

The Principles of Buddhist Psychology

David J. Kalupahana

State University of New York Press

the known. In other words, it is a complete rejection of the discrimination that a metaphysical realist or a substantialist would make between knowledge (*jñāna*) and the object of knowledge (*jñeya*). It is what Nāgārjuna was emphasizing when he wanted to establish the non-substantiality of elements (*dharma-nairātmya*), namely, the appeasement of the object (*draṣṭavyopāśama*, *Kārikā* V.8). It is not intended as a justification for absolute idealism.

Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi *Trīṣṭikā-vijñapti-kārikā*

1. *Ātma-dharmoṣacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate,
vijñāna-pariṇāme 'sau pariṇāmaḥ sa ca tridhā.*

Whatever, indeed, is the variety of ideas of self and elements that prevails, it occurs in the transformation of consciousness. Such transformation is threefold, [namely,]

Upacāra is a usage or a prevailing idea. Self (*ātman*) was an idea that predominated the Indian philosophical scene before the advent of the Buddha. The notion of elements (*dharma*) possessing substance (*svabhāva*) is an idea that came to prevail as a result of the speculations of the Sarvāstivāda school of Buddhism. In their attempt to get rid of the notion of substantial elements, the Sautrāntika school of Buddhism adhered to the notion of a momentary stream of consciousness (*citta-samṭāna*), and surreptitiously re-introduced the old Indian notion of a self (*ātman*, *pudgala*). These are distinct and subtle theories that Vasubandhu had to deal with. As such, if Vasubandhu's explanation is going to be any different, he should avoid the variety of metaphysical theories presented by the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas. This would be the most important fact to be borne in mind when evaluating Vasubandhu's explanation of the transformation of consciousness (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*). Any explanation that would involve either the Sarvāstivāda or the Sautrāntika metaphysics would vitiate Vasubandhu's efforts to restore the original teachings of the Buddha, if that was what he had in mind when compiling this treatise.

Therefore, when Vasubandhu declared that the concepts of self (*ātman*) and elements (*dharma*) occur in the process of consciousness (*viññāna*) that undergoes transformation (*pariṇāma*), he seems to be emphasizing the epistemological issues rather than replacing the self and elements with another equally metaphysical idea that consciousness is the only reality.

Sthiramati explains the motivation for the compilation of the *Triṃśikā* as follows:

“Or else, some think that, like consciousness (*viññānavad*), the object of knowledge (*viññeyam*) exists as a substance (*dravyataḥ*). [Others assume] that like the object of knowledge (*viññeyavad*), consciousness (*viññāna*) exists only in terms of convention (*saṃvṛtitāḥ*) and not in an ultimate sense (*paramārthataḥ*). The treatise was compiled for the sake of rejecting these two extreme (*anta*) views.”

The implication is that Vasubandhu perceives consciousness (*viññāna*) as having an ultimate meaning (*paramārtha*). This would mean that he is rejecting the metaphysical realism of Sarvāstivāda as well as the nominalism of the Sautrāntikas. As a philosopher interested in epistemology, he lays great emphasis on psychology, especially the psychology of perception. As such the phenomenon of consciousness (*viññāna*) was of prime importance. Even though some of his views about the external world compare well with those of George Berkeley, his involvement in human psychology aligns him more with William James. He abandoned his Sautrāntika leanings because of the metaphysical problems in which the Sautrāntikas got involved. Moving from the position of a Sautrāntika to the position of a Vijñānavādin (or Yogācārin), Vasubandhu would not be making any progress in his philosophical position if he were to bring back similar, or even more complicated metaphysical theories into his new philosophy. The drastic changes Vasubandhu brought about in the terminology employed by the classical idealists in the Buddhist tradition as represented by the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* and the *Samādhinirmocana-sūtra* would also make no sense if he is considered to be a metaphysical idealist.

Furthermore, there must be some valid reason for Vasubandhu to abandon his Sautrāntika leanings and adopt a Vijñānavāda standpoint. That reason is clearly explained by Vasubandhu in his *Viṃśatikā*, especially when he criticized the theory of atoms (*paramāṇu*). The theory of atoms, though not identical with the theory of moments, is based upon the latter. Yet, Sthiramati brings back the theory of momentariness in his explanation of the transformation of consciousness (*viññāna-pariṇāma*), even though Vasubandhu never utilized the theory of momentariness in the present

treatise. Sthiramati's explanation is almost identical with the Sautrāntika standpoint that Vasubandhu was rejecting. He says:

Transformation is the obtaining of its own identity on the part of the effect simultaneous with the moment of the destruction of the cause and the moment of its abandoning its characteristic, (*kāraṇa-kṣana-nirodha-samakālaḥ kāraṇa-kṣana-nirodha-vilakṣaṇaḥ kāryasyātmatābhavaḥ pariṇāmaḥ*, p. 16).

2. *Vipāko mananākhyas ca vijñaptir viśayasya ca,
tatrālayākhyam vijñānam vipakas sarva-bījakaṃ*

the resultant, what is called mentation, as well as the concept of the object. Herein, the consciousness called *ālaya*, with all its seeds, is the resultant.

The transformation (*pariṇāma*), as explained here, avoids the notion of an absolute beginning and, therefore, of a temporal sequence as prior and posterior. This is one important reason for Vasubandhu to refer to *ālaya-vijñāna* as a resultant (*vipāka*), which is a semantic equivalent of "dependently arisen" (*pratityasamutpanna*), rather than as seed (*bīja*) or cause (*kāraṇa*) in this initial reference or description of it. Transformation, therefore, is not from a primordial substance, like the *prakṛti-prabhāsvara-citta* of the *Laṅkāvatāra*. It is a transformation of consciousness involving the *ālaya*, the *manas* and *viśaya-vijñapti* all acting together, and it is this process that gives rise to the beliefs in self and elements (*ātma-dharma-upacāra*).

Instead of assuming them to be actual states in an inevitable process of transformation, they are better understood as three occurrences that are intended to explain a variety of issues relating to the problem of perception.

The concept of *ālaya* is, indeed, central to the explanation of the problem of perception in Buddhism. As pointed out earlier, it occurs in the Buddha's discourse on "The Noble Quest" (*Ariyapariyesana*), where he expressed his reluctance to preach the doctrine because human beings are overwhelmed by *ālaya*. Nāgārjuna utilized a similar term *adhilaya* (*Kārikā* XXIV.13) in order to explain the same problem. We have interpreted *ālaya* as "mooring." It is the source of the dispositional tendencies (*saṃskāra*) that are operative in the perceptual process. The relationship between lust (*rāga*)

or craving (*taṇhā*) or even hatred (*dosa*) and dispositions (*saṅkhāra*) recognized in the early Buddhist tradition corresponds to the relationship between *ālaya* and *vāsanā* in Vasubandhu's explanation of Buddhist epistemology.

Unfortunately, the term *ālaya* came to be associated with the Sautrāntika concept of *āśraya*, implying a store or location (*sthāna*) of the momentary impressions, a conception that is as metaphysical as the *ātman* of the later Nyāya epistemologists who believed that all knowledge occurs in the *ātman*. Thus, Sthiramati, following the *Lankāvatāra* version, defines *ālaya* as "the location of all seeds of the defiled dharmas" (*sarva-saṃkleśika-dharma-bīja-sthāna*). For him, *ālaya* is primarily a synonym for *sthāna* (p. 18), and the original meaning of the term "mooring" in the sense of "attachment" (*alīyante*) is secondary.

Vijñāna is not an entity. It is the act of being conscious (*viñānāṭi viññānam*, p. 18; *viñānāṭi viññāṇam*, S 3.87; cp. William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 4). *Ālaya-vijñāna* is thus the process of consciousness that gets anchored, resulting in "attachment" or "desire." In that sense it is a resultant (*vipāka*). However, since such consciousness continues to be functional in human behavior, it also serves as the cause (*kāraṇa*) or seed (*bīja*).

In his auto-commentary on the *Viṃśatikā*, Vasubandhu provided an explanation of immediate experience (*pratyakṣa*). For him, an immediate experience evaporates into thin air the moment one tries to identify it. This is because such identification involves reflection and the so-called immediacy is lost in the process. Identification, therefore, involves the activity of *manas* and the process culminates with the conceptualization of the external object (*viśaya-vijñapti*). It is significant to note that here Vasubandhu is referring not to the consciousness of the object (*viśaya-vijñāna*), but to the concept of the object (*viśayasya vijñaptiḥ*), for it is through such concepts that objects of immediate experience are identified. If not so identified, they remain forever unknown.

3. *Asaṃviditakopādi-sthāna-vijñāptikaṃ ca tat,
sadā sparśa-manaskāra-vit-saṃjñā-cetanānvitaṃ.*

It is unidentified in terms of concepts of object and location, and is always possessed of [activities such as] contact, attention, feeling, perception and volition.

The term *asamvidita* qualifies only two of the activities and not the rest. This means that most of the activities such as contact (*sparsā*), attention (*manaskāra*), feeling (*vit*), perception (*saṃjñā*) and even volition (*cetanā*) are available. Even though consciousness of the object, etc. is available, these are not yet identified by breaking that consciousness into distinct entities, and substituting concepts (*viññapti*).

This description of *ālaya-vijñāna* eliminates any possibility of presenting it as the primordial source of all experience. Indeed, what is emphasized is the existence of all forms of experience whenever they take place on the basis of conditions.

4. *Upekṣā vedanā tatrānivr̥tāvyaḥkṛtaṃ ca tat,
tathā sparsādayas tac ca vartate śrotasaughavat.*

In that context, the neutral feeling is uninterrupted and is not defined. So are contact, etc. And it proceeds like the current of a stream.

This is the flux of experience where events are not identified or defined. It is similar to what William James called the "plethora of the experienced continuity unbroken into parts." The simile of the stream (*sota*) used by the Buddha to illustrate the process of becoming (*bhava*) is here utilized by Vasubandhu without any metaphysical embellishment in the form of a theory of moments (*kṣaṇavāda*), relished so much by his erstwhile companions, the Sautrāntikas.

5. *Tasya vyāvṛttir arhatve tad āśritya pravartate,
tad ālambam mano-nāma vijñānam mananātmakam.*

Its (i.e. *ālaya*'s) dissipation occurs in *arhatship*. Associated with this process and depending upon it occurs the consciousness called *manas*, which is of the nature of mentation.

Vyāvṛtti means "taking a different direction" and does not involve annihilation or complete cessation (*niṣṛtti*). The different direction it takes is dependent upon the appeasement of the dispositions, and this latter is achieved through the elimination of lust (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*) and confusion (*moha*). The elimination of these three roots of evil is considered to be freedom or "worthiness" (*arhatva*). At this stage, the *ālaya-vijñāna*, in a sense gets transformed, and is no more an *ālaya* ("attachment") but simply *vi-jñāna*. It is cleansed of all defiling tendencies, but not the experiences of contact, attention, feeling, perception or volition.

After describing the normal stream of experiential consciousness, Vasubandhu proceeds to explain how the ideas of self and elements (*ātma-dharma-upacāra*) emerge. As stated in the commentary on the *Viṃśatikā*, the conceptualization of an object, though based upon the experienced flux, involves reflection. Such reflection inevitably brings about the feeling of "I" (*aham*). The difference between Buddhist and Brahmanical speculation on this issue is that the latter assumed that all experiences begin with the perception of "self," while according to the former, it is merely a product of reflection. This stage, according to Vasubandhu is represented by *manas*.

Subsequent explanations of Vijñānavāda seems to assume that this state of consciousness is different from *mano* in the early Buddhist tradition. Therefore, it is looked upon as the seventh consciousness, the *ālaya-vijñāna* being the eighth. However, Vasubandhu himself makes no such characterization. For him, *manas* serves the same function as *mano* in the early Buddhist tradition (see section on "Yogācāra Psychology"). Vasubandhu also holds an identical position when he insists that the concepts (*vi-jñapti*) of objects (*viśaya*) are dependent upon the *manas*. It is the coordinating activity of *manas* that gives rise to the notion of a self. Hence Vasubandhu's description of *manas* as possessing the four defilements, discussed in the verse that follows.

6. *Kleśaiś caturbhiḥ sahitaṃ niṣṛtavyākṛtaiḥ sadā,
ātma-dṛṣṭy ātma-mohātma-mānātma-sneha-saṃjñitaiḥ.*

Endowed with the four types of defilements, constantly concealed and undefined, involving self-view, self-confusion, self-esteem and self-love,

If there is any notion of self (*ātman*), it eludes oneself everytime an attempt is made to identify it. The *avyākṛta* represents this indefinability or unidentifiability of the notion of self, even though this concept of self continues to be part of our view of the world, as well as the confusion, esteem and love that it generates. For Vasubandhu, it is a defiling tendency that is produced with reflection or mentation on occasions of sense experience.

7. *Yatrajas tanmayair anyaiḥ sparśādyaiś cārhatō na tat,
na nirodha-samāpattau mārge lokottare na ca.*

And also possessed of other forms of contact, etc. (i.e. attention, feeling, perception and volition) born of such (self-view, etc.) and made of such (self-view, etc.). It is not found in the worthy one, nor in the state of cessation nor in the supra-mundane path.

With the emergence of self-consciousness, all perceptual activities such as contact, attention, feeling, perception and volition, which previously "belonged," now come to be "possessed." What was earlier "dependently arisen" (*prafītyasamutpanna*) in the individual stream of consciousness, now turns out to be part of an ego. The stronger the view, the confusion, the pride and love of this self, the greater is the ego that emerges within the experiencing personality.

This would mean that a perceptual process which was originally a product of various conditions, including dispositions (*vāsanā*), comes to be possessed by the so-called "ghost in the machine." As a result, the dispositions that were part of the perceptual flux are solidified thereby contributing to further dispositional tendencies and the creation of a sharp dichotomy between the self and other. When this ego reaches its climax, one ends up with the belief in a permanent and eternal self which, unfortunately, remains unidentified through any available means of ordinary experience.

8. *Dvīṭīyaḥ pariṇāmo 'yaṃ tṛtīyaḥ saḍ-vidhasya yā,
viśayasopalabdhiḥ sā kuśalākuśaladvayā.*

Such is the second transformation. The third represents the acquisition of the sixfold object, and this is either good, bad or indeterminate.

Even though this is considered to be the third transformation, there is no indication that it is temporally subsequent. Vasubandhu's emphasis is on the "acquisition" (*upalabdhiḥ*), rather than the object itself. In the transformation discussed earlier, the acquisition or grasping is directed at oneself, whereas in the present it is focussed on the object of experience. This acquisitive element that emerges in the process of experience is heightened by the incapacity on the part of the human person to deal with the "big blooming buzzing confusion." Thus, selectivity becomes an inalienable part of the perceptual process. The recognition of this fact by Vasubandhu, as well as many other leading Buddhist thinkers since the time of the Buddha, has prevented them from assuming the possibility of knowing something in "its ultimately real form." Instead of being an ultimate reality, the object becomes a convention (*saṃvṛti*) or something that is "put together" (*saṃskṛta*) in terms of one's interest. As such, it turns out to be either good or bad or indeterminate.

9. *Sarvatragair viniyataiḥ kuśalaiś caitasair asau,
saṃprayuktā tathā kleśair upa-kleśais tri-vedanā.*

That [acquisition of the sixfold object] is associated with wholesome psychological conditions, both universal and particular, and similarly with primary as well as secondary defilements. That includes the threefold feeling.

Verses 9–14 are devoted to an enumeration of the different categories of psychological conditions (*caitta*, *caitasika*) that occur in human beings resulting from the perceptual process explained earlier. The list undoubtedly is the work of early Ābhidharmikas who attempted to determine, with great precision, the variety of psychological elements that come to be associated with the perceptual process. Vasubandhu, as the author of *Abhidharmakośa*, had dealt with all these psychological conditions and had no difficulty utilizing that list without getting involved in either the Sarvāstivāda

or Sautrāntika metaphysics (see *Akb* pp. 54–55). In fact, his predecessor in the Yogācāra tradition, namely Asaṅga, had done so (see *Abhidharma-samuccaya*). The adoption of that list was merely for the sake of being comprehensive in his treatment of consciousness.

10. *Ādyāḥ sparśādayaś chandādhimokṣa-smṛtayaḥ saha,
samādhidhūbhyāṃ niyatāḥ śraddhātha hṛīr apatrapā.*

The first [i.e., universals] are contact, etc. Yearning, resolve, memory together with concentration and wisdom are particulars. Confidence, shame and remorse,

Contact, attention, feeling, perception and volition are referred to as universals (*sarvatraga*) as they occur with all forms of consciousness. Particulars (*vinīyata*) are associated with some and not all acts of being conscious. In this and the next verse, ten good psychological conditions are enumerated.

11. *Alobhādi trayam vīryam praśrabdhiḥ sāpramādikā,
ahimṣā kuśalāḥ kleśā rāga-pratigha-mūḍhayaḥ.*

The triad consisting of absence of greed, etc., effort, diligence and non-violence are wholesome [psychological conditions]. The [primary] defilements are lust, aversion and confusion,

12. *Māna-dṛg-vicikitsāś ca krodhopanahane punaḥ,
mrakṣaḥ pradāśa īrṣyātha mātṣaryam saha māyayā.*

pride, view and doubt. Furthermore, anger, enmity, hypocrisy, malice, envy, avarice along with deception,

13. *Śāṭhyam mado 'vihimṣāhṛīr atrapā sthāna-muddhavaḥ,
āśraddhyam atha kauśīdyaṃ pramādo muṣītā smṛtiḥ.*

fraudulance, self-esteem, violence, shamelessness, remorselessness, deceitfulness, stupidity, lack of confidence, sluggishness, indolence and forgetfulness,

14. *Vikṣepo 'saṃprajanyaṃ ca kaukṛtyaṃ middham eva ca, vitarkaś ca vicāraś cety upa-kleśā dvaye dvidhā.*

distraction, inattentiveness, worry, sloth, reflection and investigation—these are the secondary defilements, the last two being twofold [defiled and non-defiled].

15. *Pañcānāṃ mūla-vijñāne yathāpratyaṃ udbhavaḥ, vijñānānāṃ saha na vā taraṅgāṇāṃ yathā jale.*

The arising of the five forms of consciousness, together or separately, within the foundational consciousness is like the waves in the water.

The foundational consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*) referred to here is the mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*), since specific reference is made by Vasubandhu to the five other forms of consciousness which are the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory and tactile consciousness. *Manovijñāna* is associated with *manas* which, along with the other five senses, eye (*cakṣu*), ear (*śrota*), nose (*ghrāṇa*), tongue (*jihvā*) and body (*kāya*) constitute the six senses. If, as explained earlier, *manas* occupies a pre-eminent position among the six senses because it is the co-ordinator of the other five senses it can be rightly called the foundational sense, and *mano-vijñāna* then is synonymous with *mūla-vijñāna*. If the foundational consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*) is the same as *ālaya-vijñāna*, there is no justification for the popular interpretation in Vijñānavāda that *ālaya-vijñāna* is the eighth consciousness and *manas* is the seventh in addition to the six forms of consciousness referred to above. On the contrary, the threefold evolution of consciousness (*vijñāna-pariṇāma*), with *ālaya*, *manas* and *viśaya-vijñapti*, will be another way of dealing with or explaining the six types of consciousness recognized by the Buddha as well as the later Buddhists. The recognition of *ālaya-vijñāna* as the eighth consciousness and *manas* as the seventh followed by yet another

six types of consciousness, therefore, seems a colossal mistake made in the interpretation of Vasubandhu. The present verse, indeed, does not allow for such an interpretation of Vasubandhu's treatment of consciousness. Furthermore, the previous analysis of *ālaya-vijñāna* clearly indicated that activities such as contact, attention, feeling, perception and volition occur in that consciousness, except for the fact that they are not identified. *Manana* and *viśaya-vijñapti* explain the manner in which they come to be identified, leading finally to the emergence of the beliefs in self and elements.

Vasubandhu seems to have introduced the simile of the "waves in the water" (*taṇḍāṇām yathā jale*) in order to avoid the metaphysics of identity and difference that plagued the Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika schools. Yet, the literal interpretation of *ālaya-vijñāna* as the location (*sthāna*) seems to have been responsible for the re-introduction of the same metaphysical notions with a substantial consciousness and fluctuating aspects. This is how the simile is mostly understood.

16. *Mano-vijñāna-sambhūtiḥ sarvadāsamjñikād ṛte,
samāpatti-dvayān middhān mūrchanād apy acittakāt.*

The manifestation of mental consciousness takes place always, except in the sphere of non-perception, in the two attainments and in the state of torpor occasioned by insensibility and absence of thought.

Mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*), described in the previous verse as fundamental consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*) and, therefore, identical with *ālaya-vijñāna*, functions on all occasions, except when the conditions for such activity are removed. Examples of such occasions when mental consciousness is not functional are: (1) the world of dieties (*āsamjñika-sattva*), who probably were a class of deities without the normal sensory faculties, (2) the two final stages of *dhyāna*, namely, the state of neither-perception-nor-non-perception (*naiva samjñā naivāsamjñā*) and the state of cessation of perception and what is felt (*samjñā-vedayita-nirodha*) and, (3) the clouding of consciousness conditioned by various disorders such as epilepsy and other conditions that prevent the functioning of this fundamental consciousness.

17. *Vijñāna-pariṇamo 'yaṃ vikalpo yad vikalpyate,
tena tan nāsti tenedaṃ sarvaṃ vijñāpti-mātrakaṃ.*

Thus, thought involves this transformation of consciousness. For that reason, what has thus been thought of does not exist. Therefore, all this is mere concept.

There is no denial of an object here. What is denied is the existence of a real object that is reflected "as it is" in consciousness. The fact that consciousness, while reflecting the object, has passed through several transformations makes it impossible for the object to be known "as it is." For this reason, all that is available is a "concept" (*vijñāpti*), not an ultimate reality or substance, either in oneself or in the world of experience.

18. *Sarva-bijaṃ hi vijñānaṃ pariṇāmas tathā tathā,
yāty anyonya-vaśād yena vikalpaḥ sa sa jāyate.*

Consciousness, indeed, possesses all seeds. Its transformation occurs in a variety of ways. It proceeds on the basis of mutual dependence as a result of which such and such thoughts are born.

The so-called seeds of consciousness are the dispositional tendencies, the *vāsanās*, in terms of which the objects of experience are understood. No object of experience is known or cognized as something that is completely independent of all the previous experiences. Every new occurrence is *understood* in relation to something that has already been experienced. For this reason, consciousness is said to have the seeds of everything, not in the sense that it is a repository of all innate ideas. The transformation of consciousness and the development or advancement of knowledge are thus based upon dependence (*anyonya-vaśād*), not in isolation or as a result of a complete break in the sequence of thinking, that is, with no connection to the past or the existing body of knowledge. Neither the percept nor the concept remains an incorruptible and permanent entity. They are all dependently arisen.

19. *Karmaṇo vāsanā grāha-dvaya-vāsanayā saha,
kṣīṇe pūrva-vipāke 'nyad vipākam janayanti tat.*

Karmic dispositions, together with the two dispositions of grasping, produces another resultant when the previous resultant has waned.

Depending upon one's dispositions, one understands the duality involved in grasping, namely, grasping (*grāha*) and grasped (*grāhya*) or grasping (*grāha*) and grasper (*grāhaka*). The former leads to the wrong impression about substantial elements (*dharma*) that are independent of grasping, and the latter generates the belief in the existence of a substantial self (*ātman*) as the agent of grasping. Such dispositions and understandings, of course, produce consequences (*vipāka*). This is a different way of presenting the pragmatic theory of truth. Of the pragmatic theory that says "truth is what works," the more unpalatable aspect, namely, the psychological process that is involved in the working of that truth, is here emphasized.

The continuous working of the effects or fruits provides a foundation for verification and common acceptance of "mere concept" (*viññaptimātra*) which, otherwise, would be considered a "mere fabrication," allowing room for all forms of day-dreams and utopias (see William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism*, p. 32).

20. *Yena yena vikalpena yad yad vastu vikalpyate,
parikalpita evāsau svabhāvo na sa vidyate.*

Whatever thought through which an object is thought of as a substance, that indeed is a fabrication. It is not evident.

In the present context, the object (*vastu*) that is thought of is not an ordinary object of experience, but one that possesses self-nature or substance (*svabhāva*). An ordinary object of experience (as explained earlier as well as in the verse that follows) is one that is "dependently arisen" (*pratītyasamutpanna*). Such dependence is not confined to the various physical conditions that provide a foundation for experience. It also includes the psychological factors involved in such experience. However, an object that has self-nature

does not depend upon any such conditions. Vasubandhu, who was the author of the famous *Abhidharmakośa*, could not have been unaware of the implications of the Sarvāstivāda notion of self-nature. Substance (*svabhāva*), as an independent entity, could not be part of experience as understood by the Buddhists who are faithful to the Buddha's epistemological standpoint. If substance were to be thought of or conceptualized in spite of its being not given in experience, it should be a mere fabrication, like a unicorn or a hare's horn. *Parikalpa*, as opposed to *vikalpa*, implies such fabrication with no grounding in experience. It is a mere imagination.

21. *Paratantra-svabhāvas tu vikalpaḥ pratyayodbhavaḥ,
niṣpannas tasya pūrvēna sadā rahitatā tu yā.*

A dependent self-nature is a thought that has arisen depending upon conditions. However, the absence of the one prior to it is always the accomplished.

Just as much as one can have the thought of something that is non-existent by simply fabricating or imagining, there also can be a thought that is dependent upon various conditions. Indeed, if there were to be a self-nature that has "come to be" (*bhūta* = *niṣpanna*) or is accomplished (*pariniṣpanna*), it should pertain to the dependent (*paratantra*), rather than the fabricated (*parikalpita*).

Pariniṣpanna is often equated with *paramārtha*. On the basis of a substantialist (both Buddhist and Brahminical) interpretation of *paramārtha* as "ultimate reality," the term *pariniṣpanna*, in spite of its being a past participle (like the term *bhūta*), is taken to mean an Absolute Reality. Thus, consciousness turns out to be the independent, the non-relative, ultimate reality in the world. There is little doubt that this is a gross misrepresentation of Vasubandhu's view, especially when placed in the context of his philosophical enterprise embodied in the *Viṃśatikā*.

The epistemological investigations in that treatise precludes any possibility of recognizing an ultimate reality that transcends experience. Experience itself involves subjective as well as objective conditions. The search for an ultimate reality in the objective world was criticized by Vasubandhu because it leads to an abandoning of the only epistemological means available, namely, sense experience. Phenomena (*dharmāḥ*), either

in the form of substance (*svabhāva*) or as atoms (*paramāṇu*), were rejected because they were not available to any experience. Having abandoned such an attempt, Vasubandhu was not ready to present consciousness (*viññāna*) as the Absolute Reality, for that would be to reintroduce some aspects of the Brahmanical notion of a self (*ātman*). The epistemological arguments used against the acceptance of an ultimately real object would be as valid against the acceptance of an ultimately real subject. For this reason, the *pariniṣpanna* needs to be understood in a totally different way.

The use of the past participle—*pariniṣpanna*—(comparable to the Buddha's own use of the past participle, *yathābhūta*) is extremely significant. Hsüan Tsang's rendering of this phrase into Chinese retains this meaning. Instead of being an Absolute or Ultimate Reality, it would mean something that is achieved or accomplished. Furthermore, the Buddha's own use of the term *paramattha*, as well as Nāgārjuna's utilization of the term *paramārtha*, in the sense of "ultimate goal or fruit," should prevent any absolutistic interpretation of the conception of *pariniṣpanna*. However, while the Buddha's and Nāgārjuna's use of the term *paramārtha* has a more ethical connotation, Vasubandhu's primary concern in the present treatise being epistemological, one is justified in taking the term *pariniṣpanna* in such an epistemological context. That epistemological implication is clearly brought out in the verse that follows.

22. *Ata eva sa naivānyo nānanyaḥ paratantrataḥ,
anityatādivad vācyo nādr̥ṣṭe 'smin sa dr̥śyate.*

Thus, it [i.e., the accomplished] should be declared to be neither identical nor different from the dependent, like impermanence, etc. When that [i.e., the dependent] is not perceived, this too is not perceived.

This explains the relationship between *paratantra* and *pariniṣpanna*. Vasubandhu provides an important clue to an understanding of this relationship. The *pariniṣpanna* is like impermanence (*anityatā*). For the Buddha, as well as for Nāgārjuna, impermanence makes no sense except in relation to "the impermanent" (*anitya*). For them, the empirical is the impermanent. What then is the status of impermanence (*anityatā*) and how is it known? All the available evidence seems to indicate that "impermanence" (*anityatā*)

is an epistemological "achievement" or "accomplishment" based upon the perception of "the impermanent" (*anitya*). There is nothing more that can be known or realized through the perception of the impermanent. Absolutist or substantialist philosophical enterprise has, for centuries, suggested the possibility of knowing the "permanent" (*nitya*) through or on the basis of the impermanent (*anitya*). For the Buddhists, this is something that cannot be accomplished. Buddha's realization is said to consist of penetrating into the *dhammatā* on the basis of an understanding of the *dhamma*. Thus, the characterization of the *pariniṣpanna* as the Absolute Reality is a total misrepresentation of Vasubandhu's thought.

23. *Trividhasya svabhāvasya trividhām niḥsvabhāvatām,
saṃdhāya sarva-dharmāṇām deśitā niḥsvabhāvatā.*

The non-substantiality of all elements has been preached for the sake of [establishing] the threefold non-substantiality of the three types of substances.

Vijñānavāda scholarship has enthusiastically advocated the conception of three substances (*svabhāva*). Yet, Vasubandhu is insisting that there indeed are no substances, but only non-substances (*niḥsvabhāva*). In other words, the three *svabhāvas* are meant to establish *niḥsvabhāva*. How could this be, unless the term *svabhāva* is used in different senses by Vasubandhu?

When Vasubandhu uses the term *svabhāva* in relation to *parikalpita*, *paratantra* and *pariniṣpanna*, he seems to imply types or species, rather than substances that are eternal and immutable. The analysis of the experiential flux into elements (*dharma*) and the substitution of concepts to denote them for the purpose of identification does not mean that this experiential flux is *either* an indistinguishable and, therefore, a non-differentiated substance (*svabhāva*) *or* a series of discrete atomic pulses of sensation, representing atomic events (*paramāṇu*) which are, in themselves, indistinguishable, but which are related by the experiencing consciousness. Both these views are substantialist, even though one emphasizes identity and the other, difference in the form of discreteness. These concepts of identity and difference are, therefore, truly metaphysical, for in both cases the perceived differences and plurality in phenomena can be explained only by assuming the creativity of the perceiving consciousness.

Against these two metaphysical theories of identity and difference, Vasubandhu is insisting that there exists a variety in the experiential flux that can neither be identified nor differentiated at the metaphysical level (*asamviditaka . . . sparśa-manaskāra-vit-samjñā-cetanānvitam* = *ālaya-vijñāna*, *Trīṣṣ* 3 = *mano- or mūla-vijñāna*, ibid 15), but which is identified at the conceptual level (*vijñapti*). Thus, the identification of difference at the conceptual level is not entirely due to the function of imagination; it is grounded in the fundamental consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*). For this reason, while some concepts are merely imagined (*parikalpita*), others are dependently arisen (*paratantra*). This latter experience serves as a foundation of reality, for it produces effects or consequences (*vipāka*) which can be shared or verified by other experiential processes as well. The knowledge accomplished by understanding the second type of event is uniformity (*dharmatā*), and since this is an extension of the knowledge of the dependently arisen phenomena (*dharma*) to include the obvious past and the yet unknown future, it is still a "mere concept" (*vijñapti-mātra*). Thus, there are three types of activities represented by the different concepts, the pure imagination represented by the *parikalpita*, the experience of the dependent substituted by the *paratantra*, and the rationally accomplished by the formulation of *pariṇiṣpanna*, all of which are non-substantial (*niḥsvabhāva*).

24. *Prathamo lakṣaṇenaiva niḥsvabhāvo 'paraḥ punaḥ,
na svayambhāva etasyetye aparā niḥsvabhāvatā.*

The first is non-substantial in terms of characteristics. The other, again, is one that possesses no self-nature and, as such, is a different [form of] non-substantiality.

Unlike Nāgārjuna, who was primarily interested in getting rid of substantialist metaphysics, Vasubandhu is concerned with explaining experience and knowledge, while at the same time getting rid of the metaphysical assumptions. Dealing with the problems of concept and reality, he is interested in explaining how different types of concepts are formed. As such, his is a more detailed examination of the psychological foundations of concepts and, therefore, of language, in relation to experience. In the present context, the two types of concepts, the imagined (*parikalpita*) and the dependent (*paratantra*), are examined in relation to what they do *not* represent.

As a Sautrāntika, he dealt with the problem of characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) in great detail. The Sautrāntikas defined a characteristic in terms of causal efficacy (*kāritra*), which in turn is explained literally as "the receiving of the gift of fruit" (*phala-dāna-pratigrahaṇa*, *Akb* p. 267), i.e., fruitfulness. However, the Sautrāntikas were not satisfied with an ordinary analysis of characteristics. Their extreme analysis of phenomena (*dharma*) into momentary entities, compelled them to speak of own-characteristics (*sva-lakṣaṇa*). This latter introduces the substantialist metaphysics. Therefore, avoiding such substantialist metaphysics, Vasubandhu confines himself to the more pragmatic notion of *lakṣaṇa* in order to distinguish between imaginary and real concepts. The imaginary are, therefore, empty of characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) or causal efficacy that is shared with or experienced by others as well, like those of dream experience (*Viṃś* 18). They are sometimes referred to as *abhūta-parikalpa*, i.e., a mental fabrication about something that has not come to be. Concepts such as eternal self (*ātman*) or substance (*svabhāva*) fall under this category.

The second type of concept is the dependent (*paratantra*). It is empty of self-existence (*svayaṃ-bhāva*). In fact, it is a negation of what is asserted by, and an assertion of what is negated in, the former. Thus, the dependent is empty of a substance (*svabhāva*) that exists on its own (*svayaṃ-bhāva*) and possesses characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) as a result of its fruitfulness (*kāritra*). It is the type of concept explained at *Triṃś* 18.

Sthiramati's interpretation of dependence as "the non-substantiality pertaining to arising" (*utpatti-niḥsvabhāvatā*, p. 41) can be misleading, unless such arising is specified as "self-arising" (*svatoṭpatti*), which is the implication of self-existence (*svayaṃ-bhāva*). It would be the same sort of arising that was negated by Nāgārjuna.

25. *Dharmānāṃ paramārthaś ca yatas tathatāpi saḥ,
sarva-kālaṃ tathābhāvāt saiva vijñapti-mātratā.*

[The third is] the ultimate meaning of events, because it is also suchness. Since it remains such all the time, it, indeed, is a mere concept.

The present statement is most susceptible to an absolutistic interpretation unless it is examined in the background of the most disturbing con-

troversty within the Buddhist philosophical tradition, and which brought back all the metaphysics that the Buddha himself wanted to get rid of. It is the controversy regarding the existence of "everything" (*sarvaṃ*) during the three periods of time, past, present and future. It is the theory advocated by the Sarvāstivādins and which continued to plague the Buddhist philosophical tradition for centuries, eliciting responses from outstanding philosophers like Moggalīputtatissa and Nāgārjuna. With the analysis provided in the present verse, Vasubandhu joins the band of distinguished philosophers who attempted to preserve the Buddha's anti-metaphysical stance by rejecting such a theory.

The term *paramārtha* has a variety of meanings. In the first instance, it can mean "ultimate reality." This is the sense in which the metaphysicians used the term most often. Secondly, in a predominantly ethical context, it implies "ultimate purpose, goal or fruit." Thirdly, in a purely epistemological investigation, it would stand for "ultimate meaning."

The Buddha who abandoned any metaphysical or substantialist speculation, avoided, and sometimes, denounced the first of these meanings. As a full-fledged pragmatist, he recognized the second and third even though, as one who was most interested in morals, he emphasized the second. In our previous study of Nāgārjuna, we have indicated how faithful he was to the teachings of the Buddha. Vasubandhu, however, was more concerned with the epistemological implications of the term.

Therefore, in the present verse, we have rendered the term *paramārtha* as "ultimate meaning." This ultimate meaning pertains to *dharma*s. True *dharma*s, in contrast to the imagined ones, are said to have characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*, *Trīṃś* 24). Thus, the term *dharma*, in the present context is translated as "events."

Yet, the moment the two characteristics—*tathatā* ("suchness") and *sarvakālaṃ tathābhāva* ("remaining such all the time")—are applied to *paramārtha*, one can easily get caught in the metaphysical trap, even though these two characteristics are indispensable in formulating an acceptable account of experience as well as reason. A superficial interpretation of these two characteristics would easily throw Vasubandhu into the metaphysicians' camp, with the Sarvāstivādins and Sāṅkhyans as his companions. However, Vasubandhu has already embarked on a lengthy controversy with some of them, especially with regard to the famous Sarvāstivāda theory of *sarvaṃ asti* (*Akb* pp. 266–267). Indeed, his criticism of that theory seems to have infuriated the Sarvāstivādins to such an extent that they were willing to respond to him with a whole treatise, the *Abhidharmadīpa*.

Vasubandhu's ingenious response to the metaphysician and his solution to their problem is contained in one phrase — *saiva vijñāpti-mātrā*.

Keeping this in mind, it is possible to explain *tathatā* as "objectivity," that is, the sense in which the term occurs even in the early discourses of the Buddha (*S* 2.25, also Kalupahana, *Causality*, pp. 92–93). It is this objectivity that Vasubandhu attempted to explain by recognizing the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) that distinguish the imagined (*parikalpita*) from the dependent (*paratantra*, *Trīṣ* 24).

Sarvakālaṃ tathābhāva need not necessarily imply permanence (*nityatā*). In fact, it expresses the same sense in which the Buddha utilized the terms *avītatathā* and *anaññatathā* (*S* 2.25; Kalupahana, *Causality*, pp. 93–94). For this reason, the phrase expresses the notion of "regularity" or "uniformity."

Vasubandhu was still aware that in the Buddha's discourse, regularity or uniformity, though based upon experience of related or dependently arisen (*prāṇīyasamutpanna*) events, was still an inductive inference. Without such inductive inferences and conceptualizations about the future in terms of the past and the present experiences, man would be like a mere "sessile sea-anemone," with no possibility of any intellectual activity. This intellectual exercise, whether it pertains to the substitution of concepts, either in the explanation of the flux of experience (see *Trīṣ* 18) or in expressing uniformity (as in the present verse), is what Vasubandhu admits when he claimed that all this is "mere concept" (*vijñāpti-mātra*). This, indeed, is the relationship between the *paratantra* and *pariniṣpanna* that he expressed at *Trīṣ* 21.

26. *Yāvad vijñāpti-mātratve vijñānam nāvatiṣṭhati,
grāha-dvayasyānuśayas tavan na vinivartate.*

As long as consciousness does not terminate in mere concept, so long will the dispositions for the twofold grasping not cease.

The twofold grasping was mentioned earlier (*Trīṣ* 19). "Grasping" (*grāha*) also can mean "knowing." The *Vimśatikā* was devoted to a refutation of the two metaphysical extremes that one reaches on occasions of sense experience. Sensory knowledge, when carried beyond its confines can lead to the belief either in a metaphysical self (*ātman*) or in substantial elements (*dharma-svabhāva*). Such transgressions are the results of dispositional

tendencies. The Buddha's discourse on "Everything" (*Sabba-sutta*) wherein he refused to go beyond sense experience in order to speculate regarding existence was known to all the Buddhists. This does not mean that either knowledge (*grāha*) and the known (*grāhya*) or knowledge (*grāha*) and the knower (*grāhaka*) have to be denied. What is denied is a knower that is independent of knowing, a metaphysical *cogito*, or an object that is independent of knowing, which is implied in substantial elements. These metaphysical beliefs are determined, not by the available experiences, but by one's dispositions. Hence Vasubandhu's reference to the "inclination toward the twofold grasping" (*grāhadvyasya anusayah*), rather than the twofold grasping itself.

Following upon his analysis in the previous verse, Vasubandhu maintains that so long as one does not realize that any such speculation going beyond the immediate flux of experience confines oneself to mere concepts (*vijñapti-mātra*), one cannot overcome one's inclination toward metaphysical beliefs.

27. *Vijñapti-mātram evedam ity api hy upalambhataḥ,
sthāpayann agrataḥ kiṃcit tan-mātre nāvatiṣṭhate.*

Indeed, one who, on account of one's grasping, were to place something before himself [saying]: "This is mere concept," will not stop at "mere-ness."

In terms of its implications, this statement is not at all different from Nāgārjuna's statement regarding emptiness (*śūnyatā*) at *Kārikā* XIII.8: "Those who are possessed of the view of emptiness are said to be incorrigible." Vasubandhu's statement is not so abrasive as Nāgārjuna's. In a more restrained form, Vasubandhu is insisting that the idea of "mere concept" (*vijñapti-mātra*) should not be reified as an ultimate "some thing" (*kiṃcit*), a hidden truth. This, indeed, is similar to Nāgārjuna's own refusal to recognize either the life-process (*saṃsāra*) or freedom (*nirvāṇa*) as "some thing" (*kiṃcit*, *Kārikā* XXV.20). It is an attempt to prevent the re-introduction of metaphysics into the explanation of *vijñaptimātra*.

28. *Yadā tv ālambanam vijñānam naivopalabhate tadā,
sthūlam vijñapti-mātratve grāhyābhāve tad agrahāt.*

When consciousness with object is not obtained, then there being no object, one is established in the state of mere concept, for there is no grasping for it.

One is established in the state of mere concept when the search for an independent object of experience is abandoned. Being established in such a state of awareness, there cannot be any grasping. This is similar to the view expressed by Nāgārjuna regarding views. For Nāgārjuna, the middle path is a view. Yet, because this view provides no absolute truth, there is nothing to grasp on to. Thus, the relinquishing of views is the result of adopting a non-metaphysical view. Similarly, the adoption of the view that the so-called real object is a mere concept enables one to abandon grasping for *vijñaptimātratā*, for there is nothing in the *vijñapti-mātra* that one can grasp on to. It may be noted that the distinction Vasubandhu makes between *vijñapti-mātra* and *vijñapti-mātratā* is similar to the distinction Nāgārjuna makes between *śūnya* and *śūnyatā*.

29. *Acitto 'nupalambho 'sau jñanam lokottaram ca tat,
āśrayasya parāvṛttir dvidhā dauṣṭhulya-hānitā.*

It is without thought and without object. It is also the supramundane knowledge. Through the destruction of the twofold depravities, there is reversion of the source [of such depravities].

30. *Sa evānāśravo dhātur acintyaḥ kuśalo dhruvaḥ,
sukho vimukti-kāyo 'sau dharmākhyo 'yam mahā-muneḥ.*

This, indeed, is the realm free from influxes. It is unthinkable,

wholesome and stable. It is the serene body of release. This is called the doctrine of the Great Sage.

While Nāgārjuna concluded his famous treatise extolling the virtues of the Buddha's doctrine in eliminating the mass of suffering (*duḥkha-skandha*), Vasubandhu strikes a more positive note when he refers to the state of freedom, namely, the serene body or state of release.

This state is said to be without thought, not because all consciousness is gone, but because there is no thinking in terms of substantial entities. Hence there is nothing to grasp on to as a real object.

It is supramundane knowledge, not because it constitutes a transcendent intuition, but because the dispositional tendencies (*vāsanā*) are appeased. With the appeasement of the dispositional tendencies, the character of the fundamental consciousness (*mūla-vijñāna*) is transformed. Instead of constantly looking for an ultimately real subject (*ātman*) or an absolutely real object (*dharma*), a person deals with the world of experience as it has come to be (*yathābhūta*). Such knowledge reveals things as they have come to be (*bhūta-tathatā*).

Unperturbed by any mystery, not looking for the hidden something, a sage leads a life free from influxes. It is unthinkable, not because such a state is beyond all conceptual thinking, but because it cannot be appreciated by those who are constantly thinking of something mysterious. It is a state of happiness not punctuated by suffering. Hence it is stable. It is the highest state of release enjoyed by the enlightened ones. The doctrine of the Great Sage pertains to this state of freedom and happiness.