



Ovidiu Cristian Nedu

Selfhood and Knowledge
in
Yogācāra Buddhism



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Foreword

This volume gathers together six studies published in several journals, between 2013 and 2018, as individual papers. They were not conceived to form a whole but rather as independent articles. Nevertheless, in the present volume, we succeeded in grouping them into two major themes.

The first topic the volume deals with is the apparition of the phenomenon of human individuation within the wide cosmic experience. It is approached by three of the papers. The first one investigates the apparition of the human phenomenon within the cosmic consciousness, apparition which alters the peaceful and neutral character of consciousness. Human states of awareness and their subjective contents are analyzed in the second article, while the third one deals with the relation of reciprocal dependence between the human and the cosmic phenomena.

The second part of the volume is focused on the GHFRQVWUXFWLRQ RI ³NQRZOHGJH its reinterpretation as a mere subjective experience, as a ³ZKLP' RI dWUHQH consciousness. Starting with the most basic descriptions and until its higher forms, such as metaphysics and religion, knowledge is FRQVLGHUHG DV D SV\FKRORJLFDO contact with an objective reality, but by the karmic

Foreword

predispositions of its subject. All cognitive activity, all
FRJQLWLYH FDWHJRULHV reduced to XGLQJ
mere psychological issues, either individual or collective.

Even when they are collective, being shared by more
individuals controlled by similar karmic tendencies,
mental constructions cannot overcome their subjective
nature and lack of cognitive value. Truth is rather a
PDWWHU R³WenkaQd³ constructions than one of
³NQRZ something.

7KURXJKRXW WKH YROXPH WKH
and ³VLMx — Q³Y enc³nt³ered as names of the
LGHDOLVWLF VFKRRO RI 0DK — \ — QD Z
being attached to the choice of one name over the other.

July, 2019

Part I.

**Human Experience (*ātmanbhāva*)
within
Cosmic Experience (*ālayavijñāna*)**

Mind (*manas*) and the Afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) Individual Experience (*ātmabhāva*)¹

1. The Individual Self (*ātman*) Appropriated by the Mind (*manas*)

According to Vijñānavāda, the sphere of human experience does not represent a mere type of experience among many others, but a specific one which represents a “deviation” from the authentic reality. The erroneous self identity, the bonded, afflicted condition (*kliṣṭa*), characterized by suffering (*duḥkha*), infringes the undetermined (*nirvikalpaka*, *aparicchina*), free (*mukta*), quiet, calm (*śānta*, *nirvāṇa*), beatific (*sukha*) condition of the genuine reality (the ultimate reality - *dharmadhātu* and the causal flow - *pratītyasamutpāda* identified with the store-house consciousness - *ālayavijñāna*). Thus, the human sphere means more than a mere experience, it means alteration, it means getting out of what is real. Even if human existence is based in the ultimate reality and in the conditional flow manifested by it through a

¹ The whole chapter represents a slightly improved version of a paper originally published under the title “The Mind (*manas*) and the Illusory Projection of the Afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) Individual Self (*ātman*), in Vijñānavāda Buddhism”, in the journal *Danubius*, XXXI (2013): 327-373.

process which is difficult to understand for the human intellect, it breaks out from the sphere of reality and projects a sphere of alteration.

1.i. The mind (*manas*) and the individual self (*ātman*) appropriated by it

Given the overlapping between the sphere of individual experience and the sphere of altered experience, the first stage of alteration is the very act of constituting the human individuality (*ātman*). The human individual is constituted through the process of appropriation (*upādāna*) which takes place at the level of the store-house consciousness, i.e. through that process in which consciousness assumes for itself a certain determined sphere as self identity and, thus, it projects itself as an individual. The function of projecting the individual, when looked upon from the perspective of the universal level of the store-house consciousness, is described as the “appropriation” (*upādāna*) of an individual identity by the universal consciousness; when it is looked upon from the perspective of the individual himself, the function of projecting and maintaining individuality is described as “mind” (*manas*). The mind represents that function of consciousness which, appropriating a determined sphere of experience as its own identity, gives birth to the individual being¹. An individual being is nothing else but what the mind

¹ For a study on the concept of “mind” (*manas*), see Ganguly 1992, 43-44!

(*manas*) appropriates (*upādā*) as individual self (*ātman*).¹

Although the Vijñānavāda philosophers took great efforts to separate the universal experience of the store-house consciousness from the altered experience of the mind, they never fully succeeded in this. Even if it develops a totally specific type of experience, of attitude towards that sphere of the universal consciousness it appropriates, hence transforming it erroneously into its self identity, nevertheless, the mind is based in the store-house consciousness, it experiences it as the object (*ālambana*) of its appropriation. It is precisely in this sense that the texts of the school say that the mind is “established/grounded” (*āśrita*) in the store-house consciousness.

“.... the beings (*sattva*) are established in it as in their own self (*svātman*).”²

“The beings experience Ālaya (*ālayarata*), enjoy Ālaya (*ālayārāma*), rejoice in Ālaya (*ālayasaṃmudita*), assume Ālaya (*ālayābhirata*).”³

“«The beings experience Ālaya (*ālayarata*)» the meaning of this is the general adherence (*abhiniveśa*) to the store-house consciousness.”⁴

¹ For a discussion about the function of the mind in the process of projecting an individual self (*ātman*), see Waldron 2003, 120-121!

² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānaśāstra*, I.3, Lamotte 1973, 13-14.

³ *Āṅguttara-Nikāya*, II, apud. *Mahāyānaśāstra*, I.11, Lamotte 1973, 26.

“*ālayārāmā bhikkhave pajā ālayaratā ālayasa[m]uditā*”

Pāli text quoted in Vallee-Poussin 1928, 180.

⁴ Asvabhāva, *Upaṇibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānaśāstra*, I.11, Lamotte 1973, 26; Lamotte 1934-35, 210.

Mind and the Afflicted Individual Experience

“In that plan (*dhātu*), in that stage (*bhūmi*) where [karmic] maturization (*vipāka*) [takes place], where the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) [is actualized], in the same plan or stage, the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭa manas*) [is also born]. Since the activity (*vṛtti*) [of the mind] is closely associated (*pratibaddha*) to this [store-house consciousness], [the mind] functions being established (*āśritya*) in it.”¹

The object of the mind is the same as that of the store-house consciousness, except that the mind supplements the neutral nature of the objects experienced by the store-house consciousness with the erroneous, afflicted feeling of self identity. The object experienced by the mind is no longer a mere experience, as it was at the level of the store-house consciousness, but it becomes the own identity of the experiencing subject. The mind selects certain parts of the universal experience and makes them its own, appropriating them, transforming them into the personal identity of the experiencing consciousness².

¹ “*athavā yasmin dhātau bhūmau vālayavijñānaṃ vipākastadapi kliṣṭaṃ manastaddhātukaṃ tadbhūmikaṃ ceti tatpratibaddhavṛttivāttadāśritya pravartate /*”

Sthiramati, *Trīṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.5bcd, Chatterjee 1980, 51.

² For the store-house consciousness as an object upon which the mind focuses, see Lai 1977, 70!

Kennedy 1902, 390-393 discusses the manner in which the theme of the “non-personal” nature of the appropriated individual self appears in Buddhism and Christian gnosis, especially in Basilides. In both schools of thought, personality is something that does not belong naturally to that person who, by an unfortunate accident, comes to identify himself with it. It is precisely this “foreign” nature of personality that makes successive reincarnation in human bodies, in animals or even in plants possible.

Mind and the Afflicted Individual Experience

“..... Being established (*āśritya*) in it and having it as its object (*ālambana*), that consciousness (*vijñāna*) whose name (*nāman*) is «mind» (*manas*) and whose nature (*ātmaka*) consists in mentation (*manana*) evolves (*pravṛt*).”¹

“«Having this [store-house consciousness] as object (*ālambana*)» – this is said. Having the store-house consciousness itself as an object, because of the association (*saṃprayoga*) with the view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) and with others, the object of the store-house consciousness [is considered] as «I» (*aham*) or as «mine» (*mama*).”²

“The store-house consciousness represents the object (*nimitta*) of the view of the self (*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*), of grasping the self (*ātmagrāha*), which are characteristic to the afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) mind.”³

The object appropriated by the mind (*manas*) is constituted both by the actual factors manifested by the store-house consciousness and by the seeds (*bīja*), by the potentialities that subsist latently in the store-house consciousness. Although in later texts one may accidentally come across passages suggesting that only the actual factors constitute the object appropriated by the mind, the contexts which discuss the experience of appropriation (*upādāna*) – which is nothing else but the experience of the mind under a different name (when looked upon from the perspective of the store-house

¹ “.....*tadāśritya pravartate tadālambanaṃ mano nāma vijñānaṃ*”
Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 5, Anacker 1998, 422.

² “*tadālambanamiti / ālayavijñānālambanameva satkāyadr̥ṣṭyādibhiḥ saṃprayogādahaṃ mametyālayavijñānālambanatvāt /*”
Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.5bcd, Chatterjee 1980, 51.

³ Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, ad.
Mahāyānasamgraha, I.59, Lamotte 1973, 81-82.

consciousness) – state explicitly that both the factors and the seeds represent the objects of the appropriation.

“Of the seed and maturation parts of Ālaya-Vijñāna, it is the latter which is its objective support (*ālambana*).”¹

“Again, the equivalents (*paryāya*) of the seeds are the appropriation (*upādāna*), the basis of the view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭyadhiṣṭhāna*), the basis of considering the personal existence (*asmimānādhiṣṭhāna*). As such, the equivalents (*paryāya*), the divisions (*bhāgīya*) [of the seeds] should be known.”²

A person consists not only of a hump of factors, of a psycho-corporal complex, but equally of certain tendencies, certain potentialities, which are nothing else but the seeds (*bīja*) appropriated by the mind. As Sthiramati explains, the actual factors (*dharma*), when becoming the object of the mind, turn into the “self”, into the “own individuality” (*ātman*), while the seeds (*bīja*) turn into the attributes of the self (*ātmīya*), into the individual potentialities.

“Sthiramati thinks that mind (*manas*) has as its object both the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) in itself and its seeds (*bīja*); it turns the store-house consciousness in a self (*ātman*) and its seeds (*bīja*) into its possessions (*ātmīya*).”³

¹ Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 107.

² “*bījaparyāyāḥ punar upādānaṃ satkāyadrṣṭyadhiṣṭhānaṃ asmimānādhiṣṭhānaṃ cety evaṃbhāgīyāḥ paryāyā veditavyāḥ*”

Yogācārabhūmi, 26,18f, in Schmithausen 1987, 332, note 391.

³ Huan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 251.

1.ii. The etymology of the term "*manas*"

Vijñānavāda elaborates a specific sense of the verb "*man*" which, in Sanskrit, has the general meaning of "to think"; in the texts of the school, the root "*man*" refers to whatever is related to the appropriating activity, to finding and accepting a determined identity. This explains the choice of the term "*manas*" to designate that instance of the consciousness which performs the appropriation. Generally speaking, in Sanskrit, the term "*manas*" has a very large semantic sphere, being able to designate any instance of psychic or mental nature.

The experience specific to mind is also designated by compounds of "*man*", such as "*manyānā*", "*manana*" or finite verbal forms such as "*manyate*", etc. Obviously, in this case too, the root "*man*" still has a meaning that is related to the act through which consciousness not only experiences something, but also appropriates the experienced object. The translation of these terms raises problems because, in order to remain consistent with the interpretation of "*man*", which appears in "*manas*", almost always translated by "mind", "mental", the only possible equivalents are "mentation", "minding". These English terms do not naturally suggest their specific meanings from Vijñānavāda, but, in order to maintain a certain consistency in the semantic equivalence of the root "*man*", they represent the only acceptable variants.

In general, the acts of appropriation, the specific acts of the mind, designated by "*manyānā*", "*manana*", etc. are considered as the aspect (*ākāra*) of the mind, its

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object (*ālambana*) being represented by the store-house consciousness. The conceptual pair “aspect” (*ākāra*) – “object” (*ālambana*) is taken by Vijñānavāda from Abhidharma and it designates, in case of the object, the object that the consciousness intends, upon which it is focused, and in case of the aspect, the manner in which this object reveals itself to consciousness.

“..... Being established (*āśritya*) in it and having it as its object (*ālambana*), that consciousness (*vijñāna*) whose name (*nāman*) is «mind» (*manas*) and whose nature (*ātmaka*) consists in mentation (*manana*) evolves (*pravṛt*).”¹

“..... by the mind (*manas*), mentalization (*manyate*) is done....”²

“There, the mind (*manas*) is the one whose aspect (*ākāra*) is the permanent (*nitya*) mentation (*manyānā*).”³

“The aspect of mentation (*manyānākāra*) [is considering] the object (*ālambana*) of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) as «[I] am that [object] itself», «I am [that]».”⁴

¹ “..... *tadāśritya pravartate tadālambanam mano nāma vijñānam*”
Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 5, Anacker 1998, 422.

² “... *.manasī manyate*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, verse 116, Nanjio 1956, 48.

³ “*tatra mano yannityam manyānākāram*”

Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāṅgabhāṣya*, ad. III.22, Anacker 1998, 445.

⁴ “*tad dhy asmīty aham ity (ātmety) ālayavijñānālambanamanyānākāram*”

Yogācārabhūmi, Tibetan version, Zi6a7f, in Schmithausen 1987, 444, note 945.

The reconstruction of the Sanskrit text belongs to Schmithausen.

1.iii. The determined and limited nature of the individual self (*ātman*) appropriated by the mind (*manas*)

The mind (*manas*) – as the consciousness responsible for the experience of the ego – and the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) are innovations of Vijñānavāda; on the other hand, the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and the sensorial consciousnesses can be met in the Abhidharma schools as well. The fact that the mind is included in the philosophical system of Buddhism at the same time with the store-house consciousness is not incidental, but the introduction of the concept of “*ālayavijñāna*” requested the introduction of the concept of “*manas*”.

The philosophical approach of Abhidharma was restricted to a phenomenology of the individual experience; the constitution of individuality posed no question because, for the authors of these schools, the individual represented an ultimate datum. The epistemic foundation of Abhidharma philosophy involved the ascertainment of the existence of the individual and of some of his experiences; the minute analysis of the Abhidharma philosophers started from here.

On the other hand, Vijñānavāda expands the perspective to the universal level of experience and, under these circumstances, the individual ceases to be an ultimate datum. Therefore, once the universal level of experience, represented by the store-house consciousness, is introduced, the introduction of the mind (*manas*), as the instance which accounts for the

individualization of a being at the level of the universal experience, becomes necessary.

The mind has a restrictive function; it does not appropriate the entire sphere of the universal experience, but only a determined, limited part of it.¹ This way, it alters the universality and the undetermined nature of experience, in its natural condition. Once it appropriates only a determined part of experience, only a limited self (*ātman*), its entire experience focuses on that self. Even when experience expands beyond the strict limits of the appropriated individuality, this expansion happens only to the extent where the universal level of experience affects the self. Thus, what does not interact with this self remains outside the experience of the individual. In a more common terminology, everything that a being experiences is mediated by his individuality, his body, his person. No being can experience objects situated outside the interaction field associated with his/her body, but only the existence of an interaction between an object and the being itself makes the experiencing of that particular object possible.

The universality of experience is regained only when, as a result of the mystical practice, the mind (*manas*) is reversed (*parāvṛtta*); once the mind ceases its activity, the subject reaches the state of “uniformity” (*samatā*), where no part of experience is privileged any longer, considered as having a special “personal” status.

¹ The mind as an alteration of the store-house consciousness in Chatterjee 1999, 102.

As this focus upon a determined sphere of experience ceases, the subject revolves into a state in which the entire manifestation is experienced uniformly (*samatājñāna*). At that moment, he rediscovers the undetermined universality.

“The difference between the non-reversed mind (*manas*) and the revolved mind is justified; error is limited, while knowledge is unlimited. The absence of the self (*nairātmya*) is universal, while the self (*ātman*) is not universal.”¹

“When not yet revolved (*parāvṛtta*), it carries its mentalization (*manyate*) only upon the constructed self (*ātman*); after being revolved, it carries its mentalization upon the condition devoid of self (*nairātmya*).”²

1.iv. Individual identity (*ātman*) as the ground of duality (*dvaya*)

The limited identity of the individual conveys a dual nature to his experience; the individual being identifies at the level of his experience both a part that constitutes his own identity and another part which is distinct from this. The condition of limited individual being, living within the flow of the universal experience, determines a dual structure of experience, divided between the subject and the object. The object, although experienced, is considered as distinct, as exterior to the self, to the nature of the aware subject. The identity of a “subject” leads to the discrimination of its correlate, the

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 253.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 254.

“object”; the discrimination of a self (*sva*), of an ego (*ātman*) leads to the discrimination of the “other” (*para*).

“When the self (*ātman*) exists, the notion (*saṃjñā*) of an «other» (*para*) [also appears].”¹

“Here, the discrimination (*vikalpa*) of the object of perception (*grāhya*) means the apparition (*pratibhāsa*), within the consciousness (*viññāna*), of objects (*artha*) and beings (*sattva*). The discrimination of the subject of perception (*grāhaka*) means the apparition of the self (*ātman*) and of [its] ideations (*viññapti*).”²

“The comprehension (*grāha*) of the subject (*grāhaka*) means the certainty (*niścaya*) regarding the idea (*grhyata*) that consciousness (*viññāna*) is the one which perceives (*grh*), the one which knows (*viññā*).”³

“The comprehension (*grāha*) of the object (*grāhya*) means the superimposition of the existence of the object (*grāhyamasti*) as the superimposition (*adhyāsita*) of an own series (*svasantāna*) [of factors] existing separately (*prthag*) from the consciousness (*viññāna*).”⁴

This duality alters the universality of reality and illusively projects two conditions, the subject (*grāhaka*) and the object (*grāhya*), both imagined as having their own substantiality.

¹ “*ātmani sati parasamjñā*”

Maitreya-nātha, *Bhavasamkrāntiṭīkā*, quoting from *Ratnāvalī*, but without explicitly mentioning it, Śāstri 1938, 35.

² “*tatra grāhyavikalpo 'rthasattvapratibhāsaṃ viññānam / grāhakavikalpa ātmaviññaptipratibhāsaṃ* /”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāga bhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.1 (I.2), Pandeya 1999, 12.

³ “*tatra viññānena pratīyate viññāyate grhyata iti yo 'yam niścayaḥ sa grāhakagrāhaḥ* /”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.19, Chatterjee 1980, 107.

⁴ “*tatra viññānātpṛthageva svasantānādhyāsitaṃ grāhyamastītyadhyavasāyo grāhyagrāhaḥ* /”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.19, Chatterjee 1980, 107.

“Duality means considering the subject and the object as substances.”¹

Later on, this way of structuring the experience will play a decisive role in producing the suffering, due to the fact that the dynamic nature of manifestation will always place the self (*ātman*) under the threat of the “other” (*para*) means². The duality self-other (*sva-para*), subject-object (*grāhaka-grāhya*), internal-external (*adhyātmika-bāhya*), positions the individual in front of what is distinct from himself and which may represent a threat to his individual condition.

This newly assumed condition of the consciousness, the condition of a limited individual subject, is the origin of all the subsequent forms of personal experience and of the bondage as well.

“Established in this [duality] other series [of factors are also born]; hence [takes place] the connexion between cause and effect (*hetuphalānvita*), the apparition (*pratibhāsa*) of the non-existent (*abhāva*). Due to the apparition of these, the absolute (*dharmatā*) doesn’t show (*ākhyatā*) anymore.”³

Plurality, multiplicity result from this condition which involves duality; i.e. from the condition of subject assumed by the consciousness. This is more than a mere relation of succession between duality and multiplicity; the subject-object duality represents rather a condition for the appearance of multiplicity (*nānātva*). The discrimination of multiplicity happens only when the

¹ Dignāga, *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, Yamaguchi 1929, 50.

² According to Chatterjee 1999, 102, alterity, otherness (*paratva*) is the most fundamental type of discrimination, the basis of all other categories.

³ Asaṅga, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, 63, Levinsion 2001, 76.

consciousness erroneously assumes a determined individual condition, a limited condition that brings it in front of what is “other” than it.

1.v. The subject-object (*grāhaka-grāhya*) duality

Most experiences of a subject reflect his dual condition. There is also an objective aspect, besides its subjective ones, in almost any manifestation. Only a few of the experiences of a subject are exclusively related to him and, most often, an objective counterpart is also involved.

“In fact, whenever there is the conception «an object apprehended», a duality is implied: e.g., «visible» implies visual consciousness as well.”¹

“Here, the object of perception (*grāhya*) means form (*rūpa*) and so on. The subject of perception (*grāhaka*) means the visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna*) and so on.”²

The ideations of the human consciousness have the tendency of distinguishing two components as their parts: (1) the subjective one, which consists of the content of perception, of a representation (*darśana*) and (2) the objective one, which consists of an “object” (*nimitta*) having the characteristics displayed by the representation. However, the discrimination of these two components is done in an illusory manner, they being, to an equal extent, “just ideation” (*viññaptimātra*).

¹ *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*vṛtti, Potter 1999, 588.

² “*tatra grāhya rūpādi / grāhakaṃ cakṣurvijñānādi /*”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāga*bhāṣyaṭīkā, ad. I.1 (I.2), Pandeya 1999, 12.

“How is the «only ideation» (*viññaptimātra*) character of the ideations of a consciousness established?

.....

2) From the point of view of duality (*dvaya*), by the fact that these ideations involve an aspect of object (*sanimitta*) and an aspect of representation (*sadarśana*).”¹

Consequently, the human mind tends to analyse the visual ideations (*cakṣurvijñapti*) both from an objective perspective (*nimitta*) – identifying forms and anything else that might constitute the object of the visual perception – and from a subjective, representational perspective (*darśana*), as the ideations themselves. Although only the representational component (*darśana*) displays in an explicit way its status of ideation, the objective component is also of an ideatic nature, but presents itself as something else and, in this sense, it represents an error.

“....2) Since [the ideations] comprise both a representation and an object, they are double. Hence, the visual or other type of ideations (*cakṣurādivijñapti*) have, as their object aspect (*nimitta*), the ideations of form and so on (*rūpādivijñapti*), and, as representation aspect (*darśana*), the ideations starting with those of the visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñānavijñapti*) and until those of tactile consciousness (*kāyavijñānavijñapti*).”²

The category of the “object”, of the “objects” that a certain subject interacts with, includes other subjects as well; due to this, Vijñānavāda does not constitute a type of solipsism. In Vijñānavāda, the entire manifestation is reduced to consciousness but this consciousness is not an

¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II. 11, Lamotte 1973, 99.

² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II. 11, Lamotte 1973, 100.

individual consciousness; it is a consciousness which transcends the individual. It is precisely due to this thing, that trans-individual manifestations are possible, that something distinct from the individual may exist, something that the individual only gets in contact with.

Therefore, for each particular subject, the category of the “object” can contain other subjects as well, recognised as “subjects” due to the similarity between the manners in which their bodies appear and the manner in which the body of the subject that perceives them appears.

“Here, the notion (*vikalpa*) of «object of perception» (*grāhya*) means the apparition (*pratibhāsa*), within consciousness (*vijñāna*), of objects (*artha*) and beings (*sattva*).”¹

“Here, [in case of the object of perception], the apparition of the objects (*arthapratibhāsa*) represents whatever manifests (*pratibhā*) as being (*bhāva*) form (*rūpa*) and so on. The apparition of beings (*sattvapratibhāsa*) means [whatever manifests] as being the five sense organs (*pañcendriya*), both in case of one’s own personal series (*santāna*) and in case of others’.”²

Due to the limited nature of the individual consciousness, there are manifestations outside of it even if, by virtue of the absolute idealism of the Vijñānavāda

¹ “*tatra grāhyavikalpo ‘rthasattvapratibhāsaṃ vijñānam’*”
Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.1 (I.2), Pandeya 1999, 12.

² “*tatrā ‘rthapratibhāsaṃ yad rūpādibhāvena pratibhāsate / sattvapratibhāsaṃ yat pañcendriyatvena svaparasantānayoḥ /’*”
Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, ad. I.3, Anacker 1998, 425.

school, these, on their turn, are also of an ideatic nature (but being ideations of the universal consciousness).

The fact that the subject participates in a universe characterized by alterity and that the self is constantly interacting with the non-self, with what is different from it, determines the vulnerability of his nature and all the afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) experiences resulting from this.¹

2. Mind as a Subconscious Structure

2.i. The mind as an unconscious substratum of the conscious individual being

As the mind represents the very condition through which the person is projected, the personal experience automatically includes the activity of the mind. The mind is intrinsic to the person and none of the modifications that appear at the level of the individual consciousness affects the mind at all.²

Once constituted as an individual being, a person has certain intrinsic essential determinations, as a result of his being a “person”, and other determinations which have only a contingent, non-essential character. The conscious experience of a being is produced at the level of the mental consciousness and of the operational

¹ On the importance of annihilating the duality during the soteriological practice, see Kochumuttom 1999, 11-14!

² Waldron 2003, 123 explains the individual character of everything that individual experience means precisely by the fact that these experiences presuppose the continuous and subliminal experience of the mind.

consciousnesses; this experience has, in any of its forms, a contingent, non-essential character. There is a certain freedom any being has in relation with what he experiences and this is due precisely to the fact that the experiences of the mental consciousness and those of the operational consciousnesses do not flow directly from the intrinsic nature of that being. Everything that is referred to as “awareness” in common speaking, as experience upon which the individual has a certain control, owns this status precisely to its non-essential nature.

On the other hand, the activity of the mind involves the very essence of beings; it is through this activity that a being is projected as an individual and thus it is intrinsically present in any experience of an individual being. Being not a product of the free, conscious activity of the being, it is unconscious or, better said, subconscious.¹ The same status is enjoyed by the store-house consciousness which, being the substratum of the universal experience, is intrinsically present in any experience of a being.

“The five [sense]-consciousnesses have a gross and unstable aspect²; they depend on conditions which are often missing. Therefore, they don’t produce all the times, most of the time being absent.

The mental consciousness also has a gross and unstable aspect; but generally, the conditions on which it

¹ The mind (*manas*) as an unconscious substratum at Chatterjee 1999, 103.

² “Gross” means accessible to the individual awareness, while “subtle” means not accessible to it.

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depends are present. Nevertheless, at times, due to some contrary conditions, it does not produce.

The seventh and the eighth consciousnesses (*viññāna*) have a stable aspect; they depend on conditions which are always present and there is no contrary condition preventing their production.”¹

“In case of all beings, two consciousnesses (*viññāna*) are always simultaneous (*sahavartin*): the store-house consciousness (*ālayaviññāna*) and the mind (*manas*).”²

Therefore, the attachment to the self (*ātmasneha*) is inborn (*sahaja*), does not depend on the conscious activity of the mental consciousness, it exists through itself (*svarasena*) in case of any being. It is produced by the characteristic seeds (*bīja*) which always exist within the store-house consciousness. Of course, this inborn attachment could not have originated in the individual being itself but only in something that ontologically precedes it, since the appearance of the attachment to the self represents the very constitutive act of an individual being.

“The innate view of the self (*sahajātmadr̥ṣṭi*) is born as a result of perceiving compact objects (*piṇḍagrāha*), of its own seeds (*svabīja*) and of the tendencies towards it (*tadanuśaya*).”³

“The comprehension of the self (*ātmagrāha*) is of two types: innate (*sahaja*) and conceived (*vikalpita*).

The first one is produced as a result of some intrinsic causes (*abhyantarāhetuśāit*), of [its] seeds (*bīja*), of the

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 399.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 411.

³ “*tatra sahajātmadr̥ṣṭi[h] piṇḍagrāhāt svabījāc ca tadanuśayāj jāyate* /”

Asaṅga, Commentary on *Paramārtha-gāthā* I.31, Schmithausen 1987, 236.

beginningless (*anādikālika*) impregnations of the comprehension of the self (*ātmagrāhavāsanā*), which are impregnations of the error (*vitathavāsanā*). [This] is always to be found in case of an individual, without depending on a false teaching (*mithyādeśanā*) or on a false concept (*mithyāvikalpa*). It exists by itself (*svarasena*). That's why it is labeled «innate» (*sahaja*).”¹

2.ii. The mind and the store-house consciousness as intrinsic conditions of any individual being

The mind delineates the individual being at the universal level of the store-house consciousness in a manner inaccessible to the individual consciousness which will come into existence only subsequent to the projecting act of the mind. The operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), i.e. the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and the five sensorial consciousnesses, will come into existence only at the level of the individual basis (*āśraya*) projected through the activity of the mind.

“With the appropriating consciousness as a basis, six other types of consciousness evolve – the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustative, tactile and mental consciousnesses.”²

“What is mind (*manas*)? It is that whose nature (*ātmaka*) is always (*nityakāla*) the mentation (*manyānā*), who has as an object (*ālambana*) the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), that consciousness (*vijñāna*) which is

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 16.

² *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, V.5, Lamotte 1935, 183.

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the immediate antecedent [condition] (*samanantaraniruddha*) of the six consciousnesses ...”¹

Thus, the appearance of the six operational consciousnesses is preceded by two other levels of experience: the level of the store-house consciousness, through which the Universe, as a whole, is projected, and the level of the mind, through which the individual sphere of experience is delimited.

“Being established (*samāśritya*) in the store-house (*ālaya*) [consciousness], mind (*manas*) evolves (*saṃpravṛt*). Being established in the consciousness (*citta*)² and in the mind, the [operational] consciousnesses (*viññāna*) evolve.”³

To put it differently, as long as a being exists, in his case, the store-house consciousness and the mind form continuous, uninterrupted series, inaccessible to the individual awareness characterized by contingent activities, instability and, to a certain extent, by freedom.⁴

“The seventh and the eighth consciousnesses (*viññāna*) don’t have simultaneous supports (*sahabhū-āśraya*)

¹ “*manañ katamat / yan nityakālaṃ manyanātmakam ālayaviññānāmbanam yac ca saṇṇaṃ viññānānāṃ samanantaraniruddhaṃ viññānam /*”

Asaṅga, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 12,2ff, in Schmithausen 1987, 443, vol.II, note 943.

² In *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, the term “*citta*”, whose literal meaning is of “consciousness”, is used as a synonym for the “store-house consciousness” (*ālayaviññāna*).

³ “*ālayaṃ hi samāśritya mano vai saṃpravartate / cittaṃ manaś ca saṃśritya viññānaṃ saṃpravartate //*”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, *Sagāthakam*, 269, Nanjio 1956, 300.

⁴ Waldron 2003, 121 points to the continuous nature of the experience of the mind, to the unconscious nature of the act of permanent appropriation of an individual self performed by the mind.

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because, as a result of their big force, they evolve as a continuous series.”¹

“The seventh and the eighth consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) constitute series by themselves.”²

2.iii. The inborn (*sahaja*) attachment to self and the conceptually discriminated (*vikalpita*) attachment

The mind (*manas*) is the one that, in a non-deliberate, non-conceptual manner, appropriates the person, the individual self; nevertheless, at its level, the experience of the ego is still conceptually undetermined, irrational, unconscious (it is not accessible to the regular states of conscience of a human being), instinctual, subliminal. The attachment to ego, as it is experimented at the level of the mind, manifests as irrational instincts or natural urges. Only at the level of the mental consciousness, the ego, the individual self, is rationally, conceptually depicted, acquiring a clearly determined conceptual identity. Here, the individual self takes the shape of determined conceptual construction, becomes an object having its own categorically determined nature, similar to all the other objects discriminated by the mental consciousness.

The inborn attachment to the self, produced by the mind, can be moulded into a conceptual (*vikalpa*), discursive (*deśanā*) shape through the activity of the mental consciousness. Thus, the experience of the ego

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 232.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 242.

can take a conscious and conceptual shape (*vikalpita*).¹ In case of a being, the existence of the attachment to ego, in its conceptual form, is contingent as it depends on conditions not pertaining to the very essence of a person.

“The second [type of the view of self, namely the conceived one] is not produced as a result of some intrinsic causes; it also depends on some external conditions. Hence, it is not to be always found in case of a person. It is produced due to some false teachings or due to a false concept (*vikalpa*). Being this produced, it is labeled as «of a conceived type» (*vikalpita*).

This is characteristic exclusively to the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).”²

The conceptual type of the perception of the self, consisting in certain discursive, conceptual contents, may be easily eliminated through approaches of cognitive nature. It is enough to eliminate those conditions that favour the production of such a piece of knowledge and to replace them with pieces of knowledge that oppose the error of the self. The conceptual attachment to self can be eliminated through adequate learning; as a result, this form of attachment is labeled as “to be eliminated by knowledge” (*darśanaheya*).

The inborn attachment to self does not depend on conditions pertaining to the aware individual experience and, due to this fact, it cannot be eliminated by means of discursive knowledge. However, Buddhism has never

¹ For a study of the two types of attachment to self, the inborn one (*sahaja*) and the reflection-type one (*vikalpita*), see Waldron 2003, 118!

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 16.

considered bondage as implacable and, as a matter of fact, Buddhism owns its existence as a religion precisely to the existence of a possibility to get out of bondage. The way to eliminate the inborn attachment, the inborn afflictions (*sahaja kleśa*), is the meditation (*bhāvanā*), the mystical practice. The mystical exercises succeed in going beyond the conscious level of the individual being and thus they can operate changes, can annihilate even instances not accessible to the mental consciousness, such as the mind (*manas*). Therefore, the Buddhist soteriology labels the inborn attachment as “to be eliminated through meditation” (*bhāvanāheya*).¹

“The conceived (*vikalpita*) afflictions are to be eliminated through knowledge (*darśanaheya*), since they are gross and easy to discard.

The innate (*sahaja*) afflictions are to be eliminated through meditation (*bhāvanāheya*), since they are subtle and difficult to discard.”²

“The innate (*sahaja*) view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*) is to be eliminated by meditation (*bhāvanā*).....”³

The fact that liberation from bondage also involves other approaches than cultivating a specific type of discursive knowledge has significant

¹ A discussion on what is “to be eliminated by knowledge” (*darśanaheya*) and what is “to be eliminated through meditation” (*bhāvanāheya*) in Chaudhury 1983, 90-91. For the inborn attachment to self and for the conceptually discriminated one, as well as for the means through which these can be annihilated, see Ganguly 1992, 34!

² Huan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 359.

³ “*sahajā satkāyadrṣṭiḥ bhāvanāprahātavyā.....*”

Stthiramati, *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya*, 62,3ff, Schmithausen 1987, 440.

philosophical consequences as far as the status of human knowledge is concerned. First of all, since liberation cannot be reduced to a practice that is strictly of a cognitive nature, this justifies the necessity of mystical exercises, of ascetic exercises, as a part of the soteriological practice.¹ It is not only the conscious part of the human being that has to be liberated, disciplined, but also the one not accessible to common awareness. Secondly, as the inborn forms of the attachment to self are intrinsic in any conscious condition, this attachment is intrinsic in any form of conceptual knowledge as well. The most that conceptual knowledge can do, in its most “correct” forms, is to avoid the conceptual error of conceiving the self but it cannot elude the inborn experience of the ego. In all its forms, conceptual knowledge is produced within a being affected by error and, therefore, conceptual knowledge implacably emerges from a determined, limited, particular perspective. It cannot elude the limitations and the determinations characteristic to individuality.

¹ For a detailed study on the meditative practices in Buddhism, see Matics 1970, 68-79; Dayal 1999, 221-236; Conze 1975, 96-101; Conze 1956, 113-118!

3. The Ontological Error Involved by the Individual Self

3.i. The superimposition of the experience of individual identity (*ātman*) on the experience of the store-house consciousness and the new illusory ontologic status ascribed to it

The experience of the mind is not exactly a new type of manifestation, but rather it means considering the experience of the store-house consciousness, of the factors (*dharma*) composing the series of the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), in a specific erroneous manner. The factual content of the experience of the mind is not distinct from that of the store-house consciousness; the mind does not supplement the universal experience with a new type of factors. The object of the mind is constituted by the factors manifested by the store-house consciousness, which it considers erroneously as its own self. The novelty brought by the mind is not a new type of factors but rather a perception of the factors manifested by the storehouse consciousness in an erroneous manner. The object of the mind is included in the universal sphere of the store-house consciousness but the mind ascribes to it a new erroneous ontological status. The error is of an ontological nature; it mainly consists in substituting the real ontological status of certain experiences with a new erroneous status. At the level of the store-house

consciousness, their condition was that of phenomenon, of dependant (*pratyaya*, *paratantra*), transitory (*anitya*), non-substantial, even illusory (*māyāvat*) entities. The mind however confers them a new condition, that of self (*ātman*), of substantiality, of persistent (*nitya*) entity, of entities having an own-nature (*svabhāva*). Once the experiencing subject assumes certain phenomena as its own nature, they stop being only phenomena, only experience, and start sharing the reality of the subject, its substantiality.

The mind superimposes error upon the experience of the store-house consciousness and confers it a new illusory status.¹ Therefore, there are two components that could be found within the experience of personality, of individuality, of the individual self which the mind is responsible of: the factors manifested by the store-house consciousness, which have a relative, dependant existence (*paratantra*), and their absolutely erroneous interpretation as the own identity of the subject. According to the old cosmologies from Abhidharma, Vijñānavāda identifies sometimes the first component with the five aggregates (*skandha*) which, according to early Buddhism, represented the ultimate elements of any analysis of experience. This component has a relative, conditioned existence, but different from

¹ For a detailed analysis of the function of alteration ascribed to the mind (*manas*), according to Chinese sources, see Liu 1985, 358-359! For the mind as an instance characterised by ignorance, by ontological illusion, by error, by non-existence, see Liu 1985, 359-360!

the absolute non-existence; in fact, it shares the general status of the manifestations of the store-house consciousness.

The second component involved in the experience of personality is the identification with this component; this second aspect represents the specific contribution of the mind. Once an experience is considered to be the self identity of the experiencing subject, its ontological status becomes one of “substance”. After it becomes the own identity of the experiencing subject, the appropriated person takes over the substantiality, the autonomy, the persistence that any subject experiences regarding his condition. This identification with a certain set of factors constitutes pure error (*viparyāsa*, *mithyā*), there being nothing real about it. Vijñānavāda, embracing a previous tradition, generally designates this erroneous identification through the terms “*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*” (“the perception of the reality of the body”), “*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*” (“the perception of the self”) etc.

“These five internal aggregates (*skandha*) are born due to conditions (*pratyaya*) and, as such, they exist, even if [only] as something illusory (*māyāvat*). But the self (*ātman*), which is nothing else but a erroneous interpretation of the aggregates, represents absolute non-existence.”¹

“Perceiving (*darśana*) a self (*ātman*) in the appropriated aggregates (*upādānaskandha*) means «the view

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928 20.

of the self» (*ātma-drṣṭi*), «the view of the reality of the body» (*satkāyadrṣṭi*).¹

“Here, the view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*) means perceiving (*darśana*) a self (*ātman*) or the properties of a self (*ātmīya*) within the five appropriated aggregates (*upādānaskandha*).²

“What are the concepts (*vikalpa*) of «I» (*aham*) or «mine» (*mama*)? They are the unreal (*vitatha*) concepts [through which] the view of the self (*svaṃ drṣṭi*) is established in case of an object (*vastu*) that is born from conditions (*pratītyotpadyate*).³

Buddhism, especially in its early versions, had the tendency of considering the transitory (*anitya*), momentary (*kṣaṇika*) character as the specific mark of the phenomenal, of the relative; in opposition to this, there stands the persistent, permanent (*nitya*) character as a mark of the ultimate reality, of the absolute, of the substantial. At times, multiplicity (*aneka*, *nānātva*) and unity (*eka*) have also played this role of indicators of the relative, respectively of the absolute. In the absence of other terms for conveying the ideas of “necessary existence” and of “contingent, relative existence”, of “substantial” and “phenomenal”, Buddhist texts have often used the “transitory” (*anitya*) – “persistent” (*nitya*)

¹ “*upādānaskandheṣvātmēti darśanamātmadrṣṭiḥ satkāyadrṣṭir.....*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.6cd, Chatterjee 1980, 54.

² “*tatra satkāyadrṣṭiriyatpañcasūpādānaskandheṣvātmātmīyadarśanam /*”
Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.11ad, Chatterjee 1980, 76.

³ “*ahamiti mama ca vikalpaḥ katamaḥ / svaṃ drṣṭisthānīyaṃ vastu pratītyotpadyate vitatho vikalpaḥ /*”
Bodhisattvabhūmi, Tattvārthapaṭaḥ, part IV, Willis 2003, 169.

pair in order to express the phenomenal – absolute opposition.

This terminology is also used in Vijñānavāda; accordingly, the ontological aspects of the activity of the mind (*manas*) can be described as the illusory superimposing of the idea of persistence (*nitya*) upon certain experiences whose characteristic is precisely lack of persistence (*anitya*), momentariness (*kṣaṇika*), hence projecting the “person” (*pudgala*), the “individual self” (*ātman*). The transitory factors, when wrongly identified as the subject’s own nature, become a “person” (*pudgala*), a “self” (*ātman*) and, in doing so, they are conferred, in an erroneous manner, the characteristic of permanence, of substantiality.

“The person (*pudgala*) is not different (*vyatirikta*) from form (*rūpa*) and from the others, since it doesn’t manifest (*apratibhāsa*) [separately from them]. The idea (*pratyaya*) of «I» (*aham*) is born in regard to form and the others. Moreover, the person is not of the nature (*svabhāva*) of the aggregates (*skandha*), of form and so on, since their nature, of the form and so on, is transient (*anitya*) and multiple (*aneka*), while [the nature] of a person is imagined (*upakalpita*) in a different way, as a permanent (*nitya*) and unitary (*eka*) nature (*rūpa*).”¹

¹ “*na tāvad rūpādīvyatiriktaḥ pudgalo 'sti tasyā pratibhāsanāt rūpādiṣvevāhamiti pratyayotpattiśca / na cāpi rūpādiskandhasvabhāvaḥ pudgalaḥ / teṣāṃ rūpādīnāmanityānekasvabhāvatvāt / pudgalasya ca nityaikarūpeṇa parairupakalpitatvāt /*”

Kamalaśīla, *Bhāvanākrama III*, Gyaltsen 1985, 256.

3.ii. The ontological error (*viparyāsa*) and the illusory individual (*ātman*)

Therefore, the function of mind consists mainly in changing the ontological status of the factors representing its object. The mind brings no additional factual content to these factors, but only substitutes their true ontological status, that of dependant, phenomenal, relative, illusory entities, with an erroneous status which involves their own substantiality and own nature. To this extent, the mind does not produce a new type of manifestation but rather gives birth to a certain error (*viparyāsa*), casts ignorance (*avidyā*) upon the ontological condition of the already existing experiences. Once the mind has interfered, the experience does not represent a mere manifestation anymore, a mere apparition, but is veiled by error, by ignorance. Based on this error, later on, the bondage will appear.

“It must be said about person (*pudgala*) that it exists only as a designation (*prajñapti*) and not substantially (*dravyataḥ*), since it cannot be found [as a substance], since it represents error (*viparyāsa*), since it represents affliction (*saṃkleśa*), since it is the cause of affliction (*kliṣṭahetu*).”¹

Therefore, from an ontological point of view, the mind is responsible for the error (*viparyāsa*) of ascribing substantiality, which characterizes the ultimate subject, to certain components of experience. An important aspect of this process is the appearance of ignorance (*ajñāna*, *avidyā*). “Ignorance” refers to not knowing

¹ “*prajñaptiyastitayā vācyaḥ pudgalo dravyato na tu /
nopalambhādviparyāsāt saṃkleśāt kliṣṭahetutaḥ //*”
Aśaṅga, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, XVIII.92, Limaye 2000, 441.

what is truly real, to the erroneous identification of reality, to finding it in the illusory sphere of individuality.

When a certain series of factors is ascribed the status of “individual self” (*ātman*), of “person” (*pudgala*), the entity thus created is nothing else but an ontological fiction. The consciousness affected by the error (*viparyāsa*) of the individual self projects itself within a sphere of ontological illusion, a sphere wrongly identified as reality.¹ What is truly real, i.e. the ultimate reality (*dharmadhātu*) and the conditional flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*) of an ideatic nature, gets out of comprehension when the person, the individual self are considered as real and the whole experience starts to be structured according to the tendencies induced by the individual identity.

Therefore, there is a double aspect involved in the ontological error of the individual self (*ātman*), of the person (*pudgala*). There is a positive aspect, through which an absolutely fictitious entity is projected as real, and a negative aspect, which consists of hiding what is real.

Vijñānavāda texts associate the activity of the mind (*manas*), the appropriation, with the attribute “obstructed” (*nivṛta*). Literally “*nivṛta*” means “covered”, “veiled”, and the idea here is precisely this obstruction, this occultation of the authentic reality performed by the mind.

¹ See Thurman 1996, 190-191!

3.iii. The ontological fiction of the individual self (*ātman*)

The ontological fiction of the individual self (*ātman*), of the person (*pudgala*), of the individual being (*sattva*), looks like a determined, limited and unitary entity which represents the basis, the foundation (*āśraya*) of an entire set of experiences. This unitary and persistent substratum (*adhiṣṭhāna*) is the place where all “inner”, “individual” experiences (*ādhyātmika*) allegedly happen, i.e. all those transformations that the consciousness affected by ignorance experiences as related to its very nature. The individual self comes to life by superimposing the idea of “unity” (*eka*), of “persistence” (*nitya*), of “substantiality”, of “foundation” (*āśraya*), upon something that is only a series (*santāna*) of dispersed, momentary, factors (*dharma*) with no substance. This self presents itself as that unitary and persistent substance which constitutes the foundation, the substratum of knowledge (*jñātr*, *vedaka*), of action (*kartr*, *kāraka*), of experience (*bhoktr*), of the biological feeding processes (*poṣa*), of life (*jīva*) and so forth. The person is imagined as the “possessor”, the “master” (*svāmin*) of such processes. Therefore, the idea of “person” involves substantiality, temporal persistence, continuity.

“The self (*ātman*) is perceived (*darśana*) as a unique causal agent (*ekaheturva*), as the subject of experience (*bhoktr*), as the subject of action (*kartr*), as the controller (*vaśa*), as the active one (*varṭana*), as the one which determines (*ādhipatya*), as a persistent (*nitya*) entity (*artha*); it is also [perceived] as the substratum (*āśraya*) of affliction

(*kleśa*) and of purification (*śuddha*), as the one practicing the ascesis (*yogin*), as the not liberated one (*amukta*) or the liberated one (*mukta*)."¹

“The three kinds of grasping after self are grasping for one central entity, grasping for an «enjoyer», and grasping for a «doer».”²

3.iv. The human being as a series (*santāna*) of momentary (*kṣaṇika*) factors (*dharma*)

Mahāyāna considers this stable, persistent, autonomous “person” as a pure ontological fiction.³ What is truly real within the person is a series (*santāna*) of momentary factors (*dharma*), that only an erroneous act of the mind (*manas*) gathers together in an illusory unitary entity. The inner, personal (*ādhyātmika*) spheres acquire this specific “personal” status, this unity, only in an illusory manner, they being as isolated and without persistence as any other type of experience.

“Here, there are no beings (*satva*), no selves (*ātman*), but only factors along with their causes (*sahetuka dharma*).”⁴

“Hence, for the ultimate reality (*paramārtha*), there is no owner (*svāmin*), no subject of action (*kāraka*), no subject

¹ “*ekahetutvabhoktrtvakartrtvavaśavartane /
ādhipatyārthanityatve kleśaśuddhāśraye 'pi ca //
yogitvāmuktamuktatve hyātmadarśanameṣu hi '*”

Asaṅga, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, III.15-16a, Anacker 1998, 442.

² Vasubandhu, *Pañcaskandhakaprakaraṇa*, 5, Anacker 1998, 74.

³ Waldron 2003, 190 (note 4) also brings as an argument in favour of the Buddhist conception according to which the individual self is nothing but an illusion the conceptions of some contemporary researchers in the field of cognitive sciences.

⁴ “*nāstīha satva ātmā vā dharmāstveti sahetukāḥ*”

Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, ad.8, quoting *Majjhima-Nikāya*, I.138, Anacker 1998, 415.

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of knowledge (*vedaka*), but only causes and effects (*hetuphalamātra*).”¹

“The certain knowledge (*adhimuktijñāna*) is knowing that in case of the factors (*dharma*), there is no self (*nairātmya*), no beings (*niḥsatva*), no living creatures (*nirjīva*), no living organisms (*niṣpoṣa*), no persons (*niṣpudgala*), but only causes and conditions (*hetupratyaya*).”²

The activities performed by the body or by the senses are in fact only successions, characterized by a certain regularity, of some momentary and dispersed factors. For instance, the moving of an object with the hand is nothing but the succession of a certain combination of factors (the object in a certain location) after another combination of factors (the hand plus the mental factor of the intention to modify the position of the object). It can not be the case, here, of a real movement of the object by hand as a consequence of a certain intention because the object exists only for a single moment, the moment when it is in the initial location. The object situated in a new location is a new object whose appearance was determined by some specific previous factors, but, nevertheless, it is a new and different object, not the old one that has undergone a movement.

¹ “*evaṃ paramāṛthataḥ svāmīny asati kārake vedake vā hetuphalamātre ca sati.....*”

Asaṅga, Commentary at *Paramāṛtha-gāthā*, I, in Schmithausen 1987, 234, vol.1, appendix II.

² “*yad idam hetupratyayajñānaḥ nairātmyeniḥsatvaṃnirjīvaṃniṣpoṣaṇiṣpudgaleṣu dharmeṣv adhimuktijñānam /*”

Kāśyapaparivarta, 97, von Stael-Holstein 1926, 142.

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“..... though it is true that compounded events are without progression to another locus, because they are destroyed by their own-natures, yet there arises, in a hand, etc., a special event as a cause for something’s arising in another locus immediately subsequent to a previous thing at the first locus, which event has a certain *citta* as its cause. It is (conventionally) called both «motion» and «manifest action».”¹

Similarly, the activities of the sense organs and even the intellectual activities are nothing else but regular successions of factors, the activity per se being impossible.

“The eye (*cakṣuṣ*) doesn’t see (*dṛś*) any form (*rūpa*), the ear (*śrotra*) doesn’t hear (*śrū*) any sound (*śabda*); the nose (*ghrāṇa*) doesn’t smell any odour (*gandha*), the tongue (*jihvā*) doesn’t taste any savour (*rasa*), the body (*kāya*) doesn’t feel (*spṛś*) any touch (*sparsā*), the mind (*manas*) doesn’t conceive (*kṛp*) any entity (*dharma*). There is no substratum (*adhiṣṭhātā*) of these and no instigator (*preraka*) [of these] can be found.”²

Birth is not the incarnation of a “soul” which remains constant during transmigration and is entitled to represent the subject of this process, but the actualization in a bodily, incarnated form of some karmic residues which have existed this far only as seeds (*bīja*), as karmic imprints (*vāsanā*). The human person is nothing else but a flow (*pravāha*) of seeds, of karmic traces

¹ Vasubandhu, *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, 11, Anacker 1998, 100.

² “*cakṣuḥ paśyati no rūpaṃ śrotram śabdām śṛṇoti naḥ /
ghrāṇam jighrati no gandhām jihvā nāsvādayed rasam /
kāyaḥ spṛśati no sparśā mano dharmān no kalpayet /
nāsti caiśām adhiṣṭhātā prerako vidyate na ca //*”

Asaṅga, *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Śrāvakabhūmi*, *Paramārtha-gāthā*, 6-7, Wayman 2002 („Asaṅga’s Treatise, the *Paramārtha-gāthā*”), in Elder 2002, 336.

which during the intermediary period between two successive reincarnations exist only as a potentiality, whereas during the period of a life they exist actualized as a embodied living being.

3.v. Liberation as the annihilation of the illusory experience of the individuality and not as purification of an individual substratum

Liberation is not the purification of a real individual substratum from certain forms of bondage but simply the annihilation of the illusion, of the error claiming the reality of the individual. No real individual is involved in the process of liberation or transmigration; everything sums up to a series (*santāna*) of impersonal appearances, gathered together in an illusory unity. However, these appearances are not random but determined by the karmic traces, by the karmic seeds (*bīja*) left by the previous experiences. Thus, Mahāyāna opposes the common conception about beings, which identifies them with a certain substratum, replacing it with a new doctrine which presents the beings as chains of appearances determined by the karmic traces.

“There is nobody that exists in this world (*loka*) and goes (*gam*) to the other world (*paraloka*) when passing beyond (*saṃkram*) death (*mṛtu*), but the actions (*karma*), whenever done, don’t get annihilated (*naś*), produce their [bad or good] effects (*phalu*) and transmigrate (*saṃsṛ*).”¹

¹ “*na ca asmi loki mṛtu kaści [naro] paraloka saṃkramati gacchati vā /*

na ca karma naśyati kadāci kṛtaṃ phalu deti [kṛṣṇaśubha] saṃsarato //”

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“Mahāmati, here, there is nobody in bondage (*badh*) and nobody liberating (*muc*), but only that bondage (*bandha*) and liberation (*mokṣa*) are discriminated (*prajñā*) by those whose understanding (*buddhi*) is affected by error (*vitathapatitā*).”¹

Within the series (*santāna*) of factors which constitute a person there are both karmic seeds, which ensure the continuity of bondage, and pure seeds (*śuddhabīja*), which constitute “influences” (*niṣyanda*) of the ultimate reality; this kind of seeds make the series tend to its own annihilation, to liberation. Liberation and bondage are not so much consequences of a personal attitude, of a personal decision, but rather the effects of the mere presence or absence of a certain type of factors, without the involvement of any personal substratum or personal activity. As it is frequently stated in the Hīnayāna canon, “there is only suffering, not the one who suffers”. The conversion to Mahāyāna is not, as it might seem, the act of a conscious soul which consigns to certain truths, but, simply, the orientation of a series of factors towards its own annihilation.

Nothing gets purified in the process of liberation; the process of liberation does not consist in purifying a subject representing the stable substratum of this process, but everything is reduced to a succession of factors, less and less accentuated in their afflicted character.

Maitreya-nātha, *Bhavasamkrāntiṭīkā*, quoting *Samādhirāja-sūtra*; Śāstri 1938, 32.

¹ “*nātra kaścinmahāmate badhyate naca mucyate, anyatra vitathapatitayā buddhyā bandhamokṣau prajñāyete* /”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chapter III, Nanjio 1956, 162.

“Since what is afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) is absolutely (*atyanta*) [afflicted] and what is pure (*śuddha*) is of a translucid nature (*prakṛtibhāsvara*), nothing gets purified (*śudh*) by anything.”¹

“Since the benefic (*kuśala*) or the non-benefic (*akuśala*) [states] of consciousness (*citta*) appear one by one (*ekacaratva*), there is no contact with another [state] of consciousness, through their union (*yoga*) or conjunction (*abhisamdhāna*).”²

“All factors, pure (*vaiyavadānika*) or afflicted (*sāṃkleśika*), are devoid of movement (*āniñjya*), devoid of personhood (*niḥpudgala*). That’s why I state that they are totally devoid of action (*kriyārahita*). The afflicted factors are not now afflicted and later on purified; the pure factors are not now pure and later on unpurified. But common immature people (*bālapṛthagjana*), being affected by malefic, adhere to erroneous beliefs, that involve the imagined concepts of an own-nature of things and persons. They adhere to concepts such a «I», «mine» etc....”³

3.vi. The possibility of the individual to liberate forever

This ontological status of the person, of the individual self, allows the fulfillment of the soteriological ideal of Vijñānavāda, which is the permanent extinction of the entire suffering generated by the erroneous identification with the person, even if Vijñānavāda necessarily associates the absolute with a

¹ “*yat kliṣṭam tad ihātyantāc chuddham prakṛtibhāsvaram / na ceha śudhyate kaścit kutaścic dvāpi śudhyate //*”

Asaṅga, *Paramārtha-gāthā*, 41, Schmithausen 1987, 232, vol. I, Appendix II.

² “*kuśalākuśalayościttayorekacaratvād dvitīyacittānabhisamdhānayogena paramuṣprativedhyam //*”

Asaṅga, *Uttaratantravyākhyā*, ad. I.15, Obermiller 1991, 139.

³ *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, X.8, Lamotte 1935, 267.

certain tendency towards the manifestation, towards the emanation of the causal flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Vijñānavāda, unlike other absolutist philosophical currents, does not dissociate the absolute from all the forms of manifestation, but associates the absolute reality with the causal flow, with the dependant nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*). However, this does not make liberation from the individual bondage impossible because the individual is something else than the causal flow, something else than the dependant nature. Individual identity is related to the constructed nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), which is absolutely unreal (*atyanta abhāva*) and thus the necessary association between the ultimate reality and the causal flow (the dependant nature), does not imply any necessary association between the ultimate reality and the illusion of individuality.

The individual represents only the error, the illusion of the unity of a certain set of factors; even if the factors themselves represent the dependant nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*), to which Vijñānavāda attributes a certain degree of reality, the experience of their unity in terms of “person” (*pudgala*), “individual self” (*ātman*), is a pure illusion, an absolute error, whose permanent annihilation raises no ontological problems.

For that matter, final liberation of the individual is possible even if the potentiality for the manifestation of the causal flow is always present. As the human individuality represents nothing else but a compositum of factors gathered together in an illusory unity,

individual liberation is nothing else but simply the annihilation of the illusion of individual unity superimposed upon the factors. Individual liberation is irreversible (*avivartya*, *avaivartika*) because when this illusion of individual unity disappears, it does so completely and leaves nothing behind, nothing on the basis of which a new state of bondage may be revived.

It is true that the absolute reality which represents the foundation of the individuality remains and, in addition, the potentiality for the causal flow to manifest always exists at its level, but Vijñānavāda insists upon the fact that these levels of reality, the ultimate reality and the causal flow, are entirely free of everything that represents individuality. The individual is an illusion and when it disappears, everything related to his individuality is totally annihilated. When the individual series is interrupted, it can no longer restart because it was nothing more than an illusion of unity and continuity.

Even if other individuals are born, they simply represent other individualities. Any individual, when annihilated, is annihilated for good; therefore, the final liberation of any individual, which is the soteriological ideal of Vijñānavāda, can be achieved.

3.vii. The experience of the mind as the “fundamental error” (*viparyāsamūla*) which affects the entire human condition

The state of ignorance produced by the mind also affects the operational consciousnesses which are all

born at the level of the individuality created through the activity of the mind. As they are produced subsequent to the mind, they share the ignorant condition created by the latter. This explains the ignorant condition of the entire human experience. The activity of the mind creates the “fundamental error” (*viparyāsamūla*), the “fundamental ignorance”, its veiling activity which engenders that background ignorance affecting the human being during all his experiences. The absence of the absolute knowledge in case of the human beings is explained precisely by the fact that their experience is constituted on the basis of the experience of the mind.

“Here, ignorance (*avidyā*), the fundamental error (*viparyāsamūla*) [is produced]. The error is the view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*)”¹

“The state of transposed substance that has the obscuring indeterminate nature is the connection between the sentience and the basis. According with conditions and attached to self, its mode of knowledge is fallacy. Day and night it reduces sentient beings to a state of confusion.”²

The authors of Vijñānavāda did formulate an argument in favour of the existence of the mind on the basis of the ignorant nature of human experience. Even when a being does not have any kind of determined experiences, when his operational consciousnesses are not active, he is still affected by a state of “solitary ignorance”, of “pure ignorance” (*avidyā āveṇikī*), a state where absolute knowledge is missing. Given the absence

¹ “*tatra viparyāsamūlam avidyā / viparyāsaḥ satkāyadr̥ṣṭir....*”
Yogācārabhūmi, 199,16f, Schmithausen 1987, 449.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Pa-shih kuei-chu sung*, Epstein 1998, 33,36.

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of the experience of the operational consciousnesses, only another form of consciousness, distinct from the operational consciousnesses, which exists even when they are absent, may explain the production of this ignorant condition. Hence, the authors of Vijñānavāda bestow to the mind this role of veiling, of covering (*nivṛta*) the ultimate reality. The mind produces that condition of “pure ignorance”, of “solitary ignorance” (*avidyā āveṇikī*), a purely negative state which consists only of the absence of absolute knowledge.

“If the existence of the afflicted mind (*manas*) is denied, there could be no solitary ignorance. The characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the solitary ignorance are a state of confusion (*moha*) that prevents (*āvṛṇoti*) the apparition of the knowledge of the ultimate reality (*tattvajñāna*).”¹

“..... the ignorance labeled «solitary» (*āveṇikī*) produces the confusion (*moha*) regarding the absence of a self (*nairātmya*), obstructs the ultimate reality (*bhūtatahatā*), obstructs the eye of the ultimate knowledge (*āryaprajñācakṣus*).”²

4. The Afflicted Nature (*kliṣṭa*) of the Experience of Mind

4.i. The entrapping of the individual being in his own experience

The afflicted, bonded condition is constituted on the basis of the state of ignorance (*avidyā, ajñāna*) or,

¹ Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 17.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 277.

better said, of error (*viparyāsa*) projected by the mind (*manas*). Afflictions (*kleśa*) seem to be as inherent to the mind as ignorance; sometimes, Vijñānavāda texts, refer to the mind not as much by the simple term “*manas*”, but by the compound “*kliṣṭa manas*” (“the afflicted mind”).¹

“Always (*sadā*), the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭamanas*) is born (*utpanna*) and ceases (*niruddha*) along (*saha*) with the afflictions (*kleśa*).”²

The apparition of bondage (*saṃsāra*), of the afflicted condition (*kliṣṭa*), is due to ignorance, by means of which the own nature of the subject is identified somewhere where it does not really exist. The own nature of the subject, his substantiality, is identical with the ultimate reality but the mind illusorily transfers this own nature to the sphere of the fleeting factors. Due to the veil of ignorance, the own nature of the subject does not appear to him as the ultimate and unchanging reality, but as a sum of fleeting factors. Once his own nature has been identified within the fleeting experience, this experience stops being only experience and illusorily becomes his own nature. Or, to put it more precisely, the

¹ The term “*kleśa*”, rendered here as “affliction”, was translated in Tibetan and in Chinese in more suggestive ways than the Sanskrit original. The Tibetan translators interpreted it as “wrapping”, “bondage”, and it was similarly translated into Chinese as well. See Tillemans 1990, 207 (note 32)!

For the afflicting role of the mind (*manas*), see Waldron 2003, 148-149!

² “*sahotpannaniruddhaṃ hi kleśaiḥ kliṣṭaṃ manasā sadā* /”

Paramārtha-gāthā, 39, Wayman 1961, 173; Schmithausen 1987, 232, vol. I, ap. II.

subject illusorily transfers his own nature somewhere in the fleeting sphere of experience and starts getting involved in this experience. Representing his own nature, the subject stops being indifferent to experience and thus he gets existentially involved in experience. He is no longer indifferent to the transformations of the experience, which are no longer mere experiences, but appear as alterations of his own nature. The permanent fluctuation of the factors, the permanent risk that any set of factors, including the ones involved in his own identity, might get annihilated become essential experiences for the subject, and not only phenomena, not only appearances which do not affect his nature. This way, the subject undergoes affliction (*kleśa*), gets entrapped in his own experience. The anxiety and the suffering that characterize human existence are due to this erroneous identification of the human nature with the illusory identity appropriated by the mind.

The afflicted condition of the consciousness is much accentuated by the transient, dynamic nature of the entire experience. Since no state persists, the effort of searching and settling the elements favorable for the self and even the effort of maintaining this self, of preventing it from being destroyed, is a perpetual one. This way, the individual consciousness experiences a perpetual agitation which alters the state of tranquility, peace (*śānta*, *śama*), which characterizes his essential condition.

4.ii. The elevated state of consciousness (*cittonnati*), the pride (*māna*) whose object is the self (*ātman*)

The attitude of the subject towards those components of the experience that have been assumed as his own self (*ātman*) changes and becomes one of “elevation” (*unnati*), of “pride” (*māna*). The terms most frequently used to refer to this attitude are “*unnati*” (“elevation”) or “*cittonnati*” (“elevation of consciousness”); some texts prefer the use of “*māna*” – “pride”, “vanity”, “consideration”. The attitude meant by these terms is that of a special importance paid to certain components of experience, due to the new status that has been ascribed to them. This status is one of “self” (*ātman*), of “belonging to self” (*ātmīya*).

The term “*māna*” (“pride”, “vanity”, “consideration”) renders suggestively enough the attitude towards those components of experience that have been identified as the own self. Pride involves not only an acceptance of its object, but also its exultation, a total dedication to it, a total dependency on it; analogously, the subject conforms to his assumed self, enters a dependency relationship with what has been identified as his own self. The object of pride gets a maximum degree of reality and importance for the subject experiencing it and so does the object identified as “self” (*ātman*).

“What is pride (*māna*)? It is an elevation (*unnati*) of the consciousness (*citta*) through [its] establishment

(*sanniśraya*) in the view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*).¹

Another term frequently met in Vijñānavāda texts is “*asmimāna*”, a compound made of the 1st person singular of the verb “to be” (*as*) and “*māna*” (“pride”, “vanity”, “consideration”). This compound could be translated by “the pride that I am”, “the pride of being I” and suggests the idea of attachment to a certain self identity, to that identity which constitutes the “I” and the consideration shown for this identity.

“The elevation of the consciousness (*cittasyonnati*) through the attachment (*abhiniveśa*) to the self (*ātman*) and to the characteristics of the self (*ātmīya*) [perceived] within the five appropriated aggregates (*upādānaskandha*) which are devoid of self and of those characteristic to the self, this is «the pride that I am» (*asmimāna*).²

“There being confusion (*sammūḍha*) regarding the nature (*svarūpa*) of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), the view of the self (*ātmadrṣṭi*) regarding the store-house consciousness is born (*utpad*). Due to the view of the self (*ātmadarśana*) and of the others [takes place] the elevation (*unnati*) of the consciousness (*citta*); this is «the pride that I am» (*asmimāna*). When these three exist, the attachment (*abhiśvaṅga*) to the elements (*vastu*) considered as the self (*ātmābhimata*) represents «the attachment to the self» (*ātmāsneha*).³

¹ “*mānaḥ katamaḥ / satkāyadrṣṭisanniśrayeṇa cittasyonnatiḥ*”

Asaṅga, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, 7,4, apud. Schmithausen 1987, 438.

²

“*pañcasūpādānaskandheṣvātmātmīyarahiteṣvātmātmīyābhiniveśādy ā cittasyonnatiḥ so 'smimānaḥ*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.11, Chatterjee 1980, 75.

³ “*tatrālayavijñānasvarūpe sammūḍhaḥ sannālayavijñāne ātmadrṣṭimutpādayati / ātmadarśanādyā cittasyonnatiḥ so*

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“Hence, it is considered (*man*) that, superimposing (*adhyāropya*) the existence (*bhāva*) of the self (*ātman*) and of those characteristic to the self (*ātmīya*) upon the aggregates (*skandha*) [and claiming] «I am this (*ayamaham*)», «this is mine (*idaṃ mama*)», through these particular ways (*viśeṣa*), the individual self (*ātman*) is raised (*unnam*) above (*adhika*) the others (*anya*).”¹

This “raising of the individual self beyond the others” (*ātmānam.....unnamayati anyebhyo 'dhikam*) represents the premises on the basis of which the afflicted condition (*kleśa*) appears.² Once certain components of experience have a special status, a favored status, the subject starts searching for them and tries to preserve them. He will try to ensure the persistence of his nature, of his self (*ātman*) and of whatever belongs to this self (*ātmīya*), of whatever favors this self. The permanent effort to find and perpetuate these elements represents the afflicted condition (*kleśa*).³

'smimānaḥ / etasmintraye sati ātmābhimite vastuni yo 'bhiṣvaṅgaḥ sa ātmasnehaḥ /”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 6cd, Chatterjee 1980, 54-55.

¹ “*tathā hyātmātmīyabhāvaṃ skandheṣvadhyaṛopyāyamahamidam mametyātmānam tena tena viśeṣeṇonnamayati anyebhyo 'dhikam manyate /*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 11, Chatterjee 1980, 74.

² A long discussion on the afflictions (*kleśa* - which are 6) and upon the minor afflictions (*upakleśa* - which are 20) in Chatterjee 1999, 118-122. See also Dayal 1999, 104!

For a study on the various ways of classifying afflictions (*kleśa*) and minor afflictions (*upakleśa*) in various Buddhist texts, see Potter 1999, 38-39!

³ For a discussion on the nature of afflictions (*kleśa*), according to the *Abhidharmakośa*, see Chaudhury 1983, 106!

4.iii. The tendency towards the proliferation of the individual self (*sāsrava*)

All this process implies a metaphysical presupposition which the Buddhist texts do not generally give many details about. The presupposition is about a certain attachment, a certain tendency of preserving its own essence, its own nature, tendency which would characterize any form of existence. Once the own nature has been identified within the transient experience, this tendency manifests very clearly as the effort of perpetuating the own self. In case of the ultimate reality this tendency loses itself in the unity of the absolute, which due to its substantial reality, has this tendency always fulfilled. At this level it does not appear anymore, it does not manifest in any way precisely because it is always fulfilled through the substantial being of the ultimate reality. The ultimate reality is its own essential nature and consequently has this tendency naturally fulfilled.

However, as soon as the own nature of a being has been identified within the sphere of transient phenomena, this tendency becomes manifest as the effort the beings feels compelled to make in order to preserve his own nature. The survival instinct, the attachment to life (*abhiniveśa*) from Yoga, would be nothing else but the biological hypostasis of this metaphysical tendency.

A study of the term "*kleśa*" and of the ways in which the term was translated in Tibetan and Chinese, in Anacker 1998, 146-147. Anacker also offers a number of arguments in favour of translating the term by "afflicted", "distressed", "troubled", and not by "defilement", as it is usually done.

Buddhism designates this attitude, this tendency, by means of the term “*sāsrava*”; “*sa*” means “with”, “accompanied/characterized by”, and “*āsrava*” derives from the verbal root “*ā-sru*” - “to flow”, “to leak”.¹ Literally, “*sāsrava*” designates something that has the tendency of flowing, leaking, of manifesting itself in a continuous flow. For the purpose of the present paper, we decided to translate “*sāsrava*” by “characterized by the tendency towards proliferation”. The meaning of this term, in Buddhism, is that of a tendency towards maintaining its continuity, towards a continuous perpetuation. One can use “*sāsrava*” to designate something that not only exists at this moment but, more than this, something that has the tendency of “flowing” towards the future, of perpetuating its existence beyond the present moment.

The human being can be labeled as “*sāsrava*” because the existence of the human individual is not characterized simply by assuming a certain present condition, but is equally characterized by the tendency of perpetuating this individual condition. The instinct of survival and the attachment to his own person are ways in which this tendency towards proliferation (*āsrava*) manifests itself. Although Vijñānavāda texts do not discuss this aspect, the instinct of preserving the species could be also considered as a way the tendency towards proliferation manifests.

¹See Williams-Monier 1997, 162, col.1, Incze 1995, 309.

The presence of this tendency bonds the consciousness as a result of its association with the compulsion of preserving that sphere of experience which is assumed as its own self.¹ The ultimate reality is labeled in the Buddhist texts as “*anāsrava*”, as “lacking the tendency towards proliferation”, because its stable, immutable condition excludes the presence of any unfulfilled tendency that needs to be fulfilled at its level; the proliferation of its nature is accomplished naturally, due to its substantial being. Given the fact that the presence of the tendency towards proliferation bonds as well as the fact that the ultimate reality is not characterized by this tendency, the Buddhist texts sometimes assimilate the *sāsrava* - *anāsrava* opposition with that between impure and pure.

4.iv. The afflicted individual condition characterized by desire (*trṣṇā*)

The afflicted condition is characterized first of all by “desire”, by “thirst” (*trṣṇā*); this is nothing else but the longing of the subject towards those experiences that are favorable to his self, to the assumed own nature. The object of desire is situated at the level of the universal experience, at the level of the experience of the store-house consciousness. Thus, the subject comes to experience a “thirst for the store-house consciousness”

¹For a discussion regarding to the absence of the tendency towards proliferation (*anāsrava*), respectively its presence (*sāsrava*), according to *Abhidharmakośa*, see Chaudhury 1983, 70-71!

(*ālayatrṣṇā*).¹ Due to the existence of desire, the store-house consciousness stops representing only experience, only phenomenon. When the self identity is erroneously transferred to the level of experience, experience stops being only a non-essential phenomenon.

The existence of desire (*kāma*), of the thirst whose object is the store-house consciousness (*ālayatrṣṇā*), afflicts (*kliś*) the subject, entraps him in the experience which has become as real as his being.

The thirst for the store-house consciousness, for those states that are favorable, that are in conformity with the assumed individual self, is never satisfied due to the momentary (*kṣaṇika*), transient nature of experience which denies persistence to any of its states. This is how one comes to experience suffering (*duḥkha*) which, according to Buddhism, is not accidental, but rather belongs to the very nature of experience. Even from its incipient forms, Buddhism equated experience and suffering, the first noble truth of Buddhism (*āryasatya*) stating precisely that “life is suffering” (*jīvaṃ duḥkhaṃ*).

4.v. The appropriation of an individual identity as the main condition for the apparition of suffering

What Vijñānavāda brings new into the matter is that it offers a precise presentation of the stages of the process of the apparition of suffering, presentation which highlights the decisive importance of the appropriating function of the mind.

¹ *Śrāvakabhūmi*, 16, 15-18, apud. Schmithausen 1987, 165.

“And it was said:¹ «Due to these four – namely, ignorance (*avidyā*), the view of the self (*ātma-drṣṭi*), the pride that I am (*asmimāna*) and thirst (*trṣṇā*) – the mind (*manas*), whose characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) is mentation (*mananā*), gets afflicted (*saṃkliś*). The mind is always afflicted (*kliṣṭa*), has as [its] characteristic (*nimitta*) the error (*viparyāsa*) and is always the cause (*kāraṇa*) of the sense of the ego (*ahaṃkāra*) involved in the beneficial (*kuśala*) or indeterminate (*avyākṛta*) [states of] consciousness (*citta*).»”²

Buddhism had suggested a gradual process of the appearance of suffering even from its early phases. This process was expressed by the series of the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Vijñānavāda neither elaborates a theory that would become as consecrated as the theory of the dependent origination, nor delineates very precisely the stages of the appearance of suffering. However, one can identify, as it results from the fragment of Sthiramati’s *Triṃśikābhāṣya* previously quoted, a certain order within this process as follows: the appearance of ignorance (*avidyā*) regarding the real self, the own nature, the perception of the self as an individual self (*ātma-drṣṭi*), the elevated state of consciousness (*cittonnati*) or the pride of being I (*asmimāna*), the appearance of afflictions (*kleśa*), of thirst (*trṣṇā*), all of these ending with the appearance of suffering (*duḥkha*).

¹ Sthiramati quotes, without explicitly mentioning it, *Yogācārabhūmi*, 11,6f. According to Schmithausen 1987, 442.

² “āha ca avidyayā cātma-drṣṭyā cāsmimānena trṣṇayā /
ebhiścaturbhiḥ saṃkliṣṭaṃ mananālakṣaṇaṃ manañ /
viparyāsanimittaṃ tu manañ kliṣṭaṃ sadaiva yat /
kuśalāvyākṛte citte sadāhaṃkārakāraṇaṃ //”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 6cd, Chatterjee 1980, 54-55.

Moreover, Vijñānavāda explicitly indicates the connection between affliction, suffering, and the view of the individual self (*ātma-drṣṭi*) or, using a terminology specific to Vijñānavāda, the perception of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*).¹

An important element of novelty involved by the theory regarding the appearance of suffering elaborated by the authors of Vijñānavāda is the mention that not any form of experience is necessarily accompanied by suffering, but only the one which involves appropriation (*upādāna*), which involves the afflicting function of the mind (*manas*). Thus, the experience of the store-house consciousness, being devoid of appropriation, is characterized by the sensation (*vedanā*) of indifference (*upekṣā*).

“The view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*) has as [its] characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) the affliction (*kleśa*), the affliction (*saṃkleśa*) of «I» (*aham*) and «mine» (*mama*).”²

“Therefore, passion (*rāga*) and the other afflictions (*kleśa*) are born (*prabhū*) from the view of the self (*ātma-drṣṭi*).”³

The correlation between suffering (*duḥkha*) and the individual self (*ātman*) has an important soteriological consequence, namely that the understanding of the illusory, erroneous nature of the

¹ For the primordial role that the attachment to self has in the apparition of bondage, see Matics 1970, 91!

² “*satkāyadrṣṭikleśalakṣaṇo hyeṣa saṃkleśo yaduta ahaṃ mama* /” Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, ad. XVIII.103, Limaye 2000, 448.

³ “*tathā hyātma-drṣṭiprabhavā rāgādayaḥ kleśāḥ*” Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, Introduction, Chatterjee 1980, 27.

individual self is equivalent to the understanding of the unreality of suffering and, through this, to its annihilation.

“The one in suffering (*duḥkhita*) doesn’t exist (*as*) due to the non-existence (*asatva*) of the self (*ātman*) which is associated with suffering (*duḥkhayukta*).”¹

5. The States of Consciousness (*caitta*) Associated with the Mind

5.i. The experience of the mind as pure affliction (*kleśa*)

The only experience that the Vijñānavāda texts associate with the mind is that of affliction (*kleśa*). The mind represents pure affliction and not the afflicted experience of something. At the level of the individual experience, the pure experience of the mind, unassociated with other types of experience, can be hardly found. The experience of the mind is to be found within any type of experience whose subject is an individual being; however, it cannot be found in a pure state but only as the affliction which affects the entire experience. Affliction can be found only at the level of afflicted experience and not in itself. The individual experience is a mixture between the empirical experience of the six operational consciousnesses (the sensorial material produced by the five sensorial

¹ “*na duḥkhito duḥkhayuktasyātmano 'satvāt /*”

Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, ad. VI.4, Limaye 2000, 70.

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consciousnesses and its conceptual form taken at the level of the mental consciousness) and the experience of affliction produced at the level of the mind. These types of experience cannot be disassociated, separated, but they always exist together at the level of any human experience. The five sensorial consciousnesses produce the brute sensorial material which will be conceptually framed by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), and this experience will undergo affliction through the activity of the mind (*manas*).

To afflict experience means to ascribe value connotations to it, to determine it (*vyākṛ*) from the point of view of its subjective value, to make an object of desire (*trṣṇā*) or of aversion (*dveṣa*) out of it. All these are the results of the activity of the mind because they require an individual self in relation to which they are operated. Only when experience is considered from the perspective of an individual self, it can acquire value connotations, can be turned into an object of desire or aversion.

“The mind is the support of affliction and purification (*saṃkleśavyavadānāśraya*), because affliction and purification depend on it.”¹

Because it wraps the subject in ignorance (*avidyā*), because it leads him into the error (*viparyāsa*) of perceiving the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*), because it subjects him to affliction (*kleśa*), the mind is associated with an obstructed (*nivṛta*) type of experience. The obstructed nature can be interpreted as referring

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 239-240.

both to the “covering” (this is one of the meanings of “*nivṛta*”) of the ultimate reality, and to the “obstruction” (another possible meaning of “*nivṛta*”) of the mystical path (*āryamārga*) that leads to the ultimate reality.

5.ii. The appropriating experience (*upādāna*) of the mind as a standard for value determination (*vyākṛta*) and for sensorial evaluation (*vedanā*)

The mind creates the self which is the instrument, the standard, the measure in relation to which experience is determined from the point of view of its value (*vyākṛta*), is assessed as pleasant (*sukha*) or painful (*duḥkha*), but mind itself lacks value determinations (*avyākṛta*), and the sensation (*vedanā*) associated with it is neither pleasure, nor pain but indifference (*upekṣā*). Experience is evaluated both from a moral point of view and from the point of view of its sensation, depending on the way it conforms with the tendencies of the individual self (*ātman*) appropriated by the mind. Such an evaluation requires an individual self on the basis of which to be performed and precisely due to this reason the individual ego itself, the standard, cannot be subjected to this kind of evaluation.

“There, [in case of mind], the sensation (*vedanā*) is only that of indifference (*upekṣā*); [the mind] is obstructed (*nivṛta*) and indeterminate (*avyākṛta*).”¹

Hiuan-Tsang, associating the sensations of pleasure (*sukha*) and of pain (*duḥkha*) with the

¹ “*tatropekṣaiva vedanā anivṛtāvyākṛtaṃ ca*”
Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 14, Chatterjee 1980, 93.

modifications, the alterations (*vikāra*) of experience, alterations which can be favorable or unfavorable to the experiencing individual self, shows that the mind cannot be associated with another sensation but that of indifference (*upekṣā*), because the object of the mind is only the individual self, not the transformations of experience having this self as a subject.

“The mind functions continuously, homogenously, having as its object the inner self (*ātman*) devoid of transformations; therefore, it cannot be associated with sensations (*vedanā*) that involve alteration (*vikāra*).”¹

Hiuan-Tsang also mentions two theories referring to the type of sensation associated with the mind, but they seem to be only some accidental deviations, not very well founded, from the consecrated doctrine of Vijñānavāda.

5.iii. The four “fundamental afflictions” (*mūlakleśa*) associated with the mind

Being strictly associated with the affliction, the mind is related to a relatively small number of states of consciousness (*caitta*). It is true that on the basis of the attachment to self produced by the mind quite a large number of afflicted attitudes are engendered, but these require also the activity of the mental consciousness and that of the operational consciousnesses; therefore, they do not represent experiences directly produced by the mind. Even if it creates the possibility for numerous types of afflictions (*kleśa*) to appear, the mind is

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 264.

intrinsically associated only with those afflictions which consist strictly of the attachment to self and not with those consisting in the evaluation of the experience on the basis of this attachment.¹

Vijñānavāda texts consider this attachment to the self from four perspectives and, consequently, ascribe four afflictions to the mind. These are called “the fundamental afflictions” (*mūlakleśa*), because they represent the basis of all other afflictions.² Their names vary from text to text but they are always four. Nevertheless, this number may be somehow random and not based on philosophical grounds because, essentially, it is the same attitude looked upon from four different perspectives.

Triṃśikā calls these four afflictions associated with the mind as follows: “the view of the self” (*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*), “the confusion of to self” (*ātmamoha*), “the pride of the self” (*ātmamāna*) and “the attachment to self” (*ātmasneha*).

“It always exists along (*sahita*) with the four afflictions (*kleśa*) known as «the view of the self» (*ātmadr̥ṣṭi*), «the confusion of the self» (*ātmamoha*), «the pride of the self» (*ātmamāna*) and «the attachment to the self» (*ātmasneha*). It is obstructed (*nivṛta*) and indeterminate (*avyākṛta*).³

¹ For a discussion upon the types of experience associated with the mind, upon the forms the attachment to self may take, see Waldron 2003, 121!

² See Chatterjee 1999, 103!

³ “*kleśaiścaturbhiḥ sahitaṃ nivṛtāvyākṛtaiḥ sadā / ātmadr̥ṣṭyātmamohātmamānātmāsnehasamjñitaiḥ //*” Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 6, Anacker 1998, 422.

There is however little difference among these four perturbations because each one of them implies the others, hence their individual identity counting less; what is really important are they as a totality, their assembly, because the individual experience is afflicted by their cumulated activity.

“Perceiving (*darśana*) a self (*ātman*) in the appropriated aggregates (*upādānaskandha*) is «the view of the self» (*ātmadṛṣṭi*), is «the view of the reality of the body» (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*) – this is the meaning (*artha*). «Confusion» (*moha*) means ignorance (*ajñāna*). The ignorance regarding the self (*ātman*) is «the confusion of the self» (*ātmamoha*). The pride (*māna*) whose object (*viṣaya*) is the self is «the pride of the self» (*ātmamāna*), «the pride that I am» (*asmimāna*) – this is the meaning. «The attachment (*sneha*) to the self» is the love for the self (*ātmaprema*) – this is the meaning.”¹

5.iv. Explaining the four fundamental afflictions (*mūlakleśa*)

The explicit definitions of the four afflictions as well as their mention under different names in other texts suggest the fact that they consist of the following four aspects.

¹ “*upādānaskandheṣvātmeti darśanamātmadṛṣṭiḥ
satkāyadṛṣṭirityarthah / moho 'jñānam / ātmanyajñānamātmamohah
/ ātmaviṣaye māna ātmamāno 'smimāna ityarthah / ātmani sneha
ātmapremetyarthah /*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.6, Chatterjee 1980, 54.

See the definitions of the four fundamental afflictions from Huan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 255; the text associates “the pride of the self” (*ātmamāna*) with the “elevated state of consciousness” (*cittonnati*).

The most basic of all seems to be the ignorance, the confusion of the self (*ātmamoha*) and the erroneous view of the self (*ātmadrṣṭi*) or, more simply, ignorance, non-knowledge (*ajñāna*, *avidyā*) and error (*viparyāsa*). Then, there would be the more active aspects of the experience of the mind, namely the pride of the self (*ātmamāna*) or the elevated state of consciousness (*cittonnati*) and the attachment to the self (*ātmasneha*) or the desire, the thirst (*trṣṇā*).

“Its associated [mental factors] are contact (*sparsā*) and the other four [omnipresent factors], along with attachment, ignorance, pride and opinion about self: in total nine.”¹

Sthiramati, immediately after defining the four fundamental afflictions, offers a presentation in stages of the process through which, as a result of the activity of the mind, the afflicted condition is produced.² Four stages of this process are indicated and, even if they are not called exactly as the four fundamental afflictions, both their description and the terms of these descriptions allow a correlation between each stage with one of the fundamental afflictions.

“There being confusion (*sammūḍha*) regarding the nature (*svarūpa*) of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), the view of the self (*ātmadrṣṭi*) regarding the store-house consciousness is born (*utpad*). Due to the view of the self (*ātmadarśana*) and of the others [takes place] the elevation (*unnati*) of the consciousness (*citta*); this is «the pride that I am» (*asmimāna*). When these three exist, the

¹ Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 109.

² Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 6 cd, Chatterjee 1980, 54-55.

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attachment (*abhiṣvaṅga*) to the elements (*vastu*) considered as the self (*ātmābhimata*) represents «the attachment to the self» (*ātmāsneha*).¹

Thus, the first stage, the existence of the confusion regarding the nature of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñānasvarūpa saṃmūḍha*) may be correlated, both ideologically and terminologically, with the “confusion of the self” (*ātmamoha*). Then comes the stage of the “view of the self” (*ātmadrṣṭi*, *ātmadarśana*), in whose case the correlation with the affliction bearing the same name is obvious. Moreover, Sthiramati himself equals the third stage, the “elevation of consciousness” (*cittasyonnati*), with the “pride of I am” (*asmimāna*), which also implies an equivalence with the “pride of the self” (*ātmamāna*). The situation is similar in case of the last stage, where Sthiramati himself equates the attachment (*abhiṣvaṅga*) with the “attachment to the self” (*ātmāsneha*).

Further on, Sthiramati offers a quotation from *Yogācārabhūmi* which clearly and briefly presents also four stages of the process of affliction, stages which can be easily matched with the previously mentioned stages and, in doing so, with the four fundamental afflictions (*mūlakleśa*). In the paragraph quoted from *Yogācārabhūmi* the four stages are mentioned as the

¹ “*tatrālayavijñānasvarūpe saṃmūḍhaḥ sannālayavijñāne ātmadrṣṭimutpādayati / ātmadarśanādyā cittasyonnatiḥ so 'smimānaḥ / etasmintraye sati ātmābhimate vastuni yo 'bhiṣvaṅgaḥ sa ātmāsnehaḥ /*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 6cd, Chatterjee 1980, 54-55.

“ignorance” (*avidyā*), the “view of the self” (*ātma-drṣṭi*), the “pride of I am” (*asmimāna*) and the “thirst” (*trṣṇā*).

“And it was said:¹ «Due to these four – namely, ignorance (*avidyā*), the view of the self (*ātma-drṣṭi*), the pride that I am (*asmimāna*) and thirst (*trṣṇā*) – the mind (*manas*), whose characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*) is mentation (*mananā*), gets afflicted (*saṃkliś*).”²

5.v. The problematic association of the five omnipresent factors (*sarvatraga*) with the mind

Without giving though too many details on the matter, Vijñānavāda texts associate the mind with the five so-called “omnipresent factors” (*sarvatraga*) as well, namely with the sensorial contact (*sparsa*), the sensation (*vedanā*), the concept (*saṃjñā*), the volition (*cetanā*) and the mental act (*manaskāra*).

“It says in the *Guhyārtha-vyākhyā*: «It has only nine mental factors associated with it – the four afflictive emotions and the five omnipresent ones taught earlier...»”³

“The afflicted mind (*kliṣṭa manas*) [is associated] with the five omnipresent [factors] (*sarvatraga*) and with the four afflictions (*kleśa*) starting with the confusion of the self (*ātmamoha*).”⁴

¹ Sthiramati quotes, without explicitly mentioning it, *Yogācārabhūmi*, 11,6f. According to Schmithausen 1987, 442.

² “*āha ca avidyayā cātma-drṣṭyā cāsmimānena trṣṇayā / ebhiścaturbhiḥ saṃkliṣṭaṃ mananālakṣaṇaṃ manaḥ //*” Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 6cd, Chatterjee 1980, 54-55.

³ Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 109.

⁴ “*kliṣṭam manaḥ sarvatragaiḥ pañcabhiścaturbhiṣca kleśairātmamohādibhiḥ //*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 14, Chatterjee 1980, 93.

The association of the mind with the five omnipresent factors, just like in the case of the store-house consciousness, does not seem to be made on another ground than the omnipresent status ascribed to the five factors. This alledged omnipresence imposed their correlation with any type of experience, including the experience of the mind. The omnipresent status of the five factors mentioned above is problematic and it seems to be just an inheritance taken uncritically from Abhidharma. In case of the mind also, as in the case of the store-house consciousness, the association with the five factors considered as omnipresent is problematic. It is true that the mind is closer to individuality, it even represents the decisive factor in projecting individuality, but most omnipresent factors seem to apply only to the already constituted individual existence, when the experience of the sensorial consciousnesses and that of the mental consciousness are also involved.

5.vi. Accidental deviations of the theory regarding the states of consciousness (*caitta*) associated with the mind

Hiuan-Tsang also mentions some other opinions regarding the types of afflictions associated with the mind.¹ These alternative theories however have not managed to go beyond the status of accidental deviations from the classical form of the doctrine and are known only from indirect sources. What they do is to simply

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 257-262.

associate the mind also with other afflictions than the fundamental ones, afflictions which are constituted by the application of the fundamental afflictions to the experience of the operational consciousnesses. Moreover, the mind is sometimes associated with some of the minor afflictions (*upakleśa*); these are nothing else but more particular forms of the afflictions (*kleśāvasthā*) or “influences”, “outflows” (*niṣyanda*) exerted by the afflictions upon some particular experiences. Given the similar status of the fundamental afflictions (*mūlakleśa*), of afflictions (*kleśa*) in general, and of the minor afflictions (*upakleśa*), one may consider that the alternative theories mentioned by Hiuan-Tsang do not bring significant philosophical changes to the consecrated doctrine.

6. Proofs for the Existence of Mind (*manas*)

The mind (*manas*), as the consciousness responsible for the appearance of the experience of the ego, does not appear in Buddhist philosophy prior to Vijñānavāda; this is why, as in the case of the store-house consciousness, which is another innovation of the authors of Vijñānavāda, the need was felt to present arguments for the acceptance of this new type of consciousness.

The arguments for the existence of the mind are in general six and they are presented in rather similar ways in all the texts that mention them. Hiuan-Tsang

tries to add an extra scriptural argument for the existence of mind and in *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun* this constitutes argument number one. He reaches the number of seven arguments precisely because the other six are added after this scriptural argument. As a matter of fact, the scriptural argument brought by Hiuan-Tsang is not a very well founded one, since he only notices the presence of the term “*manas*” in the canonic texts of Hīnayāna and interprets it, erroneously, as bearing, in those scriptures, the same meaning it has in Vijñānavāda.

6.i. The mind as accounting for the “solitary ignorance” (*avidyā āveṇikī*), the basic ignorance which affects human condition

The first and the last of the six arguments are somehow correlated. Both refer to the erroneous nature (*viparyāsa*) of the experience of the mind, error which consists of ascribing own being, selfhood, to a certain limited sphere of the phenomenal, which is illicitly bestowed the status of substantial self. The first argument takes its stand on the absence of the knowledge of reality in case of human experience, on the fact that human experience is wrapped in ignorance (*avidyā, ajñāna*). The sixth argument takes its stand on the presence of the error of the determined self, of the sense of the ego, in case of all human experiences. Based on these remarks, both arguments state the need to introduce the mind (*manas*) as the structure accounting for concealing the reality, respectively for substituting it with a limited phenomenal identity. The first argument

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starts from noticing the negative function of the mind, namely from the concealing of reality, the apparition of non-knowledge, of ignorance (*ajñāna*, *avidyā*) regarding reality, while the sixth starts from the positive aspects of the activity of the mind, namely the production of the illusion, of the error (*viparyāsa*) of the limited self identity.

The first argument starts from the acknowledgment of the so-called “solitary ignorance” (*avidyā āveṇikī*), i.e. the ignorance consisting only of concealing the reality. This type of ignorance is labeled as “solitary”, “un-associated” (*āveṇikī*) because it simply represents a state of not knowing the reality, without being associated with a particular type of error (*viparyāsa*). In most cases, in common human experience, this type of ignorance is accompanied by the perception of different types of error. However, its existence is indicated by the perpetual state of ignorance characterizing a human being, even in the moments when he does not experience any determined content.

“*Pratītyasamutpādasūtra* states: «Solitary (*āveṇikī*) ignorance (*avidyā*) is subtle, always manifesting, being the one that veils reality, that obstructs the knowledge of reality».

This type of ignorance would be missing if the seventh consciousness, the mind (*manas*), missed.”¹

“Common people (*prthagjana*) are always influenced by the ignorance known as «solitary» (*āveṇikī*), which engenders confusion (*moha*) regarding the non-self (*nairātmya*), that veils the ultimate reality (*bhūtatathatā*), that

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 276.

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obstructs the eye of ultimate knowledge (*āryaprajñācakṣus*).”¹

“[The beings] would experience reality (*bhūtārtha*) if there were no solitary ignorance, which is always present and always obstructs consciousness.”²

“If the existence of the afflicted mind (*manas*) were denied, solitary ignorance could not exist. The solitary ignorance is that state of confusion (*moha*) that obstructs (*āvṛṇoti*) the apparition of the knowledge of reality (*tattvajñāna*).”³

The solitary ignorance cannot be produced at the level of the mental consciousness or at the level of the operational consciousnesses because it exists even when these are not active. In case of human experience, the absence of conceptual thinking and perception, namely the absence of the activity of the operational consciousnesses, does not lead to the manifestation of the absolute knowledge, and this indicates the existence of a distinct form of ignorance, which exists independently from the sensorial consciousnesses and from the mental consciousness.

At the same time, the production of the solitary ignorance by the mental consciousness would compromise the possibility of liberation because in this case the mental consciousness would be ignorant by its own nature and thus would no longer have the capacity to produce the antidotes (*pratipakṣa*) of ignorance. If solitary ignorance were established in the mental

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 277.

² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 22.

³ Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 17.

consciousness, ignorance would be intrinsic to it, would be related to its very nature and thus the mental consciousness would not have had the liberty to produce the antidotes of ignorance. It is true that in many cases the mental consciousness is affected by ignorance, but this is only an extrinsic influence, exerted upon it by the mind. Vijñānavāda claims that the mental consciousness is the one which initiates and keeps going the process of liberation; this process consists in the production, by the mental consciousness, of the antidotes (*pratipakṣa*) to the ignorance generated by the mind (*manas*). Precisely for this, in order to maintain the possibility of liberation, it is essential for the mental consciousness not to have an ignorant nature, not to be intrinsically ignorant; in such a situation, there would be no instance able to unfold the process of liberation.

“In case we consider that this kind of affliction, [the solitary ignorance], is established in the non-afflicted mental consciousness (*akliṣṭamanovijñāna*), we should also accept that this [mental consciousness] is, by its own nature, absolutely (*atyanta*) afflicted.”¹

“The ignorance cannot be established in the non-afflicted mental consciousness (*akliṣṭamanovijñāna*) because, as a result of this ignorance, the mental consciousness would be afflicted by its own nature The consciousness [which has as its content] the charity and so on (*dānādicitta*) would not be beneficial anymore since it would be associated (*samprayukta*) with the afflicting ignorance.”²

¹ Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, ad.II.4.3, Lamotte 1934-35, 191-192.

² Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 17.

6.ii. The mind (*manas*) as the structure responsible for the error of the individual self

The sixth argument for the existence of the mind starts from the remark that human experience, under all its aspects, involves the perception of an ego (*ātmagrāha*). In case of any experience, there is a limited ego which appears as the subject of that experience.¹

“[The mind must exist] because it is noticed that [in case of any] consciousness (*citta*), beneficial (*kuśala*), non-beneficial (*akuśala*) or indeterminate (*avyākṛta*), the perception of the self (*ātmagrāha*) is always (*sarvakāla*) at work (*samudācāra*).”²

“In the absence of mind (*manas*), the perception of the ego in any circumstance could not be explained anymore..... Charity and all the other beneficial conditions (*kuśalāvasthā*) of the consciousness always include the perception of an ego, since people state: «I am the subject of this act of charity» etc.”³

Even in the cases of the beneficial states of the operational consciousnesses, states in which the conceptual (*vikalpita*) view of an individual self is absent, the attachment to self, the tendency for self proliferation (*sāsrava*) is present and this indicates the existence of a certain type of attachment to ego, more fundamental than the one generated at the level of the operational consciousnesses.

“If the perpetual existence of that view of the self (*ātmagrāha*) which is specific to mind (*manas*) were not

¹ The afflicted nature of any human experience as an argument for the existence of the mind is studied in Waldron 2003, 149.

² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 21.

³ Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 21.

accepted, the beneficial [states of consciousness] (*kuśala*) or the unobstructed and indeterminate ones (*anivṛtāvyākṛta*) would have to be considered as free from the tendency towards the proliferation [of the ego] (*anāsrava*).¹

“The beneficial factors and the others can have the tendency towards proliferation (*sāsrava*) due to the mind (*manas*), which continuously engender the perception of the self (*ātmagrāha*). If mind were missing, the beneficial factors couldn’t have the tendency towards proliferation.”²

Hiuan-Tsang reformulates the argument³ in a different way, namely he claims that the division of each experience into a representation component (*darśanabhāga*) and an object component (*nimittabhāga*) – division also advocated by Dharmapāla and by other late authors of Vijñānavāda – would not be possible in the absence of a certain experience of the self, inherent in any experience, which could constitute the ground for that division. The representation component (*darśanabhāga*) would be the one the individual self experiences directly while the object component is that element of experience considered to be exterior to self, something else than it.

6.iii. The mind as the structure which determines the activity of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*)

The second argument in favour of the existence of the mind takes its stand on the relation of determination between the mind and the mental

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 285-286.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 287.

³ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 285.

consciousness (*manovijñāna*). More precisely, once the necessity of the existence of an object (*ālambana*) of the mental consciousness, of a simultaneous support (*sahabhū āśraya*) of it, is acknowledged, it can be stated that only the mind can be this support. The argument shows, based on the analogy with the five sensorial consciousnesses, that in the case of the mental consciousness too there has to be a regent condition (*adhipati pratyaya*) accountable for its production, able to contain and mature its seeds. The fact that this condition has to be a particular, individual and not a universal one (the mental consciousness being specific to each individual) excludes the possibility that the store-house consciousness might represent this condition. Thus, the argument points towards the existence of a consciousness such as the mind (*manas*) as the only solution in this issue.

“ There would be no similarity [between the mental consciousness] and the five [sensorial consciousnesses] (*pañcasādharmya*), and that would be a mistake. The five sensorial consciousnesses (*pañca vijñāna*) have as their simultaneous support (*sahabhū āśraya*) the eye (*cakṣus*) and the others.....”¹

“These [five] consciousnesses have, each of them, the eye and the others as their specific simultaneous support. These organs are their regent conditions (*adhipatipratyaya*) The same should be the situation regarding the mental consciousness as well; it should have its own specific support. It is true that the store-house consciousness represents a

¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 18.

simultaneous support of the mental consciousness, but it cannot be said that it also represents its specific support.”¹

6.iv. The existence of the mind (*manas*) justified on the basis of the usage of the terms "*man*" and "*manas*" in the current language

The third argument, following the order from *Mahāyānaśāṃgraha*, claims that, since the root “*man*” and its verbal derivatives (“*manyate*”, “*manyati*”, “*manyata*” etc.) are used in current language, this implies the existence of a characteristic experience to which they are applied. Implicitly, the argument also justifies the existence of a specific type of consciousness accounting for the apparition of that experience. This etymological (*nirukti*) argument states simply that the mind (*manas*) is that instance responsible for the experiences meant by the compounds and derivatives of “*man*”; the existence of the mind would be implied, trivially, by the existence of the respective experiences. The experience of the mind (*manas*) would be no more than, in general, the experiences meant by the compounds of “*man*”, since the term “*manas*” is just an etymological derivate of the root “*man*”.

“ If mind didn’t exist, the etymology (*nirukti*) of the word «*manas*» couldn’t explain anymore and that would be a mistake.”²

“It is said: «Mentation is done by the mind» (*manyata iti manas*); [if mind didn’t exist], what would be the meaning of this etymology?”¹

¹ Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānaśāṃgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 18-19.

² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānaśāṃgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 19.

“ again, by the mind (*manas*), mentalization (*manyate*) is done....”²

6.v. The mind and the states of *asaṃjñīsamāpatti* and of *nirodhasamāpatti*

The fourth and the fifth argument make use of certain concepts from Abhidharma, adopted by Mahāyāna as well.

The fourth argument shows that the only difference (*viśeṣa*) between certain two stages of the mystical practice, namely between “the attainment of the unconscious state” (*asaṃjñīsamāpatti*) and “the attainment of cessation” (*nirodhasamāpatti*), depends only on the presence, respectively the absence, of the mind in those two states.³ In both states the conscious activity is absent, the operational consciousnesses being suppressed. Only the presence of the mind (*manas*) in the state of *Asaṃjñīsamāpatti* and its absence in the even more elevated state of *Nirodhasamāpatti* would be able to account for the existence of a distinction between them.

“There would be no difference (*viśeṣa*) between «the attainment of the unconscious state» (*asaṃjñīsamāpatti*) and «the attainment of cessation» (*nirodhasamāpatti*), and this would be a mistake. In fact, while during the attainment of the

¹ Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, ad. I.7, Lamotte 1973, 19.

² “*manasā manyate punaḥ*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, verse 116, Nanjio 1956, 48.

³ For a study upon the conditions of “*Āsaṃjñīka*”, “*Āsaṃjñīsamāpatti*” and “*Nirodhasamāpatti*”, see Potter 1999, 71!

unconscious state, the mind is present, during the attainment of cessation, it is not.”¹

6.vi. The mind as the sole structure which can account for the condition of “unconscious being” (*asaṃjñīsattva*)

The fifth argument appeals to a certain individual condition whose existence is stated by Buddhist cosmology. It deals with a certain class of beings, very elevate, whose experience is lacking any form of conceptual knowledge, of consciousness (*asaṃjñīsattva*, *asaṃjñīn*). Despite their elevated level, these beings that are no longer affected by the conceptual experience are still not fully liberated. The condition of “unconscious god” (*asaṃjñīsattva*, *asaṃjñīn*) represents a superior stage of transmigration (*saṃsāra*) but it is still transmigration, bondage (even if in a very subtle and soft way). As the operational consciousnesses and their conscious experience are totally suppressed in case of these beings, only the mind (*manas*), the inborn attachment to ego, could account for their bonded condition.

“In case of the unconscious gods (*āsaṃjñīka*) there would be no perception of the self (*ātma-grāha*) and no pride of «I am» (*asmimāna*). During their whole lives, due to the absence of [conscious] experience, they would be free from affliction (*kliṣṭa*) [in case the mind went missing].”²

¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 19-20.

² Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.7, Lamotte 1973, 21.

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“If in case of the unconscious gods (*āsaṃjñika*) there were no view of self, they would be free from bondage.”¹

¹ Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 147.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*)¹

1. The Operational Consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) and the Conscious Human Experience

1.i. The projection of the individual being at the level of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and of the mind (*manas*) as a process inaccessible to the human awareness

The appropriating activity (*upādāna*) of the mind (*manas*), applied to the universal experience of the store-house consciousness, is the one through which the individual being is constituted. Due to the fact that they precede the individual, representing the conditions for him to be constituted, the individual being is not aware of these two types of experience, they are not encompassed within his field of conscious experience, over which he has a certain degree of freedom. It is precisely for this reason that they can represent bondage. Something is able to enchain only if it escapes the control of the person it is enchainning. Otherwise, it

¹ The whole chapter represents a slightly improved version of a paper originally published under the title “Human States of Awareness in Vijñānavāda Buddhism (the Operational Consciousnesses - *pravṛtti vijñāna*)”, in the journal *Danubius*, XXXII (2014): 459-495.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses would be nothing else but a contingent experience of the subject, which would not have the capacity to alter the nature of the subject in any way.

Therefore, the mind (*manas*) and the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) create the individual sphere of experience. The individual consciousness is constituted through the following two steps: the appearance of the ideations of the store-house consciousness, at their universal level, and the limiting and appropriating activity of the mind. Buddhism and other philosophical systems which approach this issue do not succeed in offering details regarding the manner in which it is possible for the consciousness to get enchainned as a result of a process which takes place nowhere else but at its own level. The universal consciousness undergoes this process of self-limitation through which its own ideations lead it into error and enchain it; it is difficult for the human reason to understand how such a process is possible, but the fact that it takes place is clearly stated in the Buddhist texts. The very idea of “individual being (*ātmabhāva*)”, the way it is depicted in *Vijñānavāda*, contains something hard to fathom by the human reason, the fact that a human being is nothing else but the universal consciousness entrapped in its own ideations.

1.ii. The sphere of the operational consciousnesses as the sphere of the individual consciousness

The individual sphere of awareness is explained in Vijñānavāda on the basis of the six operational consciousnesses (*pravṛtti vijñāna*).¹

“Being established (*saṃniśṛitya*), being founded (*saṃniśṛitya pratiṣṭhāya*) in the appropriating consciousness (*ādānavijñāna*), a group of six consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) is born: the visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna*), the auditory (*śrotra*) consciousness, the olfactory (*ghrāṇa*) consciousness, the gustatory (*jihvā*) consciousness, the tactile (*kāya*) consciousness and the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).”²

The term “*pra-vṛtti*” derives from the root “*pra-vṛt*”, root which has quite a multifarious semantic range. However, all meanings converge on the idea of “engaging in an activity”, of “carrying it (*vṛt*) it forward (*pra*)”.³ Essential for the case in point is the connotation of “conscious activity”, an activity unfolded under the control of the individual. “*Pravṛtti*” is not synonymous with “*pariṇāma*” (“transformation”) because “the transformations of consciousness” (*vijñānapariṇāma*) refer to any type of dynamics of the consciousness, not

¹ For a study on the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), see Ganguly 1992, 45-46!

² *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, V.4, Lamotte 1935, 185.

³ “*Pra-vṛt*” has the meaning “to proceed”, “to commence”, “to begin to”, “to set about”, “to engage in”, “to be intent upon”, “to be occupied with”, “to behave”, “to conduct one's self towards”, “to deal with” (Williams-Monier 1997, 693).

“*Pravṛtti*” – “activity”, “exertion”, “efficacy”, “active life”, “giving one's self to”, “application”, “use”, “employment”, “conduct”, “behaviour”, “practice” (Williams-Monier 1997, 694).

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses only to those encompassed within the sphere of individual awareness, whilst “*pravṛttivijñāna*” refers strictly to the individual awareness.¹

The operational consciousnesses have, in case of an individual being, a contingent existence; at a certain moment, any of them may be either present, or absent, according to the specific conditions (*pratyaya*) of that moment.² Although the mental consciousness necessarily accompanies the activity of the five sensory consciousnesses, it is not always present as under certain circumstances it itself can be missing. The certain degree of freedom that each individual has in respect of his awareness is due precisely to the fact that this awareness can be, at least to a certain extent, controlled by him. Any perception, any conceptual discrimination can be stopped by the individual. The situation is not the same in case of the experience of the mind (*manas*) or of the experience of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). The conditions for their activity to happen are not related to the individual and, thus, they escape his conscious control. Not even the experience of the mind, which is that of constituting the individuality, is related to the individual, but it precedes him.

¹ For the relation between the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) and the conscious experience, see Chatterjee 1999, 106!

² For an analysis of the activity of the six operational consciousnesses and of the conditions which their activity depends on, see Liu 1985, 363!

“The five (*pañca*) [sensory consciousnesses] take birth (*udbhava*) in the root-consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*)¹ according to the conditions (*yathāpratyaya*). The consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) [are born] together (*saha*) or not, like the waves (*taraṅga*) in the water (*jala*).

The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is always (*sarvadā*) produced (*saṃbhūti*), except for (*ṛta*) [the states] devoid of concept (*asaṃjñika*), slumber (*middha*), fainting (*mūrcchana*), the unconscious ones (*acittaka*) or in the two attainments (*samāpatti*).”²

“These are like the water streams of a great river. If the conditions (*pratyaya*) for the birth (*utpatti*) of one wave appear, one single wave occurs (*pravṛt*). If the conditions for the birth of two or more waves appear, several waves occur. Nevertheless, regarding the river to whom the water streams belong, it is known that it is neither interrupted (*samucchitti*), neither exhausted (*parikṣaya*).”³

1.iii. The six operational consciousnesses

The six operational consciousnesses are, according to Vijñānavāda, the visual consciousness (*caṅkṣurvijñāna*), the auditory consciousness (*śrotravijñāna*), the olfactory consciousness

¹ In the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).

² “*pañcānāṃ mūlavijñāne yathāpratyayamudbhavaḥ / vijñānānāṃ saha na vā taraṅgāṇāṃ yathā jale // manovijñānasaṃbhūtiḥ sarvadāsaṃjñikāḍṛte / samāpattidvayānmiddhānmūrcchanādapyacittakāt //*”
Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 15-16, Anacker 1998, 443.

³ “*mahata udakaughasya vahataḥ sa ced ekasya taraṅgasyotpattipratyayaḥ pratyupasthito bhavaty ekam eva taraṅgaṃ pravartate / sa ced dvayoḥ saṃbahulānāḥ taraṅgāṇāṃ utpattipratyayaḥ pratyupasthito bhavati / saṃbahulāni taraṅgāni pravartante / na ca tasyodakaughasya srotasā vahataḥ samucchittir bhavati na parikṣayaḥ prajñāyate //*”
Samḍhinirmocana-sūtra, V.5, Lamotte 1935, 186.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses (*ghrāṇavijñāna*), the gustatory consciousness (*jihvāvijñāna*), the tactile consciousness (*kāyavijñāna*) and the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*). The first five are adjacent to each other, complementary; the ideations of each of them constitute the specific ideations of each of the five senses. The mental consciousness is though in a different type of relationship with the other five operational consciousnesses; it takes over the raw sensory material of the first five operational consciousnesses and ascribes conceptual determinations to it, including it into specific categories.

The visual consciousness (*caḥsurvijñāna*), the auditory consciousness (*śrotravijñāna*), the olfactory consciousness (*ghrāṇavijñāna*), the gustatory consciousness (*jihvāvijñāna*) and the tactile consciousness (*kāyavijñāna*), on the one hand, and the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), on the other, form the two main divisions of the operational consciousnesses. The terminology of the school does not have though a generic term for the five sensory consciousnesses. Sometimes, they are labelled “the five consciousnesses” (*pañcavijñāna*) or, simply, “the five” (*pañca*). Or, while the store-house consciousness is sometimes called “the eighth consciousness”, the mind is called “the seventh consciousness”, the five sensory consciousnesses are called “the five consciousnesses” and the mental consciousness is termed “the sixth consciousness”.

Explaining human experience in terms of the six operational consciousnesses represents, somehow, an excessive simplification of the human experience. The system of the six operational consciousnesses accounts for the cognitive activities of a human being; however, it does not account for the volitive, active experiences. These aspects of human experience find no systematic explanation in Vijñānavāda literature.

2. The Five Sensory Consciousnesses

2.i. The idealist interpretation of the senses as sensory faculties (*indriya*), as the five sensory consciousnesses

The five sensory consciousnesses, generally labelled “the five consciousnesses” (*pañcavijñāna*), equal the sensory faculties, the senses of a being. Hence, the term “sensory consciousnesses”, although not to be found in the Sanskrit terminology of Vijñānavāda, renders their status well enough.

“The five [sensory consciousnesses] manifest (*khyā*) the perceivable ones (*drśya*)¹.”²

“The third transformation of consciousness (*vijñānapariṇāma*) has as its nature the comprehension of the sensory fields (*viśayopalabdhyātmaka*). Through this statement, the own-being (*svabhāva*) and the aspect (*ākāra*) of the six consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) is being indicated.”³

¹ “*Drśya*”, literally, “seen”, “visible”.

² “ *pañcanām khyāyate drśyam* /”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, verse 117, Nanjio 1956, 48.

³ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 291-292.

If we consider the idealist metaphysical context of Vijñānavāda, we can also equate the sensory consciousnesses with the sensory organs.

“The name [of the operational consciousness] is established according to the [sensory] organ, because the organ has five functions [in relation to an operational consciousness]: the consciousness (*vijñāna*) has the organ as a support (*āśraya*), the consciousness is determined (*vidhā*) by the condition of the organ, the seeds (*bīja*) of the consciousnesses depend on the organ, [the apparition] of the consciousness is simultaneous with [the activity] of the organ, the consciousness conforms to the organ.”¹

According to Vijñānavāda, the manifestation of the sensory experience represents a process which takes place exclusively at the level of consciousness; otherwise, the idealism would have been compromised. What to the common sense, affected by the erroneous belief in the existence of the “external” objects, appears as a sensory organ, as an entity exterior to the consciousness, which only mediates the production of sensory ideations at the level of the consciousness, according to Vijñānavāda, is nothing else but a certain function of the consciousness. The eye is not an outer instrument through which consciousness could acquire visual experiences being determined from the outside, but is rather a function, a capacity of the consciousness to experience visual sensations. The senses (*indriya*) are sensory faculties rather than sensory organs. Vijñānavāda even tries to explain this condition of the senses (in Sanskrit, *indriya*) on the basis of the

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 289.

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etymology of the Sanskrit word “*indriya*”, which is derived from “*indra*”. The word “*indra*”, in spite of the uncertainties related to its precise etymology, does convey the meaning of “power”, “capacity”.¹

“As their name, «*indriya*», indicates, [the senses] are only «capacities» (*śakti*), and not external objects, derived from the four material elements (*bhautikarūpa*). A compact (*sapratigha*)² form (*rūpa*), existing outside the consciousness, cannot be logically accepted. Therefore, the five organs, just as their five objects, all these ten fields (*āyatana*), are nothing but transformations of consciousness.

Nevertheless, although all these pertain to the consciousness, are nothing but transformations of the consciousness, their functions are manifold. Hence, the one which produces the visual consciousness, the one which represents the condition for the birth of the visual consciousness, is named «the organ eye» (*cakṣur-indriya*).³

“The name of «senses» (*indriya*) is given to the potentialities (*sāmarthyā*) of forms (*rūpa*), which lie within the consciousness.”⁴

“..... The senses (*indriya*) have the nature (*rūpa*) of capacities (*śakti*), because they represent auxiliary causes (*sahakārin*) which determine [the production of sensations].”⁵

“Therefore, for us, just as the form is interior, the eye also is an interior proper being.”¹

¹ See Williams-Monier 1997, 166-167!

² “*Sapratigha*” – literally, “which opposes resistance to penetration”.

³ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 42.

⁴ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 231-232. In this passage, Hiuan-Tsang deals with an opinion of Dignāga, which, nevertheless, is in agreement with the system of classical Vijñānavāda.

⁵ “*sahakārivaśādyaddhi śaktirūpaṃ [tat] indriyam //*”

Dignāga, *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, 7, in Śāstri 1942, 52.

The Sanskrit text is not the original, but Śāstri’s reconstruction.

Sensory faculties can be best explained in terms of seeds (*bīja*), of imprints (*vāsanā*), of karmic residues. Vijñānavāda considers that the entire experience of a being is the result of the appropriation of a certain individual basis and of the seeds (*bīja*) belonging to it, under the determination of the karmic imprints (*karmavāsanā*). The sensory experience is nothing else but a particular aspect of the appropriated individual experience.² Due to the existence of some specific karmic imprints, at the moment of reincarnation (*pratisam̐dhi*), the consciousness appropriates, among others, the seeds (*bīja*) which, later on, will engender the sensory experience. The concepts of “sensory faculty”, “sense” (*indriya*) are nothing else but generic names for a certain type of individual experience which happens, just as in case of other individual experiences, due to some specific seeds that the consciousness has appropriated.³

The fact that the senses do not represent objects, parts of the human body, is also proved by the fact that they are not known directly, by perception, as it should

¹ Vinītadeva, *Commentary on Ālambanaparīkṣā*, 7, in Śāstri 1942, 52, note 46. Śāstri's translation was done from the French translation of Yamaguchi.

² For the interpretation of the sensory faculties and their activity as karmic transformation, see Tillemans 1990, 258-259 (notes 281 and 283-284)!

³ For a criticism of the realistic theories of perception, see Dharmapāla, *Catuṣṣatakvṛtti*, ad. *Catuṣṣataka*, V.311-317, in Tillemans 1990, 150-161, vol. I! Throughout the dispute, Dharmapāla brings several arguments in favour of the idea that senses are nothing else but karmic potencies of the consciousness.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses have happened if the realist theory of perception had been true. Even if a certain sense is an intermediary for the production of certain perceptions, an alleged condition of “object” would have made the sense itself perceptible. According to Vijñānavāda, the manner in which a human becomes aware of his own sensory capacities is by inference; more precisely, by the abstractization of the sensory experiences of a certain type. The repeated, persistent experience of a certain type of sensation proves the existence of a certain predisposition of the consciousness, which is nothing else but the sensory faculty. Each and every sensory faculty is known through its particular activity, namely the sensations of a particular type. As evidence in support of this fact stands the common experience, which shows that the concepts referring to particular colours, particular shapes, etc. are phenomenologically prior to the concepts of “seeing”, of “sight”¹.

“The senses (*indriya*), representing the supports of the [operational] consciousnesses, are not known through perception (*pratyakṣapramāṇa*). Their existence is inferred from their activities; they are those who give birth to the ideations.”²

“The senses (*indriya*) are inferred (*anu-man*) from their own activities (*svakārya*), as having the nature (*rūpa*) of

¹ An analysis that emphasises the fact that the organ “eye” is different than the sight itself and which demonstrates the inferred nature of the knowledge referring to the existence of the organ “eye”, in *Abhidharmakośa*, I.9 and in *Dhammasaṅgani*, 616, 628.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 42.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses capacities (*śakti*); [they] are not material elements (*bhautika*).”¹

2.ii. The accidental, contingent association between the corporeal organs and the sensory faculties

The fact that, through inference, a human notices the existence of an association between a certain sense and a certain part of his body is simply a finding subsequent to the mere awareness of the activity of the sensory faculties. The comprehension of the sensory faculty is already accomplished when a certain sense is associated to a certain body part and, therefore, this association is nothing else but an accidental determination ascribed to that particular sense. A human becomes aware of his visual abilities before realising the existence of his eyes and, of course, before making the association between the eye and the sight. No matter how tight is the association between a sensory faculty and a particular bodily organ, the sense itself is different from the bodily organ associated to it. The sensory faculty is of an ideatic nature; it simply represents the propensity of the consciousness to experience a particular type of ideations. Even if the activity of a particular sensory activity is associated to the activity of a particular body part, it does not mean that the nature of the sensory faculty includes in any way the nature of that particular organ. The association between a sense and a

¹ “*indriyaṃ svakāryāt śaktirūpamevānumīyate na tu bhautikam* /”

Dignāga, *Ālambanaparīkṣāvṛtti*, ad. 7, in Śāstri 1942, 52.

The Sanskrit text is not the original, but Śāstri’s reconstruction.

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certain bodily organ is made empirically, a posteriori;
there would be nothing contradictory about the
possibility of the existence of some sensory
representations in the absence of the organ associated to
that particular sense.

The existence of a distinction between the
sensory faculty itself (the sensory consciousness), on the
one hand, and the bodily component associated to it, on
the other, also clearly results from the opposition
between the personal, individual, non-common
(*asādhāraṇa*) character of the sensory faculty and the
public, common, shared (*sādhāraṇa*) character of the
bodily component, which is available not only to the
experience of the individual himself, but equally to the
experience of the other beings.

The late Tibetan or Chinese authors of
Vijñānavāda even outline a distinction between two
components that usually make up the senses of a being.
Thus, they distinguish between a purely formal
component (the sensory faculty, the sensory
consciousness) and a bodily one, consisting of those
body parts which particular sensory faculties were
associated to. These bodily components are the eyes, the
ears, the nose, the tongue and the body or, more
precisely, the skin. In terms of the division between the
representation component (*darśanabhāga*) and the object
component (*nimittabhāga*), division operated during the
later stages of Vijñānavāda, the bodily component of the
senses relates to the perceived object component
(*nimittabhāga*), experienced as exterior to consciousness,

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses whilst the purely formal component pertains to the individual awareness, to the representation component (*darśanabhāga*).

“The five consciousnesses are all supported by organs of pure form The foolish have difficulty in distinguishing consciousness from organ.”¹

2.iii. The idealistic interpretation of the sensory contact

The condition of faculties of the consciousness, of capacities (*sāmarthya*), ascribed to the senses also has certain implications regarding the nature of the sensory contact. This can no longer be considered in a realistic manner, as the interaction between consciousness and something from outside, but it is reinterpreted as a process that takes place entirely at the level of consciousness. More precisely, the sensory contact (*sparsā*) takes place when certain internal conditions of consciousness are fulfilled, when the condition of consciousness allows the actualization of the sensory potentiality (*śakti*, *sāmarthya*) of the senses. Vijñānavāda doesn't explicitly deny the realistic description of the sensory contact, which depicts it as “the conjunction of three [elements]” (*trīkaśamnipāta*), that is the conjunction (*śamnipāta*) between consciousness (*vijñāna*), sense (*indriya*) and object (*viṣaya*), but it reinterprets it in idealistic terms. All three elements involved in the production of the sensory contact are reinterpreted as transformations (*pariṇāma*)

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Pa-shih kuei-chu sung*, Epstein 1997, 38.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses of consciousness, as conditions of consciousness, and their conjunction represents just the actualization of some internal conditions of consciousness which, once realised, will engender another transformation, namely the sensory contact.

“These three preexist in the state of seeds (*bīja*). The sensory contact (*sparśa*) which also preexists in the state of seeds (*bīja*) is based on these three to be reborn. This activity is called [karmic] «maturation» (*vipāka*). The sensory contact (*sparśa*) is such a maturation.”¹

3. The Five Sensory Consciousnesses and the Non-determined Perception

3.i. The experience of the five sensory consciousnesses as non-determined perception

As previously shown, the five sensory consciousnesses are quite precise equivalents for the “senses”, for the “sensory faculties”. At the same time, the experience engendered at their level can be considered as the sensory knowledge, the sensory datum.

However, there is a very significant difference between what is understood by “sensory knowledge”, “sensory datum”, “sensory experience” in Vijñānavāda and the meaning of these concepts in the majority of the western philosophical systems. Vijñānavāda insists a lot upon the absence of conceptualization, of categorial discrimination, in case of the experience of the five

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Ganguly 1992, 82 (slightly modified).

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses sensory consciousnesses. Their ideations (*viññapti*) present themselves as an amorphous flow, devoid of determination, devoid of internal delimitation. The categorial schematism, the categorial subsumption, represents a subsequent stage of experience, performed by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*)¹. In Kantian terminology, the ideations of the five sensory consciousnesses represent apperception, i.e. the raw sensory material of knowledge, which no formalism of any kind, no categorial scheme has been applied to yet.

The only specification regarding the type of experience characteristic to the five sensory consciousnesses is that each consciousness corresponds to a determined type of sensation: the visual consciousness is associated to the ideation (*viññapti*) of shape and colour (*rūpa*)², the auditory consciousness is associated to the ideations of sound (*śabda*), the olfactory consciousness is associated to the ideations of smell (*gandha*), the gustatory consciousness is

¹ The conceptually non-determined nature of perception is also stated by other schools of Indian philosophy. For instance, Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika includes the term “*avyapadeśa*” (“that which can not be indicated”) in the definition of perception (*pratyakṣa*). See Gautama, *Nyāyasūtra*, I.2.4, and Shastri 1990, 218-220!

The Vedānta logicians as well noticed the fact that, at first, perception has a raw shape, unconceptualized, the perceptual material being only later included under categories. Thus, in Vedānta, there are two stages of perception: “the perception devoid of conceptualization” (*nirvikalpakapratyakṣa*) and “the perception accompanied by conceptualization” (*savikalpakapratyakṣa*). See Dharmarāja Advarīndra, *Vedānta-paribhāṣā*, in Swami Madhvananda 1997, 32-33.

² The Sanskrit term “*rūpa*” may mean both “shape” and “colour”.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses associated to the ideations of taste (*rasa*) and the tactile consciousness is associated to the tactile ideations (*spraṣṭavya*). The last category also includes thermal sensations and sensations associated to weight.¹

“The third consists in the six kinds² of apprehension (*upalabdhi*) of the sensory fields (*viśaya*).

[Bhāṣya:]«The six kinds»: the meaning (*artha*) is the apparition (*pratipatti*) of the perceptions (*grahana*), of the comprehensions (*upalabdhi*) of the fields (*viśaya*), whose nature (*ātmaka*) is of six kinds: form (*rūpa*), sound (*śabda*), smell (*gandha*), taste (*rasa*), touch (*spraṣṭavya*) and factors (*dharma*).”³

¹ The fact that the only possible specification regarding the content of perception is the one referring to its typology (visual, auditory, etc.) led to an etymological interpretation of the term “*pratyakṣa*” (“perception”) which claims that the term would mean “corresponding to each (*prati*) sensory organ (*akṣa*)”. Perception can be determined only with reference to the specific sensory organ involved in its production. See Tillemans 1990, 273-274 (notes 365-367)!

² The text speaks about “six kinds” since it also considers the mental consciousness and its specific sphere, namely the sphere of the constructed own-beings.

According to *Triṃśikā*, the operational consciousnesses represent the third type of transformation, the first two being the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and the mind (*manas*).

³ “*trītyaḥ śaḍvidhasya yā viśayasyopalabdhīḥ sā /*
[Bhāṣya:] *śaḍvidhasyeti* *ṣaṭprakārasya*
rūpaśabdagandharasaspraṣṭavyadharmātmakasya viśayasya yā
upalabdhirgrahanaṃ pratipattirityarthaḥ /”

Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 8, Anacker 1998, 442; Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.8, Chatterjee 1980, 59-60.

3.ii. Perception (*pratyakṣa*) and inference, subsequent knowledge (*anumāna*), according to Sautrāntika-Yogācāra logicians

The logicians of Vijñānavāda, known under the name of “Sautrāntika-Yogācāra”, will largely discuss on the topic of the opposition between the undetermined nature of perception (*pratyakṣa*) and the subsequent mental determination (*anumāna*). Perception, according to Sautrāntika-Yogācāra logicians, constitutes the mere experimentation of something, without identifying that something or including it into any category of the intellect.

Moreover, one of the classical definitions given to perception in the texts of this school states that perception “lacks mental construction” (*kalpanāpoḍha*). A positive definition of perception, which would conceptually indicate what perception represents, is impossible due to this distinction between perception and conceptual construction.

The instance which does the conceptualization is the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) or, in the terminology of Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, conceptualization pertains to inference, to subsequent knowledge (*anumāna*), and not to perception (*pratyakṣa*).

3.iii. The experience of the sensory consciousnesses as non-erroneous, non-afflicted experience

Though the experience of the sensory consciousnesses can never be found isolatedly, but it is always accompanied by the afflicted experience of the

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses mind (*manas*) and by the erroneous experience of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), yet, intrinsically, the sensorial experience is neither perturbed, nor erroneous. The sensory experience becomes afflicted when associated to the perception of an ego (*ātma-dṛṣṭi*), experience engendered by the mind (*manas*); it becomes erroneous when superimposed with the conceptual nature (*svabhāva*), the conceptual identities, categories (*vikalpa*) engendered by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).

“The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is the support of conceptualization (*vikalpa-āśraya*), in regard to these [sensory data].

The mind (*manas*) is the support (*āśraya*) of their affliction (*saṃkleśa*) or purification (*vyāvadāna*), since their afflicted or purified character depends on it.”¹

Impossible to be ever met in isolation but only along with the conceptual experience of the mental consciousness and with the appropriating experience of the mind, it is always accompanied by error, by affliction, not intrinsically though, but only as extrinsically determined².

In itself, sensory experience contains neither affliction, nor error. It appears at an individual level and, therefore, it is limited, but its experience does not involve the error of considering its own content otherwise than it really is. Operational consciousnesses

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin, 1928, 239-40.

² For the mind (*manas*) as the one which leads into error the entire individual, the entire assembly of the six operational consciousnesses, see Liu 1985, 361, 364!

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses do not assign to their own content a fictitious higher ontological status. Sensorial experience doesn't involve any claim of "own nature" (*svabhāva*), of "self" (*ātman*), but they simply engender the ideations characteristic to them, without projecting any error unto them.

The later Chinese texts of the school distinguish three types of knowledge: the direct, veridical one, the inferred one and the erroneous one. The direct, veridical knowledge consists of the pure sensory datum, devoid of any conceptual identity. This is the type of experience characteristic to the five sensory consciousnesses. Since nothing is added to the simple sensory datum, error is totally excluded from this type of experience and thus the direct knowledge is always veridical. The other two types of experience, i.e. inference and error (dreams, hallucinations, etc.) involve the activity of the mental consciousness and are susceptible of error, of untruth.

Also according to the distinction made by the late authors, the sensory consciousnesses are associated to the natural condition of experience, unlike the mental consciousness, which is associated to absolutely imaginary contents, and unlike the mind which is associated with the knowledge that consists of transposing the substantiality of the absolute to the illusory self. The last two types of knowledge differ from the knowledge of the natural condition because they involve error. In case of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), the error consists of experiencing some purely fictitious characteristics, while, in case of the mind (*manas*), it consists of transmuting the

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses substantiality somewhere where it can not be found. Unlike these, the experience of the sensory consciousnesses consists of the manifestation of the phenomena in their normal, natural state, without ascribing them any illusory own-being or the substantiality that is not characteristic to them.

“The direct, veridical perception of natural states can involve any of the three [moral] natures.”¹

3.iv. The experience of the sensory consciousnesses as experience of the flow of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*)

The non-erroneous nature of the sensory experience is due to the fact that it has as its object the conditional flow as it is, without ascribing to it any conceptual nature and the substantiality it does not have. It may be stated that the sensory experience is nothing else but the manner in which the conditional flow affects the human being. The contribution of the human being to the content of the sensory experience is minimal. In case of the sensory experience, the human person is rather passive and thus the sensory experience, through its undelimited, undetermined, continuous nature, simply reflects the equally undelimited, undetermined, amorphous, continuous nature of the causal flow.

The Sautrāntika-Yogācāra logicians, whose approach to “reality” is more empirical than the one of classic Vijñānavāda (they consider that everything that

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Pa-shih kuei-chu sung*, in Epstein 1998, 39 (slightly modified).

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses has causal efficiency, everything that may represent a part of a causal chain is real), ascribes full reality to the object of perception (*pratyakṣa*), i.e. the object experienced by the sensory consciousnesses. The ontology of Sautrāntika-Yogācāra is more empirical than that of the classic Vijñānavāda, as it does not resort to a metaphysical concept of “reality”, which would be applied only to a sphere transcendent to manifestation, but it considers as “real” anything that has causal efficiency, anything that can engender an effect. The object experienced by the sensory consciousnesses is the universal causal flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*) which, for the Sautrāntika-Yogācāra logicians, represents “reality”. Perception would be nothing else but the non-determined, amorphous, continuous experience of this causal flow. Only the subsequent stage, labelled as “inference” (*anumāna*), in the terminology of Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, or “conceptualization” (*parikalpa*) performed by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), in the terms of Vijñānavāda, is considered as unreal, as false (*vitatha*).

The opposition between the reality of the object of perception, of the object experienced by the sensory consciousnesses, and the unreality of the inference (*anumāna*), of the experience of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), can also be found in classic Vijñānavāda, but in a slightly modified way, for reasons that are related to the ontological framework of the schools. Classic Vijñānavāda ascribes reality to the causal process but with the restriction that this is only a contingent, relative (*paratantra*) reality and not absolute,

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses as it is considered in Sautrāntika-Yogācāra. Therefore, the experience of the sensory consciousnesses is associated with the dependent (*paratantra*), relative reality, whilst the ideations of the mental consciousness are considered, as in the case of Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, absolute unreality (*atyantābhāva*), error (*viparyāsa*), pure imagination (*parikalpa*).

In the terminology of the three own-natures (*trisvabhāva*), the status of the sensory experience, respectively, of the experience of the mental consciousness, can be reformulated as follows. The undetermined experience of the sensory consciousnesses corresponds to the experience of the dependent own-being (*paratantrasvabhāva*), which is real, even if having only a relative, conditioned reality; the conceptual experience of the mental consciousness corresponds to the constructed own-being (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), which is absolutely unreal (*atyantābhāva*), erroneous.

3.v. The mind (*manas*) and the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) as supports (*āśraya*), conditions (*pratyaya*) of the sensory consciousnesses

When dealing with the support (*āśraya*), the conditions (*pratyaya*) responsible for the production of the sensory experience, Vijñānavāda texts display certain heterogeneity.

The most suitable explanation for the conditionings of the sensory consciousnesses seems to be that which states their dependency on the store-house

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses consciousness, on the conditional flow, on the one hand, and on the mind (*manas*), on the other. As for their dependency on the mind, one must specify the fact that they do not depend so much on the appropriating, perturbing activity of the mind, but on its limitation activity, the activity of focusing upon a limited, determined part of the universal experience. To put it differently, the operational consciousnesses depend on the mind, but not so much on the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭamanas*), as on the mind as an immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*).¹ Dependency on the mind is related to their individual character, to their being circumscribed to the person; the sensory faculties have this personal nature, which is explained through their being born at the level of the experience delimited by the mind, at the level of the individual experience.²

“Hence, in respect of the visual consciousness, the eye (*cakṣus*) represents its regent condition (*adhipatipratyaya*), the form (*rūpa*) represents its objective condition (*ālambanapratyaya*) and the consciousness that has just ceased to exist in the immediately preceding moment (*anantaniruddhavijñāna*) represents their immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*).”³

¹ See section 5, “The Determination of the Mental Consciousness (*manovijñāna*) by the Mind (*manas*)” for an explanation of the two aspects of the mind: the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭamanas*) and the mind as an immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*)!

² For a study upon the dependency of the six operational consciousnesses on the appropriation of an individual identity, see Waldron 2003, 97!

³ Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.28, Lamotte 1973, 48.

On the other hand, the experience of the sensory consciousnesses depends on the conditional flow, on the store-house consciousness. This dependency on the trans-individual conditional flow explains the common experience of the fact that the senses of a being are oriented towards outside. The sensory experience, although located at the level of an individual, is not strictly subjective but it seems to be also determined from the outside of the individual. There is an obvious difference between the purely subjective status of conceptual construction (*parikalpa*) and the not entirely subjective status of the sensory experience, and this is explained precisely by the fact that the sensory experience is determined from the outside of the individual as well.

This does not compromise the ontological idealism because Vijñānavāda interprets even the trans-individual experience, even the universal causal flow, in idealistic terms, considering them as ideations of the universal store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).

The later texts of the school even explicitly state the fact that the experience of the sensory consciousnesses would depend on the shared component (*sādhāraṇa*), on the common component of the store-house consciousness. Or, in terms of the distinction that Dharmapāla operates between the representation component (*darśanabhāga*) and the object component (*nimittabhāga*) of the store-house consciousness, one may state that the experience of the sensory consciousnesses is determined by the object component.

“ the five [sensory consciousnesses] are established in the object component (*nimitta*) of the eighth [consciousness].”¹

Vijñānavāda texts don't state very explicitly this theory referring to the determination of the sensory consciousnesses by the mind and the store-house consciousness, at least not in the manner previously presented. Generally, they offer theories that are quite heterogeneous, quite complicated and, more often than not, different texts present theories that are incompatible on this subject.

For instance, the necessary coexistence of the five sensory consciousnesses with the mind and the mental consciousness determined some authors to consider, not exactly accurately, that these two instances would constitute supports, conditions for the production of sensory experience.² The incorrectness of this opinion can be explained by the fact that in such a situation the operational consciousnesses would not constitute undetermined, non-conceptual perception anymore, but, having the mind (in both its aspects, afflicted mind and mind as an immediately preceding condition) and the mental consciousness as supports, they themselves would be characterized by conceptualization, appropriation and attachment to the ego.

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 469.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 239; *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra* considers mental consciousness as their condition, Asvabhāva considers the mind as their condition; apud. Vallee-Poussin 1928, 239, note 1.

3.vi. The states of consciousness (*caitta*), the factors (*dharmas*) associated to the sensory consciousnesses

The fact that the experience of the sensory consciousnesses represents pure and raw perception also has some consequences on the factors (*dharmas*), on the states of consciousness (*caitta*) associated to them. Older texts, such as *Trīṃśikā*, when discussing the factors associated to each of the eight consciousnesses, take into consideration all six operational consciousnesses together and thus the existence of a distinction between the factors associated to sensory consciousnesses and those associated to mental consciousness is out of the question. However, more recent texts, especially the Chinese sources, not only detail and expand the list of factors associated to the consciousness, reaching a total number of one hundred factors, but also analyse the mental consciousness and the five sensory consciousnesses separately.¹ As a result, the list of factors associated to sensory consciousnesses is shortened to 31 factors, as opposed to the 51 factors associated to mental consciousness. The reason for this restriction is that those factors which necessarily involve conceptualization, intellectual discrimination, such as pride (*māna*), erroneous opinions (*kudṛṣṭi*), or doubt (*vicikitsā*), were eliminated from the list of factors associated to sensory consciousnesses.

¹ The factors associated to consciousness have constituted an important topic in many works, either classic or modern. See Stcherbatsky 2002, 95-107; Sogen 2002, 219-230!

4. The Mental Consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and the Categories

4.i. The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) as the instance responsible for the conceptual determination, for the categorial discrimination

The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is the one which operates the conceptual discriminations (*vikalpa*) upon the raw sensory material produced at the level of the five sensory consciousnesses.¹ The ideations of the five sensory consciousnesses present themselves as a flow lacking internal separation. The mental consciousness operates the categorial divisions, the conceptual discriminations within this amorphous flow. Its main function is precisely to discriminate (*vi-kalp, vijñā*); the particle “*vi*”, meaning “separation”, “division”, is essential for the description of the activity of the mental consciousness which cuts up, separates, discriminates, delineates certain parts of the sensory experience and assigns them a conceptually determined own-being (*svabhāva*).

“Discriminating knowledge (*vi-jñā*) [is performed] by the [mental] consciousness (*vijñāna*).”²

The identity of an object, the object considered as an individual entity, is exclusively produced by the operations of the mental consciousness. At the level of the sensory consciousnesses, the experience does not

¹ For a discussion on the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), as it is regarded in the Abhidharma schools, see Chaudhury 1983, 140!

² “*vijñānena vijānāti*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, verse 116, Nanjio 1956, 48.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses consist of separate objects but everything constitutes an amorphous undefined flow of sensations. The delimitation of a particular object at the level of the raw sensorial material represents an operation performed solely by the mental consciousness.

Not only conceptual identity (*saṃjñā*, *svabhāva*) is the product of the mental consciousness, but also everything representing a determined characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*, *nimitta*), a particular feature. Anything that can be stated about an object, any of its characteristics, due to the very fact that they can be expressed in words, that they have a determined meaning, represent the result of the activity of discrimination performed by the mental consciousness. Since the experience of the operational consciousnesses is absolutely devoid of determinations, even the most primitive attributes, even the primary characteristics, such as a certain colour, a certain shape, a certain taste are products of the mental consciousness. Any determination ascribed to experience, no matter how empirical it might seem, is not produced by the senses, but by the mental consciousness.

The mental consciousness is responsible for all names (*nāman*), for all operations of naming; the relation between the mental consciousness and the name is only a consequence of the relation between the mental consciousness and the concept, the determination. The name is nothing but the public aspect, the outer aspect of the concept and thus it also represents a product of the mental consciousness.

“... all operational consciousnesses are objects of mental consciousness; therefore, various aspects of mental consciousness are conceptual. When that engages and focuses on that basis, one obtains the names of this and that.”¹

The epistemic consequences of this view are very important since considering that the entire experience of the mental consciousness is absolutely fictitious, illusory, the entire conceptual knowledge, the entire sphere of concepts becomes deprived of empirical validity, being totally equated to imagination.

4.ii. Categorical identity superimposed on the raw sensory material

The experience of the mental consciousness is generally simultaneous with the experience of the sensory consciousnesses; although there may be situations in which the mental consciousness produces ideations in the absence of the activity of the sensory consciousnesses, as is the case with dreams, hallucinations or free fantasy, most often the mental consciousness accompanies the experience of the sensory consciousnesses, putting it in a conceptual shape. Vijñānavāda texts state that the mental consciousness functions along (*saha pravṛtta*) with the sensory consciousnesses, that it is simultaneous (*samakāla*) with them and that it has the same object as they do (*samaviṣaya*).

“Then, the discriminating (*vikalpaka*) mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) occurs; it functions along with

¹ Jñānagarbha, *Āryamaitreyakevalaparivartabhāṣya*, Powers 1998, 49.

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“As soon as a group of two, three, four or five [sensory] consciousnesses starts its activity, simultaneously, a single discriminating mental consciousness also starts to work, and it has as its object the same object as the five [sensory] consciousnesses.”¹

“If a single mental consciousness starts to function, immediately, a single discriminating mental consciousness, having as its object the same object as the visual consciousness, also starts its activity. If two, three, four or five [sensory] consciousnesses start to function, immediately a single discriminating mental consciousness, having as its object the same object as the five [sensory] consciousness, starts its activity.”²

The process of categorial subsumption, through which the conceptual schematism is superimposed on the raw perceptual material, is, in most cases, an automatic operation performed without any deliberation. When a manifestation becomes an object of human deliberation, it is, in most cases, already displayed in a conceptual manner.

4.iii. The sensation as determining only the intensity of the conceptual experience and not its content

The role of pure sensation in constituting the conscious human experience is that it makes the representations of the mental consciousness more vivid (*paṭu*), when they happen along with the ideations of the sensory consciousnesses.

“Regarding the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), it has two simultaneous supports, namely the seventh and the

¹ Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, Lamotte 1934-35, 179.

² *Samādhinirmocana-sūtra*, V.4, Lamotte 1935, 185.

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eighth consciousnesses. If any of these is missing, the mental
consciousness cannot exist.

When it has as a support/condition the five [sensory]
consciousnesses, it is more lively (*paṭu*); nevertheless, the five
[sensory consciousnesses] are not necessary for its existence
and hence they cannot be considered as supports of it.”¹

Therefore, the contribution of the senses to the
conscious experience is rather related to the intensity,
persistence and force with which the representations of
the mental consciousness are manifesting. In the case of
free imagination, of fantasy, of dream, the mental
consciousness is not assisted by the sensory
consciousnesses and, consequently, it does not have
much intensity, its series of ideations being interrupted
more easily. When the activity of the mental
consciousness is accompanied by the activity of the
senses, i.e. in the case of what is commonly termed as
“perception”, the ideations of the mental consciousness
still represent only imagination and mental construction,
but their higher stability and enhanced intensity are due
to the fact that they are assisted by the sensory activity.
However, this does not mean they are produced by the
sensory consciousnesses, but only that they are made
more lively through their being assisted by the senses.

4.iv. The conceptual sphere as separate from the sphere of sensory experience

The concept (*vikalpa*), the notion (*saṃjñā*), the
own-being (*svabhāva*) that the mental consciousness
ascribes to the ideations of the five sensory

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 240.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses consciousnesses are not as much synthesized from the sensory material, as they are superimposed on that material. The self identity, the conceptual nature, does not intrinsically belong to the sensory experience; the mental consciousness does not synthesise, does not extract anything from something. On the contrary, the mental consciousness creates by itself the conceptual nature which it will later superimpose on the sensory material produced by the sensory consciousnesses. The conceptual identity is extrinsic to the sensory material, something created only by the mental consciousness, without any participation of the senses. After the sensory experience is engendered, the concept freely created by the mental consciousness will be superimposed on it.

Without being determined in any way by the senses when engendering concepts, the mental consciousness performs an activity that is closer to imagination rather than to synthesis or subtraction. The concepts manifested by the mental consciousness find no support, no justification whatsoever in the perceptions of the senses and, therefore, they represent imagination, fantasy, pure mental construction (*parikalpa*). According to the theory of the three own-beings, the concept, the category (*vikalpa*, *saṃjñā*) represent the constructed own-being (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), which is nothing but imagination, which lacks any objectivity, but is exclusively projected by the individual consciousness.

The object of the mental consciousness is a universal but not in the sense of abstracting a single common feature from a larger number of particulars. It's

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses simply a single fictitious feature which is arbitrarily ascribed to several particulars, whose nature does not require, does not justify the application of that universal. Therefore, the concept is not a universal feature shared by multiple particulars but rather a single mental construction freely superimposed on multiple particulars. The connection between the particulars and the universal is not an intrinsic, natural one, but an extrinsic one, an act of superimposition.

“But surely the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) arises after the ear consciousness and designates a universal character.....”¹

“Therefore, in conclusion, the universal character does not in fact refer.”²

Although the conceptual ideations engendered by the mental consciousness are generally associated with the sensory ideations, this does not also imply the existence of a natural connection between them. The ideations of the mental consciousness are originated exclusively in the seeds of conceptualization (*prapañcavāsanā*), in those individual imprints that the mind (*manas*) appropriated and are not based on the sensory ideations, as the common sense claims. Vijñānavāda does not go into too many details about the process through which the mental consciousness superimposes conceptual characteristics upon sensory contents. However, it explicitly claims the artificial

¹ Dharmapāla, *Vṛtti* on Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka*, ad. kārikā 318cd, Tillemans 1990, 163

² Dharmapāla, *Vṛtti* on Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka*, ad. kārikā 318cd, Tillemans 1990, 164.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses connection between concept and sensation, as well as the subjective nature of the concept. Some texts consider memory (*smṛti*) to be responsible for the operation of the conceptual discriminations, suggesting that their origin is to be found within the individual subject. Sometimes, the difference between concept and sensory data is justified based on the existence of a temporary interval between them, between the occurrence of the sensory ideations and the occurrence of the concepts, characteristic to the mental consciousness.

“... is born (*utpad*) the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), which is associated with (*saṃprayukta*) memory (*smṛti*) and is characterized by the apparition (*pratibhāsa*) of forms (*rūpa*) and of the other discriminations (*vikalpika*).”¹

“When it [is produced], the object (*artha*) is no longer seen (*drś*). How could it be conceived (*mata*) its condition of sensory perception (*pratyakṣatva*)?”

When that knowledge (*buddhi*) which is the sensory perception (*pratyakṣa*) takes place (*bhū*) – «This is my sensory perception» –, then the object (*artha*) is no longer seen (*drś*), since discrimination (*pariccheda*) [is performed] only by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), after the visual consciousness (*caṣurvijñāna*) has ceased (*niruddhatva*). Therefore, how could it be accepted (*iś*) as sensory evidence (*pratyakṣatva*) of anything? Duet o the particularity (*viśeṣa*) that all the objects (*viśaya*) are momentary (*kṣanika*), forms (*rūpa*), tastes (*rasa*) and the others cease (*niruddha*).”²

¹ “*smṛtisamprayuktā tatpratibhāsaiva rūpādivikalpikā manovijñaptirutpadyata...*”

Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, ad. 17b, Anacker 1998, 419.

² “.....*sa ca yadā tadā/ na so ’rtho drśyate tasya pratyakṣatvaṃ kathamā matamā //*

“When the mental consciousness arises, the sound and the ear consciousness have both already ceased, so what does the universal character rely upon?”¹

This way, the mental consciousness engenders a new ontological level, that of discriminated, determined, conceptual entities (*parikalpita*). This can be considered as a distinct ontological level, different from that of perception, of the experience of the causal flow, since any attempt of reducing the conceptual entities to sensory experience is bound to fail; consequently, the conceptual level becomes “something else” than the sphere of the causal flow. The ontological level of the mental construction (*parikalpa*) is the third level of reality accepted in Vijñānavāda, along with the absolute level of the perfected own-being (*pariniṣpanna*), the ultimate reality, and the level of the causal flow (*paratantra*), of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).

4.v. The “exteriority” (*bāhya*) of the objects of common experience as a fictitious product of the mental consciousness

The “external objects” (*bāhya artha*), having determined conceptual identities, are the main kind of

yadā ca sā pratyakṣabuddhirbhavatīdam me pratyakṣamiti tadā na so'rtho dṛśyate manovijñānenaiva paricchedāccakṣurvijñānasya ca tadā niruddhatvāditi / katham tasya pratyakṣatvamiṣṭam / viśeṣeṇa tu kṣaṇikasya viśayasya tadidānīm niruddhameva tadrūpaṃ rasaādikam vā /”

Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, ad. 16b, Anacker 1998, 418-419.

¹ Dharmapāla, *Vṛtti* on Āryadeva, *Catuhṣataka*, ad. kārīkā 318cd, Tillemans 1990, 163.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses entities accepted by the common thinking and by the realistic philosophy. For the idealistic school of Vijñānavāda, they represent only constructed own-beings (*parikalpitasvabhāva*), projected by the mental consciousness, and which are, erroneously, interpreted as autonomous, objective entities. The reality illicitly ascribed to them creates the illusion of their objectivity; the “exteriority” commonly ascribed to them is nothing else but a consequence of the ontological autonomy erroneously imputed to them. Their illusory autonomous existence made them “something else” than consciousness, made them “exterior” to consciousness. The ontological idealism makes the object present at the level of the subject, including the former into the latter; the object’s “exteriority” is possible only in an illusionary manner, when the object’s condition of ideation is overlooked and is replaced with an erroneous condition which involves substantiality, autonomous own-being.

“When the [sensory] consciousnesses occur, the form is not considered as being external. Only afterwards, the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) gives birth to the erroneous notion (*saṃjñā*) of exteriority (*bāhya*)..... Regarding the form that the mental consciousness considers as being external and real, it is said to be non-existent, since it is the mental consciousness the one which erroneously constructs it as being real.

The object is not a form, but it appears as a form (*rūpābhāsa*), is not external, but it appears as external (*bāhyābhāsa*).....”¹

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 428-429.

**4.vi. The absolute non-existence
(*atyantābhāva*) of the object intended by the mental
consciousness (*manovijñāna*)**

The object of the mental consciousness is said to be absolutely non-existent (*atyantābhāva*); this means that it is impossible to find an object which complies with the category, with the conceptual identity constructed by the mental consciousness. The concepts constructed by the mental consciousness claim to refer to objects which are both determined, delimited, and ontologically autonomous, substantial. According to Vijñānavāda, it is impossible to find this kind of objects, which would be both determined and substantial. The concepts, the notions constructed by the mental consciousness, which intends this kind of objects, represent nothing more than imagination, free fantasy.

“It is stated that the other [consciousnesses] are directed (*mukha*) towards one [object], are conditioned by an object (*vastupratyaya*). [This] is not valid also in respect of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*). Since it is not directed towards one [object], [it] has as a condition (*pratyaya*), aims at something existing [only] conventionally (*saṃvṛtisat*), such as a chariot or others Hence, it is established (*sidh*) that the object (*artha*) that the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is established on (*ālambana*) is absolutely non-existent (*atyantābhāva*).”¹

¹ “*pare tāni ekonmukhāni vastupratyayāni iti pratipadyante / ato manovijñānaṃ na yuktam / ekonmukhatvābhāvāt rathādi[vat] saṃvṛtisatpratyayatvābhyupagamāt / tathā manovijñānālambanārtho 'tyantamabhāvaḥ sidhyati /*”

Dharmapāla, *Ālambanaparīkṣāvyaākhyā*, Śāstri 1939, 56-57.

“..... the sixth consciousness makes the mirages, the past, the future and other illusions appear as objective ...”¹

An argument for the non-existence of the object intended by the mental consciousness, frequently brought up by the authors of Vijñānavāda, takes its stand on the unanimous acceptance of some situations, such as the dream state (*svapna*), the hallucinations, the illusions, in which the mental consciousness can produce ideations utterly devoid of an object. The possibility of the existence of the ideations of the mental consciousness even in the absence of a proper object is taken as a premise based on which Vijñānavāda extends the applicability of this situation and claims that the mental consciousness is always devoid of object.

“The one who is not awaken (*aprabuddha*) doesn’t realise (*avagam*) the non-existence (*abhāva*) of the objects (*viṣaya*) seen in dream (*svapnadṛś*). ”

The world (*loka*) is fallen asleep (*prasupta*) in the slumber (*nidrā*) of the [mental] imprints (*vāsanā*) and in the practice (*abhyāsa*) of some unreal (*vitatha*) discriminations (*vikalpa*). Just as in the case of dream (*svapna*), non-existing (*abhūta*) objects (*artha*) are seen (*dṛś*) and the one who is not awaken (*aprabuddha*) doesn’t realize (*avagam*) correctly (*yathāvat*) their non-existence (*abhāva*).

But, when [the world] is awaken (*prabuddha*) due to the obtainment (*lābha*) of the non-conceptual (*nirvikalpa*) transcendent (*lokottara*) knowledge (*jñāna*), [which is] the antidote (*pratipakṣa*) of that [condition of sleep], then, due to the apparition (*bhāva*) of the pure (*śuddha*) worldly (*laukika*) knowledge (*jñāna*), acquired as a reverse of this [enlightenment] (*tatprṣṭhalabdha*), of [the knowledge] directed towards [everything] (*sammukhin*), se înțelege

¹ *Fan ming yi tsi*, Tok. XXXVI, Levi 1932, 160.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses (*avagam*) in mod corect the non-existence (*abhāva*) of the objects (*viṣaya*) is correctly (*yathāvat*) understood. These [situations] are identical (*samāna*).”¹

4.vii. The experience of the mental consciousness and the deliberate reasoning

The ideations of the mental consciousness represent, to a very high degree, the awareness of the individual. The raw sensory experience engendered by the five sensory consciousnesses is automatically subjected to the categorial schematism and only in a conceptual form does it become an object of awareness, of the conscious attention of the individual. Most often, human awareness operates with categorically delimited phenomena and less with raw perceptions.

All conscious operations of the human thinking take place on the conceptual level; all acts of inference, of discovering regularities, of predictions, abstractions, imagination, fantasy, memory, involve concepts and not raw perception. The raw sensory material can be directly, passively experienced, but the conscious thought can not operate with this type of material due to its undetermined nature. The perceptions of the five sensory

¹ “... *svapnadṛgviṣayābhāvaṃ nāprabuddho ’vagacchati / evaṃ vitathavikalpābhyāsavāsanānidrayā prasupto lokaḥ svapna ivābhūtamārthaṃ paśyanna prabuddhastadabhāvaṃ yathāvannāvagacchati / yadā tu tatpratipakṣalokottaranirvikalpajñānalābhātprabuddho bhavati tadā tatprṣṭhalabdhāśuddhalaucikajñānasammukhībhāvādviṣayābhāvaṃ yathāvadavagacchatīti samānametat/”*

Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, ad. 17c, Anacker 1998, 419.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses consciousnesses, being continuous, amorphous, undelimited, can be only passively received; to try to operate with this sensorial material is possible only if certain divisions are operated, or this means precisely conceptualization.

Sautrāntika-Yogācāra considerably details the discussion on the nature of perception (*pratyakṣa*) and of conceptualization (*kalpanā*), of “inference” (*anumāna*). The Yogācāra logicians noticed the fact that the object of perception is always the absolute particularity (*svalakṣaṇa*), which is unique, unrepeatable in its characteristics. The general characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) pertain to conceptualization, to what the authors of the school call “inference” or “subsequent knowledge” (*anu-māna*). Since the object of perception is an unrepeatable particular, an absolute particular, it strictly characterizes only the present experience. Moreover, due to its absolute particularity, it also has a discrete nature, there being no connection between the object of perception at a given moment and the object at another moment. The experience of the raw perception is simply a succession of momentary, unique, absolutely particular and unrepeatable appearances. Of course, at the level of this perceptual flow, no regularity whatsoever can be discovered, no prediction of any kind is possible. Everything is reduced to the momentary ascertainment of a present state, absolutely particular and which, once ceased, will never come back again.

Therefore, human thinking would not only have great difficulties in operating with these absolute

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses particulars, but, more than this, it would not have any reason, any kind of motivation to perform such operations. No kind of prediction is possible in relation to these absolute particulars (*svalakṣaṇa*), no kind of regularity (*niyama*) can be discovered in regard to their succession. Human thinking, which tries to discover laws, regularities at the level of experience so as to be able to make predictions, is completely incapable of doing this in case of the experience of raw perception.

Consequently, all laws, all regularities, all predictions involve concepts (*kalpanā*), generalities (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*), and, therefore, they don't occur between sensorial ideations, but rather among the constructions of the mental consciousness. Any law, any prediction involves the existence of general terms in order to make the connection between the already known cases and the still non-experienced situations which are nevertheless subjected to the law or prediction in case.

Therefore, since the entire human knowledge referring to the future, to the past, to situations inaccessible to direct perception, to regularities, to any kind of generalities is constructed by the mental consciousness and, considering that even the present sensory experience appears to the human consciousness not in its raw form, but, most often, in a conceptual shape, it can be stated that the human awareness unfolds primarily at the level of the mental consciousness.

The mental consciousness is functional throughout the entire range of human awareness; the only states in which it is missing are the various states of

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses unconsciousness (*acittaka*) a being may go through. Generally, these states are considered to be five: the condition of being devoid of conceptual experience (*āsaṃjñika*), slumber (*middha*), fainting (*mūrchana*) and the two mystical realisations, the attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) and the state of lack of consciousness (*asaṃjñīsamāpatti*).

“The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is always (*sarvadā*) produced (*saṃbhūti*), except for (*ṛta*) [the states] devoid of concept (*asaṃjñika*), slumber (*middha*), fainting (*mūrcchana*), the unconscious ones (*acittaka*) or in the two attainments (*samāpatti*).”¹

Hiuan-Tsang mentions another opinion as well, according to which the mental consciousness would be also missing at the moment of birth and at the moment of death.

“Others consider that the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is missing also at the moments of birth and death.”²

¹ “*manovijñānasam̐bhūtiḥ sarvadāsaṃjñikādr̥te / samāpattidvayānmiddhānmūrcchanādapyacittakāt //*”

Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 16, Anacker 1998, 443.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 410.

5. The Determination of the Mental Consciousness (*manovijñāna*) by the Mind (*manas*)

5.i. The conceptual cognitive experience as determined by the individual self (*ātman*) appropriated through the activity of the mind (*manas*)

In Buddhism, the categorial system is not based in an objective reality whose structure would be reproduced through the categorial system, but it is something purely subjective. The conscious thinking, the experience of the mental consciousness, operating with this categorial system, also represents a purely subjective activity, similar to fantasy. The conscious reasoning, the categorial system and the experience of the mental consciousness don't reproduce an objective reality, are not determined by such a reality. They represent purely subjective experiences, determined only by individual, subjective conditions. The mental consciousness only brings to a conscious level some elements pertaining to individuality, to subjectivity. The common, pre-philosophical reflection, as well as the realistic philosophy tend to consider conscious thinking, conceptual thinking, as an attempt to reproduce an objective reality, as having cognitive value, as being determined by an objective reality.

Vijñānavāda - and Buddhism, in general - considers that conscious conceptual reasoning would rather reflect human individuality, subjectivity. Using the terminology of Vijñānavāda, we can state that the

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) only projects in a conscious form something related to the ego, to the self (*ātman*) appropriated by the mind (*manas*). Both the mind and the mental consciousness relate to an individual self, to a human subjectivity. If the mind (*manas*) is responsible for the unconscious attachment towards this self (*ātman*), the conscious form of this attachment, the conscious recognition of the individual self appropriated by the mind, are done by the mental consciousness. All experiences of the mental consciousness are determined exclusively by the personality appropriated by the mind, as there is nothing objective, outside the individual, to determine it. Therefore, between the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and the mind (*manas*) there is a very tight connection; the mental consciousness experiences consciously, conceptually, the individual self and its determinations, which the mind appropriates unconsciously.

The authors of Vijñānavāda even interpret the name of “mental consciousness” (*manovijñāna*) precisely as referring to the idea of “consciousness/awareness (*vijñāna*) of the mind (*manas*)”. To put it differently, the mind and its unconscious activity constitute the object of the mental consciousness, which brings them to a conscious level.¹

¹ For the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) as the instance responsible for the cognition of the mind (*manas*), see Chatterjee 1999, 106!

“The seventh [consciousness] is the object (*ālambana*) of the sixth.”¹

“What is visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna*)? It is the one which, being established in the organ «eye» (*cakṣus*), discriminates the forms (*rūpa*).

What is mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*)? It is the one which, being established in the organ «mind» (*manas*), discriminates the factors (*dharma*).”²

Using a less philosophical terminology, the fact that the mind represent the object (*ālambana*) of the mental consciousness might be expressed by saying that the ideations (*vijñapti*) of the mental consciousness comply with the personality (*ātman*) appropriated by the mind. The conscious experience of an individual, namely the ideations of his mental consciousness, depends on the mental-corporeal-sensorial structure that constitutes his person.³ The mind appropriates this structure unconsciously; it produces the sense of the ego, of the self, regarding the appropriated structure. The mental consciousness consciously experiences some contents of the appropriated personality.

The process through which the activity of appropriation performed by the mind comes to determine the conceptual experience of the mental consciousness is not very clearly detailed in Vijñānavāda texts. Nevertheless, it is suggested that, first of all, the mind determines the mental consciousness to represent, in a conceptual, conscious manner, the appropriated self.

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 469.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 292.

³ For the dependence of the mental consciousness on the mind, see Waldron 2003, 227-228 (notes 72-74)!

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Once this self has acquired a conceptual representation, the next step seems to be the one through which everything that the self interacts with is represented in a conceptual manner. A possible justification could be that, once the self is experienced as having a conceptual identity, it is natural for its interaction with the rest of manifestation to be also conceptually presented. Since the self mediates the experience of the entire manifestation, the universe being represented as it is reflected at the level of the individual self, the conceptual representation of the self implies the existence of a conceptual representation of its interactions as well. Through this, the entire universe the self interacts with acquires a conceptual representation. This outline of the process through which experience acquires a conceptual form due to the determination exerted by the mind is rather a reconstruction attempt, as it never appears explicitly and entirely formulated in any text of the school, but is only suggested.

5.ii. The association of the sensory consciousnesses with the sensory organs and of the mental consciousness with the individual self appropriated by the mind (*manas*)

Vijñānavāda texts tend to ascribe this role of consciously experiencing the determinations corresponding to the individual self appropriated by the mind to the mental consciousness, but, within this process, the role of the five sensory consciousnesses is close enough to that of the mental consciousness. More

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses precisely, the sensory consciousnesses experience the ideations produced at the level of the appropriated sensory organs (*indriya*) and the mental consciousness puts these ideations in a conceptual form. Therefore, we can consider that the mental consciousness and the sensory consciousnesses are equally involved in the process of bringing to awareness determinations of the appropriated individual self.

The sensory consciousnesses experience the ideations corresponding to each of the five sensory organs; nevertheless, this sensory content presents itself in a raw, unconceptualized, form. The sensory consciousnesses are “established” in these sensory organs, have them as “support”, as “basis” (*āśraya*), but, since the sensory organs represent organs appropriated by the mind, the sensory consciousnesses have also the mind as their support. However, in order to differentiate them, they take their names not from the mind (*manas*) – which represents their common support – but from their particular bases, which are the specific sensory organs. Thus, instead of being called, undifferentiatedly, “mental consciousnesses” (*manovijñāna*), they are given specific names such as “visual consciousness” (*cakṣurvijñāna*), “auditory consciousness” (*śrotravijñāna*), etc. Their experience equally constitutes an experience of a content appropriated by the mind but, since certain bases specific to each of them have been identified as well, they were given names according to these bases, so as to clearly differentiate them.

The situation was not the same in the case of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) itself, for which the authors of Vijñānavāda did not find any specific corporeal support from which it could have been given a specific name. The authors of the school simply noticed the dependence of the consciousness which performs the conceptualization on the individual self, on the person appropriated by the mind (*manas*), and thus they call it “mental consciousness” (*mano-vijñāna*). The same way, the visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna* – literally, in Sanskrit, “the consciousness of the eye”, “*cakṣus*” meaning “eye”), having the eye (*cakṣus*) as support, was given the name of “*cakṣurvijñāna*”, the consciousness which performs the conceptualization, having the individual self (*ātman*) appropriated by the mind (*manas*) as support, was given the name of “*mano-vijñāna*” (“consciousness of the mind [which appropriates the individual self]”).

“Since the five organs represent the seeds (*bīja*) of the five [sensory] consciousnesses (*vijñāna*), we must consider that the mind (*manas*) represents the seed of the mental consciousness. This, because the mind is, in regard to the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), what the five sensory organs are in regard to the five [sensory] consciousnesses.”¹

Modern science would ascribe the process of conceptual reasoning to the brain, but the authors of Vijñānavāda do not seem to have any knowledge about this.² They do not associate the process of conceptual

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 234.

² For an interesting analogy between the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and the brain, see Lai 1977, 69!

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses thinking to any specific part of the human body, but they consider that the only support of the consciousness which performs the conceptualization is simply the person, the individual self (*ātman*), at large. Since it was directly dependent on the individual self appropriated by the mind (*manas*) and since it lacked any specific support (*āśraya*), the consciousness which performs conceptualization could not have been given another name but “mental consciousness” (*manovijñāna*).

Strictly speaking, the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and the sensory consciousnesses are equally mental consciousnesses, i.e. instances of the consciousness which have the mind (*manas*) as object (*ālambana*). The fact that the term “mental consciousness” (*manovijñāna*) is used only for that consciousness which operates the categorial synthesis lacks any serious philosophical ground. It is true that there are significant differences between the activity of the mental consciousness and that of the sensory consciousnesses, but these are not related to the fact that the former is based on the mind (*manas*) to a greater extent than the latter.

“All the six consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) are established in the mind (*manas*); nevertheless, only the sixth, the mental consciousness, receives the name of «mental consciousness» (*manovijñāna*). This happens because it is named according to its special support, namely the seventh consciousness, the mind (*manas*). In the same way, the five [sensory] consciousnesses, even if they are equally established in the mind (*manas*), are also named according to their special supports, i.e. the eye, etc.

Otherwise, we can state that the reason the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is thus named is the fact that it is established only in the mind (*manas*), while the other five are also established in certain material organs (*rūpīndriya*), such as the eye, etc.

Therefore, the six consciousnesses (*vijñāna*) are named according to their supports and considering them in relation to another [consciousness]: visual consciousness, mental consciousness.”¹

“The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) ... must have a support, a field (*āyatana*) corresponding to its name. ... This support is the seventh consciousness, [namely the mind].”²

5.iii. The mind (*manas*) as the object (*ālambana*), as the realm (*dhātu*) of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*)

Vijñānavāda texts often explain the relation between the mental consciousness, on the one hand, and the mind, the self appropriated by the mind, on the other, as a relation between a consciousness and its object (*ālambana*), its realm (*dhātu*). Even if the concept of “mind” (*manas*), in the sense it has in Vijñānavāda, can not be found in the Abhidharma texts, the manner in which Abhidharma discusses the object of the mental consciousness is still quite similar to the manner in which Vijñānavāda discusses the same problem. The difference resides in the fact that, when exposing its theory about the object of the mental consciousness, Vijñānavāda resorts to the concept of “mind” (*manas*), whilst Abhidharma does not involve this concept.

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 289-290.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 282.

The Vaibhāṣika school, at least in the form it is presented by Vasubandhu in *Abhidharmakośa*, postulates the existence of a so-called “*mano-dhātu*” (“realm of the mind” or, more precisely, “realm of the mental consciousness”) as the object of the mental consciousness. In order to establish a similarity with the five sensory consciousnesses, which certain organs and certain specific objects are associated to, the object of the mental consciousness is sometimes said to have as an object the so-called “field of the mind” (*manaāyatana*) or “organ of the mind” (*manaindriya*)¹. The field of the mental consciousness represents the experience of the sensory consciousnesses, put in a categorial form.

“The first five consciousnesses have the five material organs, namely the eye and so on, as supports; the sixth consciousness, the mental consciousness, doesn’t have such a support. Therefore, in order to ascribe a support to this consciousness, whatever serves as a support for it, namely each of the six consciousnesses, is named «mind» (*manas*) or «realm of the mind» (*manodhātu*) or «field of the mind» (*manaāyatana*) or «organ of the mind» (*manaindriya*).”²

The same function is attributed to the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) in Vijñānavāda, only that in a slightly different terminology. The mental consciousness exerts its activity on any of the contents of the sensory consciousnesses, putting them in conceptual frames. As for its object (*ālambana*), Vijñānavāda texts

¹ In Abhidharma, the term “mind” (*manas*) does not have the meaning it has in Vijñānavāda, but it rather stands for the “mental consciousness” (*manovijñāna*) of Vijñānavāda.

² Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa*, I.17, apud. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, Lamotte 1973, 16, footnote.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses don't claim that it would be any of the sensory consciousnesses, any of the sensory faculties, but it is generally said that its object is the mind (*manas*), i.e. of that aspect of the consciousness which appropriates the whole body, including its sensory faculties.

That the mind, the self appropriated by the mind, represents the object (*ālambana*) of the mental consciousness results from the common, pre-philosophical ascertainment of the fact that the conscious experience of a person is dependent on his self, on his psycho-corporeal structures. A person experiences the sensory ideations engendered by his sense organs as well as his discursive thoughts engendered by his brains (the equivalent, in a modern terminology, of the mental consciousness). Thus, it may be stated that, since it depends on certain components of a person, the conceptual experience depends on the appropriation act (*upādāna*) of the mind, through which a particular individual self, along with his predispositions towards particular experiences, are assumed as own identity (*ātman*).

5.iv. The seeds of conceptualization (*abhilāpavāsanā*) and their appropriation by the mind (*manas*)

Of all the elements belonging to an appropriated personality, Vijñānavāda considers that responsible for the production of conceptual experience are the so-called "imprints of the linguistic categories" (*abhilāpavāsanā*). The authors of the school do not identify a certain organ

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses (i.e. the brain) and its specific mechanisms as the ones accounting for the production of the conceptual experience, but they confine themselves to considering these imprints (*vāsanā*), these seeds (*bīja*), as being those which explain the apparition of the conceptual experience.

Since the process of conceptualization is not based in anything objective, conceptual experience depends simply on the conceptualization performing instance that was appropriated. Conceptualization, being somehow similar to imagination, i.e. having a subjective nature, the act of appropriating the seeds of conceptual construction, performed by the mind, acquires a decisive role in engendering the conceptual experience. Consequently, in case of any being, the experience of conceptualization engendered by the mental consciousness depends exclusively on the mind (*manas*) which appropriates a certain type of seeds of conceptual construction (*abhilāpavāsanā*) and not on any alleged characteristics of an objective entity.

Both the sense organs and the mental consciousness represent appropriated elements. Therefore, what a person experience in a conscious manner is basically the same with the appropriated elements that constitute his personality, his individuality. The trivial ascertainment that nobody experiences the ideations produced by the sensory organs or the mental consciousness of others represents a supplementary proof of the dependency of the conscious experience (the experience of the operational consciousnesses) on the

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses appropriating activity of the mind. The very idea of “personal experience”, of “individual experience” analytically involves the idea of “mind”, of “appropriation”, because individuality, the person, necessarily involves the mind (*manas*). The realistic philosophy claims a certain objectivity of the conscious experience considering that it reproduces, intends a certain objective reality; however, Buddhism considers that human awareness is strictly an individual, subjective phenomenon and, thus, it is the individuality appropriated by the mind that determines the content of the conscious thinking.

“The mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) is said to be based on mind (*manas*), because as long as mind (*mind*) has not ceased, [mental consciousness] is not freed from the bondage of perception (*vijñapti*) in regard to phenomena (*nimitta*).”¹

It is true that a certain person may create new concepts or may acquire concepts from the relations with other individuals, but these two situations do not jeopardize the subjective nature of the categorial system because, in the first case, one may consider that the creation of the new concepts is done only on the basis of the pre-existing ones, while, in the second case, the subjective nature of the categories is preserved, their origin being still within an individual.

¹ “*tan manovijñānaṃ mana-āśritam ucyate aniruddhe hi manasi nimitte vijñaptibandh(an)āmuktiḥ niruddhe ca tanmuktiḥ /*” *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Pravṛtti* section, in Waldron 2003, 183 (slightly modified); in Schmithausen 1987, 202 (English translation), 1987, 489-490 (Sanskrit reconstruction).

“The comprehension of the factors (*dharmagrāha*) is of two types: inborn (*sahaja*) and conceptual (*vikalpita*).

The first type is born only from some causes inherent [to personality], such as the imprints (*vāsanā*) of the error (*vitatha*), namely from the beginningless tendency towards the perception of some factors and from the seeds this tendency imprints to the consciousness. This [type] is always associated to the person. It is born through itself and manifests through itself, without depending on any false teaching (*mithyādeśanā*), on any false reflection. That’s why, it is named «inborn» (*sahaja*).....

The second type of [comprehension] is born as a result of the actualization of some external conditions (*pratyaya*). For it to be born, false teachings or false reflections are necessary. Hence, it is named «conceptual» (*vikalpita*).”¹

5.v. The individual being (*ātman*) as the object component (*nimittabhāga*) of the mind, the ideations of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) as its representation component (*darśanabhāga*)

Vijñānavāda texts operated a distinction between a representation component (*darśanabhāga*) and an object component (*nimittabhāga*); this distinction is not really correctly applied to all types of consciousness. This distinction rests on the illusion that there is an “object” external to consciousness, which would represent the object component (*nimittabhāga*), as opposed to the representation of the object within the consciousness, i.e. the representation component (*darśanabhāga*). The possibility of applying this distinction to the store-house consciousness is doubtful,

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 80.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses but it can be applied to the individual consciousnesses that involve the illusory experience of an “external object”.

In case of the mind, it may be considered that, as its object component (*nimittabhāga*), it has any type of manifestation that is appropriated, anything that could constitute a human individual. As its representation component (*darśanabhāga*), i.e. as the way the mind represents its object for itself, Vijñānavāda identifies the ideations of the mental consciousness, and this because the mental consciousness is the one that becomes conscious, that represents the object appropriated by the mind. In case of an individual, the manner in which he represents, experiences the self appropriated by the mind, consists of those conscious conceptual experiences that refer to the self and which are engendered by the mental consciousness. The component of representation (*darśanabhāga*) of the mind doesn't comprise only the conscious ideations dealing with the self, engendered by the mental consciousness, since the experience of the mind also includes the afflictions (*kleśa*). However, the representation component (*darśanabhāga*) of the mind at least includes the ideations of the mental consciousness, as a result of the relation of tight determination by which the mind, exerting it upon the mental consciousness, transfers its content to the latter.

“The ideations of the mind (*manovijñapti*) have as their object component all the ideations, starting with the visual ideations and until the factors (*dharma*), while, as their representation component, they have the ideations of the mental consciousness (*manovijñānavijñapti*), since the mental

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consciousness represents the concepts and manifests itself as
all the concepts (*vikalpa*).”¹

5.vi. The determination relation between the mind (*manas*) and the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), formulated in Abhidharmic terminology

In Abhidharmic terms, the relation between the mind (*manas*) and the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) can be expressed by stating that the mind represents either the immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya-āśraya*) either the sovereign condition (*adhipatipratyaya-āśraya*) of the mental consciousness.² There are some differences between these two positions, which are not easy to explain otherwise than in Abhidharmic terms, but both positions share the fact that they ascribe to the mind the role of determinant (be it either immediately preceding either regent) in relation to the mental consciousness. The theory according to which the mind is an immediately preceding condition is the oldest of the two and it can be found in texts such as *Yogācārabhūmi*, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, etc. The mind appears as the regent condition (*adhipatipratyaya-āśraya*) or, to put it differently, as the simultaneous condition (*sahabhū-āśraya*) of the mental consciousness,

¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.11, Lamotte 1973, 100-101.

² For a discussion on the four types of conditions (*pratyaya*) discovered by the Hīnayāna philosophers and which are generally accepted in the Mahāyāna schools as well, see *Abhidharmakośa*, III.61-65, in Chaudhury 1983, 113-114. See also Stcherbatsky 1999, 138-139; Ganguly 1992, 49-50!

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses at Nanda, an author known only from the references to him made by Hiuan-Tsang.¹

“What is mind (*manas*)?..... It also represents the consciousness (*viññāna*) which has just ceased to exist in the immediately preceding moment (*samanantaraniroddha*) of the six [operational] consciousnesses.”²

“Acting as an immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) and representing a support (*āśrayībhūta*), the consciousness that has just ceased to exist in the immediately preceding moment (*anantaraniroddhaviññāna*) represents the support of the birth (*utpattiyāśraya*) of the mental consciousness (*manoviññāna*).”³

“..... the consciousness that has just ceased to exist in the immediately preceding moment (*anantaraniroddhaviññāna*) and which is named «mind» (*manas*) gives birth to the occasion (*avakāśa*) for the apparition of the consciousness which is about to occur (*utpitsa viññāna*) and hence it represents the support of its birth (*utpattiyāśraya*).”⁴

5.vii. The double function of the mind: the production of afflictions and the determination of the mental consciousness

Both *Mahāyānasamgraha*, and *Abhidharmasamuccayabhāṣya* suggest an etymological derivation of the name “*manas*” from the term

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 230-232.

² “*manas katamat /yacca saṇṇāṃ viññāṇaṃ samanantaraniroddhaṃ viññāṇaṃ /*”

Abhidharmasamuccaya, apud. Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 112.

³ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.6, Lamotte 1973, 16.

⁴ Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, ad. I.6, Lamotte 1973, 16.

“*samanantara*” (“immediately”). They also accept the classical – and correct at the same time – etymological interpretation, according to which “*manas*” comes from the root “*man*” (meaning “to think” but which, in Vijñānavāda, acquires a more specific meaning: “to mentalize”, “to appropriate”, “to consider something as its own self”). The etymological relatedness between “*manas*” and “*samanantara*” is not correct though; the presence of the group of letters “*mana*” in “*samanantara*” is only the result of a phonetic accident generated by the adjoining of “*sam*” (“together”) to “*an*” (privative particle) and to “*antara*” (“interval”, “break”) – which, together, yield the meaning of “together/joint, without any intermediary interval” – these being the real etymological components of “*samanantara*”, which have nothing to do with “*man*” or “*manas*”.

The search for two etymological interpretations for “*manas*” was probably motivated by the double function ascribed to the mind in Vijñānavāda texts: that of being the determinant condition of the mental consciousness and that of engendering the afflictions, by inducing attachment to the appropriated individual self.

“The mind (*manas*) can be of two types (*dvividha*):

1) acting as an immediately preceding condition (*samanantarapratyaya*) represents the support of the birth (*utpattyaśraya*) of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).

2) The second is the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭamanas*).....

The [operational] consciousnesses are born having the first type of mind as a basis; the second type represents affliction.”¹

“Therefore, the mind is of two types: the afflicted mind and the mind as an immediately preceding condition.”²

Both functions represent alteration; through its capacity of engendering afflictions (*kleśa*), the mind alters calm, peaceful (*śanta*) condition of consciousness, whilst, through its being the determinant of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), the mind participates in the alteration of the uniform, non-determined condition of reality. This alteration is done through the projection of the various determined own beings (*svabhāva*). Therefore, the experience of the mind, in both its aspects, constitutes an “obstruction” (*āvaraṇa*) of reality.

In the specific terminology of Vijñānavāda, we can state that the double function of the mind consists in engendering the “obstructions of the knowable” (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) and the “obstructions of the afflictions” (*kleśāvaraṇa*).

“This mind (*manas*), which is the seventh [consciousness], has two potentials: a) the potential to produce afflictive emotions when it again views the storehouse [consciousness] (*ālaya*) as self, and b) the potential that comes from it functioning as the simultaneously arising basis of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), that designates [things] with various expressions (*vyavahāra*). [This latter

¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.6, Lamotte 1973, 15-16.

² Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 112.

Human States of Awareness. The Operational Consciousnesses potential] produces grasping after factors (*dharma*), the obstructions of the knowable (*jñeyāvaraṇa*).”¹

5.viii. The determination of the categorial system by the condition and the inclinations of the individual self

An important philosophical consequence of the determination of the mental consciousness by the mind is the fact that any kind of conceptual knowledge, which constitutes a product of the mental consciousness, depends on the ego, involves the ego. As a result, conceptual knowledge has a subjective nature, involves the limited individual perspective it is produced from. Being dependent on the ego, conceptual knowledge is affected by the erroneous nature (*viparyāsa*, *vitathā*) of the discrimination of the ego. Any representation of the mental consciousness involves the attachment to the self (*ātmasneha*), the error of the self. Vijñānavāda – and Buddhism in general – claims that the categorial classification results from the inclinations of the ego; thus, the erroneous nature of the ego is passed on to conceptual knowledge.

“Those who do not know (*ajānaka*), the immature ones (*bāla*), conceive (*kṛp*) [the idea] of «inner self» (*antarātmān*). Through establishing (*āśritya*) in the view of the self (*ātmadarśana*) many opinions (*drṣṭi*) [take birth].”²

¹ Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 115.

² “*kalpaya[n]ty antarātmānaṃ taṃ ca bālā ajānakāḥ / ātmadarśanam āśritya tathā bahvyas ca drṣṭayaḥ //*” *Paramārtha-gāthā*, 30, Schmithausen 1987, 228.

“The view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) is the root (*mūla*) of all the other opinions (*dr̥ṣṭi*).”¹

The relation between the appropriated individual self and the tendencies to apply a certain categorial system involves more than the mere existence of the seeds of a certain categorial system in an appropriated self. The categorial discriminations tend to conform to certain tendencies of the individual. The categorial system tends to display, in a conceptual manner, the states which the individual may go through; the application of a categorial system to the individual states reifies them, turns them, in an illusory manner, into determined, autonomous entities. The Buddhist authors do not detail the manner in which a certain individual self determines the application of a certain categorial system, but they indicate clearly enough the fact that the categorial system is related to the self and to its states. First and foremost, the individual self acquires a conceptually determined identity, on the basis of which, its various particular conditions as well acquire categorial identities, being thus reified.² The categorially structured universe would therefore reproduce the tendencies, the interests of an individual self.

“The one in pain (*duḥkhin*), [thinking] «I am subjected to pain» (*duḥkhito 'ham asmi*), establishes [the

¹ “*satkāyadr̥ṣṭim tadanyasarvadr̥ṣṭimūlaṃ*”

Bodhisattvabhūmi, Wogihara, 51,9f; apud. Schmithausen 1987, 515.

² For the tight relation between the mind (*manas*), the discrimination of the individual self, and the multiple categorial discriminations of the determined objects, see Chatterjee 1999, 104!

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existence] of the self (*ātman*) and of pain (*duḥkha*). Or, again,
[the same thing happens] with the happy one (*sukhita*). [This
act] is the one which engenders (*samutthāpaka*) a constructed
(*parikalpa*) view (*dṛṣṭi*). Once born (*jata*), from it, that [view]
is also born.”¹

¹ “*duḥkhī duḥkhito 'ham asmīty ātmānaṃ sukhito vā punar
duḥkhaṃ vyavasyati /
parikalpo dṛṣṭisamutthāpakaḥ sa tasmā jātas taj janayaty api //*”
Paramārtha-gāthā, 38, Schmithausen 1987, 232, appendix II.

Human Affliction (*kleśa*) as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe. The Mutual Dependence between Cosmos and Man¹

1. The Dependence of the Universal Consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) on Human Obstructions (*āvaraṇa*)

1.i. The dependence of the content of *Ālaya-vijñāna* on the karmic seeds (*karmabīja*, *karmavāsanā*)

The most specific activity of the store-house consciousness is the maturation (*vipāka*) of the karmic impressions (*karmavāsanā*) produced as a result of the afflicted processes that take place on the level of the individual beings (*pudgala*, *ātman*), on the level of the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*). The content of the store-house consciousness consists exactly in these impressions left by the afflicted individual experience, thus being entirely determined by human experiences.²

¹ The whole chapter represents a slightly improved version of a paper originally published under the title “Human Affliction (*kleśa*) as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe, in Yogācāra Buddhism”, in the *Romanian Journal of Indian Studies* 1 (2017):50-79.

² The dependence of the store-house consciousness on human conditions, in Wu 2014, 422. *Ālaya-vijñāna* as the “stored one”, as

“... [the store-house consciousness] owns its being to karmic maturation (*vipāka*), since it is always imprinted (*bhāṇita*) with the seeds of all experiences.”¹

Therefore, the continuity of the content of the store-house consciousness is possible only through the continuous deposition, within it, of new karmic impressions that prevent the exhaustion of its series. Any of the already existing impressions, when the conditions become favorable, gets matured and is actualized as a particular experience, thus being consumed. Nevertheless, all individual conditions and experiences engendered by karma involve appropriation (*upādāna*), volition (*cetanā*) and hence, at their turn, through their afflicted experiences, they produce new karmic impressions, thus ensuring the continuity of the content of Ālaya-vijñāna.² The perpetuity of the store-house consciousness is possible only as a result of the afflicted mechanisms pertaining to the individual condition.

“Karmic impressions (*karmanāvāsana*), along (*saha*) with the impressions of dual perceptions (*grāhadvaya*), engender (*jan*) other (*anya*) maturations (*vipāka*) [of the seeds] when the previous (*pūrva*) maturations (*vipāka*) are exhausted (*kṣīṇa*).”³

the effect of the other seven consciousnesses, in Shun’ei 2009, 36-37.

¹ Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasamgrahabhāṣya*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, ad.II.II.5, Lamotte 1934-35, 237. Translation after Lamotte’s French translation.

² The process of “perfuming” (*vāsanā*) the store-house consciousness, in Verdu 1981, 10-11; Shun’ei 2009, 32-33.

³ “*karmaṇo vāsanā grāhadvayavāsanayā saha / kṣīṇe pūrvavipāke’nyad vipākaṃ janayanti tat //*”
Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikākārikā*, 19, Anacker 1998, 188, 423.

The dependence of the content of the store-house consciousness on the afflicted individual condition also results from its frequently ascribed statute, of a “collection” (*saṃcaya*) of seeds (*bīja*).¹ As a mere collection of seeds, the store-house consciousness consists of the impressions left by the so-called “afflicted factors” (*sāṃkleśikadharma*).

Generally, Yogācāra philosophy identified two types of obstructions (*āvaraṇa*) characterizing human condition: the so called “obstructions of the afflictions” (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and the “obstructions of the knowable” (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). Both of them play a decisive role in the production of karmic impressions.

1.ii. Karmic impressions (*karmavāsanā*) and the obstructions of the afflictions (*kleśāvaraṇa*)

The seeds involved in the process of “maturation” (*vipāka*) are the karmic impressions. Most commonly, they are called “*karmavāsanā*” or simply “*karma*”; however, they can be named in various other ways throughout Vijñānavāda literature (“*vipākavāsanā*”, “*vipākabīja*” etc.).² “Karma(n)”,

¹ Consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*, *citta*) as a “collection” of seeds, in classical Yogācāra, in Verdu 1981, 20-21; Schmithausen 2014, 337-339; Jiang 2006, 64. The centrality of the “seeds” in the accounts of Ālaya-vijñāna, in Jiang 2005, 256-257, 261-263. The interpretation of “consciousness” (*citta*) as related to the act of “accumulating” (*ci*) karma, in the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, in Suzuki 1998, 249. Suzuki’s view of “*citta*” as “collection”, critically discussed in Giripescu-Sutton 1991, 174-175.

² A discussion on the terms “*karma*”, “*vāsanā*”, “*saṃskāra*”, “*bīja*”, in Kritzer 1999, 97, 99-102; Jiang 2006, 61. Accounts of the

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe usually translated as “deed”, refers more exactly to an act embedding volition, active and passionate involvement in experience.¹ All the attitudes of this kind, which take place at the level of the individual being, imprint within the store-house consciousness seeds that, when the conditions become favorable, at the so called “occasion of maturation” (*vipākāvasthā*), will be matured (*vi-pac*) and will engender the so-called “effects of maturation” (*vipākaphala*).

“Karma is the volition (*cetanā*), virtuous (*puṇya*), non-virtuous (*apunya*) or indifferent (*aneñja*). The capacity (*sāmarthyā*) placed by this karma within the store-house consciousness, which will engender a future individual condition (*anāgatātmabhāva*), that is the karmic impression (*karmavāsanā*).”²

The only experiences that engender new karmic imprints are those activities of the operational consciousnesses which are intrinsically tainted by

concept of “*Vāsanā*”, both in Buddhism and in non-Buddhist schools of thought, in Tripathi 1972, 22-23; Tola&Dragonetti 2005, 456-457; Wu 2014, 423. The concept of “*bīja*”, in Yogācāra Buddhism, discussed in Lusthaus 2002, 193-194; in the *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, discussed in Jiang 2005, 257-259; Jiang 2006, 60. The Sautrāntika origins of “*bīja*”, along with references to *Abhidharmakośa*, in Jiang 2006, 39-40. The “*bījas*” and karmic maturation (*vipāka*), in Sautrāntika, in Matilal 1990, 338-340.

¹ The connection between karma and intentional action, in Lusthaus 2002, 171-172; acc. to *Abhidharmakośa*, in Gold 2015, 189-192, 196; Jiang 2006, 28. The characteristics of karmic causation (*vipākahetu*) and a discussion about the experiences which engender karmic traces, in Chaudhury 1983, 111,113!

² “*puṇyāpuṇyāneñjacetanā karma / tena karmaṇā yadanāgatātmabhāvābhiniṣṛtaye ālayavijñāne sāmarthyamāhitam sā karmavāsanā*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 19, Chatterjee 1980, 107.

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe appropriation (*upādāna*), by the tendency towards proliferation (*sāsrava*) and, consequently, by affliction (*kleśa*). Some texts even utterly state that the experiences that imprint new karmic traces within the store-house consciousness are the specific activities of the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), consisting of actions (*karma*), based on the clinging to erroneous discriminations (*vikalpa*), the most important of them being the one between self and other (*sva-para*), between subject and object (*grāhaka-grāhya*).¹

“Ālayavijñāna [which is] the fundamental element of a living being (*maulaṃ sattva-dravya*), consisting in [the Result-of]-Maturation (*vipākātmaka*), produced by the Impression (*vāsanā*) of previous good and bad (*kuśalākuśala*) deeds (*karma*) and by Clinging (*abhiniveśa*) to the concepts (*vikalpa*) of object (*grāhya*) and subject (*grāhaka*).”²

“In case of the apparition (*utpādana*) of the individual condition (*ātmabhāva*) projected (*ākṣipta*) by the totality of the karmic imprints (*karmavāsanā*) of the operational [consciousnesses], the impressions of dual perceptions (*grāhadvayavāsanā*) function as an auxiliary cause (*sahakāritva*), just as water [functions] in case of the apparition of the sprout. Therefore, it is said that karmic impressions (*karmavāsanā*) produce the maturation (*vipāka*)

¹ See Kochumuttom 1999, 150-151!

For a discussion on the ways karmic traces are engendered based on the discriminations of consciousness, see Waldron 2003, 31-33! Also, see Waldron 2003, 122, for an account of how the impressions of conceptual proliferation are responsible of the production of karmic traces!

²

“*pūrvakuśalākuśalakarmavāsanāgrāhyagrāhakavikalpābhiniveśanirvartitam*” – reconstruction by Schmithausen.

Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, Schmithausen, 1987, 328, note 367. Schmithausen’s translation, with some Sanskrit equivalents added.

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not by themselves, but along with the impressions of dual perceptions (*grāhadvayavāsanā*).”¹

“Initially, in dependence upon two types of appropriation – the appropriation of the physical sense powers associated with a support and the appropriation of predispositions which proliferate conventional designations with respect to signs, names, and concepts – the mind which has all seeds ripens; it develops, increases, and expands in its operations.”²

Vijñānavāda literature doesn’t offer a very thorough account of the way karmic traces are produced. Nevertheless, it is quite clear that they are brought forth as a result of the cooperation between the passionate afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) experience of the mind (*manas*) and those experiences focused upon a defined object, projected by the operational consciousnesses. Karmic impressions are produced when there is a passionate, volitional attitude towards a defined object. Karma is engendered by the individual operational consciousnesses but not by any activity performed by them; only those experiences which involve clinging (*upādāna*), volition (*cetanā*) have karmic potencies.

Generally, Vijñānavāda texts link the production of the karmic traces to those experiences which involve

¹ “*grāhadvayavāsanāyāstu sarvakarmavāsanānām yathāsvaṃ ākṣiptātmabhāvotpādane pravṛttānām sahakāritvaṃ pratipadyate / tad yathā apādayo ’nikurasyotpattāviti / evaṃ ca na kevalāḥ karmavāsanā grāhadvayavāsanānugrhitā vipāka janayantītyuktaṃ bhavati /*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 19, Chatterjee 1980, 107.

² *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, V.2, Powers 1995, 70-71. Lamotte 1935, 184 has “En s’appuyant sur cette double appropriation, la pensée mûrit, grandit, prend de l’ampleur et du développements.”

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the so-called “tendency towards proliferation” (*sāsrava*).
“*Sāsrava*” refers to the tendency towards maintaining
individual life, towards perpetuating individual condition
(*ātmabhāva*) and to all attitudes subsequently deriving
from this. It is closely related to the preservation instinct
or to the clinging to life (*abhiniveśa*) from Yoga and
Vedānta. The association between the tendency towards
proliferation and the production of karmic impressions is
sometimes utterly stated by saying that the six
operational consciousnesses, whether beneficent or non-
beneficent, will engender karmic traces only when they
are characterized by the tendency towards proliferation
(*sāsravakuśalākuśalavijñānaṣaṭkad....*).¹ Other times, the
association is rather implied, the texts stating that the six
operational consciousnesses engender karmic traces only
when they are non-beneficent (*akuśala*) or when, being
beneficent (*kuśala*), they are nevertheless characterized
by clinging, by the tendency towards proliferation
(*sāsrava*). But, even in case of such statements, the
tendency towards proliferation (*sāsrava*) is given the
main role since, according to the psychology of
Vijñānavāda, all maleficent (*akuśala*) experiences
inherently involve this tendency which accounts for its
“maleficence”.

The connection between the tendency towards
proliferation and the production of karmic traces also
results from the statement that the experiences which
don’t engender such traces are either those explicitly

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 91.

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devoid of the tendency towards proliferation (*anāsrava*)
either those which are morally non-determined
(*avyākṛta*); in their case, the absence of this tendency is
also involved.

The mere ideations engendered by the
operational consciousnesses, all by themselves, don't
bear any karmic load; they receive a karmic value only
when they become associated with the afflicted
experiences of the mind (*manas*).

1.iii. Karmic impressions (*karmavāsanā*) and the obstructions of the knowable (*jñeyāvaraṇa*)

Nevertheless, the mind (*manas*) alone, unassisted
by the operational consciousnesses and deprived of the
constructed (*parikalpita*) object projected by them,
which could represent its focus, its appropriated (*upātta*)
object, fails to produce karmic traces, leaving only
impressions of outflow (*niṣyandavāsanā*).

“The mind (*manas*), being afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) and non-
determined (*avyākṛta*), [produces] only impressions of
outflow (*niṣyandavāsanā*).”¹

It is only when, under the influence exerted by
the mind (*manas*), the experiences constructed
(*parikalpita*) by the operational consciousnesses acquire
a passionate character through the tendency towards
proliferation (*sāsrava*) which is associated to them –
namely in case of all the non-beneficent (*akuśala*)
experiences which, intrinsically, are characterized by

¹ “*avyākṛtaṃ kliṣṭaṃ ca mano niṣyandavāsanāmeva*”
Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 1d, Chatterjee 1980, 30.

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe clinging, by the tendency to proliferation, or in case of the beneficent (*kuśala*) but characterized by proliferation (*sāsrava*) experiences – karmic traces are also produced. Therefore, any act of desire, any intention focused upon a determined object, any conceptually determined experience which is not neutrally experienced but along with clinging, with desire, engenders karmic impressions.¹ The sole experience of non-determined clinging, specific to the mind (*manas*) unassisted by the operational consciousnesses or the sole experience of the operational consciousnesses devoid of the passionate and afflicted experience of the mind, do not produce any karmic impression.

The dependence of the karmic impressions on the constructed own-being (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) is frequently presented by stating that the production of the seeds depends on the clinging (*abhiniveśa*) to the constructed own-being (*parikalpita svabhāva*). Frequently, seeds are referred to through terms such as “*nimittanāmaṅkalpavyavahāraprapaṇcavāsanā*” (“the imprints of the conventional practice of discriminating names and characteristics”), “*parikalpitavāsanā*” (“the imprints of the constructed [nature]”), “*prapaṇcavāsanā*” (“the imprints of the conceptual proliferation”), all these terms suggesting the dependence of the seeds on the clinging to the

¹ The role of the the linguistic dual discriminations in the creation of Vāsanā-s, in Wu 2014, 424-425. Saṃsāra, as being moved forward by desire along with dual perceptions (*grāha*), in Jiang 2006, 61.

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constructed own-being which, through its own nature,
involves error and the affliction of the ego.

“Those impressions (*vāsanā*, *bīja*) originated in a consciousness which clings to the constructed own-being (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) represent the dependent own-being (*paratantra*).”¹

“First, there are the following three components to its objective support: ...

3) the residual impression (*vāsanā*) [left] by settling on the thoroughly imagined nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) of persons and dharmas.”²

In terms of Vijñānavāda ontology, the perpetuation, the “increase” (*samutthāna*) of the dependent own-being (*paratantra svabhāva*) is determined by the constructed own-being (*parikalpita svabhāva*), through the imprints (*vāsanā*) it leaves. Otherwise stated, the conditional flux (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is “fuelled”, “nourished” by the afflicted experience of the individual being living in bondage.³

“The dependent own-being (*paratantra*) is produced (*upalabh*) based on (*samāśritya*) the constructed own-being (*parikalpita*).”⁴

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 544. Translation after Vallee-Poussin's French translation.

² Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 51.

³ The functions of the afflicted experiences in the perpetuation of the store-house consciousness are studied in Waldron 2003, 113-116.

⁴ “*parikalpitaṃ samāśritya paratantrapalabhyate /*”
Lañkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, verse 193, Nanjio 1956, 131.

1.iv. The mutual conditioning relation between the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and the afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) individual being (*ātmabhāva*)

Any of the individual conditions, although occurring at the level of the actual state of the store-house consciousness, thus having the store-house consciousness as its condition or support (*āśraya*), also, at its turn, represents the condition/support for the future states of the store-house consciousness. Therefore, there is a double conditioning relation between the store-house consciousness and the afflicted individual condition; on one hand, the actual condition of the store-house consciousness represents a condition for the occurrence of the individual being, but, on the other hand, the individual being, determining the production of karmic impressions and, consequently, of the future states of the store-house consciousness, represents the condition of the perpetuation of the *Ālaya-vijñāna*.¹

“Regarding the eighth consciousness, it has as its simultaneous support the seventh consciousness; it cannot exist without having this as its support. *Yogaśāstra*² states: «*Ālaya* always functions (*sampravartate*) along with the mind (*manas*)»; in other places, [it states]: «The store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) is always established in affliction.»³

¹ The way operational consciousnesses are born of seeds but, at their turn, are engendering new seeds, in Jiang 2005, 266-267. *Ālaya-vijñāna* as both cause and effect, in Jiang 2006, 64,69. The mutual conditioning between *Ālaya-vijñāna* and the afflicted experiences (*sāṃkleśikadharmā*), in Yamabe 2017, 20-22.

² *Yogācārabhūmi*, 63,11.

³ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 240. Translation after Vallee-Poussin's French translation.

“ ... The store-consciousness and the afflicted factors (*sāṃkleśika*) are simultaneously (*samakāle*) mutual causes (*anyonyahetuka*). ... In the same way, here too it is a matter of mutual causes: the store-consciousness is the cause (*hetu*) of the afflicted factors; in the same way, the afflicted factors are the cause of the store-consciousness. ”¹

One of the consequences incurred by this view is that it makes impossible to dissociate the store-house consciousness from the afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) individual condition (*ātmabhāva*), to find a condition of the store-house consciousness which would be free from affliction, from bondage.² The store-house consciousness seems to be ontologically prior to the human afflicted condition and, therefore, it seems to be possible to have a “pure” store-house consciousness, free from human drama. Nevertheless, according to Vijñānavāda, the store-house consciousness (the Universe) and the afflicted human condition are rather in a relation of mutual conditioning than in one of ontological hierarchy. In this situation, the existence of a “pure” store-house consciousness, of a pure Universe, free from human affliction, becomes impossible, the Universe being intrinsically related to human drama.

¹ Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasamgraha*, I.17, Lamotte 1973, 34-35.

² The Ālaya-vijñāna as the “perfumable” which is “perfumed” by the mind (*manas*), the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and five sense-consciousnesses, in Brown 1991, 207-208. The dependence of the causal flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*) on the karmic impressions (*vāsanā*), in Tola&Dragonetti 2005, 456-457.

1.v. The impossibility to dissociate the ultimate reality (*pariniṣpannasvabhāva*) from human affliction (*kleśa*)

Such an approach sanctions the “impurity” of the ultimate reality, already exposed by Vijñānavāda philosophers which, in some developments of the school, claimed that the conditional flow (or, in terms of Vijñānavāda ontology, the dependent own-being, the store-house consciousness) represents a natural adjunct of the ultimate reality. Moreover, the necessary connection between the store-house consciousness and the afflicted human condition binds the absolute reality to human affliction itself. Hence, human affliction is somehow considered as “normal”, as a natural aspect of reality. In spite of its drama and tragedy, human condition doesn’t seem to be a merely accidental (*āgantuka*) occurrence but rather the manifestation of a natural function, of a potency of the ultimate reality. Even if the individual human condition involves ignorance (*ajñāna*) and a certain cleavage from the reality, falling into this unfortunate condition doesn’t seem to be a mere accident but rather the manifestation of an intrinsic tendency of the reality itself. Reality itself seems to be characterized by such a tendency of self-deceit, of self-obstruction. Human condition can no longer be considered as something alien to reality but which, out of hard to fathom reasons, nevertheless occurs, becoming rather a “natural” aspect of reality.

The natural relation between the absolute reality and human drama induces an element of impurity to the

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absolute reality, “tainting” it somehow. Even if any particular human drama can be terminated, the potency towards the occurrence of such dramas is always present within the absolute reality.

2. The Perpetuation of the Store-house Consciousness through the Processes of Karmic Maturation (*vipāka*) and Outflow (*niṣyanda*)

2.i. Karmic maturation (*vipāka*)

In its classical forms, Vijñānavāda explains the dynamics of the store-house consciousness as a combination of two major processes: the “[karmic] maturation” (*vipāka*) and the “flux”, the “outflow” (*niṣyanda*).¹

What is important in respect of these two processes is that only karmic maturation creates novel experiences; the outflow only maintains, to a certain extent and for a certain duration, the experiences already produced by karmic maturation.

Karmic maturation (*vipāka*) represents the most specific process of the store-house consciousness; this process takes place solely within it, the other seven consciousnesses being only effects of maturation

¹ The approach seems to be the simplified form of a Sautrāntika scheme, to be found in *Abhidharmakośa* (II.55-60), which identified not only two processes, but five; along with “karmic maturation” (*vipāka*) and “outflow” (*niṣyanda*), the text also mentions *Viśamīyoga* (“release”, “liberation”), *Puruṣakāra* (“the making of the human”) and *Adhipati* (“domination”, “regency”). See Chaudhury 1983, 112-113!

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(*vipākaja* – “born of maturation”), without performing the maturation itself.¹ Karmic maturation means transforming the seeds (*bīja*) imprinted within the series of the store-house consciousness as a result of the experiences of the individual consciousnesses into a new individual destiny, into a new “appropriation” (*upādāna*), when the actual life comes to an end.² More broadly speaking, maturation is the process of karmic retribution, through which the acts, the volitions of an actual life, determine, through the karmic seeds they leave, a new reincarnation.

“The impressions of maturation (*vipākavāsanā*) are those which, due to the obtaining of [their] activity (*vr̥tti*), the projection (*ākṣepa*) [performed] by the old karma of the store-house consciousness is fully accomplished.”³

The karmic seeds are accumulated within the store-house consciousness, representing its “stuff”, its “content”. The continuity of the series of the store-house consciousness is ensured through the continuous accumulation, within it, of new karmic seeds. Within the series of the store-house consciousness, karmic impressions exist in a latent condition, of mere potencies

¹ Karma and karmic maturation, in Verdu 1981, 12-13. Ālayavijñāna as Vipākavijñāna, acc. to *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, in Jiang 2006, 59. See also Wu 2014, 422.

² Personal condition (*ātmabhāva*) as the reification of karmic energy, in Berger 2015, 97-99. The process of karmic maturation, discussed in Verdu 1981, 9-13, 15, 22-23; as the “projector” (*ākṣepaka*) of new individual conditions, in Brown 1991, 210.

³ “vipākavāsanāvṛttilābhādālayavijñānasya pūrvakarmākṣepaparisamāptau yā”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 1d, Chatterjee 1980, 30.

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe (*śaktirūpa*); when the conditions become favorable, they are actualized, being turned into actual factors (*dharma*). Karmic impressions project a new appropriation (*upādāna*), a new “basis of an individual being” (*ātmabhāvāśraya*), a new “destiny” (*gati*) or “birth” (*yoni, jāti*). Once actualized, they are consumed; nevertheless, the individual condition newly “projected” (*ā-kṣip*) by them will engender new karmic impressions, hence continuously “nourishing” the series of the store-house consciousness.

“The eighth consciousness (*viññāna*) is born having karmic impressions (*vipākavāsanā*) as its dominating condition (*adhipatipratyaya*). It is called «maturation» (*vipāka*) since it is the one which «projects» (*ākṣepaka*).....”¹

2.ii. The distinction between the nature of the cause and the nature of the effect, in case of karmic maturation

What is specific to the results of karmic maturation (*karmavipākaphala*) is that they are of a different nature than their causes (*hetu*).² Karmic maturation is produced by the seeds imprinted within the store-house consciousness by the afflicted (*kliṣṭa*) experiences involving volition (*cetanā*) of the six operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttiviññāna*). Since the experiences that leave karmic impressions are characterized by affliction, by clinging, they are always

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 91-92. Translation after Vallee-Poussin’s French translation.

² For a study on the heterogeneity between cause and effect, in case of karmic processes, see Waldron 2003, 64-65!

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe morally determined (*vyākṛta*). On the other hand, the effects of maturation consist of the projected (*ākṣipta*) individual conditions (*ātmabhāva*), of the neutral and yet indeterminate (*avyākṛta*) acts of appropriation (*upādāna*), and not of subjective and morally determined experiences, as their causes. In case of karmic processes, the cause is the afflicted subjective experience, while the effect is the morally indeterminate birth, in future, of a new individual being, of a new subject. This newly born individual being will engender new afflicted experiences and so the cycle keeps on repeating.

“The effect of maturation is not of the same nature as its cause.”¹

In a text belonging to his Abhidharma period, Vasubandhu gives an example of this situation, showing that an individual and morally determined (*vyākṛta*) act, such as the will to kill, will engender the effect of a future birth in a hell; this birth, this new appropriation of an individual condition is, in itself, a morally indeterminate (*avyākṛta*) experience.²

What is really important for the dynamics of the store-house consciousness is that the cycle: afflicted experience → a new birth → afflicted experience keeps

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 477. Translation after Vallee-Poussin's French translation.

² *Abhidharmakośa*, I.25; Vasubandhu's example is discussed in Gold 2015, 52-53. The way mental events, such as volition, are materialized through karmic processes, acc. to *Abhidharmakośa*, in Bronkhorst 2000, 67,70-71.

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on going on indefinitely, hence the store-house
consciousness being unceasingly perpetuated.¹

Another important particularity of karmic maturation is that, unlike the outflow process (*niṣyanda*), between the cause (*hetu*) and the effect (*phala*) there can be a temporary gap; throughout this gap, the continuity between cause and effect is ensured by the presence, within the store-house consciousness, of the karmic seeds (*karmabīja*), of the latent potencies (*śakti*) imprinted in the store-house consciousness by the cause.² Generally, the effects of karmic maturation are actualized in a future life, in a life succeeding the one of the cause.

¹ The continuity of the store-house consciousness, through the series *dharmas* → *bījas* → *dharmas*, in Shun'ei 2009, 45-47; Lusthaus 2002, 193; Matilal 1990, 340-342; Jiang 2006, 59, 69-72. The “restoration” of the karmic impressions representing the stuff of the store-house consciousness by cyclical causation, in Tola&Dragonetti 2005, 460-462. On the various ways the causal relation between factors (*dharma*) and seeds (*bīja*) was understood along the various developments of Yogācāra, especially in China, see Yamabe 2017, 21-23.

² A discussion on the temporal gap between cause and effect, in case of karmic processes, in Waldron 2003, 65. The ways the two major schools of Abhidharma dealt with the problem of continuity, through the concepts of “*prāpti*” (in Vaibhāṣika) and “*bīja*” (in Sautrāntika), and how the problems involved in their approaches determined the novel approach of Yogācāra, in Matilal 1990, 336-337; Griffiths 1999, 93. The theories of temporal continuity of the Dharmas, acc. to Sautrāntika, Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra, in Jiang 2006, 33, 36-37.

2.iii. The outflow (*niṣyanda*)

According to classical Vijñānavāda, along with karmic maturation (*karmavipāka*), the other major kind of process taking place in the Universe is the outflow (*niṣyanda*).¹ The outflow is characteristic to the individual consciousnesses, namely mind (*manas*) and the six operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), the specific dynamics of the store-house consciousness being not the outflow, but rather karmic maturation.²

The main difference between karmic maturation (*vipāka*) and outflow (*niṣyanda*) is that the outflow (*niṣyanda*) represents a continuous series of experiences of a certain kind, where there is no possibility of change in the typology of the experience in cause. The outflow (*niṣyanda*) simply means the continuous and automatic reiteration of a certain experience, its repeated “flow”. Though consisting of momentary (*kṣāṇika*) occurrences, human experiences have continuity, duration, since any instance of them leaves impressions of outflow (*niṣyandavāsanā*) which will engender new instances of the same type (*sabhāga*). This process keeps on going on indefinitely, thus ensuring the continuity of individual experiences.

“A previous seed engenders a future seed of the same type; this means the homogeneity (*sabhāga*) of the causes engendering an effect of outflow (*niṣyandaphala*).”³

¹ The two process comparatively analysed in Tripathi 1972, 343-344.

² The dynamism of outflow, studied in Brown 1991, 208-209.

³ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 123. Translation after Vallee-Poussin's French translation.

“Virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral engaging consciousnesses which are simultaneous with the ālaya-vijñāna – one coming into being as the other is going out of existence – leave a seed that will, in future, give rise to an engaging consciousness of a similar type.”¹

“A repeated experience (*abhyāsa*) determines a cause of the same type (*sabhāgaheṭu*), which will be associated to an effect of outflow (*niṣyandaphala*).”²

The process of karmic maturation (*vipāka*) is specific to the experiences (*upādāna*) involving appropriation, to the experiences of an individual subject, while those of outflow (*niṣyanda*) are common both to appropriated subjective experiences and to neutral, unappropriated experiences. Karmic maturation is specific to human afflicted experience, while the outflow takes place also in case of non-afflicted experiences, its principle being mechanical continuity. A certain mechanical continuity is to be found also in case of subjective experiences, along with karmic maturation, which is restricted to appropriated experiences.

The main differences between the outflow (*niṣyanda*) and karmic maturation (*vipāka*) are, firstly, that the outflow processes, while passing from cause to effect, preserve the typology of the experience (*sabhāga*) involved and, secondly, the continuous and repeated occurrence of the outflow transformations. In case of

¹ Tsong-Khapa, *Yid dang kun gzhi dka'ba'i gnas rgya cher'grel pa legs par bshad pa'rgya mtsho*, Sparham 1995, 88.

² Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, X.29, Lamotte 1973, 315. Lamotte's French translation is: “Un acte répété (*abhyāsa*) détermine une cause pareille (*sabhāgaheṭu*), nécessairement associée à un fruit d'écoulement (*niṣyandaphala*).”

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karmic maturation, the transformation of the seeds into a “destiny” (*gati*), into a “birth” (*jāti*), takes place only once, without the possibility of reiterating this transformation. New karmic seeds will be produced by the individual being thus born, but these new seeds are not necessarily similar to those that projected the individual being in cause; therefore, in case of karmic maturation, we can no longer speak of a continuous reiterating series of transformations.

Unlike the outflow (*niṣyanda*), karmic maturation displays a certain heterogeneity between cause and effect. The cause is a volitional act, consisting in the afflicted experience of an individual being, while the effect is the trans-subjective experience of projecting a new “destiny”, the experience of creating a yet non-existing subject.

On the other hand, in case of the outflow (*niṣyanda*), a certain type of seeds (*bīja*) engenders a certain type of actual factors (*dharma*), which, at their turn, will engender the same type of seeds; this cyclical process keeps going on indefinitely, without any change in the typology of the series. Thus it is accounted for the fact that generally experiences have a certain continuity, in spite of them consisting of mere momentary flashes (*kṣaṇa*). The preservation of the typology of the flashes, through the outflow dynamics, makes the process a continuous series.¹

¹ The outflow and its homogeneity (*sabhāgatā*), in Verdu 1981, 14-15, 22-23.

“Certainly, the seeds originating in the dual perceptions engender uncountable effects of outflow (*niṣyanda*). On the other hand, karmic seeds are exhausted when they bring forth their effect, which is an effect of maturation (*vipāka*).”¹

The perpetuity of experience, provided by the outflow dynamism, is not absolute; any apparition maintains its being for a while, through the outflow processes, but, at one point of time, it is necessarily annihilated. The outflow processes are responsible for maintaining any apparition in a relatively continuous form, between its birth and its destruction. Generally, Vijñānavāda texts describe this dynamism as the “causation of the preservice/maintenance of the species” (*sabhāgahetuka*). Whatever, in ordinary experience, appears as the perpetuation of an entity, according to the theory of momentariness (*kṣaṇikavāda*), is nothing but the serial occurrence of several momentary discrete apparitions, all of them sharing a common typology.

“The impressions of outflow (*niṣyandavāsanā*) are those which, due to the obtaining (*lābha*) of [their] activity (*vṛtti*), a similarity of category (*nikāyasabhāga*) among the different (*antara*) [factors of a series] takes place.”²

The outflow can ensure the continuity of the apparitions only because the outflow seeds (*niṣyandabīja*) are actualized immediately, in the very next moment (*kṣaṇa*), without any gap between cause

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 477.

² “*nikāyasabhāgāntareṣvabhinirvṛtiḥ niṣyandavāsanāvṛtilābhāccayā*”

Sthiramati, *Trimśikābhāṣya*, ad.1d, Chatterjee 1980, 30.

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe and effect, as it happens in case of the process of karmic maturation.

“The effect of maturation ... is not born immediately but in another life. The effect of outflow is of the same type as its cause and is immediately born.”¹

2.iv. The entire individual experience as characterized by outflow

The entire sphere of individual experience has a certain degree of continuity; any human experience leaves impressions of outflow (*niṣyandavāsanā*) which ensure the continuity of that experience. Even the morally non-determined (*avyākṛta*) experiences and those non-afflicted (*akliṣṭa*), devoid of the tendency to proliferation (*anāsrava*), which fail to leave karmic traces within the store-house consciousness, nevertheless impregnate it with outflow seeds (*niṣyandabīja*).

As stated before, the mind (*manas*), all by itself, unassisted by the operational consciousnesses and thus devoid of a definite focus, also does not engender any karmic impressions, its sole dynamism being the outflow.

“There, the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), beneficent (*kuśala*) or non-beneficent (*akuśala*), place in the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) impressions of maturation (*vipākavāsanā*) and impressions of outflow (*niṣyandavāsanā*). The indeterminate (*avyākṛta*) [operational consciousnesses] and the afflicted

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 477. Translation after Vallee-Poussin's French translation.

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mind (*kliṣṭamanas*) [place] only impressions of outflow
(*niṣyandavāsanā*).”¹

“Thus, under the determination (*adhipatyā*) of
beneficent (*kuśala*) and non-beneficent (*akuśala*) factors
(*dharma*), the store-house consciousness gathers (*pari-grh*)
impressions (*vāsanā*) [producing] both effects (*phala*) of
maturation (*vipāka*) and of outflow (*niṣyanda*). Under the
determination (*adhipatyā*) of indeterminate (*avyākṛta*) factors,
it [gathers] only impressions [producing] effects of outflow
(*niṣyandaphala*).”²

2.v. The limitations of the continuity provided by the outflow (*niṣyanda*) and karmic maturation (*vipāka*) as the only process creator of novel experiences

Operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*)
and mind (*manas*) are characterized solely by outflow
processes. Karmic processes, though determined be the
seeds imprinted within the store-house consciousness by
the operational consciousnesses assisted by mind, take
place only at the cosmic level of the store-house
consciousness. It is also noteworthy that the continuity
ensured by the outflow processes is not absolute, but
only a limited one. Any experience which is preserved
for a while through the outflow processes nevertheless

¹ “*tatra pravṛttivijñānam kuśalākuśalam ālayavijñāne
vipākavāsanām niṣyandavāsanām cādhante / avyākṛtaṁ kliṣṭam ca
mano niṣyandavāsanāmeva /*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad. 1d, Chatterjee 1980, 30.

² “*tathā hi kuśalākuśaladharmādhipatyādālayavijñānam
vipākaniṣyandaphalavāsanām pari-grhṇāti /
avyākṛtadharmādhipatyācca niṣyandaphalavāsanāmeveti /*”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.9 (I.10), Pandeya
1999, 28.

Human Affliction as the Karmic Nourishment of the Universe ceases at a moment of time. Hence, the outflow processes, by themselves, cannot ensure the perpetuity of the Universe. The outflow can only provide a limited continuity to an already existing apparition, without being able to engender novel apparitions.

Karmic maturation (*vipāka*) is the only process efficient in bringing forth novel contents within the store-house consciousness and hence able to perpetuate the cosmic manifestation. Karmic maturation repeatedly creates novel apparitions, under the determination of the impressions (*vāsanā*) left in the store-house consciousness by the existing afflicted experiences. The outflow (*niṣyanda*) restrictively applies to the effects of karmic maturation, to whatever is “born of maturation” (*vipākaja*).¹ Only karmic maturation is truly creative, in the sense of bringing forth novel apparitions. The outflow (*niṣyanda*) does nothing but ensures the continuity, the “flow” of what is born as a result of karmic maturation (*vipākaja*).

For our discussion, it is important that, only by itself, the outflow can’t ensure the perpetuity of the store-house consciousness. The dependence of the store-house consciousness on karmic maturation means nothing but the dependence of cosmic manifestation on human affliction. The store-house consciousness can never be reduced to a set of “pure” experiences, characterized only by outflow (*niṣyanda*) since, as we

¹ See Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 92. Karmic dynamism and the “growth” of Ālaya-vijñāna, in Brown 1991, 210.

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have already shown, these transformations can ensure only the limited continuity of some already existing apparitions. The outflow is somehow subordinated to karmic maturation since the outflow does nothing else but to perpetuate an apparition born as a result of karmic maturation (*vipāka*).

Part II.

The Subjective “Game” of Knowledge

Knowledge as Fanciful Construction. The Abusive Imposition of Conceptual Identities (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) unto the Conditional Flow (*paratantrasvabhāva*)¹

1. The Amorphous Causal Flow

1.i. Manifestation as dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) or store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*)

The way Buddhism considers worldly manifestation, as a series of dependent origination, as a conditional undefined flow, is quite different from the conceptually shaped world envisaged by humans. In human experience, the world consists of multiple well-defined objects, each having a certain degree of persistence and autonomy and also a particular conceptual identity. The dynamics of the Universe is considered as an interaction of these defined objects. According to Mahāyāna, this representation of the

¹ The whole chapter represents a slightly improved version of a paper originally published under the title “Language as Fanciful Construction. The Abusive Imposition of Conceptual-Linguistic Identities (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) onto the Conditional Flow (*paratantrasvabhāva*), in Yogācāra Buddhism”, in *Revue Roumaine de Philosophie* 62, no.2 (2018): 127-146.

Universe is nothing but human fantasy, being consequently rejected.

Mahāyāna considers the manifestation of the Universe as a flow of momentary (*kṣaṇika*) factors (*dharma*), all of them devoid of any conceptual identity and causally inter-connected.¹ Generally, Mahāyāna labelled this flow as the series of “dependent origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda*).² In Vijñānavāda, this causal flow is framed in an idealistic perspective, being identified with the cosmic consciousness, with the “store-house consciousness” (*ālayavijñāna*) experiencing the entire manifestation.³ According to Vijñānavāda, the series of the “dependent origination” represents a “stream”, a “flow” of momentary ideations (*vijñapti*), whose continuous succession is causally regulated. The store-house consciousness should not be considered as a “substantial” consciousness but rather as a stream of consciousnesses, permanently changing, transforming. It is a series of conscious flashes never

¹ *Dharma*-s as mere points of space and time, lacking extension and own-identity, in Goodman 2004, 391. *Dharma* and some similar concepts from Western thought, in Goodman 2004, 394-395. A brief discussion of several attempts to translate “*dharma*” into English, in Goodman 2004, 392.

² For a discussion on the series of dependent origination and on how this approach denies the existence of any substantial entity, of any “self” (*ātman*), see Stcherbatsky 1932, 877-879!

The ontological consequences of the dependent origination are also analysed in Waldron 2003, 12-14!

³ The depiction of consciousness as a process, as a causal series, according to Sthiramati, in Scarfe 2006, 53. The dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as the Yogācāra version of the Mahāyānic “*Pratītya-samutpāda*”, in Nagao 1991, 64.

lasting more than one single moment (*kṣaṇa*). The regularity of the series is ensured through the causal connections between one flash of apparition and the succeeding ones.

“Again, through the words «the transformation of consciousness» (*vijñānasya pariṇāma*), it is made known the fact of being conditionally born (*pratītyasamutpannatva*).”¹

All momentary flashes that compose the store-house consciousness are unique, being absolutely different both from the preceding flash and from the following one. The store-house consciousness is continuously transforming, there being nothing stable in its content.

“What is that which is named «transformation» (*pariṇāma*)? It is the condition of existing otherwise (*anyathātvā*). At the same time with the destruction of the cause moment (*kāraṇakṣaṇa*) [another moment is engendered], having different features (*vilakṣaṇa*) from the cause moment.”²

1.ii. The absence of any delimitation within the conditional flow

The causal dynamics of the store-house consciousness should not be considered as the shift from one particular and determined condition to another determined condition. The transformation is not a

¹ “*pratītyasamutpannatvaṃ punarvijñānasya pariṇāmaśabdena jñāpitam*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.1, Chatterjee 1980, 28.

² “*ko 'yam pariṇāmo nāmo / anyathātvam / kāraṇakṣaṇanirodhasam akālaḥ kāraṇakṣaṇavilakṣaṇaḥ /*”

Sthiramati, *Triṃśikābhāṣya*, ad.1, Chatterjee 1980, 27.

transformation of some alleged particularities but it rather looks like the amorphous dynamics of a gaseous mass, of a cloud. Maybe the most precise analogy for the transformations happening in the store-house consciousness could be the perpetual dynamism of a gaseous mass; all along this dynamism, nothing is ever defined, nothing acquires or changes any features. Such a dynamism should not be equated with the transforming process of some alleged determined and defined entities which, while transforming, would acquire novel features; the process is rather an amorphous, never defined dynamism.

Instead of the common conceptual depiction of the manifested Universe, Mahāyāna proposes a new perspective, seeing the Universe as a continuous and amorphous flow of causes and effects (*pratītyasamutpāda*) which are mutually interlaced in such a close manner that nothing ever could be isolated. Therefore, we can never represent this continuous flow as the succession of several conceptually defined objects, as our categories and language suggests.¹

¹Nāgārjuna claimed that the series of dependent origin does not represent a causal theory. In the first chapter of his major work, *Mūlamādhyamikakārikā*, he criticizes several theories of causation, none of these being accepted as compatible with the process of dependent origination. See Lai 1977, 252-253 and Matics 1970, 114-115!

Lai 1977, 243 explains how dependent origination differs from all the other theories of causation from Indian philosophy, all of these involving, in some ways, the existence of a determined entity which undergoes change. Lai 1977, 245, even doubts that the relation involved by the dependent origination should be considered as a

The mutual interlacing of the momentary factors (*dharma*) composing the series of the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is clearly evinced by the most classical way of describing this process. Buddhist authors depict the dependent origination as “*asmin satīdam bhavaty asyotpādād idam utpadyate*” – “When this exists, that [also] exists/appears; when this is born, that is [also] born”.¹ “*Asmin sati*” is a Locative construction and its more precise translation would be “in its existence”; hence, more literally, “*asmin satīdam bhavaty*” would be translated as “within its existence, that exists/appears”. Such a translation utterly indicates the interlacing of the dependently originating factors, the fact that the existence of any of them cannot be dissociated from the existence of others.²

cause-effect relation, at least in the common understanding of causality.

Also, see Cheng 1982, 424 for a discussion on the type of conditional relation involved by the dependent origination!

¹*Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, VI.5, Lamotte 1935, 189.

²A very suggestive analysis of the universal interlacing involved by the dependent origination, where all delimitations, both in space and in time, vanish, in Kalupahana 1974, 182. Also, see Chaudhury 1983, 133-138, for a detailed discussion on the ontological implications of the dependent origination!

Taking his stand on a classical text on the universal interlacing, *Avatamsakasūtra*, Nakamura 1967, 107, discusses the dependent origination and its consequences, comparing it to some similar conceptions from Plato and from several Christian mystics.

Waldron 2002, 1-2, remarks that nowadays there is a tendency in the Western thought to see reality rather in terms of “relations” than in terms of “objects”. According to him, this tendency is nothing but a revival of the Buddhist theory of dependent origination, formulated in India 2,500 years ago.

As a series of dependently originated factors, the Universe doesn't allow its explanation as a succession of "beings" (*bhāva*). Since within the flow of dependent origination everything is conditioned by everything, nothing ever stands by itself, nothing has an autonomous own-nature (*svabhāva*). Consequently, the very idea of "determined object", of an "object" which has a conceptual and linguistic identity is precluded.¹ The rejection of the "object" (*artha*), of all possible relations between such "objects" and, consequently, of all theses, statements, "opinions" (*dr̥ṣṭi*) which attempt to describe reality, is of utmost importance in the Mādhyamika

Vasubandhu's views on the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), based on an etymological interpretation of the term, in Kardas 2015, 294.

For the doctrine of universal interlacing, as it appears in the Chinese school of Hua-Yen, see Mario Poreski's article in Buswell 2003, 346-347!

Several passages from the Hīnayāna scriptures that deal with the ontological aspects of the dependent origination are: *Samyutta-Nikāya*, XXII.35 in Warren 1995, 166-168; *Viṣuddhi-magga*, XVII in Warren 1995, 168-170; *Mahānidāna-sutta*, *Dīgha-Nikāya* in Warren 1995, 202-208.

¹The manifestation not to be explained in terms of "entities" or "objects", but still not to be equated with absolute non-existence, discussed in Kiblinger 2015, 15. Waldron 2002, 6-8 analyses the universal interlacing of the dependent origination and its incompatibility with the concepts of "object", "entity". Also, see King 1994, 667, and Mansfield 1990, 62-63, for the incompatibility of the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) with the determined object, having an own being (*svabhāva*)! The Mādhyamika denial of views/theses as a rejection of determinate existence is discussed in Burton 2000, 67.

branch of Mahāyāna, representing even its major philosophical approach.¹

“The production (*saṃbhava*) through causal conditions (*pratyayahetu*) of an own-nature (*svabhāva*) is not logically possible.”²

Māhāyana rejects altogether that it could be said about anything that it “exists” (*asti*) or that it “doesn’t exist” (*nāsti*); these two concepts are vain concepts since they don’t apply to anything, the delimitation of an object being ontologically impossible.³

“In his speech to Kātyāyana, the divine one (*bhagavat*), which is an adhept neither of existence (*bhāva*) nor of non-existence (*abhāva*), rejected both existence (*asti*) and non-existence (*nāsti*).”⁴

“In the conditionally (*pratyaya*) born (*utpādita*) reality (*artha*), non-existence (*nāsti*) or existence (*asti*) cannot be found (*vid*). Those who conceive (*kṛp*) existence (*asti*) and non-existence (*nāsti*) regarding that which is (*bhāva*) caught amidst (*antargata*) conditions (*pratyaya*), the philosophers (*tīrtha*) holding [such] opinions (*drṣṭi*) are far away (*dūrībhūta*) from my teachings (*śāśana*).”⁵

¹ The ineffability of reality as the fundamental point of contact between Yogācāra and Madhyamaka, in Burton 2000, 56-57.

² “*na saṃbhavaḥ svabhāvasya yuktaḥ pratyayahetubhiḥ* /”

Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XV.1, Kalupahana 1999, 228.

³ The attitude of Mādhyamika and Vijñānavāda authors towards “existence” and “non-existence” in Vallee-Poussin 1928, 164-167! For the way Hīnayāna scriptures deal with the dependent origination, as an alternative to the concepts of “existence” and “non-existence”, see *Samyutta-Nikāya*, XXII.90 in Warren 1995, 165-166!

⁴ “*kātyāyanāvavāde cāstīti nāstīti cobhayam / pratisiddham bhagavatā bhāvābhāvavibhāvinā* //”

Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XV.7, Kalupahana 1999, 232.

⁵ “*pratyayotpādite hyarthe nāstyastīti na vidyate / pratyayāntargataṃ bhāvaṃ ye kalpentyasti nāsti ca* /

“The production (*sambhava*) of the existence (*sat*) or of non-existence (*asat*) of some entities (*dharma*) within the conditional [flow] (*pratyaya*) is not possible.”¹

The series of dependent origination cannot be stated to represent a succession of absolutely different “objects” since such a claim would require the possibility to isolate, to delimitate something, namely the alleged “object” within the causal flow.² For an object to be different from another object, first of all, it should be able to stand as a separate and particular “object”. But this possibility of separating anything is precluded by the process of dependent origination. Distinction (*parābhāva*) requires, first of all, own identity (*svabhāva*) since it is nothing but a relation between one or more such identities. Therefore, the rejection of “identity”, of “own nature” (*svabhāva*) equally involves the rejection of “difference”.

“In case the own nature (*svabhāva*) is non-existent (*abhāva*), how could the other nature (*parabhāva*) exist? «Other nature» is called the own nature (*svabhāva*) of a different entity.”³

The causal flow is absolutely amorphous, absolutely devoid of separation, of determination. Its

dūrībhūtā bhavenmanyē śāsanāttīrthadr̥ṣṭayaḥ //

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, Sagāthakam, 168, Nanjio 1956, 287.

¹ “*sadasataḥ pratyayeṣu dharmāṇāṃ nāsti sambhavaḥ //*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, Sagāthakam, 34, Nanjio 1956, 268.

² Cheng 1982, 426-428 discusses the distinction between dependent origination and the common theories of causation which all involve a relation between different entities.

³ “*kutaḥ svabhāvasyābhāve parabhāvo bhaviṣyati / svabhāvaḥ parabhāvasya parabhāvo hi kathyate //*”

Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XV.3, Kalupahana 1999, 229.

homogenous nature is not compatible with any of the categories used by human thought, such as own identity (*svabhāva*) or distinction (*parābhāva*), unity (*ekatva*) or alterity (*anyatva*), existence (*bhāva*) or non-existence (*abhāva*), ascribing (characteristics) (*samāropa*) or rejecting (characteristics) (*apavāda*) and so on. Neither, more metaphysical concepts, such as “annihilation” (*uccheda*) or “permanence” (*śāśvata*) are compatible with anything from the realm of dependent origination for the simple reason that there is nothing to last or to be annihilated.

“That which dependently exists, that is neither identical (*tadeva*) with the others, nor different (*anya*) from them. Therefore, there is neither annihilation (*ucchinna*) nor permanence (*śāśvata*).”¹

“Again, Mahāmati, the doctrinary teaching (*dharmadeśanā*) of the liberated ones (*tathāgata*) is free (*vinirmukta*) from the four [extremes] (*catuṣṭi*). Namely, Mahāmati, the doctrinary teaching of the liberated ones, which consists, first of all (*pūrvaka*), from truth (*satya*), from the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), from the path to cessation (*nirodhamārga*) and from the effort of liberation (*mokṣappravṛtti*), is devoid (*vivarjita*) of unity (*ekatva*) and otherness (*anyatva*), of both (*ubhaya*), of the negation of both (*anubhayapakṣa*), is devoid of non-existence (*nāsti*), of existence (*asti*), of ascribing (*samāropa*) and rejection (*apavāda*).”²

¹ “*pratītya yad yad bhavati na hi tāvat tad eva tat /
na cānyadapi tattasmānnocchinnaṃ nāpi śāśvatam //*”

Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, XVIII.10, Kalupahana 1999, 273.

² “*punaraparaṃ mahāmate catuṣṭayavinirmuktā tathāgatānāṃ
dharmadeśanā, yadutaikatvānyatvobhayānubhayapakṣavivarjitā
nāstyastisamāropāpavādavinnirmuktā* /

1.iii. The rough and non-determined experience of the causal flow

In human life, the causal flow would be felt as the rough experience of a non-determined dynamism, as mere “experience”, which does not intend upon any particular object, which does not fall under any human category.¹ The categorically structured experience, consisting of “objects” with a definite conceptual identity, is just a realm that human mind abusively imposes upon the rough and non-determined sensation stirred by the causal flow.² Categories and linguistic designations are subsequent to sensation and, according to Mahāyāna, there is no natural connection between these two realms.

The causal flow is experienced as a mere rough “materiality/substantiality” (*vastu*), devoid of any

*satyapratītyasamutpādanīrodhamārgavimokṣappravṛttipūrvakā
mahāmate tathāgatānāṃ dharmadeśanā /*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, Nanjio 1956, 96.

¹ Shaw 1987, 227, finds in the pre-reflexive experience of “pure sensation”, as it was considered by William James, a suitable Western equivalent for the Buddhist experience of the dependant nature. He points to more similarities between the “pure sensation” of W. James and the “construction of what it was not” (*abhūtaparikalpa*) of Vijñānavāda (see Shaw 1987, 227-228). Both systems of thought claim that categorial structure is just a subjective product, human mind being entirely responsible for it.

² The dependent nature as the apparition of the illusion, the constructed nature as the objects envisaged by the illusion, in D'Amato 2005, 190-191.

categoreal determination.¹ Human mind cannot express the experience of the causal flow; it can merely state that it represents the experience of “something”, without being able to put in concepts what that “something” is.² We can state that the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*), the causal flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*), are responsible for the “substance”, the “material” of human experience, while its form, its categoreal structure are just subsequent operations of human imagination.³

“The basis (*saṃniśraya*) of illusion (*bhrānti*) is the dependent [nature] (*paratantra*).....”⁴

“The dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) is the pure (*śuddha*) worldly (*laukika*) sphere (*gocara*), cannot be by any means verbally expressed (*anabhilāpya*), is born of

¹ Waldron 2003, 52, remarks that the factors (*dharma*) should not be considered as the objects of knowledge but rather as its “stimuli”. Although the factors stir the cognitive capacity, the content of knowledge does not reflect any alleged determination of them.

²The dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as the mere awareness of the functional interrelatedness and causal interdependence, without ascribing any conventional characteristics to this process, in Scarfe 2006, 54. The dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as the undescrivable causal process stirred by karmic impressions (*vāsanā*), in Thakchöe 2015, 81.

³ King 1998, 14, speaks about the non-determined experience of the dependent nature as “mere sensorial datum”, “mere materiality” (*vastumātra*), thus suggesting both its reality and the impossibility to put it under any category. The dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as mere states of consciousness, devoid of any particular identity, in Guenther 1973, 94.

⁴ “*bhrānteḥ saṃniśrayaḥ paratantras*”

Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, ad. XI.13, Limaye 2000, 172.

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conditions (*pratyaya*), is devoid of conceptualization (*akalpita*).¹

Since the nature of the causal flow cannot be put into determined concepts, in order to suggest what is it like, Mahāyāna authors make use of terms evoking the mere substantiality, corporeality.

“..... the dependent [nature] (*paratantra*) means what is corporeal (*dehin*).”²

Sometimes, the texts refer to the dependant nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) using terms with a very broad but also unspecified meaning, which refer to everything without saying much about anything. Such term are: “the internal and the external factors” (*adhyātmabāhyadharma*) or “the ideations of the known object and those of the knowing subject” (*grāhyagrāhakavikalpa*).

“Here, the construction of the non-existent (*abhūtaparikalpa*) means the ideation (*vikalpa*) of the known objects (*grāhya*) and those of the knowing subjects (*grāhaka*).”³

In their most classical formulation, Vijñānavāda texts minimally speak of the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*) as “what appears” (*yatkhyāti*),

¹ “*akalpitaḥ pratyayaḥ 'nabhilāpyaśca sarvathā / paratantrasvabhāvo hi śuddhalaupikagocaraḥ //*”
Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.5 (I.6), Pandeya 1999, 19.

² “.....*paratantram ca dehinām //*”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, *Sagāthakam*, 204, Nanjio 1956, 291.

³ “*tatrābhūtaparikalpo grāhyagrāhakavikalpaḥ //*”
Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣya*, ad. I.1, Anacker 1998, 424.

while of the constructed nature they speak as “how it appears” (*yathā khyāti*).¹

“That which appears (*yat khyāti*) is the dependant [nature] (*paratantra*), the way it appears (*yathā khyāti*) is the constructed [nature] (*kalpita*), since [the dependent nature] is the substratum (*pratyaya*) where the transformations (*vṛtti*) are established and since the [constructed nature] is mere construction (*kalpanāmātra*).”²

“Here, what does appear? The construction (*kalpa*) of the non-existing (*asat*). How does it appear? Through the dual nature (*dvayātman*).”³

1.iv. The dependent nature (*paratantra*) and the non-determined perception; the constructed nature (*parikalpita*) and the categoreally structured experience

Classical Vijñānavāda was more interested in the ontological aspects of the causal flow and of the conceptual realm and less in their phenomenological aspects. The focus will shift in Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, a late branch of Vijñānavāda, dealing mainly with logics. This school will focus more on the phenomenological and epistemic aspects of the two realms.

¹ The dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as “what appears”, the conceptual nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*) as “how it appears”, discussed in Thakchoe 2015, 75. The dependent nature as a “magical illusion” and the constructed nature as the “appearance of a magical illusion”, in Gold 2007, 136.

² “*yat khyāti paratantra 'sau yathā khyāti sa kalpitaḥ / pratyayādhīnavṛttitvāt kalpanāmātrabhāvataḥ //*”

Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 2, Anacker 1998, 464.

³ “*tatra kiṃ khyātyasatkalpāḥ kathāṃ khyāti dvayātmanā //*”

Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 4, Anacker 1998, 464.

Nevertheless, the phenomenological approach to the causal flow and to the conceptual realm is to be found also in the classical texts of Vijñānavāda. Hence, the non-determined experience of the causal flow is associated to the five sensory consciousnesses (*pañcavijñāna*), namely to rough sensation. Categorical schematization, conceptual identification are done by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) which is associated not to the dependent nature (*paratantra*) but with the illusory realm of the constructed nature (*parikalpita*). Common human experience, comprising a multiplicity of conceptually determined objects, represents exclusively the sphere of the constructed nature. Not only own being, own identity (*svabhāva*) belong to the constructed realm, but all characteristics ascribed to an object, whatever can be expressed in words, all names (*nāman*).¹ Since all characteristics and all words pertain to the constructed nature, we cannot state much about the dependent nature. In human experience, dependant nature appears as the mere experience of an undetermined “something”. It is the mere notification of the presence of something, sensing the flow of momentary apparitions but without being able to state anything about it. Vijñānavāda texts refer to this experience by using terms with a general and undetermined meaning, such as “*ābhāsa*” (“apparition”),

¹ Name (*nāman*) as “bending” towards illusory objects, in Salvini 2015, 33-34. The unreal character of the constructed nature, which reifies selves and objects, masquerading these illusions as perceptual input, in Thakchoe 2015, 75.

“*nimitta*” (“sign”, “cause”), “*dharma*” (“factor”) ¹ or, according to the Idealistic ontology of the school, by “*viññapti*”, “*vikalpa*” (“ideation”).

“The dual (*dvaya*) perceptions (*saṃgraha*) mean marks (*nimitta*), discriminations (*vikalpa*) and names (*nāman*).”²

“According to this, the perception of the characteristics and of the ideations which produce (*ārabhya*) the five [kinds] of objects (*pañcavastu*) means the dependent [nature] (*paratantra*). Names (*nāman*) are the constructed [nature] (*parikalpita*).”³

“The characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the dependent [nature] (*paratantra*) are ideations (*saṃkalpa*) of some illusory (*nimitta*) marks (*bhṛānti*). The names (*nāman*) of these marks are the characteristics of the constructed [nature] (*vikalpita*).”⁴

¹ Klostermaier 1991, 33, finds some similarities between the Buddhist concept of “factor” (*dharma*) and the concept of “atom”; one of the most important similarity is that both lack a definite representation. See pp. 33-34 for a study on the factors and their undetermined character!

For the way factors (*dharma*) were conceived in Abhidharma thought, see Potter 1999, 49!

Waldron 2003, 52, remarks that “*dharma*” (“factor”) is not a concept, such as the other words of common language. A “factor” (*dharma*) is not a particular “thing”. It cannot be defined since it is a momentary and unique apparition (*svalakṣaṇa*).

² “*nimittasya vikalpasya nāmaśca dvayasamgrahaḥ* /”

Asaṅga, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, III.13, Anacker 1998, 441.

³ “*yathāyogaṃ pañcavastūnyārabhya nimittavikalpayoḥ paratantraṇa samgrahaḥ / nāmanāḥ parikalpitenā* /”

Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, ad. III.13, Anacker 1998, 441.

⁴ “*bhṛāntirnimittaṃ saṃkalpaḥ paratantrasya lakṣaṇam / tasminnimitte yannāma tadvikalpitalakṣaṇam* /”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, *Sagāthakam*, 138, Nanjio 1956, 282.

The later school of Vijñānavāda, Sautrāntika-Yogācāra, claimed that the experience of the dependent nature is the perception (*pratyakṣa*) of the “own characteristics” (*svalakṣaṇa*)¹; on the other side, the experience of the constructed nature would be the “general characteristic” (*sāmānyalakṣaṇa*) expressed by concept, name, which all are nothing but subjective mental construction (*kalpanā*), experienced not once but repeatedly, on multiple occasions.² The association of the dependent nature with the “own characteristics”, with the absolute particularity, suggests the impossibility to state anything, to communicate anything about the dependent nature, since it can never be associated with a general and therefore communicable concept. As dependent apparition, all manifestation is simply what it is, its reduction to anything else, its expression through anything else being impossible. All manifestation is absolutely particular, lasts only for one moment (*kṣaṇa*) and, once it ceased, it never reappears again. No factor shares anything with any other factor and even its own nature is not stable, but it lasts only for a single moment. The particularity of manifestation is therefore absolute. The causal flow represents a series of momentary apparitions, each of them having an absolute degree of

¹ A clear explanation of the “own characteristics” (*svalakṣaṇa*) pertaining to the experience of the factors (*dharma*), in Tillemans 1990, 273 (note 366)!

² The constructed nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*) as fancied characterization and unfound universality, in Guenther 1973, 93.

particularity and not sharing anything with any other apparition.

In human life, this experience of the causal flow generally occurs along with the experience of the constructed nature. The rough experience of the causal flow is always ascribed conceptual determinations by the mind, out of purely subjective reasons. In human experience, the dependent nature is always wrongly interpreted through the constructed nature (*parikalpita*), the two existing altogether.¹

“Here, names (*nāman*) and characteristics (*nimitta*) should be known as the constructed nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*). Again, Mahāmati, that which is the support (*āśraya*) where this [constructed nature] manifests (*pravṛtta*), which is labelled (*saṃśabdita*) as «ideation» (*vikalpa*), «consciousness» (*citta*), «state of consciousness» (*caitta*), which is born (*udita*) at the same moment (*yugapatkāla*) [with the constructed nature], just like the Sun (*āditya*) [which is born] along (*sahita*) with its rays (*raśmi*), which represents the support (*ādhāraka*) of the ideations (*vikalpa*) of various (*vicitra*) characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) and own natures (*svabhāva*), that, Mahāmati, is called the «dependent nature» (*svabhāva paratantra*).”²

¹ The dependent nature as the process itself, as a mere causal description of the arising of an erroneous duality, and the constructed nature as the erroneous dual experience, in Gold 2007,133.

² “*tatra nāma ca nimittaṃ ca parikalpitaḥ svabhāvo veditavyaḥ /
yaḥ punarmahāmate tadāśrayapravṛtto
vikalpaścittacaittasamśabdito yugapatkālodita āditya iva
raśmisahito vicitralakṣaṇasvabhāvo vikalpādhārakaḥ, sa mahāmate
svabhāvaḥ paratantra ityucyate /*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. VI, Nanjio 1956, 291.

1.v. Imposing the constructed conceptual nature (*parikalpita*) upon the dependent nature (*paratantra*)

The Universe, as it is represented by the mind of a human being, as a succession of well-defined objects, pertains only to the subjective sphere, being a mere human fancy, unsupported by anything from outside the realm of subjectivity. All identifications operated by human mind within the realm of the causal flow, namely all beings and objects (*ātmadharmā*), are nothing but constructions (*parikalpa*), “metaphors” (*upacāra*) which ascribe to the undetermined stream of always transforming consciousness (*vijñānapariṇāma*) fanciful identities (*parikalpitasvabhāva*).¹

“«Person» (*ātman*) and «object» (*dharma*) are metaphors (*upacāra*) which manifest in various ways within the transformations (*pariṇāma*) of consciousness (*vijñāna*).”²

“But the case of the consciousness (*vijñāna*) transforming as selves and objects (*ātmadharmā*) is different. This consciousness exists being dependently produced but without also being characterized by the natures of selves and

¹ Conventional symbols (*saṃketa*), worldly designations (*vyavahāra*), notifications (*prajñapti*) as mere “conventions/human practices” (*saṃvṛti*), in Nagao 1991, 15. Words, meanings and forms as illusions imposed to the dependent nature, in D’Amato 2005, 193-194. The constructed nature as a misleading experience, in Gold 2007, 137. Conceiving the constructed nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*) as real exposed as an “extremist” position (*anta*), namely as the “extreme of reification”, in Thakchoe 2015, 74.

² “*ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate / vijñānapariṇāme 'sau.....'*”

Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 1, Anacker 1998, 422.

objects. Nevertheless, it appears as selves and objects. That's why it is claimed that it has a mere conventional reality.”¹

There is no natural relation of representation between the constructed nature (*parikalpita*) and the dependent nature (*paratantra*) unto which it is imposed. Vijñānavāda insists upon the “absolute non-existence” (*atyanta abhāva*) of the constructed nature, of concept. This is illicitly superimposed (*adhyāropa*) to the causal flow, which, in itself, doesn't contain anything corresponding to the attributes ascribed to it.²

“What does it here mean the construction (*kalpa*) of something non-existent (*asat*)? It means the consciousness (*citta*) which conceives (*kṛp*) of it. The object (*artha*), in the ways it is conceived, is absolutely non-existent (*atyanta*).”³

“The ignorant ones imagine the dependent nature (*paratantra*) in a wrong way, as a self (*ātman*), as some objects (*dharma*), as being existent, non-existent, identical, different and so on. Just like an illusory apparition, this imagined nature is absolutely non-existent. This is the constructed nature (*parikalpita*). All these selves (*ātman*), all

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1928, 10.

² For the illicit superimposing of the constructed nature upon the dependant nature, as it is discussed in *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra* and *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, chap. XI, see D'Amato 2005, 191! “*Parikalpa*” and its common implication of falsity, in Nagao 1991, 62. Determining things (*vyavasthāna*) and giving names (*nāmābhilāpa*) as a mere subjective practice of “notification/making known” (*prajñaptisamvṛti*), in Nagao 1991, 16. Absolute non-existence (*atyanta abhāva*) of the constructed nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*), its condition of mere superimposition, in Thankchoe 2015, 76, 82. Descriptions of the dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as falsifications of the dependent nature, in Burton 2000, 54.

³ “*asatkalpo 'tra kaścittam yatastena hi kalpyate / yathā ca kalpayatyārtha tathātyantam na vidyate //*”

Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 5, Anacker 1998, 465.

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these objects (*dharma*), which are erroneously ascribed to the dependent nature (*paratantra*) are void (*śūnya*). ”¹

The illicit character of the conceptual interpretation of the causal flow is often expressed in Vijñānavāda texts by stating that the dependant nature is “void of determined existence” or, more literally, “void of existence as «that one» (*atadbhāvaśūnyatā*). The dependent nature is void (*śūnya*) of any determined way of being, of any “*tadbhāva*” (“that existence”, “existing as that”).²

“Voidness (*śūnyatā*) is of three kinds: the voidness of non-existence (*abhāvaśūnyatā*), [corresponding to the constructed nature], voidness of determined non-existence (*atadbhāvaśūnyatā*), [corresponding to the dependent nature] and the voidness of own nature (*svabhāvaśūnyatā*), [corresponding to the fulfilled nature]. ”³

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 533.

² Linguistic conceptualization as necessarily requiring dichotomized essences and thus failing to refer to a non-dichotomized dependently arisen world, in Kiblinger 2015, 22. The absence of the constructed dualities from the dependent nature, in D’Amato 2005, 191.

³ “*trividhā śūnyatā abhāvaśūnyatā atadbhāvaśūnyatā svabhāvaśūnyatā ca* /”

Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra*, ad. III.7b-8a, Anacker 1998, 439.

2.The Relational Void (*itaretaraśūnyatā*)

2.i. The relational void (*śūnya*); voidness as the absence of conceptual determination (*parikalpita*) within the causal flow (*paratantra*)

The void of Vijñānavāda is “softer” than the void of early Mahāyāna. It is rather a relational issue, the absence of some unreal determinations from a real locus.¹ Voidness is generally defined as the “separation between the constructed nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) and the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*)” or as the “absence of the constructed nature from the dependent nature”.²

While other schools, such as Mādhyamika, are interested especially in rejecting the reality of the determinations, Vijñānavāda authors are quite interested also in debating about the real locus of the imposed determinations, about what remains when the fanciful determinations have been discarded.³ Vijñānavāda’s void applies only to the constructed nature imposed upon the conditional flow which remains unaffected by the predication of voidness.⁴

¹ The need for a real substratum of illusion, according to Yogācāra, in Burton 2000, 71.

² For an analysis of the relational voidness, see King 1994, 666!

³ The Madhyamaka sense of emptiness as “self-emptiness” and the Yogācāra sense as “other-emptiness”, in Yao 2014, 330.

⁴ Yogācāra’s emptiness as “being of non-being”, in Nagao 1991, 214-215. The need for a real basis of designation (designatum) and the absurdity of Nihilism, according to Asaṅga, in Thankchoe 2015, 89. The relational voidness of Yogācāra defined according to the *Madhyānta-Vibhāga*, as the “non-existence of the duality, and the

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“Voidness (*śūnyatā*) is logically acceptable (*yuj*) if that which is void (*yacchūnya*) is real (*sat*) and that of which it is void (*yena śūnya*) is unreal (*asat*).”¹

“Since something does not exist in a locus (*yad yatra na bhavati*), that [locus] should be seen as void of that something (*tat tena śūnya*).”²

The conditional flow, devoid of the determinations imposed by human mind, represents the basis (*āśraya*), the real locus unto which the conceptual identifications were imposed. Since voidness affects only the relation between the locus and its constructed identity, the predication of voidness doesn’t impact in any way on the reality of the locus.

“Again, that which remains (*āvaśiṣṭa*) here, that should be correctly (*yathābhūta*) known as being real (*sat*) here.”³

“The non-erroneous (*aviparīta*) characteristics of voidness (*śūnyatā*) are shown: that which is void (*yacchūnya*) is real while that of which it is void (*yena śūnya*) is not existing there.”⁴

existence of that non-existence”, in Yao 2014, 329. The twofold aspect of manifestation: non-existent, when viewed as a constructed nature, and existent, when viewed as a dependent nature, in Yao 2014, 325.

¹ “*yena hi śūnyam tadasadbhāvāt / yacca śūnyam tatsadbhāvācchūnyatā yujyate /*”

Yogācārabhūmi, Tattvārthapaṭaḷam, Part II, Willis 2003, 162.

² “*yataśca yad yatra na bhavati tat tena śūnyamiti samanupaśyanti /*”

Yogācārabhūmi, Tattvārthapaṭaḷam, Part II, Willis 2003, 162.

³ “*yatpunaratrāvaśiṣṭaṃ bhavati tatsadihāstīti yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti /*”

Yogācārabhūmi, Tattvārthapaṭaḷam, Part II, Willis 2003, 162.

⁴ “*aviparītaṃ śūnyatālakṣaṇamudbhāvitam bhavati / yacchūnyam tasya sadbhāvāt yena śūnyam tasya tatrābhāvāt /*”

The meaning of the term “void” is therefore “softer” in Vijñānavāda than in early Mahāyāna, since not only the ultimate reality remains after the proclamation of void but also the conditional flow, the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).

“Again, what is left (*āvaśiṣṭa*) here? The construction of the non-existent (*abhūtaparikalpa*) and the voidness (*śūnyatā*). These two exist here – thus it is known according to reality (*yathābhūta*) and without seeing anything superimposed (*adhyāropa*) or rejected (*apavāda*).”¹

The meaning of “voidness” (*śūnyatā*), as considered by Vijñānavāda authors, is somehow anticipated in the very early Buddhist texts; Hīnayāna authors frequently engage in debates regarding the fancied identity humans convey to mere aggregates (*saṃghāta*) of factors devoid of any conceivable characteristics. The most classical such examples could be those from *Milinda-Pañha*, where it is shown how the most important human concepts (such as “chariot”, “person”) are nothing but names, fancies. What truly exists are just some “aggregates” of factors lacking the conceptual identity illicitly ascribed to them by human mind.

In early Mahāyāna, the relation between concept and conditional flow had a lower importance since,

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.1 (2), Pandeya 1999, p.13.

¹ “*kiṃ punarihāvaśiṣṭam / abhūtaparikalpaḥ śūnyatā ca / tadubhayam ihāśūṭyanadhyāropānapavādena paśyan yathābhūtaṃ prajānāti /*”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.1 (2), Pandeya 1999, 12.

according to those philosophers, all manifestation, either conceptual constructions of the individual either the conditional flow manifested by the ultimate reality, were equally illusory. Early Mahāyāna was rather interested in stressing the opposition between the substantial reality of the absolute and the illusory, devoid of own nature, character of manifestation, without being much interested in drawing levels of reality within the manifestation itself.

Mādhyamika reintroduces in Buddhist metaphysics the ontological distinction between the conditional flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the conceptual realm engendered by human mind. Some early Mahāyāna texts, which already contain Idealistic elements, thus anticipating Vijñānavāda, deal with void as a kind of relation between two levels of manifestation.¹ Thus, *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* talks about the “reciprocal/mutual void” (*itaretara*), namely about a relation of dissociation which takes place between two kinds of manifestation. This relation of mutual dissociation doesn’t affect the existence of any of the two types of manifestation, but only their connection. *Laṅkāvatāra* instantiates this “relational void” by the relation between a monastic cell and various animals; the absence of the animals from the monastic cell doesn’t hinder in any way the own nature of the cell, which still

¹ The dependent nature (*paratantra svabhāva*) as “empty” of the constructed nature (*parikalpita svabhāva*) and thus not liable to description, ineffable, in Burton 2000, 54.

can legitimately represent the substratum of various predications (such as the presence of a monk etc.).

“Again, Mahāmati, what is mutual voidness (*itaretaraśūnyatā*)? When something does not exist in a certain place (*yadyatra nāsti*), it is said about that [place] that it is void (*śūnya*) of that. Mahāmati, it is as in case of the Śṛgāla monastery hall (*prāsāda*), where there are no elephants, bulls, sheep or others. I state about this [hall] that it is void (*śūnya*) of these but I state that it is not void of monks (*bhikṣu*). Again, Mahāmati, the hall is not void of the condition of hall (*prāsādabhāva*) and neither the monks from the condition of monkhood (*bhikṣubhāva*).”¹

Even if the void professed by Vijñānavāda philosophy leaves the conditional flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*), the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), unaffected, this should not be interpreted as a statement an ontological similarity between them and the ultimate reality, which is also left unaffected by the void of Vijñānavāda. The illusory and non-substantial character of the conditional flow is frequently stated in Vijñānavāda texts, even if it is not expressed through the term “void” (*śūnya*), as in early Mahāyāna. The conditional flow is claimed to be different from the ultimate reality, being a mere manifestation of the ultimate reality. Even when freed from the conceptual construction, it is still compared to a mere illusion

¹ “*itaretaraśūnyatā punarmahāmate katamā yaduta yadyatra nāsti tattena śūnyamityucyate / tadyathā mahāmate śṛgālamātuḥ prāsāde hastigavaidākādyaṁ na santi / aśūnyaṁ ca bhikṣubhiriti bhāṣitaṁ mayā sa ca taiḥ śūnya ityucyate / na ca punarmahāmate prāsādaḥ prāsādabhāvato nāsti bhikṣavaśca bhikṣubhāvato na santi /*”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, Nanjio 1956, 75.

(*māyopama*).¹ Vijñānavāda texts contain many passages proclaiming the non-substantial character of factors, opposing the conditioned being of the factors to the absolute substantiality of the ultimate reality (*dharmadhātu*).

Moreover, when discussing the voidness of the three natures (*triniḥsvabhāvatā*)², Vijñānavāda texts also talk about the “voidness of the dependent nature”, generally considered as a “voidness of birth” (*utpattiniḥsvabhāva*). This “voidness of birth” is the result of being conditionally born (of the dependent nature) and it reveals the non-substantial and illusory character of the conditional flow, even under its purified aspect.

2.ii. The soteriological efficiency of the “relational void”

Even if this concept of “voidness” leaves the conditional flow unaffected, it is nevertheless enough for accomplishing the soteriological ideals of Vijñānavāda. The main ontological cause of bondage is considering manifestation as a multiplicity of substantial entities, as it is depicted by the categorial system. As soon as the categorial system has been shown as “void”, the world of substantial entities ceases, the attachment towards this

¹ Dependent existence (*paratantra*) as a mediation between pure imagination and absolute reality, in Nagao 1991, 62.

² For a study on the “absence of own being” (*niḥsvabhāva*) involved by each of the three natures (*svabhāva*), see Ganguly 1992, 53-54!

world is equally annihilated and therefore bondage itself is cancelled.

Therefore, even in the context of a “softer” ontology, which ascribes reality both to the absolute (*dharmadhātu*, *pariniṣpanna svabhāva*) and to its emanation, the conditional flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*, *paratantrasvabhāva*), Vijñānavāda succeeds in totally isolating the linguistically shaped sphere from the real. Consequently, human drama and human suffering, which take place within the conceptually shaped world, are equally excluded from the realm of reality.¹ Human concepts and the existential situations defined based on them are nothing but subjective “games”, originating in the karmic predispositions imprinted within a personal series (*santāna*).² Since the problem is strictly subjective, the solution itself is subjective; humans can escape suffering simply by refraining from its illusory projection.

This soteriological function performed by the predication of “voidness” (*śūnyatā*) conveys some kind of unity to the various meanings the term had all along Buddhist schools of thought. Under all its meanings, the term had the same soteriological import; it constantly brought out the destructible character of the causes of bondage.

¹ The false constructed nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) as the medium of all human drama, in Nagao 1991, 63.

² The experience of the conceptual nature as originated in karmic impressions (*vāsanā*), in the “linguistic impressions” (*abhilāpavāsanā*), and not in an alleged “objective reality”, in Thakchoe 2015, 76.

A Non-referential and Non-cognitive Theory of Truth¹

1. The Subjective Origin of the Categorical System

Vijñānavāda Buddhism claims all kind of experience, including knowledge, is “mere ideation” (*viññaptimātra*), being devoid of any objective counterpart, of any objective value. The experience of knowledge is determined solely by the individual predispositions of the knowing subject (his “imprints of the linguistic constructions” – *abhilāpavāsanā*) and not by an alleged “external reality”.

1.i. The categorical system originating in “the imprints of the linguistic constructions” (*abhilāpavāsanā*)

For Vijñānavāda, the categorical system has no grounds at the level of the objective reality; the relation between the conceptual construction of a cognitive subject and the reality beyond him is not a

¹ The whole chapter represents a slightly improved version of a paper originally published under the title “A non-referential and non-cognitive theory of truth, in Vijñānavāda Buddhism”, in *Hiperboreea Journal* (New Series) II, no.2 (December 2015): 52-73.

A Non-referential and Non-cognitive Theory of Truth
representational one. The conceptual schematization,
being similar to imagination, fantasy, finds its origin
only at the level of the cognitive subject.¹

Vijñānavāda relates conceptualization to the so-called “imprints of the linguistic constructions” (*abhilāpavāsanā*); these represent the seeds (*bīja*) which, in case of an individual, give birth to the conceptual constructions experienced by him. Although the term “*abhilāpavāsanā*” - “imprints of the linguistic constructions” or, in a looser translation, “imprints of the concepts”, is the one consecrated for referring to the seeds which give birth to conceptual experience, one can also come across other terms, such as “*vikalpavāsanā*” (“imprints of the conceptual discrimination”), “*prapañcavādavāsanā*” (“imprints of the discursive manifestation”) and so forth.

“Hence, Mahāmati, those who cling (*abhiniviṣṭa*) to the imprints of proliferation (*prapañcavādavāsanā*), of the philosophical (*tīrthya*) [constructions], [imprints] which are devoid of a temporal beginning (*anādikāla*), [those] cling (*abhiniviś*) to the statements (*vāda*) of identity (*ekatva*), alterity (*anyatva*), existence (*astitva*), non-existence (*nāstitva*), [their] thinking (*mati*) not having established (*avadhārita*) that [everything] is only (*mātra*) perception (*drśya*) of one’s own consciousness (*svacitta*).”²

¹ For a study on the entirely subjective causes which lead to the categorical discrimination of the object, see Forman 1989, 399-400!

² “*evameva mahāmate*

*anādikālatīrthyaprapañcavādavāsanābhiniviṣṭāḥ
ekatvānyatvāstitvanāstitvavādānabhiniviśante
svacittadrśyamātrānavadhāritamatayaḥ*”

Lañkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, Nanjio 1956, 90.

“Consciousness (*citta*) engenders (*saṃbhū*) diversity (*vicitra*), being determined (*baddha*) by the imprints of conceptual discrimination (*vikalpavāsanā*). Although [diversity] is only consciousness (*cittamātra*), to the worldly (*laukika*) people (*nr*) it appears (*ākhyā*) as external (*bahiṣ*).”¹

“Due to the imprints (*vāsanā*) and the seeds (*bīja*) of externality (*bāhya*) conceptual discrimination (*vikalpa*) is produced (*saṃpravṛt*). The dependent (*tantra*) [own-being] is perceived (*grh*) through this; that which perceives (*grh*), that is the constructed (*kalpita*) [own-being].”²

“Mahāmati, what are words (*rūta*)³? A «word» is said to be the discrimination (*vikalpa*) associated (*saṃyoga*) to speech (*vāc*) and letters (*akṣara*), to inter-personal (*paraspara*) verbal communication (*jalpa*) which is issued (*vinīḥṣṛta*) from the teeth, jaws, palate, tongue, lips and the cavity of the mouth, and which has as [its] cause (*hetu*) the imprints of conceptual discrimination (*vikalpavāsanā*).”⁴

“The apparition (*vikhyāna*) of an object (*artha*) having constructed (*parikalpita*) characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) is due to the imprints (*vāsanā*) caused (*nimitta*) by conceiving (*saṃjñā*) an object (*artha*) which conforms to verbal expressions (*yathājalpa*).”⁵

¹ “*vikalpavāsanābaddhaṃ vicitraṃ cittasaṃbhavam /
bahirākhyāyate nrñāṃ cittamātraṃ hi laukikam //*”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. III, verse 32, Nanjio 1956, 154.

² “*bāhyavāsanabījena vikalpaḥ saṃpravartate /
tantraṃ hi yena grhṇāti yadgrhṇāti sa kalpitam //*”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, *Sagāthakam*, 407, Nanjio 1956, 317.

³ “Words” or “concepts”; in Buddhist thinking, word and concept are closely connected, the word being only the public expression of concept.

⁴ “*tatra rutam mahāmate katamat? yaduta
vāgākṣarasam̐yogavikalpo
danīhanutālujihvausṭhapuṭaviniḥṣṛtaparasparaajalpo
vikalpavāsanāhetuko rutamityucyate*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. III, Nanjio 1956, 154.

⁵ “*yathājalpārthasaṃjñāyā nimittam tasya vāsanā /
tasmādaparthavikhyānam parikalpitalakṣaṇam*”

Therefore, the conceptual discrimination represents the actualization of a certain tendency existing at the level of an individual consciousness.¹ This tendency is assumed by a certain individual along with appropriating a certain personal identity; in general, Vijñānavāda texts consider that the act of appropriating a certain personality consists of the appropriation of the body and its organs (*sendriyakakāya*) as well as of the appropriation of certain specific seeds (*bīja*) which will later become responsible for the tendencies of that particular individual, including the tendency of applying a certain categorical system.

Consequently, the categorical discrimination is more related to the personality, to the individual self, appropriated by the consciousness rather than to the objective manifestation. The fact that, later on, the conceptual experience will be related to the objective manifestation represents an erroneous act (*viparyāsa, mithyā*) of consciousness; the conceptual discrimination is superimposed (*adhyāropa*) on the objective manifestation in the absence of any natural connection between them.

Therefore, conceptual knowledge is a mere subjective experience; Mahāyāna texts often compare

Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, XI.38, Limaye 2000, 187.

¹ Waldron 2003, 2-3, states, in agreement with certain recent results of the cognitive sciences, that the “object” would be nothing else but a certain type of stimuli that are repeatedly produced. The “object” is nothing but an “instrument” the human being, due to his higher mental capacity, has created, in order to deal in a better way with experience, to be able to pursue his own interests more easily.

the experience of conceptual knowledge with the experience of dreams and hallucinations, arguing that the situations are the same in the case of the conceptualized knowledge as in the production of the dreams, which is determined only by causes related to the subjectivity of the individual, without being influenced at all by what exists objectively, outside the individual consciousness. Explaining the occurrence of the conceptual knowledge does not resort to its possible referentiality, but it is simply a causal explanation applied to the sphere of the human psychic; this type of knowledge is produced simply when certain subjective conditions are met.

“A thesis (*pratijñā*) is caused (*kāraṇa*) by some conditions (*pratyaya*), causes (*hetu*), apparitions (*dṛṣṭānta*), as a dream (*svapna*), as the [town] of the Gandharvas, as a circle (*cakra*) [of fire], as a mirage (*marīci*), as the rays of the sun (*somabhāskara*).”¹

1.ii. Arguments for the subjective nature of the categorical discrimination

The subjective nature of categories results also from the frequently noticed tendency of the Buddhist texts to operate classifications of the objects of experience on soteriological grounds. The objects of

¹ “*pratyayairhetudṛṣṭāntaiḥ pratijñā kāraṇena ca / svapnagandharvacakreṇa marīcyā somabhāskaraiḥ //*”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, Sagāthakam, 65, Nanjio 1956, 272-273.

The Sanskrit text is slightly problematic, since literally it states that a thesis is produced *through* a dream (*svapna*), the [town] of the Gandharvas, a circle (*cakra*) [of fire], a mirage (*marīci*), the rays of the sun (*somabhāskara*), the corresponding sanskrit words being in the Instrumentative. Nevertheless, we interpreted the statement more freely, as a comparison.

experience are classified according to their role within the soteriological approach; the identity of the objects depends on this role they fulfil.

It is obvious that, in this case, the categorical framing process is based solely on subjective grounds, the soteriological approach requiring an individual subject as reference point. Mahāyāna does not consider this type of classification as a special case, in which the subjective reasons would interfere only accidentally with the objective ones; on the contrary, the reasons on the basis of which any classification, any categorical framing is made can be only subjective, the classification on soteriological grounds being simply a common case of classification. In doing so, Mahāyāna anticipates certain tendencies that manifest in the cognitive sciences of today, which claim that the categorical system reflects not so much the structure of reality as the interests of the subject operating the categorical framing.¹

Another argument in favour of the subjective nature of the categorical system and, implicitly, of any theoretical construction, is the obvious remark that they appear at the level of an individual being, at the level of a limited subject, and therefore can not elude the limited, particular perspective they are compelled to by their specific support. Therefore, the conceptual knowledge always carries with itself, intrinsically, the

¹ Dasgupta 1928, 38-39, shows how the mind (*manas*) and the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) are the ones responsible for the production of the conventional construction (*vyavahārika, saṃvṛti*), under any of its aspects.

discriminatory attachment towards an individual self and the limited perspective to which they are compelled by the limited nature of the self at whose level they appear. The conceptual knowledge appears at the level of the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) which, on its turn, is determined by the mind (*manas*). But the mind, according to Vijñānavāda, is the one responsible for the appearance of the error of the individual, limited self (*ātman*). Because mental consciousness is determined by the mind, the error, the limitation, the subjectivity specific to the mind are inherent to it and, implicitly, this error will also characterise any form of conceptual knowledge that appears at the level of the mental consciousness. To put it differently, due to the fact that it appears at the level of an instance affected by the error of individuality, of subjectivity, conceptual knowledge possesses a certain inherent subjective, limited nature.

“The mind (*manas*) represents corruption (*pradoṣa*); [its] nature (*prakṛti*) is corrupted (*praduṣṭa*), and, therefore, whatever conforms to words (*yathārūta*) has an incorrect (*ayukta*) nature (*rūpa*).”¹

¹ “*manah pradoṣaḥ prakṛtipraduṣṭo [‘yathārute cāpi] hyayuktarūpaḥ /*”

Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, I.21, Limaye 2000, 19.

The words “*yathārute cāpi*” are missing from the Sanskrit text preserved until today, as a result of the corruption of the manuscript. They represent only a reconstruction done by Bagchi, 1970. Apud. Limaye 2000, 19.

1.iii. The equally altered nature of the affective-volitive experience and of the conceptual experience

According to Vijñānavāda, there is a tight connection between the attachment to the ego, on the one hand, and the presence and the intensity of the tendency towards conceptual discrimination, on the other. As the tendency towards conceptual discrimination is related to the subjectivity of a certain individual, to a certain personality, the intensity of the attachment to the individual ego determines the intensity of the tendency towards conceptual discrimination. The same way the seeds of afflictions (*kleśa*) can be found at the level of the individual self (*ātman*) and of its tendencies, the seeds of categorical discrimination can be found in the sphere of the ego as well. For Vijñānavāda, the categorical discrimination does not have a more objective or a less altered status than the value discrimination depending on the preferences of the individual self. In the same way in which to constitute an object of desire is determined by purely subjective reasons, to constitute an object (*artha*, *viśaya*) of a certain type, with a certain categorical identity (*parikalpita svabhāva*), is equally the result of a decision made on subjective grounds. The altered nature of the erroneous discrimination of the individual self (*ātman*) can be found not only in the sphere of value judgements, but, equally, in the sphere of conceptualisation.

Realistic philosophy operates a sharp dichotomy between the subjective sphere, to which thirst/desire

(*tṛṣṇā*), afflictions (*kleśa*), and value determinations (*vyākṛta*) belong to, and the objective sphere, to which conceptual knowledge, notions would belong to. But, for Vijñānavāda, both afflictions, the attachment to a certain individual self, on the one hand, and the adherence to a certain categorical system and the making of certain categorical discriminations based on this system, on the other, are equally related to subjectivity and alteration. The objective sphere of manifestation is constituted only of the amorphous flux of the dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*).

Moreover, as the afflictions determined by the ego illusively and erroneously inflict the appearance of the self-other duality (*sva-para*), the categorical discrimination determined by the ego also erroneously inflicts the appearance of some dualities, of the multiplicity inherent to it. In doing so, similar to afflictions (*kleśa*), conceptual knowledge falsifies reality and inflicts the state of bondage. Vijñānavāda considers that the objects of conceptual knowledge, the “knowable objects” (*jñeya*) represent, just like afflictions (*kleśa*), obstructions (*āvaraṇa*) on the path to eliberation, the texts of the school frequently discussing about these two types of obstructions: obstructions consisting of the knowable objects (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) and obstructions consisting of afflictions (*kleśāvaraṇa*).¹

¹ The two kinds of *āvaraṇa*-s, the obstructions of the afflictions and those of the knowable objects, along Buddhist Mahāyāna tradition, in Muller 2013, 1195-1197, 1200-1208. A detailed discussion on the

“Oh, Lord (*adhipati*) of Lañka, the practice (*yoga*) of the philosophers (*tīrthya*) is produced (*pravṛt*) due to the clinging (*abhiniveśa*) of the philosophers to the individual self (*ātman*). The ugly (*asaumya*) practices (*yoga*) of the philosophers (*tīrthya*) are due to the perception (*darśana*) and the clinging (*abhiniveśa*) to [considering] the own-nature (*svabhāva*) of consciousness (*viññāna*) as a dual object (*dvayārtha*).”¹

“..... Equally (*samatā*), the apparitions (*ākhyā*) of knowledge (*jñāna*) and of afflictions (*kleśa*) preclude (*vivarjita*) liberation (*vimukti*).”²

“[The propensity for discrimination of] this consciousness will be intensified by both [the intellectual] defilement of holding fast to perverse views and [the affectional] defilement of indulgence in passion.”³

1.iv. The “obstructed” (*nivṛta*) nature of conceptual knowledge

Vijñānavāda texts assign to the conceptual discrimination an “obstructed” (*nivṛta*) nature, i.e. they consider that it is affected by the illusion of the determined individuality, by the illusion of subjectivity, which obstructs the absolute and liberated condition of reality, characterised by universality, non-determination. Subjectivity and individuality obstruct this condition because they involve at least the dichotomy between

obstructions of the knowable (*jñeyāvaraṇa*), in Swanson 1983, 52-54, 63-65.

¹ “*tīrthyayogo hi laṅkādhīpate tīrthyānāmātmābhiniveśātpurvartate/ viññānasvabhāvadvayārthānāmabhiniveśadarśanādasaumyayogastīr thakarāṇām /*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. I, Nanjio 1956, 11.

² “..... *samatājñānakleśākhyā vimuktyā te vivarjitāḥ //*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, verse 206, Nanjio 1956, 135.

³ *Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda*, part. 3, Hakeda 1967, 53.

subject and object (*grāhaka – grāhya*), self and other (*sva-para*). In Vijñānavāda texts, the function of giving birth to obstructions is ascribed to the mind (*manas*), as its own essence, the mind being responsible for the illusory appearance of the ego, of the individual. However, the mind, through the determination relation it exerts upon the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and upon the conceptual experience that is engendered at its level, transfers the “obstructed” (*nivṛta*) nature to the mental consciousness as well.¹

“Again, the obstructed (*nivṛta*) and the [valorically] non-determined (*avyākṛta*) ones are those associated (*samprayukta*) to the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*), which are born along (*sahajāta*) with it, namely the view of the reality of the body (*satkāyadrṣṭi*) and the view of perceiving extremes (*antagrahadrṣṭi*).”²

¹ Tillemans 1990, 245 (note 216) mentions a fragment from Candrakīrti which says that the consensus received by a thesis, by an opinion, represents the same kind of attachment as the attachment towards one’s native places.

² “*nivṛtāvyākṛtaṃ punaḥ manovijñānasamprayuktasahajātasatkāya[drṣṭy]antagrahadrṣṭi*” Asaṅga, *Abhidharmasamuccaya*, apud. Sparham 1995, 118, note 3. “Perceiving the extremes” (*antagrāha*) refers to any kind of conceptual representation which delineates between what is included in the sphere of a concept and what remains outside of it.

2. A Non-referential and Non-cognitive Theory of Truth

2.i. The similarity between the individual experiences of various subjects accounted by means of the “similar karma” (*tulyakarma*)

Although Vijñānavāda denies all cognitive value to conceptual knowledge, reducing it to a particular type of subjective experience, the school does not slip into a form of absolute solipsism. Truly, Vijñānavāda claims that any type of conceptual knowledge simply represents a subjective phenomenon, with no cognitive value and no corresponding object; it also considers that the apparition of a certain conceptual experience is determined by entirely subjective causes, which are related only to the individual identity (*ātman*) appropriated by consciousness. Nothing else but the karmic imprints (*vāsanā*), the seeds (*bīja*) appropriated by the consciousness along with the appropriation of an individual identity, have a role in engendering conceptual knowledge.

However, despite their entirely subjective nature, the conceptual experiences of various subjects may have a similar content (*tulya*), and this is explained through the similarity of the karmic imprints (*tulyakarma*), through the so-called “common karma” (*sādhāraṇakarma*). Since the categorical system and the conceptual representations are determined by the karmic content, it is obvious that the similarity of these karmic imprints leads to a similarity of the conceptual

experiences of the individuals as well. This is how Vijñānavāda manages to explain the common experience of a phenomenal “truth”, of the existence of a similarity among the experiences of various individual subjects.¹

“All the dead (*preta*) which are in the situation (*avasthā*) [resulting from] the maturation (*vipāka*) of a similar karma (*tulyakarma*) see a river full of pus and not only few of them.”²

“Since they are governed (*adhipatya*) by the maturation (*vipāka*) of some similar (*samāna*) own karma (*svakarma*), their torment by these [infernal entities] was established (*siddha*), although the Hell guardians and the others are not real (*asat*).”³

Interpreting in this way the existence of a certain similarity among the conceptual experiences of various individuals, Vijñānavāda manages to avoid the postulation of a phenomenal “truth” having cognitive value. Such a cognitive “truth” would have compromised its own theories regarding the non-

¹ A detailed discussion on the possibility of experiencing a “common object” even in an idealist context, in Kochumuttom 1999, 168-169. His discussion is based on the arguments Vasubandhu brings in *Viṃśikā*, 4-5 (Anacker 1998, 414). See also Prasad 1993, 426, for an analysis of the way the common experience of beings is engendered. An interesting approach of the concepts of “similar karma” (*tulyakarma*) and “shared world” (*bhājanaloka*), in Chung 1993, 63-69. See also Waldron 2003, 239-241, for a neuroscientific approach of the issue of trans-individual experience as determined by cultural conventions.

² “*tulyakarmavipākāvasthā hi pretāḥ sarve 'pi pūyapūrṇāṃ nadīm paśyanti naika eva* /”

Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, ad. 3c, Anacker 1998, 414.

³ “.....*taīśca tadbāddhanam siddhamasatsvapi narakapālādiṣu samānasvakarmavipākādhipatyāt* /”

Vasubandhu, *Viṃśikāvṛtti*, ad. 4c, Anacker 1998, 414.

referentiality of the conceptual knowledge, the absence of any cognitive value of all conceptual constructions.¹

The similarities between the conceptual representations of various individual beings are not due to the fact that they would intend a unique objective reality, which thus could have represented the standard for the truth value of these experiences. According to Vijñānavāda, the similarity of representations is explained simply through the similarity of the causes generating these experiences. The similarity of the conceptual representations is explained in the same manner as the similarity of any other phenomena; the explanation is a purely causal one, which appeals only to the similarity of causes and not to any cognitive, referential aspects. In case of the realistic theories of truth, the similarity of the conceptual representations experienced by different individuals is explained on the grounds of their cognitive, referential charge, i.e. on the grounds of the fact that all these pieces of knowledge intend a unique reality. Vijñānavāda, however, considers conceptual knowledge, in its entire variety, as simple phenomena, as simple experiences which, having similar causes, display a certain degree of similarity themselves. The conceptual representations of various individuals do not converge towards a unique reality but rather they are in tune with each other, are characterized by a certain consonance;

¹ Wright 1986, 21-23 denies the “truth” nature of the conventional truth and reduces it to a non-cognitive category: that of the “common sense”. His study relies especially on texts belonging to the Hua-Yen branch of Vijñānavāda Buddhism.

although consonant, they still remain parallel experiences, without aiming any common “object”. The sphere of common representations does not have objectivity but it is only something constituted through the consensus of the subjects, something “established by the world” (*lokaprasiddha*).

“Worldly (*loka*) acceptance (*prasiddha*) is from the unity (*eka*) [of the consent];

[Bhāṣya:] regarding the constructed own-being (*parikalpitasvabhāva*). Regarding an object (*vastu*), there is a similarity (*tulyatā*) of the perceptions (*darśana*) of all the worldly (*laukika*) [people], through the fact that [their] intellects (*buddhi*) conform (*anupraviś*) to some common (*saṁstava*) conventions (*saṅketa*), such as «this is earth (*prthivī*) and not fire (*agni*)», «this is a shape (*rūpa*) and not a sound (*śabda*)» etc.”¹

“The naming (*abhidhāna*) of all entities (*sarvabhāva*) has always [took place], along hundreds of births (*janma*), through the fact that, mutually (*paraspara*), discrimination (*vikalpa*) has repeatedly taken place (*abhyas*) and is repeatedly taking place.

If there were no speaking (*kathyamāna*), the whole world (*loka*) would fall (*āpad*) into confusion (*saṁmoha*); therefore, with the goal (*artha*) of eliminating (*vyudāsa*) confusion, naming (*nāman*) is done (*kr*).”²

¹ “*lokaprasiddhamekasmāt /*

[Bhāṣya:] *parikalpitasvabhāvāt / yasmin vastuni saṅketasaṁstavānupraviṣṭayā buddhyā sarveṣāṁ laukikānāṁ darśanatulyatā bhavati prthivyeveyaṁ nāgnīrūpamevedaṁ na śbda ityevamādi //*”

Asaṅga, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, III.12; Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, ad. III.12, Anacker 1998, 441.

² “*abhidhānaṁ sarvabhāvānāṁ janmāntaraśataiḥ sadā / abhyastamabhyasantam ca parasparavikalpayā / akathyamāne saṁmohaṁ sarvaloka āpadyate / tasmātkriyate nāma saṁmohasya vyudāsārtham //*”

“Due to the similarity (*sāmānyavattva*) of the ideations (*jñāpti*), there is a commonly (*sāmānya*) shared (*bhājana*) element (*dhātu*).”¹

“.... It’s not about the existence (*sattā*) of some real objects (*bhūtārtha*) since these are [only ideations] existing in common (*sādhāraṇyaya bhāva*).”²

Thus, the problem of truth is transferred from the cognitive level to the level of simple experience. The truth of a sentence does not mean anything else but a certain consonance with the statements of the other subjects; when qualifying a sentence as true or false, the only thing that accounts for its truth-value is the totality of the subjective conceptual representations. There is no objective authority to establish what the truth is; all truth-related matters are about consensus, convention and practice.³ The Sanskrit term used to refer to this type of truth, i.e. “*vyavahārasatya*”, utterly reveals its subjective status, its status of “practice”, of “convention”.⁴ “*Vyavahāra*” does not carry any

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, *Sagāthakam*, 169-170, Nanjio 1956, 287.

¹ “*jñāpteḥ sāmānyavattvācca sāmānyaṃ dhātubhājanam* /”

Asaṅga, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, 13, Levinsion 2001, 31.

² “....*bhūtārthasattā naivāsti sādhāraṇyaya bhāvataḥ* //”

Asaṅga, *Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*, 17, Levinsion 2001, 38.

³ The “conventional truth” (*saṃvṛttisatya*), according to Vijñānavāda, in Lusthaus 2009, 113-116. The relation between truth and human conventions, in Lusthaus 2009, 115-116.

⁴ Wright 1986, 23-24 ascribes the conventionality of the “conventional truth” (*vyavāhārika*) to the conventional, constructed, artificial character of language. The conventional truth would be nothing else but a mix of conventional linguistic expressions.

Waldron 2003, 162-169 points to the connection between language and the constitution of common experience. Both language and the shared experience of the world are produced by the common karma

cognitive meaning but it refers simply to a certain human practice or, more exactly, to a social practice, a convention.¹

“The constructed [own-being] (*kalpita*) is of the nature (*ātman*) of practice (*vyavahāra*)...”²

“The conventional [truth] is a kind of truth because a person is not lying when he calls a pot «a pot», and as far as conventional designations are concerned, he is using them properly.”³

2.ii. The mind and the store-house consciousness as the bases (*āśraya*) of the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*)

Vijñānavāda manages to offer a further detailed presentation of the manner in which the existence of a similarity among the conceptual experiences of different individuals is possible. This is done by means of a theory dealing with the “bases” (*āśraya*), with the factors which determine the operational consciousnesses responsible

and, thus, their ontological statuses are quite similar. Waldron considers common experience as an “experience moulded into linguistic shapes”; the trans-individual nature of language bestows to the linguistically moulded experience an equally trans-individual character.

¹ Williams-Monier 1997, 1034, col.1: “vy-ava-hr” - “to transpose”, “to exchange”, “to act”, “to proceed”, “to behave towards or deal with”, “to be active or busy”, “to work”, “to carry on commerce”, “to trade”, “to deal in”, “to manage”, “to employ”.

“Vy-ava-hāra” - “doing”, “performing”, “action”, “practice”, “conduct”, “behaviour”, “usage”, “custom”, “ordinary life”, “common practice”, “activity”, “adherence to law or custom”, “the use of an expression”.

² “*kalpito vyavahārātmā.....*”

Vasubandhu, *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*, 23, Anacker 1998, 465.

³ Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, VI.4, Potter 1999, 560.

for the apparition of conceptualised experience. These theories are, to a certain extent, heterogeneous, at least in the way they are formulated if not in their content as well.

“Visual consciousness is born depending on the eye, form and store-house consciousness.”¹

“Which are the supports (*āśraya*) of the visual consciousness (*cakṣurvijñāna*)?”

The eye (*cakṣus*) is its simultaneous (*sahabhū*) support (*āśraya*). The mind (*manas*) is its immediately preceding (*samanantara*) support. The store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), possessing all the seeds (*sarvabījaka*), appropriating the [individual] basis (*āśrayopādātṛ*), gathering together (*saṃgrh*) the [karmic] maturation (*vipāka*), is the support of the seeds (*bījāśraya*).²

Irrespective of the manner in which they are exposed, the theories about the conditionings of the operational consciousnesses state the conditioning of conceptual experience by two factors. On the one hand, it is conditioned by the mind (*manas*), by the various components of the individuality appropriated by mind; on the other hand, it is conditioned by the seeds existing within the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). This means that responsible for the experience of the operational consciousnesses are both the factors that were appropriated by the mind as own self (*ātman*), and

¹ *Samdhinirmocana-sūtra*, V.5, Lamotte 1935, 186; Vasubandhu, *Mahāyāna-saṃgrahabhāṣya*, ad. *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*, I.5, Lamotte 1973, 15.

² “*cakṣurvijñānasyāśrayaḥ katamaḥ / cakṣuḥ sahabhūr āśrayaḥ / manaḥ samanantara āśrayaḥ / sarvabījakaṃ āśrayopādātṛ vipāka-saṃgrhītaṃ ālayavijñānaṃ bījāśrayaḥ* /” *Yogācārabhūmi*, 4,5ff, in Schmithausen 1987, 110.

the trans-individual sphere of the store-house consciousness. The apparition of the conceptual experience of an individual, the experience engendered by his operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), requires the cooperation of two factors: the appropriated seeds, which are strictly individual, and the seeds that could be “shared” (*bhājana*) by other individuals as well, seeds which are not imprinted in a certain individuality but in the trans-individual sphere of the store-house consciousness.

This does not bestow any objective value to the individual experiences, but only a trans-individual one. The individual experience is still subjective, similar to fantasy, devoid of an objective counterpart, without representational value. Nevertheless, there can be a certain similarity among the subjective representations of different individuals because some of the conditions that determine these representations are “shared” (*bhājana*).

This approach presents significant philosophical importance since it can lay the foundations of a theory of the empirical truth which could be applied to the knowledge engendered by the operational consciousnesses (the sensorial consciousnesses and the mental consciousness). Since the experiences of the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), i.e. the perceptual contents put in a conceptual mould by the mental consciousness, are caused by the trans-individual component of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), by the seeds (*bīja*) stored within it, these

experiences acquire a certain trans-individual dimension and hence they are saved from being only subjective imagination (*parikalpa*).

The experiences of the operational consciousnesses are entirely subjective since they are determined by the mind (*manas*) and appear at the level of the individual self (*ātman*) appropriated by the mind¹; however, since they are also determined by the trans-individual component of the store-house consciousness, they also acquire a certain degree of trans-subjectivity.

Taking his stand on the trans-individual element that is involved in their apparition, one may elaborate a theory to explain their “truth value”. Of course, this “truth value” would not have any cognitive significance but it would rather reflect the degree to which the trans-individual conditions are those who determine the apparition of these experiences. Therefore, the truth would be determined by the relation between the determining trans-individual component of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and the determined operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*). The source of “error” would be the mind (*manas*), the individual seeds appropriated by it, which, through their contribution to the apparition of the knowledge experience, diminishes the role of the trans-individual elements within this process.

¹ For a study upon the dependency of the six operational consciousnesses on the appropriation of an individual identity, see Waldron 2003, 97! For the dependence of the mental consciousness on the mind, see Waldron 2003, 227-228 (notes 72-74)!

2.iii. The strictly causal interpretation of the relation between the seeds of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) in classic Vijñānavāda

Despite the fact that the determination relation that the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), including its shared contents, exerts upon the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) was known to the authors of Vijñānavāda ever since the old period of the school, the early and the classic authors do not realize that this determination relation could account for the existence of a certain similarity between the individual experiences of various beings. They seem to totally deny the existence of such a trans-individual dimension of the individual experiences of various beings, sliding into a form of solipsism. At times, the dependence of the operational consciousnesses on the store-house consciousness, on the condition consciousness (*pratyayavijñāna*), is stated¹, but, more than this, their dependency on the appropriated part of the store-house consciousness draws their attention. These philosophers rather stress on the dependence of the operational consciousnesses on the mind (*manas*) and, through this, they highlighted their subjective side.

Classic Vijñānavāda authors often restrict themselves to generally stating the dependence of the operational consciousnesses on the store-house

¹ For the conditioning of the six operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) by the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), see Chatterjee 1999, 106!

consciousness without detailing on the nature of this relation. They hardly approach in different ways the dependence of the operational consciousnesses on each of the two components of the store-house consciousness: the common (*sādhāraṇa*), shared (*bhājana*) component and the non-common (*asādhāraṇa*), appropriated (*upādāna*) one.¹ This neglection suggests that the classic authors of the school were not aware of the philosophical bearings the relation between the operational consciousnesses and the shared side (*bhājana*) of the store-house consciousness might have had.

“The five [consciousnesses] appear (*udbhava*) in the root-consciousness (*mūlavijñāna*) according to conditions (*yathāpratyaya*).”²

In *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣyaṭīkā*³, Sthiramati notices the dependence of the individual experiences engendered by the operational consciousnesses on the trans-individual factors, on the so-called “exterior domains, such as the manifestation of forms and of others” (*rūpādipratibhāsaḥ bāhyam āyatanam*), on “the manifestation, by the store-house consciousness, of the common objects” (*ālayavijñānasya sādhāraṇārthapratibhāso*). He also remarks that this dependence relation must be understood only as the “production of the manifestations

¹ A discussion on the common (*sādhāraṇa*) and the non-common (*asādhāraṇa*) object of the store-house consciousness, in Waldron 2003, 161-162.

² “*pañcānām mūlavijñāne yathāpratyayamudbhava*”

Vasubandhu, *Triṃśikā*, 15, Chatterjee 1980, 96.

³ Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣyaṭīkā*, 146.5 ff, in Schmithausen 1987, 415-416, note 769.

A Non-referential and Non-cognitive Theory of Truth of the operational consciousness having the exterior domains as their regent condition” (*pratibhāsasya pravṛttivijñānasyotpattāvadhipatipratyayatvād bāhyamāyatanam*) and not as the dependence of their content on something trans-individual. The relation between the operational consciousnesses and the store-house consciousness is, in Sthiramati’s opinion, a strictly causal one and he does not investigate whether the store-house consciousness determines also the content of the individual experiences. Even if the experiences of the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) are caused by and appear in dependence on the manifestations of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), their content, their object, is not determined in any way by the fact that all of them share a unique store-house consciousness as their condition (“*na tu tad viṣayatvād....*” – “do not have it as their object ...”). Sthiramati accepts a strictly causal theory of perception, according to which perception is determined by something exterior to the individual consciousness experiencing it. This strictly causal relation between the store-house consciousness and the operational consciousnesses is, in fact, the only relation that the authors of the classic period seem to accept. Only the act of apparition of the individual experience seems to depend on the store-house consciousness, on its trans-individual component, not also the object of this experience, its content, whose nature is, in the opinion of the authors of the classic period of Vijñānavāda, entirely subjective, similar to imagination, fantasy.

“The external fields (*bāhya āyatana*) representing the manifestation (*pratibhāsa*) of forms (*rūpa*) and of others by the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*), are the manifestation (*pratibhāsa*) of the common (*sādhāraṇa*) object (*artha*) of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), moreover, those represent the perceived object (*grāhya*)..... [It is stated] that the fields (*āyatana*) are external (*bāhya*) because they are the regent condition (*adhipatipratyaya*) for the apparition (*utpatti*) of the operational consciousnesses (*pravṛttivijñāna*) and not because they would have them as an object (*viśaya*).”¹

2.iv. The “immediate” object and the “remote” object of the operational consciousnesses

It is only the late texts that debate the problem of the existence of a consonance relation between the content of the individual experiences, of the experience of the operational consciousnesses of various individuals, and the trans-individual seeds, the shared seeds from the

¹ “ *pravṛttivijñānasya rūpādipratibhāsaḥ bāhyam āyatanam / ya ālayavijñānasya sādhāraṇārthapratibhāso so 'pi grāhya pratibhāsasya pravṛttivijñānasyotpattāv adhipatipratyayatvād bāhyam āyatanam ucyate na tu tadviśayatvād iti /*”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra*, 146,5 ff apud. Schmithausen 1987, 415-416, note 769.

The first part of the quotation seems to state that the “external fields” (*bāhya āyatana*) represent both the object of the operational consciousnesses and of the store-house consciousness. Both the terms “*pravṛttivijñāna*” and “*ālayavijñāna*” are in the Genitive and they determine the syntagm “*bāhya āyatana*”. Therefore, the text seems to state that the “external fields” would stand in the same relation towards the operational consciousnesses and the store-house consciousness, i.e. they would be equally the objects of the store-house consciousness and of the operational consciousnesses. Nevertheless, the last part of the quotation utterly rejects the possibility of such an interpretation.

store-house consciousness. Late authors remark that, since there is a trans-individual, shared, element involved in the determination of the operational consciousnesses, then the content of their experiences might have a trans-individual, shared, element as well.

“The sixth [consciousness, namely the mental consciousness], is not the object (*ālambana*) of the five [sensorial consciousnesses] since these five are established only¹ in the object component (*nimitta*) of the eighth [consciousness].”²

A more elaborate discussion of this matter is found at Hiuan-Tsang, although the manner he formulates Vijñānavāda doctrine is not entirely the classic one and, consequently, his theory about the “immediate” and the “remote” object of a consciousness rises problems when one has to integrate it into the classic doctrine of Vijñānavāda.

Hiuan-Tsang starts by exposing the fact that every consciousness, by its status of “consciousness”, involves an “immediate” object (*sākṣāt*) of its experience. This one represents simply what consciousness perceives in a representation that appears at its level.

“That factor (*dharma*) that doesn’t exist separately (*avisamyukta*, *avinirbhāgin*) from the consciousness that is focused upon him (*ālambaka*), upon which it is established and through which it experiences the representation component (*darśanabhāga*), that is the «immediate object» (*sākṣādālambana*). Every consciousness (*viññāna*) has this

¹ “Only” is here demanded by the context and its presence does not preclude the determination of the operational consciousnesses also by the mind (*manas*).

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 469.

kind of object since no consciousness can exist without being established on an inner object, without perceiving such an object.”¹

However, at the same time, the consciousness may also have another type of object, i.e. an external one, standing in a tight connection with the internal object, with the “immediate” object, whom it determines. This outer object represents the object “intended” by the consciousness, which the “immediate” object reproduces at the level of consciousness.

“That factor (*dharma*) which, although existing separated from consciousness, nevertheless represents the pattern, the object component (*nimittabhāga*), which is able to engender the representation component (*darśanabhāga*), the one in which [the representation component] is established and through which it is perceived, that is the «remote object»².”³

Not every consciousness necessarily has such a “remote object”; the consciousness may experience also in the absence of such an external counter-part of its perception. The common human experience reveals the cases of hallucinations, dreams, imagination, where the absence of an intended external object is obvious.

“Not every consciousness has this kind of object (*ālambana*) since a consciousness can exist even in the

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 445-446.

² The Sanskrit term for “remote object” is difficult to restore; the dichotomy immediate object – remote object is not found in any of the Sanskrit texts of Vijñānavāda that have survived until today and, therefore, even “*sāksāt*”, as the Sanskrit equivalent of “immediate”, is only a reconstruction.

³ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 446.

absence of an external pattern, of a corresponding object component (*nimittabhāga*).”¹

This distinction is important when applied to the ideatic experiences of the operational consciousnesses because, in their case, in most situations, there is a corresponding remote object and the relation between that remote object and the immediate one accounts for their truth value.

“The five [operational] consciousnesses, before being revolved, are gross, weak, feeble; that’s why they depend on a pattern and hence they always have a remote object.”²

Even if Hiuan-Tsang does not go into details about this relation, the fact that he accepts it creates the possibility of claiming an “empirical truth” and saves the experience of the operational consciousnesses from the status of pure imagination.

2.v. The theory about the “immediate” object and the “remote” object of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) considered in relation to the overall doctrine of Vijñānavāda

This theory regarding the existence of an “immediate” object and of a “remote” one, of a consciousness, can not be found in the early or classic literature of Vijñānavāda, but only in the late texts of some Chinese authors. Sometimes, the later versions of Vijñānavāda present significant shifts from the classic Vijñānavāda. The theory itself raises some noteworthy problems, such as the possibility of applying the

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 446.

² Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch’eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 448.

distinction between the immediate and the remote object to the store-house consciousness. There are, however, some formulations of the theory which present it in such a way that it becomes possible for it to be integrated into the whole system of thought of Vijñānavāda. The relation between this theory and the overall Vijñānavāda doctrine is though one of consistency and not one of implication, as this theory supplements the classic doctrines of Vijñānavāda and not just details them.

Applied to the mind (*manas*), this distinction between the remote object and the immediate one always reveals the existence of a remote object which the afflicted mind focuses upon and appropriates.

“The mind (*manas*), before its revolution (*parāvṛtti*), has always a remote object (*ālambana*). Being always inborn (*sahaja*) and never appearing as constructed (*parikalpītoḍbhava*), it never acquires its own immediate object otherwise than by depending on an external pattern.”¹

The specific activity of the mind (*manas*) is never simply the creation, through an inner act, of a specific object; the mind rather appropriates a pre-existing object being “established” in the experience of the store-house consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). This pre-existing object represents its remote object which, once appropriated, once represented as the individual self (*ātman*) becomes its immediate object.

The store-house consciousness, at least when considered according to the classic Vijñānavāda, i.e. as “the one holding all the seeds” (*sarvabījaka*), can have

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 447.

only an immediate object and never a remote one. Due to the universal nature of the store-house consciousness, nothing can exist outside it.

However, Hiuan-Tsang mentions the existence of three distinct opinions about the alleged existence of a remote object of the store-house consciousness. One of them states the impossibility of the existence of a remote object of the store-house consciousness and this position is the only one compatible with the classic system of thought of Vijñānavāda. The other two theories, which support the possibility of the existence of such a remote object even in the case of the store-house consciousness, are based on the presupposition that the store-house consciousness is one for each individual person. Not having an absolutely universal nature but being limited to the level of one person, any store-house consciousness can have and must have an external object, a remote object, as clearly revealed by the situations when it perceives elements which are related to the experience of another person's store-house consciousness. However, this manner of considering the store-house consciousness, as an entity circumscribed to an individual, is not really compatible with the classic Vijñānavāda and thus the possibility of the existence of a remote object of the store-house consciousness may be claimed only within the framework of a slightly modified version of Vijñānavāda.

“Regarding the object (*ālambana*) of the eighth consciousness, there are three opinions:

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1) The eighth [consciousness] has only an immediate object, since it manifests its objects in a spontaneous way, under the determination of karma, of some intrinsic causes;

2) The eighth [consciousness] also has a remote object. When it manifests the body of another person, in doing so, it must establish itself upon the manifestations of the eighth [consciousness] of the other. Hence, it manifests an ideation which represents its immediate object.....

3) None of the two theories are precise We must say that the eighth consciousness, either in case of those under bondage either in case of the enlightened ones, can either have either not have a remote object.”¹

¹ Hiuan-Tsang, *Ch'eng-wei-shih-lun*, Vallee-Poussin 1929, 446-448.

Buddhist Doctrine (*dharma*) as Ontological Therapy¹

1. The Soteriologically Efficient but Non-Cognitive Character of Religious Doctrine

1.i. Criticism of conceptual construction, in Mahāyāna Buddhism

Generally, Mahāyāna Buddhism accepts three levels of reality: an absolute, substantial reality (*tathatā*, *dharmatā*, *dharmadhātu*), an amorphous and non-differentiated conditional flow (*pratītyasamutpāda*) consisting of indistinct momentary entities (*dharma*), the conceptual level (*parikalpa*, *vikalpa*) projected by human consciousness. Mahāyāna denies all cognitive value to any conceptual construction.

Conceptual constructions are not about the absolute reality or about the conditional flow, but they represent a level of reality of its own. Therefore, they are considered as illusions, as fancies, since they don't intend anything

¹ The whole chapter represents a slightly improved version of a paper submitted for publication in a volume containing the works of the International Conference "Knowledge, Reality, Transcendence. A Dialogue between East and West", Constanța-Sinaia-Vatra Dornei, 1st -6th November, 2016, organized by Ovidius University, Constanța, which is also supposed to publish the volume. The paper was submitted with the title "Buddhist Doctrine as Ontological Therapy".

outside them. The conceptual realm, which includes religious doctrine, along with all other human experiences, is simply a “game” (in Wittgenstein’s sense) consciousness plays stirred by karmic energy. There are no corresponding objects to conceptual constructions, the entire human conceptually structured experience being simply a subjective and fanciful construction.

“The own natures (*svabhāva*) of all entities (*bhāva*) is nothing but speech (*vacana*) of men (*nṛ*).”¹

“The nature (*svabhāva*) of an entity (*bhāva*) is its characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*)...”²

“These entities (*dharma*) are devoid of an essence (*asāraka*), are born (*samutthita*) as consisting of thought (*manyānā*).”³

“The condition of being only (*mātratva*) a name (*nāman*) of everything.....”⁴

Conceptual construction is not only devoid of any cognitive value but it also creates the illusory realm the human beings are entrapped within. Human beings get bonded in their own conceptual constructions, the entire human drama being engendered by the conceptual constructions humans freely create.

“All actions (*carya*) are of the nature of mental construction (*parikalpya*).”¹

¹ “*sarvabhāvasvabhāvā ca vacanamapi nṛṇām* /”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, verse 144, Nanjio 1956, 88.

² “*svabhāva eva hi bhāvānām lakṣaṇam* /”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāṣṭkā*, “Introduction (I.1)”, Pandeya 1999, 7.

³ “*asārakā ime dharmā manyānāyāḥ samutthitāḥ* /”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, *Sagāthakam*, verse 10, Nanjio 1956, 265.

⁴ “*sarvasya nāmamātratvaṃ.....*”

Asaṅga, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, V.18, Anacker 1998, 457.

A common Buddhist metaphor is that of the fright of a painter who got scared of a dragon he himself had painted, suggesting the way humans are being trapped in a drama they create by themselves.

“Just as a painter paints a picture of demon and then faints at the sight of his own creation, so ordinary people fabricate forms, sounds, odors, tastes, and textures, and then wander in saṃsāra afflicting themselves with all kinds of suffering without knowing it.”²

1.ii. Preaching the non-cognitive doctrine (dharma) for soteriological reasons

Although conceptual constructions are blamed for the entire human drama, liberation takes place through a process determined also by some particular conceptual constructions, namely through the teachings of the Buddhist doctrine. The liberating practice means, first of all, knowing, grasping and assuming the doctrine (dharma) of Mahāyāna. The doctrine itself takes a conceptual shape.

“Again, Buddha said:

“The Absolute Truth (*paramārtha*) cannot be preached without having recourse (*āśrītya*) to the activity (*caryā*) of the Empirical World (*saṃvṛti*).”³

Mahāyāna finds a way out of this problem by transferring the issue of religious truth from the sphere of metaphysics and cognition to the psychological sphere.

¹ “....*caryā sarvā parikalpyā* /”

Kamalaśīla, *Bhāvanākrama III*, Gyaltsen 1985, 269.

² *Kāśyapaparivarta-sūtra*, 68-69, Garma 1998, 396.

³ “*apicoktaṃ buddhena:*

saṃvṛticaryām nāśrītya paramārtho na deśyate /”

Maitreyaṇātha, *Bhavasamkrāntiṭīkā*, Śāstri 1938, 34.

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Its authors stress upon the fact that their own doctrine is devoid of any cognitive value but has only some kind of soteriological efficiency. The act of preaching the doctrine is not the result of an alleged objective need to reveal an “ultimate/absolute truth” but the outcome of noticing the subjective need to put an end to the suffering and bondage of the human beings. Preaching the Buddhist doctrine (*dharma*) does not mean exposing the truth – and this, because there is no truth to be uttered/spoken – but only removing the errors, the illusions that entrap human beings.

Since it belongs to the illusory realm of conceptual construction, the doctrine doesn’t have any cognitive value. The issue of religious truth pertains more to psychology than to knowledge. It’s not a matter of stating things about reality but rather of changing the human attitude towards their own mental constructions.

Even if the Buddhist doctrine fails to convey any truth, still it has a beneficial import since it puts an end to the false belief in the illusory sphere projected by the conceptual constructs. Abolishing this illusory realm that entraps human beings, it can bring about liberation.

The beneficial character of the doctrine doesn’t lay in an alleged cognitive import it may have but only in its instrumental function. Thus, Mahāyāna transfers the issue of religious truth from the sphere of cognition to the existential sphere; the doctrine does not aim at revealing some truth but rather at abolishing the errors that afflict the human beings and keep them in bondage. Religious doctrine is not as much a doctrine about the

absolute but rather a device (*upāya*), a tool for reaching the absolute. This tool takes the shape of a doctrine, of a theory whose content is determined only by the particularities of the human being and of its bondage.

The efficiency of the doctrine pertains more to the psychological realm than to cognition. The doctrine does not aim at conveying a new representation of the world but rather at changing the attitude towards this world. Its major task is to abolish the reifying attitude induced by any act of conceptualization. Buddhist doctrine mainly opposes the reification of our conceptual discriminations, revealing them as they are, namely as freely created fantasies, which afflict us. Bondage takes place in the illusory sphere created by the reified concepts; hence, making reification cease means putting an end to bondage itself.

1.iii. The doctrine as a mere antidote (*pratipakṣa*), not as knowledge

Mahāyāna ascribes to its own doctrine not as much a status of “truth” but rather one of “antidote” (*pratipakṣa*) to some particular errors. The main error opposed by Buddhist doctrine is the natural and common tendency towards reifying concepts, towards bestowing illusory substantiality to our discriminations; concepts, sentences and theories are substantially interpreted by the human mind and hence they cast the illusory sphere of multiplicity, of ordinary human experience. Buddhist doctrine mostly opposes the substantial plurality

projected in an illusory manner by our conceptual discriminations.

“Therefore, since it does not reach (*prāpti*)¹ anything (as a real existent thing), this teaching is not true (*satya*); it cannot either be said to be untrue (*mṛṣā*), in so far as it is in agreement (*ānukūlya*) with (the fact that illumination is reached); it is taught (*deśanā*) so as to serve as a counteragent (*pratipakṣa*) to the inclination (*niveśa*) of taking words according to their literal meaning (*yathāruta*) (as if they corresponded to an entity).”²

Although having a conceptual form, the doctrine of Mahāyāna is preached not for the sake of its alleged cognitive import; in such a case, the well-ascertained claims regarding the non-referential character of concept and of sentence would have been jeopardized. The doctrine is preached for the sake of its “therapeutic” capacity.³ Under all its forms, the doctrine of Mahāyāna tends to establish the voidness of the entities it targets; this is what its critical, deconstructive, antidotal character means. Through its preaching, Mahāyāna doesn’t try to establish a truth but rather it tries to remove some errors.⁴

¹ “*Prāpti*” - literally, “obtains”, “reaches at”.

² “*apṛāpter ānukūlyāc ca na satyā na mṛṣā matā yathārutaniveśasya pratipakṣeṇa deśanā //*”

Asaṅga, *Triśatikāyāḥ Prajñāpāramitā Kārikāsaptati*, 33, Tucci 1956, 70.

³ Wright 1986, 38, compares the Indian Buddhist doctrine with the Koans of Zen authors. Buddhist doctrine is not more “cognitive”, more “referential” than the Koan; both are only instruments, only soteriological devices.

⁴ For the way some religious conceptual constructions act as antidotes, see Matics 1970, 108-109!

Therefore, the function of the doctrine is not descriptive but exclusively deconstructive, critical. Even if the doctrine itself has a conceptual (*vikalpa*) shape, its goal is none else but abolishing all conceptual constructions, reaching a condition of no concept and, once this condition has been realized, allowing the spontaneous arising of the non-conceptual apprehension (*nirvikalpikajñāna*) of the absolute reality. The deconstructive function of the doctrine also involves its own annihilation since the doctrine itself is discarded during the religious process which cleanses the consciousness of all conceptual construction.

“Although it is of the nature (*svabhāva*) of name (*nāman*) and discrimination (*vikalpa*), still, since its nature is of correct reflection (*yonisomanasikāra*), [the doctrine] engenders (*udaya*) undifferentiated knowledge (*nirvikalpakajñāna*).”¹

“The doctrine (*śāstra*) means [those] ideations (*viññapti*) manifesting (*prabhāsā*) as names (*nāman*), sentences (*pada*) and composite signs (*vyañjanakāya*). Or, otherwise, the doctrine represents [those] ideations manifesting as particular words (*śabdaviśeṣa*) leading to the obtainment (*prāpaka*) of the supramundane knowledge (*lokottarajñāna*).”²

¹ “yadi nāmāsau vikalpasvabhāvātathāpi yoniśo manasikārasvabhāvatvāt tato bhūta nirvikalpajñānodaya”

Kamalaśīla, *Bhāvanākrama*, III, Gyaltzen 1985, 266-267.

² “nāmapadavyaṇjanakāyaprabhāsā vijñaptayaḥ śāstram / atha vā lokottarajñānaprāpakasābdaviśeṣaprabhāsā vijñaptayaḥ śāstram /” Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣyaṭīkā*, “Introduction”, Pandeya 1999, 4.

1.iv. Preaching the doctrine as an act of mercy

The activity of preaching the Buddhist doctrine is just one of the ways a Bodhisattva manifests his compassion for the beings bounded by the various conceptual discriminations to which they cling. A Bodhisattva doesn't preach the doctrine for the sake of a "truth" that would have to be widely exposed but rather for the sake of the well-being, for the sake of the emancipation from suffering. It is not the truth which motivates a Bodhisattva to preach the doctrine but his compassion stirred by his taking notice of the human suffering. Religious preaching is more like offering help, like an act of mercy, than like disclosing truth.

A specific feature of Mahāyāna texts is the idea of the transfer of merit, stated generally as invocation placed at the end of the book. Through this, the Bodhisattva declares his intention to dedicate the whole "merit" (*pun̄ya*) flowing from writing the text to the liberation of all beings.¹ His authorship of the texts is motivated by nothing else but by the compassionate feelings of the Bodhisattva and not by any objective necessity to reveal an alleged "truth".

"Through the benefit (*śubha*) of composing *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, may all beings (*jana*) be embellished (*vibhūṣaṇa*) with the practice of enlightenment (*bodhicaryā*)!"

Through my merit (*pun̄ya*), may [all beings] from all the corners (*diś*) [of the world], suffering (*ātura*) from the torments (*vyatha*) [incurred] by the body (*kāya*) or the mind

¹ For the idea of the transfer of merit, see Matics 1970, 96-101 and the article of John S. Strong in Jones 2005, 5874-5875!

(*citta*), obtain (pra-āp) oceans (sāgara) of happiness (*sukha*) and enjoyment (*prāmodya*)!”¹

2. The Illusory Character of the Doctrine

2.i. The ontological similarity between the doctrine (*dharma*) and the particular errors it opposes

Since it is nothing but the antidote to some particular errors, the doctrine shares the ontological status of the errors it opposes; therefore, it also belongs to the illusory conceptual realm. The content of a doctrine is always related to the particular illusions it opposes; hence, in respect of its content, every doctrine depends on a particular illusion. Buddhist doctrine deals with illusions and not with the absolute and, being illusion-dependent, the doctrine shares the ontological status of illusion.²

Liberation from the self-induced drama is a process that takes place at the same ontological level as the drama itself, namely at the level of the “illusion”, of the illusory conceptual experience. The Buddhist doctrine has nothing to do with the absolute but is just a

¹ “*bodhicaryāvatāraṃ me yadvicintayataḥ śubham / tena sarve janāḥ santu bodhicaryāvibhūṣanāḥ // sarvāsu dikṣu yāvantāḥ kāyacittavyathātūrāḥ / te prāpnuvantu matpunyaiḥ sukhaprāmodyasāgarān //*” Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, X.1-2, Matics 1970, 227.

²The illusory character of religious doctrine which, in spite of its soteriological efficiency, pertains to the “conventional truth” (*saṃvṛtisatya*), detailed in Dutt 1973, 220.

particular form (a self denying form) the conceptual “game/play” takes.

Under any of its aspects, Buddhist doctrine tends to establish the voidness of the entities it discusses about. While ordinary human approaches to existence assume the reality of the multiple entities projected by conceptual discriminations, Buddhist doctrine critically, negatively approaches this multiplicity, claiming it is mere void (*śūnya*). But this very act of claiming the voidness of the entities is equally void, as void as the entities themselves. The projection of the entities and the denial of their reality are equally void, being similar in their ontological status. Mahāyāna creates the concept of “voidness of voidness” (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*) and, by this term, it suggests that the process of opposing conceptual illusion, of preaching the antidotal Buddhist doctrine, of proclaiming the universal void, is itself void.

Buddhist doctrine is nothing but a particular type of illusion which is important only because of having the capacity to oppose, to abolish the other illusory projections to which human beings cling.¹ It itself is an illusion but an illusion which has the capacity to annihilate other illusions; hence, in spite of being illusory, it can lead the consciousness to a state of purity, without pertaining itself to that purity. Buddhist doctrine

¹ *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* presents all statements, all concepts, as “magical creations”, as artificial devices, as something which can be freely used by an individual, according to his own intentions and without any objective constraint. See Ch'ien 1984, 384-386!

is simply that illusion which opposes and destroys all illusions that bind human consciousness.

“It is as if an illusory (*māyā*) king is defeated (*parājita*) by another illusory king.”¹

“Regarding those factors (*dharma*) which have the characteristics of antidotes (*prātipakṣika*), it is established that they are like an illusory (*māyā*) king, since they determine (*ādhipatya*) the purification (*vyavadāna*), and the abandoning (*prahāṇa*) of afflictions (*saṃkleśa*).”²

“The voidness (*śūnyatā*) also pertains to the benefic [factors] (*kuśala*) and therefore their conduciveness to the never exhausting condition (*akṣatā*) is only mentally constructed (*kalpita*).....”³

“The four noble truths (*āryasatya*), namely the truth about suffering (*duḥkhasatya*), the truth about the origination of suffering (*duḥkhasamudayasatya*), the truth about the cessation [of suffering] (*nirodhasatya*) and the truth about the path (*mārgasatya*) are only conventional (*saṃvṛti*) teaching (*deśita*).”⁴

¹ “*māyārājeva cānyena māyārājñā parājitaḥ* /”

Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, XI.29, Limaye 2000, 181.

² “*ye prātipakṣikā dharmāste māyārājasthānīyāḥ saṃkleśaprahāṇe vyavadānādhipatyāt* /”

Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasūtrālamkārabhāṣya*, ad. XI.29, Limaye 2000, 181.

³ “*kuśalānām ca śūnyatve tadgatā akṣatā tathā / kalpitaiveti.....*”

Dignāga, *Prajñāpāramitāpiṇḍārtha*, 18, Pasadika 1966, 93.

⁴ “*duḥkhasatyam duḥkhasamudayasatyam nirodhasatyam mārgasatyamityādyāryasatyāni catvāri saṃvṛtau deśitāni* /”

Maitreya-nātha, *Bhavasamkrāntitīkā*, Śāstri 1938, 29.

2.ii. The provisory character of the doctrine and the avoidance of the temptation to consider the path as absolute

Considering its doctrine as more related to illusion than to reality, Mahāyāna clearly distinguishes between the path, as the soteriological instrument, and its accomplishment, the final realization. The doctrine is seen as a mere instrument, never considered as absolute. Mahāyāna stresses upon the fact that the doctrine it preaches is also of an illusory character, that even if it leads consciousness towards the absolute realization, the doctrine itself does not pertain to the ultimate condition.¹

Thus, Mahāyāna succeeds in not giving up to the temptation of considering the path as absolute, temptation to which many religions fail to resist. Often, the instrument which leads to the absolute realization – be it a text, some doctrines, a prophet, moral, ascetic or sacramental practices – is given a status equal to the absolute and it is considered as having an absolute validity. A frequently encountered example of this situation is canonization, which does nothing but considering a text or a doctrine as absolute and not as merely instrumental. In many religions, there is a tight and unbreakable connection between the absolute condition and the means of attaining it, the imperatives stating the ways it should be reached.

¹ A study of some passages from the *Saddharmapūṇḍarīka-sūtra* and also from Daoist literature, which reveal the provisory character of any verbal and conceptual indication, in Ch'ien 1984, 391-392.

Nevertheless, Mahāyāna approaches religion in a rather instrumental way, pointing to the fact that the doctrine, the path to salvation, doesn't enjoy the same status as the ultimate realization itself.

“When the [condition] devoid of apparitions (*nirābhāsa*) is established (*sthita*), where could the three vehicles (*yāna*) be established (*vyavasthāna*)?”¹

“..... but, when consciousness (*citta*) has been revolved (*parāvṛtta*), there is no more vehicle (*yāna*) nor the one who travels by a vehicle (*yānin*).”²

“The meditations (*dhyāna*), the immeasurables (*apramāṇa*), the formless [conditions] (*ārūpya*), the concentrations (*samādhi*), the cessation of concepts (*saṃjñānirodha*), cannot be found (*vid*) in any way (*nikhila*) in the unicity of consciousness (*cittamātra*).

The realizations (*phala*) of the stream enterer (*srotāpatti*) and of the one who will be born again only once (*sakṛdāgāmin*), the realizations (*phala*) of the one not to be born again (*anāgāmin*), the Arhat-hood are only confusions (*vibhrama*) of consciousness (*citta*).

The one who meditates (*dhyātṛ*), meditation (*dhyāna*), the object of meditation (*dhyeya*), the relinquishment (*prahāṇa*), the perception of truth (*satyadarśana*) are only mental constructions (*kalpanā*). The one who knows (*budh*) this, that one liberates (*muc*) himself.”³

¹ “..... yānatrayavyavasthānaṃ nirābhāse sthite kutaḥ //”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, verse 132, Nanjio 1956, 65.

² “..... citte tu vai parāvṛtte na yānaṃ na ca yāninaḥ //”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, verse 204, Nanjio 1956, 135.

³ “dhyānāni cāpramāṇāni ārūpyāśca samādhayaḥ /
saṃjñānirodho nikhilaścittamātre na vidyate //
srotāpattiphalaṃ caiva sakṛdāgāminastathā /
anāgāmi-phalaṃ caiva arhattvaṃ cittavibhramaḥ //
dhyātā dhyānaṃ ca dhyeyaṃ ca prahāṇaṃ satyadarśanam /
kalpanāmātramevedaṃ yo budhyati sa mucyate //”
Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, verses 176-178, Nanjio 1956, 121.

“Morality (*śīla*) should not be seen as the supreme (*parama*), nor the concentrations (*samādhi*) as consisting of this (*taṃnmayā*)¹. When transcendent knowledge (*prajñā*) is cultivated (*bhāvanā*) and when [morality and concentrations] are no longer grasped (*anopalambha*), the noble (*ārya*) nature (*gotra*), the pure morality (*viśuddhaśīla*) praised (*praśasta*) by the Blessed One (*sugata*)² [are reached].”³

2.iii. Discarding the religious doctrine as a condition for accomplishing the ultimate realization

Liberation means discarding all conceptual construction, both the entrapping conceptual constructs that project the world and the path which annihilates this bondage; hence, for the accomplishment of liberation, both the adverse factors (*vipakṣa*) and their antidotes (*pratipakṣa*) should be discarded. In case the path (*mārga*), the antidotes, were not discarded once their task – the annihilation of the afflictions (*saṃkleśa*) – is reached, they themselves turn into a hindrance to the realization of the ultimate condition. Total liberation takes place only when the path itself is discarded. The path involves concepts, refers to illusory objects, and, therefore, although it has the capacity to annihilate all forms of entrapping conceptually projected entities, its ontological status is not compatible with the realization

¹ “*Taṃnmayā*” – a rare and atypical form of “*tanmaya*” – “consisting of that”.

² “*Sugata*” – literally, “welcome”, but frequently translated as “the Blessed One”; an epithet frequently ascribed to Buddha.

³ “*na śīlaparamo na samādhitaṃnmayoḥ paryeṣate duttari prajñābhāvanā| anopalambhaṃ āryāṇa gotraṃ viśuddhaśīla sugataṃ praśastam*”

Kāśyapaparivarta-sūtra, 137, von Stael-Holstein 1926, 198.

of the ultimate reality. If anyone clings to the path (*mārga*), to the doctrine (*dharma*), even after the completion of the liberating process, he will remain entrapped in the doctrine itself; his condition will not be the pure condition of the absolute since he will also experience the defilement of the illusory entities the doctrine deals with (even if in a critical way).

“A concept (*saṃjñā*) should not be discarded (*kṛṣ*) through another concept.”¹

“All thoughts, as soon as they are conjured up, are to be discarded, and even the thought of discarding them is to be put away, for all things are essentially in the state of transcending thoughts.....”²

“First of all, the divine one (*bhagavat*) praises generosity to the greedy one; after that, he criticizes the generosity to the one who gives.

First of all, the divine one (*bhagavat*) praises morality (*śīla*) to the immoral one; after that, he criticizes the morality to the moral one so that he may reach to the cultivation of something of an upper level.”³

Frequently encountered in the Buddhist texts is the comparison – to be found also in other religions, especially in their mystical developments – between the doctrine and a raft which is to be used for crossing to another bank (or, in case of the doctrine, to another ontological level). The raft is necessary only as long as the destination, “the other side”, hasn’t been reached yet; once the crossing is accomplished, the raft is not only of

¹ “*mā ca saṃjñāyā saṃjñā kārṣvaḥ*”

Kāśyapaparivarta-sūtra, 144, von Stael-Holstein 1926, 209.

² *Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda*, part 4, Hakeda 1967, 91.

³ Asvabhāva, *Upanibandhana*, ad. *Mahāyānasamgraha*, II.31, Lamotte 1973, 131.

no use anymore but grasping to it any longer becomes a serious impediment.

“The grasping (*adhigama*) of the doctrine (*dharma*) means conformity (*ānukūlya*) [to it], but not also being established (*sthāna*) [in it]. [The doctrine], similar to a raft, should be entirely abandoned (*parityāga*).....”¹

“It is said (*ukta*) about this path (*mārga*) that it is [similar] to a raft, since [its] complete realization (*abhisamaya*) means [its] destruction (*paryavasāna*).”²

2.iv. The self-denying character of Mahāyāna

The doctrine of Mahāyāna involves its own denial; Buddhist doctrine denies the reality of any conceptual construction, including its own. The realization aimed by Buddhist doctrine is not compatible with the doctrine itself. Buddhism exhorts a negative, denying attitude towards all conceptual constructions in order to reach a condition where all concepts vanished; this condition is not compatible with assuming any conceptually determined entity, not even as an object of criticism. More generally, it can be stated that Buddhism exhorts a particular mental attitude in order to reach a condition which lays entirely beyond the mental level.

“Further, Mahāmati, a Bodhisattva, a great being (*mahāsattva*), doesn’t hold the thesis (*pratijñā*) that «all factors (*dharma*) are devoid of birth (*anutpanna*)». O,

¹ “*asthānād ānukūlyāc ca dharmeṣv adhigamasya hi / kolasyeva parityāgo.....*”

Asaṅga, *Triṣatikāyāḥ Prajñāpāramitā Kārikāsaptati*, 14, Tucci 1956, 60.

² “*sa ca mārgābhisamayaparyavasānatvāt kolopam ityuktah /*”

Asaṅga, *Uttaratantrabhāṣya*, ad. I.20, Johnston & Obermiller 1991, 144-145.

Bodhisattva Mahāmati, great being (*mahāsattva*), the cause (*hetu*) for this is that the thesis involves all own natures (*svabhāva*); due to this cause, [it] is characterized (*lakṣaṇatva*) by activity (*pravṛtti*), contradicts (*prati-brū*) the thesis that all factors are devoid of own nature, annihilates [this] thesis. This thesis, that all factors are unborn, annihilates [the sens] of this thesis since this thesis depends (*apekṣā*) on the [ideea] of «birth» (*utpatti*). Mahāmati, this thesis about the unborn character (*anutpattilakṣaṇa*) of existence (*sat*) and non-existence (*asat*) is comprised within the limits of existence (*bhāva*)¹. Mahāmati, if the thesis that all entities (*bhāva*) are unborn were stated through this thesis regarding non-birth (*anutpanna*), the thesis would be annihilated (*hāṇi*). [This] thesis should not be hold because of the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of «existence» (*bhāva*) of the thesis regarding the unborn [character] of existence and non-existence. Mahāmati, the characteristics of these thesis are the unborn own nature (*svabhāva*); that's why, Mahāmati, these thesis should not be hold Also, Mahāmati, the thesis that «all factors are void (*śūnya*)», that «all factors are devoid of own nature (*asvabhāva*)» should not be held² by a Bodhisattva, a great being.”³

¹ The Sanskrit compound “*sarvabhāvābhyantarā*” – literally, “within the limits / interval of the whole existence” was translated more simply, as “within the limits of existence” in order to get a more fluid English rendering.

² For the several occurrences of the word translated as “hold”, the Sanskrit text uses forms of the stem “*kr*” – “to do”.

³ “*punaraparaṃ mahāmate anutpannāḥ sarvadharmā iti bodhisattvena mahāsattvena pratijñā na karaṇīyā / tatkaśya hetoḥ? pratijñāyāḥ sarvasvabhāvabhāvitvāttaddhetupravṛttilakṣaṇatvācca / anutpannān sarvadharmān pratijñāya pratibruvan mahāmate bodhisattvo mahāsattvaḥ pratijñāyā hīyate / yā pratijñā - anutpannāḥ sarvadharmā iti, sāśya pratijñā hīyate, pratijñāyāstadapekṣotpattitvāt..... sā hi mahāmate pratijñā sarvabhāvābhyantarā sadasatoranutpattilakṣaṇāt / yadi mahāmate tayā pratijñāyā anutpannayā anutpannāḥ sarvabhāvā iti pratijñāṃ kurvanti, evamapi pratijñāhāniḥ prasajyate / pratijñāyāḥ*

“Transcendent knowledge (*prajñā*) does not discriminate (*viklṣ*) that all factors (*dharma*) are unborn (*anutpanna*).”¹

“Just as through [the friction] of two pieces of wood devoid of the characteristic of fire, a fire is engendered and, once engendered, it burns out the two pieces of wood, in the same way, through [the conjunction] between what is characterized (*lakṣaṇa*) by not being correct (*asamyaktva*) with the investigation (*pratyavekṣā*) according to reality (*yathābhūta*), which is characterized (*lakṣaṇa*) by being correct (*samyaktva*), the faculty (*indriya*) of the noble (*ārya*) transcendental knowledge (*prajñā*) is engendered and, once engendered, it destroys the investigation of reality (*bhūtapratyavekṣā*).”²

3. The Relative Character of Religious Doctrines

3.i. Doctrines as particular antidotes to particular errors

According to Mahāyāna, religious doctrine is only an instrument, a tool which is used for the realization of

*sadasatoranutpattibhāvalakṣaṇatvātpatijñā na karaṇīyā /
anutpannasvabhāvalakṣaṇā hi mahāmate teṣāṃ pratijñā bhavati /
ataste mahāmate pratijñā na karaṇīyā..... evaṃ śūnyā
asvabhāvāḥ sarvadharmā iti mahāmate bodhisattvena
mahāsattvena pratijñā na karaṇīyā”*

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. III, Nanjio 1956, 166-167.

¹ “*anutpannāḥ sarvadharmāḥ prajñayā na vikalpayet /”*

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. III, verse 50, Nanjio 1956, 168.

² “*yathā kāṣṭhadvayādanagnilakṣaṇādagnirjāyate jātaśca tadeva
kāṣṭhadvayam dahati / evamasamyaktvalakṣaṇāyā
yathābhūtapratyavekṣāyāḥ samyaktvalakṣaṇamāryaṃ
prajñendriyam jāyate / jātaṃ ca tāmeva bhūtapratyavekṣāṃ
vibhāvayati /”*

Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, ad.V.26, Anacker 1998, 460-461.

the ultimate reality by a human being characterized by a particular type of bondage. Mahāyāna doesn't consider its own doctrine as an aspect of the ultimate reality, as a "description" of the absolute, but only as a cleansing tool, targeted against some human errors. The doctrine simply *liberates* the consciousness from particular errors, without revealing any universal truth to it. Any religious doctrine is only a path which leads from a particular error, from a particular type of bondage, to the experience of reality, without stating anything about the reality itself.

"The path (*mārga*) is not established (*pratiṣṭhita*) in the result (*phala*), but it represents a cause (*kāraṇa*) of that result."¹

All religious doctrines are only antidotes to particular types of bondage. This status bestowed to religious doctrine makes its content highly dependent on the particular bondage to which it responds. The contents of all doctrines depend on the various types of bondage of the humans they are preached to. The dependence on the nature of the persons to be liberated is total; the content of a religious doctrine is determined exclusively by the bondages that afflict its recipients. The reason for this is that Buddhism considers its doctrine simply as a critical, denying tool, which does not construct anything by its own but only annihilates an already existing particular error. Since the absolute condition cannot be

¹ "*phalāpratiṣṭhito mārgas tatphalasyāpi kāraṇam* /"

Asaṅga, *Triśatikāyāḥ Prajñāpāramitā Kārikāsaptati*, 31, Tucci 1956, 69.

conceptually depicted, all that doctrine can do is to release consciousness from the errors, from the illusions that hamper the self-revealing of the absolute reality.

“The teachings (*deśanā*) of the doctrine (*dharma*) are given by me and by the other liberated ones (*tathāgata*), by the other Arhats and by the other perfectly enlightened ones (*samyaksambuddha*) according to the functioning (*pravṛtta*) of the inclinations (*āśāya*) of being (*sattva*), according to the multiplicity (*nānā*) of the beings characterized by [various] convictions (*adhimuktika*), and with the goal (*artha*) to bring consciousness (*citta*), mind (*manas*) and mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) to cessation (*vyāvṛtti*).

“[The teachings are not given] with the aim of establishing (*pratyavasthāna*) and reaching (*adhigama*) the noble knowledge (*āryajñāna*) [which is obtained only through] the inner self (*svapratyātman*).”¹

Therefore, religious doctrine, under any of its forms, is always bounded to have a particular content; it approaches in a nihilistic way a particular error to which some human beings cling. The difference between common knowledge and religious knowledge is that, though being focused upon the same object, in case of common experience, this object is approached with a positive and accepting ontological attitude, while religious experience approaches it with a critical, denying attitude. The shift from worldly to religious is only a shift in the ontological attitude while dealing with the same object of experience.

¹ “*sattvāśayapravṛttatvānnānādhimuktikānām sattvānām dharmadeśanā kriyate cittamanomanovijñānavyāvṛttyartham mayā anyaiśca tathāgatairarhadbhiḥ samyaksambuddhaiḥ, na svapratyātmāryajñānādadhigamapratyavasthānāt...*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. III, Nanjio 1956, 194.

The validity of doctrine, its assessment doesn't have an absolute character. No doctrine is valid by itself but any doctrine is valid only in dependence on the existence of some particular types of bondage. The only assessment a doctrine can get is the existence of some particular afflictions that need to be cleared.

Religious imperatives should not be considered as having an unconditional and universal validity. Only the existence of a particular type of bondage makes it reasonable to preach a particular doctrine which, under different conditions, may make no sense. Hence, Mahāyāna avoids falling into the trap of making its own path to salvation absolute; though all the Mahāyāna texts stress on the preaching of the void (*śūnya*), the voidness of all conceptual constructs is not to be considered as a doctrine enjoying absolute validity. Only the general tendency of human beings to cling to the illusory reality projected by conceptual constructions justifies the general preaching of the voidness (*śūnyatā*) and not an absolute and *per-se* validity of this doctrine.

3.ii. The content of a religious doctrine entirely determined by the particular errors it targets and not by an alleged “truth”

What all the forms of Buddhist doctrine have in common is that they oppose the ordinary ontological attitude towards common experience; nevertheless, this doesn't say much about their content, since the ontological attitude also requires a particular object upon which consciousness should be focused. Any doctrine

represents nothing but a shift in the ontological attitude towards some particular conceptual constructions; common experience ascribe them reality, religious doctrine simply denies this reality. The doctrine does not construct anything by itself but it rather demolishes an illusory conceptual construction already existing; therefore the content of a doctrine is not religiously determined but a religious statement always starts from human constructions. The content itself is the human construction whose substantiality is denied.

The content of a particular doctrine depends exclusively on the characteristics of the humans it addresses. Only the existence of a particular type of bondage justifies the preaching of a particular doctrine.

The “religious” content of the doctrine is only the shift in the ontological attitude, no religious entity or realm being involved. Religious doctrine does not deal with an alleged “absolute reality” but only with illusory entities whose reality is denied.

“The doctrine (*dharma*) is indicated through the ultimate reality (*tathātva*), through the entities (*bhūta*), and by the way (*gati*) of the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of the particular (*viśeṣa*) inclinations (*anuśaya*) of beings (*sattva*).”¹

“... since [the doctrine] manifests (*ākhyā*) as diverse (*vicitra*). It manifests (*ākhyā*) diversely (*vicitra*), as the provisions (*saṃbhāra*) of the path (*mārga*) and not only as voidness (*śūnyatā*).”²

¹ “*sattvaviśeṣānuśayalakṣaṇagatibhūtāstathātvāya dharmam deśayanti*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. III, Nanjio 1956, 196.

² “*vicitrasyākhyānāt / vicitraścātra saṃbhāramārga ākhyāyate na kevalam śūnyatvaiva /*”

Therefore, the status of religious doctrine is similar to the status of a medicine, of an antidote, which aims at curing a particular disease. Such a status involves a high degree of relativity. Just as there is no universal medicine, but only particular medicines required for particular diseases, there is no universally valid doctrine, no absolute doctrine, but only particular doctrines, valid in particular situations. The doctrine of Mahāyāna doesn't claim to be a universal truth, a universal path, but only a particular tool that opposes the error of considering the conceptual construction as substantial; hence, Mahāyāna does nothing but cleanses consciousness from some obstructions afflicting it.

“The doctrine (*dharma*), the well-composed (*sunibaddha*) doctrine, having eight parts (*aṣṭāpada*), is exposed according to the beings (*sattva*) characterized by multiple (*nānā*) convictions (*adhimuktika*).”¹

“Therefore, the teaching (*deśanā*) can be variously (*citra*) exposed and it can be deviated (*vyabhicārin*). What in one case is doctrine, in another case may not be doctrine.

Just as a physician prescribes medicines (*dravya*) to various sick (*ātura*), in the same way, the enlightened ones (*buddha*) speak to the beings (*sattva*) about the sole reality of consciousness (*cittamātra*).”²

Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, ad. I.15, Limaye 2000, 14-15.

¹ “*aṣṭāpadasunibaddhadharmā nānādhimuktikatayā sattvebhyo dharmam deśayati //*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.VI, Nanjio 1956, 227.

² “*deśanāpi tathā citrā deśyate vyabhicāriṇī / deśanā hi yadanyasya tadanyasyāpyadeśanā // ātūre ātūre yadvadbhiṣadragvyaṃ prayacchati / buddhā hi tadvatsattvānāṃ cittamātram vadanti vai //*”

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap.II, verses 122-123, Nanjio 1956, 48-49.

“However, because of the differences in the various beings, there are also different ways of teaching them what to practice.”¹

3.iii. The variety of the doctrines justified by the variety of the illusions bounding human beings

A certain degree of generality of the religious preaching is justified by the need to oppose the realist ontological assumptions of the common sense. The common sense ontology is to be found in all profane and pre-reflexive views of the world, shared by all the so-called “common people” (*prthagjana*). Common sense tends to hold ontological realism; hence the void (*śūnya*, *śūnyatā*) is a message that can be preached at large.

Nevertheless, not only the realist ontological approach of the common sense may impede the realization of the ultimate reality but also some more sophisticated philosophical approaches, such as Nihilism (*ucchedavāda*), which denies any reality whatsoever, claiming the “absolute non-existence” (*atyanta abhāva*) of everything. In order to counteract this obstruction, Buddhist philosophers didn’t preach void (*śūnya*) but existence (*astitva*). There is no contradiction in the legitimacy of preaching both voidness (*śūnyatā*) and existence (*astitva*) since religious doctrines are devoid of any cognitive load, being mere antidotes; their applicability totally depends on the particular situations

¹ *Mahāyānaśraddhotpāda*, part 3, chap.II, Hakeda 1967, 85.

of their recipients. Hence, it is legitimate that, in opposite situations, opposite doctrines be preached.¹

“Again, Mahāmati, the teaching (*upadeśa*) about existence (*bhāva*) [is given] with the aim to [produce] the comprehension (*parigrāha*) of the cycle of existence (*samsāra*), with the aim (*artha*) of discarding (*nivāraṇa*) the nihilism (*uccheda*) stating that nothing exists (*nāsti*), with the aim of [producing] the comprehension of the various (*vicitra*) types of karma, of production (*upapatti*) and of sensory domains (*āyatana*). Through the comprehension of the word (*śabda*) «existence (*bhāva*)» the comprehension of the cycle of existence is accomplished.

Mahāmati, the indication (*nirdeśa*) regarding the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) of illusory being (*māyābhāva*) of the own natures (*svabhāva*) [is given] with the aim (*artha*) of terminating (*vyāvṛtti*) the characteristics of reality (*bhāva*) [ascribed to] the own beings (*svabhāva*) by the immature ones (*bāla*) and by common people (*prthagjana*). I am showing that all factors (*dharma*) are characterized by the own being of an illusion, of a dream (*svapna*), with the aim of discarding the clinging (*abhiniviṣṭa*) to the characteristics of «cause (*hetu*)», of «condition (*pratyaya*)», of «action (*kriyā*)» and of «birth (*utpatti*)» [accepted] by those that do not understand (*avadhārin*) that [all these] are only perceived (*dṛśya*) by their own consciousness and by those who encounter tendencies (*āśaya*) towards [accepting] the characteristics conforming to some erroneous opinions (*kudṛṣṭi*).²

¹ The dependency of the doctrine on the conditions of its recipients, studied in Ch'ien 1984, 392-393.

² “*bhāvopadeśaḥ punarmahāmate saṃsāraparigrahārthaḥ ca nāstīyucchedanivāraṇārthaḥ ca / macchiṣyāṇāṃ vicitrakarmopapattīāyatanaparigrahārthaḥ bhāvasābdaparigraheṇa saṃsāraparigrahaḥ kriyate / māyābhāvasvabhāvalakṣaṇanirdeśeṇa mahāmate bhāvasvabhāvalakṣaṇavyāvṛttyarthaḥ bālaprthagjanānāṃ kṛdṛṣṭīlakṣaṇapatitāśayānāṃ svacittadṛśyamātrānavadhāriṇāṃ*”

“The discrimination (*kalpa*) of non-existence (*abhāva*), of existence (*bhāva*), of super-[imposition (*adhi*), of negation (*apavāda*), the discriminations of unity (*ekatva*), of multiplicity (*nānā*), of the own particularities (*svaviśeṣa*), the discrimination of the clinging (*abhiniveśa*) to [considering] the name (*nāman*) as conforming to the object (*yathārtha*) should be discarded by the sons of the victor (*jinātmaja*)¹. ”²

“There are ten kinds of discrimination (*vikalpa*) that a Bodhisatva should avoid (*parivrj*).

The discrimination of non-existence (*abhāva*) is the one whose antidote (*pratipakṣa*) is what has been stated in the *Prajñāpāramitā*: «A Bodhisatva is truly a Bodhisatva».

The discrimination of existence (*bhāva*) is the one whose antidote is a [statement] such as «There is no Bodhisatva to be perceived (*samanudrś*)» and so on.

The discrimination of superimposition (*adhyāropa*) is the one whose antidote is the statement: «Śāriputra, form (*rūpa*) is void (*śūnya*) of own nature (*svabhāva*)».

The discrimination of negation (*apavāda*) is the one whose antidote is the statement: «[Factors] are not the voidness (*śūnyatā*)».”³

*hetupratyayakriyotpattilakṣaṇābhiniviṣṭhānām nivāraṇārthaṃ
māyāśvapnasvabhāvalakṣaṇān sarvadharmān deśayāmi //*

Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra, chap. II, Nanjio 1956, 111-112.

¹ “*Jinātmaja*” – literally, “the one born of a victorious self” – refers to those belonging to the “family of the enlightened ones” (*buddhakūla*). More frequent is the name “*jinaputra*” – “son of the victor”. Expressing the sharing relation between a liberated person and the ultimate reality as a paternal relation can also be found in other religions. It is very common in Christianity; see: “Ephesians” 1:5; “Romans” 8:29; “I John” 3:1; “John” 1:12; “Galatians” 3:26.

² “*abhāvabhāvādhyapavādakalpa ekatvanānāsvaviśeṣakalpāḥ /
yathārthanāmābhiniveśakalpāḥ jinātmajaiḥ saṃparivarjanīyāḥ //*”
Asaṅga, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, XI.77, Limaye 2000, 218.

³ “*daśavidhavigalpo bodhisatvena parivarjanīyaḥ / abhāvavigalpo
yasya pratipakṣeṇāha / prajñāpāramitāyāmiha bodhisatvo
bodhisatva eva sanniti / bhāvavigalpo yasya pratipakṣeṇāha /
bodhisatvaṃ na samanupaśyātītyevamādi / adhyāropavigalpo yasya*

4. Void (*śūnya*) as the Main Doctrinary Device of Buddhism

4.i. The proclamation of the universal void as the main soteriological reaction of Buddhism

All Buddhist responses to the problem of human existence, of human bondage, revolve around the ideas of “void/voidness” (*śūnya*, *śūnyatā*). The message of the universal voidness (*śūnya*, *śūnyatā*) is the religious device that counteracts the widely accepted realist ontology. Hence, it is the most common aspect of Buddhist preaching. The preaching of the voidness does not state anything about the world or about the human being but simply denies their reality and, consequently, favors the liberation from their bondage.

The philosophical enterprise of most Buddhist schools generally tends to reveal the voidness of the entrapping human experiences. Proclaiming the voidness of the afflicted human condition is the major reaction Buddhism has when having to deal with human bondage. Realizing the voidness of all bonding experiences means depriving the bonded condition of reality and considering as real only what remains after the annihilation of the “void” (*śūnya*) experiences. Revealing the voidness of all bonding experiences is the converging point of all the various soteriological approaches of Buddhism.

pratipakṣeṇāha / rūpaṃ śāriputra svabhāvena śūnyamiti / apavādavikalpo yasya pratipakṣeṇāha / na śūnyatayeti /

Vasubandhu, *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkārabhāṣya*, ad. XI.77, Limaye 2000, 218.

The literary meaning of the term “void” (*śūnya*) is “zero”, “empty”; its ontological meaning revolves around the ideas of “unsubstantial”, “accidental”.¹ The term is a keyword in all Buddhist schools even if its precise philosophical meaning vary to some degree. However it may be ontologically considered, the soteriological consequence of proclaiming the “void” is always the same: whatever is stated to be “void” (*śūnya*), due to its lack of reality, of substance, can be annihilated. All the elements of human individuality, the entire experience of multiplicity, being void, can be subjected to annihilation and thus the bondage they incur can equally be terminated.

An accurate synonym of the term “*śūnya*” is “*niḥsvabhāva*” – “without own-nature”, “without own reality”, “without independent/autonomous existence”. “*Svabhāva*”, usually translated by “own being”, refers to whatever exists by itself, to whatever has autonomous reality (*sva-bhāva*). The word can be also used for referring to the absolute reality. The particle (*upasarga*) “*niḥ*” has a privative meaning and, consequently, “*niḥsvabhāva*” refers to what is devoid of own reality, to what does not exist independently. In this interpretation, the meaning of “*niḥsvabhāva*” comes close to the meaning of “*śūnya*”.

¹ For an etymological and philosophical analysis of the term “*śūnya*”, see King 1994, 665! The etymology of the terms “*śūnya*” and “*śūnyatā*” is briefly but clearly approached in Frederick J. Streng’s article in Jones 2005, 8855-8856.

4.ii. The voidness of the entire human experience

In Buddhist texts, the term “*śūnya*” is applied to all human experience. Whatever is experienced by an individual is labeled as “void”. Even the apparition of the individual is a void phenomenon and, therefore, all individuality, along with all experiences, lack reality. Not only experience (*bhojana*) is void but also the subject which experiences (*bhoktr*).

At times, Buddhist texts operate various divisions of the experience and, according to these divisions, they identify corresponding types of voidness. No matter how many and which aspects of the voidness are distinguished, the entire area of human existence is labeled as “void”.

“Here, through the voidness (*śūnyatā*) of the subject of experience (*bhoktr*) are aimed the individual (*ādhyātmika*) domains (*āyatana*); these are the eye (*cakṣus*) and so on, until the mind (*manas*).”¹

“The voidness (*śūnyatā*) of experience (*bhojana*) aims the external ones (*bāhya*): form (*rūpa*) and so on, until the conceptualized objects (*dharma*).”^{2,3}

¹ “*tatra bhoktrśūnyatā ādhyātmikānyāyatanānyārabhyeti / tāni ca cakṣurādīni yāvanmanahparyantāni* /”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāga bhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.17 (18), Pandeya 1999, 44.

² Here “*dharma*” refers to a conceptually determined object, as it is constructed by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*) of Yogācāra authors.

³ “*bhojanaśūnyatā bāhyānīti rūpādīni yāvat dharmaparyantāni* /” Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāga bhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.17 (18), Pandeya 1999, 44.

The voidness of the subject (*bhoktr*) signifies the voidness of all the physical and psychological determinations, characteristics of an individual being, of all his feelings, values, experiences, longings. All humans are bounded by all these, are entrapped in them, but this happens only in an illusory way, the bonds being all void. The voidness of the object denies the reality, the substance of all experiences. Consequent to the grasping of the voidness of the subject and of the object, only a totally non-determined condition remains but, soteriologically, this condition means the cessation of suffering.

4.iii. Proclaiming the voidness of an entity as illusory as the entity itself

The conceptually determined entity and the proclamation of the voidness of this entity both pertain to the realm of subjective illusion, to an ontological realm lacking absolute reality. Denying the substantiality of the illusions is itself an illusory act, human liberation being just as illusory as human bondage. The annihilation of an illusion is no more real than the illusion itself. Rejecting the illusion is also a part of the illusory experiences which throws human beings into confusion, driving them away from reality. Religion and the religious process of rejecting the illusion are not more “serious” or of a higher order than accepting the illusion. It is only more benefic since it quenches the afflictions stirred by the illusion. Neither the autonomous entity nor its denial, performed through the

proclamation of its voidness, pertain to reality. From the perspective of reality, the voidness of an entity, the denial of the reality of an entity, is just as illusory, as unreal as the autonomous entity targeted through its negation.

“If a person did exist, then negation of the person would also be suitable.

The signs of the selflessness of phenomena are empty by way of the emptiness of non-things. If phenomena did exist, then negation of phenomena would also exist.”¹

Therefore, Mahāyāna texts speak about the “voidness of voidness” (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*) and about the “voidness of non-reality” (*abhāvaśūnyatā*). This means that voidness, as the denial of the substantiality of the conceptually determined entities, is as void as the entities themselves. Voidness is nothing but a particular way of approaching entities; therefore, since the entities themselves are unreal, whatever involves them, whatever is based on them, is equally unreal. The negation of an entity cannot be real as long as the entity itself is not real. The annihilation of an illusory apparition cannot be something real since it doesn’t involve anything real. Similarly, grasping the voidness of the entities is itself void.²

¹ Jñānagarbha, *Āryamaitreyakevalaparivartabhāṣya*, Powers 1998, 41.

² For the importance of not getting “established” in the concept of “void” (*śūnya*), see King 1994, 672! King also mentions the frequent remark of the early Mahāyāna authors, that the finger pointing to the Moon should not be considered as the Moon itself. Similarly, the proclamation of the void leads to the void, without being the void itself.

“The voidness of the knowledge of voidness (*śūnyatājñāna*), i.e. the one through which the individual domains (*ādhyātmikāyatana*) and the others are seen as void (*śūnya*), is the voidness of voidness (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*)”¹

Human experience is void under all its aspects; it is void even when it is directed not towards maintaining its continuity but towards self-extinction. All the human procedures that reveal the voidness of human experience are equally void. Therefore, Buddhism feels entitled to speak about the voidness of the procedure of revealing the void, i.e. about the “voidness of voidness” (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*). In Buddhist texts, the voidness of the religious proclamation of the void is referred to not only by the term “voidness of voidness” but also by some other less frequent, such as “voidness of non-existence” (*abhāvaśūnyatā*) or “voidness of the nature of non-existence” (*abhāvasvabhāvaśūnyatā*).

“Voidness (*śūnyatā*) also characterizes that through which these things (*artha*) are seen (*drṣṭa*) as such, [i.e. as void].”²

“The non-existence (*abhāva*) of the unreal being (*asadbhāva*) of persons (*pudgala*) and of factors (*dharma*) is voidness (*śūnyatā*). The real existence (*sadbhāva*) of their non-existence (*abhāva*) is the voidness of the nature of non-existence (*abhāvasvabhāvaśūnyatā*).”³

¹ “*taccādhyātmikāyatanādi yena śūnyam drṣṭam śūnyatājñānena tasya śūnyatā śūnyatāśūnyatā* /”

Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāgaśāstra*, ad. I.17, Anacker 1998, 429.

² “... *tacca yena yathā drṣṭam yadarthaṃ tasya śūnyatā* /”

Asaṅga, *Madhyāntavibhāga*, I.17, Anacker 1998, 429.

³ “*tatra pudgaladharmayorasadbhāvo ‘bhāvaśūnyatā / tadabhāvasya sadbhāvo ‘bhāvasvabhāvaśūnyatā* /”

The universally liberating activity carried by a Bodhisattva for the benefit of all beings is also considered as void; human experiences, even when being in a regressive process of extinction, are equally void.¹ The voidness of the liberating activity also means the voidness of the preaching of Buddha Śākyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism.

“«All the time (*sarvakāla*), in any way (*sarvākāra*), I have to do good (*hita*) to the beings (*sattva*)» – the voidness of this [vow] is the voidness without an end (*atyantaśūnyatā*).”²

4.iv. Voidness of voidness (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*) and the voidness of religion

More broadly speaking, the voidness of voidness (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*) or the voidness of non-existence (*abhāvaśūnyatā*) mean the voidness of the religious path (*mārga*) put forward by Mahāyāna Buddhism. Religion doesn't belong to a higher ontological realm than the world. Religion is not settled in the sacred while the world is in the profane; both are in the same realm of the illusory. Religion has nothing to do with the absolute, it

Sthiramati – *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.20 (21), Pandeya 1999, 47.

¹ See the meanings no. 7-14 of the voidness, according to Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣya*, ad. I.18-19, Anacker 1998, 219-220 (English translation) Anacker 1998, 429-430 (Sanskrit text) and Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.18-19, Stcherbatsky 1976, 90-94; Pandeya 1999, 45-46.

² “*sarvākāraṃ sarvakālaṇca mayā sattvahitaṃ kartavyamiti tacchūnyatā 'tyantaśūnyatā*”

Sthiramati, *Madhyāntavibhāḡabhāṣyaṭīkā*, ad. I.18 (19), Pandeya 1999, 45.

is just a particular way, a “cleansing” way, of “sporting/playing” in the illusory realm of conceptual construction.

This should not be taken as a denial of the path; it only reveals the useful but illusory character of religious practices. The path exhorted by Mahāyāna is a device used for bridging the gap between illusion and reality; nevertheless, this tool itself doesn’t pertain to reality but to illusion. Thus, although it is efficient in achieving its task, the path itself is void. In respect of human bondage, the path has the efficiency to bring release but this capacity to act as an antidote (*pratipakṣa*) to human bondage does not make it something pertaining to reality.

Therefore, the path itself is to be discarded when, through the exertion of its efficiency, the entire conceptual construction has been annihilated; since it involves particular and determined entities, the path may turn into a hindrance to the realization of the ultimate reality, which is totally devoid of determination and particularity.

“For the one who knows the ineffable character of objects (*lakṣaṇatathatārthapratisaṃvedin*), for that one, the notion of the absence of own-being of person (*pudgalanairātmya*), of the absence of own-being of factors (*dharmanairātmya*), of the sole reality of ideation (*viññaptimātra*) and of the ultimate reality (*paramārtha*) are engendered. All these are discarded by the notion of the infinite voidness (*atyantaśūnyatā*), of the voidness of non-existence (*abhāvaśūnyatā*), of the voidness of the nature of non-existence (*abhāvasvabhāvaśūnyatā*) and of the voidness of the ultimate reality (*paramārthaśūnyatā*)

For the one who meditates to the voidness that counteracts these notions (*tannimittapratipakṣa*), the notion of voidness is engendered. It is annihilated by the voidness of voidness (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*).¹

And Jñānagarbha's commentary on this passage states:

“Any cognition of emptiness that eliminates all these signs is also empty.”²

By proclaiming the voidness of voidness (*śūnyatāśūnyatā*), the voidness of the path it exhorts, Buddhism succeeds in avoiding a temptation to which many religions fail to resist, namely the consideration of its path as absolute, as sharing the same status as the ultimate reality itself.

Since, in most religions, the soteriological target means taking part, in a certain way, in the ultimate condition of reality, naturally, this ideal has to be presented as universal, as absolute. But the ways the distances between the variously bounded humans and the unique and absolute ideal can be bridged naturally share the variety of the human types of bondage, the variety of the multiple points of departure of the religious paths.

Moreover, the path itself makes sense only as long as there is a distance to be bridged; the existence and the typology of a religious path is justified not only by the absolute reality but also by the existence of a particular altered human condition. Necessarily, a religious path deals with a decayed human condition that

¹ *Samdhinirmocanasūtra*, VIII.29, Lamotte 1935, 225.

² Jñānagarbha, *Āryamaitreyakevalaparivartabhāṣya*, Powers 1998, 41.

has to be restored, is dependent on such a condition and, therefore, when this condition ceases, the path itself loses its reasons to be.

4.v. The term “void” (*śūnya*) as a linguistic device (*upāya*) efficient in abolishing conceptual discrimination and not as a particular concept

Rather than being a particular concept, the term “void” (*śūnya*) is a device, a tool used for denying the substantiality, the reality of an entity; hence, declaring the voidness of something is more of a psychological act than of a cognitive one.

Voidness (*śūnyatā*) is not to be considered as a particular feature of things, a new characteristic that is added unto them. Proclaiming the voidness of a thing does not mean adding a new feature to that thing, does not mean enriching its description. The meaning of “voidness” is not a particular feature; all things are to be stated as being “void” (*śūnya*). “Voidness” applies to all things, denying their reality. Voidness is not something apart from the objects it is ascribed to; “voidness” refers to that very object, as it has always been seen, but considered as lacking substance, reality. The term “void” points rather to a change in the attitude towards one thing than to a new cognitive element added onto that thing.

“Form (*rūpa*) is voidness (*śūnyatā*) and voidness is form. Voidness doesn’t exist apart (*prṭhak*) from form, neither

form exists apart from voidness. What is form, that is voidness; what is voidness, that is form.”¹

The term “void” (*śūnya*) doesn’t have any meaning of its own; hence, the term cannot be considered in isolation, separated from the objects to which it is ascribed. “Voidness” (*śūnyatā*) is not the name for a characteristic to be added to things but rather a tool, linguistic device (*upāya*) which destroys the illusion of the reality, of the own-being (*svabhāva*) of the corresponding entity (*artha*) of a concept (*saṃjñā*, *vikalpa*). Stating the voidness of a thing means simply reverting the process of considering that thing as having own-being, own reality, and, therefore, viewing it as illusory, as unsubstantial. The term “void” (*śūnya*) involves a shift in the ontological attitude towards a particular thing; its meaning necessarily involves a particular object to which it is linked. There is no independent meaning of the term “void” (*śūnya*) which would be added to the meaning of another term – such as “person” (*pudgala*) – and which hence would engender a new and semantically enriched term, such as “the voidness of the person” (*pudgalaśūnyatā*).

“Kāśyapa, surely voidness (*śūnyatā*) doesn’t mean the destruction (*vināśa*) of the existence of the person (*pudgalabhāva*), but voidness is the person itself.”²

¹ „*rūpaṃ śūnyatā, śūnyataiva rūpaṃ / rūpāṇṇa pṛthak śūnyatā, śūnyatāyā na pṛthag rūpaṃ / yadrūpaṃ sā śūnyatā, yā śūnyatā tadrūpaṃ /*”

Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya-sūtra, Vaidya 1961, 76.

² „*na khalu punaḥ kāśyapa pudgalabhāvavināśāya śūnyatā pudgalaś caiva śūnyatā*”

Kāśyapaparivarta, 64, Pasadika, 1966, 114.

Buddhist Doctrine as Ontological Therapy

“With the aim (*artha*) of avoiding these extremes (*anta*) the middle path (*madhyamāpratipad*) doesn’t make the entities (*dharma*) void (*śūnya*) through a voidness (*śūnyatā*), but [considers] that all entities are themselves the void (*śūnya*).”¹

“Person” (*pudgala*) and “void person” (*śūnyapudgala*) have the same phenomenal content, they refer to one and the same apparition, the term “void” not bringing about any new phenomenal feature. The only difference between “person” and “void person” is that, in the first case, the ontological illusion of the reality of the “person” is present, while in the second case it is missing. When “voidness” is stated about an object, only the ontological attitude towards that object changes, not also its features.

The word “void” (*śūnya*) functions rather as a device (*upāya*) that opposes (*pratipakṣa*) conceptual discrimination (*vikalpa*) and the illusory entities projected by it and not as a particular concept. This remark is very important for maintaining a strictly critical attitude towards concepts. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, concepts are blamed for the illusory projection of the realm of determined entities, where bondage occurs. Hence, all concepts are firmly rejected. Considering the term “void” as a concept would have jeopardized the firmly critical attitude towards concepts;

¹ „*etasyāntasya parivarjanārthaṃ madhyamā pratipad yanna śūnyatayā dharmān śūnyān karoti api tu dharmā eva śūnyā ityevamādi*”

Vasubandhu, *Madhyāntavibhāṅgabhāṣya*, ad. V.26, Anacker 1998, 460.

hence Mahāyāna is bound to ascribe a purely negative function, of antidote (*pratipakṣa*) to the preaching of the void. The preaching of the void is rather benefic than “true”; the message of the void is not as much a piece of knowledge but a reaction. To “understand” the void doesn’t mean exactly to get some pieces of knowledge but rather a change in the attitude towards personality and world. Proclaiming the void leads to a void condition, where no concept, no determination is to be found any longer; hence, void is different from any other word, which engender determination, discrimination and not void.

Therefore, the function of religious doctrine is rather psychological and existential than cognitive. The doctrine (*dharma*) does not state *something* but rather changes the attitude towards *everything*.

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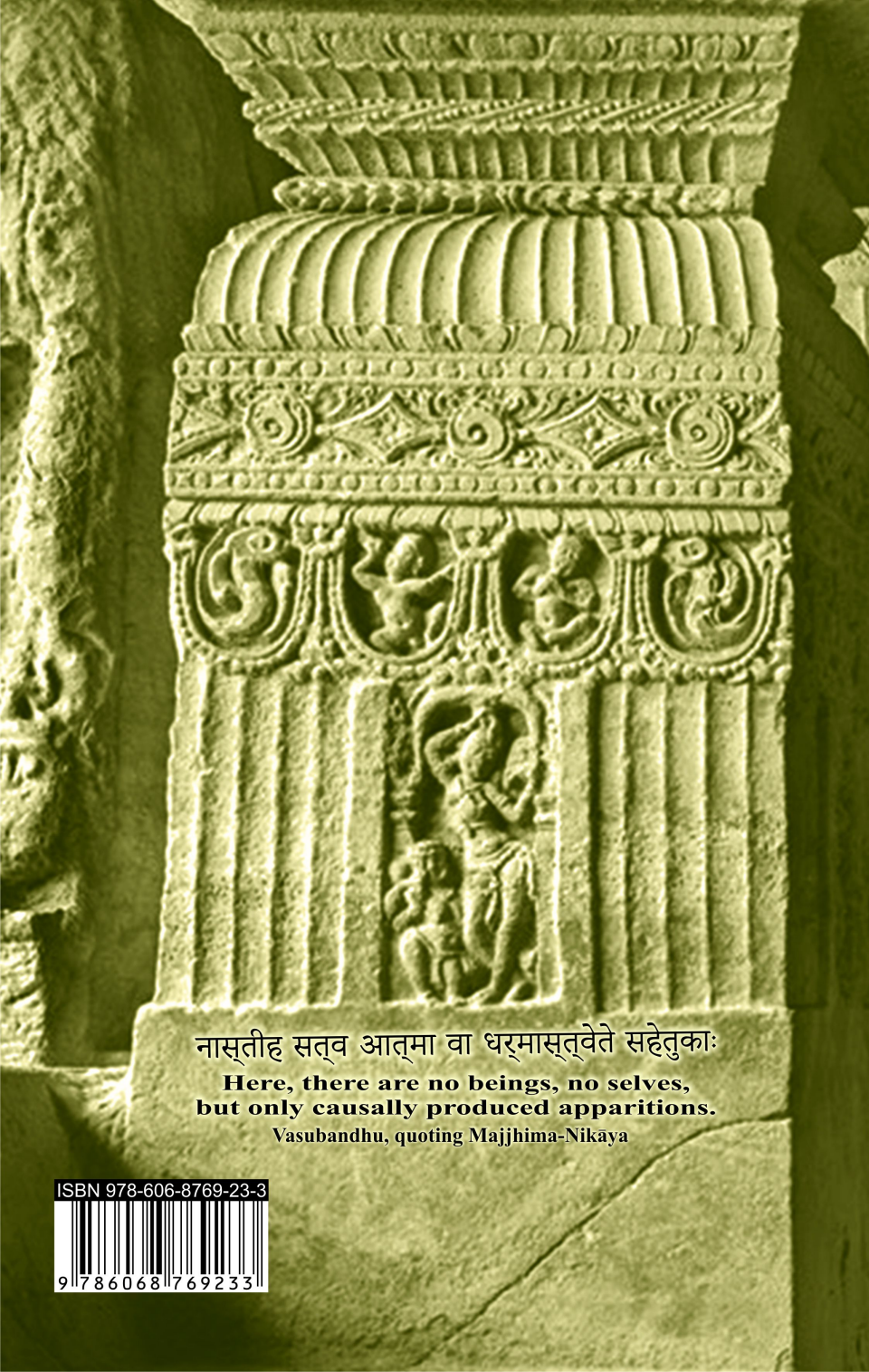
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नास्तीह सत्त्वं आत्मा वा धर्मास्तत्त्वेते सहेतुकाः

**Here, there are no beings, no selves,
but only causally produced apparitions.**

Vasubandhu, quoting Majjhima-Nikāya

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