representation of consciousness."⁵

The next stanza is a further look at the contents of the imagination of the unreal. Vasubandhu calls it the classification

1. *Upalabhyartha-abhāva upalabdhivyayogāt.* MVK I.8

2. *Tasmāc-ca samatā jñeyā nopalambha-upalambhayoh.* MVK I.8

3. *Upalabdhir-upalabdhitvena-asiddhā*

4. *Abhūta-artha-pratibhāsatayā tu-upalabdhir-iti-ucyate' nupalabdhī-svabhāvā-
api satī.* MVKB I.8

5. *Artha-anupalambhasya vijñapti-mātratā-upalambhasya ca-satvād-aviśeṣataḥ.*
MVKBT I.8

definition (*prabheda-lakṣaṇam*). Introducing the first half of the stanza he says, "Now follows the classification-definition of the same imagination of the unreal".¹ The first half of the stanza reads:

[MVK I.9] The imagination of the unreal
Is *citta* as well as *caittas*,
Belonging to all three worlds.²

Commenting on it Vasubandhu says that the three worlds refer to "the distinction between the worlds of passion, forms, and formless beings".³ That the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa*) includes whatever is called 'mind' and 'mental' in western thought has already been repeatedly said. The above lines are a clear statement of the same point: the imagination of the unreal is nothing but the mind (*citta*) and the mental factors (*caittas*), no matter to which of the three modes of existence they belong.

Introducing the second half of the stanza Vasubandhu says, "Now follows the synonym-definition".⁴ It says how *citta* and *caittas* operate, and therefore serves as a synonymous description of the imagination of the unreal. Hence the name 'synonym-definition' (*pariyāya-lakṣaṇam*). It reads as follows:

[MVK I.9 cont'd.] There, perception of objects is consciousness, And perception of their qualities is mental factors.⁵

Vasubandhu then comments :

Consciousness is perception of just the objects. The mental factors, namely, feeling etc., are the perception of the qualities of the same objects.⁶

1. *Tasya-eva-idānim-abhūta-parikalpasya prabheda-lakṣaṇam khyāpayati.*
MVKB I.9

2. *Abhūta-parikalpaś-ca citta-caittas-tridhātukāḥ.* MVK I.9

3. *Kāma-rūpa-ārūpya-avacara-bheda.*

4. *Pariyāya-lakṣaṇam khyāpayati.* MVKB I.9

5. *Tatra-artha-dṛṣṭir-vijñānam tad-viśeṣe tu caitasāḥ.* MVK I.9

6. *Tatra-artha-mātre dṛṣṭir-vijñānam. Arthaviśeṣe dṛṣṭis-caitasāḥ vedanā-dayaḥ.* MVKB I.9

Here one or two terminological clarifications are required. First of all, what are referred to as consciousness (*viññāna*) and mental factors (*caitasāḥ*) are respectively the mind (*citta*) and mental factors (*caittāḥ*) mentioned in the first half of the same stanza. Secondly, what are referred to as objects (*artha*) and their qualities (*viśeṣa*) are respectively what are otherwise called *bhūta* and *bhautikas*. *Bhūtas* are just the objects (*artha-mātra*) in the sense that they do not refer to the qualities (*viśeṣas*, characteristics) such as being pleasant, unpleasant etc., while *bhautikas* are such qualities. Perception of *bhūta*/*artha-mātra* is what is called *viññāna*/*citta*, while perception of their *bhautikas*/*artha-viśeṣa* is called *cetasā*/*caitta*.¹ In both cases it is just the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa-mātra*), for the object (*artha*) perceived (*dṛṣṭa*), no matter whether it is *bhūta*/*artha-mātra* or *bhautika*/*artha-viśeṣa*, is only imaginary or rather mentally constructed (*parikalpita-svabhāva*). So Sthiramati says, 'Citta and caittas operate with reference to the own-nature and qualities of the things which though unreal are imaginable. Citta and caittas, which are respectively the perception of the own-nature and qualities of objects, are themselves the imagination of the unreal, and therefore are synonyms of the latter.'²

The store-consciousness and the active consciousness

The next stanza introduces the distinction between the store-consciousness (*ālaya-viññāna*) and the active consciousness (*pravṛtti-viññāna*). They are both viewed as functions of the imagination of the unreal, and in that sense Vasubandhu has named this stanza the activity-definition (*pravṛtti-lakṣaṇam*) of *abhūta-parikalpa*. Introducing the stanza he says, "[The next verse] states the activity-definition."³ The stanza reads:

1. ...mātra-sabdo viśeṣa-nirāsārthaḥ. Tena-agrūta-viśeṣa vastu-svarūpamātra-upalabdhir-iti-arthaḥ...tatra-āhlādaka-paritāpakataviśeṣo yas-tasya bhāvasya yat-saumanasyādīsthānam tad-grahaṇam vedanā. Sīri-puruṣa-vyavahāra-lakṣaṇo yo'rtha-viśeṣas-tad-grahaṇam sañjñā. Evam-anye 'pi yathā-yogam yojyaḥ. MVKBT I.9

2. Abhūta-parikalpya-vastunaḥ svabhāva-viśeṣa-parikalpanayā citta-caittānām pravṛt-tavāt. Artha-svarūpa-viśeṣa-dṛṣṭis-citta-caitta-abhūta-parikalpaś-ca-iti par - yāya - antar-bhūtaḥ. MVKBT I.9

3. Pravṛtti-lakṣaṇam ca khyāpayati. MVKB I.10

[MVK I. 10] One is the source-consciousness,
 And the other is the enjoyment-consciousness,
 There, the mental factors are
 Enjoyment, determination and motivation.¹

Vasubandhu commenting on this stanza says:

The store-consciousness being the source of other consciousnesses is called the source-consciousness. The active consciousness, which has the latter as its source, is called the enjoyment-consciousness. Enjoyment refers to feelings etc., determination to concept, and motivation to the conditioning forces such as volition, attention etc., of consciousness.²

Sthiramati places this stanza and the following one in the context of life-process. *Pravṛtti* for him means process/movement. When it is applied to life, he recognizes two levels of movement: (i) movement from one moment to the next forming a series of moments which is responsible for defilements and enjoyments in the present life; (ii) movement from one life to the next, which is responsible for the defilements of *kleśa*, *karma* and *janma*. The present stanza, says Sthiramati, "deals with the former type of movement, leaving the latter for the next stanza.

The concept of movement involves that of cause-effect relationship. In Buddhism, causality means, to put it rather naively, one moment giving way to the next, or, in technical terms, the rising of one moment depending on the previous one (*pratitya-samutpāda*). In any case such a view of causality presupposes the distinction between the causal moment and the resultant moment. There being only the imagination of the unreal (*abhūta-parikalpa-mātra*) how could one account for the distinction between cause and result (*hetu-phala-prabhedam*)? This, according to Sthiramati, is the concern of the present stanza.³

1. *Ekam pratyaya-vijñānam dvītiyam aupabhogikam*

Upabhoga-pariccheda-prerakas-tatra caitavāḥ. MVK I.10

2. *Ālaya-vijñānam-anyeṣāṃ vijñānānāṃ pratyayatvāt pratyaya-vijñānam. Tat-pratyayam pravṛtti-vijñānam-aupabhogikam. Upabhogo vedanā. Paricchedaḥ sañjñā. Prerakāḥ saṃskārā vijñānasya cetanā-manaskārādāyāḥ.* MVKB I.10

3. *Abhūta-parikalpa-mātre'nyasya ca-abhāve hetu-phala-prabhedam na vijñāyate iti tad-pratipādanārtham pravṛtti-lakṣaṇam-ca khyāpayati.* MVKBT I.10

According to him this stanza must be interpreted so as to mean that it is the imagination of the unreal itself that appears as both cause and result (*hetuphal-bhāvena*).¹ That is, the imagination of the unreal on the one hand appears as the store-consciousness, which functions as the causal source (*hetu-pratyaya*) of the active consciousness;² the same imagination of the unreal appears on the other hand as the resultant active-consciousness.³ The sevenfold active consciousness is called enjoyment consciousness (*aupabhogikam vijñānam*) because it leads to enjoyment (*upabhoga-prayojakatvāt*).⁴ The mental factors (*caitasā/caitta*), too, are part of the resultant consciousness.⁵

Thus what the whole stanza is trying to establish is that every sort of consciousness, whether *ālaya-vijñāna* or *pravṛtti-vijñāna* or *caitta*, is an expression of the same imagination of the unreal. The imagination of the unreal, transforming itself into various types of consciousness, each involving the subject-object distinction, keeps one's empirical life going from moment to moment. A stream of consciousness is what constitutes the stream of samsāric existence, and this is made possible by the continuous imagination of the unreal forms of subjectivity and objectivity.

The life-circle

Now it remains to explain in terms of the same imagination of the unreal how one moves from one life to the next (*janma-antara-pravṛtti*). This is done in the next two stanzas, which according to Vasubandhu, "state the defilment-definition"⁶ of the imagination of the unreal. It shows how by the operation of the imagination of the unreal the defilements (*saṅkleśa*), namely *kleśa*, *karma* and *janma*, bring about the sufferings of the world.⁷

1. *Anena hetu-phala-bhāvena-abhūta-parikalpa iti lakṣaṇam*. MVKBT I.10

2. *Tatra-ekam-iti-ālaya-vijñānam śeṣānam vijñānānam hetu-pratyayabhāvena hetur-iti pratyaya-vijñānam*. Ibid.

3. *Dvītiyam-aupabhogikam . phalam iti vakya-śeṣaḥ*. Ibid

4. *Sapta-vidham pravṛtti-vijñānam-upabhoga-prayojakatvāt aupabhogikam*. Ibid

5. *Tatra vijñāne ye caitasās-te'pi tat-phalam-iti sambandhaḥ*. Ibid

6. *Samkleśa-lakṣaṇam-ca khyāpayati*. MVKB I.11

7. *Kleśa-karma-janma-saṅkleśa yathā pravartamānā jagataḥ parikleśāya bhavanti tat-saṅkleśa-lakṣaṇam*. MVKBT I.11

Thus it shows "how, although there is no substantial self, solely from the imagination of the unreal there arises the *saṃsāra*".¹ The stanzas under reference may be translated as follows:

[MVK I.11-12] The world is oppressed/defiled²

- (1) By being concealed,
- (2) By being raised,
- (3) By being led,
- (4) By being seized,
- (5) By being completed,
- (6) By being trebly determined,
- (7) By enjoying,
- (8) By being attracted,
- (9) By being bound,
- (10) By being orientated, and
- (11-12) By being subjected to suffering.³

This clearly is the Yogācārin's version of the twelve links (*niḍāna*) of the chain of dependent origination (*pratītya-samutpāda*), which explain the ever-reverting process of *saṃsāra*. The Sanskrit word translated here as "world" is *jagat*. This term literally means "moving" or "going". So it is just another word for *saṃsāra*, meaning "going round". Sthiramati says, "*Jagat* is that which keeps going".⁴ Just like the term *saṃsāra*, the term *jagat*, too, although it ordinarily refers to the world as a whole, for all practical purposes refers to the individual beings who constitute that world. Therefore the above-described process of oppression/defilment (*saṅkleśa*) by the twelve-linked

1. *Yathā-ca asati-apī-ātmani abhūta-parikalpa-mātrāt saṃsāraḥ prajāyate iti pradarśanārtham khyāpayati.* Ibid.

2. Sthiramati points out that the verb *kliṣyate* in this context may be taken either to mean *piḍyate* (is oppressed) or to mean *na vyavadāyate* (is made impure): "*kliṣyata iti...piḍyata iti arthaḥ. Kliṣyata iti na vyavadāyata iti-apare*" MVKBT I.11. Sthiramati personally seems to prefer the first meaning, namely, *piḍyate*.

3. *Chādanād-roṣaṇāc-ca nayanāt samparigrahāt*

Pūraṇāt tri-paricchedād-upabhogāc-ca karṣanāt. MVK I.11

Nibandhanād-ābhīmukhyād duḥkhanāt kliṣyate jagat. MVK I.12

4. *Gacchati-iti jagat.* MVKBT.. I.12

process of dependent-origination should be understood as applying to each individual undergoing the experience of *samsāra*. Vasubandhu interprets those twelve links as follows:

There,

- (1) 'by being concealed' means 'by being impeded by ignorance from seeing things as they are',
- (2) 'by being raised' means 'by the installation of the impressions of deeds on consciousness by the conditioning forces',
- (3) 'by being led' means 'by being taken by consciousness to the place of re-birth',
- (4) 'by being seized' means '[by being seized] by the *nāma* and *rūpa* of egohood,
- (5) 'by being completed' means '[by being completed] by the six organs',
- (6) 'by being trebly determined' means '[by being trebly determined] by contact',¹
- (7) 'by enjoying' means 'by feeling',
- (8) 'by being attracted' means '[by being attracted] by the desire for a new existence the seeds of which have already been sown by previous deeds',
- (9) 'by being bound' means '[by being bound] by the inclinations towards sense-pleasure etc., which are conducive to a new birth of the consciousness',
- (10) 'by being orientated' means 'by making the deeds of former existence tend to manifest their matured fruits in a new existence',
- (11-12) 'by being subjected to suffering' means '[by being subjected] to birth, old age and death'.

By all these is the world oppressed/defiled.²

1. Here 'contact' (*sparsa*) means 'sensation' which is trebly determined (*pariccheda*) by *indriya*, *viśaya* and *viññāna*: (See MVKBT I.1)

2. *Tatra-*

Chādanād—avidyayā yathā-bhūta-darśana-avabandhanāt.

Roṇaṇāt—saṃskārair-viññāne karma-vāsanāyāḥ pratiṣṭhāpanāt.

Nayanāt—viññānena-upapatti-sthāna-saṃprāpaṇāt.

Saṃparigrahaṇāt—nāma-rūpeṇa-ātmabhāvasya.

pūraṇāt—ṣaḍ-āyatanena.

[The same stanza continues :]

[MVK. I.12 The oppressives/defilements,
cont'd.] All proceeding from the imagination of the
unreal,
Could be classified
Either into three groups,
Or into two groups,
Or into seven groups.¹

Vasubandhu's commentary on these lines reads as follows:

The classification of the oppressives/defilements into three groups is as follows:

1. Oppressive oppressors, namely ignorance, desire and inclinations;
2. Deed-oppressives, namely conditioning forces and existence/birth;
3. Birth-oppressives, namely the remaining members.

The classification of the oppressives/defilements into two groups is as follows:

1. Causal oppressives/defilements which include the groups of oppressive oppressors, and deed-oppressives;
2. Resultant oppressives which are the same as the birth-oppressives.

The classification of the oppressives/defilements into seven groups refer to the seven kinds of causes such as:

1. cause of error, namely ignorance,
2. cause of sowing of seeds, namely conditioning forces,
3. cause of direction, namely consciousness,
4. cause of seizure, namely *nāma-rūpa* and the six bases,
5. cause of enjoyment, namely contact and feeling,

Tri-paricchedāt—sparśena.

Upabhogāt—vedanayā.

Karṣaṇāt—Trṣṇayā karma-ākṣiptasya punar-bhavaśya.

Nibandhanāt—upādānair-vijñānasya-utpatti-anukūleṣu kāmādiṣu.

Abhimukhyāt—bhāvena kṛtasya karmaṇaḥ punar-bhave vipākādānāya-abhimukhī-karaṇāt.

Duḥkhanāt—jātyā jarā-maraṇena ca parikliṣyate jagat.

1. *Tredhā dvedhā ca saṅkleśaḥ saptadhā-abhūtakatpanāt* VK I.12

6. cause of attraction, namely desire, inclination and existence,
7. cause of unrest, namely birth, old age and death.

All these oppressives/defilements operate due to the imagination of the unreal.¹

What is to be particularly noticed here is the fact that the entire *saṅkleśa*, which is just another name for *saṃsāra*,² is traced to the imagination of the unreal.³ This is so, because, as already explained, the experience of *saṃsāra/saṅkleśa* is ultimately the passion for graspable-grasper distinction,⁴ which depends entirely on the imagination of the unreal.⁵ Sthiramati derives the same conclusion in a different way:

All these oppressives/defilements operate due to the imagination of the unreal, because the oppressives/defilements depend on *citta* and *caittas*, about which it has been said:

The imagination of the unreal

Is *citta* as well as *caittas*

Belonging to all three worlds. (MVK I.9)⁶

1. *Tredhā saṅkleśaḥ—kleśa-saṅkleśaḥ, karma-saṅkleśaḥ janma-saṅkleśaś-ca. Tatra kleśa-saṅkleśo'vidyā-tṛṣṇopādānāni. Karma-saṅkleśaḥ saṃskārā-bhavaś ca. Janma-saṅkleśān śeṣāni-aṅgāni.*

Dvedhā saṅkleśaḥ—Hetu-saṅkleśaḥ phala-saṅkleśaś-ca. Tatra hetu-saṅkleśaḥ kleśa-karma-svabhāvair-aṅgaiḥ. Phala-saṅkleśaś-ca śeṣaiḥ.

Saptadhā saṅkleśaḥ saptavidho hetuḥ : viparyāsa-hetuḥ, akṣepa-hetuḥ, upanaya-hetuḥ, parigraha-hetuḥ, upabhoga-hetuḥ, ākarṣaṇa-hetuḥ, udvega-hetuś-ca. Tatra viparyāsa-hetur-avidyā. Akṣepa-hetuḥ saṃskārāḥ. Upanaya-hetur-vijñānam. Parigraha-hetur-nāma-rūpa-śaḍ-āyatane. Upabhoga-hetuḥ sparśa-vedane. Ākarṣaṇa-hetus-tṛṣṇopādānābhāvaḥ. Udvega-hetur-jāti-jarā-marāṇe.

Sarvaś-ca-eṣa saṅkleśo'bhūta-parikalpāt pravartata iti. MVKB I.12

2. See the equation above on page 38

3. *Sarvasca eṣasaṅkleśo'bhūta-parikalpāt pravartate. MVKB I.12*

Also, *Tredhā dvedhā ca saṅkleśaḥ saptadhā-abhūta-parikalpanāt. MVK I.12*

4. For example, see above pp. 38 ff

5. *Abhūta-parikalpo grāhya-grāhaka-vikalpaḥ. MVKB I.2*

6. *Sarve-ca-ete saṅkleśā abhūta-parikalpāt pravartante iti citta-caitta-āśrayatvāt saṅkleśasya. Uktam hi tat, abhūta-parikalpaś-ca citta-caittas-tridhātukaḥ (Ka. I.9) iti. MVKBT I.12*

The summary-meaning of the imagination of the unreal

Vasubandhu now winds up the discussion on the imagination of the unreal by recalling the various definitions of it:

The ninefold definition, giving the summary-meaning of the imagination of the unreal, has [now] been explained. Those definitions are, namely, positive definition, negative definition, own-definition, inclusive definition, instrumental definition, classification-definition, synonym-definition, activity-definition and the defilment-definition.¹

3. *The Emptiness*

From the next stanza onwards one has the discussion on the emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which has already been described as "that state of the imagination of the unreal which is lacking in the form of being the graspable and grasper."² Introducing the next stanza Vasubandhu says, "Thus having explained the imagination of the unreal, the author now shows how the emptiness should be understood."³

[MVK I.13] About the emptiness

One should summarily know

Its definition,

Its synonyms along with their meaning,

Its classification,

And the reason⁴ for its classification.⁵

1. *Pinḍārthaḥ punar-abhūta-parikalpasya navavidham lakṣaṇam paridīpitam bhavati. Sal-lakṣaṇam, asal-lakṣaṇam, sva-lakṣaṇam, saṅgraha-lakṣaṇam, asallakṣaṇa-anupraveśa-upāya-lakṣaṇam, prabheda-lakṣaṇam, paryāya-lakṣaṇam, pravṛttīlakṣaṇam, saṅkleśa-lakṣaṇaṁ -ca. MVKB I.12*

2. MVKB I.2 See above page 30 and note 1 for the text.

3. *Evam abhūtaparikalpam khyāpayitvā yathā śūnyatā vijñeyā tan-nirḍiśati. MVKB I.13*

4. The term translated here as 'reason' is *sādhanaṁ*, which ordinarily means 'a proof'. However, as Sthiramati has pointed out, in the present context it means 'reason' (*yukti*): *sādhanaṁ śūnyatāprabheda-pradarśane yuktiḥ. MVKBT I.13*

5. *Lakṣaṇam-ca-athaparyāyas-tadartho bheda eva ca Sādhanaṁ-ca-iti vijñeyam śūnyatāyāḥ samāsataḥ. MVK I.13*

This is just an enumeration of the various topics that are going to be dealt with in the subsequent stanzas. First of all the author attempts a definition of the emptiness. "How the definition of the emptiness is to be understood?"¹

[MVK I.14] The negation of the pair
Is indeed the assertion of such negation;
This is the definition of the emptiness.²

That is, when one denies the existence of the pair of subject and object, it amounts to the assertion that there is no such pair. In other words, to say that there is the absence of the pair (*dvaya-abhāvaḥ*) is the same as to say that there is the presence of such absence (*abhāvasya bhāvaḥ*). Thus, by emptiness is meant the positive state of existence in which there is no place for the duality between subjects and objects. Vasubandhu comments,

There is the negation of the pair of the graspable and grasper. The definition of emptiness then, is the assertion of that negation. Thus, it is shown how the emptiness is to be defined in negative terms. And, what those negative terms are,³

is further stated:

[MVK I.14 It is neither [total] assertion,
cont'd.] Nor [total] negation.⁴

"Why not [total] assertion ? Because there is the negation of the pair of subject and object. Why not [total] negation ? Because there is the assertion of the negation of that pair. This indeed is the definition of the emptiness. Therefore, with reference to the imagination of the unreal"⁵ the emptiness is:

1. *Katham lakṣaṇam vijñeyam ?* MVKB I.14
2. *Dvaya-abhāvo hi-abhāvasya bhāvaḥ śūnyasya lakṣaṇam.* MVK I.14
3. *Dvaya-grāhya-grāhakasya-abhāvaḥ. Tasya ca-abhāvasya bhāvaḥ śūnyatāyāḥ lakṣaṇam-iti-abhāva-svabhāva-lakṣaṇatvam śūnyatāyāḥ paridīpitam bhavati. Yaś-ca-asau tad-abhāva-svabhāvaḥ sa—*MVKB I.14
4. *Na bhāvo na-āpi ca-abhāvaḥ.* MVK I.14
5. *Katham na bhāvaḥ ? Yasmād dvayasya-abhāvaḥ. Katham na-abhāvaḥ ? Yasmād dvaya-abhāvasya bhāvaḥ. Etac-ca śūnyatāyāḥ lakṣaṇam. Tasmād-abhūta-parikalpāt—*MVKB I.14

[MVK I.14 Neither different [from the imagination of
cont'd.] the unreal],
Nor identical [with the imagination of the
unreal].¹

Vasubandhu explains it as follows:

If different, it would imply that the 'universal' [*dharmatā*] is other than the particular thing [*dharmas*], which is unacceptable. For example, 'impermanence' is not other than the impermanent things, and the state of suffering is not other than suffering itself. If identical, there would be no place for purifying knowledge, nor would there be the commonplace knowledge. Thus is shown a definition which states that emptiness is that which is free from being different from thatness.²

Thus, *śūnyatā* stands to *abhūta-parikalpa* just as *dharmatā* stands to *dharma*, or *anityatā* to *anityadharmā*, or *duḥkhatā* to *duḥkha*. The terms of these pairs are not quite different from each other, nor quite identical with each other. Similarly *śūnyatā* and *abhūta-parikalpa* are neither quite different (*na-prthak*) from each other, nor quite identical (*na-eka*) with each other. They are instead just two different modes of existence of the same individual: *śūnyatā* refers to one's mode of existence in the state of *nirvāṇa*, while *abhūta-parikalpa* refers to one's mode of existence in the state of *saṃsāra*. Thus both *śūnyatā* and *abhūta-parikalpa* refer to the same individual. They are not, however, identical with each other. If, for example, *śūnyatā* were identical with *abhūta-parikalpa*, it would mean either that one is always in the state of *saṃsāra*, characterized by *abhūta-parikalpa* and that, therefore, the idea of purifying knowledge (*viśuddhi-ālambanam jñānam*), which is believed to lead one to the state of *nirvāṇa*, would make no sense; or that one is always in the state of *nirvāṇa*, and that, therefore, commonplace/empirical/conventional knowledge

1. *Na-prthaktva-eka-lakṣaṇam*. MVK I.14

2. *Prthaktve sati dharmād-anya dharmatā-iti na yujyate, anityatā-duḥkhatāvat. Ekatve sati viśuddhi-ālambanam jñānam na syāt sāmānya-lakṣaṇam-ca. Etena tattva-anyatva-vinirmuktaṃ lakṣaṇam paridīpitam bhavati*. MVKB I.14

(*sāmānya-lakṣaṇam jñānam*), which is characteristic of *saṃsāra* experience cannot occur at all.¹ *śūnyatā*, then is the bare reality (*tattvam*), characterized neither as subject nor as object. It should be defined as nothing other than thatness.²

The next question is, "how is the synonym [of emptiness] to be understood?"³ Hence the next stanza:

[MVK I.15] Suchness, the extreme limit of existence,
The uncaused, absoluteness,
The source-reality:
These are summarily the synonyms of
emptiness.⁴

The next stanza explains, "how is the meaning of these synonyms to be understood?"⁵

[MVK I.16] The synonyms respectively mean [that the emptiness is]
Never otherwise,
Never falsified,
Never admitting a cause,
The object intuited by the sages,
And [that it is]
The source of the powers of the sages.⁶

Vasubandhu interprets the above two stanzas as follows:

The emptiness is called suchness in the sense that it is never otherwise insofar as it remains ever the same way. It is called the extreme limit of existence in the sense that it is never falsified, because it is never an object of doubt. It is called the uncaused, because it does not admit for itself any cause, for it is far from having any cause whatsoever. It is called the

1. Cf. MVKBT I.14

2. *Śūnyatā...tattva-anyaiva-vinirmukta-lakṣaṇā*. MVKBT I.14

3. *Katham paryāyo vijñeyaḥ?* MVKB I.15

4. *Tatthatā bhūtakotiś-ca-animittam paramārthatā
Dharma-dhātus-ca paryāya śūnyatāyāḥ samāsataḥ*. MVK I.15

5. *Katham paryāya-artha vijñeyaḥ?* MVKB I.16

6. *Ananyathā-aviparyāsa-tan-niroddha-ārya-gocaraiḥ
Hetuvāc-ca-ārya-dharmāṇāṃ paryāyārtha yathākramam*. MVK I.16

absoluteness/the ultimate object, because it is the object of the knowledge of the sages, meaning that it is the object of the ultimate knowledge. It is called the source-reality, because it is the source of the powers of the sages, meaning that the powers of the sages have their origin depending upon it: here the term *dhātu* is used in the sense of *hetu*, indeed.¹

As I have already pointed out here there is no attempt to describe emptiness in terms of consciousness, which would justify the interpretation of the Yogācāra system as idealism.²

Next, "how is the classification of the emptiness to be understood?"³

[MVK I.17] It is defiled and purified;⁴

"So is its classification. In what condition is it defiled, and in what condition is it purified?"⁵

[MVK I.17 It is with and without impurities.⁶
cont'd.]

That is, "when it is with impurities, then it is defiled, and when it is rid of the impurities then it is purified."⁷ Here the emptiness is considered as defiled (*saṅkliṣṭā/samālā*) and pure (*viśuddhā/praṇipamālā*). However, this classification of the emptiness raises a problem, which Vasubandhu formulates as follows: "Getting rid of the impurities once associated with it [i.e. emptiness]

1. *Ananyathārthena tathatā, nityam tathā-iti kṛtvā. Aviparyāsā-rthena bhūta-kotih, viparyāsa-avastutvāt. Nimitta-noirodhārthena animittatvam, sarva-nimitta-abhāvāt. Ārya-jñāna-gocaratvāt paramārthaḥ, parama-jñāna-viśayatvāt. Ārya-dharma-hetutvād dharma-dhātūḥ, ārya-dharmāṇām tadālambana-prabhavatvāt. Hetu-artho hi-atra dhātu-arthaḥ.* MVKB I.16

2. See above page 6.

3. *Katham śūnyatāyāḥ prabhedo jñeyaḥ ?* MVKB I.17

4. *Saṅkliṣṭā ca viśuddhā ca.* MVK I.17

5. *Iti-asyāḥ prabhedaḥ. Kasyām-avasthāyām saṅkliṣṭā, kasyām-viśuddhā ?* MVKB I.17

6. *Samālā nirmālā ca sā.* MVK I.17

7. *Yadā saha malena vartate tadā saṅkliṣṭā. Yadā praṇipamālā tadā viśuddhā.* MVKB I.17

implies that it [i.e. emptiness] is changing in character. How is it then that it is still not impermanent ? Because its"¹—

[MVK I.17 Purity is understood
cont'd.] As the purity of elemental water,
Gold and space.²

That is, elemental water (*abdhātu*), gold, and space are pure by nature. However, they can be made impure by the addition of foreign matter. Such foreign matter cannot, however, change their inner nature, but can only externally cover it, so to speak. Moreover, to recover their original, pure, nature, one needs only to remove that foreign matter, which will not imply any change in the character of water or gold or space. Similarly, the stanza argues, the factors which are thought to constitute the impurities of the emptiness are only externals or accidentals (*āgantuka*) which do not affect it substantially. Nor does the removal of these accidental impurities (*āgantuka-malāḥ*) imply any change in the character (*dharma*) of the emptiness. Vasubandhu, interpreting the above lines says, "[The purity of the emptiness is recovered] by shaking off the accidental impurities, which does not mean a change in its own-nature"³.

The next stanza is trying to classify the emptiness from another point of view. Introducing it Vasubandhu says,

Here is another classification according to which there are sixteen kinds of emptiness :

- (1) emptiness of internal [elements],
- (2) emptiness of external [elements],
- (3) emptiness of internal as well as external [elements],
- (4) emptiness of the great,
- (5) emptiness of emptiness,
- (6) emptiness of the absolute object,
- (7) emptiness of the conditioned [elements],

1. *Yadi samalā bhūtvā nirmalā bhavati, katham vikāra-dharmiṇītvādanityā na bhavati? Yasmād-asyāḥ*—MVKB I.17

2. *Abdhātuka-naka-ākāsā-suddhivac-chuddhir-iṣyate.* MVK I.17

3. *Āgantuka-mala-apagamāt, na tu tasyāḥ svabhāva-anyatvam-bhavati.* MVKB I.17

- (8) emptiness of the unconditioned [elements],
- (9) emptiness of the ultimate [element],
- (10) emptiness of the eternal [element],
- (11) emptiness of the unforsaken [element],
- (12) emptiness of nature,
- (13) emptiness of defining marks,
- (14) emptiness of every power,
- (15) emptiness of negation,
- (16) emptiness of negation as own-nature.¹

This enumeration of the sixteen kinds of emptinesses is an attempt to show that all kinds of characterizations are bound to be only approximations, when they are applied to things in themselves. There are different elements (*dharma*s), but their characterizations as internal (*adhyātma*), external (*bāhya*) etc., are empty of meaning. The elements in their suchness are just things (*vastūni*) without any qualification. Their multiplicity is accounted for not by different predications, but merely by numerical distinctions. "That all elements are of non-dual form, is the general definition of emptiness. The multiplicity is shown on account of the numerical multiplicity of things, not otherwise."² This observation of Sthiramati is important. Right in the beginning of this chapter it was made clear that emptiness essentially consists in the absence of the duality between subjects and objects. In other words, emptiness means that nothing can be characterized as subject or object. A strict application of this concept of emptiness will demand that all characterizations of things as such and such are to be avoided. For, any characterization of a thing implies attribution of some kind of objectivity to that thing. For example, when one says, "This is good", one is characterizing "this" as "good". In so

1. *Ayam-aparāḥ prabhedaḥ—śoḍaśavidhā śūnyatā. Adhyātma-śūnyatā, bahirdhā-śūnyatā, adhyātma-bahirdhā-śūnyatā, mahā-śūnyatā, śūnyatā-śūnyatā, paramārtha-śūnyatā, saṃskṛta-śūnyatā, atyanta-śūnyatā, anavarāgra-śūnyatā, anavakāra-śūnyatā, prakṛti-śūnyatā, lakṣaṇa-śūnyatā, sarva-dharma-śūnyatā, abhāva-śūnyatā, abhāva-svabhāva-śūnyatā* ca. MVKB I.18

2. *Sānānya-lakṣaṇam śūnyatāyāḥ sarva-dharmaśya-advaya-svarūpatvam. Nānyathā nānātvam śakyate darśayitum-iti-ato vastu-nānātvena tan-nānātvam darśayati.* MVKBT I.18

doing one is first of all envisaging a distinction between the subject "this" and its predicate "good", which is just another form of subject-object distinction. Secondly, one is claiming that one has experienced "this" as "good", which again, presupposes the distinction between the experiencing subject and the experienced object. Thus the characterization of "this" as "good" violates the definition of emptiness as the absence of duality in two ways: first by making a distinction between the subject (i.e. "this"), and the predicate (i.e. "good"), and secondly by making a distinction between the experiencing subject, and the experienced object. This applies to all the sixteen characterizations mentioned by Vasubandhu. All those characterizations may be valid and useful from a commonplace (*saṃvṛti/sāmānya-lakṣaṇa/vyāvahārika*) point of view. But in the absolute state of existence one cannot think of any characterizations which will distinguish the individual things (*vastūni*) from one another, although they are numerically different things (*vastu-nānātvam*).

"All those kinds of emptiness should be briefly understood".¹
Hence the next four stanzas.

[MVK I. 18] There is the emptiness of the enjoyer,
Emptiness of the enjoyed,
Emptiness of the body [of the enjoyer and
enjoyed],
Emptiness of the basic thing,
Emptiness of that by which it [i.e. the emptiness
of the enjoyer etc.] is perceived,
Emptiness of the way in which it is perceived,
and
Emptiness of that for which it is perceived.²

Here the first six kinds of emptinesses correspond to the first six of the sixteen emptinesses enumerated above by Vasubandhu, He, therefore, says:

1. *Sā-eṣā samāsato vedilavyā. MVKB I.18*
2. *Āhokṭṭ-bhojana-tad-deha-pratiṣṭā-vastu-śūnyatā*
Tac-ca yena yathā dṛṣṭam yad-artham tasya śūnyatā. MVK I.18

Here, the emptiness of the enjoyer means the emptiness of the internal senses etc., the emptiness of the enjoyed means the emptiness of the external elements, the emptiness of their bodies, namely the *śarīras* which are the basis of both the enjoyer and the enjoyed, means the emptiness of the internal and the external elements. The basic thing means the universe which is the basis [of the enjoyer, the enjoyed and their bodies]. Its emptiness is called the emptiness of the great because of the vastness of the universe. The emptiness of the internal senses etc. is perceived by the knowledge of emptiness, whose emptiness is called the emptiness of emptiness. The emptiness of internal senses is perceived as the absolute object, whose emptiness is called the emptiness of the absolute object.¹

The last kind of emptiness mentioned in the above stanza (I.18) covers the last ten kinds of emptinesses on Vasubandhu's list. Explaining it Vasubandhu says,

The emptiness of that for which the Bodhisattva attains [the emptiness of the internal senses etc.] is the [final] kind of emptiness. For what, indeed, is the emptiness of the internal senses etc. attained?²

This question is answered as follows :

[MVK I.19] For the attainment of the twofold prosperity.³

That is, for the attainment of "the conditioned as well as the unconditioned fortune".⁴ The emptiness of the conditioned as well as the unconditioned fortune corresponds respectively

1. *Tatra bhoktr-śūnyatā adhyātmikāni-āyatanānyārabddhā, bhojana-śūnyatā bhāyāni. Tad-dehas-tayor-bhoktr-bhojanayor-yad-adhiṣṭhānam śarīram tasya śūnyatā-adhyātma-bahirdha śūnyatā-iti-ucyate. Pratiṣṭhā-vastu bhājana-loka, tasya vistirṇa-tvāc-chūnyatā maha-śūnyatā-iti-ucyate. Tac-ca-adhyātmika-āyatanādi yena śūnyam dṛṣṭam śūnyatā-jñānena, tasya śūnyatā śūnyatā-śūnyatā. Tathā ca dṛṣṭam paramārtha-ākāreṇa tasya śūnyatā paramārtha-śūnyatā. MVKB I.18*

2. *Yadārtham-ca bodhisattvaḥ prapadyate tasya ca śūnyatā. Kīmartham-ca prapadyate ? MVKB I. 18-19*

3. *Śubha-doṣasya prāptyartham. MVK I.19*

4. *Kuśalasya saṃskṛtasya-asamskṛtasya ca. MVKB I.19*

to "the emptiness of the conditioned" and "the emptiness of the unconditioned" on Vasubandhu's list.

[MVK I.19 For the everlasting benefit of the living beings.¹
cont'd.]

That is "for the ultimate benefit of the living beings"², the emptiness of which has been referred to by Vasubandhu as "the emptiness of the ultimate element".

[MVK I.19 And for not leaving the *saṃsāra*,³
cont'd.]

That is, if one does not perceive the emptiness of the internal senses etc., then "not seeing the emptiness of the eternal *saṃsāra*, one, being depressed, would rather leave the world."⁴ The emptiness of 'not leaving the *saṃsāra*' has been referred to as "the emptiness of the eternal [element]".

[MVK I.19 For the non-cessation of fortune.⁵
cont'd.]

"Even in the absolute state of *nirvāṇa* there is something that one does not give up, the emptiness of which is called the emptiness of the unforsaken."⁶

[MVK I.20] For the purity of the lineage.⁷

"Lineage means nature, for it belongs to one's own-nature."⁸ Its emptiness has been referred to as "the emptiness of nature".

1. *Sadā sattva-hītāya ca.* MVK I.19

2. *Atyanta-sattva-hītārtham.* MVKB I.19

3. *Samśāra-atyajanārtham.* MVK I.19

4. *Anavarāgasya hi samśārasya śūnyatām-apaśyan khinnāḥ samśāram parityajate.*
MVKB I.19

5. *Kuśalasya-akṣayāya.* MVK I.19

6. *Nirupadhiṣeṣe nirvāṇe'pi yan-na-avikirati notsrjati tasya śūnyatā anava-kāra-śūnyatā-iti-ucyate.* MVKB I.19

7. *Gotrasya ca viśudhyartham.* MVK I.290

8. *Gotram-hi prakṛtiḥ, svābhāvikatvāt.* MVKB I.20

[MVK I.20 For attaining the defining marks.¹
cont'd.]

That is, "for attaining the marks that are characteristic of great men."² Its emptiness has been referred to as "the emptiness of defining marks".

[MVK I.20 And for the purity of the powers of an enlightened one.
cont'd.]
Does the Bodhisattva attain the emptiness of internal senses etc.³

Namely, for the purity of the powers such as "strength, fearlessness, special endowments etc.",⁴ the emptiness of which has been referred to as "the emptiness of every power". "Thus, indeed, the fact of the fourteen kinds of emptiness should be known."⁵

The last two kinds of emptiness are still to be explained, which the next stanza does. "What other kinds of emptiness are still there?"⁶

[MVK I.21] The negation of *pudgala* and *dharma*s,
Is indeed one kind of emptiness there,
The existence of that negation in it [i.e. in the enjoyer etc.]
Is another kind of emptiness.⁷

Vasubandhu explains this stanza as follows:

The negation of *pudgala* and *dharma*s is one emptiness. Another kind of emptiness is the existence of that negation in the above said enjoyer etc. These two kinds of emptiness are explained at the end in order to make the definition of the

1. *Lakṣaṇa-vyañjana-āptaye*. MVK I.20
2. *Mahāpuruṣa-lakṣaṇānām sa-anuvyañjanānām-prāptaye*. MVKB I.20
3. *Suddhaye Buddha-dharmānām bodhisattvaḥ prapadyate*. MVK I.20
4. *Balavaiśṛadya-āveṇikādīnām*. MVKB I.20
5. *Evam tāvac-caturdaśānām śūnyatānām vyavasthānam vedītavyam*. MVKB I.20
6. *Kā punar-atra śūnyatā ?* MVKB I.21
7. *Pudgalasya-attha dharmāṇām-abhāvaḥ śūnyatā-atra hi
Tadabhāvasya sad-bhāvas-tasmin sā śūnyatā-aparā*, MVK I.21

emptiness clear: in order to avoid the exaggeration of *pudgala* and *dharma*s the emptiness is explained, on the one hand, as the negation of *pudgala* and *dharma*s, and in order to avoid the underestimation of their negation the emptiness is explained, on the other hand, as having the negation of [*pudgala* and *dharma*s] for its own-nature. This is how the classification of emptiness is to be understood.¹

Here, as it is clear from Sthiramati's commentary, *pudgala* and *dharma* stand respectively for the subjective (*bhoktr-sammata*) and objective (*bhogyā-sammata*) aspects of experience. These two aspects are merely imaginary (*kalpita-lakṣaṇa*). Therefore they are to be negated, and their negation is one kind of emptiness. However, their negation does not mean nihilism. On the contrary, it points to a positive state of existence which cannot be characterized either as *pudgala/bhoktr* or as *dharma/bhogyā*. This positive state of existence, which has negation for its own-nature (*abhāva-svabhāva*) is the last and final sort of emptiness.²

These two kinds of emptiness have to be put together to construct a complete definition of emptiness. Why? Sthiramati answers as follows:

If *śūnyatā* as the negation [of *pudgala* and *dharma*s] is not mentioned [in the definition], it would mean that there is indeed the existence of *pudgala* and *dharma*s, which in fact are only of imagined forms. If, on the other hand, *śūnyatā* as having the negation [of *pudgala* and *dharma*s] for its own-nature is not mentioned, it would mean that there is not even the emptiness. Such negation of the emptiness itself

1. *Pudgala-dharma-abhāvaś-ca śūnyatā. Tad-abhāvasya ca sad-bhāvastasmin yathokte bhoktrādau sā anyā śūnyatā-iti śūnyatā-lakṣaṇa-ākhyānārtham divividhām-ante śūnyatām vyavasthāpayati-abhāva-śūnyatām-abhāva-svabhāvaś-śūnyatām-ca, pudgala-dharma samāroḥasya tac-chūnyatā-apavādasya ca parihārārtham yathākramam. Evam śūnyatāyāḥ prabhedo vijñeyāḥ. MVKB I.21*

2. *Tatra-adhyātmikeṣu-āyataneṣu vipāka-vijñāna-svabhāveṣu bālānām bhoktr-sammateṣu bhoktr-pudgalasya kalpītalakṣaṇānām ca cakṣurādīnām-abhāvas-tadabhāvasya ca sad-bhāvo' adhyātma-śūnyatā. . MVKBT I.21*

would mean the existence of the same *pudgala* and *dharma*s.¹

Therefore, it is necessary that the definition of the emptiness includes both *abhava-śūnyatā* and *abhāva-svabhāva-śūnyatā* as well.

Of the four topics mentioned in stanza I.13, the last one, namely, 'the reason for the classification of *śūnyatā*', now remains to be discussed. This is what the next stanza does by showing why *śūnyatā* has to be classified into defiled (*saṅkliṣṭā*) and purified (*viśuddhā*), a classification mentioned in stanza I.17. "How is the reason [for such classification] to be understood?"²

[MVK I.22] If it were not [ever] defiled,
Then all living beings would be [ever] liberated;
If it were not [ever] purified,
Then all efforts for liberation would be futile.

The meaning of this stanza is clear enough: it is necessary to distinguish between the defiled and the purified aspects of the emptiness, in order to explain the distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. One is in the state of *saṃsāra* when one experiences reality, which is otherwise called emptiness, as defiled, and one is in the state of *nirvāṇa* when one experiences the same reality as pure. So, *śūnyatā* is considered defiled or purified depending upon whether it is looked at from the sphere of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*. Interpreting the above stanza Vasubandhu says:

If the emptiness of elements would not be defiled by the accidental and secondary defilements, even when no remedy is applied, then, since there are no defilements whatsoever, all living beings would become liberated without any effort at all. Again, if it would not become purified, even when some

1. *Yadi-abhāva-śūnyatā nocyeta parikalpita-svarūpayor-dharma-pudgalayor-astivam-eva prasajyeta. Yadi-abhāva-svabhāva-śūnyatā nocyeta śūnyatāyāḥ abhāva eva prasajyeta. Tad-abhāvāc-ca pudgala-dharmayoḥ pūrvavad bhāvaḥ syāt. MVKBT I.21*

2. *Katham sādhanam vijñeyam? MVKB I.22*

3. *Saṅkliṣṭā-ced bhaven-na-asau muktās-syuh sarva-dehinah Viśuddhā ced bhaven-na-asau vyāyāmo niṣphalo bhavet. MVK I.22*

remedy is applied, then the efforts towards liberation would prove fruitless.¹

In other words, the fact that some are not liberated while others are, shows that the emptiness is looked at as defiled and purified.

However, *śūnyatā*, considered in itself, is neither defiled nor purified. It is defiled or purified only with reference to the way it is looked at. As Sthiramati says:

There, the defilement is on account of the inclusion of the *saṅkleśa-dharma*, and the purity is on account of the grasping of the *viśuddhi-dharma*. On the contrary, neither defilement nor purity issues directly from *śūnyatā*, for the substance [*dharmatā*] depends for its manifestation on its attributes [*dharmas*].²

What Sthiramati means by these words may be expressed differently as follows: A substance (*dharmatā*, reality) as such is not perceived, but only in accordance with the attributes (*dharmas*) imposed on it by the perceiver. If attributes of defilements are imposed on it, then it will be perceived as defiled (*saṅkliṣṭa*), and if attributes of purity are imposed on it, then it will be perceived as purified (*viśuddha*). It then follows that the distinction between the defiled and purified modes of emptiness is only an epistemological one, and that the emptiness in itself is neither defiled nor purified. This is explicitly stated in the next stanza, which Vasubandhu introduces with the conjunction "however"³ to suggest its contrast from the previous stanza.

[MVK I.23] It is neither defiled nor undefiled,
Also, it is neither purified nor unpurified;⁴

1. *Yadi sarva-dharmāṇāṃ śūnyatā āgantukair-upakleśair-anutpanne'pi pratīpakṣe na saṅkliṣṭa bhavet, saṅkleśa-abhāvād-ayatanata eva muktāḥ sarva-sattvā bhavēyuh. Atha-utpanne'pi pratīpakṣe na viśuddhā bhavet, mokṣārthamārambho niṣphalo bhavet.* MVKB I.22

2. *Atra saṅkleśadharmā-upādānāt saṅkleśo, viśuddhi-dharma-grahanād viśuddhiḥ. Na tu śūnyatāyāḥ sākṣāt saṅkleśo viśuddhir-vā-īṣyate, dharma-paratantratvād-dharmatāyāḥ.* MVKBT I.22

3. *Evam-ca kṛtvā.* MVKB I.23

4. *Na kliṣṭa na-āpi vā-akliṣṭa śuddhā-asuddhā na ca-eva sā* MVK I.23

“How is it that it is neither defiled nor unpurified ? It is so by its very nature.”¹

[MVK I.23 Because of the shining nature of citta;²
cont'd]

Evidently, this line does not fit in with the context, because it abruptly suggests *citta* to be another name for *śūnyatā*, the absolute state of reality. Nowhere before, not even on the list of the synonyms of *śūnyatā*³ was *citta* mentioned as another name for *śūnyatā*. On the contrary Vasubandhu has always used the term *citta* to mean *ālaya-vijñāna*, or in conjunction with *caitta*. Therefore, the present line sounds very much out of context. It is, therefore, difficult to believe that this is part of the original text. S. Yamaguchi, in his edition of *Madhyānta-vibhāga-tikā* (Nagoya 1934) does not in fact consider it as part of the original stanza. Th. Stcherbatsky treats it as a Scriptural quotation cited by Vasubandhu.⁵ It is quite possible, indeed, that the original line is lost, and that the present one is only a Scriptural quotation occurring in Vasubandhu's commentary, as Stcherbatsky's translation suggests. Even so the problem about considering *citta* as another name for *śūnyatā* remains unsolved. Is it possible that Vasubandhu really means that *citta* is another name for *śūnyatā*? No, because it would contradict his other passages which treat *citta* only as *ālaya-vijñāna*, which operates only on the saṃsāric sphere. So, how is one to understand the present line? Sthiramati, as if sensing the problem, says that the term *citta* in the present context should be taken to mean *citta-dharmatā*.⁶ This interpretation

1. *Katham na kliṣṭā na-apī ca-aśuddhā? prakṛtyā-eva.* MVK I.23

2. *Prabhāsaravavāc-cittasya.* MVK I.23

3. Cf. MVK I.15-16; (see above pages 75-76)

4. Cf. R. C. Pandeya, ed., *Madhyānta-vibhāga-śāstra*, (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna : Motilal Banarsidass, 1971), p. 49, note 4.

5. Cf. Th. Stcherbatsky, trans., *Madhyānta-vibhāga: Discourse on Discrimination between Middle and Extremes*, (Bibliotheca Buddhica XXX, 1936; reprint, Calcutta : Indian Studies, Past and Present, 1971), p. 215. The reference is possibly to *Āṅguttara-nikāya* 1.10 : *Prabhāsaram idam cittam..*

6. *Ara 'ca citta-dharmatā-eva citta-śabdena-uktā, cittasya-eva malalakṣaṇatvāt.* MVKBT I.23

solves the problem partly, for any element (*dharma*) in its abstract state (*dharmatā*) is for the Yogācārins another name for the absolute state of *śūnyatā*. Consequently, the element *citta*, in its abstract state of existence is no more the phenomenal intellect nor the *ālayavijñāna*, but is the absolute state of *śūnyatā*. It is just like the case of *abhūta-parikalpa* which, once it is rid of the subject-object characterizations, turns out to be identical with *śūnyatā*.¹ Thus, Sthiramati's interpretation of *citta* as *citta-dharmatā* somehow solves the problem at issue. However, it may be still asked how the attribute 'shining' (*prabhāsvara*) can be validly applied to *citta*, which here means *citta-dharmatā/śūnyatā*, for the explanation of the different kinds of *śūnyatā* (stanzas 18-22) implied that no attribute whatsoever can validly be applied to the thing-in-itself, for which the term *śūnyatā* stands.² If so, how can the attribute 'shining' (*prabhāsvara*) be meaningfully applied to *citta-dharmatā/śūnyatā*. A possible answer to this question may be that Vasubandhu, while quoting a traditional passage, does not take the attribute 'shining' in its literal sense, but only in its metaphorical sense of 'par excellence.' However, I feel that the entire line under discussion can be interpreted in a much simpler way. That 'the *citta* is of shining nature' can be understood literally to mean that *citta*, i.e. *ālaya-vijñāna*,³ is of shining nature (*prabhāsvara*) so that it leaves its reflections on the things around, which consequently would look different from what they really are. Then the first three lines of the present stanza would mean the following:

Śūnyatā is neither defiled nor undefiled,
Also, it is neither purified nor unpurified,
It is neither defiled nor unpurified
Because the defilements and impurities,
Which are attributed to *śūnyatā*,

1. *Śūnyatā tasya abhūta-parikalpasya grāhya-grāhaka-bhāvena virahitatā*. MVKB I.2; see above pages 29 ff

2. See above pages 78ff

3. In fact in one of the Tibetan versions of this stanza the term used is *sems*, which means *ālaya-vijñāna*. Cf. Th. Stcherbatsky, op. cit., p. 215, note 162.

Are only reflections from *citta*,

Which is otherwise called *ālaya-vijñāna*.

This latter is shining in nature, and, therefore,

Can cause its own defiled and impure contents to reflect on
sūnyatā,

Which will consequently appear as defiled and unpurified.

The final line of the same stanza explains "how is it [i.e. *sūnyatā*] neither undefiled nor purified?"¹

[MVK I.23 Because of the accidental character of the
cont'd.] defilements.²

That is, the defilements attributed to *sūnyatā* are only some accidentals which by no means affect it substantially. So the *sūnyatā* never really gets defiled or impure. Consequently the removal of those defilements, which means only a change in the perceiver, rather than in the perceived *sūnyatā*, cannot be said to be an undefiling or purification of *sūnyatā*.

"Thus, the above-mentioned classification of emptiness [into defiled and purified] is justified."³

Finally Vasubandhu summarises the discussion on the emptiness as follows:

There, the summary-meaning of emptiness is to be understood under two heads: one, the definition [of emptiness], and the other, the establishment [of the same definition]. There, definition is, again, twofold: positive and negative. The positive definition is likewise twofold: one, [the assertion that emptiness is] neither assertion nor negation, two, [the assertion that emptiness is] that which is free from being different from thatness. By the establishment [of definition] is to be understood the establishment of synonyms of emptiness

1. *Katham na-akliṣṭā na śuddhā?* MVKB I.23

2. *Kleśasya-āgantukatvataḥ.* MVK I.23

3. *Evam sūnyatāyāḥ uddiṣṭaḥ prabhedāḥ sādhitā bhavati.* MVKB I.23

etc. There, by the fourfold introduction of the emptiness the following four definitions of it are intended : its own-definition, operative-definition, defilement-purity-definition and rationality-definition; these definitions help one respectively to get rid of uncertainty, fear, indolence and doubt.¹

1. *Tatra śūnyatāyāḥ piṇḍārtho lakṣaṇato vyavasthānataś-ca veditavyaḥ. Tatra lakṣaṇato bhāva-lakṣaṇato'bhāva-lakṣaṇataś-ca. Bhāva-lakṣaṇam punarbhāva-abhāva-vinirmukta-lakṣaṇataś-ca tatva-anyatva-vinirmukta-lakṣaṇataś-ca. Vyavasthānam punaḥ paryāyādi-vyavasthānato veditavyam. Tatra-etaṃ caturprakāra-deśanayā śūnyatāyāḥ sva-lakṣaṇam, karma-lakṣaṇam, saṅkleśa-vyavadāna-lakṣaṇam, yukti-lakṣaṇam-ca udbhavitam bhavati : vikalpa-trāsa-kausīdya-vicikitsānpasāntaye. MVKB I. (conclusion)*

APPENDIX I
THE VERSES ON
DISCRIMINATION BETWEEN MIDDLE AND EXTREMES
AND
VASUBANDHU'S COMMENTARY ON THEM

A CHAPTER ON DEFINITIONS

[27]* Having paid homage to the founder of this science,
 Son of the well-gone,
 And also to its expositor for people like me,
 May I now endeavour to analyse its meaning.

[28] 1. The definition,
 The coverings,
 The truth,
 Meditation of the opposite,
 Its stages,
 Attainment of results,
 And the pre-eminence of the path.

These are the seven topics discussed in this science. They are namely the coverings, the truth, meditation of the opposite, stages of that meditation, attainment of results, and, seventhly, the pre-eminence of the path. There, beginning with the definitions, [the text] says :

[29] 2. There exists the imagination of the unreal,
 There is no pair,
 But there is emptiness,
 Even in this there is that.

*The numbers in square brackets refer to pages above where the respective stanzas and passages are analysed.

There, the imagination of the unreal means the discrimination between the graspable and the grasper. The pair is the graspable and the grasper. Emptiness means that state of the imagination of the unreal which is lacking in the form of being graspable or grasper. Even in this [emptiness] there is that, namely, the imagination of the unreal. Thus, when something is absent in a receptacle, then one, seeing that receptacle as devoid of that thing, perceives that receptacle as it is, and recognizes that receptacle, which is left over, as it is, namely as something truly existing here. Thus, the definition of emptiness is shown to imply no contradiction.

3. Neither void nor non-void :

[41] So is everything described,
 That indeed is the middle path,
 For there is existence as well as non-existence,
 And again existence.

On account of the existence of emptiness, on the one hand, and that of the imagination of the unreal, on the other, it is not void. And on account of the non-existence of the pair of graspable and grasper, it is not non-void, either. This description applies to everything, whether conditioned or unconditioned. The term 'conditioned' goes for what is called the imagination of the unreal, while the term 'unconditioned' goes for what is called the emptiness. That indeed is the middle path, for, on the one hand, there is the existence of emptiness within the imagination of the unreal, and, on the other, the existence of the imagination of the unreal within the emptiness. It is therefore neither exclusively void nor exclusively non-void. This reading is thus in accordance with the scriptures such as *Prajñā-pāramitā*, [where it is said] : "all this is neither void nor non-void".

Thus having stated the positive and negative definition of the imagination of the unreal, now the [author] gives its own-definition :

4. Under the appearance of things inanimate,

[46] Living beings, self and representations of consciousness,
 Is born the consciousness.

There is nothing as its [i.e. consciousness's] object,
And thus that object being absent
That [consciousness], too, is non-existent.

In the form of colour etc. the consciousness appears as inanimate things, and in that of five senses it appears as living beings. These five senses refer to one's own as well as other's streams of existence. The appearance of consciousness as self is the same as defiled thought, because it is associated with self-delusion etc. The representations of consciousness are otherwise called the sixfold consciousness. The appearance of inanimate things as well as of living beings are devoid of form; likewise the appearances of self and representations of consciousness are not in the way they appear to be. This is why it is said that there is indeed nothing as its [i.e. consciousness's] object. That is, the four kinds of graspables—namely, (i) colour etc., (ii) the five senses, (iii) thought, and (iv) the sixfold consciousness—are absent. Thus the graspable being absent, the grasper, namely the consciousness, too, is non-existent.

5. Therefore its being the imagination of the unreal
[55] Remains established,
For it is not so,
It is not altogether absent, either.

For its existence is not the way it appears to be. It is not totally absent, either, because there is the production of illusion only, for

From its cessation results liberation.

For otherwise there would be neither bondage nor liberation, which would imply the denial of the facts of defilement and purity.

Thus having stated the own-definition of the imagination of the unreal, now [the author] states its inclusive definition. It shows how, there being only the imagination of the unreal, there could be the inclusion of the three natures.

6. The imagined, the other-dependent,
[58] And the absolutely accomplished,
Are derived [respectively] from

The objects, the imagination of the unreal,
And the absence of the pair.

The object is the imagined nature, the imagination of the unreal is the other-dependent nature, and the absence of the graspable-grasper duality is the absolutely accomplished nature.

Now is shown a definition which can be used as an instrument in comprehending the negative definition of the same imagination of the unreal :

7. Depending upon perception
[61] There arises non-perception,
 And depending upon non-perception
 There arises non-perception.

Depending upon the perception that there are only representations of consciousness, there arises the non-perception of knowable things. Depending upon the non-perception of knowable things, there arises the non-perception of the mere representations of consciousness, too. Thus one understands the negative definition of graspable and grasper.

8. Therefore it remains established
[62] That perception has the same nature
 As non-perception.

Because, there being no perceivable things, there is no possibility of having perception either.

Therefore the sameness
Of non-perception and perception
Should be recognized.

Because perception as such is not obtained. Though not having the own-nature of perception, still it is called perception because there are the appearances of unreal objects.

Now follows the classification-definition of the same imagination of the unreal :

9. The imagination of the unreal
[64] Is *citta* as well as *caittas*,
 Belonging to all three worlds.

[The three worlds refer to] the distinction between the worlds of passion, forms, and formless beings.

Now follows the synonym-definition :

There, perception of objects is consciousness,
And perception of their qualities is mental factors.

Consciousness is perception of just the objects. The mental factors, namely, feeling etc., are the perception of the qualities of the same objects.

The next verse states the function-definition :

10. One is the source-consciousness,
[66] And the other is the enjoyment-consciousness.
There, the mental factors are
Enjoyment, determination and motivation.

The store-consciousness being the source of other consciousnesses is called the source-consciousness. The active consciousness, which has the latter as its source, is called the enjoyment-consciousness. Enjoyment refers to feeling etc., determination to concept, and motivation to the conditioning forces such as volition, attention etc., of consciousness.

[The next two verses] state the defilement-definition :

11. The world is oppressed / defiled
[68] (1) By being concealed,
(2) By being raised,
(3) By being led,
(4) By being seized,
(5) By being completed,
(6) By being trebly determined,
(7) By enjoying,
(8) By being attracted,

12. (9) By being bound,
[68] (10) By being orientated, and
(11-12) By being subjected to suffering.

There, (1) 'by being concealed' means 'by being impeded by ignorance from seeing things as they are', (2) 'by being raised'

means 'by the installation of the impressions of deeds on consciousness by the conditioning forces', (3) 'by being led' means 'by being taken by consciousness to the place of re-birth', (4) 'by being seized' means '[by being seized] by the *nāma* and *rūpa* of egohood', (5) 'by being completed' means '[by being completed] by the six organs', (6) 'by being trebly determined' means '[by being trebly determined] by contact', (7) 'by enjoying' means 'by feeling', (8) 'by being attracted' means '[by being attracted] by the desire for a new existence, the seeds of which have already been sown by previous deeds', (9) 'by being bound' means '[by being bound] by the inclinations towards sense-pleasure etc., which are conducive to a new birth of the consciousness', (10) 'by being orientated' means 'by making the deeds of former existence tend to manifest their matured fruits in a new existence', (11-12) 'by being subjected to suffering' means '[by being subjected] to birth, old age, and death'. By all these is the world oppressed / defiled.

This [list of]

The oppressives / defilements,
All proceeding from the imagination of the unreal,
Could be classified
Either into three groups,
Or into two groups,
Or into seven groups.

The classification of the oppressives/defilements into three groups is as follows : (1) oppressive oppressors, namely ignorance, desire and inclinations; (2) deed-oppressives, namely conditioning forces and existence/birth; (3) birth oppressives, namely the remaining members.

The classification of the oppressives/defilements into two groups is as follows : (1) causal oppressives/defilements which include the groups of oppressive oppressors, and deed-oppressives; (2) resultant oppressives which are the same as the birth-oppressives.

The classification of the oppressives/defilements into seven groups refer to the seven kinds of causes such as, (1) cause of error, namely ignorance, (2) cause of sowing of seeds, namely

conditioning forces, (3) cause of direction, namely consciousness, (4) cause of seizure, namely *nāma* and *rūpa* and the six bases, (5) cause of enjoyment, namely contact and feeling, (6) cause of attraction, namely desire, inclinations and existences/birth, and (7) cause of unrest, namely birth, old age and death.

All these oppressives/defilements operate due to the imagination of the unreal.

The ninefold definition, giving the summary-meaning of the imagination of the unreal, has [now] been explained. Those definitions are, namely, positive definition, negative definition, own-definition, inclusive definition, instrumental definition, classification definition, synonym-definition, activity-definition and defilement-definition.

Thus having explained the imagination of the unreal, the author now shows how the emptiness should be understood :

13. About the emptiness

- [72] One should summarily know
 Its definition,
 Its synonyms along with their meaning,
 Its classification,
 And the reason for its classification.

How the definition of the emptiness is to be understood ?

14. The negation of the pair

- [73] Is indeed the assertion of such negation;
 This is the definition of the emptiness.

There is the negation of the pair of the graspable and grasper. The definition of emptiness, then, is the assertion of that negation. Thus, it is shown how the emptiness is to be defined in negative terms. And, what those negative terms are, [is further stated] :

- It is neither [total] assertion,
 Nor [total] negation.

Why not [total] assertion ? Because there is the negation of the pair of subject and object. Why not [total] negation ? Because there is the assertion of the negation of that pair. This

indeed is the definition of the emptiness. Therefore, with reference to the imagination of the unreal, the emptiness is :

Neither different from the imagination of the unreal,
Nor identical with the imagination of the unreal.

If different, it would imply that the 'universal' [*dharmatā*] is other than the particular things [*dharma*s], which is unacceptable. For example, 'impermanence' is not other than the impermanent things, and the state of suffering is not other than suffering itself. If identical, there would be no place for purifying knowledge, nor would there be the commonplace knowledge. Thus is shown a definition which states that emptiness is that which is free from being different from thatness.

How is the synonym [of emptiness] to be understood ?

15. Suchness, the extreme limit of existence,
[75] The uncaused, absoluteness,
The source-reality :
These are summarily the synonyms of emptiness.

How is the meaning of these synonyms to be understood ?

16. The synonyms respectively mean that the emptiness is
[75] Never otherwise,
Never falsified,
Never admitting a cause,
The object intuited by sages,
And that it is
The source of the powers of the sages.

The emptiness is called suchness, in the sense that it is never otherwise, and insofar as it remains ever the same way. It is called the extreme limit of existence in the sense that it is never falsified, because it is never an object of doubt. It is called the uncaused, because it does not admit for itself any cause, for it is far from having any cause whatsoever. It is called the absoluteness/the ultimate object, because it is the object of the knowledge of the sages, meaning that it is the object of the

ultimate knowledge. It is called the source-reality, because it is the source of the powers to the sages, meaning that the powers of the sages have their origin depending upon it : here the term *dhātu* is used in the sense of *hetu*, indeed.

How is the classification of the emptiness to be understood ?

[76] 17. It is defiled and purified;

So is its classification. In what condition is it defiled, and in what condition is it purified ?

It is with and without impurities.

When it is with impurities, then it is defiled, and when it is rid of the impurities, then it is purified. Getting rid of the impurities once associated with it, implies that it is changing in character. How is it then that it is still not impermanent ? Because its

Purity is understood
As the purity of elemental water,
Gold and space.

[The purity of the emptiness is recovered] by shaking off the accidental impurities, which does not mean a change in its own-nature.

Here is another classification according to which there are sixteen kinds of emptiness: (1) emptiness of internal [elements], (2) emptiness of external [elements], (3) emptiness of internal as well as external [elements], (4) emptiness of the great, (5) emptiness of emptiness, (6) emptiness of the absolute object, (7) emptiness of the conditioned [elements], (8) emptiness of the unconditioned [elements], (9) emptiness of the ultimate [element], (10) emptiness of the eternal [element], (11) emptiness of the unforsaken [element], (12) emptiness of nature, (13) emptiness of defining marks, (14) emptiness of every power, (15) emptiness of negation, (16) emptiness of negation as own-nature.

All those kinds of emptiness should be briefly understood :

18. There is the emptiness of the enjoyer,
[79] Emptiness of the enjoyed,

Emptiness of the body of the enjoyer and enjoyed,
 Emptiness of the basic thing,
 Emptiness of that by which it
 [i.e. the emptiness of enjoyer etc.] is perceived,
 Emptiness of the way in which it is perceived,
 and
 Emptiness of that for which it is perceived.

Here, the emptiness of the enjoyer means the emptiness of the internal senses etc., the emptiness of the enjoyed means the emptiness of the external elements, the emptiness of their bodies, namely the *śarīrās* which are the basis of both the enjoyer and the enjoyed, means the emptiness of the internal and the external elements. The basic thing means the universe which is the basis of the enjoyer, the enjoyed and their bodies. Its emptiness is called the emptiness of the great because of the vastness of the universe. The emptiness of the internal senses etc., is perceived by the knowledge of emptiness, whose emptiness is called the emptiness of emptiness. The emptiness of internal senses is perceived as the absolute object, whose emptiness is called the emptiness of the absolute object. The emptiness of that for which the Bodhisattva attains the emptiness of the internal senses etc., is the final kind of emptiness.

For what, indeed, is the emptiness of the internal senses etc. attained ?

[80] 19. For the attainment of the twofold prosperity,
 [namely], the conditioned as well as the unconditioned
 fortune,
 For the everlasting benefit of the living beings,
 [namely], for the ultimate benefit of the living beings,
 And for not leaving the *saṃsāra*,

[that is, otherwise], not seeing the emptiness of the eternal *saṃsāra*, one, being depressed, would rather leave the world.

For the non-cessation of fortune,

Even in the absolute state of *nirvāṇa* there is something that one does not give up, the emptiness of which is called the emptiness of the unforsaken.

- [81] 20. For the purity of the lineage,
 Lineage means nature, for it belongs to one's
 own nature.
 For attaining the defining marks,

[that is], for attaining the marks that are characteristic of
 great men.

And, for the purity of the powers of enlightenment,
 Does the Bodhisattva attain the emptiness of
 internal senses etc.

[namely], for the purity of the powers such as strength,
 fearlessness, special endowments etc. Thus, indeed, the fact of
 the fourteen kinds of emptiness should be known.

What other kinds of emptiness are still there ?

- [82] 21. The negation of *pudgala* and *dharma*s
 Is indeed one kind of emptiness there,
 The existence of that negation in it [i.e. in the
 enjoyer etc.]
 Is another kind of emptiness.

The negation of *pudgala* and *dharma*s is one emptiness. Another
 kind of emptiness is the existence of that negation in the above
 said enjoyer etc. These two kinds of emptiness are explained at
 the end in order to make the definition of the emptiness clear :
 in order to avoid the exaggeration of *pudgala* and *dharma*s the
 emptiness is explained, on the one hand, as the negation of
pudgala and *dharma*s, and in order to avoid the underestimation
 of their negation the emptiness is explained, on the other hand,
 as having the negation of *pudgala* and *dharma*s for its own-nature.
 This is how the classification of emptiness is to be understood.

How is the reason [for such a classification] to be
 understood ?

- [84] 22. If it were not ever defiled,
 Then all living beings would be ever liberated;
 If it were not ever purified,
 Then all efforts for liberation would be futile.

If the emptiness of elements would not be defiled by the accidental and secondary defilements, even when no remedy is applied, then, since there are no defilements whatsoever, all living beings would become liberated without any effort at all. Again, if it would not become purified, even when some remedy is applied, then the efforts towards liberation would prove fruitless. .

However,

23. It is neither defiled nor undefiled,

[85] Also, it is neither purified nor unpurified;

How is it that it is neither defiled nor unpurified ? It is so by its very nature,

Because of the shining nature of *citta*;

How is it neither undefiled nor purified :

Because of the accidental character of the defilements.

Thus, the above-mentioned classification of emptiness into defiled and purified is justified.

There, the summary-meaning of emptiness is to be understood under two heads : one, the definition [of emptiness], and the other, the establishment [of the same definition]. There, definition is again, twofold : positive and negative. The positive definition is likewise twofold : one, [the assertion that emptiness is] neither assertion nor negation; two, [the assertion that emptiness is] that which is free from being different from thatness. By the establishment [of definition] is to be understood the establishment of synonyms of emptiness etc. There, by the fourfold introduction of the emptiness the following four definitions of it are intended: its own-definition, operative-definition, defilement-purity-definition and rationality-definition; these definitions help one respectively to get rid of uncertainty, fear, indolence and doubt.