

Realism and the Philosophy of Consciousness-Only

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1. Critique of Realism

Introduction

The doctrine of *ālaya*-consciousness (*vijñāna*) is a theory which accounts for the formation of mental images without dependence on external objects. “*Ālaya*” is a derivative of the verb “*ā-ṅ*,” which means “settle down upon” or “abide in” something and connotes a “dwelling,” “receptacle” or “storehouse.” For example, “*himālaya*” means “storehouse of snow.” The *ālaya*-consciousness is said to be a storehouse in which the residual force (*vāsanā*) of all previous experiences has been stored up as latent impressions. The Vijñānavāda theory is that an image appears when the latent residual force of experience is actualized, and that this image is not formed by the cognition of an external object. This theory makes clear that empirical cognition is *karmic* and stresses the need to find an absolute knowledge which transcends the level of empirical cognition. This Vijñānavāda theory, which denies the existence of external entities as objects of cognition, naturally invites the opposition of all schools which took a realist position. In responding to that opposition and criticizing realism, the Vijñānavāda thinkers firmly established their own represen-

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tationalist epistemology. In the philosophical tradition of Abhidharma, they developed extremely subtle theories with regard to the problems raised in epistemology.

A criticism of realism is to be found in a coherent form in the *Vimśatikā*.¹ It is believed that Vasubandhu, after criticizing the various theories of realism in this small work, then wrote the *Trimsikā*,² which expounds the theory of "the transformation of consciousness" (*vi-jñāna-pariṇāma*). This dispute between the Vijñānavādins and the various schools of realism was repeated again and again in later periods, but the main points of the dispute can already be seen in Vasubandhu's exposition in the *Vimśatikā*. Subsequently, Dignāga wrote the *Ālambanaparīkṣā*,³ in which he clarified the necessary conditions of an object of cognition, based on Vasubandhu's explanations. He also criticized realism from the same perspective, providing the basis for Vijñānavāda epistemology. The theory that he expounds in this text became the basis for all later philosophical discussions concerning the object of cognition. In the following discussion, I will use these two works in order to clarify the nature of Vijñānavāda epistemology.

Four Questions and Responses

In the beginning of the *Vimśatikā*, Vasubandhu quotes this passage from the *Hua Yen Sutra* (*Daśabhūmika* Section, T. 278). "Oh Jinaputra (Sons of the Buddha), in reality the Triple World is Mind-Only," and then expounds the Vijñānavāda theory that all the things of this world, like the net-shaped hairs that appear in the illusion of a man suffering from a vision disorder, are unreal, and exist only as images. Four questions are raised by the opponents of this theory.

¹ The Sanskrit version of the *Vimśatikā* (Twenty Verses) of Vasubandhu was edited and translated into French by Sylvain Lévi, *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi. Deux traités de Vasubandhu: Vimśatikā (la Vingtaine) accompagnée d'une explication en prose, et Trimsikā (la Trentaine) avec le commentaire de Sthiramati*, Paris, 1925. It was translated into Chinese several times, most notably by Hsüan-tsang in 661. Its Chinese title is *Wei shih erh shih lun* (T. 1590).

² The *Trimsikā* (Thirty Verses). See note 1. Translated by Hsüan-tsang in 648 as *Wei shih san shih lun sung*. T. 1586.

³ The *Ālambanaparīkṣā* (*Examination of Objects of Cognition*). Translated into Chinese by Hsüan-tsang in 657 as *Kuan suo yūan yūan lun*. T. 1624.

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If external objects are not real, and images result from the residual force of experience which is latent in the mind, then:

- (1) Why is it that the image of a certain thing occurs only in a specific place and not anywhere?
- (2) Moreover, why does the image in that place occur only at a specific time, and not at any time?
- (3) The illusion of a non-existent hair occurs only for the person with a visual disorder, and not for other people. In contrast, the image of a given thing does not occur for only one person, but occurs in the minds of all the people who are in the same place and time. How is this explained?
- (4) Such things as appear in the illusion of a person with a vision disorder and as are seen in a dream do not, in fact, have efficacy. If, in a dream, one is bitten by a snake or injured by a weapon, it would not be the case that, on waking, poison is circulating in the body or that a scar remains. However, what is presented as images when one is awake actually achieves efficacy. How are these things to be explained?

Vasubandhu answers these objections in the following manner:

(1, 2) The fact that images occur within the limits of space and time does not necessarily presuppose the fact that what is presented as images really exists in an external world. This is because in a dream, although there is no real object, such images as a flower garden, a man, or a woman, are seen only in a certain specific place. Moreover, they are not seen at any time in that place, but only at a certain specific time.

(3) All those who have fallen into the state of ravenous ghosts as a result of deeds done in a previous existence, when facing a river flowing with pure water, together embrace the image of a river filled with pus, urine and excrement, and of the existence of watchmen, who are not actually there, on guard with cudgels and swords in their hands. Consequently, just because an image occurs in the minds of more than one person, there is no reason to admit the existence of objects in the external world.

(4) Wet dreams occur as a result of sexual intercourse experienced in a dream; which is to say that even non-existent things do, in fact, achieve efficacy.

Vasubandhu goes on to explain all four of these points using the following hell simile. Sinners who have fallen into hell see such things as those who inflict punishment on them, and see iron mountains which press in to crush them. Moreover, not just one, but all persons see these things. Thus, although such things as tormentors do not really exist, the sinners in hell are actually made to suffer.

The Sarvāstivādins believe that the demons, etc., are real, but this cannot be said to be a valid opinion because the demons do not feel the torments inflicted on the sinners. On the other hand, the Sautrāntikas regard the demons, etc., as no more than subjective images, but they do not completely deny the reality of those images as do the Vijñānavādins. They say this is because the sinners in hell produce certain kinds of material elements by means of the remaining force of deeds committed in the past, and these cause images of cudgel-wielding demons and groves of iron trees which torment sinners with their thorns. In his criticism of the Sautrāntika view Vasubandhu leads us into the Vijñānavāda theory which is as follows. The latent residual force of action permeates the stream of consciousness of the actor and does not exist outside of that stream. Consequently, instead of hypothesizing that the residual force produces material elements outside of the mind, it is more valid to think that when this residual force becomes actual, and a specific transformation occurs in the stream of consciousness, images of demons, etc. appear.

If we assume that images produced in the mind are things that arise from specific transformations of the stream of consciousness, and that objects which produce images do not really exist in an external world, then our daily experiences can be compared to a dream. Vasubandhu does, in fact, use the simile of a dream in replying to the questions raised by his critics. The Vijñānavāda thinkers after him also recognized that the dream consciousness that sees unreal objects was an apt simile and made repeated use of it.

However, it might be objected that because the objects seen in a dream disappear when we are awake, we know clearly that they are not real. It might also be objected that we do not experience objects seen when we are awake in the same way we experience dream objects.

Responding to these questions, Vasubandhu says, "A person who is not yet awake does not realize the fact that the objects seen in a dream are not real." A dreaming person does not know that the objects that

appear in his own consciousness do not actually exist. The daily experience of the people of the world is also the same. Because people have continued to hold, from past lives, the mistaken conception that external objects exist, they fall into the deep sleep of that latent residual force and do not realize that such objects do not, in fact, exist. However, when our knowledge of the mundane world has been purified through the eye-opening attainment of an imageless transmudane knowledge which counteracts the latent residual force, we awaken to the fact that the object does not really exist.

Vasubandhu's response clearly reveals that Vijñānavāda philosophy has as its basic theme the awakening from dreamlike empirical cognition and the attainment of transmudane knowledge. The fact that empirical cognition is common to all people does not mean that such cognition is correct; it means no more than that people have the same dream because of similar *karma* in former lives. It was not the purpose of the Vijñānavāda thinkers to inquire into the grounds of empirical cognition, given the fundamental fact that such cognition is characterized by a universal consensus. They understood all of empirical cognition as *karma*, and concertedly focused on finding a position which transcended *karma*. The analogy of dreams, ravenous ghosts and hell points to a position that transcends the level of the realists' discussion of the structure of cognition. However, subordinating this religious aspect within their argument, the Vijñānavāda school stood on the same level as the realists and pursued the investigation of epistemological problems.

Three Types of Realism

In the *Vimsatikā*, Vasubandhu divided the theories that the object of cognition actually exists in the external world into three types. These theories are first divided into two types depending on whether the externally existent object of cognition is understood as a composite body formed from various parts, such as a jar which is made up of a neck, main body and foot, or whether it was understood as a unitary thing. If we push to its logical conclusion the position in which a single material body is understood as a composite body, by repeatedly dividing the various parts that make up the composite body into their respective parts until the dividing is carried to its limit, we will arrive at the atom

(*paramāṇu*). In the case in which numerous atoms are recognized as composing a single composite body, there are two more theories, depending on the way in which the atoms are arranged. Thus Vasubandhu presents the following three theories. That which is believed to exist externally as an object of cognition is one of the following:

- (1) a unitary thing such as the *whole* hypothesized by the Vaiśeṣika, or
- (2) a collection of atoms which have not congealed, and thus have spaces between them, as viewed by the Sarvāstivādins, or
- (3) a thing that has achieved a single, coarse form, not apparent in a unitary atom, many atoms having assembled without spaces, as in the Sautrāntika theory.

Through successive refutation of these three types of realism Vasubandhu establishes the Vijñānavāda theory. The important points of his critique of realism are as follows:

- (1) A unitary thing does not exist anywhere as a *whole* distinct from its various parts.
- (2) Since, without spatial extension, individual atoms would not be cognizable, then even if many came together, they still could not become an object of cognition.
- (3) Since it is not possible to demonstrate the fact that the atom is a single substance, it also could not be demonstrated that the numerous atoms which have come together comprise an aggregation with a coarse form.

Vaiśeṣika Realism

The theory of the Vaiśeṣika and their offshoot, the Nyāya school, is that the whole which is composed of many parts exists as a unitary entity, distinct from its parts. For example, a cloth exists as something different from the threads which make it up, and a jar exists as a unitary substance different from the two bowl-shaped pieces from which it is made. The cloth and the jar are considered not to be simply a combination of the respective material causes, but to exist as something newly created from, and independent of, the combination of these causes.

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This Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika doctrine runs counter to the Buddhist position that all entities are the combination of various factors. Nāgārjuna criticized this Nyāya view in his *Vaidalya-prakarana*,⁴ where he argued that the whole does not exist separate from the parts. Vasubandhu's denial of the whole follows Nāgārjuna's argument. It is on this question of the whole and the parts that we can clearly see the difference between the Buddhist and the realist views of reality.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika believed that concepts and the words which signify them are all real things. In technical terms these are called the "*padārtha*" (word-meaning) where "*artha*" is the externally existent referent of words. For example, corresponding to the word "cow," there exists a substance (*dravya*), cow, and corresponding to words such as "white" or "walking" attributed to that cow, are the real *quality* (*guṇa*), white (color), and the real *activity* (*karma*), walking. Further, since "cow" can be used to refer to white cows or spotted cows, standing cows or walking cows, there also exists as its referent a cow-in-general—that is, *universality* (*sāmānya*) which makes all cows cows. At the same time, there also exists *particularity* (*viśeṣa*) to distinguish the referent of "cow" from horses, etc. Because white (color) and walking, universality and particularity are combined with the substance in an inseparable relationship, this relationship also exists, and is called "*inherence*" (*samavāya*). Hence, the judgment, "this cow is white" corresponds to a real state in which the *quality* referred to by "white" *inheres* in the *substance* referred to by "cow."

In this way, the Vaiśeṣika divide what exists as "word referents" into six categories: substance, quality, action, universality, particularity, and inherence (or necessary relation). These six are given in the *Vaiśeṣika-sūtra*,⁵ which outlines the school's system. Whereas these six all correspond to positive concepts, a seventh category of "*non-existence*" (*abhāva*) was added in later times to correspond to negative concepts. So, for example, the sentence, "The cow is not in the cowshed," refers to the non-existence in the cowshed of the cow; and the sentence, "The cow is not a horse," refers to the non-existence in the horse of the cow.

⁴ The *Vaidalya-prakarana* exists only in Tibetan, edited by Kajiyama Yūichi, *Miscellanea Indologica Kiōtiensia*, Nos. 6-7 (1965), pp. 129-155.

⁵ There is an English translation of this text, *The Vaiśeṣika Sūtras of Kaṇāda*, by Nandalal Sinha, Allahabad 1923 (Sacred Books of the Hindus, VI).

Needless to say, among these "word referents" it is substance which occupies the central place: the others exist as factors inhering in and limiting the substance. There is no white color independent of something such as a cow or a piece of cloth. Neither is there any walking which does not inhere in some substance. Substance too, however, does not exist as pure substance. It always exists determined by its qualities, etc.: a cow is white, black or some other color; it is walking, standing, etc. As mentioned earlier, the word "cow" refers to a corresponding substance, cow. But while the word or concept "cow" can refer to all cows, the substance we cognize is always some particular cow, and not cows in general. Buddhists, therefore, argue that "cow" is a general concept constructed by the subject through the operation of abstraction from a plurality of individuals; it does not correspond to any real entity. The Vaiśeṣika position, however, is that the universal, cowness, which makes all the particular substances, cows, exists independently of the subject. And it is because the substance is determined by this universal that we grasp it as a cow. This individual substance restricted by the cowness is also determined by qualities, actions, and the other categories.

Substance

According to the Vaiśeṣika theory, then, the object of our cognition is the substance as determined by the various other categories; the cognition of quality, actions, and so on always presupposes the cognition of some substance. Since what is cognized is a "word referent," we can express it through language. Words, according to the Vaiśeṣika (theoreticians), are signs established by the ancients to transmit concepts derived from the cognition of entities. Praśastapāda (sixth century) in his systematic treatise on Vaiśeṣika, *Padārthadharmasamgraha*,⁶ says that reality has three aspects: existing, being verbally expressed, and being the object of cognition; in the Vaiśeṣika system these three are essentially indistinguishable. What exists is what is expressed by language, and language expresses what is perceived.

The perceived substance is expressed by words such as "cow,"

⁶ *The Padārthadharmasamgraha of Praśastapāda*, tr. by Ganganatha Jha, Allahabad 1911 (Reprint from Pandit).

“cloth,” and “jar.” The substance directly cognized is simply “this,” but, because at the same time we also cognize the determining universal, cowness, “this” becomes perceived and expressed as “something possessing the cowness”—i.e., as “cow.” Similarly, because we simultaneously cognize the determinant of quality and action, “this” becomes perceived as “a white cow” or as “a walking cow,” and can be expressed in sentences such as, “This cow is white,” or “This cow is walking.” One substance can also serve as a limiting factor for another substance. For example, the expressions, “This cow has a horn,” or “He has a stick,” are based on the cognition of a cow determined by a horn or of a man determined by a stick.

The Vaiśeṣika divide substances (*dravya*) into nine types: earth (*pr-thivī*), water (*jala*), fire (*tejas*), air (*vāyu*), ether (*ākāśa*), space (*dik*), time (*kāla*), soul (*ātman*), and mind (*manas*). These substances, moreover, are divided into those which are made up of a plurality of elements and those which are not. Substances that are not composed of elements are the five from ether on and the individual atoms of earth, water, fire, and air.⁷ When these atoms combine they make new substances which are separate, individual entities, possessing their own existence, and capable of being expressed by their own specific terms. Thus, atoms are called “causal substances” and the entities produced by their combination are called “resultant substances.” Moreover, those “resultant substances” themselves can combine to produce new substances. Thus, independent of the torso, legs, tail, etc. there exists the substance, cow, and independent of the threads there exists the substance, cloth. The referents of the words “cow” or “cloth” exists as an individual whole separate from their respective parts.

Uddyotakara⁸ gives the following argument for the reality of the whole. If the whole is not something other than the sum of the parts, and does not have its own existence different from these parts, then we could not perceive, for example, a tree in the garden as a “tree.” What we actually cognize is only the part of the tree facing us; we do not

⁷ According to Vaiśeṣika theory, the atoms of earth, water, fire, and air are imperceptible particles and only become perceptible *substances* when they combine in great numbers with each other. The other five *substances* are unitary and imperceptible.

⁸ Uddyotakara lived around the second half of 6th century and was the author of the *Nyāyavārttika*, a commentary on Vātsyāyana's *Nyāyabhāṣya*.

cognize the other side or the interior of the tree. Nevertheless, we can perceive as a "tree" the object of our cognition. The reason for this is that the *whole*, "tree," is present in the part we cognize. He also gives the following examples. If we pull one part of a cloth, we pull the whole cloth; if we hold one part of a jar, we hold the whole jar. This would not be possible if the cloth and jar were only the sum of their parts. If we pull or lift one part of a pile of dust, for example, we do not thereby pull or lift the whole. Thus, we see the "cloth" and "jar" are present in the parts as separate single *wholes*.

Substance Does Not Exist

In opposition to the Vaiśeṣika's viewpoint that concepts and words all correspond to reality, Buddhists are of the opinion that what is expressed by words is not real and that words are only signs made for the purpose of daily functioning. What we express by a word such as "cow" or "man" is no more than a temporary collection of various elements which does not have existence as a thing in itself. From the beginning, Buddhists took the position that human existence was an aggregation of five types of physical and mental elements (the five *skandhas*), and denied any human substance outside of these elements. The aggregation of elements, changing its aspect moment after moment, forms a stream. Eventually the collected elements disperse. There is no human existing as the substance corresponding to any such name.

In *The Questions of King Milinda*, a dialogue between the Bactrian king, Menander, and the Buddhist monk, Nāgasena, there is a passage in which Nāgasena employs a skillful simile to show that the substance, man, does not exist. To the King's question, "What, Sir, is your name?" Nāgasena replies that as far as people of the world are concerned, he is Nāgasena, but that "Nāgasena" is merely an appellation, and there is no personal substance corresponding to it. The king is doubtful and raises the objection that if there is no personal substance, then there is no one who controls his conduct, no one who devotes himself to spiritual cultivation, no one who experiences the holy state; and there is no one who kills, steals, or commits any other of the Five Major Transgressions. The consequence of such a position is, therefore, a complete denial of good and evil deeds, as well as the fruit of such deeds. Then, thinking that without some entity to which it refer-

red there could be no name, the King inquired to what entity the name "Nāgasena" has been given: is it the hair of the head? the hair of the body? . . . the skin? . . . the flesh? . . . the nerves? . . . the bones? . . . the heart? . . . the liver? . . . blood? . . . the brain? is it all of these combined? is it something other than these? In response to these questions, Nāgasena, taking the chariot in which the king has come as an example, now questions the King.⁹

"Then if you came, Sire, in a carriage, explain to me what that is. Is it the pole that is the chariot?"

"I did not say that."

"Is it the axle that is the chariot?"

"Certainly not."

"Is it the wheels, or the framework, or the ropes, or the yoke, or the spokes of the wheels, or the goad, that are the chariot?"

And to all these he still answered no.

"Then is it all these parts of it that are the chariot?"

"No, Sir."

"But is there anything outside them that is the chariot?"

And still he answered no.

"Then thus, ask as I may, I can discover no chariot. Chariot is a mere empty sound. What then is the chariot you say you came in? It is a falsehood that your majesty has spoken, an untruth! There is no such thing as a chariot!"

In this way, the king who had intended to press Nāgasena with his questions is himself pressed by the same questions, and in the end, arrives at the position Nāgasena had wanted to take.

"I have spoken no untruth, reverend Sir. It is on account of its having all these things—the pole, and the axle, the wheels, and the framework, the ropes, the yoke, the spokes, and the goad—that it comes under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of 'chariot.' "

"Very good! Your Majesty has rightly grasped the meaning of 'chariot.' And just even so it is on account of all those things you questioned me about—the thirty-two kinds of organic matter in a human body, and the five constituent elements of being—that I come

⁹ The English translation here is after T.W. Rhys Davids, tr. *The Questions of King Milinda*, Part I (N.Y., 1963), pp. 43-44, with changes.

under the generally understood term, the designation in common use, of 'Nāgasena.' "

This simile is quite famous, and is found in the *Samyuttanikāya*.¹⁰ Candrakīrti too, in his commentary to the *Madhyamakakārikā*,¹¹ uses this simile of the chariot to explain the concept of "dependent origination," in which all things exist only in relation to others, and do not possess own-being.

The Sarvāstivāda View

The Buddhist theory that a thing that is made up of many components is only tentatively referred to by a single name, and that no substance corresponding to names exists clearly differs from the Vaiśeṣika view that there is a unitary whole separate from its composite parts and indicated by a word. Yet, even if we accept as non-existent the thing which is given a name, can't we assume that the components really exist? Even if there is no such substance as a chariot, do not the shafts, axles, and wheels which compose it exist? If we take it that even they exist as something in name only, and are not real, what ultimately exists? The answer to such questions is layed out in the philosophical system of the Abhidharma.

The Sarvāstivādins recognize as ultimate entities 75 kinds of elements (*dharma-s*), divided into five groups: material entities (*rūpa*), thought (*citta*), thought functions (mentals, *caitasika*), things dissociated from thought (*citta-viprayuktasamskāra*), and unconditioned things (*asamskrta*). They are not something produced from other elements, nor can they be changed by other elements, nor are they things which ever lose their own inherent characteristic. For example, fire, a primary element, exists independently of other elements, does not lose its own homogenous nature, and has the inherent characteristics of heat. Water in a pot placed on a stove becomes hot,

¹⁰ Edited and published by the Pali Text Society in 5 volumes. T. 99 is a Chinese translation of the Sarvāstivāda version.

¹¹ The *Madhyamakakārikā* of Nāgārjuna (second century C.E.) exists in a Sanskrit edition edited by De La Vallée Poussin (St.-Petersbourg, 1903-13, Bibliotheca Buddhica, IV) and chapters 1 and 25 were translated into English by Stcherbatsky (Leningrad, 1927). The Chinese translation is in T. 1564. Candrakīrti's (c. 600 C.E.) commentary, the *Prasannapadā*, is included in the edition and translation above.

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and a hot wind blows on a burning desert, but the water's heat and the wind's heat are something imparted by the fire of the stove and the sun, and if those conditions should cease to exist the heat is lost. Consequently in both the wind and the water heat is not an inherent characteristic. On the other hand, the heat of fire is never lost under any conditions. The primary element of fire which possesses heat is an ultimately existent element.

There seems to have been a problem about whether the number of ultimately existent elements counted by the Sarvāstivādins is seventy-five or not, but the various treatises of this school are united on the point of making of material entities eleven types. The eleven types are the five organs of cognition (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body-organ of touch awareness), the five objects of these organs (color-shape, sound, odor, taste, and tactile sense data) as well as unmanifested form. The cognitive organs of eye and ear, etc. are said to be a kind of matter that is translucent and invisible, having the function of seeing and hearing, etc., and are called special transformations of the primary elements (*bhūtavikāra viśeṣa*), earth, water, fire, and air. Whereas we would regard these cognitive organs to be distinct from the visible bodily organs, such as the eyeball and ear orifice, within which they reside, the Sarvāstivādins considered them to be special material organs in their own right. The unmanifested form is the potential force remaining after the bodily activity which was manifested as form, and the potential force remaining after the function of words which were manifested as sound; it is a material substance which is invisible and which does not vie with other elements.

The five kinds of objects, other than the four primary elements themselves, are all made from the primary elements. Thus, we must first take note of the distinctive view of the Sarvāstivādins concerning the primary elements. According to the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (*dhātu-nirdeśa*),¹² the primary elements are earth, water, fire, and air, but they, being included under *tactile sense data* (tangibles) within the five kinds of objects, are not deemed to be color-shape (*rūpa*). Earth is

¹² The *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* is Vasubandhu's commentary on the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, written before his Vijñānavāda conversion. The Sanskrit text has been edited by Pradhan (Patna 1967, Tibetan Sanskrit Works Series, VIII) and the Chinese translation is contained in T. 1558-60.

hardness, not a hard *thing*. Water is *dampness*, not a damp thing. Similarly, fire is *warmth* and wind is *motion*. Here the primary elements are not being thought of as material causes of concrete matter, but as characteristics possessed by substances.

In the earlier texts, earth is clearly revealed to be a hard substance. If we consider this hard substance in terms of the human body, it is hair, nails, teeth, etc., and in terms of the external world, rocks, tiles and pebbles, etc. Water in people is sweat, tears, urine, etc., and again in the external world, such things as rain and dew, or wine and milk. However, in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*¹³ there gradually arises the tendency to abstract from these concrete substances those tangible properties which they possess, namely, hardness, dampness, etc., and it is here that the interpretation of the four primary elements are hardness, dampness, warmth, and motion clearly appears.

This tendency of Sarvāstivāda to abstract things is seen in its interpretation of the four primary elements, as well in its interpretation of the five kinds of objects. Color-shape (*rūpa*) is divided into color as such (*varṇa*), and form (*saṃsthāna*); the former are of four types, blue, yellow, red, and white, to which is added shadow, light, brightness, darkness, cloudiness, smokiness, dustiness, and foginess, making twelve types altogether; the latter (shape) is of eight types, long, short, square, round, convex, concave, straight, and crooked. Sound, smell, and taste are divided into eight, four, and six types respectively. Tactile sense data totals eleven types since, besides the four primary elements, there are seven types, such as smoothness and roughness. The colors blue, yellow, etc., the forms, long, short, square, round, etc., sound, smell, taste, and tactile sense data are attributes of matter, and are not to be thought of as material entities in themselves. A blue *thing*, a round *thing*, or a *thing* that makes a sound has a definite mass and exists as impenetrable (*sa-pratigha*) matter, occupying a space corresponding to its mass, but it is difficult for us to conceive of a blue *color*, a round *shape*, an emitted *sound*, etc. existing

¹³ The *Mahāvibhāṣā* (Chinese, T. 1545-7) by Kātyāyanīputra is a commentary on the *Jñānaprasthāna* (Chinese, T. 1543-4) by Pārśva and Vasumitra II. The *Jñānaprasthāna* is the earliest known Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma text. Both exist in Chinese only, though the earlier text has been reconstructed in Sanskrit from the Chinese by Śānti Bhikṣu (Santinketan, 1955).

as such matter. They are attributes of matter, grasped by the functions of seeing and hearing. The Sarvāstivādins, taking an epistemological point of view, abstracted from concrete matter the attributes corresponding to each of the cognitive functions of the subject, and considered these to be material entities. In this way, concrete matter is analyzed into color and form, etc., down through tactile sense data.

Atom Theory

If we carry to its logical conclusion the Sarvāstivāda theory which analyzes material existence into elements such as color and shape, etc., then the fact that matter has spatial extension becomes inexplicable. If we assume that color and shape, themselves, have extension, then there couldn't be any shape where there is color, and in the space occupied by shape, there would be no room for tactile sense data to enter. It would be impossible to appreciate a celadon porcelain jar's feeling of smoothness while enjoying its color. However, the Sarvāstivādins did not carry their logic to the point of denying that matter is extended. They did think of material entities as having spatial extension. It is in their atom theory that this way of thinking can be seen.

All material entities are aggregation of atoms (*paramānu*). The four primary elements are no exception to this. The individual atom has no extension, but atoms do not exist alone; even the particles of dust floating in the sun's rays which shine through a window are "assembled atoms" and have extension. Atoms are not homogeneous. The atoms of earth, water, fire, and wind each differ in substance. Colors and shapes, etc. are things made up of the four primary elements, and colors are thought to be collections of color atoms and shapes collections of shape atoms. Thus, when something in the external world is cognized, even in the case of the simplest inorganic substance, it is said to be cognized as a synthesis of at least eight elements, the four primary elements, earth, water, fire, and wind, and color-shape, odor, taste, and tactile sense data. In cases of a thing possessing the organs of touch (body), sight, hearing, etc., or again of a thing which emits sound, to these eight are added other elements corresponding to the respective cases. Quantitative differences in a thing originate from qualitative differences of the atoms. The hardness of a certain thing is because the power of the earth atoms of that thing is greater than the

others. If one mixes cracked barley and salt together and tastes it, only the salty taste will be sensed, not the taste of the barley. In the same way, it is said that when the atoms of the eight kinds of elements are combined, if the strength of the earth atom is greater than that of the other atoms, only hardness will be sensed.

As the preceding explanation shows, the Sarvāstivādins did not think that the characteristics of hardness, dampness, warmth, and movement, or color and shape, etc. existed in themselves. What exists as a cognizable object is made up of eight elements, and has spatial extension. Tactile sense data such as hardness, etc. and color-shape, etc. represent conceptual abstractions from concretely existing things and are elements corresponding to our cognitive organs. In this way, the Sarvāstivādins reified each of the elements thus abstracted. A concrete material object, a jar made from clay for example, if seen by the sight organ, is a russet color and has a round shape. If felt by the organ of touch, it has a rough, hard feeling. A "jar" is a synthesis of these elements. If the jar falls to the floor, it will be smashed, but the color and shape, etc. remain. Even when that jar ceases to exist, the same color and shape are seen in other jars, and the rough feeling and the hardness also continue to exist somewhere else. Color-shape down through tactile sense data (i.e., the five elementary objects of the cognitive organs) are constant and unchanging, but a concrete material object which is a synthesis of those elements is impermanent and no more than a temporary entity.

The atom is the limit in the division of the spatial extension of matter. The quantitative mode of matter is determined by the aggregation of atoms, but the qualitative mode is not. If the atoms composing a body are many, that body will be large, and if the atoms are few, it will be small, but the sensation of hardness exists in both a great boulder and a small stone, and white color exists in both a piece of cloth and a strand of thread. The Vaiśeṣika considered the atom to be the "substance" (*dravya*), and clearly distinguished it from attributes such as color and tactile sense data. In the theory of the Sarvāstivādins, both substance and attribute are combined. It can be called a mixing of two points of view, the epistemological view which analyzes matter into separate sense data, and the ontological view which cuts matter off from the subject and grasps it as entities having a definite mass. The epistemological view is given preference in the Sarvāstivādin position,

which except for unmanifested form, takes the five organs of cognition and their objects as material existence. The atom theory was originally not a Sarvāstivādin theory and seems to have been adopted from the Vaiśeṣikas about the time of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. This means that, because matter is grasped in terms of its qualitative distinctions by the various organs of cognition, the Sarvāstivādins recognized qualitative distinctions even in the atom which was basically the limit of quantitative analysis, thus harmonizing the atom theory with their theory.

Problems in the Sarvāstivādin Theory

Concerning the whole and its parts, there is no intrinsic problem in the preceding theoretical position of the Sarvāstivādins. The concept of the whole and its parts is a general concept concerning the quantitative mode of matter. The bowl shape is part of the jar, but the jar's *color* and tactile sense data are not its parts. If seen from a distance, an army composed of many troops, war chariots, elephants, horses, etc., or a forest in which all sorts of trees are collected is a single color and a single shape.

The view that a thing composed of many elements is only an appearance and not real runs throughout the Sarvāstivādin philosophy. There does not exist anywhere the substance of a person corresponding to a given name. But the special characteristic of the Sarvāstivādin theory is that it regards the elements that compose a thing to be what is grasped by each organ of cognition, for example, color, shape, tactile sense data, etc., and not the parts of the entity as a whole, for example, the shaft, axle, etc. of the chariot. The Sarvāstivādins are of the opinion that a thing such as a jar or a cloth is a synthesis of various sense data and is, therefore, only a temporary entity, but that the sense data of *color, shape, etc.* really exist. Color and shape which are visible by virtue of the organ of vision are considered real because they possess the capacity to produce visual cognition. Thus, while treating as real the product of the analysis into discrete sense data of material entities that have the capacity to produce cognition ("doors of cognition"), the Sarvāstivādins also adopt a heterogeneous atom theory that is problematic for their position. For if color and shape are held to be collections of their respective atoms, then they cannot be real and will have no more than a provisional existence. A unitary atom is not something

that can be seen by the organ of vision. It is not a door of cognition. The Sarvāstivādins seem to have held the inconsistent view that both the atom of color and the collection of such atoms are real; it was the Sautrāntikas who established a thoroughly consistent theory with regard to this point.

The Sautrāntika Position

The Sautrāntika criticized the Sarvāstivādins on many points, and in the process ended up providing a bridge to Vijñānavādin philosophy. In particular the clarification of the distinction between conceptual entities and entities existing objectively in the external world was the achievement of this school. A detailed discussion of the Sautrāntika position on this point appears in the second chapter of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* in the form of a criticism of the Sarvāstivāda. According to the Sautrāntika, among the entities the Sarvāstivādins held to be ultimate elements of existence, the two categories of "things dissociated from thought" (*citta-viprayukta-samskāra*) and "unconditioned things" (*asamskrta*) are not real, but merely concepts; for their existence is not known directly by the organs of cognition, as are color, sound, etc., nor do they have a clear function, as do the organs of vision, hearing, etc.

With regard to material entities (*rūpa*) as well, the Sautrāntika clarified the distinction between reality (*paramārtha-sat*, "ultimate reality") and appearance (*prajñapti-sat*, "nominal existence" or *samvrti-sat* "empirical reality") which exists in name only and lacks any reality. In doing so they did not, like the Sarvāstivādins, consider as real what is seen by the organ of vision, such as the blue *color* or round *shape*; instead, by understanding as real that which has the *efficacy* to produce visual cognition, they sought to resolve the difficulties inherent in the Sarvāstivādin atom theory. As expressed in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (*dhātu-nirdeśa*), the Sautrāntika opinion is that what is visible to the eye is the collection of atoms; the individual atoms are by themselves not seen by the organ of vision, but when collected, each atom becomes the cause of visual cognition. The meaning of the Sautrāntika assumption that, "the aggregate of atoms is no different from the individual atom" should be understood from this point of view.

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A real thing must be a unitary thing and possess a single efficacy. The thing which is formed from a mutual connection of many elements, because it would become non-existent if the elements which had joined were separated, is an appearance and unreal. That which is real is the ultimate unit reached by carrying analysis to its limit. The Sarvāstivādins divided the objects of the organ of vision into colors, such as blue, yellow, red, and white, and forms (*samsthāna*) such as long, short, square and round; but the Sautrāntika denied the reality of form. Form is something produced by the way in which color atoms collect and is appearance.

In the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (āryapudgala-nirdeśa) the distinction between reality and appearance is made as follows: "That thing is an appearance if, when broken, the concept connected with it ceases to exist, as for example in the case of the jar. Likewise, that thing is an appearance if the concept of it ceases to exist when the atoms that compose it, such as color, taste, etc., are mentally abstracted out, as for example in the case of water. Reality is different from that mode of being."

In other words, if a jar falls to the floor and is smashed, what exists are broken pieces, not the jar. If a cloth is unraveled, there are only the threads, and nothing called "cloth." Water cannot be destroyed as a jar and cloth can, but because within it exist color, taste, and a cool feeling, it is possible to mentally analyze it into its various elements. If it is analyzed into color atoms, taste atoms, etc., there will exist nothing in addition to these to be called "water." All such divisible things are appearance; only things that cannot be broken up or mentally analyzed into their components are real.

Samghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra*¹⁴ quotes exactly this statement of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, and makes reference to an Elder who expressed what amounts to the same view: "When a thing formed from many components is said to exist, that existence is appearance. Conversely, when a unitary thing is said to exist, that existence is real. When an entity is analyzed, if it loses its former name, it is an appearance. If an entity is analyzed and does not lose its former name, it is real." The person referred to as the Elder in the *Nyāyānusāra* is the old Sautrāntika teacher, Śrīlāta, who was active in Ayodhyā, and is

¹⁴ Samghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra* exists only in Chinese, T. 1562.

said to have written the *Vibhāṣā* of the Sautrāntika.¹⁵ There can be no doubt that the distinction between reality and appearance in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* is the Sautrāntika theory, following in the tradition of Śrīlāta.

The Concept of Appearance

A work that clarifies the Sautrāntika concept of appearance is Dignāga's **Upādāyaprajñaptiprakaraṇa*.¹⁶ This work states that the Sautrāntika considered the "whole" (*avayavin*), the "continuum" (*sa-mtāna*), and "modality" (*avasthābheda*) to be appearance.

The Whole: If the whole possesses reality, then it must be either different from or the same as the parts which make up the whole. If the whole is not considered different from the parts, then each part is respectively the whole; thus we are led to the illogical conclusion that each part is the same as the other parts. If the body does not differ from the hands and feet, then both the hands and the feet are the body; therefore, the hands and the feet turn out to be the same. However, if on the other hand we consider each individual part making up the whole as differing from it, then a single entity would possess many existences, and this is also illogical. Thus, if the whole is assumed to be a thing possessing reality in itself then it cannot escape contradiction. Nevertheless, in man's daily experience, what is expressed by words such as "body," "forest," or "army," are not completely non-existent; on the basis of such words they are understood as things existing as wholes. In other words, the whole is not real, but its existence is recognized as appearance, and as such it cannot be said either to be the same as or different from the real parts.

The continuum: If the continuum is the same as what exists in each moment, then the infancy, childhood, etc. of a given person would each be that person's entire life; and therefore, childhood, youth, maturity, etc. would all be the same as infancy. Moreover, because the

¹⁵ The *Vibhāṣā* of the Sautrāntika by Śrīlāta is not extant. However, it is referred to by Kuei-chi in *Ch'eng wei shih lun shu chi* (Commentary on the Vijñaptimātratā-siddhi), Vol. 4, T. 1830.

¹⁶ Dignāga's **Upādāyaprajñaptiprakaraṇa* exists only in Chinese translation, T. 1622.

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person's entire life would be lost when separated from childhood, human growth could not be admitted. Conversely, if the continuum is different from each individual moment, then it would be completely meaningless for a person now suffering from a fever to attempt to cure it by taking medicine. If we admit reality in the continuum, we are led to such contradictions; however we understand a name, such as Devadatta, as referring to a single person who exists continuously from birth to death. Thus, even though the continuum is not real, in the world of daily experience, its existence is tentatively taken as real.

Modality: A single material entity, according to differences in viewpoint, is grasped and determined in various modes. If it is being viewed as being a thing formed from the assembly of numerous atoms, then it is determined as being the result of that assembly rather than the cause; if juxtaposed to a permanent entity such as space, then it is determined as impermanent; if juxtaposed to mind which is invisible and without tangibility, it is determined as being a visible and impenetrable entity. In this way various determinations are employed, yet the thing expressed by these determinations is the same material entity. If it is maintained that this material entity must be a different thing from its variously determined modes, then it would not exist in any of these modes; however, if this material entity is taken to be the same as the various modes, then, for the same reason explained in the case of the whole and the continuum, we invite the illogical conclusion that there is absolutely no distinction between modes. Thus, differences of mode also do not exist in this sense, and are nothing but appearances based on differences in determinations.

That which can be established as the same as or different from a real thing must itself be real. The wholes, etc., which cannot be determined to be either the same as or different from their real parts, etc., are not real. Obviously, the relationship of sameness or difference between appearances is not thus denied. The body is not real, but to the extent that its existence as appearance is recognized, to say that A's body differs from B's is certainly reasonable. However, we cannot consider as analogous the body's similarity to or difference from the hands and feet. For, in contrast to the hands and feet, which exist in themselves, the body is a temporary construct, having the hands and feet, etc. as its material cause (*upādāna*); if the material cause is removed, no trace of the body would remain. The real cannot be something which loses its

own being when other things related to it are removed or destroyed. A thing which ceases to exist as itself when other elements related to it are removed is an appearance.

In the *Upādāyaprajñaptiprakaraṇa*, Dignāga, while borrowing the concept of appearances from the Sautrāntika, concludes that all things considered as entities in the world of daily experience are appearances, and shifts towards Vijñānavāda thought; but that is not the question before us.

Vasubandhu's Criticism of Realism

Now let us return to the *Vimśatikā*. The first of the three kinds of realism criticized by Vasubandhu was the Vaiśeṣika theory that the whole is separate from the parts. Vasubandhu's position, which is critical of this theory, denying the existence of anything like a unitary whole, stands, needless to say, in a philosophical tradition handed down from early Buddhism in which human existence is dissected into its elemental components, and thus denied any substantiality. But it is also possible in particular to see in the background of Vasubandhu's criticism, the Sautrāntika theory that the "whole" is an appearance.

The second kind of realism is the Sarvāstivādin atom theory. The general nature of that atom theory has already been explained, but the problem here is its unique exposition of the manner in which the atoms assemble. The Sarvāstivādins take the position that when the many atoms assemble and become a visible thing, the separate atoms are merely in the vicinity of one another, and not touching.

The atom, since it is the limit of the division of the spatial extension of matter, has no parts. Accordingly when two atoms touch, it is impossible for a part of each to come into contact. However, if the two atoms are wholly touching each other, then because they would be completely overlapping, they would be exactly the same as a single atom. Thus, the Sarvāstivādins claim that atoms assemble without touching each other.

This explanation raises a simple question. If a piece of cloth, for example, is taken to be many atoms collected without touching each other, and if someone were to take this cloth and shake it, would not the collected atoms be scattered about? Why is it that such a thing does

not actually happen? The Sarvāstivādins reply that the element air maintains the collected atoms.

Vasubandhu criticizes this Sarvāstivādin theory, arguing that since the individual atoms are not perceived, even though they collect in numbers they will not become the object of cognition.

What would happen, then, if the atom theory is not employed? If we return to the original Sarvāstivādin position, and regard as the object the color, tactile sense data, etc., corresponding to the individual organs of cognition, then are not such fallacies as the non-cognition of the objects dissolved? However, color and tactile sense data are properties and not things that can be quantitatively analyzed. Vasubandhu points out the failure of the Sarvāstivādin theory on this point.

- (1) If we see the earth's surface as the object of the visual organ, namely, as *rūpa*, then it is a single, indivisible thing. Thus, it would be impossible to walk the earth's surface step by step; for, if we advance the foot one step, then we should cover all the earth's surface within the bounds of vision.
- (2) There would be no situations in which one edge of a piece of cloth is grasped and not the other edge. Since the cloth, regarded as white, is without parts it would be impossible to grasp one edge and not grasp all edges at the same time.
- (3) Let us assume that a horse and an elephant are in a certain place. In this case, if the place is seen as color, it cannot be divided. Thus, because the place of the elephant and the place of the horse would be the same, it would be impossible to distinguish between the elephant and the horse. Moreover, the space between the elephant and horse is occupied by neither, but that empty place and the places occupied by the elephant and horse would be the same. In other words, there arises the contradiction that in the same place animals both exist and do not exist.
- (4) There is no quantitative distinction between colors or shapes. As white color, there is no difference between a small cloth and a large cloth. Accordingly, if we follow the Sarvāstivādin theory, then for example, because even a microscopic water creature would be equivalent to a large thing having the same color and shape, that microscopic creature ought not to be invisible to the eye.

Because objects of cognition are analyzed only qualitatively into such properties as blue, and green or hard and rough, problems like these will arise. Therefore, Vasubandhu says that it is necessary to examine the atom theory which explains an object's quantitative distinctions. However, as previously shown there are faults in the Sarvāstivādin theory in which atoms assemble without mutual contact.

The third kind of realism is the view that the object of cognition is an aggregation of numerous atoms without gaps between them. This view is presented as the theory of the "Venerable One" (*bhadanta*) in the *dhātu-nirdeśa* of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, where Vasubandhu comments that "The Venerable One's theory ought to be accepted." It is not clear who the person called "the Venerable One" is (in one theory, it is the Sarvāstivādin, Dharmatrāta), but this view is close to the Sautrāntika theory seen in later literature. When we consider the fact that Yaśomitra, in his commentary to the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* contrasted this view with the Sarvāstivādin view, and the fact that in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, Vasubandhu is often in agreement with the Sautrāntika theories, it would appear that this atom theory can be attributed to the Sautrāntika. The Sarvāstivādins also held that the atoms were adjacent to one another, but not that they adhere to one another without intervals. According to Yaśomitra's explanation, they say that there is no room for light to enter between the atoms, but think that there is enough room for other atoms to enter. However, to think that there is space between atoms is to deny the doctrine of the impenetrability of matter. Accordingly, the Sautrāntika said that there is no gap between the collected atoms.

The *Vimsatikā* criticizes this Sautrāntika theory, saying that, since in the first place the atoms which are parts of the aggregation cannot be established as a simple substance, it is impossible for numerous atoms to form an aggregation.

If the atoms are regarded as assembled, then because other atoms would be attached at the top, bottom and four sides of a given atom, the atom would have six parts. Something that possesses parts ought to be further divisible, and is not a simple substance. Conversely, if an atom has no parts, a single atom would completely overlap the six other atoms it combines with, and thus the entire body composed of an aggregation of atoms would be the size of a single atom. Hence, not a single thing would be perceived.

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Whether atoms are considered to have spatial parts or not, in either case it is impossible to escape an illogical conclusion. Hence, the existence of the unitary atoms which form aggregates is not demonstrated, and lacking that demonstration, it cannot be claimed that aggregates of atoms are the objects of cognition.

Ālambana-parīkṣā (Inquiry into the Object of Cognition)

It is necessary to discuss in further detail the Sautrāntika theory, but let us delay this briefly. We have seen in general the criticism of the three kinds of realism in the *Vimśatikā*. The atom theories of the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntika were also criticized in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣā*. This small essay of Dignāga makes clear two conditions that must be possessed by the object of cognition, and from this point of view carefully inquires into realism.

An object of cognition must satisfy the following two conditions:

- (1) It must be the cause which produces the cognition.
- (2) It must have the same form as the image.

In order to satisfy the first condition, the object must be real. It would be impossible for an unreal thing to trigger the five sense organs and give rise to cognition. If even an unreal thing could be the cause of the production of visual cognition, then people ought to be able to see even rabbit horns.

Moreover, the object must be the factor which limits the content of one cognition such that it is different from another; for each cognition necessarily possesses a unique content, and is not a generalized cognition unlimited in content. Furthermore, the object, being the factor determining the content of each cognition, must be thought of as having the same form as the image which is the content of the cognition. For, if a person, while having a round thing as an object, is able to have the image of a square thing, then it ought to be possible to have even a triangle as the object of that same image, and thus the individuality of cognition would be lost.

If we examine the Sarvāstivādin theory from this point of view, since the individual atoms combined without touching each other are real, they satisfy the first condition of any object of consciousness. However, since atoms do not have the same form as the image, they

fail to satisfy the second condition; and hence, the Sarvāstivādin theory cannot be considered correct. If it were simply a matter of the first condition of being a cause of cognition, even the individual organs of cognition could satisfy it; but no one would consider the organ of sight to be the object of visual cognition.

How about, then, the Sautrāntika theory, which makes the aggregate of atoms the object of cognition? Because in the aggregate of atoms there is a gross form not visible in the atoms themselves, the second condition is satisfied. However, the form in the aggregate is an appearance, and not something real. As will be explained when we deal with the self-cognition of knowledge, this form is something inferred from the image. Since an unreal thing fails to satisfy the first condition of an object of cognition, the Sautrāntika theory is also incorrect. No one thinks that when the person with bad eyes sees a double moon the cause of that image is an unreal double moon.

In the *Ālambana-parīkṣā* along with the above two theories a third theory not seen in the *Vimśatikā* is introduced and criticized. This theory is attributed to the "New-Sarvāstivādin,"¹⁷ though there is also a view which attributes it to Buddhadeva, and can be seen in Saṅghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra*. It takes the opposite view from the Sautrāntika, holding that the aggregate of atoms, directly perceived as something having a certain form, is real; and that the individual atoms, which are not directly perceived but whose existence is merely inferred, are appearances. The aggregate of atoms, being both real and possessed of a visible form, is considered to satisfy the two conditions of the object of cognition.

Dignāga criticizes this theory on the basis of the Sautrāntika doctrine of the real and the apparent introduced above. Although differences in the contents of separate cognitions are said to derive from differences in the form of the jars, plates, etc., which are the objects of these cognitions, still the form of these jars and plates, etc., is only an appearance and not real; for when analyzed into the component atoms, the knowledge of the forms of the jars and plates, etc., is completely lost. In the case of something real, even if one part is removed, the knowledge of that thing is not lost. For example, in the case of the

¹⁷ The "New-Sarvāstivādin" is discussed in Kuei-chi's *Wei shih erh shih lun shu chi*, ch. 2, T. 1834.

white color of a cloth, even if the cloth is cut in half or unraveled into a single thread, it is still perceived as a white color. Therefore, color is real. The form is the collection of color atoms, and is nothing but appearance. The atoms themselves are all round, and have no distinction as to form. Thus, if the individual atoms are held to be the cause of cognition, the cognition of a jar and the cognition of a plate would be the same.

2. The Representationalist Theory of Knowledge

The Lamp Illumines Itself

We have seen that in both the *Vimśatikā* and *Ālambanaparīkṣā* all forms of realism are denied. What, then, ought to be accepted as the object of cognition? The answer given here is the Vijñānavāda theory that it is the form within knowledge itself. In the *Ālambanaparīkṣā* Dignāga says, "The form of an object within knowledge, which appears to be something external, is the object of cognition."

To say that the object of cognition is the form within knowledge is to say that knowledge cognizes knowledge itself. This notion that self-cognition is the essence of knowledge is one of the basic theories of the Vijñānavāda school.

If we light a lamp in a dark room the walls and ceiling, tables and chairs, and other objects previously unseen are illumined. But we are also able to see the lamp itself; at the same time that the lamp illumines objects it also illumines itself. The Vijñānavāda school holds that the nature of knowledge is similar to that of the lamp.

A metal weight set in one dish of a balance functions to measure the weight of a substance in the other dish. But in order to know that exact weight of that metal weight it must be weighed by another weight: the weight of the metal weight cannot be known by the metal weight itself. In other words, a metal weight reveals the weight of other objects, but not its own weight. Some schools of thought hold that knowledge has the nature, not of the lamp, but of the metal weight.

According to the Sāṃkhya theory, for example, reason (*buddhi*), which possesses the activity of cognition, is something evolved from

the material principle (*prakṛti*), and thus is a non-spiritual entity. Therefore, while it functions to cognize objects presented to it by the sensory and thought organs, it is not conscious of its own function. That which knows the function of reason is the *puruṣa*, the spiritual principle which, like the audience watching a dancing girl on the stage, observes everything evolved from the material principle. The Nyāya school takes the view that one knowledge is known by another knowledge. First, through the contact between sense organ and object knowledge arises; but that knowledge is not self-conscious. Subsequently, knowledge mediated by the thought organ arises; and this knowledge knows the first knowledge. After Dignāga, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (ca. 600-50) of the Mīmāṃsā school developed a unique theory. According to him, since cognition is a function, cognition itself is not known directly. But since, as a result of the function of cognition, the object is known—or as it is said, the character of “cognizedness” (*jñātaṭā*) occurs in the object—the function of cognition is inferred from this cognizedness. Thus, according to Kumārila, the cognitive function is known through the inference, “If there had been no cognitive function, this object would not have been known (would not have possessed ‘cognizedness’).”

In opposition to these schools, the Vijnānavāda argued that knowledge in so far as it is knowledge must be self-cognizant. When we perceive a blue color, we are also simultaneously conscious of that cognition. If we did not have this consciousness, we would not know that we had perceived a blue color. If the lamp illumined only the objects and not itself, we would see only the object and not the lamp; and therefore we would not know whether the objects appeared of their own accord or whether the lamp illumined them. The lamp by illuminating itself also reveals the fact that the objects are illumined by the lamp. Knowledge, like the lamp, illumines itself, and thereby reveals that the object has been illumined by knowledge. This is the special characteristic of knowledge which distinguishes it from non-sentient bodies.

Consequently, that an object is cognized means that within our knowledge there exist simultaneously the two factors of the object illumined by knowledge and the knowledge illumining the object. Knowledge always has within itself these two factors. That being the

case, the object of knowledge becomes an object internal to knowledge—i.e., an object which has already been taken into and made a part of knowledge. We know a blue color which we have perceived, a blue color within our knowledge, and not a blue color in the external world. It was this that Dignāga demonstrated in his criticism of realism.

Proofs of Self-Cognition

The two factors internal to knowledge—the perceived object and its cognition—are described respectively as “the form of the object” (*arthākāra*, *viśayākāra*) and “the form of (knowledge) itself” (*svākāra*), or as “the manifestation (of knowledge) as object” (*arthābhāsa*, *viśayābhāsa*) and “manifestation as itself” (*svābhāsa*); or again, the two factors are expressed by the terms, “the grasped aspect” (*grāhyākāra*) and “the grasping aspect” (*grāhakākāra*). In Chapter 1 of his *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Dignāga offers several proofs for the existence of these two factors internal to knowledge. Here let us mention one or two of them.

- 1) It is universally admitted that distinct from a given knowledge of an object there is another knowledge which takes that knowledge as its object. The knowledge which recollects, for example, that “I saw him yesterday” has as its object a knowledge occurring yesterday which had “him” as its object. If, then, there were not the two factors of object and cognition within knowledge there would not be this distinction between “knowledge of the object” and “knowledge of knowledge of the object.”

If knowledge did not contain within itself the form of the object, then knowledge would always appear simply as itself, and would lose the particularity of individual knowledges: it would be like a lamp with nothing to illumine. The knowledge of an object, and the knowledge of that knowledge are both the activity of illumination itself, and are identical. If on the other hand, knowledge only illumined the object and not itself, then to know the object would mean simply that the form of the object is manifest, and we would not know whether the object was made appar-

ent by knowledge or had appeared by itself. Furthermore, since knowledge of the knowledge of the object would only illumine the form of the object manifest in this way, even this knowledge would only be the manifestation of the same form of the object. Consequently, there would not be a distinction between knowledge of the object and the secondary knowledge which has that knowledge as its object.

Only when it is recognized that the "form of the object" and the "form of knowledge itself" are both included within knowledge—that is, that knowledge has self-cognition as its fundamental nature—can we explain the distinction between "knowledge of the object" and "knowledge of knowledge of the object." Since the argument here is rather complicated let us symbolize it as follows:

C_1 (knowledge of the object); O_1 ("form of the object" in C_1); S_1 ("form of itself" in C_1).

C_2 (knowledge of knowledge of the object); O_2 ("form of the object" in C_2); S_2 ("form of itself" in C_2).

If we express the fact that C_1 includes within itself both O_1 and S_1 by $C_1 = (S_1 \cdot O_1)$, then $C_2 = (S_2 \cdot O_2)$. Since C_2 has C_1 as its object, $O_2 = (S_1 \cdot O_1)$. Therefore, $C_2 = [S_2 \cdot (S_1 \cdot O_1)]$, and C_2 and C_1 are clearly different.

In the case where knowledge does not include within itself the form of the object, $C_1 = S_1$, $C_2 = S_2$; but $S_2 = S_1$; therefore, $C_2 = C_1$.

In the case where knowledge does not include within itself its own manifestation, $C_1 = O_1$, $C_2 = O_2$; but $O_2 = C_1 = O_1$; therefore, $C_2 = C_1$.

- 2) **Recollection always occurs in reference to a past experience: it is impossible to recollect, for example, some animal we have never before seen. Now, we recollect not only, say, the pot on the table yesterday; we also recollect *having seen* the pot on the table yesterday. That is, what is recollected is not only the object, but the knowledge of the object as well. This means that yesterday we experienced *the knowledge of the object*; or in other words, that there occurred yesterday a knowledge which included within itself both the object seen and that which saw.**

The Sautrāntika Doctrine: Dharmakīrti's Theory

The Sautrāntika school also recognized the self-cognition of knowledge. This school taught a theory of momentariness (*ksanika*) in which both the external entity and the mind disappear the moment they arise. In the moment when knowledge arises, the object in the external world has already vanished. Therefore, the external object itself is not perceived. What is perceived is the form produced in knowledge by the external object. Since in this way knowledge knows the form of the object within itself, that cognition is nothing other than the self-cognition of knowledge. This is the Sautrāntika view. They differ from the Vi-jñānavāda in admitting the existence of the external world.

If what we perceive is a form internal to knowledge then we cannot know whether or not the external object actually exists. The Sautrāntika recognized the existence of the external object, because they thought that the factors limiting cognition spatially and temporally must exist outside knowledge itself. The jar seen on this table now is not seen everywhere all the time: cognition always occurs in a specific time and place. If cognition arose of its own accord without any restriction by external conditions, the time and place in which the jar was seen would be quite arbitrary. The reason why the jar is seen only here and now is that cognition is limited (or conditioned) by the external object. On the basis of this way of thinking, the Sautrāntika inferred the existence of an external object not directly perceived.

Consequently, according to the Sautrāntika the external object is essentially the efficacy to give rise to, or cause, knowledge. Dharmakīrti says,

If it is asked how it is possible for the external object of the preceding moment, being of a different time from the knowledge (of that object), to be the object of cognition, the answer is as follows: it is recognized by those versed in logic that to be the object of cognition means nothing but to be the cause able to project into knowledge a form similar to its own form. (*Pramānavārttika*, Pratyakṣa Chapter, 247.)

If we hold that that which exists in the external world as the cause of knowledge has a form, then it could not be individual atoms, and must

be considered a collection of atoms. But according to the Sautrāntika theory an aggregate is only an appearance, and in an appearance there could be no efficacy to produce knowledge. One solution for this problem contained in the Sautrāntika doctrine of realism was provided by Dharmakīrti's theory.

His argument, presented in the *Pramāṇavārttika* (Pratyakṣa Chapter, 194-230), is developed against the background of Dignāga's interpretation of one section of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya* (in *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, Pratyakṣa, 4), and the criticism of that interpretation by the Jain scholar Mallavādin (mid-sixth c.) (in *Dvādaśāra-Nayacakra*, "Twelve-spoked Wheel of Viewpoints"); but there is no need here to go into the details of this background. What was at issue was the question of whether or not the sight organ could grasp many things simultaneously. Dignāga's view was that to cognize as a whole in terms of a characteristic aspect a multiplicity of objects in the visual field is different from cognizing that multiplicity individually, and then thinking the universal which unites them. Dharmakīrti, following this view, argued that the notion that forms are composed of a multiplicity of elements was valid only from the point of view of reason, and that in visual cognition the various colors decorating the wings of a butterfly are grasped in their variety as a single whole.

The same thing can be said of a collection of many atoms. This, however, raises the question of how the individual atoms, which cannot be seen in isolation, can become the object of vision when collected. Dharmakīrti argues that when many atoms collect without intervals between them, they come to have a special character not present when they are scattered individually. Palanquin bearers individually do not have the strength to carry the palanquin by themselves, but when two or four get together each display the ability to carry the palanquin. In the same way, atoms, though individually incapable of being the cause of visual cognition, when collected, possess a special character (*atīśaya*) which is the cause of knowledge. And "to be an object is nothing other than to be a cause of knowledge." (Pratyakṣa Chapter, 224).

In this way, the multiplicity of atoms collected without interstices become the object of visual cognition as a unified multiplicity. When a multiplicity of atoms are perceived simultaneously the form within

knowledge is one. Reason which analyzes this form into many images caused by the separate atoms, does not function in perception. And since there is inferred an external object which throws this form into knowledge, this external object, while in reality being a multiplicity of atoms is at the same time understood as having a single form.

In this way, the combined multiplicity of atoms, because 1) they are the cause giving rise to cognition, and 2) they possess the same form as the image, satisfy the conditions for the object of cognition. This is the Sautrāntika theory worked out by Dharmakīrti.

The Weakness in the Argument for Inferring the External World

The Sautrāntika, while beginning from the view that knowledge has self-cognition as its essence, at the same time sought to maintain that this self-cognition was the cognition of an external object. This was because, as we have said, they sought the factors temporally and spatially limiting cognition in the external world. If the occurrence in a specific time and place of knowledge having the form of the object can be explained without there being an object in the external world, then the grounds for the Sautrāntika realism will be insufficient. As we mentioned in the beginning, Vasubandhu in his *Vimśatikā*, using the analogy of the dream, argued that the spatial and temporal limitations of cognition could be established even where the external object does not exist. Just as in the case of the dream, so during our ordinary waking experience as well the knowledge accompanied by the form of the object arises from “a special transformation of the stream of thought” (*samtati-pariṇāma-viśeṣa*). Therefore, the Vijñānavāda philosophy holds that there is no need to posit the existence of an external object. This philosophy is a theory of knowledge worked out from the position of the practical subject, who realizes that empirical cognition is *karma*, and who seeks to awaken from the dream of empirical cognition to attain a trans-mundane knowledge transcending *karma*. In this sense, it differs qualitatively from the representationalist realism of the Sautrāntika, whose concern was only with the logical consistency of their theory.

The recognition of the existence of the external object as the factor limiting cognition spatially and temporally is not only unnecessary;

there is clearly a weakness in the Sautrāntika logic, which infers the external object on the basis of the perceptual image. Though the object is considered external, its essence is not determined objectively, but is said by the Sautrāntika to exist as it is perceived. This, however, leads to the contradiction that one entity possesses a multiplicity of essences. This problem was pointed out by Dharmakīrti, who showed that even in Sautrāntika realism what knowledge cognizes is not the external object. (*Pramānavārttika*. Pratyakṣa Chapter, 341.) The same point is discussed in the *Mahāyānasamgraha*¹⁸ in order to demonstrate the non-existence of the external world. It is sometimes the case that a number of people will have differing images of the same thing. In looking at a single red apple, will not the artist's image differ from that of the ordinary man? Although looking at the same river, the ravenous ghosts will have an image that is filled with pus, excrement, and urine, while the human will receive an image of pure water. If one holds that the essence of the external object is inferred from the image, then this means that a single object will be possessed of a multiplicity of essences.

The Cause of Knowledge

In his *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, Dignāga denies all forms of reality, and teaches that the object of cognition is to be understood as nothing other than the form of the object within knowledge. From this position, Dignāga explains several epistemological problems.

Dignāga himself gave two conditions for the object of cognition: 1) that it be the cause giving rise to the cognition; and 2) that it possess the same form as the image. The form of the object within knowledge obviously fulfills the second condition. But in regard to the first condition the opponent objects: "How is it that something which is a part of knowledge, and thus arises simultaneously with knowledge, can be a cause of knowledge?"

Dignāga gives two kinds of answers to this problem. First, he argues that to say that the form of the object is the cause, and the knowledge which is aware of the object is the result does not mean that there is tem-

¹⁸ The *Mahāyānasamgraha* is attributed to Asaṅga and exists in Tibetan (Tohoku No. 4048) and Chinese translations (T. 1592-4).

poral succession between the two; it means, rather, that the two are in a relation of necessary connection:

Although it (the form of the object within knowledge) is simultaneous with knowledge, because it is in a relation of necessary connection with knowledge, it is the cause of knowledge.

A "relation of necessary connection" here means a relationship of logical consistency—which is to say, when A exists B exists, and when A does not exist B does not exist. When such a relationship holds between A and B, although A does not temporally precede B, A is considered the cause of B. For example, the substance is the cause of the attribute; for only when there is the substance does the attribute exist, and where there is no substance the attribute does not exist. The relation of the form of the object within knowledge to the knowledge which is aware of that form is precisely such a relationship. This is Dignāga's first answer to the opponent.

Of course Dignāga does not deny that in addition to this cause there are other causes which bring about the occurrence of knowledge. It is an established theory of Abhidharma philosophy that the "mind (*citta*) and mental activities (*caitta*) arise from four types of causes" (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, *indriya-nirdeśa*) and Dignāga accepts this view (*Pramāṇasamuccaya*, *Pratyakṣa Chapter*). In particular, for any thought the immediately preceding thought (*samanantara-pratyaya*) is an important cause. Like the staff on which the man leans his body in order to support himself, the form of the object within knowledge is the "support" (*ālambana-pratyaya*) for the thought or knowledge arising from other causes, and in this sense it is seen as a cause.

As a second answer, Dignāga says that the form of the object within knowledge is a cause temporally preceding knowledge. Knowledge is momentary; and when one moment of knowledge is extinguished, the form of the object of that knowledge leaves its impression in the subconscious. That impression gives rise in the knowledge of the next moment to a similar form. Therefore, the form of the object in the knowledge of the first moment is the same as the form in the knowledge of the second moment; and, assisted by the impression left in the subconscious, becomes the cause of the latter.

The question of how something simultaneous with knowledge can be

seen as a cause of knowledge was further examined in detail by Dharmakīrti. According to him, what is to be considered the primary cause of knowledge is not a cause common to any knowledge, but must be that element which limits the knowledge as a specific knowledge. The reason why a given cognition is a cognition of blue and not of yellow is because it possesses some cause other than the sight organ common to all cognitions of color. What gives to a knowledge its specificity is nothing other than the form of the object appearing in that knowledge. Without that form, individual knowledges would all become one. Therefore, it is precisely the form of the object within knowledge that must be seen as the principal cause of knowledge. In this case the cause is understood, not as "the producer" (*janaka*) of the effect, but as "the determiner" (*vyavasthāpaka*) of the effect.

The Organs of Cognition

A further question is put to Dignāga. According to the doctrine of the twelve *āyatana*s or the eighteen *dhātu*s taught by the Buddha, "visual cognition results from the sight organ (*cakṣur-indriya*) and the material entity." But if there is no external material entity, then does it not follow that the sight organ as well cannot perform the function of producing cognition? To this Dignāga gives the following reply.

As is shown by its name, "*indriya*" (belonging to Indra), the essence of the organs of cognition is *efficacy* (See *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*, *indriya-nirdeśa*). That is, the organs themselves cannot be perceived; rather, from the fact of cognition which is a result of their functioning, we infer their existence as the efficacy bringing about such cognition. Nothing more can be known about the nature of the organs of cognition. The Sarvāstivādins say that they are special transformations of the primary elements; there is the view of Buddhadeva that they are the elements themselves; and there are also those such as the Sāṃkhya who hold that they are transformations most immediately of the sense of self (*ahamkāra*) and ultimately of primordial matter (*prakṛti*). But these are all dogmatic assertions, and not based on proper inference. All that can be inferred is that the organs are the efficacy which results in cognition. And, if we suppose that efficacy to be within knowledge itself, then there is no necessity for an external entity.

While answering the objections of his opponents, Dignāga demonstrated that there is within knowledge, on the one hand, the form of the object, and on the other, the efficacy to know that form. Dignāga's conclusion, then, is that, although the external object does not exist, through the interaction of these two factors there has come down from a beginningless past a stream of momentary knowledges.

Sākārajñāna-vāda and *anākārajñāna-vāda*

The view that knowledge contains within itself the form of the object is known as *sākārajñāna-vāda*. It cannot be said with certainty when this name began to be used, but its earliest appearance is thought to be in the *Madhyamakālamkāra*¹⁹ of Śāntarakṣita (ca. 725-88). The name is used in opposition to *anākārajñāna-vāda*, which holds that the form belongs to the external object, and that knowledge merely reflects it. The Nyāya and Mīmāṃsā, and within Buddhism schools taking the realist position such as Sarvāstivāda, consider knowledge to be without form (*anākāra*).

The weakness of the *anākārajñāna-vāda* lies in its inability to explain the specificity of individual knowledges. Without the form of the object all knowledge would be identical as simply the activity of knowing, and could not be distinguished as a cognition, say, of blue or yellow. Although it is maintained that the form possessed by the external object internally limits knowledge, still as long as it is external it cannot limit knowledge. If it is maintained that the form limits knowledge at the time it is perceived, then the form of the object perceived cannot be said to be external.

The Sautrāntika advocated a realism based on the *sākārajñāna-vāda*. It may be characterized as a "representationalist realism." If one pursues the *sākārajñāna-vāda* position to its extreme, it leads to the Vijñānavāda doctrine denying the existence of the external world. This theory we have seen in Dignāga's *Ālambanaparīkṣā*.

The main theme of the Vijñānavāda philosophy was not the proof that cognition could be established in the absence of an external object. They held empirical cognition as a whole to be a dream, and their basic

¹⁹ The *Madhyamakālamkāra* exists only in Tibetan (Tohoku Nos. 3884-3885).

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concern was with the attainment of a transmudane cognition in which one awakes from the dream. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti carefully examine the structure of cognition from the point of view of Vijñānavāda, and construct subtle epistemological theories, but they almost wholly ignore the question of the transcendence of empirical cognition. Their Vijñānavāda system is called *sākāravijñāna-vāda*, and is contrasted with the *nirākāravijñāna-vāda* which emphasizes the “shining mind” of one awakened from the dream of empirical cognition.

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM POWELL