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Autor: Kellner, Birgit / Taber, John

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Birgit Kellner and John Taber

Studies in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda idealism I: The interpretation of Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*

Abstract: In recent scholarship there has been a persistent tendency, especially among North-American scholars, to deny that Indian Yogācāra philosophy is a form of idealism. The discussion has naturally focused on the interpretation of Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*, a foundational text of the school, as well as one of the most accessible, which other researchers have taken to be denying the existence of a material world external to consciousness.

In this article, after noting some of the points in favor of a non-idealist reading of the *Viṃśikā*, we shall offer a new reading that supports the old "standard", but still widespread, interpretation that it indeed intends to deny the existence of physical objects outside of consciousness. We suggest that Vasubandhu develops in the *Viṃśikā* an extended *argumentum ad ignorantiam* where the absence of external objects is derived from the absence of evidence for their existence. This reading is the result of examining argumentation strategy rather than investigating the logical structure of individual proofs in isolation, and it takes cues from Vasubandhu's strategy for refuting the existence of a self in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX. In addition, our reading looks at the entire *Viṃśikā*, rather than isolating a purported argumentative "core" (vv. 11–15), and draws attention to the relevance of some of its subtleties. Finally, we also suggest that Vasubandhu might have opted for a less direct argumentation strategy to prove the non-existence of the external world because of specific soteriological aspects of the doctrine of *vijñaptimātratā*.

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In recent scholarship there has been a persistent tendency, especially among North-American scholars, to deny that Indian Yogācāra philosophy, or what Buescher 2008 calls Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda, is a form of idealism. Here we under-

Birgit Kellner: Chair of Buddhist Studies, Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context – The Dynamics of Transculturality", University of Heidelberg, Karl Jaspers Centre, Voßstraße 2, Building 4400, 69115 Heidelberg, Germany.
E-mail: kellner@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de
John Taber: Department of Philosophy, The University of Mexico, MSC 03 2140, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87131-0001, U.S.A. E-mail: jataber@unm.edu

stand by "idealism" the view that objects cannot exist without being cognized or, as it is sometimes put, that there is no "mind-independent world." In the history of Western philosophy this view is sometimes referred to as "subjective idealism", to distinguish it from other forms of idealism, such as "absolute idealism" and "transcendental idealism." The classic statement of the position in Western philosophy was by the early modern Irish philosopher George Berkeley, who famously declared that "to be is to be perceived" (*esse est percipi*), implying thereby that something that is not perceived or cognized cannot exist. (Absolute idealism, on the other hand, is associated with the philosophy of Hegel, while Kant identified his own philosophy as transcendental idealism.) Wayman 1979, Kochumuttom 1982, Hall 1986, Hayes 1988, Oetke 1992, King 1998, and most recently Lusthaus 2002 can all be seen as denying that Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda is idealism in the sense defined, though in somewhat different ways.[1] The discussion has naturally focused on the interpretation of Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*[2], a foundational text of the school, as well as one of the most accessible, which other researchers, naively or not, have taken to be denying the existence of a material world external to consciousness.

In the present study we shall argue for an idealist interpretation of the *Viṃśikā*. We, first, review the non-idealist interpretation of this text as presented in recent literature, then assess what we believe to be the strengths and weaknesses of such an interpretation. We conclude that, while the non-idealist interpretation has certain points in its favor, it is not entirely satisfactory, hence a renewed attempt to work out an idealist reading is justified. The primary challenge of seeing the *Viṃśikā* as an idealist text is to ascertain its logical structure: if it is indeed presenting an argument in favor of the idealist position, then what kind of argument is it? Here we believe it is crucial to note that idealism is equivalent to a negative thesis, that is, the negation of the statement that there are uncognized objects or objects outside of consciousness. In another of his works Vasubandhu is clearly intent on establishing a negative thesis, namely, the ninth chapter of his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, where he attempts to prove that there is no self. We undertake a detailed analysis of Vasubandhu's argument there and determine that it has the structure of what is known in informal logic as an *argumentum ad ignorantiam* (argument from ignorance): there is no self, because there is no evidence for one. Then, by carefully comparing the *Viṃśikā* with AKBh IX we believe we are

1 See also Rahula 1978: 79–85, which anticipates this position.

2 As demonstrated by Kanō 2008: 345, the title *Viṃśikā* is better attested for this work than *Viṃśatikā*.

able to discern *an argumentum ad ignorantiam* for the conclusion that there are no uncognized objects in that text as well. Along the way, we draw attention to other applications of the argument from ignorance in classical Indian philosophy. *anupalabdheḥ*, "because it is not apprehended", is a reason frequently used to prove the non-existence of something, and came to be recognized as one of the three types of valid inferential reason (*hetu*) by Dharmakīrti. We conclude that the *Viṃśikā* is an idealist text, after all, which attempts to establish that there are no uncognized objects by means of reasoning that has the characteristics of an argument from ignorance, though Vasubandhu never identifies his argument as such, nor does he even explicitly state its conclusion but allows the reader to draw it for himself. Finally, we speculate about why Vasubandhu might have preferred a less explicit, indirect approach when it came to defending the central Yogācāra thesis of "mere-cognition" (*vijñaptimātra*).

1 Non-idealist readings of the *Viṃśikā*

For a sketch of the non-idealist position we shall refer to Hayes 1988, who follows Hall 1986, and Oetke 1992. In limiting the discussion to these scholars we do not mean to lump together all non-idealist interpretations of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda; Wayman and Lusthaus, in particular, are concerned with much more than just the *Viṃśikā*.[3]

In a section titled "Vasubandhu's Phenomenalism" in his pioneering study *Dignāga on the Interpretation of Signs*, Richard Hayes presents D. N. Shastri as an example of those who have viewed Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda as a kind of idealism. Shastri writes,

> Subjective idealism consists in the assertion that there are no other things than thinking beings; that the things we believe ourselves to perceive are only the ideas of thinking beings.

3 Lusthaus's position vis-à-vis Yogācāra and idealism, we note, is rather confusing. While insisting that the Yogācāra philosopher is not an idealist in the sense "that mind alone is real and that everything else is created by mind" (Lusthaus 2002: 533) – perhaps he is thinking of *absolute* idealism here – he nevertheless describes the Yogācāra view in terms that make it difficult to distinguish it from what would normally be considered idealism (or *subjective* idealism), namely, the doctrine that objects cannot exist outside of consciousness: "Yogācāra never denies that there are sense-objects (*viṣaya*, *artha*, *ālambana*, etc.), but denies that it makes any sense to speak of cognitive objects occcurring outside an act of cognition" (538). "Yogācārins deny the existence of objects in two senses: 1) In terms of conventional experience they do not deny objects such as chairs, colors, and trees, but rather they reject the claim that such things appear anywhere else than in consciousness. It is *externality*, not objects per se, that they challenge [...]" (540). The same sort of confusion surfaces in Kochumuttom 1982.

> In short, the theory holds that there is no objective world independent of the perceiving mind [...]. In Indian philosophy it is represented by the Yogācāra school of the Buddhists. In Western thought, Berkeley is the chief representative.[4]

By contrast, Hayes maintains that what Vasubandhu, for instance, is concerned to show in his *Viṃśikā* is simply that our experience can be completely accounted for by factors within consciousness itself, and that it is not necessary to posit any external objects. That, clearly, is not the same as denying that there are any external objects – objects that exist independently of being cognized.

> Vasubandhu is intentionally questioning the assumption that the correct account of experience is that a passively conscious subject experiences *directly* something entirely outside consciousness itself and is suggesting instead that what there really is is simply an integrated experience onto which we project (or out of which we abstract) the notions of perceiving subject and object perceived.[5]

Thus, the position being represented in the *Viṃśikā* is no more representationalism – the view that in perceptual experience we are directly aware of ideas or mental representations caused by external objects – than idealism. Here Hayes relies on Hall.

> The term *vijñapti* signifies a "phenomenon" of consciousness, a "manifestation" to consciousness, or a "percept" – so long as one bears in mind that these terms should not be taken in a naively realistic or a naively idealistic sense. [...] To translate *vijñapti* here by "representation" conveys its public aspect, but seems to imply representation of something, presumably an external object or referent, which suggests a "representationalist" theory of knowledge. On the contrary, the purpose of the argument throughout the *Viṃśatikā* is to show that the concept of *vijñapti* suffices to make sense of perception and that *the concept of an external referent (artha) is logically superfluous*.[6]

We shall briefly address the interpretation of *vijñapti* as "percept" or "representation" further below. To be sure, Hayes is aware that at the beginning of the treatise Vasubandhu says that the term *mātra*, "nothing but", in *vijñaptimātra*, "nothing-but-*vijñapti*", is "for the sake of ruling out objects" (*arthapratiṣedhārtham*), but according to Hayes this may only mean that "the objective component of experience is being excluded from consideration" in working out a theory

4 Shastri 1964: 42–43, Hayes 1988: 98.

5 Hayes 1988: 99 (Hayes' emphasis). Kochumuttom (1982: 198) says that "the Yogācāra system has *always* been interpreted, invariably by *all* commentators and historians, as idealism of one kind or another" (italics ours) and proceeds (199–200) to offer a list of illustrative statements by modern interpreters, all of them Indian except for Stcherbatsky.

6 Hall 1986: 14, Hayes 1988: 100; our italics.

of experience, not that its existence is being denied altogether. Later in the text, in vv. 11–15, which we shall refer to as the *āyatana* section (which investigates the *āyatana*s or "sense-spheres"), Vasubandhu appears to be arguing that physical objects, whether conceived as aggregates of atoms, as wholes, or as single atoms, are impossible. This is a key passage on which other scholars (e.g., Kapstein 1988) have based interpretations of the *Viṃśikā* as advocating idealism. But the point of the discussion according to Hayes is, again, not to *deny* the existence of physical objects but only to show that "reason" cannot postulate them as the causes of our experiences, since however they are conceived, they are logically incoherent. Thus, all features of our experience are to be explained in terms of the elements of experience itself. He writes, again referring back to Hall: "The motivation behind declaring that all experience is nothing but phenomena is, according to Hall, not to make 'a metaphysical assertion of a transcendent reality consisting of "mind-only". It is a practical injunction to suspend judgment: "Stop at the bare percept; no need to posit an entity behind it."'"[7]

Oetke's formulation of the non-idealist position is more concise than that of Hayes-Hall, but he seems to be making much the same point.[8] Oetke maintains that the thesis Vasubandhu is arguing for in the *Viṃśikā* is best expressed as,

(**T**) There are no[9] entities which become the objects of cognition,

which can be formulated more precisely as either,

($\mathbf{T_1}$) There are no concrete particulars which are the objects of our experience,

or,

($\mathbf{T_2}$) There are no material bodies which are the objects of our experience.

He supports this interpretation with a brief analysis of the *āyatana* section, which as noted before, is a crucial passage for the idealist interpretation of the *Viṃśikā*. He suggests that what Vasubandhu shows in this passage is just that *the things we are experiencing* are not aggregates of atoms or wholes, i.e., physical objects. Thus, strictly speaking, Vasubandhu is arguing for either ($\mathbf{T_1}$) or ($\mathbf{T_2}$). But – and this is Oetke's main point – it follows from neither of these statements that there

7 Hayes 1988: 100.

8 Oetke 1992, especially 218–219.

9 The printed version (Oetke 1992: 219) reads "not", but we assume a misprint and read, as in T_1 and T_2, "no".

are no physical objects. "These theorems exhibit the formal scheme: 'There are no F-things which are G' and since propositions of this form do not logically entail 'There are no G's' or 'There are no F-things,' both ($\mathbf{T}_1$) and ($\mathbf{T}_2$) do not strictly imply [...] that there are no material bodies or other particulars of a world of physical things."[10]

In order for either ($\mathbf{T}_1$) or ($\mathbf{T}_2$) to entail that there are no material bodies external to consciousness one would have to supply another premise to the effect that "there are no non-mental particulars which are not objects of our experience", and Vasubandhu never articulates any such premise. Therefore, the main idea Vasubandhu is arguing for in the *Viṃśikā* does not "entail the impossibility of an external world", or that things exist only insofar as they are perceived, that is to say, subjective idealism.

2 Revisiting the *Viṃśikā*

While one could dispute some of the details of Hayes' and Oetke's analyses of the *Viṃśikā*, especially when it comes to the *āyatana* section, their overall impression of the work, that it stops short of a full-throated denial of the existence of external objects, seems correct. The reticence or ambivalence of the *Viṃśikā* in regard to external or uncognized objects becomes particularly evident when one compares it to Western presentations of idealism. To bring this out, we consider briefly the *locus classicus* for subjective idealism in modern Western philosophy, Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*.

There is little doubt that Berkeley in his *Principles* intends to deny the existence of objects outside of consciousness – what he refers to as "material substances." As is well known, Berkeley felt that "materialism", which he understood to be the positing of material substances, and which he saw in the dominant philosophies of his day, the systems of Descartes and Locke, had to be refuted because it led directly to skepticism and atheism. In the *Principles* one is presented immediately with arguments to the effect that material substances are inconceivable and even contradictory. His main argument, developed in the first few paragraphs of the work, is that objects consist of various qualities: colors, shapes, smells, textures, and so on. But such qualities, often called *sensible* qualities, are of such a nature as to exist only for a perceiving mind.

> That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination exist without the mind is what everybody will allow. And it seems no less evident that the various sensa-

10 Oetke 1992: 219.

> tions or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them [...]. The table I write on exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I would say that it existed – meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit [i.e., conscious subject] actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a color or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch.[11]

Thus, since objects such as "houses, mountains, rivers", and so on are collections of qualities such as color, shape, and smell, they can only exist insofar as they are perceived. "For what are the aforementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And is it not plainly repugnant [i.e., contradictory] that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived?"[12]

Whatever argument for idealism Vasubandhu is making in the *Viṃśikā*, if he is making any, it is not as explicit or direct as this. Vasubandhu does not launch an all-out, frontal assault, as it were, on the idea of objects existing outside of consciousness. The *Viṃśikā* seems to begin, rather – after citation of a scriptural passage which declares that the world consisting of three realms is mere cognition – with the idea that, since we sometimes experience "non-existent objects", such as hairs floating before the eyes, we could always be experiencing non-existent objects! Vasubandhu then goes on to show that essential features of our experience, e.g., the fact that certain cognitions are restricted to certain times and places, or that persons in the same place experience objects in the same way, do not require us to postulate physical objects as, say, the causes of our cognitions (vv. 2–7); nor does anything the Buddha said entail that there are such objects (vv. 8–15); nor, finally, is their existence established by perception (vv. 16–17ab). Thus, the overall trend of the treatise seems to be merely that, considering all the available evidence, our experience seems *compatible with* the non-existence of external objects. It offers no direct proof that they are in fact absent. Even the arguments of the *āyatana* section appear not to provide any such proof. For, first of all, those arguments subserve the assertion that *scripture* does not establish the existence of objects. In other words, that objects are impossible, no matter how one conceives of them, is not what Vasubandhu is primarily trying to prove in this section. Second, if Vasubandhu really were intent on proving that objects are impossible as a way of showing that external objects do not exist – for impossibility implies non-existence – and if this were the main point he wanted to make

11 Berkeley 1970: 246–247.

12 Berkeley 1970: 247.

in his treatise, then why didn't he do so at the very outset, as Berkeley does? Finally, if Vasubandhu thought he proved in this section that objects are impossible, then other arguments of the treatise, in particular those of the first section to the effect that an external object needn't be posited in order to account for our experience, would be rendered moot. For such objects being impossible, there would be no question of postulating them for any purpose; their absurdity would immediately rule out their playing any role in causing our perceptions.[13]

Thus, the non-idealist reading of the *Viṃśikā* cannot be dismissed so easily. It is perhaps not the text of the Viṃśikā itself that inclines one to resist it so much as the later development of the tradition to which it belongs and the critique of that tradition by outsiders, Buddhist and Brahmin alike. Both clearly depict Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda as denying the existence of objects outside of consciousness, i.e., "external objects" (*bāhyārtha*); and so one would expect that the *Viṃśikā*, which stands at the beginning of the development of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda as a rigorous, coherent philosophical system, would also be defending that position.

There is, however, another consideration that inclines us to resist the non-idealist interpretation and encourages us to reconsider an idealist reading of the text. What, after all, is Vasubandhu trying to say according to the non-idealist interpretation? We would put it as follows: Our immediate awareness in perception is not, as direct or commonsense realism maintains, of material objects, but of sensa, percepts, representations, sense impressions – whatever one wishes to call them – which are private, transitory, mental entities.[14] Hayes and Hall would add that Vasubandhu also suggests that all the features of our sense experience, in particular, that one has particular perceptual experiences at particular times and locations, can be explained by factors that reside within consciousness itself. But if this is what Vasubandhu really shows in the *Viṃśikā* – once again, that we can describe and account for our perceptual experience without referring to material objects – then the obvious question is: What evidence is there for material

13 Thus, Berkeley, after arguing himself that there is no way material objects could cause our perceptions – "though we give the materialists their external bodies, they by their own confession are never the nearer knowing how our ideas are produced, since they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner body can act upon spirit, or how it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind" (Berkeley 1970: 255) – apologizes: "I am afraid I have given you cause to think me needlessly prolix in handling this subject. For to what purpose is it to dilate on that which may be demonstrated with the utmost evidence in a line or two to anyone who is capable of the least reflection?" (256).

14 This wording is adapted from Hirst 1967: 130. A classic statement of the view that objects are reducible in some way to such sense data, usually known as "phenomenalism", is Ayer 1956: 91–148.

objects? If the answer is none, then there is no reason to think that they exist.[15] On the non-idealist reading of the *Viṃśikā*, then, Vasubandhu may not explicitly say that there are no material objects, but he doesn't have to. The reader is left to draw that conclusion for himself, and it would not seem far-fetched to suggest that that is precisely what Vasubandhu could be intending him to do.

Thus, even the non-idealist interpretation of the *Viṃśikā* depicts the text, wittingly or not, as presenting an *incomplete* argument for the non-existence of objects outside of consciousness, which the reader simply has to complete for him- or herself in one easy step. But it would be rather odd for Vasubandhu, or any author, to leave the final conclusion of his work to the reader in this way. Perhaps then the *Viṃśikā*, after all, is somehow arguing for idealism from the outset, though by a different method than Berkeley's?[16] At the very least, we are left with the sense that we do not fully understand what is going on in this text. It merits another look.

3 Reconsidering an idealist reading of the *Viṃśikā*: a new approach

In attempting to reconsider the idealist interpretation of the *Viṃśikā*, it is doubtful one will make much headway just going back over the text. It is true that the critical edition of the text by Sylvain Lévi, published in 1925, can still be improved on the basis of a manuscript now available in photographic reproduction, as Balcerowicz and Nowakowska have demonstrated in their recent reedition.[17] Harada and Hanneder have, moreover, independently arrived at the conclusion that what we thought to be the first stanza of the text is most likely a "versification" of an argument originally presented in prose.[18] In addition to revisiting philological evidence for the *Viṃśikā* itself – including the recently published Sanskrit frag-

15 For a modern example of the employment of this strategy to reject the view that unperceived objects can exist see Stace 1934.

16 One sometimes suspects that the motive behind the non-idealist interpretation of the *Viṃśikā* is to save an important school of Buddhist philosophy from advocating what nowadays is a completely discredited view (for similar remarks, see Schmithausen 2005: 49). If, however, even the "non-idealist" reading does not fully succeed in doing this, then the most charitable way to read the text might be as presenting the strongest argument for idealism one is able to find in it.

17 See Mimaki et al. 1989 for the photographs, and Balcerowicz/Nowakowska 1999 for the reedition and a Polish translation.

18 Harada 2003, Hanneder 2007.

ments of a commentary by Vairocanarakṣita[19] – we might also look for new evidence in other writings of Vasubandhu. Schmithausen considers the following works also to have been written by the author of the *Viṃśikā*:[20]

Abhidharmakośabhāṣya

Triṃśikā

Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa

Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā

Pañcaskandhaka

Vyākhyāyukti

Now, the *Triṃśikā*, *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, *Pratītyasamutpādavyākhyā*, *Pañcaskandhaka*, and *Vyākhyāyukti* are also considered Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda works.[21] One might at first be tempted to examine them for evidence that Vasubandhu believed that objects do not exist outside of consciousness. Yet we are doubtful that philological improvements to the text of the *Viṃśikā* as well as a re-examination of these writings will bring us any further. Any evidence one might find in them of Vasubandhu's true position regarding the external world is likely to be just as ambiguous as it is in his *Viṃśikā*. For it is likely that any statement to the effect that "we are not aware of external objects", and possibly even any statement to the effect that "there *are* no external objects", will be able to be construed *phenomenologically*, as pertaining just to our experience, i.e., as meaning that *the things we are experiencing* are not external, physical objects, and not *onto-*

19 Kanō 2008.

20 Schmithausen 1987: 262, n. 101. Kritzer (2005: xxvi) accepts this list in a recent review of the problem concerning the works of Vasubandhu. Frauwallner's proposal of two Vasubandhus made the older the author of various Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda commentaries, while the younger was author of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as well as the *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa*, *Viṃśikā*, and *Triṃśikā* (cf. Frauwallner 1951, 1961: 129–132, and 2010: 374f., and the discussion of Franco/Preisendanz 2010: XV–XVII). Reexamining textual and inscriptional evidence, Deleanu (2006: vol. 2, 186–194) conjectures that Vasubandhu lived between ca. 350 and 430, and assumes that only one Vasubandhu was the author of all works listed here. There are of course also many other works attributed to Vasubandhu, but it is not necessary to go into further details here (cf. Skilling 2000).

21 The *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa* advocates the *ālayavijñāna* and can on this ground be considered a Yogācāra(-Vijñānavāda) work, in spite of Lamotte's demonstration of its Sautrāntika character (Schmithausen 1967: 111f.). The *Pañcaskandhaka* also advocates the *ālayavijñāna* and can therefore likewise be considered a Yogācāra work.

logically, as denying that there are material objects outside of consciousness or asserting that things only exist if they are perceived (*esse est percipi*). Semantic considerations about the meaning of such terms as "visible form/matter" (*rūpa*), "thing/object/referent" (*artha*) or "external" (*bāhya*) that occur in such statements are helpful, but ultimately insufficient, as the import of such statements can only be reasonably determined by careful scrutiny of the argument strategies that support them.[22]

We shall therefore adopt the following approach. Taking as our hypothesis that Vasubandhu is denying the existence of objects outside of consciousness in the *Vimśikā*, are there any other writings of his in which he is clearly *denying the existence of something*? If there are, then an effort should be made to determine whether there are any significant similarities between the argument strategies employed in the *Vimśikā* and in those other writings. But no sooner do we ask this question – are there any other works in which Vasubandhu's main purpose is to deny the existence of something? – than the answer springs to mind: the ninth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, where Vasubandhu refutes the existence of a self. We shall, then, in what follows, offer an analysis of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX in order to ascertain exactly what kind of argument Vasubandhu develops against the existence of a self there – we would maintain it has gone unrecognized – with a view, ultimately, to determining whether he might be employing a similar kind of argument to prove the non-existence of objects outside of consciousness in his *Vimśikā*.

4 Vasubandhu's argument strategy for the non-existence of the self in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX

Abhidharmakośabhāṣya IX is by no means an uncomplicated text. It is an elaborate discussion of all the evidence for the existence of a self, or anything resembling one (e.g., a "person" or *pudgala* as upheld by the Vātsīputrīyas/Sāṃmitīyas,

22 For a complementary approach that relies on aspects of terminological, textual and doctrinal coherence – though, we would argue, it is one that in a veiled fashion also considers argument strategies – see Schmithausen 2005. It should be noted that Schmithausen discusses the *Cheng weishi lun*, which inspired by Vasubandhu's *Triṃśikā* argues for *vijñaptimātratā* relying on the notion of a "store-consciousness" (*ālayavijñāna*) which holds seeds from which our objects of experience evolve. For a treatment of the problem of idealism in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda thought with special consideration of the topic of self and other see Yamabe 1998.

who are fellow Buddhists), brought forward by other philosophers. We believe that the most important feature to note about it is that it is primarily, if not exclusively, critical in its method: it is mainly devoted to refuting other theories. Vasubandhu never presents any direct proof that there is no self in the form of a proper inference or *anumāna*.

Vasubandhu announces what we take to be his main argument at the very beginning of the treatise.[23] The question is posed: How is it understood that the designation "self" refers just to a temporally limited section of a series of *skandhas* (aggregates) and not to something else? Vasubandhu responds, "Because of the absence of perception and inference" in regard to any such thing (*pratyakṣānumānābhāvāt*). For, he explains, there is, in the absence of any obstruction, an immediate, perceptual apprehension of those entities or *dharmas* which exist, for example, of the six kinds of objects of the senses and of the mind (*manas*). And we are also able to infer things that exist, as for instance when we infer the existence of the five external senses from the fact that, when some of the causes of perception are present – an object placed in the light and mental attention (*manaskāra*) – a perceptual apprehension of an object sometimes occurs, but at other times it doesn't occur (e.g., for someone who is deaf or blind). Thus, one postulates a sense-faculty as another cause whose presence or absence in conjunction with the other factors brings about a perception. "But it is not like this for the self; [hence] it does not exist", Vasubandhu says.[24] In other words, there are no such considerations that would require us to infer or postulate one; therefore, we can conclude there isn't one.[25]

Thus, Vasubandhu's initial argument against the existence of a self appears to be: there is no self because there is no evidence for one![26] This is a type of argu-

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23 Claus Oetke presents a much more detailed synopsis of the text than we are about to give, in Oetke 1988: 195–209. The most in-depth analysis to date is Duerlinger 2003. It will be evident from what follows that we disagree with Duerlinger's overall interpretation of the text as presenting a positive theory of persons, though we find the theory he sees in the text to be intriguing. Roughly, Duerlinger believes that Vasubandhu holds that we are *both* conventional entities "as objects of conceptions of ourselves" *and* ultimately exiting entities, insofar as we are "the same in existence as collections of aggregates." See esp. Duerlinger 2003: 30f. for a more nuanced statement.

24 AKBh 461: 12–13: *na caivam ātmano 'stīti nāsty ātmā*; reading *ātmano* for *ātmato*. All passages from AKBh IX have been checked against the critical edition $AKBh_L$.

25 This strategy may be an extension of the refutation of the *pudgala* in Vasubandhu's *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkārabhāṣya*; cf. our Appendix below for a discussion of relevant passages.

26 The terms "argument", "evidence", and "proof" are not being used in any technical sense in this article. Roughly, a "proof" is an attempt to establish or demonstrate a thesis by means of some "argument", which is a pattern of reasoning, with a definable logical structure, that draws a certain conclusion from a set of premises. "evidence" usually means a reason cited when as-

ment that in Western philosophy is identified as an argument from ignorance (*argumentum ad ignorantiam*), and we shall discuss this type of argument in Indian philosophy, or at least certain varieties of it, more generally further below. Our concern at this point is to show that the rest of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX is but the elaboration of such an argument.

Vasubandhu does not initially consider objections to the assertion that there is no perceptual or inferential evidence for a self. He will, in fact, interestingly enough, never take up a serious challenge to the claim that the self is not perceived.[27] Later in the text he will weigh a series of considerations that other philosophers believed compel us to postulate or infer the existence of a self. But in the first part of the text he is occupied with refuting the doctrine of the person (*pudgalavāda*) of the Vātsīputrīyas or Sāṃmitīyas.[28] Yet this is quite in keeping with the overall strategy of the text to provide an argument from ignorance. A Buddhist may perhaps readily accept that there is no perceptual or inferential evidence for a self but will still want to know if there is any scriptural evidence. The Vātsīputrīyas indeed put forward the *pudgalavāda* as a teaching they believed is implied by key Buddhist doctrines, especially the doctrines of *karman* and transmigration. They also maintained that the Buddha refers to a *pudgala* in some of his statements. In order to provide a compelling argument from ignorance against the existence of a self, then – i.e., that there is no evidence of any kind for a self, neither perceptual nor inferential nor scriptural – Vasubandhu must show that there is no reason to hold that the Buddha ever accepted the existence of anything even like a self, such as a *pudgala*.

Vasubandhu does not, however, immediately discuss scriptural passages. Rather, he launches into a lengthy attack against the coherence of the *pudgalavāda*. The *pudgalavādin*s maintain that there is a *pudgala* which is neither the same nor different from the *skandha*s, but, precisely because it is not different from them, it is not an eternal self; at the same time, it is the bearer of *karman* and the entity that transmigrates and attains Nirvāṇa.[29] Vasubandhu begins by posing

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serting something, the ground for one's assertion. Thus, perception or inference both can count as evidence.

27 Though, as we shall see below, he does argue that a *pudgala* could not be the object of any of the six *vijñāna*s.

28 Henceforth referred to, for convenience, as just the Vātsīputrīyas. Vasubandhu refers to the adherents of the *pudgala* doctrine as "Vātsīputrīyas" (AKBh 461,14). Yaśomitra (AKVy 699,3) glosses: *vātsīputrīyā āryasāṃmatīyāḥ*. Both schools are recorded as advocating *pudgalavāda*. Sources regarding the relationship between Vātsīputrīyas and Saṃmatīyas/Sāṃmatīyas/Sāṃmitīyas are presented in Kieffer-Pülz 2000: 296f.

29 For a concise summary of the *pudgalavāda* see Eltschinger 2010: 294–296. See also Priestly 1996.

the dilemma: does such a *pudgala* exist "substantially" (*dravyataḥ*) or "nominally" (*prajñaptitaḥ*)? If the first, then the *pudgala* would have to be different from the *skandha*s after all, for it would have its own distinct nature. If the latter, the *pudgalavādin* just agrees with Vasubandhu: the *pudgala* has mere nominal existence (461,14–18). To avoid this dilemma the *pudgalavādin* proposes that "the *pudgala* is designated in dependence on the *skandha*s" (*skandhān upādāya pudgalaḥ prajñapyate*) (461,19–20).[30] Vasubandhu proceeds ruthlessly to deconstruct this statement – what, for instance, does "in dependence on" mean? – showing that however it is interpreted it involves the denial of one of the *pudgalavādin*'s premises; typically, it will entail that the *pudgala* is either the same or different from the *skandha*s (461,21–463,9). The Vātsīputrīyas also apparently held that the *pudgala* is perceptible.[31] Vasubandhu is therefore also intent on showing that there is no conceivable way it could be cognized by any of the six *vijñāna*s, and by visual cognition in particular (463,10–465,9). The purpose of this last passage concerning the unknowability of the *pudgala*, we would submit, is not merely to establish that we don't actually have a cognition of a pudgala but, more broadly, that the Vātsīputrīya theory of a cognizable *pudgala* which satisfies the condition of being neither the same nor different from the *skandha*s is untenable, hence it is not something the Buddha ever could have taught.

Next, Vasubandhu adduces a number of "explicit" (*nītārtham*, 465,18) scriptural passages that suggest that when it comes to talking about a "person" one has only to do with the *skandha*s, that terms like *sattva*, *nara*, *mānuṣya*, *puruṣa*, and *pudgala* are "mere names, mere expressions" (*sañjñāmātrakaṃ vyavahāramātrakam*), and that no self is to be found among the *dharma*s (entities) (465,10–466,17).[32] And he ridicules the idea that these passages, even the famous saying "All *dharma*s are without self",[33] are not *pramāṇa*s for the *pudgalavādin*

30 More precisely, on "internal, assimilated, presently existing *skandha*s" (*ādhyātmikān upāttān vartamānān skandhān*). Cf. AK(Bh) 1.34 and 39ab for definitions of "assimilated" and "internal", respectively.

31 See *Kathāvatthu* I.1: *puggalo upalabbhati saccikaṭṭhaparamatthena*.

32 In other words, Vasubandhu at this point, in showing that there is no scriptural evidence for a person, turns properly to scriptural exegesis. As Eltschinger (2010: 299) notes of the discussion that corresponds to this in the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkārabhāṣya*, "The philosophical quarrel then turns into an exegetical one, for the Buddha, no one would dare to contend, has often made use of the notion *pudgala*. Now, did he resort to it in a purely pragmatic and didactic purpose, as the adversary of the *pudgala* repeatedly contends, or did his statements concerning the *pudgala* refer to an *ens* – whatever its precise ontological status – as the Pudgalavādin (allegedly) has it?"

33 SN 3.133, DhP v. 279, SN 4.400–401.

because they are not found in the Vātsīputrīya canon (466,17–24)! Finally,[34] Vasubandhu considers a series of other scriptural texts and orthodox doctrines that would seem to imply the existence of a *pudgala*: e.g., the teaching of the omniscience of the Buddha (467,13–468,1),[35] the text that speaks of "the burden, the taking up of the burden, the laying down of the burden, and the carrier of the burden"[36] (468,1–9), the characterization of the denial of spontaneously arising beings (*sattva upapādukaḥ*) as a false view (468,10–14), the Buddha's refusal to say whether the living being is the same as the body or not (469,9–24)[37] and to explicitly deny for Vacchagotta that there is a living being or a self at all (469,25–470,18),[38] his statement that "I have no self" is a false view (471,19–23), the doctrine of transmigration (471,24–472,3), and the Buddha's claims that he remembered being this or that person in a previous existence (472,3–7). None of these statements or teachings, Vasubandhu shows, is to be taken as referring to or implying that there is a *pudgala* in the sense understood by the Vātsīputrīyas.

We would suggest that the purpose of this lengthy section on the *pudgalavāda*, which comprises more than half of the work (461–472), is not to refute the *pudgalavāda per se*, but to show that there is no scriptural basis for belief in a self, even in the guise of a *pudgala*. The rest of the text, then, which takes up arguments made by the Tīrthikas (or Tīrthakaras), or that are common to both Tīrthikas and the Vātsīputrīyas, is to show that other rational considerations do not require us to postulate a self, either.[39] This of course is not quite the same as

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34 After discussion of further scriptural passages that say that any (false) idea of a self pertains only to the *skandha*s, 1204,3–1205,3.

35 The *pudgalavādin* maintains that only a being who endures over time could know everything, while Vasubandhu argues that the omniscient Buddha is a series of *skandha*s which do not always actively know everything but have the capacity to cognize whatever is desired to be known.

36 SN 3.25–26. See Frauwallner 2010: 16.

37 If the *pudgala* were just the *skandha*s, then it would be.

38 He goes on to discuss why the Buddha did not answer *any* of the unexplained questions, 470,19–471,19.

39 This part is introduced by the sentence, *ye 'pi ca dravyāntaram evātmānaṃ manyante tīrthakarāḥ teṣām eva mokṣābhāvadoṣaḥ niṣkampaḥ* (472,14–15), "And those Tīrthakaras who believe the self to be a different substance – for them in particular the fault of the absence of liberation is immovable." This refers back to the very beginning of the text, 461,2–4: *kiṃ khalv ato 'nyatra mokṣo nāsti? nāsti. kiṃ kāraṇam? vitathātmadṛṣṭiniviṣṭatvāt. na hi te skandhasantāna evātmaprajñaptiṃ vyavasyanti. kiṃ tarhi? dravyāntaram evātmānaṃ parikalpayanti, ātmagrāhaprabhavāś ca sarvakleśā iti.* "Is it then really the case that there is no liberation anywhere else but here [in our teaching]? There is not. Why not? Because [others] are attached to the false view of a self; for they do not discern that the designition 'self' refers only to the series of *skandha*s. What then [do they think it refers to]? They imagine that the self is indeed another

saying that there is no *anumāna* that proves the existence of a self. Vasubandhu, interestingly enough, never considers a formal *anumāna* to that effect. Nevertheless, the reasons or grounds for believing in a self that he criticizes are in many instances the very factors that were cited as "inferential marks" (*liṅga*) of the self by Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophers.[40]

Thus, Vasubandhu argues: a self is not required as the factor that combines mental states in the act of memory (472,16–473,14);[41] nor is it the one who cognizes (473,15–474,9);[42] nor could it be otherwise causally responsible for the arising of cognitions (e.g., as that with which the mind comes into contact) (475,1–12) or be the substratum (*āśraya*) of cognitions and other mental states (475,12–476,3);[43] nor is it the referent of the notion "I" (476,4–16)[44] or the one who is happy and unhappy (476,16–18);[45] nor, finally, is it necessary or even logical to postulate a self as the agent of *karman* and the enjoyer of the results of *karman* (476,19–478,13).[46] All of these phenomena can be explained otherwise, without introducing a self, while the hypothesis of a self also is not free from problems.[47] Thus, the implication seems to be, none of the reasons cited by other philosophers for inferring a self is conclusive. Hence, there is no inferential evidence for a self.

In sum, on our reading *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX should be interpreted as a lengthy argument from ignorance: (1) There is no perception of a self. As noted, Vasubandhu seems to take this as a given and doesn't feel compelled to argue for

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substance (*dravyāntaram evātmānam*), but [in reality] the defilements arise from the grasping of a self."

40 Thus, e.g., NS 1.1.10: *icchādveṣaprayatnasukhaduḥkhajñānāny ātmano liṅgam*; "Desire, aversion, effort, pleasure, pain, and cognition are the inferential marks of the self." VS 3.2.4: *prāṇāpānanimeṣonmeṣajīvanamanogatīndriyāntaravikārāḥ sukhaduḥkhe icchādveṣau prayatnāś cety ātmaliṅgāni*; "Exhaling, inhaling, closing and opening [the eyes], life, the movement of the mind, the change in another sense [when an object is perceived by one sense], pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, as well as effort are the inferential marks of the self."

41 The opponent asks: *yadi tarhi sarvathāpi nāsty ātmā kathaṃ kṣaṇikeṣu citteṣu cirānubhūtasyārthasya smaraṇaṃ bhavati pratyabhijñānaṃ vā*? (472,16–17).

42 The opponent asks: *evaṃ ko vijānāti, kasya vijñānam ity evamādiṣu vaktavyam*? (473,13).

43 The opponent asserts: *avaśyam ātmābhyupagantavyaḥ smṛtyādīnāṃ guṇapadārthatvāt tasya cāvaśyaṃ dravyāśritatvāt teṣāṃ cānyāśrayāyogād iti cet* (475,22–23, emended according to $AKBh_L$ 148). Cf. NBh_{Th} 292,2–3; NV_{Th} 391,9–15.

44 *ātmany asati kimarthaḥ karmārambhaḥ ahaṃ sukhī syām ahaṃ duḥkhī na syām ity evamarthaḥ? ko 'sāv ahaṃ nāma yadviṣayo 'haṃkāraḥ*? (476,4–5).

45 *yady ātmā nāsti ka eṣa sukhito duḥkhito vā*? (476,16).

46 *asaty ātmani ka eṣāṃ karmaṇāṃ kartā kaś ca phalānāṃ bhoktā bhavati*? (476,19).

47 E.g., it cannot really function as a substratum or an agent. In general, *na hi kiñcid ātmanaḥ upalabhyate sāmarthyam auṣadhakāryasiddhāv iva kuhakavaidyaphuḥsvāhānām*; "For no capacity of the self is apprehended, any more than [a capacity] of the Phuḥ!'s and Svāha!'s of quack doctors when it is established that the effect has been brought about by herbs" (475,10–11).

it (nevertheless, he shows that the *pudgala* is not cognized by any of the six perceptual cognitions), though it will of course be challenged later by Brahminical philosophers. (2) There is no statement of the Buddha affirming a self – to the contrary, there are many statements by which he appears to deny it – nor is there any orthodox teaching that implies its existence. Finally, (3) there is no basis for inferring a self. Therefore, given the total lack of evidence for a self we may conclude that there is none. Of course, in the process of making these points Vasubandhu presents a rich alternative account of facts that supposedly justify the existence of a self, such as memory. But we would argue that this is secondary to his main purpose, which is simply to prove, indirectly by "non-apprehension" (*anupalabdhi*), that there is no self.

Note that according to our interpretation Vasubandhu is not saying that the proponents of a self have failed to prove one, therefore we are justified in not believing in one – the burden of proof is on them. He is saying something much stronger than this, namely, since there is no evidence for a self, a self does not exist. The principle behind this argument is that if something exists, it will somehow make its presence known; it will be accessible to one of the *pramāṇa*s. If there is no evidence for something, if no *pramāṇa* reveals it, then we may conclude that it does not exist *to be* revealed.

We have of course been much more explicit about what is going on in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX than Vasubandhu is himself. He offers no summary at the end of the text like the one we have just provided. Therefore, it would be desirable if there were other, independent support for this reading. We believe that such support can be found, first, in Uddyotakara's account of the Buddhist objections to the Nyāya arguments for the existence of the self that he discusses in his *Nyāyavārttika*.

At NV 1.1.10, Uddyotakara presents the Buddhist assertion that the various phenomena cited in the *sūtra* as the "inferential marks" (*liṅga*s) of the self – desire, aversion, etc. – all of which presuppose memory, can be explained in terms of causal relations between cognitions without bringing in a self as the element that binds them together. And he (the Buddhist) concludes, "Thus, this connecting up [of past and present experiences in memory] being possible otherwise, it is not capable of proving the existence of a self."[48] The idea here is not that there is another better (or simpler)[49] explanation of memory than the one that

48 NV_{Th} 389,1: *tad idaṃ pratisandhānam anyathā bhavan nātmanaḥ sattāṃ pratipādayituṃ śaknoti.*

49 Siderits 2003: 28, 77 suggests that Vasubandhu is arguing that a "reductionist" view of the person is preferable to one that postulates a real, irreducible self, because it is "lighter", i.e., more parsimonious. But nowhere in AKBh IX does Vasubandhu mention parsimony (*lāghava*) as

appeals to a self, but that, given the existence of alternative explanations, one doesn't *have* to bring in a self to explain memory. Thus, the various *liṅga*s listed in 1.1.10 are not conclusive. Uddyotakara's reading of the type of arguments Vasubandhu develops in the latter half of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX against various Tīrthika theories – we can't be sure he had Vasubandhu specifically in mind, but given discussions of Vasubandhu's ideas elsewhere in the NV it is not unlikely that he did – is consistent with our reading, namely, they are intended to show that there is no conclusive inferential evidence for a self.[50]

It is, however, even more evident in his commentary on NS 3.1.1 that Uddyotakara considered one of the main Buddhist arguments against the existence of a self to be an argument from *anupalabdhi*.[51] There, after dispatching the *anumāna*, "There is no self, because it has not arisen" (*nāsty ātmājātatvāt*), he takes up the argument, also apparently an *anumāna* for him, "There is no self, because it is not apprehended" (*nāsty ātmānupalabdheḥ*). Uddyotakara argues that the reason is not true: the soul *is* apprehended, for it is the object of the cognition "I", which appears to be perceptual in nature. After defending this view (which was not shared by all Naiyāyikas) at some length he concludes,

> Thus, to begin with, the self, being the object of the notion "I", is perceptible. How the self is also apprehended by means of inference has been explained under the *sūtra* "Desire, etc." [i.e., NS 1.1.10]. There is also scripture [that proves the existence of a self, viz. the *Upaniṣads*]. Thus, those three *pramāṇa*s unitedly, insofar as they all refer to the same thing, prove the self. And there is no *pramāṇa* that gives rise to the opposite opinion. Hence, "because [the self] is not apprehended" is an unestablished reason.[52]

This seems to be directed against precisely the type of argument we analyzed *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX as presenting. Therefore, we take it as support for our interpretation of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX.

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a consideration in favor of the no-self view, though one can perhaps see him arguing in this way at Vś 7.

50 Cf. NV_{Th} 389,12–13: The Buddhist says, *na mayā kāryakāraṇabhāvāt pratisandhānaṃ sādhyate api tv anyathaiva tad bhavatīti hetor asiddhārthatādoṣo 'bhidhīyate*. "It is not proven by me that memory is due to the relation of cause and effect [among only cognitions] but rather, [memory] is possible otherwise [than by postulating an *ātman*]. In this way, [your] reason is indicated as having the fault of unestablished meaning."

51 See Taber 2012: 107–111.

52 NV 705,13–16: *tad evam ahaṃpratyayaviṣayatvād ātmā tāvat pratyakṣaḥ, anumānenāpi yathātmoplabhyate tathoktam icchādisūtra iti. āgamo 'py asty eva. tāny etāni pramāṇāni trīṇy ekaviṣayatayā pratisandhīyamānāny ātmānaṃ pratipādayanti. na ca pramāṇāntaraṃ vipratipattihetur asti. tasmād anupalabdher ity asiddho hetuḥ.*

This finding is strongly corroborated by the *Yuktidīpikā*. Prior to the discussion of *Sāṅkhyakārikā* 17, which gives the reasons for the existence of the self, the author of the YD presents a Buddhist *pūrvapakṣa* that explicitly states that "there is no self, because it is not apprehendended by any *pramāṇa*."[53] Several (unidentified) scriptural texts that also appear in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX are cited.[54] In the course of explaining how a self is not apprehended by perception, inference, or scripture the *pūrvapakṣin* affirms the general principle, "Here [in this context], that which exists is apprehended by one of the *pramāṇa*s perception, etc., e.g., visible form",[55] upon which Vasubandhu's argument from *anupalabdhi* appears to be based.

5 Arguments from ignorance in Indian philosophy

We have been talking about Vasubandhu's argument against the existence of a self in his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX as an argument *ad ignorantiam*, an argument which derives the non-existence of some entity from a lack of evidence for it, or, in other words, from its non-apprehension. Given how intuitive it is to at least seriously doubt the existence of something when it is not apprehended, it is not surprising that arguments to that effect left their traces in Indian philosophy already at a relatively early date.

One of the driving forces behind the articulation of arguments from ignorance, and reflection on their probative force, was surely the controversial status of supersensible entities or phenomena which only some assumed to exist. The *Carakasaṃhitā* argues with materialists who deny rebirth on the grounds that it is not perceived; it lists in the process eight causes for the non-perception of things that are generally perceptible, including their being too far away or too close, the senses or the mind being damaged, or things being simply too subtle (*atisaukṣmya*).[56] In the *Carakasaṃhitā* the argument seems mainly to be driving at an epistemological point: Because there are many things which cannot be perceived at all, and because even things which can be perceived are sometimes not perceived due to obstructing circumstances, it is unreasonable to claim that only that exists which is or can be perceived; hence one should not, as the materialists do, rely only on perception, but also consider other means of knowing the existence

53 YD 168, 23–24: *tasmāt sarvapramāṇānupalabdher nāsty ātmeti.*

54 YD 167,13–18.

55 YD 167,6–7: *iha yad asti tat pratyakṣādinā pramāṇenoplabhyate tadyathā rūpādi.*

56 See *Carakasaṃhitā*, *sūtrasthāna* 11.8, as well as MBh 2 197.8–11 (six causes, cf. Steinkellner 1992: 402). For detailed discussion cf. Preisendanz 1994: 530ff.

of things.[57] Yet, such lists of causes for non-perception also were taken to show why things exist in spite of their (occasional or even universal) imperceptibility. In the *Sāṅkhyakārikā*, challenges to the existence of the *puruṣa* and unmanifest *prakṛti* resulted in a list of causes for non-perception corresponding to that of the *Carakasaṃhitā* (SK 7); one can certainly see the focus on inference and on specific proofs for the existence of supersensible entities as reactions to similar challenges.

But we have so far only cited defensive reactions against arguments from ignorance. Indeed, there seem to be not too many sources in which arguments from ignorance are actually propounded, although the few that we have been able to find might nevertheless have been historically influential. In Dignāga's *Nyāyamukha*, the challenge to the Sāṅkhya supersensibles is condensed into the inference "primordial matter and the like do not exist because they are not apprehended."[58] But Dignāga seems to be only interested in this argument as far as one particular logical problem is concerned, namely that of stipulating something non-existent as the subject or property-bearer (*sādhyadharmin*) in an inference. Dignāga – and, following him, Dharmakīrti – addressed this by conceiving of the inferential subject as conceptualized, as simply the meaning of a word.[59]

In the course of *Nyāyasūtra* 2.2.13–38, where the question of the eternality vs. non-eternality of sound is discussed, it is asserted by the Naiyāyika that sound does not exist prior to being uttered – therefore it must be brought into existence – "because it is not apprehended and no obstruction, etc., is apprehended [either];"[60] hence it must not be eternal. Vātsyāyana introduces the *sūtra* by asking, "Moreover, how indeed is it known 'This exists', 'This does not exist'? By apprehension and non-apprehension by means of a *pramāṇa*."[61] Here we see not only the formulation of a general principle, that non-existence is known through non-apprehension by a *pramāṇa* (or by *pramāṇas*), but also an awareness that an argument from ignorance must be qualified, if probative: to show that sound is absent one not only has to point to its non-apprehension, but also demonstrate that this non-apprehension is not caused by obstructions – we can take this to be

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57 Preisendanz 1994: 532.

58 The Sanskrit text is cited by Dharmakīrti in PVSV 105,15ff.: *na santi pradhānādayo 'nupalabdheḥ*. For the Chinese translation, see Katsura 1978: 110; English translation and discussion in Katsura 1992: 230.

59 Cf. Yaita 1985: 7f., n. 3. For a discussion of more general philosophical problems cf. Vetter 1968: 353f., and for further discussion of the logical problem involved, that of the fallacy of an unestablished basis (*āśrayāsiddha*), cf. Tillemans/Lopez 1998.

60 NS 2.2.18: *prāg uccāraṇād anupalabdher āvaraṇādyanupalabdheś ca.*

61 *athāpi khalv idam asti idaṃ nāstīti kuta etat pratipattavyam iti. pramāṇata upalabdher anupalabdheś ca*, NBh 614,2–3.

in some measure a response to lists for causes of non-perception as given in the *Carakasaṃhitā* or in the *Sāṅkhyakārikā*. Near the beginning of the *Nyāyabhāṣya*, Vātsyāyana makes even more specific claims about the grounds on which something can be proclaimed as non-existent because it is not apprehended: the absence of a *pramāṇa* proves the non-existence only of such objects that, if they existed, would inevitably be apprehended[62] – a line of thinking that will become central to Dharmakīrti's complex theory of the "non-perception of a perceptible" (*dṛśyānupalabdhi*) as a separate type of reason in an inference.

What we have detected in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is, on the other hand, not a simple inference, but rather a more involved procedure along the following lines: the apprehension of an entity by means of all sorts of *pramāṇa*s is considered one by one; each *pramāṇa* fails to prove the entity in question, and hence it can be regarded as non-existent. Although this procedure is hardly made explicit, its elements are there. Our point, for now, is that Vasubandhu is certainly not the only, nor the first, Indian philosopher to consider the non-apprehension of a type of object as grounds for denying its existence; nevertheless, philosophers at his time had not yet thematized this kind of argument in the context of their theories of inference, or in their theories of *pramāṇa*s more generally.

It is intriguing to note that Kumārila, who stipulates absence as a separate *pramāṇa*, later makes use of the same procedure in what in fact seems to be the *only* application of absence as *pramāṇa*: he considers whether any of the other five *pramāṇa*s establish a particular doctrine or entity, concludes that this is not the case, and from this concludes that it is an object of *abhāvapramāṇa*.[63] Kumārila applies this kind of reasoning to the doctrine that cognition is without an external objective basis (i.e., *nirālambanavāda*), the idea of *smṛti* as an authoritative type of scripture, the assumption that the Vedas have an author (*kartṛ*), and the idea that human beings can be omniscient.[64]

Dharmakīrti's immediate predecessor, Īśvarasena, apparently held *anupalabdhi* to be a third *pramāṇa* to stand alongside perception and inference, but given that his works are not preserved, it is uncertain what he thought to be its sphere of application, and whether he also envisioned this kind of procedure to be connected with *anupalabdhi*.[65] Dharmakīrti specifies *anupalabdhi* as a

62 NBh_{Th} 1,16–20, translated in Kellner 1997:59f.

63 Connections between this pattern and the argument pattern known as *pariśeṣa*, an argument which establishes something by excluding what are to be believed all other options, are not unlikely.

64 Kellner 1996 : 149f.

65 See Steinkellner 1979: 48, n. 123 and Katsura 1992. According to accounts of Īśvarasena's views that are given in later commentaries on Dharmakīrti's works (for a list of known passages,

separate type of logical reason in an inference, but in so doing effectively limits its scope so that it cannot prove the non-existence (that is, unreality) of whole types of things. Understood specifically as the non-occurrence of perception,[66] *anupalabdhi* can only prove that things that are not perceived in a situation where their perception, if they existed, would be inevitable, can be cognitively, linguistically and physically treated as non-existent.[67] But the non-apprehension of things without any further qualification is not evidence for their absence; non-apprehension in this sense only yields the absence of its treatment as existent, because to treat something as existent presupposes its apprehension.[68] Subjectively, however, when someone does not apprehend a thing it means that for him the object is as good as non-existent.[69]

But Dharmakīrti also discusses what basically seems to be an argument from ignorance: one that allegedly proves the non-existence of "remote" objects (*viprakṛṣṭa*) on the ground that they are not apprehended by any of the three instruments of knowledge, perception, inference, and scripture.[70] He does not consider this kind of argument to be sound. The absence of a scriptural statement proving the existence of something does not prove the non-existence of that thing, since scripture is of a specific kind: it teaches what is relevant for attaining a particular purpose. There are many things that are irrelevant to that purpose,

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cf. Kellner 1997: 107, n. 166) he held that the negative concomitance (*vyatireka*) in an inference is determined by a mere non-perception (*adarśanamātra*) of the reason where the inferred property is absent, and he also advocated *anupalabdhi* as a third *pramāṇa* and understood it as the "mere absence of apprehension" (*upalabdhyabhāvamātra*). But the connection between these two assigned views is not entirely clear from the accounts known so far.

66 Or, more precisely according to the *Hetubindu*, as the occurrence of another perception.

67 Dharmakīrti's point that non-perception does not prove a thing's absence, but rather justifies treating it as absent (*asadvyavahāra*), simply means that the absence of a thing no longer needs to be proven when its perception is known to be absent (in a situation where all conditions for its perception are met); cf. Kellner 1999. In the same way, that a Śiṃśapā is a tree is not in need of proof when the Śiṃśapā is seen; it is only corresponding cognitive, linguistic, and physical practice – *vyavahāra* – toward the Śiṃśapā *as a tree* that is then the subject of an inference based on the reason of essential property (*svabhāvahetu*).

68 PV 1.2–3ab=4–5ab (Kellner 2003: 125ff.).

69 PVSV ad PV 1.198=200.

70 PVSV ad PV 1.199=201; PVin 2, p. 62. This continues the discussion of v. 32cd, which begins on the preceding page. Steinkellner 1979: 82, n. 186 regards this to be a rhetorical position because no tradition of Dharmakīrti's time advocated three *pramāṇa*s. This is not entirely true, for the Sāṅkhya advocates precisely these three *pramāṇa*s, as do some Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda thinkers, including Vasubandhu. We are not aware, however, of any Sāṅkhya philosopher to advocate a proof that entities do not exist because none of the three *pramāṇa*s establish them. If our argument that Vasubandhu did pursue such an argument is judged convincing, then Dharmakīrti could here well construe the position he refutes on the basis of Vasubandhu.

and these are simply outside the reach of scripture. If they are not mentioned in it, surely this does not prove they don't exist.

Second, as remote objects lack the capacity to produce a cognition of themselves, they are not of the kind that their effects – cognitions – could be observed as evidence for their existence. One can therefore also not conclude that they do not exist when they are not known by any of the three *pramāṇas*,[71] for they might exist without giving rise to a cognition of themselves. Non-apprehension in general is therefore – strictly speaking[72] – not a *pramāṇa* at all, since it does not result in ascertainment (*niścaya*) or certainty (*vyavasāya*). It can negate treating something as existent, but it does not provide certainty in this regard, only doubt.[73] This means that people can act on its basis – for there can also be action based on doubtful cognitions – but it is still not a *pramāṇa*.[74] In the *Pramāṇaviniścaya*, Dharmakīrti adds another argument that concerns the scope of non-apprehension. A general non-apprehension by all persons cannot establish anything because such a general apprehension is not known to oneself, nor is it known to anyone else. It is only one's own non-apprehension of an object that one knows. Such a non-apprehension may apply to remote objects – I do not apprehend a fire that might be burning behind a mountain – but it is not the case that these then do not exist at all.[75]

Dharmakīrti's description of an argument from ignorance that allegedly proves the non-existence of remote objects seems to coincide with the understanding of the Buddhist argument for no-self implied by Uddyotakara's summary of his refutation of it, which we have quoted above: "Thus, it is found that all three *pramāṇas*" – i.e., perception, inference, and scripture – "establish the existence of the self [...]. Hence, the premise 'because the self is not-apprehended' is absolutely untrue."

The consequences of Dharmakīrti's elimination of arguments from ignorance from his theory of inference remain to be assessed. It does not seem to have affected the perception of Buddhist arguments against the existence of a self greatly, for these continue to be interpreted as arguments from *anupalabdhi* by

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71 PVSV 102,1–12.

72 Kellner 2003: 134.

73 See also NB 2.27 as well as 47–48 (mentioning only perception and inference; Kellner 1999: 195), also VN 5,21–23 and 10,9–20.

74 PVSV ad PV 1.200ab=202ab. For *adṛśyānupalabdhi* as a proper reason in Tibetan interpretations cf. Tillemans 1995; for the argument that Dharmakīrti's two claims (a) unqualified non-apprehension negates treating something as existent and (b) unqualified non-apprehension is not a *pramāṇa* (in the sense of not a proper reason) indicate that Dharmakīrti was working out just what *anupalabdhi* could explain, see Kellner 2003.

75 PVin 2 64,12–14.

later Brahminical writers, e.g., Udayana,[76] Bhaṭṭa Rāmakaṇṭha,[77] and Utpaladeva.[78] Even in later Buddhist texts, e.g., the *Tattvasaṅgraha*, the strategy for arguing against the existence of a self is chiefly to show that there is no evidence, either perceptual or inferential, that establishes it.[79] But Dharmakīrti himself does not argue along these lines. In the scattered passages where he discusses Brahminical arguments for the existence of a self he primarily considers them as illustrations of the violation of various logical principles. The Nyāya argument "This living body is not without a self because [if it were,] it would follow that it would not have breath", e.g., is the kind of fallacy that would be allowed if the *vyatireka* could be established by "mere non-observation."[80] In the course of his rejection of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika attempts to infer the self as the agent of phenomena such as breathing or the substratum of mental states – for being imperceptible, Dharmakīrti points out, one could never establish a causal relationship between the self and other things – he does note that the Buddhist (typically?) denies the self on the grounds that it is unperceived.[81] But Dharmakīrti himself does not adopt such a strategy. Rather, he develops an interesting pragmatic argument in PV 2.220–256: Because a self is necessarily an object of attachment, any belief in a self (even as "pure" and disassociated from body, mind, senses, etc.) will prevent liberation.[82]

With the construction and elaboration of complex systems of *pramāṇa*s, one might expect arguments from ignorance that make use of a *pramāṇa* framework to also increase considerably in complexity. They have to our knowledge not been addressed in any one particular study. This may be because studies on Indian logic have focused on the atomic inference structures which form the core of the theory of *anumāna*, leaving aside patterns and strategies of argumentation that, for reasons that remain to be investigated, were not subsumed under the rubric of a particular *pramāṇa*, or a particular type of reasoning and inference explicitly stipulated within some classification.[83]

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76 ĀTV 739ff. [*Anupalambhavāda*].

77 Watson 2006: 126–130.

78 As explained by Abhinavagupta; cf. Ratié 2011: 45–51.

79 See *Tattvasaṅgraha* 220 (concluding the discussion of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika arguments) and 283–284 (concluding the discussion of the Mīmāṃsā view that the self is the referent of the notion "I").

80 See Eltschinger/Ratié 2013: 117–138.

81 PVSV 16,17–19; see Eltschinger/Ratié 2013: 147–151.

82 See Eltschinger/Ratié 2013: 187ff. Cf. again the opening lines of AKBh IX cited above, n. 38.

83 Hugon's discovery of a pattern of what she calls "argument by parallels" in the works of the Tibetan epistemologist Phya pa Chos kyi seng ge is an example of the rich harvest that a focus on argumentation patterns might yield, also for Indian sources (Hugon 2008).

But is this type of argument a fallacy? Usually, in modern logic textbooks, this kind of argument is considered a fallacy. Its general form has been analyzed as follows: A is not known (proved) to be true (false), therefore A is false (true).[84] Arguments of this type were used to great effect by Senator Joe McCarthy in the Senate Un-American Activities hearings in the early 1950's: "Mr. X is not known not to be a Communist, therefore Mr. X is a Communist." Yet they are also used, legitimately it would seem, in scientific research. When scientists systematically conduct experiments to detect a certain phenomenon – e.g., the *lumeniferous aether* that was once postulated as the medium for the propagation of light – but do not find it, they conclude that it does not exist. It would seem that the *argumentum ad ignorantiam* is a reasonable argument where it functions as a strong *abductive* argument, i.e., an "argument to the best explanation": under certain circumstances, the non-existence of something *provides the best explanation* why there is no evidence for it. In that case, one may be allowed to presume, though not assert, that it does not exist. In such circumstances, one could maintain that the fact that there is no evidence for P is evidence that not-P. Scientists often refer to such absence of evidence as "negative evidence."

Philosophers have also used arguments from ignorance convincingly, e.g., to claim that God does not exist.[85] We also often employ such arguments in commonsense reasoning, e.g., to assert that there are no ghosts, no UFO's, no Santa Claus, etc. But whether such arguments are regarded as convincing depends on whether there are agreed-upon standards of verification. It is very difficult to know what would count as good evidence for or against the existence of such things as UFOs, whereas the affirmation or denial of *lumeniferous aether* relies on established scientific methods. The argument that UFOs do not exist because we do not know or observe them to exist may be fallacious simply because UFOs raise specific problems regarding the nature of evidence and verification.[86] Not only in the case of UFOs, but more generally, debates about arguments from ignorance typically come to focus on the question just what it is that could count as evidence for the existence of objects – after all, one might believe that there is no evidence for something simply because one was looking for the wrong kind of

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84 Walton 1999: 368.

85 See Flew 1955. In this classic article Flew argues that unless the falsification of some factual statement counts decisively against the existence of God, then the hypothesis "God exists" loses all meaning. Theists may always come up with some explanation why there is, in a given instance, no evidence of God when it would be expected, but then the hypothesis undergoes "death by a thousand qualifications." This appeals implicitly to an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*: unless one accepts that the absence of evidence establishes that God does not exist, one's belief in God is without any content.

86 Walton 1999: 368f.

evidence, or because one failed to consider something as evidence that should be counted as such. Clearly, when Vātsyāyana or Dharmakīrti introduce restrictions to the effect that non-apprehension proves the absence of something only if the thing in question *would have to be* be apprehended were it to exist, they effectively aim to narrow down conditions for what counts as evidence for existence. The upshot of Dharmakīrti's train of thought, however, seems to be that arguments from ignorance can never be convincing because the only kind of evidence for existence, perception, can be lacking only temporarily.

In the next section, then, we shall offer our new reading of the *Viṃśikā*, and in the process also bring out parallels between *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX and the *Viṃśikā*. We believe that this will show that Vasubandhu is arguing along the same lines in both works, by means of an argument from ignorance, against the existence of a self in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, and against the existence of objects outside of consciousness in the *Viṃśikā*.

6 A new reading of the *Viṃśikā*

In spite of its importance and availability in modern translations the *Viṃśikā* has been a relatively neglected text. There exist a few studies of it, to be sure, which mainly focus on vv. 11–15, seen as presenting Vasubandhu's core arguments.[87] Only Kochumuttom's study attempts to analyze the entire text in depth.[88] There seems to be a tendency on the part of scholars to assume that one knows what it means. Yet the text contains many subtleties that have never been noticed, let alone discussed. We, too, cannot offer a complete, in-depth analysis of the text, but we hope, at the very least, to reawaken an interest in it by calling attention to some of its overlooked nuances.

The *Viṃśikā* begins with the assertion, "In Mahāyāna it is established that the world consisting of the three realms is mere cognition (*vijñaptimātra*)", followed by a citation from the *Daśabhūmikasūtra*: "Oh Sons of the Conqueror, mere mind (*cittamātra*) is this world consisting of the three realms indeed."[89] Although

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87 The most in-depth studies of this type are Kapstein 1988 and Oetke 1992. According to Frauwallner (2010: 385) vv. 11–15 comprise "the actual centerpiece of the presentation [...] Vasubandhu's own proof of the unreality of the external world."

88 Kochumuttom 1982: 164–196. Cf. also Schmithausen 1967. Though amazingly rich, this study is from the point of view of a rather specific *Problemstellung*. For other studies, which also include translations, see Lévi 1932, Frauwallner 2010: 381–411, and Wood 1991: 93–105, 163–170.

89 VśV 3,2f.: *mahāyāne traidhātukaṃ vijñaptimātraṃ vyavasthāpyate. cittamātraṃ bho jinaputrā yad uta traidhātukam iti sūtrāt*. See Lévi 1932: 43, n. 1, for sources of the quotation. Cf.

the term *vijñapti* can be used both for an epistemic act or event – a cognition that makes something conscious or brings it to mind – as well as for the content of that cognition (what Hayes and Hall refer to as "percept" or "phenomenon"), Vasubandhu seems to lean towards the event-aspect in the *Viṃśikā*, for he states right after this citation that the word *citta* which is used in it is synonymous with *manas*, *vijñāna*, and *vijñapti*.[90] The word *mātra*, "mere" or "only", is "for the purpose of denying an object" (*arthapratiṣedhārtham*). We then have the following verse in the Lévi edition:

> This is mere cognition indeed (*eva*), because of the appearance of non-existent objects, like the seeing of non-existent hairs by someone afflicted by floaters.[91]

Independently of each other, Harada Wasō and Jürgen Hanneder convincingly argued that this verse, which is missing from the Tibetan translations and from Xuanzang's Chinese translation but corresponds to prose passages in both, may actually have been fashioned from a prose statement of the *Vṛtti* when a *kārikā*-only text was composed,[92] for on that occasion it would have become obvious that otherwise the work would abruptly begin with an objection (as stated by the second verse of Lévi's edition). In other words, what is now the *second* verse of Lévi's edition might originally have been the first verse, and what is now the *first*

Daśabhūmikasūtra 49,10: *cittamātram idaṃ yad idaṃ traidhātukam*. Schmithausen 1973: 172f. discusses this passage in connection with the development of the *vijñaptimātratā* doctrine.

90 Schmithausen 2007: 213, n. 2 suggests the translation "representation", which was also adopted in Yamabe 1998 (without discussion). In Schmithausen's view, "representation" is not only noncomittal as regards the act-/event- or content-distinction, but it also has the advantage of not precluding subconscious mental processes and their contents that are also at times intended by *vijñapti*. But as Hall (1986: 14; see above p. 712) also pointed out, "representation" risks being associated, in philosophical contexts, with the position of representationalism that assumes mental states to be (or contain) representations of an independent, external reality. This is not a position to which Vasubandhu subscribes in the *Viṃśikā*. Moreover, there is no occurrence of *vijñapti* in Vś(V) which unambiguously refers to cognitive content; most occurrences unmistakably refer to cognitive acts or events, and subconscious mental processes and their contents are not topical in the Vś(V). We therefore translate "cognition." This forces us to translate *vijñāna*, *jñāna*, *buddhi*, and *vijñapti* with the same word, but in the *Viṃśikā* they indeed seem to express the same concept.

91 v. 1: *vijñaptimātram evedam asadarthāvabhāsanāt / yadvat taimirakasyāsatkeśoṇḍukādidarśanam* // This is the text according to the Nepalese *kārikā* manuscript Vś-ms-A 3a5. For variant readings cf. the overview in Hanneder 2007: 213, and also the earlier discussions in Funahashi 1986 and Harada 2003. For the identification of the *timira* disease as floaters (or *muscae volitantes*) see Chu 2004: 131, n. 67 (reporting an idea by Anne Macdonald).

92 Harada 2003, Hanneder 2007.

verse of Lévi's edition might have been fashioned out of a sentence (or a couple of sentences) of the introductory portion of the commentary.[93]

Be all that as it may, whether this first statement was originally a stand-alone verse or, in somewhat different wording, part of the commentary, it does not appear that it intends to present a formal *anumāna* that would establish the character of "this" as "mere cognition" by citing a *hetu* that consists in some property that is invariably connected with being "mere cognition", as proper *anumāna*s should.[94] Rather, it simply mentions another fact in support of the claim that "this" is mere cognition, namely, that we sometimes have cognitions of objects that do not exist. The idea seems to be – given the lack of information provided by the text, we have to speculate – that all of our cognitions are structurally indistinguishable from ones in which were are presented with non-existent objects. Therefore, we are justified in regarding *all* cognition in the same way, as mere cognition without an object. Now, since this is so weak an argument as not to be considered really an argument at all, it seems most appropriate to interpret this initial statement not as any kind of proof, but rather simply as a statement of the *thesis* to be proved in the treatise to follow, together with a *prima facie* rationale

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93 Corresponding to *rnam par śes pa 'di ñid don du snaṅ ba 'byuṅ ste / dper na rab rib can rnams kyis skra zla la sogs pa med par mthoṅ ba bzin te* / in the Tibetan translation (quoted after La Vallée Poussin 1912: 54).

94 Responding to arguments along these lines presented in Taber 1994, Kobayashi 2011 provides an interpretation of this verse where it presents a formal *anumāna*. He achieves this by construing the reason in a way that it is a property of the subject and thus fulfils the *pakṣadharmatā* condition ("because [this world] appears as an unreal object", not the more intuitive "because unreal objects appear"), and by interpreting *-darśana* in the example not as the act of seeing, but (by way of *karmavyutpatti*) as what is seen ("just like what is seen by one who suffers from an eye disease, such as an unreal hair-net"). But while these interpretive moves do achieve a formal *anumāna*, they do not provide the most straightforward reading of the verse. Moreover, by adjusting the translation of the verse in this way, Kobayashi is able to argue that it was the "prototype" for an *anumāna* that was cited by Brahminical and Madhyamaka philosophers in attacking the mere-cognition doctrine and also defended by later Buddhist *pramāṇa* philosophers (e.g., Jñānaśrīmitra and Prajñākaragupta), namely (in Prajñākara's formulation): "All cognitions [in waking states] have no external objects, because they are cognitions, just like a dream cognition" (Kobayashi 2011: 299; he discusses other formulations in the article). Assimilating Vasubandhu's argument to this *anumāna*, however, makes it prey to obvious, *prima facie* formal objections, such as were raised by the first Brahminical philosophers in critiquing the *anumāna* (Uddyotakara and Kumārila; see Taber 1994), without any indication of how they are to be answered. Thus we also feel that Kobayashi in the end proposes a less charitable reading of the *Viṃśikā* than ours.

for it. The actual proof of the thesis, as we shall see, will be of a much less direct nature.[95]

But is the *Viṃśikā* even intended to *establish* this thesis, or is it simply a *defense* of it against objections? Frauwallner seems to have taken it as the former,[96] but an influential interpretation of the text sees it as the latter. Thus, S. Lévi:

> Le premier traité, en vingt vers (Viṁśikā ou Viṁśatikā), est une sorte d'introduction au système, plutôt critique que constructive. Vasubandhu, avant d'exposer en détail sa propre doctrine de l'idéalisme absolu, s'attache à réfuter les objections de principe qu'on peut lui opposer à l'intérieur de l'église bouddhique elle-même; puis il s'attaque à la théorie atomique des Vaiśeṣikas, l'interprétation physique de l'univers la plus puissante que le génie hindou ait élaborée, et qui s'était insinuée dans le bouddhisme, jusque chez ces Vaibhāṣikas du Cachemire que Vasubandhu avait longtemps suivis avec sympathie. Sa critique de l'atome, où s'affirme la vigueur de sa dialectique, est restée classique pendant des siècles. L'atome mis hors de cause, ce n'est plus qu'un jeu pour lui de montrer les insuffisances de la thèse matérialiste en général, tandis que les données en apparence les plus réfractaires à la thèse idéaliste, la mémoire, le rêve, la mort, s'intègrent sans difficulté dans ce système.[97]

And D. Shimaji notes, in his "Historique du système *vijñaptimātra*", contained in the same volume, that the second patriarch of the Chinese *vijñaptimātratā* school, Hui Zhao, calls, in his commentary on the *Cheng weishi lun*, the *Viṃśikā* "the treatise demolishing the mountain of heresy" and the *Triṃśikā* "the treatise raising

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95 Cf. other recent attempts to construe the first verse as a valid syllogism by Feldman 2005 and Mills 2013: chapter 2. Mills, building on Feldman's formulation, argues that the verse presents a stronger argument if it is taken as an argument for phenomenalism rather than idealism. One could, for instance, see it as anticipating A. J. Ayer's famous Argument from Illusion for sense data (this, however, is not how Mills analyzes it): Because it is (allegedly) always possible that I am experiencing a hallucination or illusion, whenever I perceive something, it remains an open question whether I am perceiving an existing physical object or not. Therefore, what I am perceiving whenever I perceive something is something other than a physical object – a sense datum (cf. Ayer 1956: 104–115). The purpose of the discussion of Vś 2–7, then, would be to show that it is indeed possible that the experiences I am having could be hallucinations or illusions, i.e., uncaused by external objects. (Therefore, once again, even assuming that they are caused by physical objects, we are not experiencing physical objects directly, but rather "sense data.") We do not think there is any consideration that decisively rules out a phenomenalistic interpretation of the verse if it is considered in isolation, but our point is that an idealist interpretation makes better sense considering the *Viṃśikā* as a whole.

96 Frauwallner 2010: 381: "I now move on to the discussion of the *Viṃśatikā Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*. The doctrine of the unreality of the external world originally emerged directly from the experience of meditation. As proof, one was content to point to dreams, sensory illusions, mirages, and so forth. Accordingly, Vasubandhu begins [v. 1] by stating the tenet with a reference to the sacred scripture and by referring to these examples."

97 Lévi 1932: 7.

the banner of the Dharma."[98] We consider this a plausible reading of the text as far as it goes,[99] which is not inconsistent with ours and which does justice, in particular, to the wealth of references to Buddhist theories and concepts that it contains. Certainly, the *Viṃśikā* is not a purely philosophical treatise that can be completely taken out of its religious context. However, we believe that, in light of the understanding of the argumentative structure that we are about to work out, the text can also be seen as taking a much stronger dialectical stand – namely, it is an attempt to establish the thesis of *vijñaptimātratā*, not merely to defend it against objections – which was probably not lost on its readers, both within and outside the Buddhist community.

The second verse, then, immediately expresses an objection to this thesis, which we now paraphrase with the help of the autocommentary: If cognition does not arise from the object (*vijñaptir yadi nārthataḥ*), then how is there a "restriction" (*niyama*) of cognitions to certain times and places? How is there "a non-restriction of the [cognition] series" (*santānasyāniyamaḥ*), that is to say, how is it that some cognitions arise for "everyone situated in those times and places" (*taddeśakālapratiṣṭhitānāṃ sarveṣām*)? Finally, why do things like food or drink experienced in waking cognitions produce the effects that can be expected of them (*kṛtyakriyā*),[100] whereas the same objects do not produce these effects when we experience them in dreams? None of these facts about our experience seems possible if we were not cognizing physical objects, which indeed are the sorts of things that would be restricted to certain times and places, yet which would be intersubjectively available to all who are present at those times and places and would produce real effects, unlike dream images.

In the famous passage that follows (vv. 3–7) Vasubandhu explains away these facts about our experience by appealing to the phenomena of dreams and the experiences in the hells that Buddhist doctrine envisions. In dreams, he notes, one sees things that appear to be confined to particular times and places, without an external object (v. 3ab'); in other words, dreams are just as spatially and temporally specific as waking experiences. Due to the same maturation of their deeds, the spirits of the dead (*preta*), plagued by hunger and thirst, all see rivers of water as filled with pus and excrement, overseen by frightening guardians (v. 3b'd). Moreover, in dreams we also experience the effects of the things we see – he cites the example of a nocturnal pollution (v. 4ab'). But it is by experiences

98 Lévi 1932: 16.

99 It does overlook the last verse of the text, in which Vasubandhu says, "This *establishing* of mere-cognition has been carried out by me according to my abilities", *vijñaptimātratāsiddhiḥ svaśaktisadṛśī mayā / kṛteyam*, v. 22ac'.

100 More literally: "production of what is to be produced."

in the hells that all the phenomena which the opponent raises as problems are exemplified (v. 4b'c'). The guardians in the hells, along with horrible birds and dogs and moving mountains of iron, are seen in certain places at certain times – and they are seen by all living beings reborn in the hells, not just by a single one. And these guardians inflict pain on the denizens of the hells, and hence produce effects (v. 4c'd). Yet none of these things, the rivers of pus, the guardians, and the other awful creatures of hell, really exist, but they are experienced by the denizens of hell in these particular ways "due to the influence of the same ripening of the[ir individual] deeds" (*samānakarmavipākādhipatya*). Thus, it is possible for "this" world, too, to consist of objects that are restricted in regard to time and place, intersubjectively available, and causally efficacious, and yet also be "mere cognition."

There are many things about this first section of the text, consisting of vv. 1–7, that merit discussion. One of the most interesting aspects of the passage for our purposes is how Vasubandhu approaches the existence of the hell guardians. Some Buddhist schools such as the Mahāsāṅghikas and Sāṃmitīyas believed these to be real living beings.[101] But, as Vasubandhu argues at first, taking on the position of the Sarvāstivāda school, just like the horrible dogs and birds that appear to the hell denizens, the hell guardians cannot be living beings because they do not experience the pain that living beings reborn in the hells inevitably feel.[102] Rather, the past deeds of the hell denizens, when they come to fruition, give rise to[103] particular forms of matter (*bhūtaviśeṣa*) that undergo a transformation (*pariṇāma*), also under the influence of the denizens' *karman*, and as a result appear as making threatening gestures. The same mechanism also explains the moving mountains and other forms of frightening movement seen in the hells.

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101 For different positions on the hell guardians see AKBh 164,11–19 ad AK 3.58. Doctrinal positions are listed in La Vallée Poussin 1926: 152, n. 3, on the basis of the *Vibhāṣā* and a commentary on the *Viṃśikā*, most likely Kuiji's commentary on Xuanzang's translation that was also used in Hamilton 1938. Cf. also Lévi 1932: 47, n. 1, Frauwallner 2010: 383.

102 VśV 4,18–24 (with further arguments).

103 The Sanskrit at VśV 5,1 reads *nārakāṇāṃ karmabhis tatra bhūtaviśeṣāḥ sambhavanti*. The phrase is later taken up in v. 6: *yadi tatkarmabhis tatra bhūtānāṃ sambhavaḥ* ... According to Frauwallner's summary (2010: 383), the Sarvāstivādins assume that the hell guardians are not sentient beings, but material formations. The *karman* of the hell denizens then makes these formations appear as guardians. The text, however, rather suggests that the *karman* actually produces these formations and thus interferes in material causality; it does not just distort the cognition of hell denizens. In AKBh 164,14f., what is arguably the same Sarvāstivāda view is presented as *sattvānāṃ karmabhir* (sc. *narakapālāḥ*) *vivartanīvāyubījavat* (or, with AKVy 327,3f., *vāyuvat*): the hell guardians arise from the *karman* of living beings, just like the winds – also driven by *karman* – move to create the receptacle world.

Hence, it is not true that hell guardians and other forms of moving matter do not arise (*sambhavanti*) at all; it is only that they arise through the ripened *karman* of those living beings that experience them (VśV v. 5). Vasubandhu next criticizes this (Sarvāstivāda) position: If it is assumed that the hell guardians arise in the hells through the force of *karman*, why not simply grant that cognition itself transforms in such a way, that is, into images of hell guardians? Why assume that material elements are being produced? (v. 6) In other words, one might just as well opt for a wholly mind-based explanation; nothing forces us to stipulate a causal influence of mind (mental traces of *karman*) on matter. Surely, with this argument Vasubandhu is not merely *bracketing* the physical existence of hell guardians; he flatly denies it, for the same reason that we would argue he denies external, physical objects of cognition: there is no evidence for them.

Taken together, the first section of the Vś (vv. 1–7) has on our interpretation for its main point to show that nothing requires us to postulate external objects in order to account for certain facts about our experience. The non-existence of physical objects is on our interpretation implied by some of Vasubandhu's arguments – notably, the analogy with the hells – but it is subservient to the larger issue that reason cannot establish the existence of physical objects. For any proof of physical objects would demand that there is evidence for their existence – and this evidence would be all the more convincing if it made their existence necessary, if it could not be explained otherwise with equal cogency. The kind of reasoning which would serve Vasubandhu best if he really wanted to deny the existence of external objects – short of *conclusively* proving that they are impossible[104] – is, in other words, of the nature of (non-deductive) inference to the best explanation for the *lack* of evidence for their existence, and not deductive inference. But we saw precisely this kind of reasoning at work in AKBh IX. The strategy of this section of the *Viṃśikā* is in fact identical to the strategy of the last part of AKBh IX (472,16–478,13, discussed above p. 724), where Vasubandhu shows that there are no reasons to postulate a self. Similarly, in *Viṃśikā* vv. 1–7, the main point is arguably that there are no reasons to postulate external objects of perception, as a number of facts that are usually explained by them can also be accounted for through mere-cognition. Thus, one may see this part of the text as the first stage of an argument from ignorance; namely, none of the three accepted *pramāṇa*s, inference, scripture, or perception, attests to the existence of such objects, therefore they do not exist and all "this" is mere cognition.

The first section ends with a question: Why would one suppose that the impressions (*vāsanā*) of *karman* exist in one place, namely, in the cognition series of

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104 Which Vasubandhu probably thought could not be done. See p. 743, below.

the agent of the *karman*, and its fruit in another, namely, in a place called hell? Why would one not suppose that the fruition of *karman* occurs where the *vāsanā* is located, i.e., in the mind itself (v. 7)? To this question, which puts forward yet another argument against the Sarvāstivāda account of the hell guardians, Vasubandhu has his interlocutor answer:

> Scripture is the reason. If mere cognition had the appearance of visible form, etc., then there would be no visible form, and so forth, as object. [And] then the Blessed One would not have declared the existence of the *āyatana*s visible form, etc.[105]

In other words, it is the Buddha's teaching of the *āyatana*s or sense-spheres, which includes the sense-faculties and their objects, that establishes the existence of physical objects, including the guardians of hell, outside the series of mental cognitions, i.e., outside the mind. It is the word of the Buddha, scripture, that essentially provides evidence for the existence of objects.

In the following verses, vv. 8–15, Vasubandhu sets aside this objection, and hence also the idea that scripture provides evidence for the existence of objects. This would, then, be the second stage of his argument from ignorance. The Buddha did not affirm the existence of the *āyatana*s as his final position, Vasubandhu maintains. Rather, he mentioned them "on account of an intention (*abhiprāya*) concerning the people to be instructed by that [teaching]." (v. 8bc) What was his intention? To show that there is no self but just factors (*dharma*) and their causes, in a word, to demonstrate that the person is without essence (*pudgalanairātmya*, v. 10ab'). Specifically, all cognitions involve the appearance (*ābhāsa*) of a certain form "due to a seed which has attained a particular transformation" (*svabījāt pariṇāmaviśeṣaprāptāt*) within the mental series itself.[106] That seed and that appearance are referred to as the sense-faculty and the object, respectively (v. 9). Ultimately, however, the Buddha will teach that the factors themselves are without essence (*dharmanairātmya*): there really aren't any *dharma*s that have the nature of visible form, etc. And that is to be accomplished by the teaching that all is "mere cognition." (v. 10b')

How does one know that the Buddha "taught the sense-spheres with this intention, and that these things which are individually the objects of vision, etc., do not exist?" Here, in vv. 11–15, Vasubandhu develops his famous proof of the impossibility of physical objects of perception. As this passage has already been analyzed by several scholars, and their disagreements do not affect our main

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105 VśV 5,15–17.

106 For the nuances of the concept of "transformation" (*pariṇāma*) in the Vś(V) see Schmithausen 1967: 115.

line of interpretation, it is not necessary for us to go into details here.[107] Suffice it to say that in v. 11 Vasubandhu gives what would appear to be an exhaustive enumeration of all the ways in which physical objects might exist and rejects each one of them. The *āyatana* which serves as the object (*viṣaya*) cannot be "one", i.e., the whole of the Vaiśeṣika. Nor can it be "many according to atoms" (*anekam* [...] *paramāṇuśaḥ*), i.e., many atoms, each of which is perceived individually. Nor, finally, can it be "aggregated" (*saṃhatāḥ*) atoms (v. 11). He then proceeds, in the following verses, to show why each of these positions is untenable.

After demolishing the idea that the object is "one", i.e., an undivided whole, in v. 15, Vasubandhu concludes that a division into atoms is necessary (VśV 8,18–20); yet he has already shown (v. 12ab, 14ab) that the notion of an atom "as a single substance" is not established (VśV 7,1–2). Having thus exhausted the last hope of making sense of an object of cognition, Vasubandhu concludes, in his autocommentary to v. 15:

> That [single atom] not being established, it is not established that visible form, etc., are objects of vision, etc. And so (*iti*) it results (*bhavati*) that mere cognition is established.

It would appear from this statement that Vasubandhu thinks that the argument of the *āyatana* section against the possibility of objects indeed establishes that there are no physical objects, hence that "this" world is mere cognition. Once again, while the advocate of the phenomenalist interpretation could point out that one need only take the passage to be arguing that there are no "material bodies" or "concrete particulars" *that we are directly experiencing* (cf. Oetke 1992), we are proposing, for now, *as a hypothesis* that it is arguing that such objects do not exist. In the end, we believe that this hypothesis makes better sense of the *Viṃśikā* overall.

Yet Vasubandhu now has his interlocutor object (VśV 8,21–23):

> Whether something exists or not is ascertained on account of the *pramāṇa*s. Since perception is the most authoritative of the *pramāṇa*s, if the object does not exist, how does the cognition arise that something was perceived?

We interpret the meaning of this interesting transitional passage between what we take to be the second and third sections of the treatise in the following way. As announced in v. 8, the section up to v. 15 refutes the idea that scripture offers evidence for objects, by pointing out that the Buddha's mention of the sense-spheres is to be understood in such a way that these do not exist as external and physical

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107 See especially Kapstein 1988 and Oetke 1992 for precise reconstructions of this section.

objects. The arguments in vv. 11–15 undermine scripture as evidence for objects in essentially the same way Vasubandhu's arguments against the *pudgala* in his AKBh IX undermine the idea that there is scriptural evidence for the existence of a self, namely, by showing that the Buddha could not have taught such a thing because however one conceives of it, it is absurd.[108]

But Vasubandhu now points out that the evidence of perception, which has greater weight than that of the other *pramāṇa*s, including inference treated in vv. 1–7, seems to establish the existence of objects directly. Therefore, any attempted demonstration of the impossibility of objects will be inconclusive and trumped by perception. If the preceding section had the "proof" of the non-existence of an external world for its main purpose, that would make the entire rest of the treatise superfluous. In fact, it is in this short transitional statement where Vasubandhu enunciates the principle that we believe governs his entire discussion, namely, "Whether something exists or not is ascertained on account of *pramāṇa*s."[109] That is to say, something exists if at least one of the *pramāṇa*s can provide evidence for it; something does not exist if no *pramāṇa* provides evidence for it. Only after one has shown that none of the *pramāṇa*s – inference, scripture, or perception – provides evidence for the existence of objects can we safely conclude that there are none.[110]

Now Vasubandhu turns to perception, to show that it, too, really doesn't provide any evidence for the existence of objects. Notice that Vasubandhu is proceeding in the opposite order from AKBh IX. There, after first summarily dismissing perception, he proceeds to show that there is no scriptural evidence for a self, and then demonstrates that there is no inferential evidence for one, either. Here, he first deals with the alleged inferential evidence for objects, then with scripture, and now finally with perception. Moreover, when it comes to the self he invests far more effort in rejecting scriptural evidence than with respect to external objects. This difference in procedure may have something to do with the fact that, when it comes to the existence of a self, it was scriptural evidence that was of paramount importance for the Buddhists; for there was a large and influential group of Buddhists who thought that the existence of a *pudgala* was sanctioned

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108 See above, pp. 721–722.

109 Again, Vātsyāyana expresses the same principle in NBh ad NS 2.2.18 see above p. 728.

110 To put the point yet another way: The attempt to prove the impossibility of external objects in vv. 11–15, while sufficient to raise questions about whether the Buddha intended his references to *āyatana*s literally, is not strong enough by itself to overcome other evidence of their existence, especially that provided by perception. It is, in the final analysis, the absence of any evidence at all for the existence of something that is, for Vasubandhu, the most persuasive consideration in support of its non-existence.

by the Buddha himself. Therefore, scriptural evidence needed to be addressed more extensively, and prior to reason. When it came to the existence of an external world, on the other hand, the relative importance of the evidence may have seemed different to Vasubandhu. Buddhist scripture, meanwhile, does not make very many clear pronouncements about the existence or non-existence of an external world, compared to the scriptural statements that refer to persons. Indeed, it is rational objections that first come to mind when someone suggests that we are not really experiencing objects: How, then, do you explain the impression that our experience is not self-generated, but dependent on factors outside us, or that specific experiences are restricted to certain places and certain times, etc.? For these reasons, one may speculate, in the *Viṃśikā* it is the evidence of reason that Vasubandhu tackles first, then scripture, then perception. Long-standing habits of argumentation within Buddhist doctrinal literature may also have played a role, since examining doctrine through reasoning and scripture, *yukti* and *āgama*, was a well-established method, whereas the *pramāṇa*s – including perception – were by comparison a more recently developed conceptual framework.

The evidence that perception might offer for external objects is its mere occurrence, as it is subsequently known: if one knows that one just perceived something, surely this would be evidence for the existence of a perceived object. So how is then the cognition that an object was perceived possible without the existence of an object?[111] In v. 16 Vasubandhu declares that this cognition indeed arises in the same way as dream cognitions. Moreover, the idea "this object was perceived by me" (*idaṃ me pratyakṣam*) arises at a time when no external object is seen, for it is presented by a mental cognition (*manovijñāna*) which occurs after the sensory cognition has already disappeared – and this time-gap becomes even more pertinent if it is assumed that an alleged external object would be momentary, as this object would then already have disappeared at the time of its perception. Nor does memory establish a previous experience of the object remembered, according to the principle that one can only remember something one has previously experienced; for Vasubandhu has shown in the course of his discussion (in the *āyatana* section) that a cognition can arise possessing the appearance of an object even in the absence of an external object. That kind of cognition can serve

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111 VśV 8,23f.: *asaty arthe katham iyaṃ buddhir bhavati pratyakṣam iti*. In line with Vasubandhu's following account of *pratyakṣabuddhi* we take this concept to refer specifically to a cognition about an (immediately) past perception, whose content is given as *idaṃ me pratyakṣam iti* at VśV 8,29. This could be taken as "this [was] my perception" or "this [was] perceived by me" (or, more literally: "this [was] perceptually evident for me"). We take it in the latter sense because the discussion is primarily about perceived objects, but our main line of argument could also be maintained if *pratyakṣam* is taken to refer to perceptual cognition instead.

as the basis of a later memory *as if* of a previous experience of an external object (v. 17ab).

Through v. 21 Vasubandhu deals with a final series of altogether five objections, voiced as critical questions.[112] The first (VśV 9,8–10) concerns the analogy of ordinary experience to dreams. If we are experiencing objects as in a dream, why don't we realize their non-existence on our own, as we do for dreams? But, he responds, as long as one does not wake up one does not comprehend the non-existence of what one is experiencing (v. 17cd). In the same way, when one becomes awakened (*prabuddha*) by attaining the highest non-conceptual or transconceptual cognition (*nirvikalpakajñāna*), one then realizes the absence of objects through the "pure mundane insight" (*śuddhalaukikajñāna*) that follows after transconceptual cognition (VśV 9,14–16).[113] We note here in passing that this objection and the response to it, as well as the others to follow, are *prima facie* very difficult to reconcile with a phenomenalist interpretation of the *Viṃśikā*.

The second objection (VśV 9,16–19) attaches to the restriction of cognitions according to time and place solely due to a specific transformation of one's own mental series (*svasantānapariṇāmaviśeṣa*), to which Vasubandhu has alluded in v. 9. How can there then be any distinction of cognitions due to such causes as the association with sinful or virtuous people, or the instruction in true or false teachings, if indeed neither such association nor such instruction exist? Vasubandhu responds (v. 18ab): Such distinctions occur because different mental series influence each other (*anyonyādhipatitva*), that is, causally affect each other. A specific cognition belonging to one series then arises from a specific cognition belonging to another series – a virtuous person or a sinful person, a true or a false teacher – not from an external object. Third, if both waking and dreaming cognitions are without external objects, why does wholesome or unwholesome conduct not bring about the same effect for those who are asleep and those who are awake? (VśV 9,23–25) Answer: In a dream, the mind is afflicted by torpor (*middha*), hence the difference from a waking cognition (v. 18cd). Fourth, if all "this" is indeed mere cognition, there is neither body nor speech. Why, then, do sheep die when killed by slaughterers? Or if their death is indeed not caused by the slaughterer, how can the slaughterer then be subject to the fault of taking life (*prāṇātipāta*)? (VśV 9,23–10,2). Here, too, Vasubandhu invokes influence by another person's cognition (vv.19–20): the death of the sheep is due to a specific cognition in another mental series (the slaughterer) which results in an obstruction of the vital

112 Frauwallner, on the other hand, takes this section to begin already with v. 16 (2010: 388), after the "real" argument against the external world in vv. 11–15.

113 See Schmithausen 2005: 54ff. for pertinent further remarks on how this "subsequent insight" was understood in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda.

faculty (*jīvitendriya*), causing the sheep's mental series to cease reproducing itself. Vasubandhu supports this idea – a fully mind-based account of karmic efficacy and human life – by pointing to the example of how a demon's mental powers might cause a person to lose their memory or be possessed. Another example is drawn from Buddhist scripture, from the *Upālisūtra*,[114] where the Buddha claims – against the Jainas – that acts of violence (*daṇḍa*) by force of the mind entail more serious offences than those carried out by force of body and speech. In supporting his claim, the Buddha recalls how *ṛṣi*s or other holy men enraged by kings destroy large areas through rain of stones and fire, solely by force of their thoughts, thus killing many living beings. Surely, the example works only if the destruction is indeed mentally caused, and not brought about through some other kind of cause. Hence these examples lend scriptural support to the claim that cognitions, mental acts, can result in the taking of life, which, though not a physical matter, is nevertheless real in terms of having actual karmic consequences.

The fifth and last objection asks whether, if "this" is only mere-cognition, one can know other minds (VśV 10,19–21) – the Chinese translations supply a rationale behind this question, absent from the Sanskrit and Tibetan versions: if one can indeed know other minds, then this would invalidate the doctrine of mere-cognition.[115] The underlying assumption seems to be that this would be a case where a cognition knows something external to itself (or existing independently of the mental series to which it belongs), and that this is in contradiction with mere-cognition. Vasubandhu declares in his reply that knowledge of other minds does not truly apprehend them as they are, just like knowledge of one's own mind does not apprehend it as it really is – in its true inexpressible nature, which can solely be known by Buddhas; for ordinary knowledge has not yet abandoned the subject-object-dichotomy (v. 21).

Vasubandhu does not deny that this is indeed a case where a cognition knows something "external", but merely points out that this knowledge is not *real* knowledge, as far as ordinary people are concerned. This suggests that as far as different mental series are concerned, the idea that something external (a mental event of series A) causes a cognition (in mental series B) having that cause's image is acceptable. What would make this account, which in general form would later become identified as a Sautrāntika position, unacceptable for external *physical* objects is that we have no evidence for their existence, given the arguments Vasubandhu adduced before. Interpreted in this way, in fact, the response to the

114 Frauwallner 2010: 391.

115 Yamabe 1998: 27, n. 26.

objection on other minds would lend additional support to the view that the *Viṃśikā* is not just about denying the cognition of *external* reality, but more specifically about denying the existence of physical objects of experience.[116]

This declaration leads over to the concluding verse 22:

> This establishing of mere-cognition has been carried out by me, according to my abilities. But this [mere-cognition] is not conceivable in all its aspects; it is the domain of the Buddha.

As he explains in the commentary, mere-cognition cannot be conceived (*cintya*) in all of its aspects by people like himself, "for it is not an object of reasoning" (*tarkāviṣayatvāt*) – of the kind of reasoning called *tarka* which in many Buddhist sources is associated with limited cognitive faculties, often characteristic of Tīrthikas, of non-Buddhist "outsiders" (*bāhyaka*). The true nature of reality is ultimately inaccessible to such reasoning.[117] In the *Triṃśikā*, Vasubandhu states (vv. 26–28):

> As long as cognition does not abide in mere-cognition the burden of the duality of apprehension does not cease.
>
> For even through the apprehension, "[All] this is mere cognition", one does not abide in that [cognition] alone, because one [still] places something before oneself.
>
> If, on the other hand, cognition does not apprehend an object-support, then it stands firm in being mere cognition because, due to the absence of that [object] which is grasped, there is [also] no grasping of that [cognition which would grasp the object].[118]

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116 Yamabe (1998: 30) thinks that *ayathārtham* (for "knows wrongly") implies that an object (*artha*) exists, i.e. the other person"s mind, and that hence the existence of different mental series is presupposed. We agree with Yamabe's conclusion, although the expression *ayathārtham* can just as well be used idiomatically, without implying the existence of the other mind as an *artha*. Cf. further Yamabe for how the *Cheng weishi lun*, relying on an *ālayavijñāna*, explains the knowledge of other minds.

117 See the discussion in Krasser 2004, occasioned by Dignāga's statement in the closing verses to his *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* that the *dharma* is not the object of *tarka*. On p. 138f., Krasser lists several passages from different genres of Buddhist literature – the *Dīvyāvadāna* as well as Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda works such as the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* or the *Mahāyānasaṅgraha* – that state the *dharma* (or *mahāyāna*) to be outside the scope of *tarka*, on account of its being deep and unfathomable. In its function, Dignāga's closing statement to the *Pramāṇasamuccayavṛtti* is comparable to Vasubandhu's closing verse of the Vś. Both signal a soteriological limitation of the methods of reasoning they applied in their respective works, in what could be taken as an apologetic gesture.

118 Trś 26–28: *yāvad vijñaptimātratve vijñānaṃ nāvatiṣṭhati / grāhadvayasyānuśayas tāvan na vinivartate // vijñaptimātram evedam ity api hy upalambhataḥ / sthāpayann agrataḥ kiñcit tanmātre nāvatiṣṭhate // yadā tv ālambanaṃ vijñānaṃ naivopalabhate tadā / sthitaṃ vijñānamātratve grāhyābhāve tadagrahāt //.*

The final argument is reminiscent of a pattern of realization comprising several stages that can be traced in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda works ascribed to Asaṅga or Maitreya, and also in Vasubandhu's own *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*:[119] There is an initial apprehension of mere-cognition, still tainted by duality. Realizing that when cognition does not apprehend external objects, it is also not something which apprehends – a *grāhaka* – a deeper insight arises which Vasubandhu in the *Triṃśikā* identifies as cognition "standing firm in being mere cognition." As he clarifies in *Triṃśikā* v. 25, this state for him amounts to the realization of suchness, or *tathatā*. The *Triṃśikā* thereby suggests that there are different stages in the (meditative) realization of the *vijñaptimātratā*, an initial "apprehension" and a fuller and firmer "abiding." We do not have to explore the complex edifice of Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda soteriology any further, for the point seems clear enough: there are certain aspects of mere-cognition as "suchness" which are only realized in a higher meditative state, the *nirvikalpasamādhi* or transconceptual meditation.[120]

This consideration may also provide us with an ulterior rationale for the negative argument strategy Vasubandhu pursues in his *Viṃśikā* – to be placed alongside the fact we find appeals to arguments from ignorance elsewhere in Indian philosophy and that Vasubandhu had employed the same strategy previously himself, in AKBh IX. Aware that one's object of proof – mere-cognition – has aspects that are inaccessible to argument, one will be hesitant to try to prove it directly. One will be more confident, rather, in showing that the negation of one's thesis is false simply from the fact there there is no evidence for it. For presumably, if it were true, there would be some evidence for it. Thus, by implication, mere-cognition is established as true.

In conclusion, we have attempted to demonstrate that the elements of an *argumentum ad ignorantiam* are present in the *Viṃśikā*, and even more: that these elements provide the treatise with a structure and a strategy. The overall plan of the treatise is negative. There is no clear statement of an *anumāna* establishing mere-cognition at the outset (v. 1 or its prose equivalent). Each of the *pramāṇa*s, inference, scripture, and perception, is considered in turn in three sections, respectively, vv. 1–7, 8–15, and 16–17ab. For each *pramāṇa* the negative conclusion is reached that it does not provide evidence for the existence of objects. Even the

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119 MSA 6.6–9, MV 1.6, as well as MSA 11,47f. and 14,23ff. Cf. also *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* 36–37: *cittamātropalambhena jñeyārthānupalambhatā / jñeyārthānupalambhena syāc cittānupalambhatā // dvayor anupalambhena dharmadhātūpalambhatā / dharmadhātūpalambhena syād vibhutvopalambhatā //* Cf. further *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 10.256–258, and, on its basis, Kamalaśīla's first *Bhāvanākrama* 210,16–211,20.

120 See Schmithausen 2005: 54.

proof of the impossibility of objects within the *āyatana* section is not meant to stand on its own, but it subserves the point that there is no scriptural evidence for them. The overall strategy of the text is epistemological, we could say, not metaphysical. It considers for each *pramāṇa* what it can prove; is it powerful enough to establish the existence of things that are causing our cognitions? And in each case it answers, no. While discussing five critical questions in VśV 9,8–10,28 (vv. 17cd–21), Vasubandhu also puts forward arguments that contain a denial of the existence of external physical objects, whereas he regards an account of cognition and karmic retribution which only posits different mental series that causally interact with each other to be acceptable; this lends additional support to an idealist reading of the text.

Careful not to offend against the Mahāyāna doctrine that the true nature of reality can only be known in *nirvikalpasamādhi*, Vasubandhu refrains from stating his conclusion himself. He leaves it for the reader to draw the conclusion, in accordance with the principle he has enunciated in the course of his discussion, "Whether something exists *or not* is ascertained on account of the *pramāṇa*s", namely: objects outside of consciousness do not exist.

This does not mean, however, that the physical entities we know as visible form, etc., do not exist at all, Vasubandhu is also careful to say (VśV 6,14–21). *Dharmanairātmya* does not mean that *dharma*s do not exist. Rather, it means that *dharma*s are without the nature they are imagined to have by the unenlightened, as *grāhya*, *grāhaka*, etc. *Dharma*s exist in their inexpressible nature (*anabhilāpyenātamanā*), which is known only by the Buddhas. But it is by the teaching of mere-cognition – that *dharma*s such as visible form, in particular, do not stand as entities over against, and independently of, cognition – that one realizes the *dharmanairātmya*, which culminates in the (transconceptual) comprehension of their inexpressible nature. It is, in short, not only possible to detect the pattern of an *argumentum ad ignorantiam* in the *Viṃśikā* – just like such a pattern can be detected in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* IX – but also to indicate a reason for why Vasubandhu might have chosen this argument as a strategy for the specific case of establishing mere-cognition.

Appendix: the refutation of the pudgala *in Asaṅga's* Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra

The refutation of the *pudgala* as a real substance (*dravyataḥ*) in Asaṅga's *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* might similarly be viewed to express an *argumentum ad ignorantiam*:

> The *pudgala* must be said to exist as a [mere] designation (*prajnaptyastitayā*) but not as a [real] substance (*dravyataḥ*), because one does not apprehend [it] (*nopalambhāt*) [...] (MSA 18.92ac').[121]

Vasubandhu, the presumed author of the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkārabhāṣya*, explains:

> [Pudgalavādin:] But how can one know that this [*pudgala*] does not exist as a [real] substance? [Answer:] *Because one does not apprehend* [*it*] [MSA 18.92c']. Indeed, contrary to [*dharmas*] such as visible [things], this [*pudgala*] is not perceived as a [real] substance. [The Pudgalavādin:] But what is called "apprehension" [also consists in] a cognition by the intellect (*buddhi*). Now, it is not the case that [we] Pudgalavādins do not cognize the *pudgala* through the intellect. Moreover, the Blessed One has said: "In this very life, [the living being] perceives an *ātman*, designates [an *ātman*]."[122]

Although "a cognition by the intellect" could refer to a mental awareness (*manovijñāna*), hence a kind of perception, as Sthiramati seems to interpret it,[123] it could also refer to inference, one of the two *pramāṇa*s capable of establishing an entity as a real substance (**dravyasat*), as Sthiramati also acknowledges.[124] Thus, Asaṅga's assertion "because one does not apprehend [it]" should perhaps be taken to mean, because one does not apprehend it *at all* – not only perceptually but also inferentially and, as the passage further suggests, scripturally; for the Pudgalavādin, as Vasubandhu represents him, reacts to Asaṅga's assertion by citing both "cognition by the intellect" and scripture as support for his view.

On this background, one might argue that Vasubandhu extends this strategy "because one does not apprehend it", limited to the refutation of the *pudgala* in his *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkārabhāṣya*, to the refutation of a self more generally in AKBh IX. Nevertheless, later in his MSA commentary Vasubandhu states:

> So far (*evaṃ tāvat*), [it is] by resorting to reason(ing) [alone that it has been demonstrated that] the *pudgala* is not apprehended (*nopalabhyate*) as a [real] substance. *And* [*this can also be demonstrated by resorting to scripture,*] *because* [*the Blessed One has*] *taught* [*that*] *all dharmas are selfless*, [*that*] *ultimately* [*there is nothing but*] *emptiness and* [*that*] *to perceive a self is harmful* (*ātmopalambhe doṣaḥ*) [MSA 18.101].[125]

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121 Eltschinger 2010: 305, replacing "perceive" with "apprehend" for *upalambha*.
122 Eltschinger 2010: 308–309, emended.
123 Cf. Eltschinger 2010: 309 n. 58.
124 Cf. Eltschinger 2010: 308 n. 56.
125 Eltschinger 2010: 322, emended.

This does seem to suggest a more direct strategy, namely, the *pudgala* is *disproved* by various arguments Asaṅga has brought forward – it cannot be a real thing if, as the *pudgalavādin* maintains, it is neither the same as nor different from the *skandha*s (311–316); it cannot function as the "seer", nor as an agent (317–322) – and by scriptural passages that imply that there is no self or that it is a pernicious error to believe that there is one (322–325). Still, the arguments in question have the nature of refutations of points typically made in favor of a *pudgala*, while the scriptural passages are cited in anticipation of references to scripture (e.g., the *Bhārahārasūtra*) the *pudgalavādin* will go on to make in support of his view (325). The overall strategy of the discussion of the *pudgala* in MSA(Bh) still seems to be primarily indirect or negative; that is to say, it rejects the existence of a *pudgala* on the grounds that there is no evidence for one.

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