Moral Agency under the No-Self Premise:

A Comparative Study of Vasubandhu and Derek Parfit

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Abstract

A moral agent is someone, or something, which has the capacity to act and to abide by the principles of ethics. Most religious and philosophical systems assume, implicitly or explicitly, that moral agents are endowed with an enduring personal identity, that is, with a soul or a self. The present thesis explores the notion of moral agent in two philosophical systems, which *reject* the idea that such an enduring entity exists. The departure point of the study is the reductionist theory of the contemporary English philosopher Derek Parfit, who claims that a person can be reduced to a brain and body and a series of interrelated physical and mental events, without assuming the existence of an enduring identity. This view raises various conceptual and metaphysical difficulties related to ethics and agency, as pointed out by Parfit's critics, as well as his proponents.

To provide a different perspective on these issues, the thesis turns to the thought of the Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (dated to the 4^{th}-5^{th} centuries CE), who, similarly, criticizes the notion of an enduring self, and investigates the ways in which he addresses the difficulties that the concept of selfless moral agency raises. Vasubandhu's theory of agency is reconstructed relying on three key elements in his Abhidharmic philosophy (as expressed in his work, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*): the analysis of the person into five aggregates (*skandha*), which serves as the basis for an impersonal articulation of agential conventions; the theory of seeds (*bīja*), on the basis of which Vasubandhu explains the diachronic continuity of agents; and the theory of *karman*, or action, which clarifies the nature of the relationship between agents and actions.

The thesis contributes to current research on three levels. Within the field of Buddhist ethics, the argument put forth is that moral agency in Buddhism (as treated by

Vasubandhu) requires a provisional concept of an enduring identity. I show that despite Vasubandhu's commitment to the no-self thesis on the metaphysical level, his account of selfless agency nevertheless relies in an essential way on a conventional notion of an enduring self – both as a motivation to act and as an element in the process of undertaking actions.

At the intersection of Buddhist ethics and the Western philosophical study of personal identity, the thesis maps Vasubandhu's views into Western frameworks. I argue that his view of the person is best understood as a form of reductionism (as opposed to non-reductionism and eliminativism) and that his criterion of personal identity should be classified as psycho-physical.

Finally, the thesis engages in the Western philosophical debate on personal identity and ethics and shows how the theory of selfless agency that emerges from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* can address in new ways various issues and difficulties, with which Parfit's reductionist theory grapples. I discuss in particular the problems of the general unity of the agent, interruption in the continuity of the person, and the presupposition of identity by the psychological criterion of personal identity, as well as the practical issues of self-interested concern for the future and moral obligation.

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The idea for the research topic has germinated while I was a doctoral student at Tel-Aviv University, under the supervision of Professor Shlomo Biderman, who kindly agreed to supervise my work in its initial phase. I feel fortunate for having had the chance to be a student of Prof. Biderman and I am thankful for his supporting and encouraging guidance. I am also indebted to Roy Tzohar, who helped in different ways along the doctoral journey, from shaping the topic of the dissertation to good feedback on its content.

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I dedicate the dissertation with deep respect and gratitude to my parents, Hanna and Shlomo Henner (Hanner), without whose constant support, all this would not have been possible.

And to Efrat, the guardian angel.

Due to any merit accumulated by composing this dissertation,

may all sentient beings be happy and may they live in pure morality!

Abbreviations

AKBh	***Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu** in Prahlad Pradhan, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, revised by Aruna Haldar (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975).
AKBhT	***chos mngon pa'i mdzod kyi bshad pa*, Tibetan Derge edition of the *AKBh*** in the Asian Classics Input Project, http://www.aciparchive.org /ace/#lyt(vol)col(tendg)title(3026).
AKVy	***Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (*Spuṭhārthā*) of Yaśomitra** in Swami Dwarikadas Shastri, *Abhidharmakośa & Bhāṣya of Acharya Vasubandhu with Sphuṭārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra* (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1970-1973).
ĀVP	***Ātmavādapratiṣedha*, the ninth chapter of the *AKBh*** in Prahlad Pradhan, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, revised by Aruna Haldar (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975).
Ej.	Yasunori Ejima's critical notes on the *ĀVP* in Jong Cheol Lee, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya of Vasubandhu. Chapter IX, Ātmavādapratiṣedha.* Bibliotheca Indologica et Buddhologica 11 (Tokyo: Sankibō, 2005)
Schm.	Lambert Schmitahusen's emendations to Prahlad Pradhan, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, personal communication.

Introduction

Research Question and Textual Sources

One concept which is of central importance to moral philosophy and action theory, as well as to certain other areas in philosophy, is that of the agent. In the most basic sense, an agent is a being who has the capacity to act.[1] More elaborate accounts of agency often add certain other qualifications, such as the capacity of the agent to deliberate and plan,[2] that its actions be intentional or rational,[3] or that the agent possess free will to act,[4] but they all presuppose the capacity to act.[5] Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, philosophers in the American and European traditions have begun to show a growing interest in understanding the nature of agency and philosophical meaning of being an agent. The inception of modern philosophical inquiry into these

[1] Alfred R. Mele, *Motivation and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5; Rudolf Clarke, *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), xiii; Markus Schlosser, "Agency", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2015 /entries/agency.

[2] Michael E. Bratman, *Structures of Agency: Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1-4.

[3] E.g., Donald Davidson, "Agency," in *Essays on Actions and Events*, 43-62 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[4] Harry G. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," in *The Importance of What We Care About: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 19-20; Donald Davidson, "Freedom to Act," in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63-64; Rudolf Clarke, *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[5] Although this meager definition of agency is taken from modern Western literature, I find relevant just as well to the notion of agent in Classical India. More on the Indian notion of agent, particularly of Vasubandhu, will be said in Chapter 2 below. On the notion of agency India, see also Matthew R. Dasti, Introduction to *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3, who makes the claim that the Sanskrit term *kartṛtva* captures well the meaning of the term "agency", which he defines as "the capacity to perform actions".

concepts can be traced to works by the philosophers Elizabeth Anscombe[6] and Donald Davidson,[7] both of whom focused on the concept of action and attempted to explain it. The debates that followed have revolved around various conceptual and metaphysical questions that concern the nature of action, the nature of the agent and the relation between them. Conceptual and metaphysical questions of this kind will be at the heart of the present study.

In particular, the central concern of this study is to understand the concept of *moral* agent, a being who has the capacity to act and is expected to meet the demands of ethics. The moral agent is, therefore, someone who participates in ethical activity (or fails to participate therein); he does not merely perform actions, but rather, performs virtuous and non-virtuous actions, morally right and wrong actions. In this study, the concept of moral agent will be examined under a very specific set of philosophical assumptions, advanced by what is called "the reductionist view". In very general terms, proponents of this view hold the thesis that persons can be reduced to more basic facts, such as physical and mental states, and that none of these facts is the person itself. In this, they reject the idea that an enduring personal identity is one of the characterizations of the person. These claims go against the intuitive, conventional view, which is accepted by most religious and philosophical systems (explicitly or implicitly) and holds that persons are endowed with a persisting self or soul that accounts for their identity and turns them into one whole.

From a philosophical point of view, reductionist views lead to a number of serious difficulties with respect to moral agency – in addition to the questions that this issue normally attracts. Some of these difficulties are conceptual: what does it mean to be a

[6] G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

[7] Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons, and Causes," *The Journal of Philosophy* 60, no. 23 (1963): 685-700.

moral agent, given that persons lack a persisting self? And in what sense does a person exercise agency, under this philosophical outlook? Other difficulties are primarily metaphysical: how are the various factors which constitute the agent connected to each other? What allows for the unity of the agent? And what is the nature of the relationship between the selfless agent and the actions he carries out? Yet other difficulties have a more practical aspect: is there a rational basis for attributing responsibility to moral agents for their past deeds – as we intuitively think – given that no entity connects them over time? And what justifies our concern for our own future, if the person I will be in the future is someone "else" than the person I am now? In short, concepts as "moral agent", "personal identity", and "action" need to be considered anew.

The present study concentrates on systems of thought which reject the self, but which, at the same time, seek to maintain a concept of moral agent and even complex moral theories that presuppose such an agent. It examines how philosophers who adhere to versions of the reductionist view clarify the notion of moral agent and how they attempt to address the difficulties that it involves. Methodologically speaking, the inquiry will progress in a comparative way. I examine side by side the argumentation developed in certain trends in contemporary Western analytical philosophy – paying special attention to the early work of the English philosopher Derek Parfit and to later developments by his successors – with those employed by the Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu, who was active, according to current estimations, in north India in the 4th and 5th centuries CE.[8] While different intellectual motivations lead

[8] The precise identity and time of Vasubandhu have been debated in modern scholarship. Erich Frauwallner suggested in the 1950's that two Buddhist thinkers by the name of Vasubandhu lived in India; the first lived c. 320-380 A.D., was the brother of Asaṅga and composed the texts of the Yogācāra school ("those who practice the yoga"), while the other lived c. 400-480 A.D. and was the author of the Sarvāstivāda-Sautrāntika texts. Traditional accounts, according to Frauwallner, mistakenly merged the two thinkers into one figure (See Erich Frauwallner, *On the Date of the Buddhist Master of the Law Vasubandhu,* Serie Orientale Roma III [Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed

scholars to engage in a comparative study of distinct philosophical traditions,[9] the chief reason that I find it appropriate and profitable to employ here comparative methods is that these allow us to reveal the ways in which Vasubandhu, as a classical Indian philosopher, could have responded to philosophical issues that are currently discussed by Western philosophers today; and this can add fresh perspectives to debates on

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Estremo Oriente, 1951]). Frauwallner's hypothesis was criticized by other scholars, primarily, Hajime Sakurabe, "On Frauwallner's Dating of Vasubandhu," *Journal of Indian and Buddhist Studies* (*Indogaku Bukkyōgaku Kenkyū*) 1, no. 1 (1952-1953): 202-208 and Padmanabh S. Jaini, "On the Theory of the Two Vasubandhus," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 21 (1958): 48-53. This, in turn, sparked a debate about Vasubandhu's identity, which continued and deepened in the decades to follow, with supporters for both sides of the controversy (for a relatively updated survey of publications on the subject, see Peter Skilling, "Vasubandhu and the *Vyākhyāyukti* Literature," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 23, no. 2 [2000]: 299, fn. 2) and some scholars still suspending judgment regarding a definite conclusion (See Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundation,* 2nd Edition [London: Routledge, 2009], 301-302, n. 6). Although the question of Vasubandhu's identity remains under controversy and is historically significant, it is beyond the scope of this short introduction to thoroughly elaborate on this matter. This question, moreover, is of less importance to us, as this study focuses on the Sarvāstivāda-Sautrāntika writings alone, which according to both accounts, were composed by the same author.

On the traditional hagiography of Vasubandhu, based on various accounts, primarily that of Paramārtha, see Stefan Anacker, "Vasubandhu, His Life and Times," in *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984), 11-24. Paramārtha's biography of Vasubandhu is translated in Junjirō Takakusu, trans., *The Life of Vasubandhu* (Leiden: Brill, 1904), https://web.archive.org/web/20140627165827/http:/www.gampoabbey.org/documents/kosha-sources/Takakusu-Life-of-Vasu-bandhu-by-Paramartha-1905.pdf (accessed June 22, 2016) and Albert A. Dalia, trans., "Biography of Dharma Master Vasubandhu," in *Lives of Great Monks and Nuns* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2002).

[9] To give but a few examples of intellectual purposes that motivate scholars to engage in the study of comparative philosophy, Ben-Ami Scharfstein claims that by studying different traditions each next to the other, we become aware of a greater variety of positions, and consequently every philosophy is seen in the light of more contrasts, which gives rise to a greater variety of interpretations (Ben-Ami Scharfstein, *A Comparative History of World Philosophy: From the Upanishads to Kant* [Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998] ,7); Shlomo Biderman suggests that examining philosophical traditions comparatively reveals the unconscious perspective from which we see and understand the world (Shlomo Biderman, *Crossing Horizons: World, Self and Language in Indian and Western Thought*, Tr. Ornan Rotem [New York: Columbia University Press, 2008], 7-8); Damien Keown attempts to find analogies between the scheme of Buddhist ethics and Western ethical theory to further our understanding of the Buddhist ethical system (Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992], 165); and Charles Goodman suggests that by examining the thought of another tradition (Buddhism, in this case), we may arrive at answers to questions that our culture (in this case, Western philosophy) struggles with (Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2009], 4). For other motivations for and purposes of employing the methodology of comparative philosophy, see Monika Kirloskar-Steinbach, Greeta Ramana and James Maffie, "Introducing *Confluence*: A Thematic Essay," *Confluence* 1 (2014): 7-63.

agency, personal identity and ethics that take place in contemporary Western philosophy.

Comparative methods have their benefits and, of course, their drawbacks. Comparative studies are often criticized as suffering from oversimplification of the philosophies studied, superimposing the assumptions of one side in the comparison on the other (usually the assumptions of the side the philosopher is more familiar with), or as turning interpretation into inaccurate reconstruction of the studied systems of thought. I am well aware of these potential dangers, but these seem to me as difficulties that most dialogues face, whether these are inter-religious dialogues, cross-cultural dialogues, or comparative philosophical dialogues. There is still benefit in establishing a dialogue, if it is done carefully.

Making use of comparative methods is especially interesting – and I would even say, pressing – in this particular case, considering the fact that Derek Parfit himself did not address directly the points I will discuss, thus leaving a philosophically disturbing lacuna in his thought. On the one hand, in his treatment of the person in earlier works, Parfit rejects the idea of an enduring self; on the other hand, in his later work,[10] Parfit make claims, through detailed and well-thought reasoning, about issues in ethics, normativity, and meta-ethics. However, the connecting link, that is, the conceptual and metaphysical questions concerning the nature of the moral agent, remains almost untouched by Parfit.[11] Shedding light on these questions by examining the ways in which Vasubandhu addressed them, I believe, is one of the main contributions of the

[10] Particularly in Derek Parfit, *On What Matters*, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[11] Both in *Reasons and Persons* and *On What Matters*, Parfit does not discuss directly the issue of who or what the moral agent is. As I read Parfit, his undeclared conception of selfless agency emerges indirectly from two complementary sets of inquiries. One set of inquiries concentrates on the nature of the person; on the basis of his conclusions, Parfit then examines the import of his view for various moral issues, which is the second set of inquiries.

present study. Thus, the overall questions addressed by this dissertation is: who, or what, is the moral agent, according to Vasubandhu, in light of the claim that there is no enduring self? What philosophical assumptions, principles, arguments and doctrines enable Vasubandhu to account for his concept of selfless agent? And how does he address the problems that are involved in accounting for moral agency under a no-self premise?

As part of the comparative examination, a large portion of the study will be dedicated to the exploration of the agential dimensions and implications of certain philosophical principles in the thought of Vasubandhu. Vasubandhu was a prolific author.[12] He is considered to have composed a large body of philosophical work that gives voice to the ideas and theories of different Buddhist schools. Here I limit myself to one composition only, Vasubandhu's *magnum opus*, the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* or *The Treasury of Higher Knowledge with Self Commentary* (Henceforth, *AKBh*).[13] The *AKBh* consists in

[12] For a list of works attributed to Vasubandhu with references to bibliography see Hajime Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism: A Survey with Bibliographical Notes* (Tokyo: KUFS Publications, 1980), 268-273; Karl H. Potter, "Vasubandhu" (No. 175), in *Bibliography of Indian Philosophies*, http://faculty.washington.edu/kpotter/xtxt1.htm (accessed July 1, 2015); Roy Tzohar, "Vasubandhu," in *Oxford Bibliographies* in Buddhism, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780195393521/obo-9780195393521-0164.xml (accessed July 1, 2015).

[13] All references to the *AKBh* in Sanskrit in the dissertation are to Pradhan's critical edition. Prahlad Pradhan, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, revised by Aruna Haldar (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975). Translations from Tibetan are based on the Tibetan Derge edition, TD 4090 (henceforth, *AKBhT*). Translations of Yaśomitra's commentary in Sanskrit, the *Sphuṭārthābhidhamrmakośavyākhyā* (*An Intelligible Exposition of the Treasury of Metaphysics*), are based on Swami Dwarikadas Shastri, *Abhidharmakośa & Bhāṣya of Acharya Vasubandhu with Sphutārthā Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra* (Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati, 1970-1973). All translations from Sanskrit and Tibetan are mine, unless mentioned otherwise.

Published translations to European languages of the *AKBh* include Louis de la Vallée Poussin's translation from Chinese to French in Louis de la Vallée Poussin, trans., *L'Abhidhramkośa de Vasubandhu* (Paris: Paul Geuthner; Louvain: J. B. Istas, 1923-1931); Leo Pruden's translation to English of la Vallée Poussin's French translation in Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Leo M. Pruden, trans., *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu* (Berkeley, Calif.: Asian Humanities Press, 1988-1990); and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo's translation to English of la Vallée Poussin's French translation in Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012).

nine chapters. Each of the chapters is dedicated to one topic in the Buddhist thought, and together they constitute, according to the schools of thought they represent, a complete summary of the Buddha's teachings. The ninth and final chapter of the *AKBh* has the nature of the self for its topic. It is titled *Ātmavādapratiṣedha* (*Refutation of the Theory of a Self*) by Vasubandhu or *Pudgalaviniścaya* (*The Ascertainment of the Person*) in the commentary of Yaśomitra (henceforth, *ĀVP*). Hence, references will often be made to arguments pronounced in the *ĀVP*.[14]

The *AKBh* belongs to a scholastic genre that was prevalent at a particular stage in the development of Buddhist philosophy in India and various Buddhist schools have composed works which conformed to the conventions of this genre.[15] The goal that the Abhidharma literature aimed to accomplish was to systematize the teachings of the Buddha and to present them in technical terms that were defined with precision and ensured analytical accuracy.[16] The collections of Abhidharma writings that are still

[14] For the sake of simplicity, I use the abbreviation to refer throughout the study to the *Ātmavādapratiṣedha*; references, however, are made to Prahlad Pradhan's edition of the *AKBh* (that is, to *AKBh* IX). Published translations of the *ĀVP* include Theodore Stcherbatsky's translation from Tibetan (Theodore Stcherbatsky, "The Soul Theory of the Buddhists," *Bulletin de l'Academie des Sciences de Russie* 13, no. 12-15 [1919]: 823-854 and no. 16-18 [1919]: 937-958. Reprinted as Theodore Stcherbatsky, *The Soul Theory of the Buddhists* [Delhi: Bharatiya Vidya Prakashan, 1976] with several further reprints; Matthew Kapstein's translation from Tibetan with reference to the Sanskrit text (Matthew T. Kapstein, *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought* [Boston, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2001], 347-374); James Duerlinger's translation from Sanskrit (James Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self"* [London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003]), the first half of which (the debate with the Pudgalavādins) was republished as James Duerlinger, "Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa: The Critique of the Pudgalavādins' Theory of Persons," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, eds. William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 286-296.; and Charles Goodman's translation from Tibetan of the debate with the non-Buddhist schools (Charles Goodman, "Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa: The Critique of the Soul," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, eds. William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 297-308).

[15] For a presentation of the history of the Abhidharma literature, see Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories on Existence; An Annotated Translation of the Section of Factors Dissociated from Thought from Saṅghabhadra's* Nyāyānusāra (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995), 1-64.

[16] Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 207.

extant set out to achieve two things: first, they attempt to provide a complete description of the world by breaking it down to the basic physical and mental events (called *dharma*s) of which it is constituted; second, being scholastic in nature, they address various points of dispute that emerge from the first enterprise. These are also the characteristics of the *AKBh*, which can be considered as perhaps the most influential Abhidharma manual in the later traditions of Tibet and China. Of the various Buddhist schools, the *AKBh* spells out the views of two in particular: The Sarvāstivāda ("the doctrine that all things exist") and the Sautrāntika ("those who follow the Sūtra"). Consisting in two layers – the root verses portion and Vasubandhu's auto-commentary in prose – the *AKBh* outlines in verses the Sarvāstivāda views, but in the commentary proceeds to refute some of these views from the Sautrāntika perspective.[17] To demarcate the discussion, the concept of moral agent that I will draw in the dissertation will be loyal to the views and doctrines of the Sautrāntika.

On the other side of the comparison stands the philosophy of Derek Parfit. Parfit has published numerous articles,[18] but is known above all for two books. The main textual

[17] Vasubandhu's doctrinal affiliation in the *AKBh* is still being debated. Harada Wasō (cited in Changhwan Park, "The Sautrāntika Theory of Seeds (*bīja*) Revisited: With Special Reference to the Ideological Continuity between Vasubandhu's Theory of Seeds and its Śrīlāta/Dārṣṭāntika Precedents" [PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007]) and Robert Krtizer are two of the most notable recent supporters of the view that Vasubandhu of the *AKBh* held, in fact, Yogācāra views, which he expounded under the guise of Sautrāntika doctrines. Changhwan Park challenges their thesis and argues that Vasubandhu advanced in the *AKBh* views that are to be ascribed to the Dārṣṭāntika school ("those who use a simile as a proof"), precursors of the Sautrāntika school. See Robert Kritzer, *Rebirth and Causation in the Yogācāra Abhidharma*. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 44. (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1999); Robert Kritzer, "General Introduction," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 201-224; Robert Kritzer, "Sautrāntika in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 331-384; Changhwan Park, "The Sautrāntika Theory of Seeds (*bīja*) Revisited: With Special Reference to the Ideological Continuity between Vasubandhu's Theory of Seeds and its Śrīlāta/Dārṣṭāntika Precedents" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007), esp. pp. 10-40.

[18] For a bibliographical list of Parfit's publications, see Pablo Stafforini, "Derek Parfit: A Bibliography," *Pablo's Miscellany*, last modified March 11, 2015, http://www.stafforini.com/blog/derek-parfit-a-bibliography.

source, on which I will rely, is Parfit's first book, *Reasons and Persons*, which was published in 1984 and turned to be highly influential in the field of moral philosophy. The book discusses different, but complementing, issues in rationality, ethics and personal identity, and elaborates in particular on Parfit's reductionist view.[19] *On What Matters*, Parfit's second book, was published in 2011. In this work, Parfit revisits topics in rationality and morality; however, the question of personal identity does not receive any attention this time – neither on its own nor as part of the other discussions. Instead, one central philosophical development that Parfit dwells on in this book is a novel moral principle that attempts to synthesize three different moral theories, which are considered traditionally as distinct and irreconcilable: Kantian deontology, consequentialism and contractarianism. I will, therefore, not include in my comparison developments from *On What Matters*; I will just mention that the gap between the two books on the point of moral agency emphasizes more vehemently the missing link in Parfit's thought.

Current State of Research

Being of a comparative nature, the present dissertation enters into dialogue with current research in two areas of study: Buddhist ethics, on the one hand, and the study of personal identity and ethics in Western philosophy, on the other hand. It is situated, then, first and foremost, in the relatively young field of Buddhist ethics. In its first two decades, the study of Buddhist ethics has developed mainly through adopting different

[19] Although the most detailed account of this view is found in *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit pronounced his theory and some of the arguments in its favor in various earlier articles. See e.g., Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity," *The Philosophical Review* 80, no. 1 (1971): 3-27; Derek Parfit, "On 'The Importance of Self-Identity'," *The Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 20 (1971): 683-690; Derek Parfit, "Personal Identity and Rationality," *Synthese* 53, no. 2 (1982): 227-241.

Western theoretical frameworks,[20] and many of the notable studies originated from the conceptual linkage of Buddhist moral thinking with the Western tradition of virtue ethics.[21] To a lesser degree the ethical theory of Buddhism has been compared to consequentialist theories[22] or deontological ethics,[23] whereas other scholars argue that the nature of Buddhist ethics cannot be classified under one single Western theory.[24]

[20] For a general overview of the different analogies between Buddhist ethics and Western moral theories, see William Edelglass, "Buddhist Ethics and Western Moral Philosophy," in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel, 476-490 (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/book/10.1002/9781118324004; Charles Goodman, "Ethics in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/ethics-indian-buddhism (accessed July 21, 2015); and Christopher W. Gowans, *Buddhist Moral Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[21] Damien Keown, *The Nature of Buddhist Ethics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992) was the first to suggest a similarity between Buddhist ethics and virtue ethics. Later aretaic interpretations include James Whitehill, "Buddhist Ethics in Western Context: The 'Virtues' Approach," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 1 (1994): 1-22; Georges Dreyfus, "Meditation as Ethical Activity." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2 (1995): 28-54; Thomas F. MacMillan, "Virtue-Based Ethics: A Comparison of Aristotelian-Thomistic and Buddhist approaches," *Religion East and West* 2 (2002): 37-50; David E. Cooper and Simon P. James, *Buddhism, Virtue and Environment* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); Pragati Sahni, *Environmental Ethics in Buddhism: A virtues approach* (London: Routledge, 2008); Charles K. Fink, "The Cultivation of Virtue in Buddhist Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013): 668-701; Abraham Vélez de Cea, "The Dalai Lama and the Nature of Buddhist Ethics," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 20 (2013): 500-540; Meynard Vasen, "Buddhist Practice as Play: A Virtue Ethical View," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21 (2014): 526-557.

[22] On the consequential interpretation, see Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Gordon Davis, "Traces of Consequentialism and Non-Consequentialism in Bodhisattva Ethics," *Philosophy East and West* 63, no. 2 (2013): 275-305.

[23] Justin Whitaker, "Ethics as a Path: Kantian Dimensions of Early Buddhist Ethics" (PhD dissertation, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2015).

[24] According to Barbara Clayton's analysis of Śāntideva's ethical view, no one Western moral theory can capture the various principles Śāntideva's moral theory. See Barbara R. Clayton, *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's* Śikṣāsamuccaya*: Cultivating the fruits of virtue* (London: Routledge, 2006). A similar position is maintained by Stephen Harris in Stephen E. Harris, "On the Classification of Śāntideva's Ethics in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*," *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 1 (2015): 249-275. Jay Garfield argues along the same lines with respect to Buddhist ethics in general in Jay L. Garfield, "Buddhist Ethics" (presentation, XVth congress of the International Association of Buddhist Studies, Atlanta, Georgia, June 23-28, 2008) and with regard to Śāntideva's moral theory in particular in Jay L. Garfield, "What Is It Like to Be a Bodhisattva? Moral phenomenology in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*," *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33, no. 1-2 (2012): 333-357. Charles Hallisey argues, as well, that Buddhist ethics does not conform to one Western theory alone in Charles Hallisey, "Ethical Particularism in Theravāda Buddhism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 3 (1996): 32-43.

More recently, studies have attempted to chart also the meta-ethical outlooks that Buddhism displays in accordance with Western meta-ethical theories.[25]

Alongside the movement towards the understanding Buddhist ethics through the lens of the different interpretative models, the field of Buddhist ethics knew another type of development: while earlier works tended to analyze moral thinking in Buddhism by considering it as a homogeneous body of knowledge, more recent studies tend to focus on one Buddhist thinker, tradition or corpus, and to investigate particular moral issues rather than the nature of Buddhist ethics in general. Examples of the former tendency are Peter Harvey's reading of Theravāda texts, [26] Georges Dreyfus' ethical interpretation of meditation in the Tibetan tradition[27] and Barbara Clayton's study of the moral theory of the Indian Buddhist thinker Śāntideva in his *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (*The Compendium of Training*).[28] Examples for the latter are Tom Tillemans'[29] examination of the problem of weakness of will (Greek: *akrasia*) in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra (Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*); Amod Lele's study of ethical reevaluation in the thought of

[25] See Bronwyn Finnigan, "Buddhist Meta-Ethics" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33 (2010): 267-298; Gordon F. Davies, "Moral Realism and Anti-Realism outside the West: A Meta-Ethical Turn in Buddhist Ethics" *Comparative Philosophy* 4, no. 2 (2013): 24-53; Bronwyn Finnigan, "Madhyamaka Buddhist Meta-Ethics: Investigating the Justificatory Grounds of Moral Judgments," *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 3 (2015): 765-785.

[26] Peter Harvey, "Criteria for Judging the Unwholesomeness of Actions in the Texts of Theravāda Buddhism." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2 (1995): 140-151; Peter Harvey, "'Freedom of the Will' in the Light of Theravāda Buddhist Teachings." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 14 (2007): 35-98.

[27] Georges Dreyfus, "Meditation as Ethical Activity," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 2 (1995): 28-54.

[28] Barbara R. Clayton, *Moral Theory in Śāntideva's* Śikṣāsamuccaya*: Cultivating the fruits of virtue* (London: Routledge, 2006)

[29] Tom J. F. Tillemans, "Reason, Intentionality and Akrasia (Weakness of the Will) in Buddhism: Reflections upon Śāntideva's Arguments with Himself," *Argumentation* 22, no. 1 (2008): 149-163.

Śāntideva;[30] and Karin Meyers'[31] study of the problem of free will and determinism in South-Asian Buddhism.

Recently, several attempts have been made to clarify the nature of moral agency in Buddhism. Jay Garfield and Bronwyn Finnigan have debated in a series of articles[32] the possibility of moral agency in enlightened beings, or buddhas, under the epistemological system of the Indian Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti. The central problem discussed in this articles exchange is the inconsistency between the Dharmakīrtian principle that conceptual thinking, which relies on universals and logical inference, involves a distorted view of reality, and the requirements of moral agency. While Buddhas are said to be free of an inaccurate understanding of reality that comes about due to conceptual thinking, this type of conceptual thinking seems to be necessary for carrying out actions, and consequently for agency, where agency is understood (by Finnigan) to be instantiated in intentional action, which can be accounted for in terms of reasons.

The gist of Finnigan's argument is that under these assumptions, the epistemological principles of Dharmakīrti's system are incompatible with the idea that buddhas (whose actions are non-conceptual, non-inferential, and spontaneous) can be moral agents. Jay

[30] Amod Lele, "Ethical Reevaluation in the Thought of Śāntideva" (PhD dissertation, Harvard University, 2007).

[31] Karin Meyers, "Freedom and Self-Control: Free Will in South Asian Buddhism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010). On the study of the problem of determinism and freedom of the will in Buddhism, see fn. 178, Chapter 5.

[32] Jay Garfield, "Why Did Bodhidharma Go to the East? Buddhism's Struggle with Mind in the World," *Sophia* 45, no. 2 (2006): 61-80; Bronwyn Finnigan, "How Can a Buddha Come to Act? The Possibility of a Buddhist Account of Ethical Agency," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 1 (2011): 134-160; Jay L. Garfield, "Hey, Buddha! Don't Think! Just Act!—A Response to Bronwyn Finnigan," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 1 (2011): 174-183; Bronwyn Finnigan, "The Possibility of Buddhist Ethical Agency Revisited—A Reply to Jay Garfield and Chad Hansen," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 1 (2011): 183-194. The exchange includes also Chad Hansen, "Washing the Dust from My Mirror: The Deconstruction of Buddhism—A Response to Bronwyn Finnigan," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 1 (2011): 160-174. However, it is of less direct relevance to the question of moral agency.

Garfield argues, in response, that the notion of action that Finnigan accepts indeed makes it incoherent for a buddha to be a moral agent under the principles of the Dharmakīrtian epistemology. However, if one considers other notions of action, then the apparent incoherence involved in acting non-conceptually may be resolved. An alternative account of action, which according to Garfield is more in tune with the Buddhist worldview and does not rest on intentions and reasons, is such that the action satisfies an appropriate description, refers to a training regime from which it developed, and has an appropriate context in an "evaluative matrix". If we accept such a notion of action, then buddhas can be considered as moral agents, after all. This debate raises some of the most important questions concerning the meaning of agency and action in the thought of Buddhist traditions.

Other recent accounts of agency in Buddhism are those of Karin Meyers[33] and Leah McGarrity.[34] As part of her investigation of the question of free will and determinism in Abhidharmic sources, Meyers makes the point that the Abhidharma view of agency involves a tension between a conventional notion of autonomous personhood and an ultimate impersonal view of no-self. According to Meyers, the view that we are autonomous agents is a useful psychological delusion, which allows for the energy and motivation to act, up to the point where this view must be relinquished. McGarrity explores the role of the positive self (the self as advocated by the Buddha) in the writings of Mādhyamika philosophers, and the function this self fulfils within the ethical frameworks specified for beginning practitioners. She argues, in this regard, that

[33] Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves: Freedom and Agency in Light of the Two Truths," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

[34] Leah McGarrity, "Mādhyamikas on the Moral Benefits of a Self: Buddhists Ethics and Personhood," *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 4 (2015): 1082-1118.

the exercising of ethical agency is one of the places in which the positing of a self plays a significant role, and in fact, an identification with a positive self is what enables one to be an agent. This self is seen as the agent of good and bad actions, the experiencer of their results, and the one which is bound in *saṃsāra* and is liberated from it.

Perhaps the most extensive study of agency in Buddhism in the last years is that of Maria Heim,[35] who examines different concepts related to agency in the scriptures of the Pāli Canon and in the commentarial works of the Theravāda scholar Buddhaghosa (5th century CE). Heim studies, in particular, the meaning of intentional action, through focusing on the concepts of *cetanā* (intention, in her translation) and *karman* (action) in *sutta*s, scholastic works, and narratives. The image of the moral agent that she sketches, based on her reading of the Pāli sources, is of one whose agency is constituted by a net of psychological forces operative in the mind – emotions, energies and motivations – which are all connected to action and influence action. The capacity to exercise agential freedom, on this view of agency, is a result of a progressive process, which encompasses rearrangements of the mind (eliminating problematic motivations, shaping disposition and behavior, etc.). The culmination of this process is the freedom of the *arhat*, the perfected being. This understanding of agency stands in contrast to the concept of a "free, autonomous, and rational agent who is the subject of moral action in certain modern Western ethical systems," in Heim's words. The latter is also the concept of agent that, according to Heim, stands at the heart of certain works on Buddhist ethics. Similar to the last works mentioned above, the present dissertation aims at investigating and expanding our understanding of the notion of agency in

[35] Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Buddhist ethics, by focusing on one particular thinker, namely Vasubandhu, in one particular text, the *AKBh.*

While I see the primary scholarly contribution of the research to the field of Buddhist ethics, it is also linked to the study of ethics and the metaphysics of personal identity, an area of philosophy which has received in the past few decades a considerable attention by Western thinkers. Philosophical inquiries in this field seek to understand the exact metaphysical nature of persons and what constitutes their identity, and the bearing of the two on how we should think about the principles of ethics.[36] The most significant theories of personal identity that partake in this discourse[37] are the psychological theory of identity, the biological theory of identity[38] and the narrative theory of identity[39] – more on which will be said in the following chapters. It needs be mentioned, however, that while denying the metaphysical existence of a self as a separate entity, Parfit's reductionist theory gives rise to a psychological criterion of identity, that is, a theory of the first category.

Therefore, within the wider scope of personal identity and ethics, the questions that are relevant in particular to the study of Parfit and Vasubandhu are those which touch on the ethical implications of theories that deny the existence of an enduring self. A

[36] For up-to-date surveys of the field, its subject-matter and key debates, see David Shoemaker, *Personal Identity and Ethics: A Brief Introduction* (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2009) and David Shoemaker, "Personal Identity and Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/identity-ethics.

[37] For a recent overview of the main contemporary theories of personal identity see Amy Kind, *Persons and Personal Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2015).

[38] An extensive work in support of the biological criterion is to be found in Eric T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and David DeGarzia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[39] Some of the more developed articulations of this theory appear in Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*; Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

rather substantial work on this topic has been done by David Shoemaker, who adheres to Parfit's reductionist view and makes attempts to understand how our ethical practices and normative principles should be assessed (or reassessed) in light of the reductionist view.[40] His account of the convention of moral responsibility is one of the more extensive accounts he develops.[41] This will be further discussed in Chapter 1 below. I believe that there is still a lot to be studied at the intersection of ethics and the reductionist view of personal identity, and in this study I offer to further our understanding of these issues by referring to the thought of Vasubandhu.

Outline of the Chapters and the Argument

My dissertation offers an overall theory of selfless agency based on Vasubandhu's reductionist treatment of philosophical questions related to agential conventions and moral practices, the metaphysics of personal identity, and the metaphysics of action. This theory is then compared to contemporary philosophical accounts of selfless agency that spring from Parfit's reductionist theory, with the aim of shedding light on the uniqueness of Vasubandhu's theory and the ways in which it can address certain philosophical difficulties that the concept of selfless agency raises. One of the main arguments in the dissertation, in this regard, is that on Vasubandhu's account of moral agency, a provisional notion of an enduring self is an important and indispensable element that enables the agent to act. Thus, the moral status of the self is more complex than is normally acknowledged in modern literature. In the context of ethics, holding to

[40] David W. Shoemaker, "Personal Identity and Practical Concerns," *Mind* 16, no. 462 (2007): 316-357; David W. Shoemaker, "Selves and Moral Units," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (1999): 391-419.

[41] David Shoemaker, "Responsibility without Identity," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2012): 109-132; David W. Shoemaker, "Moral Responsibility and the Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 498-516.

the idea of an enduring self is not plainly to be eliminated, but rather to be utilized in such a way that the moral agent acts morally and makes progress along the spiritual path.

Chapter 1 of the dissertation lays the foundations for the comparative dialogue from the side of Western philosophy. Its main focal point is the reductionist theory of Derek Parfit. My aim in this part is to explain in details the meaning of reductionism and the arguments that Parfit employs to defend it, with particular emphasis on the consequences this theory has for of agency. In the following sections of the chapter, I cover some of the major objections, which philosophers have presented against Parfit's theory and are relevant to the issue of moral agency. I then describe some of the ways in which Parfit and his successors tried to grapple with these objections.

In Chapter 2 up to Chapter 4, I turn to investigate how the idea of moral agency manifests in the *AKBh*, by concentrating on three philosophical elements expressed in them. In Chapter 2, I examine the relations between the conventional person and the five aggregates (*skandha*) to which Vasubandhu reduces it. My reading shows that Vasubandhu endorses, in fact, two notions of moral agent: a conventional notion, which amounts to the conventional person, and an ultimate notion, which Vasubandhu equates with the cause of the agential event. Although Vasubandhu manages to translate into the impersonal language of the five aggregates many of the agential conventions he attempts to explain without asserting the ultimate agent, I show that he fails in doing so with respect to conventions that depend on a first-person perspective of agency. I argue that in such cases Vasubandhu knowingly relies on a notion of an enduring self. I conclude the chapter by examining one case study, the convention of self-interested concern for the future. Vasubandhu's treatment of this convention, I argue, shows that

from his point of view, holding to an enduring self is central to the motivation, which underlies the undertaking actions that are oriented towards the future.

Chapter 3 of the dissertation discusses the problem of the unity of the agent, given the absence of a single persistent element, and the way in which Vasubandhu address the problem of unity, both synchronically and diachronically. I show how the so-called theory of seeds (*bīja*), which Vasubandhu formulates and employs in order to explain temporally extended phenomena in persons (such as the recollection of past experiences), can serve as the basis for the criterion of personal identity. This criterion has an inherent dimension of agency and morality, and to follow this criterion, what determines the diachronic identity of persons is their activity. The theory of seeds, I argue, entails an impersonal "mechanism", which can explain how certain capacities that agents have and that according to non-reductionists require an independent self – such as the capacity for moral deliberation or for making decisions – can take place without such a controlling self.

Chapter 4 of the dissertation deals with the question of how moral action is possible without an acting self. I explore the different ways in which actions are related to the two levels of the agent, the ultimate and the conventional level, and how the two agents are characterized. An analysis of Vasubandhu's explication of the process by which actions come into being, I argue, shows that the initial cause which sets in motion the action, or the abstention from action, is a certain volition (*saṃkalpa-cetanā*; with its subtypes, intent [*āśaya*], and undertaking [*samādāna*]) that involves a concept of an "I". Hence, I claim, a conventional notion of a self is essential to agency not only as a motivation to undertake actions for the future (as argued in Chapter 2), but also in that it is required for the execution of actions technically, so to speak, being a part of the volition that facilitates it.

Chapter 5 is where the philosophical comparison between the Western reductionist views described in Chapter 1 and Vasubandhu's theory of selfless agency reconstructed in Chapters 2-4 is made. Drawing on the way the moral agent is characterized by Vasubandhu and the role of the conventional notion of self in agency, my first claim is that Vasubandhu should be understood as reductionist with regard to persons (as opposed to eliminativist or non-reductionist), in the Parfitian sense of the term. In this, I respond to several modern interpretations of the Buddhist metaphysical view of persons, which acquired their categories of classification from Parfit. My second comparative claim is that Vasubandhu offers a psycho-physical criterion of personal identity, which can be seen as a hybrid of two criteria of identity postulated by Western philosophers (the psychological criterion and a thin version of the biological criterion). I conclude Chapter 5 by examining four case studies, which illustrate how the criterion of personal identity and theory of agency that I find in Vasubandhu address in new ways philosophical difficulties to which Parfit's reductionist theory needs to respond.

Chapter 1

The Problem of Moral Agency under the No-Self Premise: A Philosophical Background

The notion of moral agency is intimately related to the persistence of persons over time. Moral agency entails responsibility for past actions, anticipation and concern for the future, a sense of prudence, and consistent moral values. It is generally accepted, therefore, that we can make sense of moral agency only insofar as persons are said to exist over a period of time.[42] In philosophy, the inquiry into personal persistence examines the various sufficient and necessary conditions for a person to remain one and the same along two different points of time. From a different angle, it examines the kinds of qualitative transformations that a person may undergo and still retain the same identity. It is sometimes suggested that the question of personal persistence is one of a larger set of philosophical problems, known as the problems of personal identity.[43] Most philosophers, however, use the notion of "personal identity" exclusively to refer to the

[42] See for example, David W. Shoemaker, "Personal Identity and Practical Concerns," *Mind* 16, no. 462 (2007): 319; David W. Shoemaker, "Selves and Moral Units," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (1999): 403; Walter Glannon, "Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1998): 235-236; David O. Brink, "Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons," in *Reading Parfit*, ed. Jonathan Dancy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 112. Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 158-159.

[43] Eric Olson suggests that aside from the question of personal persistence, the questions of personal identity include other problems, such as the question of personhood ("What is it to be a person?"), the question of evidence ("How do we find out who is who?") and others. See Eric T. Olson, "Personal Identity," in *The Blackwell Guide to Philosophy of Mind*, eds. Stephen P. Stich and Ted A. Warfield (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003).

narrower sense of personal persistence over time. In this chapter, likewise, I will discuss the problem of personal identity in the sense of the diachronic persistence of persons.

The question of personal identity arises from a basic discord among the ways we conceive ourselves as persons. On the one hand, we accept the fact that people are subject to a process of qualitative change on many different levels of their being, sometimes up to the point that they are "no longer the same person". But on the other hand, we recognize in ourselves and others an unchanging identity. Most people would agree, for example, that over the past ten years their character had changed in terms of beliefs, personal tastes or the vocabulary they use on a frequent basis. Sometimes, these can be extreme change. However, most people would not deny that they are still the same people as they used to be ten years ago. How can we settle the identity of beings over time with the many qualitative changes they undergo? This problem occupied the minds of thinkers who sought to understand personal identity in general, and more specifically, to understand personal identity in the context of ethical theory. In an attempt to account for moral agency, Western philosophers formulated different criteria of personal identity. These criteria aim at addressing the problem of persistence. In other words, they specify what makes a person one and the same over time, and in which cases people change in ways that render them, for the purpose of moral theory, a distinct person.[44]

This chapter will be devoted to providing the philosophical background of the problem of agency without an enduring self. This will lay the foundations for offering an analysis of a Buddhist criterion of identity and theory of agency, as they may be reconstructed from the writings of Vasubandhu, with the primary purpose of providing a

[44] Contemporary theories of personal identity are broadly divided into three groups: the psychological criterion, the biological criterion and the narrative criterion. This essay is a response to Parfit's psychological criterion, and for this reason, will discuss the other two theories only very shortly (See sub-section 5.2.1 Below).

new perspective on some of the topical philosophical problems that ensue from contemporary Western debate on the subject. I begin with an exposition of the psychological criterion of identity put forth by the contemporary philosopher Derek Parfit as part of his theory of Psychological Reductionism, and the different difficulties that this theory creates for ethical theory. First, I give an exposition of Parfit's Reductionist theory of identity and his resulting psychological criterion of identity, with special reference to points that have relevance to moral agency. Following this I survey the most consequential difficulties that his Psychological Reductionism entails for moral agency, as shown by critics, and contemporary philosophical suggestions of how to overcome them.

1.1 Psychological Reductionism and the Criterion of Identity

In his book, *Reasons and Persons*, which was published in 1984, Derek Parfit evokes themes concerning the issue of personal identity, which had been earlier developed by philosophers like John Locke and David Hume. With regard to personal identity, Parfit is a Reductionist. That is to say, he holds that facts about persons can be reduced to more particular facts about mental and physical events and the relations between them. In contrast, a non-Reductionist view would argue that a complete description of persons must include a "further fact" (to borrow Parfit's terminology): another component beyond the facts about physical and mental continuity. Usually, this component is a Cartesian ego or a religious (particularly Christian) soul. Parfit begins his move for grounding his position with a description of the conventional belief regarding personal identity, the non-Reductionist stance. He wishes to replace it with his own Reductionist view by providing evidence to the destabilization of the conventional view under philosophical scrutiny. Parfit proceeds and claims that the same "further fact", that is,

personal identity as an entity different from the physical and mental processes, is in fact unnecessary for a meaningful discussion on issues such as rationality, normativity or ethics. [45] By doing so, he attempts to illustrate how his view captures and preserves all that matters to us, philosophically and practically, in personal identity.

1.1.1 Psychological Reductionism

What is the conventional view that Parfit rejects? Firstly, the conventional view has to do with numerical identity. Parfit discerns between two senses of "identity": numerical identity, which means for an object - such as a person - to be one and the same thing at different points of time; and qualitative identity, which expresses an equality of features in different substances - for example, two billiard balls of the same color and size. The identity we are interested in, when dealing with the question of personal identity, according to Parfit, is the numerical one (p. 201-202). We wish to understand the criterion for asserting that a certain person remains one and the same over time, even when he undergoes qualitative changes. Therefore, the conventional view, and also Parfit himself, deal with identity in the sense of numerical identity.

Secondly, the conventional view is non-Reductionist. A Reductionist view, for Parfit, consists in two claims. The first is that underlying the fact of a person's identity are other, more particular facts. The second claim is that these particular facts can be described impersonally, that is, without presupposing the person as an extra object, or explicitly arguing that he owns the experiences that take place within him, and even without arguing that this person exists (p. 210). Non-Reductionist theories reject one or more of these two claims. The conventional approach is, as has been stated, a non-Reductionist one. It is so, for it presupposes that persons are entities of distinct

[45] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 217.

existence, separate from the brain, the body and the mental experiences - whether this is a Cartesian thinking substance or a soul. In this way, the conventional view rejects the Reductionist claims.

According to Parfit, we cannot find plausible reasons to believe in such a “further fact” (p. 239-240). He justifies this statement through thought experiments, which incorporate ideas taken from science-fiction. He considers, for instance, tele-transportation (p. 200-201; 287-293) and divided minds (p. 245-273). The first procedure involves the destruction of a body in one place, and at the same time the creation of a qualitatively identical one, consisting in a completely qualitatively identical psychology, in another place. The second procedure has to do with dividing the brain into the right and left hemispheres and transplanting each side in a new body. Would we say in such scenarios that we continue to exist, or that we ceased to exist as if in an ordinary death? Will we regard the critical point in the procedure as the creation of a new person, different from the former, or as its continuation? Examining our responses to such cases, Parfit argues, demonstrates that we ought to be Reductionists with regard to personal identity, and that the right kind of Reductionism is psychological. When we know the facts about a person's physical and mental events, and the interrelations between the mental events, we know all there is to know about that person. There is no further fact beyond it. Identity over time, concludes Parfit, is constituted by psychological relations that hold between a person's states in different points of time, rather than a single constant entity (p. 215-217; 261-265).

1.1.2 Psychological Continuity as the Criterion of Identity

Similar to the ideas of the philosopher John Locke, Parfit refers to connections of memory - that is, connections between an experience and the memory of that experience

later on - as a criterion of identity. According to Locke's simple memory theory,[46] personal identity should be defined in terms of "sameness of consciousness," whereas "sameness of consciousness" is commonly understood to stand for autobiographical memory. This means that someone's ability to remember past experiences makes him the person who had those experiences. Parfit extends this criterion to include other types of direct psychological connections. He does not provide an exhaustive list; he only offers several examples of what he means by psychological connections: "one such connection is that which holds between an intention and the later act in which this intention is carried out. Other such direct connections are those which hold when a belief, or a desire, or any other psychological feature, continues to be had." (p. 205).

Parfit identifies two types of psychological relations: (1) psychological connectedness and (2) psychological continuity. Psychological connectedness is "the holding of particular direct psychological connections" (p. 206). In other words, it is the immediate relation between two mental states in two different times, such as the direct relation between a memory and the experience that led to this memory, the direct relation between two instances of a recurring belief, etc. A person in two consecutive days may be related by a different number of connections, ranging from one to several thousand – memories, thoughts, beliefs, desires, intentions. Over time, our psychological connections weaken. Some experiences we remember for a few days, and gradually forget about their happening; there are beliefs that we maintain for parts of our lives, until we let go of them and replace them with different beliefs. Between a person and himself a decade ago there are significantly less strong connections than between this person and himself a day ago. For Parfit's theory of identity, it is important

[46] John Locke (1689), "Of Identity and Diversity" (Ch. XXVII), in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1995).

to notice, that this relation is not transitive. That is to say, if a person is strongly connected by psychological connections to himself yesterday, and himself yesterday is strongly connected to himself two days ago, and so on for twenty years – it does not follow, that this person is strongly connected to himself twenty years ago. The reason is that although enough connections hold between each of the days, it can be (and this is usually the case) that there are very few actual psychological connections connecting between this person and himself twenty years ago. Thus, although connectedness may show that I am the same person as myself yesterday, as it is not transitive, it does not suffice to make me the same person as myself twenty years ago. Because identity is a transitive relation, Parfit rejects psychological connectedness as a criterion of identity.

Psychological continuity, on the other hand, has a longer lifespan. Psychological continuity, Parfit explains, is "the holding of overlapping chains of *strong* connectedness" (ibid., emphasis in original). This relation is transitive: someone can be the same person as himself one day ago due to strong psychological connectedness; and if himself one day ago had strong psychological connectedness with himself two days ago – this means there are overlapping chains of connectedness and this person is the same as himself two days ago. The overlapping chains of psychological connections maintain the relation, even when there are few direct psychological connections, or even when there are no longer direct connections at all. This psychological continuity, according to Parfit, is the criterion of personal identity. That is to say, if psychological continuity holds between someone in two different points of time, we can legitimately say this is the same person (pp. 206-207). Parfit calls the two relations of psychological connectedness and psychological continuity Relations-R. According to him, what really matters to us in survival is the maintenance of Relations-R. Or in other words, as long

as there are Relations-R connecting between myself today and myself in another point in time, I am the same person in the most, and only, significant senses.

Parfit argues that from his explanation of the metaphysics of personal identity two conclusions can be drawn: first, identity is not all-or-nothing (p. 276) and second, identity is not "what matters" (what is of the greatest value to a rational agent). Identity – and hence, survival – is a matter of degree, or measure, and not a binary, all-or-nothing fact, since identity is constituted by psychological connections, which are themselves a matter of degree. We can think of instances where many psychological connections that constitute identity exist, while many others are missing, in such a way that we do not have an absolute certainty whether these are instances of identity and survival or not; this uncertainty indicates that in these kinds of extreme situations there is no clear answer to the question whether the latter person is identical to the former (pp. 238-239). However, even in everyday simple cases, Parfit believes that the unity of a person in the past, present and future is a matter of degree, constituted by Relations-R.

The discussion leads to the conclusion that personal identity is not "what matters" (p. 282). The significance of the discussion, claims Parfit, is in the understanding of the criteria for the continuity of our existence – whether it is in order to meet a psychological need, to resolve a question at the heart of a legal case of criminal responsibility, or to give a rational justification for ethical views. These thought experiments lead to the conclusion that it is not the "further fact" that counts for us when we ask about our identity or the identity of another person, but the psychological continuity formed by the psychological connections. When they are missing, we cannot talk about identity, whereas when they are present, identity is sustained without the "further fact". Thus, personal identity, in the sense of a being distinct from the mental

and physical processes, is not "what matters" and psychological continuity is the criterion of identity.

1.2 The Destructive Implications of Reductionism for Moral Agency

Psychological Reductionism needs to face several kinds of philosophical and practical difficulties. It has a destructive force that according to critiques, threatens to dismantle established cultural, legal and moral practices, and thus endangers the foundations of society.[47] As will be seen below, Parfit's Psychological Reductionism is susceptible to these threats much like Vasubandhu's theory of persons, and both had to defend their stances against them. Of the numerous destructive implications, our discussion here will only concentrate on the implications of Psychological Reductionism for moral agency. The most extreme conceivable implication in this regard, is the collapse of moral agency and, consequently, the rendering of moral theory practically pointless. This leads to what may be called *the gap of moral agency*, namely, the inconsistency that emerges from denying the enduring identity of the moral agent as part of advancing a moral system, such as in the case of Parfit's theory. Philosophers who noticed this gap called attention first and foremost to the practical need of finding a unifying factor in order to allow for agency. At the same time, they also dwelled on three particular problems that are part of Reductionist moral theories: (1) the problem of moral responsibility and desert; (2) the problem of commitment to ethics; and (3) the problem of concern for one's own future. Some scholars, responding to Parfit, have also suggested several solutions to these issues. As a preliminary stage to introducing a

[47] Rebecca Dresser, "Personal Identity and Punishment," *Boston University Law Review* 70, no. 3 (1990): 415.

Vasubandhvian approach to the gap of moral agency, let us begin by explicating these problems and noting the solutions that have been suggested by philosophers.

1.2.1 The Unification of the Agent

In a highly influential article, Christine Korsgaard[48] argues that Parfit's Reductionism emphasizes passive experiences on the expense of active agency, and consequently fails to recognize the practical reasons that we have for asserting the unity of the person. Parfit, she claims, formulates his arguments on the false assumption that persons are primarily centers of experience and that agency is just another form of experience. This view of the person as a center of experiences, rather than as an agent, is what leads Parfit to believe and argue for the Reductionist view of personal identity. However, persons are not only passive perceivers, but also acting agents. This is a practical truth, which leads to reasons neglected by Parfit for asserting the unity of the agent. This move of Korsgaard relies on the Kantian position that persons have two aspects: from a metaphysical point of view they are not different from other caused phenomena, but from a practical point of view they have agency, will and capacity for making decisions. The two aspects are not dependent on each other and cannot be reduced to each other.

Once we accept the premise that we are experiencers *and* agents, we notice the practical reasons for regarding ourselves as unified selves, Korsgaard argues. These practical reasons may not go hand in hand with our metaphysical view of persons, but they also need not. Accepting them is inevitable for us from the practical point view, whichever metaphysical theory we adhere to. Korsgaard, following Kant, differentiates between the metaphysical and the practical levels. She does not reject Parfit's

[48] Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit." *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (1989): 103.

metaphysical view; his metaphysical account may just as well be true. However, from a practical point of view, she argues, we must assert a unity of the person as a basis for moral agency, and in fact this assertion is imposed upon us.

The primary practical reason for the unity of the person is that as agents, it is necessary for us to eliminate conflicts among our intentions and motives. At any given moment we have various intentions and motives. We must coordinate between them in a way that will allow us to form actions, or put differently, in a way that will allow us to lead our life coherently. Because we must act and because we have only one body, Korsgaard believes, we have reasons to consider ourselves as unified agents and to construct an identity. This pragmatic unity of the person is also implicit in the standpoint from which we deliberate and choose, which is a second pragmatic reason (p. 111). When we deliberate or choose, we make decisions amongst our various, sometimes conflicting, desires. More importantly, we do not merely experience the decisions, but rather actively choose according to reasons. Hence, constructing a unified self and identifying with it are forced upon us, for we practically wish to lead a life with long-term plans, relationships and so on. In fact, it is a central assumption underlying our capacity to arrive at decisions.

Korsgaard applies the same approach in the analysis of the unity of consciousness. She rejects Parfit's view, that consciousness is made up only of “experiences” or “states of awareness”, and that connections amongst these experiences and states unify the consciousness. Instead, she argues that the unity of consciousness is more accurately characterized in terms of activities and dispositions. And so Korsgaard defines consciousness as follows:

> Consciousness is a feature of certain activities which percipient animals can perform. These activities include perceiving; various forms of attending such as looking, listening, and noticing; more intellectual activities like

> thinking, reflecting, recalling, remembering, and reading; and moving voluntarily. Consciousness is not a state that makes these activities possible, or a qualification of the subject who can perform them. It is a feature of *the activities themselves*. (pp. 117-118, emphasis in original).

In other words, when handling the subject of consciousness and its unity, Korsgaard shifts back the center of gravity from the terminology of experiences into a terminology of activities, whereby even pure "passive" experiences are within the realms of acts. The unity of consciousness is explained accordingly as consisting in "one's ability to coordinate and integrate conscious activities" (ibid).

There are two important points in Korsgaard's critique of Parfit's theory of identity to be noted. First, Parfit's metaphysical analysis neglects our deliberative, agential aspect and emphasizes passive experiences, treating even our decisions and acts as no more than states of awareness. This is not the case. Rather, we have an agential side that cannot be eliminated, and this should be the standpoint for assessing our practical conduct in the world. Our conscious world, including our experiences and mental states, is a world of actions. [49] Second, the practical aspect of our life as agents imposes upon us the necessity to coordinate between our acts, by constructing a unified identity. The basis for unifying our identity and consciousness is the various activities we perform as agents.

I will return to Korsgaard's critique in the final chapter of the dissertation, as I think that her points have great relevancy to the approach that Vasubandhu adopts regarding personal identity and ethics. There I will attempt to demonstrate that in laying emphasis

[49] The way I understand Korsgaard's main argument regarding agency is different from the way Mark Siderits interprets it. While I believe that the gist of her criticism is that Parfit's impersonal description fails to account for agency since it treats all acts of agency as only passive experiences, Siderits suggests that what is missing from the Reductionist view is the freedom of will that can only exist along a transcendent self. This lack of freedom, according to Siderits, is that which obstructs agency. See his discussion in *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 62-65.

on activity and agency, Vasubandhu's perspective on identity is consistent with Korsgaard's view, and in this way also provides an answer to central difficulties of Psychological Reductionism in the sphere of ethics.

1.2.2 Reductionism and Moral Units

Like Christine Korsgaard, other critics, as well as successors of Parfit's, have pointed out that the endurance over time of the moral agent is a crucial missing link in Parfit's account of identity and ethics. Hence the question poses itself as to whether Reductionist theories of identity can accommodate endurance of the person in a way that will enable any meaningful agency. Whereas Korsgaard argues for the general requirement to endorse a unity of the person synchronically and diachronically, David Shoemaker[50] dwells specifically on the issue of diachronic identity and seeks to understand, which kind of unity is relevant to ethics, assuming that we accept Parfit's metaphysics. Shoemaker observes that Parfit's Reductionist analysis remains vague as to the moral units – that is, the objects of moral concern – that are significant to ethical theory. He identifies three moral units in Parfit's terminology and metaphysical analysis: (1) Momentary states of experience, sometimes also referred to as “person slices”; (2) Selves, namely, entities that correspond to stages of limited duration in the person's life, and are united by strong psychological connectedness – sometimes referred to as “person segments”; and (3) Persons, which are entities that, temporally speaking, equal to human beings, and are united by psychological continuity. These three units are offered by Parfit in different places as relevant moral units to such moral practices as moral responsibility, commitments and just distribution of resources. Shoemaker holds that given that the answer to the question of our identity is, according to Parfit,

[50] David W. Shoemaker, “Selves and Moral Units”.

indeterminate and that identity is not what matters for our survival, but rather what matters is Relations-R – the only significant moral units for any moral theory ought to be selves (p. 392). From this conclusion Shoemaker derives the theory he calls Moderate Reductionism.

Moderate Reductionism is a revised version of Parfitian Reductionism, according to which strong psychological connectedness is the only significant relation for survival and anticipation, and hence for moral agency. Selves are metaphysical units, which are connected by psychological connectedness and represent a stage in a person's life. A person may consist of more than one self, thus creating a series of successive selves. Parts of a person's life which have many mutual psychological connections may be regarded together as one self, while parts which have a small number of mutual psychological connections may be regarded as separate selves. Naturally, as we grow and change, the strength of our psychological connections diminishes with time, and we have stronger psychological connectivity to recent parts of our lives than to older ones. As a result, we may have successive past, present and future selves. Since selves are unified by psychological connections, they are considered the only significant objects of moral concern in Moderate Reductionism.[51]

Shoemaker believes that the relation of psychological connectedness captures more accurately than any other relation what we understand in survival. Primarily, this relation preserves the most vital aspects of ours, such as common memories, beliefs and personality traits. Shoemaker distinguishes between two senses of the phrase “same

[51] Shoemaker is aware that the concept of selves in Parfit's philosophy is vague, in a way that makes it difficult to determine the boundaries between successive selves. See his discussion on this point in p. 396. Another difficulty related to selves as moral units, on which Shoemaker does not dwell, is conflicts among successive selves. See Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Self: The Moral Limits of the Criminal Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 83-84, who discusses the problem of conflicting successive selves.

person" (p. 397). The formal sense involves the "logic of identity," that is, the ontologically sameness of the entity which is the person. The "looser" sense, on the other hand, indicates the "nature of identity", which is the mundane sameness that we attribute to ourselves and that we may feel does not hold in different stages of our life, when our character changes. This latter kind of sameness is the sameness to which we intend when we say, for example, that we are not the same person as the child we used to be. Shoemaker believes that this sense of sameness is the one we care about when we care about ourselves and our survival. This sameness is maintained by psychological connectedness, rather than psychological continuity, the latter underlying the *formal* sameness. Psychological continuity is redundant in this case, preserving parts of ourselves with which we may no longer identify.

In accordance with the threefold division of Parfit's moral units, Moderate Reductionism has two rival theories. The view that Shoemaker calls Extreme Reductionism states that the only unity-relation that can be significant from a moral point of view is basic, in the sense that it cannot be further reduced. As persons and selves lack any metaphysical unity in this sense, one cannot rely on persons or selves to justify or establish ethics. Extreme Reductionists hold that the various psychological and physical connections between person-stages are irrelevant to ethics. And since there is also no enduring irreducible identity, it must be the case that the only entities that have relevance to ethics are the basic, momentary unified states of experience. The second rival theory, Conservative Reductionism, holds, in contrast, that selves endure too short to be morally significant. Conservative Reductionists believe that in order to conform to our moral intuitions, the moral units ought to be persons and the decisive relation that unifies the agent ought to be psychological continuity.

Out of the two rival candidates, the one that poses the larger threat to Shoemaker's position is Conservative Reductionism. It seems that Extreme Reductionism is too weak to be considered seriously, as it seems not to allow for any agency at all. Indeed, this theory embodies most of the difficulties that Psychological Reductionism encounters in ethics. Momentary experiencers have neither interests nor reasons for action – two things that we take as an essential component of ethical agency (p. 403). Without interests, desires or motivations, agents lose the very capacities that make them moral agents.[52] Since the real threat comes from Conservative Reductionism, Shoemaker concentrates on refuting this theory. He attempts to show that Moderate Reductionism can withstand the various attacks coming from the proponents of Conventional Reductionism and that it can meet all the philosophical requirements that we have for moral agency. In addition, Shoemaker opposes this rival approach by giving a list of counterexamples to the Conservative Reductionist thesis, while supporting the Moderate Reductionist view, and by arguing that the lifespan of a Conservative Reductionist agent will be too long, in a way that will cause the agent to have too many reasons for action. Such agents would be "schizophrenic entities, frozen into *in*action by their conflicting moral and prudential concerns" (p. 416, emphasis in original). Since Shoemaker's arguments for the defense of his view do not bear direct relevance to our discussion, I will not elaborate on them here. [53]

Whereas Shoemaker sides with Moderate Reductionism, David Brink[54] holds that what can be relevant to ethics is only psychological continuity and that persons should

[52] See Shoemaker, "Selves and moral units", pp. 403-405 for a more elaborate discussion on the absurd implications of Extreme Reductionism and possible responses.

[53] For Shoemaker's defensive move against Conservative Reductionism, see Shoemaker, "Selves and moral units", pp. 405-415.

[54] David O. Brink, "Rational Egoism and the Separateness of Persons", 113-115.

be regarded as moral agents. In other words, Brink supports what Shoemaker calls Conservative Reductionism. Brink's rejection of person segments (selves) as feasible moral units is based on a list of problematic consequences. First, these units are indeterminate; since selves are based on psychological connections and psychological connections overlap, selves themselves also overlap. This means, for example, that the later temporal part of one self overlaps with the earlier temporal part of another self. It also means that we may recognize several selves of short lifespan, connected by short-lived connections, within one long-lasting self, unified by connections that endure longer. The selves will also overlap with the person, which is present throughout the successive replacements of selves. The result, according to Brink, is that it is impossible to determine who the agent is.

Another objection that Brink raises is that this view leads to a proliferation of agents, which have different and even contradictory motives, intentions, reasons for action, etc. Those multiple selves have to interact and cooperate. They share a body which is a necessary means for the execution of their various plans and intentions. Finally, Brink claims, since selves and psychological connections overlap, dividing the person into selves is based on arbitrary stopping places, i.e. arbitrary points in which the person is divided into separate selves. These difficulties and the requirement that the selves cooperate among themselves make it more plausible, according to Brink, to preserve the natural assumption that the person is the agent, or in Shoemaker's terminology – the most significant unit for ethics.

There is, however, a third alternative to the views offered by Shoemaker and Brink, which endorse only one relation and moral unit in ethics. Walter Glannon[55] is in the opinion that each of the two relations may be relevant to different aspects of our moral

[55] Walter Glannon, "Moral Responsibility and Personal Identity", 239.

outlook. While psychological continuity is the significant relation when we measure moral responsibility, strong psychological connectedness is what matters when it comes to moral desert, or in other words, to punishment and reward. Glannon explains his position:

> While foreseeability of future consequences of one's actions is sufficient to hold one responsible for those consequences, the passage of time may weaken the reasons for punishing an individual for crimes committed in the remote past… [W]hile diminished psychological connectedness may weaken the grounds for punishing a person, it need not weaken the grounds for holding him responsible, if, at an earlier time, he is able to foresee himself being an appropriate candidate for such an attribution at a later time (ibid.)

This more refined analysis of our moral practices leads Glannon to claim that the relationship between our metaphysics and ethics should be mutual. Reductionist metaphysics should modify our moral principles, but at the same time we should examine our moral intuitions in order to evaluate which elements of our metaphysics bear relevance to different moral practices. If this observation of Glannon is true, it means that in different contexts of ethics, the unity of the moral agent may and should be different. According to our intuitions, at times the moral agent is unified by psychological continuity, at other times it is united by strong psychological connectedness, while perhaps in other contexts it may turn out that momentary experiencers have a distinctive status in moral agency.

To sum up the debate over which moral units are the most relevant to ethics, we have seen that in Parfit's philosophy there are three different alternatives: the person, the self and the momentary experiencer. A fourth suggestion, which seems to be applied *de facto* by Parfit himself, is that different moral practices require us to understand agency using different moral units. At this point, however, I want to return to the theory that seemed to be the least feasible, that is, Extreme Reductionism. Although almost all

contemporary scholarship on the topic is unanimous in observing that this view is fraught with absurdities, I believe it nevertheless brings up an important point, namely, skepticism regarding the relevance of psychological relations to ethics. Parfit, Shoemaker, Brink and Glannon, all take it for granted that Parfitian psychological relations – either connectedness or continuity or both – are relevant to ethics and agency, and that these relations can define the limitations and boundaries of the moral agent. However, none of the philosophers who believe so, provides any satisfactory explanation to the question, why psychological relations, which are relevant to survival, are also relevant to ethics. The shared presupposition here is, of course, that survival equals endurance of agency – an assumption that the Extreme Reductionist will undoubtedly call into question. This assumption, therefore, should be philosophically justified.[56]

1.2.3 Particular Moral Issues

The unity of the agent is the general problem underlying the gap of moral agency. At the same time, the gap involves particular issues in ethics stemming from the general problem of unity. Here I will only refer to three particular issues, as they have been discussed in recent discourses on Reductionism and ethics: the difficulty regarding commitment to ethics, the difficulty regarding self-interested concern for the future, and difficulty regarding moral responsibility. Daniel Palmer[57] points to the fact that Parfit's

[56] See Stone, "Parfit and the Buddha: Why There Are No People," who argues that no justification at all can be found for the relevance of Relations-R to ethics: "Psychological continuity is what matters in survival only if resemblance is what matters, hence psychological continuity carries desert only if resemblance carries desert. But resemblance does not carry desert, nor does it warrant anticipation, pride, or remorse. Therefore, psychological continuity doesn't carry desert, nor does it bear the burden of anticipation, pride, and remorse." (pp. 529-560)

[57] Daniel E. Palmer, "Parfit, the Reductionist View, and Moral Commitment" (presentation, Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy, Boston, MA, August 10-15, 1998), accessed February 4, 2014, http://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/PPer/PPerPalm.htm.

account of personal identity defeats any notion of moral commitment. He singles out the making of a promise as a paradigmatic instance of moral commitment and demonstrates how a notion of personal identity relying on Parfitian R-relations results in the fading away of our promises (our commitment to ethics) due to significant or rapid changes in psychological connectedness, to the point that our promises lose their validity. Parfit holds that promises and other commitments should be considered and assessed in relation to the degree of psychological connectedness. Psychological connectedness, however, may weaken and even lose its strength altogether within the period of a lifetime. The problem then poses itself: can we make sense of the idea of commitment in light of this view?

Palmer believes that Parfit's theory makes it impossible to keep the sense of commitments or promises in accordance with our intuitive understanding of this notion. Promises and commitments have two features, says Palmer: first we expect the force of a promise to be maintained despite psychological changes; this is the main reason that we make promises from the first place and the main reason that we request others to make promises. Secondly, our intuitive understanding of promises and commitments presupposes that they cannot change their degree of validity in the same way that psychological connections gradually lose their strength. Due to these differences between our notions of promises and commitments and the principles of Parfitian Reductionism, Parfit's analysis of personal identity remains without an adequate answer to the problem of moral commitment. Palmer proposes that the only way out of this difficulty is to resort to persons as the basic moral units for promises. Only then can we ascribe value to commitments and promises.

A second particular ethical issue stemming from Parfit's Reductionism is the problem of self-interested concern for the future. Marya Schechtman[58] explains that qualitative similarity of two distinct individuals, such as similarity of psychological life that comes about due to psychological relations, is not sufficient for self-interested concern. Emotions like self-interested fear of future pains or self-interested wish for happiness, require numerical identity. Self-interested concern, she explains, is an emotion that can be directed only towards one's self and not towards someone who is similar to one's self. The difference lies in the feeling. We may care for someone else's future more than we care for our own future, yet we have a different feeling when it comes to self-concern in comparison to concern for others. Self-concern is based on anticipation, and we only anticipate our own pains, joys etc. Therefore, Schechtman concludes, psychological similarity is not sufficient in order to arouse self-concern.

In the case of psychological continuity of the kind that Parfit puts forth, confusion is created between identity ("someone *being* me") and similarity ("someone *like* me"). The reason for this confusion is that endurance that is founded on psychological relations defines personal identity on the basis of diachronically distinct parts, which are psychologically similar but are, in practice, different individuals. Hence, psychological continuity as a criterion of identity is not sufficient to create the anticipation that is part of self-interested concern for the future (p. 53).

Finally, a third particular issue is the problem of moral responsibility: if persons can be reduced to momentary mental and physical components without any loss of meaning, and there is no permanent component – the self or the "I" – amongst them, what justifies assigning responsibility to people for acts they performed in the past? In what ways is the present self related to the acts done by previous selves? Let us recall, that

[58] Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 52.

the relevance of the relations of psychological connectedness and psychological continuity to ethics is still to be explained. The fact that there is a certain relation between the successive selves does not necessarily mean that this relation pertains to ethics.

In trying to give a satisfactory answer to the particular problem of moral responsibility, Shoemaker suggests a different perspective on the nature of moral responsibility.[59] According to Shoemaker, it is not necessary to presuppose personal identity in order to speak of moral responsibility in a meaningful way. He challenges two prevalent assumptions about moral responsibility. The first is that one can only be responsible for one's own actions and the second is that, because we can only be responsible for our own actions, moral responsibility presupposes personal identity. Contrary to the second assumption, he argues that identity is not required for moral responsibility. In fact, none of the criteria of identity suggested by philosophers explains adequately in what way responsibility entails identity, the reason being that identity is simply unnecessary for attributing responsibility for an action.[60] Instead, a sufficient condition for responsibility is a relation of ownership between a person and an action. In other words, what Shoemaker proposes is that moral responsibility can be founded on a different relation than identity. It can be founded on ownership. Moral responsibility, as well as desert, can therefore be attributed to a person, if the action belongs to him. Accordingly, we should dismiss the second assumption, that personal identity is required for discourse about moral responsibility, and attain a better grip of the nature of the relation between agents and action ownership. Contrary to identity, ownership of an

[59] David Shoemaker, "Responsibility without Identity," *The Harvard Review of Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (2012); David W. Shoemaker, "Moral Responsibility and the Self," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Self*, ed. Shaun Gallagher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 498-516.

[60] David Shoemaker, "Responsibility without Identity": 120.

action is not a unique relation, in the sense that it can be attributed to more than one person. In other words, while a relation of personal identity assumes that only one person can be responsible for an action, since only one person can be uniquely identical with the person who performed the action, a relation of ownership can be shared by several people.

While one may expect that Shoemaker would utilize the ownership relation into proposing a new perspective of responsibility shared by different person slices or person stages without asserting a diachronic relation of identity, the fact is that when it comes to accounting for diachronic responsibility, Shoemaker still attempts to find a plausible relation between temporal person slices. He suggests that an adequate relation would be an identification of an agent with the action performed (p. 123). Thus, in order to attribute responsibility for an action, three conditions must be met: first, there should be an initial relation between the moral agent and his will. Secondly, the agent to whom responsibility is attributed should identify with the will and with the action. Thirdly, an "agential identity", whose nature, Shoemaker argues, "is less than clear" is also required for the attribution of responsibility (pp. 123-125). Shoemaker proposes that agential responsibility consists in the identification of the present agent with the past agent who performed the action. However, he adds that this is only an initial direction and that further directions should be examined.

In many ways, Shoemaker's proposal resembles the criteria of identity that he rejects, with what he claims to be two significant differences: contrary to contemporary criteria of personal identity, his proposal is not committed to uniqueness and is not transitive (p. 126). In this way, he holds, this proposal avoids the second assumption of identity as a condition to attributing responsibility. Shoemaker's endeavor to account for responsibility without asserting identity is interesting and thought-provoking, but his

finale leaves us with open questions (which Shoemaker does not deny). One question is what does the "agential relation" consist of – something that Shoemaker himself admits is not completely clear yet (p. 125). A second question is, why is it necessary to avoid the assumption of identity? Why can't we take the "agential relation" to be the relation of personal identity?

I will return to these points further on, when I discuss my interpretation of the Buddhist approach to identity and agency. I will show that what we find in Vasubandhu's treatment of the subject is exactly what Shoemaker is looking for: an agential relation, which connects person segments over time on the basis of moral activity. This can solve the problem of moral responsibility in Reductionist moral theories.

Up to this point, what I did was to survey the different aspects of "the gap of moral agency", as it is described and treated in Western moral philosophy. The central philosophical problem that is fundamentally related to the gap is the unity of the person. The notion of agency requires that the person be unified to a certain degree, diachronically and synchronically. It is, however, an open question what unifies the person and what justifies the relevance of this unifying element to morality. At the same time, I have also reviewed some of the particular ethical difficulties that emerge from adopting Parfit's Reductionism in ethics and the solutions that authors, who wrote about these problems, suggested. As has been seen, and as the authors themselves admit, the current solutions are not completely adequate so far. At this point, I turn to inspect the Buddhist approach to identity and ethics, as it emerges from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu, which I believe is able to provide a fresh perspective on the gap and accompanying difficulties.

Chapter 2

The Five Aggregates (*skandha*) and the Articulation of Agential Conventions

One common way in which Buddhist thought analyzes the person into its basic components is according to what is known as the five aggregates (*skandha*). These are five categories that represent the different aspects of a person, or the different physical and mental functions that persons have. Vasubandhu understands the term aggregate as a heap. To illustrate: if one were to disassemble the person into its most basic physical and mental constituents in the past, present and future – brain cells, emotions, perceptions, etc. – one could sort them according to their essential function and pile them in five different heaps that correspond to the functions of the five aggregates.[61] Thus, beyond general categories that apply to all beings, when referring to a particular being, the five aggregates are used in the sense of the collections of the various basic entities that constitute that person. The essential functions of the aggregates will be discussed in detail below.

The analysis of the person into the five aggregates is central to Vasubandhu's reductionist account of the person. In explaining what a person is, Vasubandhu argues that a person is not an independent and enduring entity, which exists above and beyond

[61] *AKBh* I:20ab, p. 13: *idaṃ tu vaktavyaṃ kaḥ skandhāyatanadhātvartha iti/* ***rāśyāyadvāragotrārthāḥ skandhāyatanadhātavaḥ/*** *… sūtre rāśyarthaḥ skandhārtha iti siddham*. *AKBhT* Ku 35a3-5: *phung po dang khams dang skye mched kyi don gang yin pa 'dir brjod par bya ste, spungs dang skye dgu rigs kyi don // phung po skye mched khams rnams yin, mdo las […] spungs pa'i don ni phung po'i don to zhes bya bar grub po /* "But this should be said: what is the meaning of [the terms] aggregate [*skandha*], sense-base [*āyatana*] and constituent [*dhātu*]? **An aggregate, a sense base and a constituent have the meaning of a heap, a gate of arrival, and a class [respectively]**… in the Sūtra it is established that the meaning of 'aggregate' is a heap."

the psycho-physical complex of the person, the way his philosophical opponents tend to believe.[62] Rather, a person is a concept that refers to the conglomeration of mental and physical constituents itself, or in other words, to the collection of the five aggregates, on the basis of which persons are identified and named. Conventional concepts, which refer to a collection of entities rather than to one entity, are called by Vasubandhu "provisional designations" (*prajñapti*). As nominal entities, they are characterized by the fact that they can be reduced to real entities (*dravya*). According to Vasubandhu's theory, therefore, persons have a nominal existence, but they do not exist as a separate ontological entity – the kind of entity that is ordinarily thought to be the "self" or the "I".[63]

[62] The exact philosophical affiliation of Vasubandhu's opponent, which in the *ĀVP* is simply called a Tīrthika (a non-Buddhist thinker), is not fully clear. Duerlinger suggests that the opponent in the later part of the chapter – the part I will consider below – is a Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosopher (Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, 117-118, n. 60). La Vallée Poussin, on the other hand, holds that parts of the debate are directed towards a Buddhist Pudgalavādin philosopher (Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo Vasubandhu, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, pp. 2632-2633, n. 166). Charles Goodman comments that some of the passages concern the ideas of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, while others seem to be directed towards a proponent of the Sāṃkhya school; as a whole, they concern only non-Buddhist schools (Charles Goodman, "Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa*: The Critique of the Soul," in *Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings*, eds. William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 297-299). I will not enter into the details of the notions of agency held by the non-Buddhist schools. See on this Matthew R. Dasti, "Nyāya's Self as Agent and Knower," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant, 112-136 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Edwin F. Bryant, "Agency in Sāṃkhya and Yoga: The Unchangeability of the Eternal," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant, 16-40 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[63] *AKBh* IX, p. 461: *kiṃ khalv ato 'nyatra mokṣo nāsti* [Schm. emends, following the Tibetan, *mokṣo 'asti]/ nāsti/ kiṃ kāraṇam/ vitathātmadṛṣṭiniviṣṭatvāt/ na hi te skandhasaṃtāna evātmaprajñaptiṃ vyavasyanti/ kiṃ tarhi/ dravyāntaram evātmānaṃ parikalpayanti ātmagrāhaprabhavāś ca sarvakleśā iti*. *AKBhT* Khu 82a1-2: *yang ci 'di las gzhan la thar pa yod dam zhe na, med do // ci'i phyir zhe na / bdag tu lta ba phyin ci log la zhen pa nyid kyi phyir te / phung po'i rgyud kho na la bdag tu 'dogs pa ni nges par mi 'dzin to // 'o na ci zhe na / rdzas gzhan kho na la bdag tu yongs su rtogs par byed la / nyon mongs pa rnams ni bdag tu 'dzin pa las rab tu skye ba yin no.* "[Q:] Now, is there liberation elsewhere [i.e. in the teachings of other philosophies], other than this [the Buddhist teachings]? [Vasubandhu:] There is not. [Q:] What is the reason? [Vasubandhu:] Because [other philosophies are] being fixed on a false view of a self, since they do not ascertain that the provisional designation of 'self' is just a stream of aggregates. [Q:] How then [do they understand the self]? [Vasubandhu:] They determine that the self is a different

This selfless analysis of the person has implications for the way Vasubandhu understands the notion of a moral agent. The following chapter concentrates on this topic and deals with two central challenges to Vasubandhu's reductionist theory: (1) the need to explain who or what the moral agent is, given that the agent is not a persisting self and (2) the need to account for maintaining moral and normative conventions, without asserting an enduring self. These are, indeed, two of the challenges that Vasubandhu sets himself in the ninth chapter of the *AKBh*, entitled *Ātmavādapratiṣedha* (*Refutation of the Doctrine of Self*, henceforth *ĀVP*). There, Vasubandhu has his Non-Buddhist interlocutor raise a set of questions about how it is possible to account for moral agency and the various ordinary agential conventions, by relying only on the conceptual framework that Vasubandhu proposes, that is, by relying on the schema of the five aggregates and on "provisional designations" (henceforth: "designations") alone.

The chapter's course will present an attempt to survey the way Vasubandhu deals with the two main difficulties presented above. The thesis that I will defend is that although metaphysically Vasubandhu rejects the idea of an enduring self, in his account of agency, the reconstruction of a conventional identity is a requisite for ethics. In more psychological terms, what I will argue is that according to the *AKBh*, leading a moral life requires an identification with a persisting self – the kind of self that Vasubandhu rejects with the claim that it acts as one of the main obstacles to spiritual awakening. It is a common conception in modern scholarship on Buddhist ethics, almost an axiom, that there is a direct correlation between the degree to which one deconstructs one's identity (or put differently, lets go of the identification with the self) and the degree of

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entity (*dravya*), and from the holding on to this [distinct] self all mental afflictions [which are the cause of rebirth and suffering] spring."

one's capacity and potential to be moral. A paradigmatic example for this approach appears in Peter Harvey's *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics*.[64] Harvey claims that

> The teaching that no permanent Self or I exists within a person is also a support for ethics… Primarily, it undermines the attachment to self – that 'I' am a positive, self-identical entity that should be gratified, and should be able to brush aside others if they get in 'my' way – which is the basis of lack of respect for others. It undercuts selfishness by undercutting the very notion of a substantial self. Anger, for example, feeds off the notion that 'I' have been offended (p. 36)

More recently, Charles Goodman, in his consequentialist interpretation of Buddhist ethics,[65] advocates the position that the reconstruction of identity has no bearing on ethics at best and subverts it at worst. In response to the thesis of the philosopher Charles Taylor, that a sense of identity is necessary for any conception of the good and of ethics,[66] Goodman writes the following:

> That we must not only realize the ultimate nonexistence of any substantial self but also overcome the whole phenomenon of having an identity is an important message of the Mahāyāna scriptures. (*Consequences of Compassion*, p. 111)

Similarly, when he discusses Christine Korsgaard's criticism of Parfit, in which she argues that from the practical point of view, identifying with a self is a requirement for ethics (See section 1.2.1 above), Goodman says:

> Rejecting and abandoning the psychological processes that, for Korsgaard, help to constitute a persisting self may not just be a demand of Buddhism; it may, under certain circumstances, be a demand of consequentialism itself. The kinds of identification that Korsgaard regards as necessary and

[64] Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See similar claims in Rita M. Gross, "Toward a Buddhist Environmental Ethic," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, no .2 (1997): 338-339, 344.; Christopher Ives, *Zen awakening and society*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 117-120; Sallie B. King, *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005), 91-92.

[65] Charles Goodman, *Consequences of Compassion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[66] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

> inevitable will sometimes prevent people from responding in ways that would benefit sentient beings. (p. 213)

I disagree with sweeping observations of this kind. In the following pages, I will argue that they do not accord with Vasubandhu's view, as reflected in his treatment of the notion of moral agency. In this, I join recent voices in the study of Buddhist ethics, which point at the significant function that the self fulfills in agency and ethics.[67]

I start this chapter by examining Vasubandhu's understanding of each of the five aggregates and sketching his reductionist argument for the non-existence of an enduring self (Section 2.1). Following that, I give several preliminary remarks on what I understand to be Vasubandhu's general goal in applying the model of the five aggregates to issues of agency, on his methodology of doing so and on what I believe he is trying to avoid in his project (Section 2.2). In the next section (Section 2.3), I consider the question of who, or what, the moral agent is, in terms of the schema of the five aggregates, and show that Vasubandhu explains the notion of agent on two complementary levels, the conventional and the ultimate. Following this, I examine the way in which Vasubandhu accounts for agential conventions by employing the two notions of agency (Section 2.4). I conclude the chapter by taking as a case study Vasubandhu's treatment of one particular agential convention that raises an

[67] Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves: Freedom and Agency in Light of the Two Truths," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) suggests that in the Pāli *sutta*s and the Abhidharma traditions, certain elements that are involved in practicing the path – goal-oriented actions, effort and initiative – require that one regard oneself as an autonomous agent through self-grasping. My conclusions in this chapter strongly corroborate her observations. Leah McGarrity, "Mādhyamikas on the Moral Benefits of a Self: Buddhists Ethics and Personhood," *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 4 (2015): 1082-1118 argues that the works of Mādhyamika philosophers, such as Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva and Candrakīrti, advocate the reconstruction of the person as an agent and with it a sense of personhood, which serve as the basis for a teleological orientation toward future goals. A similar view, I argue, is maintained by Vasubandhu in the *AKBh*.

exceptionally challenging difficulty to his account of agency – the convention of self-interested concern for the future (Section 2.5).

2.1 The Five Aggregates and the Reductionist Argument

The *ĀVP*, the chapter on the refutation of the self, opens with Vasubandhu's reductionist argument. This argument is designed to show that persons are reducible to more basic entities and are not independent entities themselves. It is founded on two Buddhist ideas: the idea of an aggregate (*skandha*) and the idea of a factor (*dharma*). In addition, it relies on the Indian means for knowledge (*pramāṇa*) – epistemic criteria for knowledge that both Vasubandhu and his philosophical opponent are expected to meet in their arguments. In this sub-section I will first clarify these ideas and on that basis, present Vasubandhu's argument.

According to the Buddhist views expressed in the *AKBh*, beings, as well as the inanimate world, are structured by basic physical and mental elements, which are called in Sanskrit *dharma*s. These are said to be the ultimate building blocks of things, in their ultimate mode of existence.[68] As with other Abhidharmic concepts, the nature of the *dharma*s was under controversy among the schools of the Abhidharma, and in the *AKBh* we find the accounts of the Sarvāstivāda school and the Sautrāntika school.[69] In the Sarvāstivāda system, *dharma*s are described, first of all, as discrete units, separate from other *dharma*s spatially and temporally, and as having each a unique and unchanging

[68] Rupert Gethin, *The Foundations of Buddhism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 209.

[69] On the historical and theoretical development of the *dharma* theory, see Rupert Gethin, "He Who Sees Dhamma Sees Dhammas: Dhamma in Early Buddhism," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 32, no. 5-6 (2004): 513-542; Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist metaphysics: The making of a philosophical tradition* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 34-85; Paul M. Williams, "On the Abhidharma Ontology," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9, no. 3 (1981): 227-257.

nature (*svabhāva*).[70] Such an unchanging nature is, for the Sarvāstivāda, a characteristic of what is ultimately real. In terms of their function, *dharma*s are described as exerting their potential to induce the production of the next moment. They do so only in the present moment, after which this potential is immediately exhausted.[71] *Dharma*s, according to the Sarvāstivāda, are characterized as undergoing a process of change which has four characteristics: birth (*jāti*), endurance (*sthiti*), ageing (*jarā*) and impermanence (*anityatā*).

The proponents of the Sautrāntika school hold a somewhat different conception of *dharma*s. They reject the idea that dharmas abide in time and undergo a modification. Instead, they adopt the theory of momentariness (*kṣaṇikavāda*), according to which each *dharma* exists for only one moment and then ceases to exist. In their momentary existence, they take part in a continuous chain of causality. They come into existence on the basis of prior causes, and in turn, act as causes for the coming into being of future *dharma*s. Accordingly, they are characterized – as is also the case for the Sarvāstivāda – as being conditioned (*saṃskṛta*).[72] Being conditioned, the *dharma*s are seen as ultimate entities (*dravya*). They are contrasted with wholes, which are made up of ultimate parts. Therefore, when Vasubandhu argues that a permanent and independent self does not

[70] Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, Third Revised Edition* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Honk Kong, 2007), 23.

[71] Ibid., 163

[72] *AKBh* I:7ab, p. 4: ***te punaḥ saṃskṛtā dhārmā rūpādiskandhapañcakam/*** *… sametya saṃbhūya pratyayaiḥ kṛtā iti saṃskṛtāḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 29a2-3: *'dus byas chos rnams de dag kyang // gzugs la sogs pa phung po lnga… rkyen rnams 'dus shing phrad nas byas pa dag na 'dus byas rnams te.* "Further, those conditioned factors are the five aggregates – materiality and so forth… [The etymological analysis of] 'conditioned (*saṃskṛta*)' [in 'conditioned factors'] is produced (*kṛta*) by conditions after coming together (*sametya*), being combined (*saṃbhūya*)". There are three exceptions for that, namely, *dharma*s that are said to be unconditioned, *asaṃskṛta*. See Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, Third Revised Edition* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Honk Kong, 2007), 613-648.

exist, what he argues is that one cannot find such a *dharma*, that is, such an ultimate entity, which can be considered as an enduring self.

The model of the five aggregates is the schema according to which the different *dharma*s that make up the physical existence and mental experience of beings are classified in the *AKBh*. Vasubandhu explains the five aggregates and their essential functions as follows:

1. The aggregate of materiality (*rūpa-skandha*). This aggregate includes all aspects of the material world, including the physical bodies of living beings. Vasubandhu clarifies the special properties of the factors that belong to this aggregate in several ways. First and foremost, factors of materiality are characterized by the four elements (*mahābhūta*) – earth (*pṛthivī-dhātu*), water (*ab-dhātu*), fire (*tejo-dhātu*) and wind (*vāyu-dhātu*).[73] These represent different aspects of the physical body. The element of earth represents the degree of hardness (*khara*) of the materiality; the element of water represents the cohesiveness (*sneha*) of the physical objects; the element of fire represents the degree of heat (*uṣṇatā*); and the element of wind represents the quality of movement (*īraṇā*), which manifests, for example, in the movement of liquids. These are all the qualities of physicality and belong to the aggregate of form. Factors of materiality constitute both animate and inanimate beings.

2. The aggregate of feeling (*vedanā-skandha*). This aggregate includes the affective tone of each experience a human being has. The Buddhist teachings identify three types of feelings: unpleasant feelings (*duḥkha*), pleasant feelings (*sukha*) and neutral feelings (*aduḥkhāsukha*). It is explained that the factors that belong to the aggregate of feeling

[73] This presentation of the constituents of the material world is in disagreement with the theories of other Abhidharma schools, who held that there were other factors beyond the four *mahābhūta*s. On this, see Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist metaphysics: The making of a philosophical tradition* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005),56-59.

are always present. That is, each mind moment is accompanied by one of the three kinds of feelings.[74] With each and every mental event that takes place – be it a perception of an object, the arising of an emotion such as compassion or arrogance, or the occurrence of a memory – one of the three types of feelings is present.

3. The aggregate of cognition (*saṃjñā-skandha*). This aggregate encompasses all events in which we recognize objects. How do we identify an object as that particular object? Vasubandhu explains that an act of cognition is the grasping of a sign (*nimitta*), which typically marks a certain thing. Each thing has its unique sign, which sets it apart from other things. Examples are the apprehension that something is of certain color or of a certain length, that an object is pleasant or unpleasant, or that someone is a friend or an enemy.[75] Cognitions, therefore, are mental events, in which objects are recognized by the special property that is unique to them and that distinguishes them from other things. Like feelings, cognitions are present in each mind moment, and hence are always present.[76]

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[74] *AKBh* II:24, p. 54: *vedanā cetanā saṃjñā cchandaḥ sparśo matiḥ smṛtiḥ/ manaskāro 'dhimokṣaś ca samādhiḥ sarvacetasi// ime kila daśa dharmāḥ sarvatra cittakṣaṇe samagrā bhavanti*. *AKBhT* Ku 64b3: *tshor dang sems pa 'du shes dang // 'dun dang reg dang blo gros dran // yid la byed dang mos pa dang // ting nge 'dzin sems thams cad la // chos bcu po 'di dag ni sems kyi skad cig ma thams cad la tsogs par 'byung ngo zhes grag go lo*. "Feelings (*vedanā*), intention (*cetanā*), cognition (*saṃjñā*), predilection (*chanda*), contact (*sparśa*), resolution (*mati*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), attention of mind (*manaskāra*), resolve (*adhimokṣa*) and concentration (*samādhi*) are in every thought (*cetas*). It is said that these ten factors (*dharma*) occur, all of them, in every mind moment."

[75] *AKBh* I:14cd, p. 10: *saṃjñā nimittodgrahaṇātmikā// yāvannīlapītadīrghahrasvastrīpuruṣamitrāmitrasukha-duḥkhādinimittodgrahaṇam asau saṃjñāskandhaḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 33b1-2: *'du shes ni / mtsan mar 'dzin pa'i bdag nyid do // gang sngon po dang / ser po dang / ring po dang / thung ngu dang / pho dang / mo dang / mdza' bshes dang / mdza' bshes ma yin pa dang / bde ba dang / sdug bsngal ba la sogs pa'i rang bzhin gyi khyad par la mtsan mar 'dzin ba de ni 'du shes kyi phung po'o*. "Cognition has the nature of apprehending a sign. Apprehending signs as many as blue, yellow, long, short, female, male, friend, not-friend, pleasant, unpleasant, and so on – this is the aggregate of cognition." (Tibetan translation: "Apprehending the sign and difference in own-nature of that which is blue, yellow, long, short, female, male, friend, not-friend, pleasant, unpleasant, and so on – this is the aggregate of cognition.")

[76] See fn. 74 above.

4. The aggregate of conditional factors (*saṃskāra-skandha*). This aggregate includes all the factors that are not part of the other four aggregates, that is, all elements of human psychology, except for feelings, cognitions, and consciousness (the fifth aggregate). Vasubandhu explains that in fact, the term "conditional factor" (*saṃskāra*) refers to everything that is conditioned, including the factors that are classified under the other aggregates. But in its narrow sense, the term concerns specifically the remaining factors that do not exhibit the functions of the other four aggregates. These are personal dispositions or psychological patterns, which include, among other things, morally wholesome (*kuśala*) mental factors, such as faith (*śraddhā*), equanimity (*upekṣā*) or shame (*apatrāpya*); mental afflictions (*kleśa*), such as confusion (*moha*) and non-faith (*āśraddhya*); and unwholesome (*akuśala*) factors, such as anger (*krodha*), dishonesty (*śāṭhya*) and jealousy (*īrṣya*).

5. The aggregate of consciousness (*vijñāna-skandha*). A consciousness (*vijñāna*) is a sense impression of an object, or the "raw grasping" of an object. The aggregate of consciousness is the collection of the various impressions that are obtained through the contact between the sense organs and perceived objects. The *AKBh* identifies six senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching and thinking (the experience of the mental consciousness). Thus, there are six types of consciousness, corresponding to the six senses. It should be noted that in Buddhist thought, a consciousness is not a faculty, through which impressions are obtained, but rather a single momentary experience, that is the impression itself.[77]

[77] Vasubandhu's explanation of the five aggregates echoes earlier depictions of this taxonomy, such as the its depiction in the Pāli Canon and in earlier Sarvāstivāda accounts. On the five aggregates in the Pāli Nikāyas, see Sue Hamilton, *Identity and Experience: The Constitution of the Human Being According to Early Buddhism* (London: Luzac Oriental, 1996). On the five aggregates in the Sarvāstivāda tradition, see Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, Third Revised Edition* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Honk Kong, 2007), 30-32, 242-272.

Since the five aggregates are, in fact, collections of momentary factors that stand in a relation of causality to each other in such a way that the factors of a given moment ensue from the factors of the previous moment, Vasubandhu often calls them collectively the "stream of aggregates" or the "series of aggregates" (*skandha-saṃtāna*). Thus, when the idea of a person is mentioned, Vasubandhu also refers to it very often as a "stream of aggregates". The relation between persons, the aggregates and the factors in the *AKBh* is, hence, this: persons are conglomerations of physical and mental factors. These factors are basic, in that they are indivisible and non-reducible to more fundamental factors and that they come into existence and disappear within a single moment. The five aggregates are categories that enable the classification of the various factors that constitute the person into five groups, according to their essential functions. From a Buddhist point of view, the schema of the five aggregates is an exhaustive description of all the factors that constitute the person and all the physical and psychological functions that living beings possess.

Vasubandhu turns to these concepts when he presents his reductionist argument. In addition to that, as has been mentioned, Vasubandhu's argument is founded on the Indian epistemological standard of reliable means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Classical Indian texts on epistemology identified several means, by which human beings can gain accurate and reliable knowledge. While there are disagreements between the different philosophical schools of Vasubandhu's time about which means of knowledge can be trusted, many of the schools accepted at least four means of knowledge. These are (1) direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), the acquiring of knowledge through direct contact with the senses; (2) valid inference (*anumāna*), a structured procedure of logical reasoning that arrives at knowledge, which cannot be directly perceived, through the perception of another piece of knowledge; (3) comparison (*upamāna*), gaining new knowledge about

an unfamiliar object through comparison or analogy with a familiar object; and (4) reliable testimony (*śabda*) or authoritative scripture (*āpta-āgama*), gaining new knowledge from a reliable witness or a reliable scripture. Vasubandhu, however, accepts as reliable only three means of knowledge: direct perception, valid inference and authoritative scripture (*āpta-āgama*).[78] Vasubandhu's argument is simple. If an ultimate entity of an independent and separate self existed, he argues, one would be able to know it through at least one of the reliable means of knowledge. This is how people acquire knowledge about all other things that exist. However, none of the reliable means of knowledge provides such a proof for the existence of a permanent self, which is independent and separate from the five aggregates. Therefore, Vasubandhu concludes, a self beyond the five aggregates does not exist.[79]

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[78] *AKBh* II:46b, p. 76: *nahy eṣāṃ dravyato 'stitve kiṃcid api pramāṇam asti pratyakṣam anumānam āptāgamo vā. AKBhT* Ku 81a7: *de dag rdzas su yod pa'i tshad ma ji ltar gzugs la sogs pa'i chos bzhin du mngon sum pa 'am / rjes su dpag pa 'am / yid ches pa'i lung ni cung zad kyang med do.* "There is no means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) whatsoever for their existence [the existence of the characteristics of factors (*dharma*): arising, abiding, impermanence and so on] as ultimate substances (*dravyataḥ*) [*AKBhT*: as in the case of the factors of materiality and so forth]: direct perception, valid inference or authoritative scripture [through which they can be shown to exist ultimately]."

[79] *AKBh* IX, p. 461: *kathaṃ punar idaṃ gamyate skandhasaṃtāna* [Schm. emends *skandhasaṃtāne*] *evedam ātmābhidhānaṃ vartate nānyasminn abhidheya iti/ pratyakṣānumānābhāvāt/ ye hi dharmāḥ santi teṣāṃ pratyakṣam upalabdhir bhavaty asaty antarāye/ tadyathā ṣaṇṇāṃ viṣayāṇāṃ manasaś ca/ anumānaṃ ca* [Schm. emends *vā]/ tadyathā pañcānām indriyāṇām/ tatredam anumānam/ … na caivam ātmano 'stīti nāsty ātmā. AKBhT* Khu 82a2-5: *bdag tu mngon par brjod pa 'di ni phung po'i rgyud kho na la 'jug gi / brjod par bya ba gzhan la ni ma yin no zhes bya ba 'di ji ltar khong du chud ce na / mngon sum dang / rjes su dpag pa med pa'i phyir te / chos gang dag yod pa de dag ni bar chad byed pa med na mngon sum du dmigs pa yin te / dper na yul drug dang yid lta bu'o // yang na rjes su dpag pas dmigs pa yin te dper na dbang po lta bu'o // de la 'di ni rjes su dpag pa yin te / … bdag ni de ltar yod pa ma yin pas bdag med do.* "How then is it comprehended that the expression 'self' stands for nothing but the stream of aggregates, [and] not for another [entity] which is to be expressed? Because of the absence of direct perception or valid inference [which affirm it]. For the direct perception of those factors that exist must be obtained, provided there is no interruption; for example, [the apprehension through direct perception] of the six objects of the senses and of the mind. Or [alternatively, there is] a valid inference [of factors that exist]; for example, [the valid inference] of the five sense faculties. In that case, [there is] a valid inference [for] it… But such [a direct perception or valid inference] of the 'self' does not exist; therefore, there is no self."

In his reductionist argument, Vasubandhu intends to refute first and foremost the views held by the Non-Buddhist schools, which assert the existence of a permanent self. This argument has a soteriological significance. According to Vasubandhu, identifying with a separate self leads to the evolvement of mental afflictions (*kleśa*) and, consequently, to the creation of negative (*akuśala*, *aśubha*) *karman*. The mental afflictions and the accumulation (*upacaya*) of negative *karman* hinder the progress on the path to liberation from the cycle of births and deaths. This point is emphasized at the very beginning of the discussion about the nature of the self, which shows that for Vasubandhu, this discussion concerns ethical and practical matters no less than metaphysical questions. In like manner, it is argued that the understanding of the various factors (*dhātu*) that the five aggregates consist of is the only method for appeasing the mental afflictions, which underlie the existence in *saṃsāra*.[80] The reductionist argument and the terminology it involves lay the foundations for a more

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It needs to be mentioned that in his argument, Vasubandhu acknowledges only two of the means of knowledge he supports – direct perception and valid inference – as reliable sources for proving or disproving that a self exists. Scriptural authority is not mentioned by him. La Vallée Poussin suggests, following Yaśomitra, that in this argument, proof by scriptural authority is not mentioned, because it is included within the means of valid inference. See Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, trans. Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo Vasubandhu, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, 2590, n. 11. Duerlinger mentions another explanation, provided originally by the Chinese commentator Puguang, according to which scriptural authority is not mentioned because the argument is directed towards Non-Buddhist thinkers. Vasubandhu and his Non-Buddhist opponents cannot come into agreement on scriptures, since they follow different corpuses, but they can argue on the basis of perception or inference, which are two principles they agree on. See Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, 128.

[80] *AKBh* I:3, p. 2: ***dharmāṇām pravicayam antareṇa nāsti kleśānāṃ yata upaśāntaye 'bhyupāyaḥ kleśaiś ca bhramati bhavārṇave 'tra lokas taddhetor ata uditaḥ kilaiṣa śāstrā***. *AKBhT* Ku 27b3-4: *chos rnams rab tu rnam 'byed med par nyon mongs rnams / gang phyir nye bar zhi bar bya ba'i thabs med la // nyon mongs pas kyang 'jig rten srid mtsho 'dir 'khyams te // de bas de phyir 'di ni ston pas gsungs so lo.* "Since there is no means for the full pacifying of mental afflictions, except for the examination of factors (*dharma*) and by mental afflictions the world revolves here, in the ocean of cyclic existence – because of this reason, therefore, it is said (*kila*) that this was proclaimed by the teacher."

extensive discussion in the *ĀVP* of the ways in which persons can be said to be agents of actions, to which I now turn.

2.2 Vasubandhu's Strategy for Dealing with Questions of Agency

The *ĀVP* is arranged as a set of debates between Vasubandhu and his philosophical opponents. Questions of agency are dealt with in the final part of the chapter, in reply to objections raised by an opponent identified as belonging to a non-Buddhist school defending the existence of a self. In the debate, the proponents of the non-Buddhist schools serve as the voice that challenges Vasubandhu's philosophical position with regard to the nature of persons, and particularly – with regard to agency. The core question in regards moral agency to which the model of the five aggregates replies is: who is the moral agent?

In line with his first definition of self as a provisional designation referring to the five aggregates, Vasubandhu applies this model to all instances of discourse about self and agency. In what follows, I take Vasubandhu's project in the *ĀVP* as an attempt to fully translate ordinary agential conventions into impersonal language; in other words, to portray the various aspects of agency, as they are maintained by the realist, under the terms of the five aggregates without asserting a permanent self. My reading hence challenges the interpretation maintained by James Duerlinger, who holds that Vasubandhu had no pretensions to translate, without loss of meaning or information, sentences about persons to sentences about the five aggregates.[81] Notwithstanding, however, my account will also show that at two particular moments, Vasubandhu seems to have difficulties in translating ordinary agential conventions into impersonal

[81] James Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, 240.

language. These are the passages dealing with the sense of autonomous individuality and with self-interested concern for the future. Furthermore, in one particular place, Vasubandhu openly admits that his understanding of agency is different from that of the realist and that the realist's notion of agency cannot be fully maintained in light of the impermanent and interdependent nature of reality. This is the passage in which Vasubandhu and his opponent are divided in their opinions about the self capacity of the agent to perform actions.

The main reason that Vasubandhu does not succeed in translating the full range of ordinary agential conventions, we will shortly see, is that his project involves an intrinsic tension that arises from the two goals he aims to accomplish: First, Vasubandhu seeks to preserve, to the last one, the different conventions that he has his opponent presenting to him throughout the debate. At the same time, Vasubandhu strives to corroborate the Buddhist view of no-self, having a philosophical, as well as a soteriological motivation in mind. The tension between the two goals erupts in light of conventions that turn out to involve, inherently and by definition, a conception of an enduring self. In such cases, the consistency of the two sides of Vasubandhu's project must be demonstrated, as the opponent in the *ĀVP* indeed requires Vasubandhu to do.

A close reading of Vasubandhu's treatment of agency in the *ĀVP* reveals that it is characterized by two particular ways of approaching the problem of agency under the no-self premise. First, Vasubandhu chooses to explore agency from a descriptive perspective only. In accordance with this approach, Vasubandhu confines the discussion to the details of how different aspects of agency can be depicted using the terms of the five aggregates. What he tries to avoid, it seems, is deriving *normative* conclusions from his description. Such normative conclusions could have been, for example, prescriptions

for how we ought to act, whether we ought to modify our moral practices, or in what ways we ought to reformulate what matters to us in agency.

Vasubandhu could have had various reasons for this choice. It can be proposed that Vasubandhu assumes that the new understanding of what a person is will inevitably be followed by a normative shift, without the need to state the conclusions explicitly. It may also be suggested that Vasubandhu's thought was still unaware of the potential relation between the descriptive and the normative – between facts and values, the "is" and the "ought". I suggest the contrary: that Vasubandhu was trying to avoid this issue entirely, and I argue that he does so because had he derived normative conclusions from his descriptive account, it would have revealed his inability to preserve the entire range of ordinary normative conventions. It would have exposed his inability to do so, for the simple reason that ordinary normative values and principles would have had to be modified that way or another – something which, I believe, Vasubandhu attempted to avoid in this case.

A second way in which Vasubandhu chooses to approach the problem of selfless agency is by examining it from a third-person perspective. Accordingly, agency is treated primarily through the eyes of an observer who is external to the agent himself. The other approach – that of the first-person perspective of agency, i.e. agency through the eyes of the agent himself – does not occupy a central place in the discussion. In this case also, different explanations can be proposed for Vasubandhu's choice to examine agency from a third-person perspective. However, I believe that the reason that Vasubandhu refrains from the first-person perspective is that the first-person perspective, contrary to the third-person perspective, reveals the essential differences between agency under the realist view and agency under Vasubandhu's view, which

cannot capture the entire range of ordinary agential conventions.[82] Our ordinary first-person perspective involves a sense of identity, a sense of being an enduring self or subject, and this element of the first-person perspective threatens to sabotage Vasubandhu's project.[83]

As I will show later in the dissertation (see sub-section 4.3.2 below), in other sections of the *AKBh*, in which Vasubandhu discusses agency but is not obliged to demonstrate that the doctrine of no-self is compatible with agential conventions, Vasubandhu makes overt and repeating references to the first-person perspective. This, naturally, involves the notion of "I". As I will claim, the difference between the two treatments gives the impression that here, in the *ĀVP*, Vasubandhu avoids the first-person perspective deliberately – and I suggest that the reason is that this perspective undermines his project and reveals the tension the latter involves.

What I did in this preliminary section was to explain my "working assumptions" in reading Vasubandhu's treatment of agency in the *ĀVP*. To sum up, I suggest that Vasubandhu strives to translate *all* agential conventions to the impersonal language of the five aggregates. This project, I will show, leads to a tension that appears when

[82] Jonardon Ganeri distinguishes between a "first-person perspective" and what he calls a "first-person stance". The former, he explains, can involve "nothing more than a matter of having one's own mental life in view," whereas the latter requires, on top of that, that one's mental life present itself to one as "mine". In this sense, then, what I recognize in Vasubandhu is closer to what Ganeri calls a first-person *stance*. See Jonardon Ganeri, *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness and the First-Person Stance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8-9.

[83] In saying this, I don't intend to claim that Vasubandhu fails to account for the experience of the first-person perspective or the experience of being a subject; what I claim is that the very sense of self or of being a subject that this perspective involves undermines Vasubandhu's project, insofar as it is incompatible with the soteriological goal of eliminating the deluded sense of self. Therefore, I would agree with those who argue, as Matthew MacKenzie does (see Matthew MacKenzie, "Self-Awareness without a Self: Buddhism and the Reflexivity of Awareness," *Asian Philosophy* 18, no. 3 [2008]: 245-266), that the first-person perspective can be accounted for without the need to appeal to persons (in fact, I believe that's what Vasubandhu does). However, in my understanding, agency that relies on holding the sense of self that comes with the first-person perspective is in tension with the soteriological aspect of the no-self doctrine, as I will show below.

certain conventions, which are inherently associated with the notion of self, are examined. Finally, I claim that the first-person perspective and the normative approach indicate that certain aspects of agency cannot be articulated without a notion of self, and for this reason, Vasubandhu attempts to avoid them. I now move to inspect Vasubandhu's arguments themselves.

2.3 Two Notions of the Moral Agent

The notion of the moral agent that Vasubandhu's opponent expects him to explain in the *ĀVP* has three essential characteristics. First, the agent (*kartṛ*) is the one who performs (*yaḥ karoti*) the actions. Second, the agent is the owner (*svāmin*) of actions. And third, the agent has a certain self capacity (*svātantrya*[84]) to perform actions, unaided by and independent of other factors.[85] The first section in Vasubandhu's examination of agency concerns the status of the agent of memory. In reply to his non-Buddhist opponent, who inquires who the agent of memory is, provided that there is no enduring self, Vasubandhu explains that the attribution of a memory to a particular person named Caitra involves two cognitive steps. The first step is giving the name Caitra to a stream of aggregates. Then, at the moment in which a remembering thought arises in this

[84] According to Matthew Dasti, *svātantrya* in Indian thought is the best equivalent Sanskrit term to the notion of free will in Western thought. He explains that this concept suggests the capacity for self-determined action. If this is true, then Vasubandhu's rejection of the idea of *svātantrya* has implications for how we ought to understand his conception of free will. However, I will not develop this point further here. See Matthew R. Dasti, Introduction to *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

[85] This notion of moral agent as someone who performs actions and owns them might sound too thin in other philosophical contexts. It does not encompass certain characterizations, such as the capacity for deliberation, having reasons and motivations to act, being accountable for actions or possessing freedom to act - which might seem essential to agency. However, as in this chapter, my aim is to examine the notion of agency and its implication in Vasubandhu's thought, I will follow the characterization that he accepts. This thin notion, nevertheless, meets the basic definition of the moral agent presented at the beginning of the study (which states that a moral agent is someone capable of performing actions and who is expected to satisfy the demands of morality).

stream of aggregates from a perceiving thought, one says that Caitra remembers.[86] Vasubandhu immediately extends this account to other instances of momentary agential events. He argues that this cognitive process of attribution takes place when we state that a certain person apprehends an object, and engages in similar cognitive activities.[87] When a certain recognition, apprehension, and so on, arise in one of the five aggregates due to previous causes and conditions, it is said that the person designated upon the five aggregates recognizes, apprehends and so forth. What all the above cases have in common, it seems, is that they are temporally confined. That is, they take place during one single moment.

Vasubandhu, however, refers to the model of the five aggregates also when explaining the occurrences of continuous acts, such as walking, which take place over time. Here Vasubandhu adds an epistemological layer to his theory by providing an explanation of how it happens exactly that we label the aggregates with a certain name despite their momentary change. The reason for elaborating on this matter at this point seems to be that now another factor was added, namely, the factor of time and continuity. In this section of the debate, it is claimed against Vasubandhu that if persons are not selves, they cannot walk. Vasubandhu responds by claiming again that a personal name – Devadatta in this case – refers only to the stream of aggregates.

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[86] *AKBh* IX, p. 473: *yat tarhi caitraḥ smaratīty ucyate/ tato caitrākhyāt saṃtānāt tāṃ bhavantīṃ dṛṣṭvocyate caitraḥ smaratīti*. *AKBhT* Khu 91a5: *'o na gang nag pas dran no zhes bya ba ji lta bu zhe na / nag pa zhes bya ba'i rgyud de las de skye bar mthong nas smra bar zad do.* "[Q:] In that case [that it is not a self which remembers], how is it said that Caitra remembers? [Vasubandhu:] Having seen that [memory] arising from that continuum which was named 'Caitra', it is said that Caitra remembers."

[87] Ibid.: *evaṃ ko vijānāti kasya vijñānam ity evam ādiṣu vaktavyam*. *AKBhT* Khu 91b2-3: *de bzhin du su zhig gis rnam par shes / su'i rnam par shes pa yin zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa yang brjod par bya ste*. "In such a manner, [the questions] 'Who apprehends? Whose apprehension is it?' and so on are to be addressed." La Vallée Poussin explicates the expression "and so forth" (*adīṣu*) as referring to the questions "what feels [an object of feeling]?" and "What has an idea?" (Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, 2562).

Persons are "a series of momentary causally conditioned factors (*saṃskāra*) which form an uninterrupted stream."[88] Thus, in a similar way to momentary agential conventions, a continuous action is also attributed to a person on the basis of its taking place in the stream of aggregates of that person. Only that in the case of a continuous action, the attribution is justified by the stream of aggregates being causally conditioned and uninterrupted, thus creating an appearance of one single entity. According to Vasubandhu, common people see within this stream one solid entity, namely, a sentient being, which moves from one place to another. In truth, however, the "walking" of Devadatta is simply the fact of the arising of his stream of aggregates in different places.[89] The momentary and continuous conventions of agency are thus explained on the basis of the five aggregates of the person that is identified as the agent. The agent is the collection of five aggregates, designated by a certain name, in which a certain event or continuous action occurs.

Alongside this epistemological account of the nature of agency, Vasubandhu introduces an alternative view of what the agent (*kartṛ*) is. In several places he argues that agency – in accordance with his opponent's definitions – is to be attributed to the primary cause (*hetu, kāraṇa*) of the agential act or event in question. This alternative

[88] Ibid.: *kṣaṇikā… saṃskārā abhinnasaṃtānā*. *AKBhT* Khu 91b5: *'du byed skad cig pa rgyun tha mi dad pa rnams*.

[89] Ibid.: *kathaṃ ca devadatto gacchati/ kṣaṇikā hi saṃskārā abhinnasaṃtānā devadatta iti bālair ekasattvapiṇḍagraheṇādhimuktāḥ svasya saṃtānasya deśāntare kāraṇaṃ bhavanta ucyante gacchati devadatta iti/ sā ca deśāntarotpattirgatir iti*. *AKBhT* Khu 91b5-6: *lha sbyin ji ltar 'gro zhe na / 'du byed skad cig pa rgyun tha mi dad pa rnams la byis pa rnams kyis gcig pa nyid du bzung nas lhas byin zhes mos pa rnams rang gi rgyun yul gzhan du 'byung ba la rgyur gyur na lhas byin 'gro'o zhes bya'o // yul gzhan du 'byung ba de ni 'gro ba yin te.* "[Q:] And how does Devadatta walk [if there is no self to Devadatta]? [Vasubandhu:] Because uninterrupted streams of momentary causally conditioned factors (*saṃskāra*), inasmuch as they are grasped by common people as single solid beings, are firmly conceived [by common people] to be "Devadatta" [and because] they become the cause [for the arising] of his own stream in another place, [common people] say 'Devadatta is walking'. And that arising [of the stream of aggregates] in another place is 'walking'."

notion of agency, he proposes, satisfies the first two characteristics of agency mentioned above, namely, the ownership of an action and the performing of an action.[90]

The problem of agency as ownership is discussed in the chapter, when Vasubandhu's opponent raises the objection that without there being a permanent self, it must be explained who the owner of memories is. In order to argue that the cause of remembering can also be referred to as the owner of the memory, Vasubandhu questions his opponent on the meaning of ownership according to the latter. In this part of the debate, which resembles a Socratic dialectical scrutiny, Vasubandhu draws from his opponent an example of ownership, according to which a person is the owner of a memory in the same sense that a person, Caitra, is the owner of a cow. The essential expression of Caitra's ownership of the cow is explained by the opponent as the position in which Caitra is found (*adhīna*) to employ or use the cow (*tasyā viniyogaḥ*) according to his own wishes. Vasubandhu then follows this example of ownership and argues that in each and every case, the cause of an action satisfies the opponent's definition of ownership. The cause is that which exercises control over the action. Therefore, claims Vasubandhu, the cause by itself is sufficient as an owner and there is no need to assert a distinct self on top of it to fulfill this role. In the words of Vasubandhu:

[90] While Vasubandhu's main interlocutor seems to be a proponent of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika schools or the Sāṃkhya school, the context of the debate also arises from the notion of agency expounded by the Grammarians, where the agent (*kartṛ*) is said to be endowed with *svatantra* and the term *svatantra* is understood, according to George Cardona, as "one who has himself as the principal person", although the meaning is not further clarified. See George Cardona, "Pāṇinian Grammarians on Agency and Independence," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 86-87. Moreover, the relevance of the Grammarians' understanding of agency to this particular debate of Vasubandhu is demonstrated lucidly by Mattia Salvini, "Conventions and Agency in the Philosophies of the Mahāyāna" (PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, 2008), 101-121, esp. 115-118. I thank Mattia Salvini for sharing his dissertation with me.

> Then, it is the cause that follows to be (*prāpnoti*) "the master", and it is the effect that follows to be "the property". Because cause is the lord with regard to the effect, and because of the effect, the cause has lordship (*ādhipatya*).[91]

To conclude his argument, Vasubandhu returns to the model of the five aggregates and reminds the opponent that Caitra and the cow are in fact only two streams of aggregates, and that Caitra's ownership of the cow boils down to the five aggregates of Caitra being the cause for transformations in the five aggregates of the cow. Vasubandhu then applies this account to all other actions attributed to agents, beginning with the momentary events of recognition, apprehension and the like, through the continuous acts such as walking, and up to actions that carry positive or negative *karmic* potential. In the same way, later on in the chapter, the owner of the "sense of individuality" (*ahaṃkāra*) is also explained by Vasubandhu to be its cause.[92]

Jonardon Ganeri is right, in my opinion, in saying that "Vasubandhu's way of dealing with the objection [against reducing facts about ownership to facts about causal connection] is less than convincing."[93] I would add that it is less than convincing not only because this account leaves various untreated issues concerning the notion of ownership; but also because it seems to misrepresent the notion of the agent-owner itself, as Vasubandhu's realist opponent conceives of it. It seems that what the opponent has in mind is a continuous owner, who owns his memory not in a particular point in

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[91] *AKBh* IX, p. 473: *hetur eva tarhi svāmī prāpnoti phalam eva ca svam/ yasmād dhetor ādhipatyaṃ phale phalena ca tadvān hetur iti*. *AKBhT* Khu 91a7-91b1: *de lta na ni rgyu kho na la rje bo yin la 'bras bu kho na bran 'gyur te / 'di ltar rgyu ni 'bras bu la dbang byed la 'bras bu yang de dang ldan na rgyu yin pas* […].

[92] *AKBh* IX, p. 476: *yady ātmā nāsti kasyāyam ahaṃkāraḥ/ idaṃ punas tad evāyātaṃ kim arthaiṣā ṣaṣṭhīti/ yāvad ya evāsya hetus tasyaivāyam iti*. *AKBhT* Khu 93b5: *gal te bdag med pa na bdag tu 'dzin pa ni su'i yin / 'di ni drug pa 'di'i don ji lta bu yin zhes bya ba nas de ni dran pa'i rgyu gang yin pa de kho na yin no zhes bya ba'i bar de nyid 'ongs pa yin no.* "[Q:] If there is no self, to whom does the sense of individuality belong? [Vasubandhu:] This is indeed the same thing [which has been discussed before] that has come back again: 'what is the meaning of that genitive case [i.e. being an "owner"]?' 'That which is indeed the cause of another thing possesses that thing'."

[93] Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul*, 175.

time, but at all times, even after this memory has ceased from being actively present. Moreover, this owner seems to be one that can possess several memories, actions and so forth; not a momentary owner, which exercises control over one particular event and then perishes away.[94] Vasubandhu's suggestion that the owner is a certain cause in the collection of aggregates that comprise the person seems, on the face of it, as a sophistic move, which does not provide a genuine solution to his opponent's notion of ownership, but rather redefines the original notion. However, I believe that this problem is solved, if one recalls the interplay between the conventional notion of agency and the ultimate notion of agency. Since any event that occurs within the stream of the five aggregates of the person is also attributed to the person himself (the five aggregates designated by a particular name), it can be inferred that the conventional person whose five aggregates contain the owner-cause of a certain memory is *also* the owner of that memory. This solution is supported to a certain degree by Vasubandhu's final account of the nature of Caitra's ownership of the cow. The nature of the relation between Caitra and his memory, however, is not spelled out explicitly in the same way.

Vasubandhu formulates the same metaphysical notion of agency again when he treats the second characteristic of agency, namely, the performing of actions. Thus, as part of his account of memory, Vasubandhu claims that "the one who performs it [the act of remembering] (*yas tāṃ karoti*) has been explained: the cause of remembering

[94] From a Western philosophical perspective, notions of agency which resemble the ultimate notion of agent proposed by Vasubandhu have received a great quantity of criticism through what is known as the objection from the "disappearing agent". The essence of this objection is that by leaving out the agent (as a persisting entity), theories such as the one developed by Vasubandhu fail to capture agency, since all instances of agency turn into events that causally happen to us, rather than actions that are done by someone. In this dissertation I will consider one version of this problem, as presented by Christine Korsgaard. On the problem of the disappearing agent, see Alfred R. Mele, *Motivation and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 215-220; Ernest J. Lowe, *Personal Agency: The Metaphysics of Mind and Action* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 159-161; Helen Steward, "Processes, Continuants and Individuals", *Mind* 122 no. 487 (2013): 781–812.

(*smṛtihetu*-) is a special mind [moment] (-*cittaviśeṣa*)".[95] Similarly, when his opponent asks him to explain who the doer of actions, or creator of *karmic* potential (*karmaṇāṃ kartā*) is, Vasubandhu ascribes the agency to the cause of the action in the stream of aggregates. In Vasubandhu's words, "but that which is the chief cause (*pradhānaṃ kāraṇam*) of which [i.e., of the action], is said to be its agent (*kartṛ*)."[96] Finally, in this section of the debate, Vasubandhu also rejects the third characteristic of agency that his opponent puts forth, i.e. an independent power (*svātantrya*) to act, claiming that there is nothing in the process of performing an action that is independent of other factors. In addition, he argues that a self that is independent of other factors does not participate in causality, and therefore logically cannot cause anything, or in other words, cannot perform any action. Vasubandhu, therefore, concludes that a single entity, a producer dependent on itself cannot be ascertained. [97]

Even though the cause as an agent has no independent power to produce the effect, one passage in the discussion about primary causes (*kāraṇa-hetu*) in the second chapter of the *AKBh* suggests that in moral context the cause serves to distinguish between the agent and other individuals. In this passage, Vasubandhu claims that primary causes can be divided into two categories: (1) the chief (*pradhāna*) cause, which leads to the result

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[95] *AKBh* IX, pp. 472-473: *uktaḥ sa yas tāṃ karoti smṛtihetucittaviśeṣaḥ*. *AKBhT* Khu 91a5: *gang gis de byed pa de ni bshad zin te / dran pa'i rgyu ni sems kyi khyad par yin no.*

[96] *AKBh* IX, p. 476-477: *yat tu yasya pradhānaṃ kāraṇaṃ tat tasya kartety ucyate*. *AKBhT* Khu 94a3-4: *gang zhig gang gi rgyu'i gtso bo yin ba de ni de'i byed pa po zhes bya.*

[97] *AKBh* IX, p. 476: *pratyayaparatantrā hi sarve bhāvāḥ pravartante/ ātmano 'pi ca nirapekṣasyākāraṇatvābhyupagamān na svātantryaṃ sidhyati/ tasmān naivaṃ lakṣaṇam upalabhyate kaścitkartā. AKBhT* Khu 94a3: *dngos po thams cad ni rkyen gyi gzhan gyi dbang gis 'jug go / bdag kyang ltos pa med par rgyu nyid du khas mi len pa'i phyir ro / rang dbang can du mi 'grub bo / de lta bas na de lta bu'i mtshan nyid kyi byed pa po ni 'ga' yang mi dmigs so.* "All existing things [in the process of performing an action], being dependent on other causes (*pratyaya*), actively operate. And an independent 'self', too, since independence admits of non-causality, its independent power (*svātantrya*) is not established. Therefore, an agent with such a characteristic [i.e., having independent power] is not perceived whatsoever."

and (2) causes that are potentially capable of posing a hindrance to the arising of the result, yet in practice, do not pose a hindrance.[98] The second category includes all factors (*dharma*) other than the chief cause. The latter are involved by way of not interfering with the arising of the result.

At this point, an objection is raised as to the reason that when a murder is committed, not all sentient beings, like the murderer himself, are morally responsible for that murder. In reply, Vasubandhu explains that all the factors are acknowledged as efficient causes because they do not constitute an obstacle. It is not the case that they are all agents (*kāraka*).[99] In other words, the chief cause, which is plainly the cause that yields the effect, defines who the agent is. All other factors, which are causes involved in the production of the effect by not obstructing it, are not the agent and therefore, do not carry responsibility for that action. According to Karin Meyers, who mentions this point in her discussion of the larger context of free will and determinism, this notion of agent suggests that agents do not have to be necessarily persons; they may also be

[98] *AKBh* II:50a, p. 82: *saṃskṛtasya hi dharmasya svabhāvavarjyāḥ sarvadharmāḥ kāraṇahetur utpādayati / avighnabhāvāvasthānāt* [Schm. emends, following *AKBhT* and *AKVy utpādaṃ pratyavighnabhāvāvasthānāt*]. *AKBhT* Ku 86a5: *rang gi ngo bo ma gtogs pa chos thams cad ni chos 'dus byas kyi byed rgyu'i rgyu yin te / skye ba la bgegs mi byed pa'i ngo bor gnas pa'i phyir ro*. "Since all factors, with the exception of their own nature, are the primary cause of a conditioned factor, because of abiding in the state of non-obstruction to the production [of the conditioned factor]."; *AKBh* II:50a, p. 83: *yas tu pradhānaḥ kāraṇahetuḥ sa utpādane 'pi samarthaḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 86b2: *byed rgyu'i rgyu gtso bo gang yin pa 'di ni bskyed par bya ba la yang nus*. "But that which is the chief primary cause is also capable of generating [the result]."

[99] *AKBh* II:50a, p. 83: *yas tv evaṃ codayati anāvaraṇabhāvena cet sarvaṃ dharmahetavo* [Schm. emends *sarvadharmā hetavo / sarve dharmā hetavo*] *bhavanti kasmān na sarvasyotpādo yugapad bhavati prāṇātipātena ca ghātakavat sarve tadbhājo bhavantīti/ tasyedam acodyam/ yasmād anāvaraṇabhāvena sarvadharmāḥ hetuḥ pratijñāyante na kārakabhāveneti*. *AKBhT* Ku 86b3-4: *gang zhig 'di skad du gal te mi sgrib pa'i ngo pos chos thams cad rgyu dag yin no // ci'i phyir chos thams cad cig car skye bar mi 'gyur ro // srog gcod pa la sogs pa la yang gshed ma pa bzhin du thams cad de bsten par mi 'gyur zhes rgol bar byed pa de'i de ni klan kar mi rung ste / 'di ltar mi sgrib pa'i ngo bos chos thams cad rgyu yin par dam 'cha'i / byed pa po'i ngo bo ni ma yin pa'i phyir ro*. "Now, a person who disputes thus: 'if all factors become causes by being non-obstruction, then why is it that the production of everything does not take place at the same time? And why is it that with an act of killing, not everyone [should be considered as] participating in that act in the same way as the killer does?' – his [dispute] is a non-dispute, since all factors are acknowledged to be a cause by being non-obstruction, not by being an agent."

instrumental causes of other kinds, which cause a particular result.[100] This is true, with the only addition that, as it has been shown, any mental or physical event that occurs within a given stream of aggregates is immediately ascribed to the person who is designated on the basis of them, thus making him the agent under the second, conventional sense of agency. I will return to the role that the primary cause plays in agency in chapter 3, when I discuss the significance of Vasubandhu's theory of seeds for this topic.

To sum up, in the *ĀVP* Vasubandhu explains the notion of agent on two complementary levels. On the ultimate level, the agent as the performer of the action and its owner is reduced to the particular momentary cause that produced that action. This cause is the special mind moment which precedes the action in question. On the conventional level, on the other hand, the agent is the person who is designated upon the stream of aggregates, in which the action occurred. Between the two levels of agency there is a special epistemological relation: the conventional agent is apprehended in dependence upon the stream of aggregates and the event that occurs within them.

2.4 Two Conventions That Do Not Withstand Impersonal Articulation

I have discussed earlier the strategy that Vasubandhu adopts in accounting for the notion of the moral agent under a no-self premise. This strategy is used by him to explain various agential conventions. Some of these conventions have already been discussed: momentary agential conventions, such as remembering and perceiving, and continuous conventions, such as walking. I have also mentioned at the beginning of this

[100] Karin Meyers, "Freedom and Self-Control: Free Will in South Asian Buddhism" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010), 112.

chapter that Vasubandhu appears to be interested in keeping the debate around a descriptive account of agency and around the third-person perspective, and I suggested that the reason for this is that the two complementing approaches – developing a normative discussion on agential conventions and adopting the first-person perspective – would expose the inner tension that Vasubandhu's project consists of. However, there are two passages, to which we now turn, which are exceptional in that they do make mention of the aspect of first-person perspective. For this reason, they reveal further layers of Vasubandhu's notion of agency under a no-self premise and the implications that selfless agency has for ethics.

The first passage that constitutes an exception to Vasubandhu's overall strategy (and hence, I suggest, threatens his project) concerns the basis for distinguishing between the agent and other individuals. The opponent requests Vasubandhu to clarify the following problematic: if the "sense of individuality" (*ahaṃkāra*) arises when one conceives one's aggregates – one's body, for instance – why is it that this conception does not arise with regard to the bodies of other people. In this question, the opponent seems to point to the assumption that there must be some qualitative difference between oneself and others, and to suggest that this difference can be accounted for only by independent selves, which Vasubandhu rejects. In reply, Vasubandhu explains that there is a unique relation between the "sense of individuality" and one's own five aggregates, that does not obtain for the aggregates of others.[101] Vasubandhu does not provide more details about the

[101] *AKBh* IX, p. 476: *sati śarīrālambanatve paraśarīrālambano 'pi kasmān na bhavati/ asaṃbandhāt/ yenaiva hi sahāsya saṃbandhaḥ kāyena cittena vā tatraivāyam ahaṃkāra utpadyate nānyatra*. *AKBhT* Khu 93b4: *lus la dmigs pa yin na ci'i phyir pha rol gyi lus la dmigs pa yang ma yin / 'brel ba med pa'i phyir te / 'di ni lus sam sems gang dang lhan cig 'brel pa de kho na la bdag tu 'dzin pa 'di 'byung gi gzhan la ni ma yin te.* "[Q:] If [the sense of individuality] has the body as its cognitive object, so how come [the sense of individuality] does not have another's body as its cognitive object, as well? [Vasubandhu:] Because of a lack of connection [between one's own sense of individuality and the body of another person]. Since the sense of individuality arises only with respect to that

nature of this relation, except that it is a relation of cause and effect. He offers, however, a certain etiology by saying that this relation is the result of a mental habit which has no point of beginning.[102] This begginingless habit of conceiving individuality involves ignorance: Vasubandhu explains that the cause of "the sense of individuality" is "a mind moment accompanied by ignorance, whose object is its own stream [of aggregates] and which is pervaded by a former 'sense of individuality'".[103] In other words, the cause for the sense of individuality, according to Vasubandhu, is a mental event which conceives the stream of aggregates in which that mental event occurs, clouded by misunderstanding of the true nature of the person. The cause for the sense of individuality itself displays the same sense of individuality, which indicates that such a mental state is caused by a previous mental state of the same kind, and so on with no identifiable point of beginning.

Two things should be noticed in this last account of individuality. First, it is to be noted that Vasubandhu adheres to the descriptive level. His response does not include a further normative step of justifying or rejecting this convention, and he does not theorize normative implications that may stem from his account. This is in stark contrast with the approach of other Buddhist thinkers, like Śāntideva and Buddhaghosa, who purposefully utilized metaphysics to modify ordinary normative conventions in order to

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[cognitive object,] which has a connection with the body or the mind, and not with respect to [the cognitive object of] another."

[102] Ibid.: *anādau saṃsāra evam abhyāsāt/ kaś ca saṃbandhaḥ/ kāryakāraṇabhāvaḥ*. *AKBhT* Khu 93b4-5: *'khor ba thog ma med pa nas de ltar goms pa'i phyir ro // 'brel pa yang gang zhig yin / rgyu dang 'bras bu'i dngos po'i 'bras bu yin no.* "Because of the habit [of conceiving individuality on the basis of one's own body or mind] that exists since beginningless *saṃsāra*. [Q:] And what is this connection? [Vasubandhu:] It is the relation of cause and effect."

[103] *AKBh* IX, p. 476: *pūrvāhaṃkāraparibhāvitaṃ svasantativiṣayaṃ sāvadyaṃ* [Schm. emends *sāvidyaṃ*] *cittam*. *AKBhT* Khu 93b5-6: *sngon bdag tu 'dzin pas yongs su bsgos pa rang gi rgyud kyi yul can ma rig pa dang bcas pa'i sems yin no.*

better fit with the Buddhist world view.[104] A second point to be noticed is that ignorance with regard to the true nature of the self plays a central role in Vasubandhu's account. Here again Vasubandhu is compelled to describe agency using an idea – the deluded "sense of individuality" – that he had been trying all along to avoid and eradicate from our epistemology. In doing this, the passage reveals the inescapable tension in Vasubandhu's project: if one rejects the idea of a conventional permanent self, not all ordinary conventions can be accounted for. In this case, Vasubandhu was required to add a foreign concept, which seems *prima facie* to contradict his soteriological view. Otherwise, he could not explain how a particular agent could distinguish himself from other individuals.

What can be seen is that the inconsistency arises when the first-person perspective comes into the picture. Vasubandhu could use his strategy if the question were about distinguishing between one agent and another from a third-person perspective, such as in the case of distinguishing between Caitra and the cow as two different streams of aggregates and individuals. This was accomplished by applying only the concepts of aggregates and provisional designations (see sub-section 2.2). However, here the issue in question is how to distinguish between *myself* and another agent, not merely between two different agents; and in order to solve this issue, it is required that ordinary first-person perspective, along with the ignorance regarding the true nature of self, be called

[104] On this topic in Śāntideva, see Paul Williams, *Altruism and Reality: Studies in the Philosophy of the Bodhicaryāvatāra* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1998), Ch. 2, 5; and replies by Mark Siderits, "The Reality of Altruism: Reconstructing Śāntideva," *Philosophy East and West* 50, no. 3 (2000): 412–424; Barbara Clayton, "Compassion as a Matter of Fact: The Argument from No-Self to Selflessness in Śāntideva's *Śikṣāsamuccaya,*" *Contemporary Buddhism* 2, no. 1 (2001): 83-97; Jon Wetlesen, "Did Śāntideva Destroy the Bodhisattva Path?," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 9 (2002): 34-88; Jay L. Garfield, "What Is It Like to Be a Bodhisattva? Moral Phenomenology in Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra,*" *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 33, no. 1-2 (2012): 333-357. For this topic in Buddhaghosa, see Charles Goodman, "Resentment and Reality: Buddhism on Moral Responsibility." *American Philosophical Quarterly* (2002): 359-372.

into action. In face of this issue, Vasubandhu seems to face a dilemma: he either has to admit of not being able to fully account for ordinary agency without a notion of a permanent self, or he has to dismiss an essential aspect of agency, which is also central to his own soteriology. In this case, Vasubandhu takes the first route and maintains the convention of distinguishing between moral agents (or between moral agents and moral subjects) from a first-person perspective. But in order to do so, he is required to resort to the idea of a "sense of individuality", which is pervaded by ignorance. One crucial point to observe in this exceptional section of the dialogue is that maintaining a subjective sense of agency requires the acceptance of a certain unified self.

In the second of the two passages, Vasubandhu's opponent raises the problem of self-interested concern for the future – one of the objections that stem from the Extreme Claim. His question is about the end or reason (*artha*) for undertaking actions for one's own welfare, in the absence of a self. Vasubandhu replies that the purpose for which self-interested actions are taken can be described as "so that I shall be happy and not suffer".[105] It is important to notice that this exchange, as it is phrased here, is open for two levels of interpretation. One level is descriptive, whereas the other is normative. According to the descriptive interpretation, the opponent asks for an account of the process that takes place when people undertake actions for the future, given that there is no permanent self. However, according to the normative interpretation, the opponent requires much more than that: he requires that Vasubandhu provide the reasons and motivations for undertaking those actions. In other words, what the opponent asks is why we *ought* to take actions, not why people do so in practice.

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[105] *AKBh* IX, p. 476: *ātmany asati kim arthaḥ karmārambhaḥ/ ahaṃ sukhī syām ahaṃ duḥkhī karmārambhaḥ na syām ity evam arthaḥ. AKBhT* Khu 93b1: *bdag med na ci'i phyir las rtsom / bdag bde bar gyur cig / bdag sdug bsngal bar ma gyur cig ces bya ba de'i phyir ro.* "[Q:] If there is no self, what is the aim (or: reason) for undertaking actions? [Vasubandhu:] The aim (or: reason) [for undertaking action] is [the wish that] 'I shall be happy and not suffer'".

It should be remembered that in the context of this debate, the question of self-interested concern for the future must have had a broader import than establishing reasons for worldly egoistic concern; the spiritual path, both the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist, is founded on the principle that one can achieve spiritual liberation as a result of continuous practice and on the idea that seeking self liberation from *saṃsāra* is a legitimate motivation for engaging in the spiritual path, as Vasubandhu himself indicates in the outset of the chapter.[106]

This double descriptive-normative meaning is maintained in the Tibetan translation (Yaśomitra's *AKVy*, unfortunately, does not shed light on this point). The ambiguity is also maintained to a certain degree in the translations of La Vallée Poussin and of Duerlinger, although my impression is that both lean towards a normative understanding of the question.[107] Matthew Kapstein's translation is the only one that seems to follow the normative understanding wholeheartedly and unambiguously.[108]

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[106] James Duerlinger hypothesizes, in addition, that the problem of self concern for the future has bearing on altruistic actions. He argues that the context in which Vasubandhu's argument is presented, suggests that according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika opponent, as well as according to Vasubandhu, actions for the sake of others require that we first have reasons to act in our own interest. See Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, 279.

[107] Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, p. 2571: "[Vaiśeṣikas:] – If the self does not really exist, what is the goal or reason [*artha*] for undertaking actions [*karmārambha*]? [Vasubandhu:] – The goal or reason for undertaking actions is expressed as: 'I [*aham*] would be happy and not suffer.'"; Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, p. 104: "[The Tīrthikas say that] if there is no self, there is no reason to undertake an action, [since an action is undertaken out of self-interest.] [We agree that] the reason an action is undertaken is [expressed] in this way, 'I would be happy and not suffer [if I should undertake this action]'".

[108] "*Question*. If there is no self, then why undertake deeds, i.e., that 'I may be happy,' or 'I may not be miserable'?" (Matthew T. Kapstein. *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*. Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism [Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001], 372; italics in original). Charles Goodman, on the other hand, seems to understand the entire exchange according to the descriptive sense: "[Opponent:] If there is no soul, then what's the meaning of statements about the results of action, as for instance 'I am happy, I am not happy?'" (Goodman, "Vasubandhu's Abhidharmakośa: The Critique of the Soul", 303).

What follows after this part of the dialogue, however, can only be interpreted as a descriptive account:

> **Question:** What is it that is called "I"?
>
> **Vasubandhu:** That which is the object of this sense of individuality (*ahaṃkāra*).
>
> **Question:** What is the object of this sense of individuality?
>
> **Vasubandhu:** The object is the aggregates.
>
> **Question:** How is it known [to be the aggregates]?
>
> **Vasubandhu:** Because of the attachment (*sneha*) to them [i.e., to the five aggregates – and not to a self][109]

In his analysis of this passage, Duerlinger seems to be undecided between the two interpretations. He claims, on the one hand, that what Vasubandhu meant to say in this part of the dialogue is that when we act out of self-interest, we actually act in the interest of the stream of aggregates rather than in the interest of a distinct self, which does not exist (p. 281) – a claim, which expresses a descriptive interpretation of the dialogue. On the other hand, Duerlinger ponders over the question of why the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika opponent assumed that without self-interest there is no reason to undertake an action, whereas one can find reasons to act in favor of other people (p. 279) – a question, which follows a normative understanding of the opponent's objection.

Indeed, I think that whereas the opponent's initial question is best understood as requiring a normative explanation, Vasubandhu's reply must be taken as providing a descriptive account. According to this account, self-interested actions are performed by agents because they are attached to a self, which is in fact the stream of aggregates, and

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[109] *AKBh* IX, p. 476: *ko 'sāv ahaṃ nāma yad viṣayo 'yam ahaṃkāraḥ* [Ejima: *nāma/ yad viṣayo* (')*yam ahaṃkāraḥ/ <kiṃviṣayo 'yam ahaṃkāraḥ>*/] *skandhaviṣayaḥ/ kathaṃ jñāyate/ teṣu snehāt*. *AKBhT* Khu 93b1-2: *yang bdag ces bya ba yang gang zhig yin / bdag tu 'dzin pa 'di'i yul gang yin pa'o // bdag tu 'dzin pa 'di'i yul gang zhig yin / yul ni phung po yin no // ji ltar shes / de dag la chags pa'i phyir dang.* The emphasis and the dialogue form are mine. This part can also be understood as consisting in rhetorical questions and answers.

the aim of their actions is that this non-existing self would be happy and not suffer. But in taking this route and discussing the problem of self-interested concern for the future only from the descriptive perspective, Vasubandhu does not provide a satisfactory solution to the normative question of reasons and motivations to act, since he only describes the current state of affairs, which is characterized by ignorance. He does not describe the way in which a person who became disillusioned with the belief in a self comes to act.

On the other hand, if Vasubandhu's reply is to be taken as an attempt to come up with a reason or justification for performing actions driven by self-interested concern for the future, then his solution involves an apparent paradox. This paradox results from the clash between the requirement to let go of the notion of a permanent self, as a condition for liberation, and the necessity to assume such a self, as a motivation for acting in the interest of one's future; and also from the clash between the requirement to eradicate attachment to the self, as a condition for liberation, and the necessity to have attachment to the self and its happiness, as a motivation for acting in the interest of one's future. As has already been noted, this paradox concerns not only ordinary egoistic actions. Rather, it is present in the injunctions of the spiritual path itself, as advocated by Vasubandhu. The paradox goes as follows. In order to attain liberation from suffering, the Buddhist path instructs the practitioner to let go of the sense of individuality and of the attachment to the happiness of one's "self". At the same time, the realization of the Buddhist goal, *nirvāṇa*, presupposes that the practitioner is attached to his self and his future happiness, whose highest embodiment is spiritual liberation, and this entails that one accepts a sense of enduring individuality. However, as is well-known, maintaining attachment and a sense of individuality leads to suffering and to the perpetuation of rebirth in *saṃsāra*, which then contradicts the former

injunction. In short, the paradox can be framed in two propositions in the following way:

(1) In order to attain liberation, one needs to relinquish the sense of enduring individuality and let go of attachment.

(2) In order to follow the injunction expressed in proposition (1), one needs to maintain a sense of individuality and be attached to one's future happiness.

As mentioned, Vasubandhu does not develop his treatment of this problem further, and thus leaves his opponent (and the reader) either without a normative answer or with a normative paradox. However, in another section in the *AKBh*, which we will examine below, Vasubandhu touches once again on the "paradox of self-interested concern for the Future", as it may be called, where he shows both the ethical significance of the subjective belief in an enduring self and the conditions under which this assumption can be accepted. He also shows what normative conclusions can be drawn from the negation of an ultimate enduring self for the way in which one ought to care for one's own future happiness.

2.5 The Paradox of Self-Interested Concern for the Future and the Moral Status of the Conventional Agent

What I call the paradox of self-interested concern for the Future consists of two elements. The first element is related to the simultaneous maintaining and letting go of the view of an enduring self and the second element is related to the simultaneous maintaining and letting go of the attachment involved in wishing for future happiness. A closer look at the second element reveals that in fact this is an already well-known and oft-discussed problem in Buddhism, the so called "paradox of desire". This problem,

which had already been acknowledged by traditional Buddhist thinkers, has been the topic of several studies, although none of them discussed it with particular reference to Vasubandhu's thought. This paradox arises from the apparent contradiction in the principle that prescribes to "desire to end all desire". A. L. Herman summarizes the problem in these words:

> If I desire to cease desiring, then I have not ceased all desire after all; I have merely replaced one species of desiring by another. The paradox of desire points to the practical contradiction or frustration involved in the desire to stop all desiring and states simply that those who desire to stop all desiring will never be successful.[110]

From a different perspective, this paradox finds expression as the problem that arises from the idea of desireless action (in persons who have already given up desire and in persons who still aspire to give it up). John Taber describes this aspect of the paradox:

> It is a central teaching of Buddhism that the Buddha taught the Dharma to sentient beings out of compassion. It is also a central teaching of Buddhism that desire is the cause of entanglement in the cycle of rebirth. How do these two doctrines fit together? It seems that compassion, in the case of most humans, is based on some kind of emotional affect – one is moved by the suffering of others and desires to alleviate it. That, however, conflicts with the idea that the Buddha, who had eliminated the conditions of rebirth for himself, and therefore presumably overcome desire, conveyed the Dharma to others out of compassion.[111]

It is this aspect of the Paradox of Desire that makes it so relevant, in my opinion, to the Paradox of Self-Interested Concern for the Future. For, as already mentioned, one of the two questions that are at the heart of the Paradox of Self-Concern for the Future is: how can one act with an attachment for the happiness of one's future self, while aspiring to eliminate all attachment?

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[110] A. L. Herman, "A Solution to the Paradox of Desire in Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 29, no. 1 (1979): 91.

[111] John Taber, "Did Dharmakīrti think the Buddha had desires?" in *Religion and Logic in Buddhist Philosophical Analysis: Proceedings of the Fourth International Dharmakīrti Conference, Vienna, August 23-27, 2005*, eds. Helmut Krasser et al. (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2011), 437.

Modern thinkers proposed more than one solution to the Paradox of Desire.[112] Here, however, I want to examine how Vasubandhu treats this problem, which he himself links to the other aspect of the issue in question, namely, to the contradiction between the requirement to maintain and eradicate the sense of an enduring self at the same time. The context of the discussion is the classification of latent tendencies (*anuśaya*). Latent tendencies are mental afflictions in their dormant state, or in other words, dispositions in a state of potency (as opposed to their manifest state, when the dispositions are expressed). The text goes on to explain that unwholesome latent tendencies, such as attachment, hostility and conceit, which concern the "impure" (*sāsrava*), tend to "stick" and grow (*anuśerate*), whereas latent tendencies that are concerned with the "pure" (*anāsrava*) behave differently, they do not "stick".[113]

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[112] John Visvader suggests that Buddhism makes a distinction between the desires from which one aspires to be free and the meta-desire to give up those desires, and recognizes two Buddhist methods to eliminate all desires, despite the paradox. According to the method of "easing over", the meta-desire is considered unproblematic and the practitioner utilizes it to gradually wear down his other desires, until finally the meta-desire itself is worn down and disappears. With the method of "uroboric leap", which Visvader attributes to Zen Buddhism, the paradox is acknowledged and the practitioner acts at the same time to give up the desires and the meta-desire to give up those desires, until nothing is left to cling to (463). See John Visvader, "The Use of Paradox in Uroboric Philosophies," *Philosophy East and West* 28, no. 4 (1978): 462-463. According to A. L. Herman, the solution to the Paradox is the Paradox itself. He argues that the realization that desirelessness is in fact logically impossible; that there is no way out of the paradox, is tantamount to *nirvāṇa*. When the Buddhist practitioner realizes that there is actually no goal to desire and achieve, the ultimate "letting go" of all desires takes place, and at that very moment, the practitioner attains the goal of *nirvāṇa*. See Herman, "A Solution to the Paradox of Desire in Buddhism": 93-94. Wayne Alt, at the same time, responds to Visvader and Herman and argues that there is no paradox at all in desiring to eliminate all of one's desires. He claims that the nature of desire is to be eliminated when it is satisfied. Consequently, any desire that furthers the path – for example, the desire to find a spiritual teacher or to attain *nirvāṇa* – will be eliminated once it has been satisfied. See Wayne Alt, "There Is No Paradox of Desire in Buddhism," *Philosophy East and West* 30, no. 4 (1980): 521-528.

[113] *AKBh* V:17-18, p. 289: ***sarvatragā anuśayāḥ sakalām anuśerate/ svabhūmim ālambanataḥ svanikāyamasarvagāḥ***// *ye sarvatragā anuśayās te sakalāṃ pañcaprakārām api svāṃ bhūmim ālambanato 'nuśerate/ asarvatragās tu svasyāṃ bhūmau svam eva nikāyam ālambanato 'nuśerate nānyam/ … utsargaṃ kṛtvā 'pavādaṃ karoti nānāsravordhvaviṣayāḥ anāsravālambanā anuśayā naivālambanato 'nuśerate/ nāpy ūrdhvabhūmy ālambanāḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 235a5-235b1: *phra rgyas kun du 'gro rnams ni // dmigs pa'i sgo nas rang gi sa // thams cad du ni rgyas par 'gyur // kun 'gro ma yin rang ris so // phra rgyas gang dag kun du 'gro ba de dag ni dmigs pa'i sgo nas rang gi sa pa'i rnam pa lnga po thams cad la yang rgyas par 'gyur ro // thams cad du ni 'gro ba ma yin pa rnams*

What does it mean for a latent disposition to be directed at a pure cognitive object or alternatively at an impure cognitive object? To put it plainly, pure cognitive objects are objects that are related to the cessation of suffering and to the path leading to the cessation of suffering (to ethics and to correct understanding of reality, to name but two elements of the path). They are said to be harmless (*anapakāra*), peaceful (*śānta*), pure (*śuddhi*) and excellent (*agra*). Impure objects, on the other hand, are connected to suffering and to the causes of suffering; they harm, they are not peaceful, they are impure and they hold as excellent that which is low.[114] The reason that latent

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ni dmigs pa'i sgo nas rang gi sar rang gi ris kho na la rgyas par 'gyur gyi gzhan du ni ma yin te / … spyir btang bar byas nas dmigs kyis ston par byed de / zag med gong ma'i yul can min // zag pa med pa la dmigs pa'i phra rgyas rnams ni dmigs pa'i sgo nas rgyas par mi 'gyur ba kho na yin la, sa gong ma la dmigs pa rnams kyang ma yin no. "**The all-pervading latent tendencies adhere in their entire [own level according to the cognitive object]; those which are not all-pervading [latent tendencies adhere] in their own level in their own class according to the cognitive object.** Those, which are all-pervading latent tendencies, adhere in the entire all five types of their own level according to the cognitive object. However, the non-all-pervading [latent tendencies] adhere only in their own level in their own class according to the cognitive object, and not in others… having made a general rule, he makes an exception: **[Latent tendencies possessing] a pure object or an object of high [levels of the path] do not [adhere]**. Latent tendencies of pure cognitive objects do not adhere according to the cognitive object. Neither do cognitive objects of high levels [of the path]."

[114] *AKBh* V:14, p. 288: *nirodhadarśanaprahātavyās trayo 'nuśayā mithyādṛṣṭir vicikitsā* ***'vidyā*** *ca* ***tābhyāṃ*** *saṃprayuktā ''veṇikī ca/ mārgadarśanaprahātavyā apy eta eva trayaḥ/ ity ete* ***ṣaḍanāsravā****lambanāḥ/ śeṣāḥ sāsravālambanā iti siddham*. *AKBhT* Ku 234b1-2: *'gog pa mthong bas spang bar bya ba'i phra rgyas gsum po log par lta ba dang / the tsom dang, de dag dang / mtshungs par ldan pa dang ma 'dres pa'i ma rig pa dang / lam mthong bas spang bar bya ba yang gsum po de dag nyid de / de ltar na drug po de dag ni zag pa med pa la dmigs pa dag yin no // lhag ma rnams ni zag pa dang bcas pa dag la dmigs pa yin no zhes bya bar grub po.* "The three latent tendencies to be abandoned by seeing [the truth of] cessation are false view, doubt, and **ignorance which is associated with**, as well as independent of, the [previous] two [latent tendencies]. The latent tendencies to be abandoned by seeing [the truth of] the path are also these three. These **six** [latent tendencies] are **pure** cognitive objects. It is demonstrated that the remaining [latent tendencies] are impure cognitive objects."; *AKBh* V:16, pp. 288-289: *atha kasmād rāgapratighamānā dṛṣṭiśīlavrataparāmarśau cānāsravālambanā neṣyante/ … na dveṣo 'napakārataḥ/ apakāravastuni hi pratigha utpadyate/ na caivaṃ nirodhamārgau/* ***na māno na parāmarśau śāntaśuddhyagrabhāvataḥ****// nirodhamārgayoḥ śāntatvān na tābhyām unnatir bhavitum arhati/ bhūtārthaśuddhitvān na tayoḥ śuddhigrāhaḥ śīlavrataparāmarśaḥ/ agrau ca tau/ hīne cāgragrāho dṛṣṭiparāmarśaḥ/ tasmād ayuktam eṣām anāsravālambanatvam*. *AKBhT* Ku 235a1-4: *ci'i phyir 'dod chags dang / khong khro ba dang / nga rgyal dang / lta ba mchog tu 'dzin pa dang / tsul khrims dang brtul zhugs mchog tu 'dzin pa dag zag pa med pa la dmigs pa dag tu mi 'dod ce na… gnod mi byed phyir zhe sdang min // gnod par byed pa'i dngos po la ni khong khro ba skye na 'gog pa dang lam dang ni de lta ma yin no // zhi dang dag dang mchog gyur phyir // nga rgyal ma yin mchog 'dzin min // 'gog pa dang lam dag ni zhi ba yin pa'i phyir de dag gis khengs par 'gyur ba 'ongs ba yang ma yin la / yang dag pa'i don*

tendencies, which concern the pure, do not "stick" and grow is that their objects cannot be considered as "I" or "mine".[115] In other words, with regard to these objects, one does not develop an attitude of possessiveness through either the wrong view of an enduring self or through attachment. At the same time, pure objects oppose the mental afflictions, insofar as they do not sustain them.[116] Impure cognitive objects do the opposite: they cause the mental afflictions to remain and to grow.

In accordance with the abovementioned distinction between latent tendencies with "pure" cognitive objects and latent tendencies with "impure" cognitive objects, Vasubandhu identifies two types of desire, which are qualitatively different:

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du dag pa yin pa'i phyir de gnyis la dag par 'dzin pa ni tshul khrims dang brtul zhugs mchog tu 'dzin pa yang ma yin no // dman pa la mchog tu 'dzin pa ni lta ba mchog tu 'dzin pa yin na de gnyis ni mchog kyang yin te / de lta bas na de dag gi dmigs pa zag pa med pa yin par rigs pa ma yin no. "Now why are attachment, hostility, pride, clinging to wrong views and clinging to ethics and rituals not regarded as pure cognitive objects?... **Hatred is not [regarded as a pure cognitive object] because of harmlessness.** It is towards harmful things that hatred arises, but the cessation [of suffering] and the path [to the cessation of suffering] are not so [i.e., harmful]. **Pride and the clinging to ethics and rituals are not [regarded as pure cognitive objects] because of [the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering] being peaceful, pure and supreme.** Because the cessation [of suffering] and the path [to the cessation of suffering] are peaceful, arrogant is unsuitable to arise by them. Because [the two are] purity in its true state, holding to the pure in the two [the cessation of suffering and the path to the cessation of suffering] is not clinging to ethics and rituals. These two are also supreme; but conceiving the low as supreme is clinging to wrong views. Therefore, it is unsuitable that they [i.e., the latent tendencies mentioned] are pure cognitive objects."

[115] *AKBh* V:18, p. 289: *kiṃ kāraṇam/ tadālambanasya vastunaḥ asvīkārād vipakṣataḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 235b1: *ci'i phyir zhe na / de dag gi dmigs pa'i dngos po ni / bdag gir ma byas gnyen po'i phyir*. "What is the reason [that latent tendencies with pure cognitive objects and latent tendencies with cognitive objects of a high level do not adhere]? **Because of the counter-instance of non-appropriation (*asvīkāra*)** by the substance (*vastu*) of their cognitive object (*ālambana*)."

[116] Ibid.: *yad dhi vastv ātmadṛṣṭitṛṣṇābhyāṃ svīkṛtaṃ bhavati tatrānye 'py anuśayā anugamayitum* [Schm. emends *anuśayitum*] *utsahante/ ārdra iva paṭe rajāṃsi saṃsthātum/ na caivam anāsravā nāpy evam ūrdhvā bhūmiḥ/ ato na tadālambanās teṣv anuśerate*. *AKBhT* Ku 235b2-3: *dngos po gang zhig bdag tu lta ba dang sred pa dag gis bdag gir byas pa de la phra rgyas gzhan dag kyang rgyas par 'gyur bar nus te / snam bu gsher ba la rdul chags pa bzhin no // zag pa med pa yang de lta ma yin la / sa 'og ma la yang ma yin pas de'i phyir de dag la dmigs pa rnams ni de dag la rgyas par mi 'gyur ro*. "Since in a substance (*vastu*) which is appropriated (*svīkṛtaṃ bhavati*), either through a wrong view of a self or through desire, also other latent tendencies are able to adhere, just like particles of dust are able to dwell in a damp cloth. But it is not the case [in] pure [cognitive objects (*ālambana*)] and also not [in] a high level [of the path]. Hence, those cognitive objects – in them [the latent tendencies] do not adhere." The translation follows the Sanskrit.

> But that which is standing here, [the latent tendency] which asks for that [high] level [of the path, i.e. asks for the pure] – this is a wholesome [*kuśala*] wish for Dharma [*dharmacchanda*; and not the latent tendency of attachment].[117]

Because of this difference, unwholesome attachment, whose cognitive object is impure, should be abandoned, but the wholesome wish for Dharma, whose cognitive object is pure, should not be rejected.[118] Attachment of the first kind, it can be deduced, results in a denser presence of attachment and suffering in the mind. It constitutes a hindrance to the path and so distances one from liberation. However, the wholesome wish for Dharma, having a pure cognitive object, opposes the mental afflictions and is conducive to the path and to liberation.

Vasubandhu's method for solving the Paradox of Desire is, then, to distinguish between those attachments, which are unwholesome and hence lead to suffering, and their wholesome counterparts, wishes that concern the cessation of suffering and the path that leads to the cessation of suffering. Vasubandhu's solution to the Paradox of Desire is, hence, that the wish for liberation from *saṃsāra* is not the kind of attachment that must be eradicated as part of the spiritual path. If I understand Vasubandhu correctly, his view about the convention of self-interested concern for the future is that this ordinary convention need not be rejected. The injunction to eliminate attachment is not inconsistent with being concerned for future happiness. What this injunction *does* entail is that one should modify the kind of happiness one searches for and the way one

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[117] Ibid.: *yas tv iha sthas tāṃ bhūmiṃ prārthayate kuśalo 'sau dharmmacchandaḥ. AKBhT* Ku 235b3: *gang zhig 'di na gnas pa las de don du gnyer bar byed pa de ni mi dge ba'i chos la 'dun pa yin no.* The translation follows the Sanskrit.

[118] *AKBh* V:16, p. 289: *varjanīyo hi rāgaḥ/ yadi cānāsravālambanaḥ syān na varjanīyaḥ syāt kuśaladharmacchandavat*. *AKBhT* Ku 235a1-2: *'dod chags ni spang bar bya ba yin na gal te zag pa med pa la dmigs pa yin na go spang bar bya ba ma yin par 'gyur te / dge ba'i chos la 'dun pa bzhin no.* "For attachment is to be renounced. And if it had a pure cognitive object, it would not be [declared as something] to be renounced; like a wholesome wish for Dharma (*kuśaladharmacchandavat*) [which has a pure cognitive object and should not be renounced]."

works to achieve this happiness. According to ordinary worldview, one pursues happiness by following attachment which grasps at the self and at impermanent objects with a possessive mind. Searching for happiness in such a way, according to Vasubandhu's analysis, perpetuates the presence of mental afflictions in the stream of aggregates and reaffirms the belief in a self (in fact, according to Buddhist premises, this approach should not be regarded at all as pursuing happiness, but rather as pursuing suffering). The selfless way of being concerned about one's future happiness, on the other hand, aspires to attain liberation from *saṃsāra* and to follow the spiritual path that leads there. It means acting on another type of motivation, "the wholesome wish for Dharma", which opposes and erodes the mental afflictions and the belief in an enduring self, rather than maintaining them.[119] Thus, one can be attached to one's future happiness, wish not to suffer, and wish to ultimately attain liberation; it's just the kind of happiness that one ought to be attached to and the way happiness ought to be sought that need to change. Within this theoretical shift, it is especially interesting to note, that one essential aspect of the path to liberation is ethical conduct (*śīla*). Thus, the agential convention of self-interested concern for the future, as it is rephrased by Vasubandhu, also reaffirms the importance of keeping ethics as a crucial component of the true way to personal future happiness.

In discussing the varieties of attachment, Vasubandhu addresses one aspect of the Paradox of Self-Interested Concern for the Future. However, the conundrum of maintaining and letting go of the sense of individuality (*ahaṃkāra*) is yet to be resolved. To tackle this issue, Vasubandhu discusses the moral status of another latent disposition, the wrong view of an enduring self (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*), where he adopts a

[119] This idea is also expressed by Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves: Freedom and Agency in Light of the Two Truths," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 44.

different strategy than the one he employed in addressing the Paradox of Desire. It should be noted here first, that although in the *AKBh*, Vasubandhu uses various expressions to talk about the belief in an enduring and unitary self, his discussion of the notion indicates that they all denote the same idea. Thus, the concept of the "wrong view of a self" (*ātmadṛṣṭi*), which appears in Vasubandhu's reductionist argument; the concept of the "wrong view of an enduring self" (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*), which Vasubandhu uses in the discussion that follows below; as well as the concept of the "wrong view of the true existence of a self" (*ātmaviparyāsa*), which appears in other places in the *AKBh* – all refer to the same idea of grasping at an enduring and unitary self (with *satkāyadṛṣṭi* having a somewhat wider extension, which includes also the view that the self is the owner of the aggregates).[120] Moreover, in his commentary to the *AKBh*, Yaśomitra equates these concepts with the concept of a "sense of individuality" (*ahaṃkāra*), which

[120] *AKBh* V:9ab, pp. 283: *athaitad viparyāsacatuṣkaṃ kiṃ svabhāvam/ ... satkāyadṛṣṭer ātmadṛṣṭir ātmaviparyāsaḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 231a2-3: *yang phyin ci log bzhi chan [can] 'di'i rang bzhin ci zhe na… 'jig tsogs su lta ba las ni bdag tu lta ba phyin ci log go*. "But what is this inherent nature, which consists of the four mistaken views?... Because of the [wrong] view of an enduring self (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*), there is the [wrong] view of a self (*ātmadṛṣṭi*), i.e., the [wrong] view of [the true existence of] a self (*ātmaviparyāsa*)."; *AKBh* V:9a, p. 283: *katham ātmīyadṛṣṭir viparyāsaḥ/ kathaṃ ca na viparyāsaḥ/ viparyāsasūtrād/ ātmānam eva tatra vaśinaṃ paśyan nātmīyaṃ paśyatīty ātmadṛṣṭir evāsau dvimukhī athāham ity etasmāt mameti dṛṣṭyantaraṃ syāt/ mayā mahyam ity etad api syāt*. *AKBhT* Ku 231a3-5: *ci ltar na bdag gir lta ba phyin ci log ma yin / ci ltar na phyin ci log ma yin / phyin ci log gi mdo las mi 'byung ba'i phyir ro // de las ni bdag kho na dbang byed par lta ba na / bdag gir lta bar 'gyur bar bshad pa yin pas / bdag tu lta ba 'di nyid sgo gnyis pa can yin no // 'on te bdag ces bya ba 'di las bdag gi zhes bya ba lta pa gzhan zhig yin na ni bdag gis zhes bya ba dang / bdag gi phyir zhes bya ba 'dir yang 'gyur ro*. "[Q:] How is the wrong view of an owner-self a mistaken view [as it was not mentioned by you as such]? – [Vasubandhu:] And why is it not a mistaken view? [Q:] Because [of what is said in] the Sūtra on the Mistaken Views. [Vasubandhu:] There it is said, 'if he sees the self as a master, he does not see [it] as an owner-self.' The wrong view of a self has two faces. Now [if] 'mine' is a different [wrong] view than this [mistaken view of] 'I', then 'by me', 'to me' may be so, as well." (*AKBhT* renders the debate somewhat differently than the Sanskrit manuscript: "[Q:] But how is it then that the wrong view of an owner-self not a mistaken view [as it was not mentioned by you as such]? – [Vasubandhu:] And why is it not a mistaken view? [Q:] Because it is not derived from the Sūtra on the Mistaken Views. [Vasubandhu:] It is said there, 'if he sees the self as a master, he sees an owner-self.' The wrong view of a self has two faces. Now [if] 'mine' is a different wrong view than this [mistaken view of] 'I', then 'by me' and 'to me' may be so, as well.")

one finds in the discussion on the agential conventions of self-interested concern for the future and agential autonomy, which appeared earlier.[121]

Vasubandhu argues that unlike certain other latent dispositions, which are inherently unwholesome, the wrong view of an enduring self is morally neutral (*avyākṛta*), that is, this latent disposition in itself is neither wholesome nor unwholesome. Likewise, the ignorance that accompanies the view of an enduring self is also morally neutral.[122] What this means is that this view and the accompanying ignorance do not necessarily lead to the accumulation (*upacaya*) of negative (*akuśala*, *aśubha*) *karman*. One of the reasons provided by Vasubandhu for this neutral moral qualification is that maintaining the wrong view of an enduring self is not contradictory to acting morally – practicing generosity, for example. Ignorance with regard to the true nature of the person can be wholesome in that it motivates us to pursue our future happiness and to act morally in

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[121] *AKVy* V:9ab, p. 778: *ātmadṛṣṭir evāsau dvimukhīti/ ātmātmīyamukhī ekā dravyato 'stīti ahaṃkāra-mamakāramukhadvayavatīty arthaḥ.* "The wrong view of a self has two faces: it has the faces of self and owner-self [but] there is [just] one thing exiting in a substantial way, meaning that it has the two faces of the sense of individuality and the sense of being an owner."

[122] *AKBh* V:19ac, p. 290: *kāmadhātau satkāyāntagrāhadṛṣṭī tatsaṃprayuktā cāvidyā avyākṛtāḥ*. *AKBhT* Ku 236a2: *'dod pa'i khams na ni 'jig tsogs la lta ba dang / mthar 'dzin par lta ba dang / de dag dang mtshungs par ldan pa'i ma rig pa lung du ma bstan pa yin no.* "In the realm of desire, the wrong views of an enduring self and of holding to the extremes and the ignorance associated with them are morally neutral."; *AKBh* V:19d-20ab, p. 291: *katy akuśalamūlāni kati na/ kāme 'kuśalamūlāni rāgapratighamūḍhayaḥ/ kāmadhātau sarvarāgaḥ sarvapratighaḥ sarvo moho 'nyatra satkāyāntagrāhadṛṣṭisaṃprayuktād yathākramam*. *AKBhT* Ku 236a6-7: *du ni mi dge ba'i rtsa ba dag yin // du ni ma yin zhe na, 'dod na 'dod chags khong khro dang // rmongs rnams mi dge'i rtsa ba yin // 'dod pa'i khams na 'dod chags thams cad dang / khong khro ba thams cad dang / 'jig tsogs dang / mthar 'dzin par lta ba dang / mtshungs par ldan pa ma gtogs pa'i rmongs pa thams cad ni go rims bzhin du mi dge ba'i rtza ba gsum pa.* "[Q:] How many [of the latent dispositions] are unwholesome roots? How many are not? [Vasubandhu:] **In [the realm of] desire, attachment, hostility and confusion are unwholesome roots.** In the realm of desire, every attachment, every hostility and every confusion, except for that [confusion] which is connected with the wrong views of an enduring self or of holding to the extremes, in this order [are] the three unwholesome roots."

order to achieve it.[123] Here Vasubandhu's explanation echoes the problem, from which our discussion started:

> [Q:] What is the reason [that the afflicted views of an enduring self and of holding to the extremes, and the ignorance which is connected with them, are morally neutral]? [Vasubandhu:] It is because they are not incompatible with giving and so on. With the thought "I shall be happy in the next life," one gives a donation, one observes moral conduct.[124]

In other words, one may believe that one exists as an enduring self, and consequently live egoistically and immorally, creating negative *karman*; but one may also think in this way and this belief would motivate one to act morally, in such a way that brings true happiness (namely, in a way that eventually leads to the realization of no-self and liberation). It can be observed again, that what needs to be changed, according to Vasubandhu, is not the belief in an enduring self, but rather the way one pursues the well-being of that allegedly existing self. And interestingly enough, observing moral conduct is highlighted once again as an important aspect of acting for one's own future interests.

The question may be raised, why Vasubandhu did not develop these last points in the dialogue with his philosophical opponent. As I have argued throughout this chapter, I suggest that the reason Vasubandhu did not elaborate on these points is that this would have undermined his overall project in the *ĀVP*, by revealing that the Buddhist view of

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[123] Martin T. Adam suggests that we ought to distinguish between different types of agents in the Pāli Canon. According to this distinction, the good conduct of ordinary persons (*puthujjana*) is informed by the delusion of self; however, disciples in higher training (*sekha*) have penetrated the delusion of self by insight, they are drawn to *nirvāṇa*, but their good conduct is not motivated by the goal of attaining it for themselves. *Arhat*s (including the Buddha) have eradicated delusion completely and so their activity is entirely free from delusion. See Martin T. Adam, "Groundwork for a Metaphysic of Buddhist Morals: A New Analysis of *puñña* and *kusala*, in light of *sukka*." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 12 (2005): 62-85.

[124] *AKBh* V:19bc, p. 290: *kiṃ kāraṇam/ dānādibhir aviruddhatvāt/ ahaṃ pretya sukhī bhaviṣyāmīti dānaṃ dadāti śīlaṃ rakṣati. AKBhT* Ku 236a2-3: *ci'i phyir zhe na / sbyin pa la sogs pa dang mi 'gal ba'i phyir dang / bdag 'jig rten pha rol du bde bar 'gyur bar bya'o zhes sbyin par byed // tsul khrims srung bar byed do.*

no-self *does* modify in a certain way our ordinary agential conventions, contrary to his attempt to show how all ordinary conventions can be retained under a no-self premise.

The final section of the discussion can reveal a number of things about the way Vasubandhu understands the concept of moral agency and about the status of the moral agent with regard to normativity, given the absence of an enduring self. First, it can be seen that Vasubandhu takes the view that persons are enduring selves, to be morally insignificant, in the sense that definite normative values and principles cannot be conclusively derived from it. Vasubandhu emphasizes in particular the undetermined *karmic* quality of this view, but at the same time implies that due to this indeterminacy, the view can justify different moral theories: it may be associated with a lifestyle of negativities (guided by egoistic self-interest or by false beliefs[125]) or it may encourage an ethical view, which defeats the clinging to an enduring self. Because the afflicted view of an enduring self is open to a range of different, even contradicting, normative interpretations, this renders it ethically and normatively fruitless, as ultimately no moral principles or reasons to act can be definitely derived from it.

Contrary to the indefinite moral status of the afflicted view of an enduring self, from the ultimate notion of the moral agent, moral principles and reasons to act can be extracted. A normative moral theory, which assumes ultimate selfless and momentary moral agents, would prescribe principles that embody this assumption, such as moral

[125] For example, the belief in a creator god. *AKBh* V:7-8, p. 282: *yo hi kaścid īśvaraṃ prajāpatim anyaṃ vā kāraṇaṃ paśyati sa tan nityam* [Schm. emends *taṃ nityam*] *ekaṃ cātmānaṃ kartāram abhiniviśya/ tadyasmāt sa* ***īśvarādiṣu nityātmaviparyāsāt pravartate/ kāraṇābhiniveśo*** […]. *AKBhT* Ku 230a6-7: *gang la la dbang phyug gam / skye dgu'i bdag po la rgyur lta ba de ni de la rtag pa gcig pu dang bdag dang byed pa por mngon par zhen nas lta ste / de lta bas na 'di ltar / dbang phyug sogs rgyur mngon zhen pa / de ni rtag bdag phyin ci log pa yis // rab tu 'jug pas.* "For whoever considers Īśvara, Prajāpati or another [deity] as the cause [of creation], has devoted himself entirely to him [i.e., the deity] as a permanent and single self, i.e. a creator. Because of this, it follows that the **devotion to Īśvara and so on as the cause [of creation] actively operates with the mistaken view of a permanent self.**" Cf. *AKBh* ad V:13ab.

sentiments and motivations to act that do not assert an enduring self. An example is the wholesome wish for Dharma, which motivates one to act in a similar way to attachment, but does not assert and does not cling to an enduring self. Another normative consequence of Vasubandhu's ultimate notion of the agent is the redefinition of happiness and the way one ought to be concerned about one's future happiness. Once again, this is redefined in such a way that it does not involve the view of an enduring self (even if this forms a motivational factor). One ought to pursue happiness in a way that eventually diminishes the belief in a self, rather than reinforces it. In general, it can be said on the meta-ethical level, that Vasubandhu's concept of the ultimate agent redefines the good as that which does not reinforce the belief in, and clinging to, an enduring self.

Finally, while clinging to a sense of individuality can lead to a variety of moral theories and views, the discussion shows that holding to an enduring self is a *necessary* condition for the two essential conventions that have been just covered. It is required in order to maintain a subjective distinction between the moral agent and recipients of action, and as a motivation to pursue the spiritual path and to observe ethics. It is worthwhile to note that the way in which this issue is treated by Vasubandhu, sheds a different light on the prevalent presupposition in contemporary scholarship on Buddhist ethics with which I opened the chapter, according to which identification with a self is always a hindrance to being moral, whereas the realization of no-self is a requirement for perfect morality. At least in the *AKBh*, I argue, a certain reconstruction of identity is a *prerequisite* for engaging in actions for the future generally, and in moral actions in particular. Consequentialist moral theories, of which Charles Goodman is a proponent, require the agent to have an outlook for the future. Similarly, in a broader notion of ethics as a life plan, one undertakes actions because one cares for one's future – because

one wants to achieve liberation, for example – and this care for the future is embedded in a notion of an enduring self.[126] To conclude, an impersonal account of agency can be achieved as long as we keep it within the domain of the descriptive approach. However, Vasubandhu's treatment of the subject of self-interested concern for the future shows that from a normative or motivational point of view, a construction of identity is a necessity for the non-liberated person in order to follow ethics, as well as in order to follow the spiritual path.

Can Vasubandhu's account be regarded as successful in addressing the set of problems he aims to resolve? One may argue that Vasubandhu's inclusion of components that are ultimately rejected by Buddhist thought, even though they were shown to be consistent with it on a certain level, means that Vasubandhu failed to do so. In any case, in Vasubandhu's treatment of the conventions that require the reconstruction of the enduring self, the questions of why persons who eradicated the sense of individuality ought to be concerned about their future happiness (if they ought to be concerned about it at all) and how they maintain a subjective sense of agency, remain open.

[126] Since many contemporary formulations of theories in the field of engaged Buddhism adopt the Buddhist rejection of the persisting self as a major principle (see fn. 64 above), it would be interesting to consider the ethical implications of the prudence that accompany a wholesome identification with the self for these issues. Isn't a prudent attitude, which results from self-interested concern for the future, essential for the implementation of green environmental policies, social engagement and peace activism?

Chapter 3

The Theory of Seeds (*bīja*) and the Criterion of Personal Identity

The model of the five aggregates, with which I dealt in the previous chapter, is one schema through which Vasubandhu explains the nature of agency in the absence of a permanent self. The person is reduced to its components and then reconstructed epistemologically into a conventionally acting agent. At the same time, Vasubandhu displays another move of reconstructing the self – this time metaphysically. This metaphysical reconstruction is intended to address the question: what unifies the agent over time? To do this, it relies on an account of the causal relation that operates within the ultimate truth, i.e. on the level of factors (*dharma*). On that level, each of the momentary events that come into existence in any of the aggregates is connected to its predecessor and to its follower by causal relation. This causality is the principal foundation for a Buddhist criterion of identity over time. But before discussing the theory of identity in Vasubandhu, a survey of the existing literature on the criterion of identity in Indian Buddhism is in place. Even though the ways in which this subject was analyzed so far were brief, I believe the pictures they portray can pave the way to a more elaborate account of personal identity over time according to Vasubandhu's representation of the Sautrāntika views.

3.1 Causality as the Basis of Identity

The criterion of personal identity in Indian Buddhism has not been studied yet fully by contemporary scholarship, but is nevertheless discussed in several scholarly works. One common feature that their treatment of identity in Buddhism shares is that it sees causality as one of its fundamental elements. Mark Siderits, dealing with the problem of moral desert in Buddhism, suggests that in "Early Buddhism"[127] personal identity over time can be explained based on the Buddhist distinction between the two levels of truth, the ultimate level and the conventional level.[128] Siderits differentiates between the two truths according to the semantic difference between them, which he formulates as follows:

> A statement is true in the ultimate sense if and only if it corresponds to the facts and neither asserts nor entails that wholes exist. For instance, supposing that pains and moments of consciousness are simples and that someone feels a pain at place p at time t, the sentence, "A pain sensation is apprehended by a moment of consciousness at place p at time t," would be true in the ultimate sense. A statement is true conventionally if and only if it is acceptable to common sense. (p. 149)[129]

Simply put, the ultimate truth supports only statements that correspond to the facts and do not involve the existence of wholes, that is, entities that are made up of particles. The conventional level of truth, on the other hand, supports statements that accord with our commonsensical view of the world, a view that accommodates wholes. Most of the statements we use and accept are conventionally true, but ultimately false, Siderits

[127] This term is used by Siderits as an umbrella term for different non-Mahāyānist schools and works.

[128] Mark Siderits, "Beyond Compatibilism: A Buddhist Approach to Freedom and Determinism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (1987): 149-159.

[129] Siderits does not provide details about the sources he used to formulate this definition of the two truths, as well as his overall interpretation of identity. However, it can be understood from other works that his interpretation here is of the *Abhidharmic* thought, including ideas and illustrations that manifest in the *AKBh.* See Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 7 (where a similar semantic definition of the two truth is given); 14, n. a and b (in which it is explained that the study concerns the thought of the *Abhidharmic* schools).

points out. These statements use terms that entail or refer to wholes. Thus, they are acceptable to common sense, but can be described more accurately with statements that are true on the ultimate level, namely, statements that do not involve wholes, but rather refer to the parts that ultimately exist and constitute the wholes. Statements acceptable to common sense are ultimately false because the wholes they assert are nothing but conceptual fictions (according to Siderits' interpretation, see section 2.1 above) and have no referent in reality.

Despite the fact that they are unreal, concepts that assert wholes are pragmatic in that they enable us to apply a single term to a set of ultimate entities, when these entities, grouped together, have a certain function in our world. There are two major factors that shape our decision to group the ultimate constituents of the world into convenient wholes (p. 150). The first is similarity over time: we designate a conventional entity when each moment in a series of moments of that whole resembles its predecessor in some way. The second factor is the causal continuity that characterizes the whole. This means that each moment in the series serves as a causal factor in the production of its successor in a way that creates continuity.

The distinction between the two levels of truth holds true for persons as well. The person, according to Buddhism, is merely a convenient designation and does not exist in the final sense. A person is a causal series of physical and mental components grouped together. At any moment, a person consists of a set of bodily parts and psychological states. Each of the components ceases to exist eventually, but at the moment of perishing, it gives rise to a successor component. The series of momentary events that constitutes a person, argues Siderits, meets the two factors that allows for applying a convenient designation (p. 151). Firstly, many members of the person-series – such as bodily parts, memories and mental states, which reflect habitual tendencies – resemble

certain of their predecessors and successors. Secondly, the series of events that constitutes the designated person is a causal series; every physical or mental event in the series is a cause for its successor.

If the self is only a series of causally connected impermanent events, lacking an unchanging substance, what makes it possible to account for the identity of persons over time? What justifies calling the infant and the grown-up man he came to be the same person? The causal connections on the ultimate level of truth, says Siderits, are those which warrant the convenient designation of the person on the conventional level of truth. These connections, he explains, should be the “right sorts of causal connections" (ibid.). In other words, the physical and psychological states of the infant should be among the “relevant causal ancestors of the physical and psychological states of the adult” (p. 152). When it comes to moral responsibility or moral desert, persons (in the conventional truth) have responsibility over their past actions, because the present being bears the right sort of causal relations (in the ultimate truth) to certain prior beings, who brought about certain events. Siderits does not elaborate on the meaning of the “right sorts” of causal connections or explains what makes causal ancestors “relevant”, and also does not go into details regarding the nature of the causal relationships and their constituents. Nonetheless, Siderits’ discussion of moral desert gives us a possible initial direction to identifying the criterion of identity in Buddhism: such a criterion may involve the Buddhist account of causality.

What sort of causality establishes personal identity? The answer may be found in a slightly more developed analysis of the causal relationships that constitute personal identity according to Early Buddhism, which is offered by Matthew Kapstein.[130]

[130] Matthew T. Kapstein. *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought.* Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001).

Kapstein examines the Buddhist struggle between the rejection of a permanent self and the need to explain personal identity in *The Questions of King Milinda* (*Milindapañha*), a work that is dated to 100 BC – 200 AD.[131] This struggle is also a struggle between the two important concepts of identity and difference. Kapstein finds one dialogue in the work particularly relevant to the topic of personal identity. This dialogue, between the inquisitive king Milinda and the Buddhist monk Nāgasena, revolves around the extent to which an identity holds between a person who passes away and the person who is reborn immediately afterwards; are they the same or are they two different persons? - asks the king. Nāgasena's reply seems *prima facie* to be contradictory: the one who is reborn is neither the same as the one who has died, nor another. This reply, which addresses in particular the meaning of identity throughout the gross impermanence of persons – that is, the change that occurs at the time of death, when the person dies and assumes a new body and a new name – also bears upon the subtle impermanence of persons, that is, the changes that people undergo momentarily throughout their lives. We can assume that this reply is also relevant to momentary changes, because of the illustration that Nāgasena gives to the king in order to clarify his reply. The example is of a young baby and the grown up this baby turns into later on in his life, and the extent to which they are qualitatively identical. These two, argues Nāgasena, are neither the same, nor another.

Kapstein attempts to extricate Nāgasena's enigmatic, apparently paradoxical reply. The basis for understanding it is the complex nature of identity, as it is portrayed by Nāgasena. On the one hand, there is a sense in which one is not the same as the infant one used to be. But this leads to a series of absurdities (p.117). For example, the infant had parents, and if the grown-up person is actually someone else than that infant, it

[131] Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1996), 85.

follows that at present the grown-up person has no parents. The reason that these absurdities emerge is that in another respect, the infant and the grown up are the same. This is also the reason for Nāgasena's apparently contradictory reply: this reply should be understood in two different senses. In one sense the person maintains an identity, but in another sense, he changes in a way that renders him different from the person he was before.

Nāgasena turns to the physical body to introduce the sense in which a person is the same through time: "For all these states are included in one by means of this body" (translated in Kapstein, p. 118). Kapstein tries to elucidate the meaning of this statement, as it sounds unreasonable that a Buddhist text would maintain a physicalist view of personal identity (ibid.). In order to do so, he refers to a paragraph in the dialogue, in which Nāgasena claims:

> Just so, O king, is the continuity of a person or thing maintained. One comes into being, another passes away; and the rebirth is, as it were, simultaneous. Thus neither as the same nor as another does a man go on to the last phase of his consciousness. (Translated in Kapstein, p. 118)[132]

According to Kapstein's reading of this paragraph, Nāgasena's words point at some relevant sort of temporal continuity that is operative, when bodily continuity is broken by the process of rebirth (p. 119). Temporal continuity alone is not sufficient to explain the continuity of a person from one lifetime to another. The reason is that at the moment of death of a being, at least several other beings are born. If temporal continuity were the only condition for personal identity, we would arrive at the absurd conclusion that beings could be born as several other beings. This shows that another condition is required for identity in addition to temporal continuity. Kapstein holds that Nāgasena, in

[132] V. Trenckner (ed.), *The Milindapañho: Being Dialogues between King Milinda and the Buddhist Sage Nāgasena*, (London: The Pali Text Society, 1962), 41: *evam eva kho mahārāja dhammasantati sandahati, aññ*o *uppajjati aññ*o *nirujjhati, apubbaṃ acarimaṃ viya sandahati, tena na ca so na ca aññ*o *pacchimaviññāṇasanahaṃ gacchatīti*.

referring to "the last phase of his [the man's] consciousness," hints at some sort of psychological continuity, which must also be involved in the criterion of identity. Kapstein himself does not go into the details of specifying what sort of psychological condition is involved in maintaining personal identity, adding only that "the problem of specifying precisely what sort of psychological continuity is required became itself a source of considerable dispute within early Buddhist philosophical circles." (p. 119).

Coming back again to Mark Siderits' interpretation, it is interesting to examine the way he analyzes the same dialogue, as it re-connects the subject of identity to the theory of the two truths. Siderits extracts from Nāgasena's view three claims in total:[133] (1) it is neither true nor false that adult and infant are the same person; (2) adult and infant are the same person; and (3) a causal relation connects between the aggregates of the present person and the aggregates of the earlier person. In accordance with his interpretation of the Buddhist notion of identity, Siderits explains that the first and third statements are true on the ultimate level, while the second statement is true on the conventional level. Nāgasena tells the king that the infant and adult are neither the same nor different, because, ultimately speaking, there are no persons to which one can attribute sameness. Similarly, on the ultimate level the third statement is true: the various components that make up the person (on the conventional level) are connected through time by causal relations. Then, the second claim, that the infant and adult are the same person, is true on the conventional level, where the different components are grouped into concepts that represent wholes. Siderits maintains that this dialogue represents a Buddhist Reductionist strategy that makes use of the two truths in order to address problems related to ethics. The language of ethics, according to this strategy, is valid only on the conventional level, just like the language of persons. On the ultimate

[133] Mark Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 36.

level, there are no persons and likewise, ethics has no foothold. Nevertheless, according to this strategy, the facts on the ultimate level, and causality in particular, serve to support moral concerns on the conventional level.

We can see, then, that the limited literature on the criterion of personal identity in Buddhism suggests that it is constituted by causality. Kapstein adds that the causality involved in personal identity is psychological in nature, and Siderits connects the notion of identity in ethics to the theory of two truths, according to which our personal identity is a conventional truth, supported by facts, which are valid on the ultimate truth. In what follows I will adopt these three features of personal identity, but attempt to inquire further how this psychological continuity is characterized by Vasubandhu and in what ways it can serve as a criterion of identity.

3.2 Memory and Identity in the *AKBh*

At this point we begin to discuss the theory of identity in Vasubandhu. As has been seen, memory was central to several treatments of the problem of personal identity in Western philosophy. Matthew Kapstein holds that Vasubandhu's treatment of memory in the *ĀVP* embodies his general approach to the problem of personal identity. Kapstein adds, however, that Vasubandhu's intention was not to show that the causal mechanism of memory forms identity. On the contrary: he hypothesizes that "[Vasubandhu] would agree with those who… hold that memory theories tend to presuppose the concept of personal identity, rather than to explain it." (ibid.) I here side by Kapstein's opinion that Vasubandhu does not advance a memory-theory of personal identity, similar to Locke, for example – a theory according to which our identity is accounted for by connections of experiences and their memories. I believe that reading in the debate which appears in the *ĀVP* reveals that Vasubandhu's discussion of memory is not about whether memory

is required for the constitution of self-identity or not, but vice versa - whether a permanent self is required for the constitution of memory. It shall be evident that the context of the debate, as well as the content ascribed to memory and its functioning - all show that memory is not the basis for identity according to Vasubandhu. However, they do demonstrate that some kind of causal mechanism underlies memory, and hence underlies Vasubandhu's concept of personal identity.

Kapstein discusses Vasubandhu's treatment of memory and identity under three related points: First, the content of memory pertaining to Vasubandhu's treatment of the topic; second, the conditions for the occurrence of a memory; and finally, the mechanism by which a memory arises. Of the three he places the emphasis on the second point, discussing the philosophical difficulties that emerge from Vasubandhu's conception of memory and possible replies. Kapstein begins by referring to the point in the *ĀVP*, where the opponent requires Vasubandhu to explain how memory is possible in light of his selfless theory of persons. The objection and Vasubandhu's reply go as follows:

> If, then, there is no self whatsoever, then how is it that among instantaneous mental events there occurs memory or recognition of objects experienced long before?
>
> It is owing to a distinctive mental event, following from an act of concept-formation directed upon the object of memory.
>
> What sort of distinctive mental event is it, from which memory immediately flows?
>
> From one endowed with an act of mental-formation, etc. which has a resemblance to and connection with the enjoyment of that [object], and whose force is not destroyed by peculiarities of support, grief, distraction, etc. For even though it may resemble that [object], a distinctive mental event not caused by it has not the capacity to produce memory, and even if it follows from it, that [mental event] which resembles another [object] has

> not the capacity to produce memory; for the capacity is not found elsewhere. (Translated in Kapstein, pp. 120-121)[134]

On the basis of Vasubandhu's reply, Kapstein suggests an initial impersonal definition of memory that meets three conditions: a first act of concept formation occurs; there is a causal relation between that act and the occurrence of the mind moment which is the memory; and the contents of the two bear a resemblance. According to this definition, then, a psychological act *m* is a memory if and only if prior to the occurrence of *m* there was an act of concept-formation *a*, which had as its object *x*; *a* was a condition for the occurrence of *m*; and *m* has an appropriate resemblance to *x* (p. 121).

This initial definition leads Kapstein to discuss the first point, namely, the content of memory (variable *x*). He remarks that *x* can range from a certain event in which one participated ("the big cookout last summer"), through cognitions and feelings ("Marilyn Monroe's hair color, the feeling of depression") and up to skills ("how to ride a bike"), and therefore it is important to be careful in understanding the part of the definition, the requirement for a resemblance in content between concept-formation *a* and memory *m*. The meaning of the appropriate resemblance will diverge according to the type of mind moment from which the memory originated. Kapstein also remarks that this means that

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[134] *AKBh* IX, p. 472: *yadi tarhi sarvathāpi nāsty ātmā kathaṃ kṣaṇikeṣu citteṣu cirānubhūtasyārthasya smaraṇaṃ bhavati pratyabhijñānaṃ vā / smṛtiviṣayasaṃjñānvayāc cittaviśeṣāt / kīdṛśāc cittaviśeṣāt yato 'nantaraṃ smṛtir bhavati / tadābhogasadṛśasambandhisaṃjñādim ato 'nupahata prabhāvād āśrayaviśeṣaśokavyākṣepādibhiḥ / tādṛśo 'pi hy atad anvayaś cittaviśeṣo na samarthaḥ tāṃ smṛtiṃ bhavayituṃ tadanvayo 'pi cānyādṛśo na samarthastāṃ smṛtiṃ bhavayitum / labhayathā tu samartha ity evaṃ smṛtir bhavaty anyasyāṃ sāmarthyādarśanāt. AKbhT* Khu 90b6-91a2: *'o na gal te bdag rnam pa thams cad du med na sems skad cig ma rnams la nyams su myong nas ring mo zhig lon pa'i don ji ltar dran pa'am ngo shes par 'gyur/ dran pa'i yul la 'du shes pa'i rgyu las byung ba'i sems kyi khyad par las so/ /sems kyi khyad par ji lta bu las she na/ gang gi mjug thogs su dran pa skye ba ste/ de dag la rtag pa dang 'dra ba dang 'brel ba can gyi 'du shes la sogs pa dang ldan pa dang rten gyi khyad par dang/ mya ngan dang rnam par g.yengs pa la sogs pas mthu ma nyams pa can las so/ /de lta bu yin yang de'i rgyu las byung ba ma yin pa'i sems kyi khyad par gyis ni dran pa de bskyed par mi nus so/ /de'i rgyu las byung ba yin yang gzhan lta bu ni dran pa de skyed par mi nus kyi gnyi ga ltar na nus pas de ltar na dran par 'gyur te/ gzhan la ni de'i mthu ma mthong pa'i phyir ro/ /*

brief accounts of memory, like the one offered by Vasubandhu, will have to remain vague to a certain degree, as long as they do not provide a typology of the objects of memory (p. 122). Yet he concludes that clarifying this point is not of great importance in this context, as Vasubandhu's target here is to demonstrate that the concept of memory does not require us to presuppose a persisting self as a subject, rather than to seek the self among the objects of memory.

After dealing with the complexity of the notion of memory and its contents, Kapstein turns to discuss the condition for the occurrence of a memory, a point which occupies the second part of the definition. There are different counterexamples that show that this condition is insufficient for addressing the problem of memory without an enduring self. Kapstein gives the example of Pythagoras's formation of his theorem and the memory that arises in the minds of countless later generations of math students (p. 123). In this case one person's concept-formation was the condition for the occurrence of memory of other people. But this kind of phenomenon does not accord with the way we normally understand memories. Our concept of memory is such that it does not appear to a person other than the one who had the concept which created the memory. It is required, therefore, to investigate further, what kind of condition Vasubandhu had in mind.

Kapstein reads the above paragraph to mean that Vasubandhu understood the act of formation of the concept to be a sufficient condition for the *capacity to produce* memory (in contrast with the *actual* memory), and that its efficacy is conditional on the absence of obstructions, such as grief or distraction. The capacity to produce memory is, in turn, a necessary condition for the *occurrence* of the memory. In other words, concept-formation *a* alone is enough to create the capacity to produce memory *m*, as long as there are no factors that obstruct it; and the capacity is then a necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition for the occurrence of *m* – without it, the memory itself cannot

arise, but still the production of the memory may require additional conditions. Returning to the counterexample of the theorem of Pythagoras, Kapstein argues that "it seems clear that Pythagoras's formation of the concept of his theorem could not have been a *sufficient* condition, in our world as we have it, for anyone but Pythagoras to have had the capacity to remember the theorem later." Nevertheless, even after the revision, Kapstein believes that Vasubandhu must concede that his theory of memory presupposes what we call personal identity. Vasubandhu's analysis must include the qualification that the concept and its memory need to occur in the same stream of aggregates, and by that in effect bring back the idea of a substantial identity (p. 125).

The third point regarding Vasubandhu's account of memory that Kapstein discusses is the mechanism according to which memory is operated. Here Kapstein returns to his conclusion from the dialogue between King Milinda and Nāgasena and suggests that the unity of the stream of aggregates consists in a type of causal continuity (p. 127). This continuity is in essence a psychological succession lacking materiality, which functions according to intricate laws. As an example for the way this process functions, Kapstein provides the following paragraph from the *ĀVP*:

> Also, there is a fixed order among mental states, because what is to arise from such-and-such only arises from that. For when some similarity of features occurs, then there is a potency, owing to the specific of the class. E.g., if, following the thought of a woman, the thought of rejecting her body, or the thought of her father, son, etc. should arise then again when, later on, owing to the transformation of the continuum, the thought of a woman arises, then, because of its being of that class, it is capable of giving rise to the thought of rejecting her body, or the thought of her father, son, etc., but is not otherwise capable. Moreover, if from the thought of a woman a great many thoughts have gradually arisen, then those which are more frequent [or clearest] or most proximate arise because they have most forcefully cultivated, except when there are simultaneous special conditions external to the body. (Translated in Kapstein, p. 127)[135]

[135] *AKBh* IX, p. 474: *kramo 'pi hi cittānāṃ niyata eva* / *yato nūtpattavyaṃ tata eva tasyotpādāt* / *tulyākāram api hi kiṃcid utpādane samarthaṃ bhavati* / *gotraviśeṣāt* / *yadyathā strīcittānantaraṃ yadi tatkāyavidūṣaṇācittam utpannaṃ bhavati tatpatiputrādicittaṃ vā punaś ca paścātsaṃtatipariṇatyā strīcittamutpadyate tat samarthaṃ*

Kapstein notes that this passage expresses Vasubandhu's view that "the causally individuated continuum of a mind exhibits a peculiar causal density, characterized by the indefinitely complex associations among mental events occurring within the same causal stream." I agree with Kapstein's interpretation throughout his analysis, according to which mind moments occur due to causal mechanism; however, I believe there is much more to what Vasubandhu offers us here, as well as to what he intends to convey in his explanation of the way in which memory functions. What I want to argue is that Vasubandhu's account of memory is paradigmatic not only in the sense that it shows how personal continuity is possible based on psychological causality, but primarily in exemplifying Vasubandhu's theory of seeds (*bīja*) as the foundation for personal identity, and in particular, as the foundation of moral agency.

We will get to the multilayered meaning of this theory in a moment, but first let us delineate the ways in which it manifests in the *ĀVP*. This will aid to show how central this theory is to Vasubandhu's conception of personal identity and moral agency. At the conclusion of the presentation of the mechanism of memory, Vasubandhu summarizes his point, using the imagery of a seed and a fruit, by saying that

> However, [according to our view,] from a [past] mind moment of seeing [an object], another mind moment of remembering [that object] is produced, by means of the transformation of the stream, just as explained earlier [i.e.

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bhavati tatkāyavidūṣaṇācittotpādane tatpatiputrādicittotpādane vā / tadgotratvāt / anyathā na samartham / atha punaḥ paryāyeṇa strīcittād bahuvidhaṃ cittam utpannaṃ bahutara māsannataraṃ vā tadevotpadyate / tadbhāvanāyā balīyastvāt / anyatra tatkālikātkāyabāhyapratyayaviśeṣāt. AKBhT Khu 92a7-92b2: *sems can rnams kyi rim pa yang nges pa kho na ste/ rigs kyi bye brag las sems rnam pa 'dra yang 'ga' zhig sems 'ga' bskyed pa la nus pa yin te/ dper na bud med kyi mjug thogs su gsal te de'i lus sun 'byin pa'i sems sam/ de'i khyo'am bu la pa'i sems skye bar 'gyur la/ yang phyis rgyud yongs su 'gyur pas bud med kyi sems skye na de ni/ de'i lus sun 'byin pa'i sems bskyed pa'am/ de'i khyo 'am/ bu la sogs pa'i sems bskyed par nus pa yin te/ de'i rigs can yin pa nyid kyi phyir ro/ /gzhan du ni mi nus so/ /yang bud med kyi sems las rnam grangs kyi sems rnam pa mang po zhig skyes par gyur na de las ches mang ba dang/ ches gsal ba dang/ ches nye bar skyes pa gang yin pa de kho na skye bar 'gyur te/ de'i bsgos pa stobs dang ldan pa'i phyir ro.*

through the power of the special moment, *similar to the way in which a fruit arises from its seed*].[136]

The terminology which is partly adopted here, and is more observable in other places, as we shall see, makes it clear that beyond the botanical metaphor of seeds and fruits lie the philosophical concepts of the seed (*bīja*), the power (*śakti*) of the seed to produce the fruit, and the special mind moment in transformation of the stream (*saṃtati-pariṇāma-viśeṣa*). Vasubandhu adds immediately that this account is also valid for explaining how recognition of an object (*pratyabhijñāna*) comes about.[137] Later on, the mechanism by which psychological continuity is established and the formation of mind moments (*citta*) is regulated, is again described by Vasubandhu using the terms of his theory of seeds: mind moments occur in the stream of aggregates according to the seeds (this time *gotra*[138]) which are present in it. Thus, different persons may have different

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[136] *AKBh* IX, p. 472: *api tu darśanacittāt smṛticittam anyad utpadyate* / *saṃtatipariṇatyā yathoktam iti*. *AKBhT* Khu 91a3-4: *'on kyang ji skad bshad pa ltar rgyud yongs su 'gyur ba'i tshul gyis mthong pa'i sems la dran pa'i sems gzhan skye'o zhes bya ba.* Modern interpreters follow the *AKVy* in explaining that Vasubandhu refers here to *AKBh* ad II:36, where he provides one formulation of his theory of seeds (Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, 118, n. 61; Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo Vasubandhu, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary* [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2012], 2560). Yaśomitra writes in *AKVy* IX, p. 1217: *darśanacittāt smṛticittam anyad evotpadyataiti* / *vidyamānakāraṇatvād vidyamānabījāṃkuravad ity arthaḥ*. "'From a [past] mind moment of seeing [an object], another mind moment of remembering [that object] is produced'. From a present causality, means: like present seed and sprout". Finally, *AKBh* ad V:1d-2a, p. 278, confirms that Vasubandhu makes an analogy between the occurrence of memory from a previous experience and the fruit which arises from the seed: *ko 'yaṃ bījabhāvo nāma* / *ātmabhāvasya kleśajā kleśotpādanaśaktiḥ* / *yathānubhavajñānajā smṛtyutpādanaśaktir yathā cāṅkurādīnāṃ śāliphalajā śāliphalotpādanaśaktir iti*. *AKBhT* Ku 227b3-4: *sa bon gyi dngos po zhes bya ba 'di ci zhe na/ lus kyi nyon mongs pa las skyes pa nyon mongs pa bskyed pa'i mthu yin te/ dper na nyams su myong ba'i shes pa las skyes pa dran pa bskyed pa'i mthu dang/ yang dper na myu gu la sogs pa sA lu'i 'bras bu las bskyed pa'i mthu dang 'dra'o.* "What is called a 'seed-state'? [It is] the power of the individual to produce an affliction born from a [previous] affliction, just like the power to produce a memory born from a [previous] knowledge based on experience, and just like the power of sprouts and so on to produce a crop (*phala*) of rice born from a [previous] crop of rice".

[137] *AKBh* IX, p. 472: *smaraṇād eva ca pratyabhijñānaṃ bhavati*. *AKBhT* Khu 91a4: *dran pa kho na las ngo shes pa yang yin no.* "And it is from memory that recognition comes about – [therefore, the account of how a mind of memory arises explains also how a mind of recognition arises]".

[138] *AKBh* IX, p. 474: *kramo 'pi hi cittānāṃ niyata eva* / *yato nūtpattavyaṃ* [Schm. emends *yato <ye>notpattavyam;* Ejima emends *yato notpattavyam*; I follow Schm.] *tata eva tasyotpādāt* / *tulyākāram api hi kiṃcid utpādane*

thoughts according to their unique seeds, and the thoughts will tend to be more prevalent according to their number (*bahutara*, the more numerous) and proximity in time (*āsannatara*, the more proximate). As has been noted by Kapstein above, this mechanism explains how thoughts association occurs. The last point to which Vasubandhu refer in this chapter, which is of considerable importance to our discussion, is how actions produce future effects, or in other words, how the law of *karman* functions. Here again Vasubandhu, using the central concepts of his theory of seeds, utilizes it to explain how the law of *karman* operates over time without a self:

> [[As for the way, in which an action brings about a future effect,] we do not say that the production of the effect in the future [comes about] from an action that has perished [in the past]. [Q:] How then? [A:] Through the special transformation of the stream, as a fruit [arises from the] seed.[139]

This is followed by one of the central formulations of the theory of seeds in the *AKBh*, to which we will return in a moment.

It is important to note, therefore, that in all major cases of psychological relations that require continuity – memory and recognition, the formation of thoughts based on previous thoughts (i.e., the occurrence of mental association), emotional and behavioral

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samarthaṃ bhavati / gotraviśeṣāt. AKBhT Khu 92a6-7: *gang las gang zhig skye bar 'gyur ba de kho na las de skye ba'i phyir sems can* [emended *sems* {*cen*}] *rnams kyi rim pa yang nges pa kho na ste/ rigs kyi bye brag las sems rnam pa 'dra yang 'ga' zhig sems 'ga' bskyed pa la nus pa yin te.* "In fact, even the succession of mind moments is self-governed, since its production comes from that by means of which it is to be produced. The efficacy for the production [*AKBhT*: of several mind moments, which are] of a somewhat similar appearance of mind (*ākāra*) is from the distinct type of class (*gotra*) [that is, the type of their seed]." (Supported by the *AKVy* IX, p. 1221: *kasmād ity āha tadgotratvād iti / tatkāyavidūṣaṇācittaṃ tatpatiputrādicittaṃ vā gotraṃ bījam asyeti tadgotraṃ.* "Why? [The author *AKBh*] says: because of its class (*gotra*). The class [which is] the mind moment [with the content] of the defilement of [a woman's] body or [which is] the mind moment [with the content] of [that woman's] husband, son and so forth [each is because of its]- its seed (*bīja*) is its class (*tadgotra*).")

[139] *AKBh* IX, p.477: *naiva tu vayaṃ vinaṣṭāt karmaṇa āyatyāṃ phalotpattiṃ brūmaḥ / kiṃ tarhi / tatsaṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣād vījaphalavat. AKBhT* Khu 94a7-94b1: *kho bo cag kyang las zhig zin ba la tshe phyi ma la 'bras bu 'byung bar mi smra'o/ /'o na ji lta bu zhe na/ de'i rgyud yongs su 'gyur ba'i khyad par las te/ sa bon dang 'bras bu bzhin no.*

tendencies, and the relation between actions and their results – Vasubandhu accounts for continuity based on the theory of seeds. This seems, on the face of it, to be an exhaustive list of what we refer to when we talk about the characteristics of human psychology. At any rate, this certainly seems to embrace the full range of Vasubandhu's concept of a sentient being as the collection of five aggregates. I think it is safe to say, therefore, that for Vasubandhu, the particular causality underlying psychological continuity is the causality that is expressed in his theory of seeds. Accordingly, the relations that constitute personal identity are relations of "seeds" and "fruits". For the sake of simplicity, I will call them Relations-B.[140] As Collett Cox sums up this point, what I shall call Relation-B is used as an umbrella term for all psychological phenomena associated with the endurance of the person:

> By means of this process of successive transmission and transformation through which a seed develops and sprouts, Vasubandhu attempts to explain the causal efficacy of action, all varieties of causation whether homogenous, heterogeneous, remote or immediate, and thereby all forms of apparent continuity within the life-stream.[141]

In order to understand the ethical implications of this view and its bearing on the notion of the moral agent, we shall first examine how this theory was formulated and explained by Vasubandhu.

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[140] A former suggestion for Buddhist relations analogous to Parfit's Relations-R is that of Nigel Tetly in "The Doctrine of Rebirth in Theravāda Buddhism: Arguments for and Against" (PhD dissertation, University of Bristol, 1990). Tetley's claim is that in Buddhism, *karman* is the only proper cause for psychological relations. Hence, he names psychological relations in Buddhism Relations-K. See also Steven Collins, "A Buddhist Debate about the Self; and Remarks on Buddhism in the Work of Derek Parfit and Galen Strawson," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 25: 481-482.

[141] Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories on Existence; An Annotated Translation of the Section of Factors Dissociated from Thought from Saṅghabhadra's* Nyāyānusāra (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995), 95.

3.3 Vasubandhu's Theory of Seeds

Simply put, Vasubandhu's theory of seeds likens the occurrence of mental processes to the way in which seeds sprout and mature into fruits. The metaphor appears in various contexts in the writings of Vasubandhu and uses a set of defined terms, in order to describe and explain how these processes can take place without an enduring self. It addresses, therefore, some aspects common also to Parfit's Psychological Reductionism. However, Vasubandhu's theory is embedded within its own metaphysical and ethical contexts, and therefore touches upon certain aspects that are not part of the Parfitian view, while naturally being uninformed by some aspects that are part of the Western philosophical tradition in which Parfit writes. Vasubandhu advances his theory of seeds as a reply to difficulties related to identity and continuity that ensue from the doctrines developed in the Abhidharma literature. More particularly, Vasubandhu introduces the theory of seeds as part of the theoretical framework of the Sautrāntika school, as a response to another model that attempted to solve the same issues, the theory of *prāpti* (possession), offered by the *Sarvāstivāda* school.[142] A short explanation of the soteriological views of the *Abhidharma* works attributed to the Sarvāstivāda school is in place, after which we will be in a better position to elaborate on the difficulties it raises and the ways in which Vasubandhu's theory of seeds attempted to solve them.

3.3.1 The Soteriological Framework of the *Abhidharma*

In the introduction to this study and in Chapter 1, I have presented certain metaphysical principles of the Abhidharma literature. It is important to note, however, that

[142] On the notion of *prāpti*, see Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 79-92.

essentially, one of the principal purposes of the metaphysical analysis of the Abhidharma was to support the soteriological goals of the Buddhist practitioner. Like other early currents in Buddhism, the Abhidharma defined its main soteriological goal as the individual liberation from the cycle of births and deaths, *saṃsāra*, and from dissatisfaction and suffering, *duḥkha*.[143] As has been mentioned already earlier, the factors that were recognized as perpetuating the existence of beings in the cycle of births and deaths are mental afflictions (*kleśa*) and *karman* performed under the influence of ignorance.[144] Any action performed under ignorance has an efficacy which bears results in the future, and must be exhausted in order to achieve liberation. According to the Sautrāntika school, when mental afflictions are inactive, they reside in the mind in a dormant state as latent tendencies (*anuśaya*), which likewise must be eradicated before liberation can be attained. The Sarvāstivāda school, on the other hand, holds that there are no latent tendencies and that the term *anuśaya* is merely a synonym for a mental affliction, which needs to be eradicated as such. [145] Therefore, the Abhidharma saw the spiritual path as consisting in, first, identifying those factors and differentiating them from the factors that pertain to freedom from *saṃsāra*, and then, cultivating the positive mind moments and actions, while eradicating the negative ones. In accordance with this purpose, the *Abhidharma* examined and listed the factors that perpetuate the existence in *saṃsāra,* on the one hand, and the ones that are conducive to liberation, on the other hand.

The mental afflictions in their active and latent forms and the actions that carry *karmic* results – both come into existence due to ignorance (*avidyā, moha*) with regard

[143] Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, Third Revised Edition* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Honk Kong, 2007), 13.

[144] Ibid., 487

[145] Ibid., 443-445

to the way in which the world and the self ultimately exist (p. 430). As has already been mentioned in general terms (section 1.3.1 above), the Abhidharma distinguished between our conventional conception of objects in the world (including selves) and the way they actually exist on the level of ultimate reality. What is ultimately real, according to the Sarvāstivāda, are the most basic units or atoms that cannot be further analyzed physically or mentally. The ontological difference between them is explained in a well-known definition of the *AKBh* as follows:

> That which when broken into parts, its cognition (*buddhi*) ceases to exist, is conventionally true. An example is a pot, for in this case, when [the pot is] broken into pieces, the cognition of the pot ceases to exist. And in case the other *dharma*s [of which the thing is constituted] are to be removed by cognition [and] the cognition of that [thing] ceases to exist, this too should be known as conventionally true. An example is water, for in this case the *dharma*s of the materiality and so forth are removed by cognition [and] the cognition of the water ceases to exist.
>
> But just so they [the things discussed above] receive a conventional notion on account of conventionality. If one says, "the pot and the water exist", this is truth, not an error – conventional truth. [If a thing exists] in a manner different from this, then it is ultimate truth. In this case, even if [the thing] is broken, that cognition (*buddhi*) nevertheless remains [or even in the case of] removing the other *dharma*s by cognition [that cognition nevertheless remains], that is ultimate truth.
>
> That which when broken into parts, its cognition (*buddhi*) ceases to exist, is conventionally true. An example is a pot, for in this case, when [the pot is] broken into pieces, the cognition of the pot ceases to exist. And in case the other *dharma*s [of which the thing is constituted] are to be removed by cognition [and] the cognition of that [thing] ceases to exist, this too should be known as conventionally true. An example is water, for in this case, [when] the *dharma*s of the materiality and so forth are removed by cognition, the cognition of the water ceases to exist.
>
> Because in the case of these, a conventional sign is given, therefore, on account of convention, saying that the pot or the water exist, they pronounced a truth. Since it is not a falsity, this is a conventional truth.
>
> [A thing that exists] in a manner different from this is an ultimate truth. A case in which even when [the thing] is broken, its cognition (*buddhi*) nevertheless remains, [or] even when removing the other *dharma*s by

> cognition, [its cognition (*buddhi*) nevertheless remains], that is ultimate truth.[146]

Any entity that can be separated into parts, either physically or through mental analysis, is only conventionally existent; any entity that cannot be further separated into parts in this way exists ultimately (see also the discussion on the relation between the conventional self – a special instance of a conventional entity – and its ultimate constituents in sub-section 2.1 above). The psychological construction of conventional entities is accompanied by ignorance, and hence, according to the *Abhidharma* soteriology, conventional entities should be realized as such. Liberation from *saṃsāra* and ignorance require us to adhere to the ultimate level of reality. The theory of seeds serves as an explanatory device within this theoretical and soteriological framework.

3.3.2 The Purpose of the Theory of Seeds

In modern scholarship on Vasubandhu's theory of seeds, we find different interpretations of the purpose for which it was formulated, as well as different understandings of its scholarly origin and affiliation. Gelong Lodrö Sangpo[147] notes that

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[146] *AKBh* VI:4, p. 334: *yasminn avayavaśo bhinne na tadbuddhir bhavati tat saṃvṛtisat* / *tadyathā ghaṭaḥ* / *tatra hi kapālaśo bhinne ghaṭabuddhir na bhavati* / *tatra cānyān apohya dharmān buddhyā tadbuddhir na bhavati taccāpi saṃvṛtisad veditavyam* / *tadyathāmbu* / *tatra hi buddhyā rūpādīn dharmān apohyāmbubuddhir na bhavati* / *teṣv eva tu saṃvṛtisaṃjñā kṛteti saṃvṛtivaśāt ghaṭaś cāmbu cāstīti brūvantaḥ satyam evāhur na mṛṣety etat saṃvṛtisatyam* / *ato 'nyathā paramārthasatyam* / *tatra* [Schm. emends *yatra*] *bhinne 'pi tadbudhir bhavaty eva* / *anyadharmāpohe 'pi buddhyā tat paramārthasat. AKBhT* Khu 7b1-3: *gang la cha shas su bcom na de'i blo mi 'jug pa de ni kun rdzob tu yod pa ste/ dper na bum pa lta bu'o/ /de la ni gyo mor bcom na bum pa'i blo mi 'jug go/ /gang la blos chos gzhan bsal na de'i blo mi 'jug pa de yang kun rdzob tu yod pa yin par khong du chud par bya ste/ dper na chu lta bu'o/ /de la ni blos gzugs la sogs pa'i chos bsal na/ chu'i blo mi 'jug go/ /de dag kho na la kun rdzob tu de'i ming du btags pa yin pas kun rdzob kyi dbang gis bum pa dang chu yod do zhes brjod pa ni bden pa kho na smras pa yin gyi/ brdzun pa ni ma yin pas de ni kun rdzob kyi bden pa yin no/ /de las gzhan pa ni don dam pa'i bden pa ste/ gang la bcom yang de'i blo 'jug pa kho na yin la/ blos chos gzhan bsal yang de'i blo 'jug pa de ni don dam par yod pa yin te.*

[147] Gelong Lodrö Sangpo, "Notes on a Problem and on Two Attempts to Solve it," accessed March 2, 2014, http://www.gampoabbey.org/documents/kosha-sources/Lodro-Sangpo-Notes-on-a-Problem-and-on-Two-Attempts-to-Solve%20it-2001.pdf.

the problem that Vasubandhu sought to solve when he advanced this theory is the problem of personal identity, particularly in relation to ethics:

> [T]he analysis of the Abhidharma leads to a problem which needs to be solved. The problem is that if the world exists only as a multitude of discrete *dharmas* which exist in the present for one fleeting shortest moment of time only and then vanish out of the present existence, then this view seems to abolish any sense of continuity and thus seems to endanger the practice of the spiritual paths and the doctrine of *karman* and seems as well to be completely counterintuitive to common experience.
>
> How can *dharmas* cause an effect after they have vanished out of the present existence? How can a tiny momentary *dharma* account for the complexities, connections and apparent continuities of our world? How do we explain our sense of individuality and distinctiveness from other persons and our sense of responsibility for our own actions?

According to William Waldron, the theory was formulated in order to solve two sets of problems: synchronic problems and diachronic problems – both occur due to the reduction of the self in the *Abhidharma*.[148] The first group of problems concerns the interaction of coexisting *dharma*s in a particular moment or in two consecutive moments: in what way do they exist simultaneously without contradicting each other? As beings, we are endowed with a variety of dispositions, such as the disposition to be compassionate, to get angry or to act out of attachment. This can lead to different types of contradictions, but the one contradiction that interested Buddhist philosophers in particular was an ethical one, that is, how morally wholesome dispositions, like compassion, can coexist in the same mind at the same moment with morally unwholesome dispositions, such as anger. This problem, according to Waldron, is especially related to the status of latent tendencies (*anuśaya*) and the accumulation of *karmic* potential (ibid.).

[148] William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist Unconscious: The Ālaya-Vijñāna in the Context of Indian Buddhist Thought* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 55.

The second group of problems concerns the aspect of continuity, which seems to be undermined by the momentary description of the world and of persons. Although the *Abhidharma* offers a causal view of the person, it leaves open questions related to continuity beyond the momentary relation of cause and effect. In other words, it still needs to explain how continuity that lasts longer than one moment, as we identify in the endurance of persons, is possible. Moreover, as Waldron explains, in this regard, the Abhidharma faces a major theoretical difficulty: whereas the language it uses refers only to momentary mind moments, it needs to explain continuity; however, a description of continuity cannot be expressed in this way, but only in terms of conventional concepts, which according to its own view, do not describe the ultimate reality. Waldron recognizes this point as the "Abhidharmic Problematic", which he describes as follows:

> On the one hand, the active influences of the afflictions [*kleśa*s] and the type of actions they instigate are expressible in ultimate dharmic terms only to the extent that they are immediate factors of experience… on the other hand, the continuity of the factors constituting individual samsaric existence *in toto* can only be described in the more conventional, non-dharmic terms of the diachronic mental stream. But by its very method, Abhidharma explicitly privileges the first discourse at the expense of the second. *And this exclusive validity accorded to the synchronic analysis of momentary mental processes threatened to render that very analysis religiously vacuous by undermining the validity of its overall soteriological context – the diachronic dimension of samsaric continuity and its ultimate cessation.* (p. 56, emphasis in original)

Waldron thus understands the difficulties that led to the theory of seeds on two levels, the synchronic and diachronic, and as related to the simultaneous existence and continuity of two elements: (1) the dispositions and (2) *karmic* accumulation.

In parallel with the two sets of problems described by Waldron, Changhwan Park[149] identifies two contexts in which the theory of seeds is being used by Vasubandhu, which he calls the "botanical context" and the "subliminal context". The botanical use of the theory aims at explaining the diachronic continuation of *karmic* efficacy, whereas the subliminal use of the theory aims at explaining the synchronic coexistence of morally heterogeneous dispositions. Unlike Waldron, who interprets the diachronic and synchronic problems as relating both to the dispositions and to *karmic* efficacy, Park emphasizes that the theory of seeds in its botanical context (the diachronic model) is designed to explain only *karmic* efficacy, whereas in its subliminal context (as the synchronic model) it aims at explaining only the momentary coexistence of heterogeneous dispositions (pp. 246-247). Park contends that the two contexts represent two originally distinct uses of the metaphor of seeds, which were later on integrated into one theory.

As we have already seen, Collett Cox suggests a wider interpretation of the theory of seeds, according to which the theory represents one model that concerns not only the efficacy of *karman* and the latent dispositions, but encompasses all other temporal processes as well. Other Buddhist schools, she mentions, formulated several separate models in order to account for the various processes. She thus writes that

> The seed theory… has a much broader function within the interpretive models of Vasubandhu and the Dārṣṭāntikas or Sautrāntikas [than the function of the theory of possessions (*prāpti*) provided by the Sarvāstivāda school]. The model of the seeds is appealed to in all instances of general causal production: for example, the efficacy of past action; the retention and recollection of memories; the succession of dissimilar moments of thought;

[149] Changhwan Park, "The Sautrāntika Theory of Seeds (*bīja*) Revisited: With Special Reference to the Ideological Continuity between Vasubandhu's Theory of Seeds and its Śrīlāta/Dārṣṭāntika Precedents" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007)

> the arising of defilements after an interval; and the abandonment of defilements.[150]

Besides the general diachronic and synchronic problems, there is a more specific difficulty related to the moral qualities of mind moments: according to the Abhidharma, no moment of mind can produce as its result a morally heterogeneous moment of mind.[151] In other words, a wholesome mind moment cannot cause an unwholesome mind moment, and vice versa. Wholesome and unwholesome *dharma*s also cannot cohabit in the mind at the same time. This ethical-psychological principle created another challenge for the Abhidharma, which now had to explain how it is possible for a morally heterogeneous moments of mind to come into existence one after the other, and how it is possible for one mind stream to contain morally heterogeneous dispositions at one and the same time. With these philosophical difficulties in mind, we now proceed to understand the details of Vasubandhu's moral theory.

3.3.3 The Details of the Theory

The details of the theory of seeds are scattered in the *AKBh* over several sections. Each section appears in a somewhat different context and slightly varies in terminology. Despite the variations, Vasubandhu maintains a relatively consistent set of concepts, which is interwoven in the different accounts and permits for their interpretation as part of a single theory. The main three sections in which the theory is fully developed are the discussion about "possession" (*prāpti*) in *AKBh* II, particularly *AKBh* II:36; the discussion about latent dispositions (*anuśaya*) in *AKBh* V:2; and the discussion on the retribution of *karman* at the end of the *ĀVP*. Apart from that, the theory is applied in

[150] Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 96.

[151] Ibid., 92.

several other contexts, as I have shown earlier, either through a reference to one of the sections or by the mere mentioning of the metaphor of seeds.

Vasubandhu defines the term "seed" in the second chapter of the *AKBh* as follows:

> [Q:] Now, what is it that is called "a seed"? [A: It is] that name-and-form [i.e., the collection of five aggregates] which is capable of producing an effect, directly or intermediately, from the special transformation of the stream.[152]

In this concise definition we find a number of technical terms that are part of the theory of seeds. The first term is the special moment of the transformation of the stream of aggregates, *saṃtati-pariṇāma-viśeṣa*. The stream of aggregates is explained by Vasubandhu as an uninterrupted causal chain of conditioned factors (*saṃskāra*) in the past, present and future.[153] This stream undergoes constant transformation, that is, it changes from moment to moment, and the "special moment" is the last point in this transformation, before the seed ripens into a fruit, namely, gives rise to an effect. The maturation may happen immediately (*sākṣāt*) or it may be mediated (*pāraṃparyeṇa*) by other moments in the stream of aggregates. To give an example, the process of maturation can be immediate as when I recall what I have heard just one second ago, and it may be mediated, like in cases in which I recall something that I have seen several years ago. In the latter case, the effect arises only after some time in dependence upon a series of intermediate causes. Not until the right causes and conditions are present, can the initial cause give rise to the effect.

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[152] *AKBh* II:36, p. 64: *kiṃ punar idaṃ bījaṃ nāma / yan nāmarūpaṃ phalotpattau samarthaṃ sākṣāt pāraṃparyeṇa vā / santatipariṇāmaviśeṣāt. AKBhT* Ku 71b4: *sa bon zhes bya ba 'di ci zhig yin/ 'bras bu bskyed par bya ba la rgyud 'gyur ba'i bye brag gi mngon sum mam brgyud pas nus pa'i ming dang gzugs gang yin pa'o*.

[153] Ibid.: *kā ceyaṃ santatiḥ / hetuphalabhūtās traiyadhvikāḥ saṃskārāḥ. AKBhT* Ku 71b4-5: *rgyud ces bya ba 'di yang ci zhig yin/ 'du byed dus gsum pa rgyu dang 'bras bur gyur pa rnams so.* "[Q:] And what is a stream? [A: It is] the conditioned factors (*saṃskāra*) of the three times forming cause and effect".

Alongside the abovementioned description of how the mechanism of seeds operates, in *AKBh* II Vasubandhu ascribes the seeds a moral quality. Vasubandhu explains that each seed is qualified as either morally positive or morally negative. The context here is the debate about the Sarvāstivāda's theory of possession (*prāpti*) of *dharma*s in the mind. Vasubandhu surveys the morally positive seeds of good *dharma*s and the morally negative seeds of mental afflictions.[154] Although this seems to be the only account of the theory of seeds that touches on the moral aspect explicitly, this qualification seems to hold true for all seeds, such as the seeds of memories or mental associations. The most essential feature of seeds, in all of the accounts in the *AKBh*, is their function as causes that bring about results. Vasubandhu makes it clear in several places throughout the *AKBh*, both from a Sautrāntika point of view and from a Sarvāstivāda point of view, that only morally positive and negative causes – and in particular, only wholesome and unwholesome actions (*karman*) or *karmic* material (*avijñapti*) – are powerful enough to bring about results.[155] Hence, neutral seeds simply cannot produce an effect. Since all

[154] *AKBh* ad II:36cd, pp. 62-63.

[155] E.g. *AKBh* II:54cd, p. 89: ***vipākahetur aśubhāḥ kuśalāś caiva sāsravāḥ*** // *akuśalāḥ kuśalasāsravāś ca dharmā vipākahetuḥ* / *vipākadharmatvāt* / *kasmād avyākṛtā dharmāḥ vipākaṃ na nirvarttayanti* / *durbalatvāt* / *pūtibījavat*. *AKBhT* Ku 92a2-3: *rnam smin rgyu ni mi dge dang/ /dge ba zag bcas rnams kho na/ /mi dge pa rnams dang/ dge ba'i chos zag pa dang bcas pa rnams ni rnam par smin pa'i rgyu yin te/ rnam par smin pa'i chos can yin pa'i phyir ro/ /ci'i phyir lung du ma bstan pa'i chos rnams rnam par smin pa 'grub par mi byed ce na/ stobs chung ba'i phyir te sa bon rul pa bzhin no.* "Only morally bad [*dharma*s] and wholesome [*dharma*s] connected with impurity are ripening causes. Unwholesome *dharma*s and wholesome *dharma*s connected with impurity are ripening causes, because of possessing the quality of a *dharma* that ripens. [Q:] What is the reason that neutral *dharma*s do not bring about a ripening? [A:] Because of [being] weak, just like a putrid seed [which is too weak to yield a fruit]"; *AKBh* IV:7a, p. 200: ***nāvyākṛtāsty avijñaptiḥ*** *kiṃ kāraṇam* / *avyākṛtaṃ hi cittaṃ durbalam ato na śaktaṃ balavat karmākṣeptuṃ yanniruddhe 'pi tasminn anubadhnīyāt*. *AKBhT* Ku 173a3: *rnam rig min lung bstan min med/ /ci'i phyir zhe na/ lung du ma bstan pa'i sems ni stobs chung ba yin te/ de'i phyir gang 'gags kyang de'i rjes su 'brel par 'gyur ba'i las stobs dang ldan pa 'phen par mi nus so.* "A neutral *avijñapti* does not exist. [Q:] What is the reason? [A:] Because a neutral mind moment is weak and therefore not capable of throwing a forceful *karman*, which may endure even after [the mind moment] has ceased"; *AKBh* IV:47-48, pp. 228: ***sukhavedyaṃ śubhaṃ dhyānādāṭṛtīyāt…*** [Schm. emends *dhyānād ā ṭṛtīyāt*] ***ataḥ param aduḥkhāsukhavedyaṃ tu… duḥkhavedyam ihāśubham*** // *… kim idānīṃ tatkuśalam āhosvid akuśalaṃ* / *durbalaṃ tu tat*. *AKBhT* Ku 192b2-193a3: *bsam gtan gsum pa'i bar gyis las dge ba ni bde ba myong bar 'gyur ba yin pas* […] *de yan chad/ sdug min bde min myong 'gyur ba/ /* […] *sdug bsngal myong 'gyur 'di'i*

the phenomena that are explained by the theory of seeds involve the production of future effects by causes, it must be concluded that seeds are morally positive or morally negative.

In addition, in Vasubandhu's theory of seeds, the process of maturation involves agency in the new, unconventional sense in which Vasubandhu explains agency, namely, as the chief causes of action. As we have seen (Section 1.2.2 above), throughout the debate in the *ĀVP*, Vasubandhu specifies three features of agency: the performance (*tāṃ karoti*) of an action, ownership (*svāmin*) of the action and exerting independent power (*svātantrya*). Vasubandhu accepts the first two, but rejects the latter. The agent is, therefore, the one who performs the action and to whom it belongs. Vasubandhu ascribes these two features to the cause of the action, i.e., the special mind moment (*cittaviśeṣa*) that occurs immediately before the agential event. This is, in fact, the special moment in the transformation of the stream of aggregates, which is mentioned in the theory of seeds. This last moment of the transformation of the stream of aggregates, which begins with the seed, is the mind moment which directly produces the act, and which owns it, in the sense that at the time of its production, the cause has supremacy or power (*ādhipatya*) over the act.

The agent of the act of remembering, for example, is the cause of that memory, which is the special mind moment that precedes it and which is causally connected to the sense impression to be remembered (the seed).[156] The cause of the memory is also

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mi dge / […] *da ni ci las de dge ba yin nam/ 'on te mi dge ba yin zhe na/ dge ba ste stobs chung du ni ma yin no.* "A morally good action, up to the third *dhyāna*, is to be experienced as a pleasant feeling… above it, is to be experienced as a neutral (neither-unpleasant-nor-pleasant) feeling… a morally bad action, here, is to be experienced as an unpleasant feeling… [Q:] now, [from] which [action does a neutral feeling come], wholesome or rather unwholesome? [A:] It is [wholesome], but weak. [*AKBhT*: It is wholesome, but not too weak]"

[156] *AKBh* IX, p. 472-473 *AKBh* IX, p. 472-473: *uktaḥ sa yas tāṃ karoti smṛtihetucittaviśeṣaḥ*. [Schm. emends: *smṛtihetuś cittaviśeṣaḥ*]. *AKBhT* Khu 91a5: *gang gis de byed pa de ni bshad zin te/ dran pa'i rgyu ni sems kyi khyad*

the owner of that act of remembering, since this is the entity to which the act of remembering is subordinated.[157] Vasubandhu seems to be aware of the fact that this is a reformulation of the usual sense of agency, which is being disloyal to what people normally consider as the agent of actions. But he argues that this is as close as we can get to the notion of "agent", because an agent of the sort that his opponents are looking for – one which exerts independent power (*svātantrya*) – cannot be found in a world in which every event is causally dependent on other factors.[158] To put it plainly, the special mind moment (*cittaviśeṣa*), which is an inherent part of Relations-B involves agency in its narrow sense.

In *AKBh* V, the technical term of a seed is explained from a slightly different angle, using the term "seed-state" (*bīja-bhāva*). This term is connected with another technical term, "power" (*śakti*). The seed-state is explicated as the power to produce mind moments such as a memory or a manifestation of a mental affliction.[159] It is further explained that when these mind moments are dormant, they are in the state of being a

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par yin no. "That which carries out [the act of remembering] has been said: the cause of remembering is the special mind moment."

[157] *AKBh* IX, p. 473: *yo hy eva hetuḥ smṛtes tasyaivāsau*. *AKBhT* Khu 91b1: *de ni dran pa'i rgyu gang yin pa de kho na yin no*. "That which is the cause of memory is merely it [special mind moment (*cittaviśeṣa*) that precedes it]"

[158] *AKBh* IX, pp. 476-477: *yat tu yasya pradhānaṃ kāraṇaṃ tat tasya kartety ucyate / na ca ātmanaḥ kvacid api kāraṇatvaṃ dṛśyate / tasmāt sa evam api na kartā yujyate*. *AKBhT* Khu 94a3-4: *gang zhig gang gi rgyu'i gtso bo yin ba de ni de'i byed pa po zhes bya na bdag ni gang la yang rgyu yin par mi snang ste/ de lta bas na de ni de lta bur yang byed pa por mi rung ngo*. "But that which is called 'the agent (*kartṛ*) of [the action]' is that which is the chief cause (*pradhāna-kāraṇa*) of that [action]. A permanent self (*ātman*) being the cause [of the action] is not seen anywhere at all. Therefore, in such a manner, this [self] is also unsuitable as an agent."

[159] *AKBh* V:1d-2a, p. 278: *ko 'yaṃ bījabhāvo nāma / ātmabhāvasya kleśajā kleśotpādanaśaktiḥ / yathānubhavajñānajā smṛtyutpādanaśaktir yathā cāṅkurādīnāṃ śāliphalajā śāliphalotpādanaśaktir iti*. *AKBhT* Ku 227b3-4: *sa bon gyi dngos po zhes bya ba 'di ci zhe na/ lus kyi nyon mongs pa las skyes pa nyon mongs pa bskyed pa'i mthu yin te/ dper na nyams su myong ba'i shes pa las skyes pa dran pa bskyed pa'i mthu dang/ yang dper na myu gu la sogs pa sA lu'i 'bras bu las bskyed pa'i mthu dang 'dra'o*. "What is called a 'seed-state'? [It is] the power of the individual to produce an affliction born from a [previous] affliction, just like the power to produce a memory born from a [previous] knowledge based on experience, and just like the power of sprouts and so on to produce a crop (*phala*) of rice born from a [previous] crop of rice".

seed until they manifest.[160] In each moment the stream transforms in such a way that only one seed, or a complementary set of seeds (such as a memory and the associated positive feeling), yields a fruit. The rest of the seeds remain in a latent state, waiting for the right conditions that will allow them to manifest.

In the *ĀVP*, Vasubandhu lists a set of laws that regulate the manifestation of dormant seeds. As part of his account of mental associations, Vasubandhu writes:

> Of the manifold arisen mind moments, from the mind moment with the content of a woman arises that mind moment which is (1) the most numerous (*bahutara*), (2) the most intense (*paṭutara*), or (3) the most recent (*āsannatara*).[161]

A similar account is mentioned in his explanation of *karmic* retribution in the *ĀVP*:

> For example, a mind moment [at the time] of death which is accompanied by grasping at rebirth: the efficacy produced by that *karman* which is amongst the manifold *karman* of the past, and which is also (1) heavy

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[160] Ibid.: *prasupto hi kleśo 'nuśaya ucyate / prabuddhaḥ paryavasthānam / kā ca tasya prasuptiḥ / asaṃmukhībhūtasya bījabhāvānubandhaḥ / kaḥ prabodhaḥ / saṃmukhībhāvaḥ. AKBhT* Ku 227b2-3: *nyon mongs pa nyal ba la ni phra rgyas zhes bya la/ sang pa la ni kun nas dkris pa zhes bya'o/ / de la nyal ba gang yin zhe na/ mngon sum du ma gyur par sa bon gyi dngos pos rjes su 'brel lo/ /sad pa gang yin zhe na/ mngon sum du 'gyur ba'o.* "For what is termed 'latent disposition' (*anuśaya*) is [with respect to] a dormant mental affliction; [what is termed] 'outburst' (*paryavasthāna*) [is with respect to] a manifest [mental affliction]. [Q:] But what is the dormant state [of a mental affliction]? [A:] It is the uninterrupted succession in a seed-state of [a mental affliction] which is not present. [Q:] What is the manifest state [of a mental affliction]? [A:] The state of being present."

[161] *AKBh* IX, p. 474: *atha punaḥ paryāyeṇa strīcittād bahuvidhaṃ cittam utpannaṃ* [Ejima emends <*tato yad*>] *bahutaram* [Ejima and Schm. add, following Yaśomitra, <*paṭutaram*>] *āsannataraṃ vā tadevotpadyate / tadbhāvanāyā balīyastvāt. AKBhT* Khu 92b1-2: *yang bud med kyi sems las rnam grangs kyi sems rnam pa mang po zhig skyes par gyur na de las ches mang ba dang/ ches gsal ba dang/ ches nye bar skyes pa gang yin pa de kho na skye bar 'gyur te/ de'i bsgos pa stobs dang ldan pa'i phyir ro.* "Furthermore, from the mind moment [with the content] of a woman a mind moment of various [possible] kinds arises successively; of those, that [kind] which is the more numerous, the more intense, or the more recent is produced, because that thought is the most efficacious."; *AKVy* IX p .1221: *tataḥ strīcittād anaṃtarotpannebhyaś cittebhyo yad bahutaraṃ pravāhataḥ paṭutaraṃ śaktitaḥ āsannataraṃ vāsyotpādyasya cittasya / tad eva cittam utpadyate / tadbhāvanāyā balīyastvāt.* "Thereupon of the mind moments arisen immediately after the mind moment [with the content] of a woman, that mind moment to be produced, which is the more numerous on account of the stream, the more intense on account of strength, or the more recent – that mind moment arises; because that thought is the most efficacious."

> (*guru*), (2) recent (*āsanna*), (3) or frequently practiced (*abhyasta*), is manifested, and not [the efficacy produced] by another [*karman*].[162]

Despite the slight semantic variance between these two accounts, we can see that the maturation of the innumerable latent seeds, such as the seeds of mental association or of *karmic* retributions, follows certain laws. Seeds which are repetitive in the mind, which are stronger or more intense, and which are more recent, will ripen first.

Later on in Chapter V, Vasubandhu mentions the theory of seeds again – this time as part of a criticism leveled at the Sarvāstivādin account of *karmic* retribution, in which the critic argues that the result of an action is produced from an existing past dharma. This criticism is articulated right after the criticism against the Sarvāstivādin explanation of the occurrence of memory. In this short formulation of the theory, Vasubandhu reiterates some of the technical terms that we have seen in the initial definition of the seed:

> The Sautrāntikas do not state that the arising of the fruit [comes about] from a *karman* that has ceased. [Q:] How then [do they explain it]? [A: The fruit arises] from the special [transformation] of the stream [of aggregates, which proceeds] from that former [*karman*], as we will demonstrate in the *ĀVP*.[163]

The most comprehensive account of the theory of seeds, however, is found in the explication of *karmic* retribution in *AKBh* IX. Vasubandhu explains that the result of past actions arises due to a special transformation in the stream of aggregates (*saṃtati-*

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[162] *AKBh* IX, p. 477: *tadyathā sopādānaṃ maraṇacittaṃ punarbhavasya* / *trividhakarmapūrvakatve* [Schm., Ejima emend *vividhakarmapūrvakatve*] *'pi yatkarma guru vā bhavaty āsannam abhyastaṃ vā yatkṛtaṃ* [Ejima emends *tākṛtaṁ*] *sāmarthyaṃ dyotyate* [Schm. "*vyajyate*?" I follow Schm.'s proposal] *natv anyasya*. *AKBhT* Khu 94b4-5: *dper na yang srid pa'i nye bar len pa dang bcas pa'i 'chi ba'i sems lta bu'o/ / las rnam pa sna tshogs pa sngon du 'gro ba nyid yin yang las gang lci ba'am/ nye ba 'am/ goms pa yin pa des byas pa'i nus pa bsal bar byed kyi gzhan gyis ni ma yin te.*

[163] *AKBh* V:27cd, p. 300: *naiva hi sautrāntikā atītāt karmaṇaḥ phalotpattiṃ varṇayanti* / *kiṃ tarhi* / *tatpūrvakāt saṃtānaviśeṣād ity ātmavādapratiṣedhe saṃpravedayiṣyāmaḥ*. *AKBhT* Khu 242b7-243a1: *mdo sde pa rnams ni las dang 'das pa las 'bras bu 'byung bar mi brjod pa kho na'o/ /'o na ji lta bu zhe na/ de sngon du 'gro ba'i rgyud kyi khyad par las te/ bdag tu smra ba dgag pa nas bshad par bya'o.*

pariṇāma-viśeṣa) in which the action took place.[164] He likens this process to the way a fruit arises from a seed, and elaborates on the significance of this simile:

> As follows: it is said that the fruit arises from the seed, but it arises neither from a seed that has perished, nor directly [from the seed]. [Q:] How then? [A:] Through the special transformation of the stream [of aggregates]; [as the fruit arises] from the termination of the flower, which descended from the sequence of sprout, stem, leaf and so on. [Q:] If it has descended from the flower, why is it said that the fruit is of the seed? [A:] This is because it has imparted its efficacy indirectly to the flower. For if it did not come into being from the former [i.e., the seed], then the efficacy for the arising of such a fruit would not be.[165]

We can see that Vasubandhu highlights two aspects of the growing process. First, the fruit arises not directly from the seed, but rather through a gradual transformation, and in dependence upon intermediate stages. Secondly, the seed holds a certain power (*sāmarthya*), which is transmitted indirectly to the second to the last stage of the growing process, i.e. the flower, and which acts as the capacity that allows for the production of the final stage, i.e. the fruit. Vasubandhu applies this analogy in the following way:

> Similarly, it is said that the effect (*phala*) arises from the action (*karman*), but it arises neither from an action that has perished nor directly [from it]. [Q:] How then? [A:] Through the special transformation of that stream [of aggregates]. [A:] What is a "stream"? What is "transformation"? What is "special"? [A:] That constant production of mind moments preceded by *karman* is the stream. The arising of the [stream] always in a different mode

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[164] The problem of *karmic* retribution without a substantial self has attracted attention from a great number of Buddhist thinkers. On this issue, see Lambert Schmithausen, "Critical Response," in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, ed. Ronald W. Neufeldt (New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), 217-220.

[165] *AKBh* IX, p. 477: *yathā bījāt phalam utpadyata› ity ucyate / na ca tad vinaṣṭād bījād utpadyate / nāpy anantaram eva / kiṃ tarhi / tatsaṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣād aṅkurakāṇḍapatrādikramaniṣpannāt puṣpāvasānāt / tat punaḥ puṣpān niṣpannaṃ kasmāt tasya bījasya phalam ity ucyate / tad āhitaṃ hi tat parayāpuṣpe* [Schm., Ejima emend *<param>parayā puṣpe*] *sāmarthyam / yadi hi tatpūrvikān nābhaviṣyat tat tādṛśasya phalasyotpattau na samartham abhaviṣyat. AKBhT* Khu 94b1-2: *dper na sa bon las 'bras bu 'byung ba zhes bya ba de ni zhig pa las 'byung ba yang ma yin la mjug thogs kho nar 'byung ba yang ma yin no/ /'o na ci zhe na/ rgyud yongs su 'gyur ba'i khyad par las te/ myu gu dang sdong bu dang/ 'dab ma la sogs pa me tog la thug pa rim pa rdzogs pa las 'byung ba bzhin no/ /de ni me tog las grub pa yin na ci'i phyir sa bon de'i 'bras bu zhes bya zhe na/ des brgyud pas me tog la de'i nus pa bskyed pas so/ /gal te sa bon de sngon du 'gro bar ma gyur na 'bras bu de 'dra ba skyed pa la de'i nus pa yod par mi 'gyur ro.*

> is the transformation. That efficacy to produce an effect immediately after is the special transformation, because it is distinct from other transformations.[166]

An action matures into its result, therefore, through the same process of transformation we have noted in the initial definition of the seed. The action leads to a sequence of mind moments, which retains its momentum, and culminates in the effect, which follows the special transformation.

Up to this point, I surveyed the sections of the *AKBh*, in which Vasubandhu formulates his theory of seeds, and described the essential features of this theory with relevance to mental continuity. I will now move to present a philosophical analysis of this theory from the perspective of moral agency. But before that, there are some objections that may be raised against this description of the theory of seeds. As we have seen, Vasubandhu uses the metaphor of seeds to elucidate several phenomena – primarily *karmic* retribution and latent tendencies. Moreover, his terminology, albeit relatively consistent, is not entirely uniform. For example, the potential of the seed to yield a fruit is described by the Sanskrit term *śakti* in one place, but the term *sāmarthya* is used in another place. Similarly, as we have seen, in most of the accounts the term *bīja* is used, yet in one account the term *bīja-bhāva* is used. This may cast doubt as to whether the different accounts represent one comprehensive theory. It may be well argued that what we see here is basically nothing but different applications of a similar

[166] Ibid.: *evaṃ karmaṇaḥ phalam utpadyata ity ucyate / na ca tad viniṣṭāt karmaṇa utpadyate nāpy anantaram eva / kiṃ tarhi / tatsaṃtatipariṇāmaviśeṣāt / kā punaḥ saṃtatiḥ kaḥ pariṇāmaḥ ko viśeṣaḥ / yaḥ karmapūrva uttarottaracittaprasavaḥ sā saṃtatis tasyā anyathotpattiḥ* [Ejima emends *anya<thānya>thotpattiḥ*] *pariṇāmaḥ / sa punar yo 'ntaraṃ* [Ejima emends *'nantaraṃ*] *phalotpādanasamarthaḥ / so 'ntyapariṇāmaviśiṣṭatvāt* [Schm., Ejima emend *n{t}yapariṇāmaviśiṣṭatvāt*] *pariṇāmaviśeṣaḥ*. *AKBhT* Khu 94b2-4: de bzhin du las las 'bras bu 'byung ngo/ / *zhes bya ba de yang las zhig pa las kyang mi 'byung la/ mjug thogs su yang ma yin no/ /'o na ji lta bu zhe na/ rgyud yongs su 'gyur ba'i khyad par las so/ /rgyud ni ci yin/ yongs su 'gyur ba ni ci yin/ khyad par ni ci yin zhe na/ las sngon du 'gro ba'i sems phyir zhing 'byung ba gang yin pa de ni rgyud yin no/ /de gzhan dang gzhan du skye ba ni yongs su 'gyur ba yin no/ /de'i mjug thogs su 'bras bu skyed nus pa gang yin pa de ni yongs su 'gyur ba gzhan las khyad par du 'phags pa'i phyir yongs su 'gyur ba'i khyad par yin te.*

simile – a didactic method that is used in different doctrinal contexts, and therefore should not be taken as a whole.

Changhwan Park, for example, although arguing for one theory, discerns between two semantic aspects of it, the botanical and the subliminal, as has been shown above (see sub-section 3.3.2). The botanical aspect, which is expressed by the concepts of *bīja-phalavat* and *saṃtati-pariṇāma-viśeṣa*, explains diachronic mental processes and is employed particularly to explain *karmic* retribution, whereas the subliminal aspect is expressed by the concept of *bīja-bhāva* and explains the synchronic state within a single person. Thus, it is designed to clarify primarily the status of latent tendencies (*anuśaya*). Park also shows how modern scholars who studied the theory of seeds usually choose to focus on one of these two aspects.

Ulrich Timme Kragh does not bring up the semantic problem that Park discusses. However, he suggests that the same technical term and metaphor of a seed (*bīja*) are employed by the Sautrāntika school in order to clarify two different doctrinal theories, which are related to the function of *karman*. Kragh calls them the theory of a "series", or *saṃtāna*-theory, and the theory of "seeds", or *bīja*-theory.[167] Both theories aim at providing solutions to the problem of the link between an action and its result and to the problem of the locus of the action and its result. The difference between the two, according to Kragh, is that the *saṃtāna*-theory suggests that the *saṃtāna*, the stream of aggregates, is what constitutes the connection between the action and its result, whereas according to the *bīja*-theory, a separate phenomenon, the *bīja*, functions as the connecting factor, and the mind stream (*cittasaṃtāna*) serves as the basis for the occurrence of *karmic* retribution (p. 303). Thus, the same metaphor and terminology

[167] Ulrich Timme Kragh, *Early Buddhist Theories of Action and Result: A Study of Karmaphalasambandha – Candrakīrti's Prasannapadā,* Verses 17.1-20 (Wien: Arbeitskreis für tibetische und buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 2006), 267.

represent, in fact, two different theories. Kragh's discussion, it should be noted, stems primarily from the debate on this topic in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*, and draws its observations from other text besides the *AKBh*, including Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* and the *Yogācārabhūmi*.

Strictly speaking, therefore, from a semantic point of view, the variation in terminology that we encounter may suggest that this variance implies theoretical variance. However, from a philosophical point of view, I will maintain that the similar objectives that these accounts have and the theoretical problems they are designed to solve, allow for reading them as different variants of one theory. I here side by Park's suggestion that:

> These various applications of the notion of seed are, by and large, conducted with the same spirit and point to the same doctrinal direction. When we say "Vasubandhu's theory of seeds," we do not mean his mere uses of the metaphor of seeds. Rather, we are talking about Vasubandhu's systematic incorporation of the simile of seeds into his theory of causation and psychology in general and of *karmic* retribution in particular.[168]

Another point to be remembered is that although fundamentally the theory of seeds employs a metaphor and although seeds, being a figurative concept, do not have an ultimate ontological status (*dravya*), but are rather a provisional designation (*prajñapti*) – nevertheless the theory of seeds cannot be dismissed as irrelevant to the problem of personal identity. The main reason is that, although Vasubandhu employs a metaphor, the contexts and ways in which he employs it all seem to show that he meant this metaphor to have an explanatory force, and not merely a didactic or an aesthetic effect. Therefore, I believe that the metaphor of seeds can tell us something significant on the

[168] Changhwan Park, "The Sautrāntika Theory of Seeds (*bīja*) Revisited: With Special Reference to the Ideological Continuity between Vasubandhu's Theory of Seeds and its Śrīlāta/Dārṣṭāntika Precedents" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007), p. 229, n. 548.

way in which Vasubandhu understood the continuity and endurance of the person, which can be highly relevant to the philosophical issue of personal identity and agency.

3.4 Relations-B as a Criterion of Personal Identity

This part of the chapter will be dedicated to a philosophical analysis of the theory of seeds, in a way that shows its significance to the problem of personal identity and ethics and allows for a dialogue with the Western accounts I have described in Chapter 1. Here I would like to highlight three features of Relations-B, the psychological relations that are the outcome of the theory of seeds, which are relevant in particular.

The first point to be noticed is the dependence of Relations-B. As psychological relations, Relations-B cannot be extracted and isolated from the entirety of causal processes in the mind stream, that is, they cannot be isolated from other Relations-B in the same stream of aggregates. A Relation-B is propelled by the first cause in the process of maturation (the seed), which constitutes one side of the relation, but then comes into fruition in dependence upon each and every mind moment that follows the first cause up until the moment when the potential of that cause is exhausted. This means that any Relation-B that is present in the mental stream during the presence of a certain Relation-B is a necessary condition for the formation of that Relation-B. Without the essential effect of the rest of the Relations-B that are present in the mind stream and are interwoven with a particular Relation-B, the potential for the production of that certain relation will simply not be realized. Thus, the memory will not occur, the latent disposition will not manifest, and similarly, actions will not lead being about *karmic* results. This means, in effect, that without the intermediate mind moments, there would not be any psychological relation at all. According to Vasubandhu, then, all Relations-B in one mental stream are dependent.

This dependency operates on another level as well: as we have seen the seed, like the fruit, is dependent on other Relations-B for its existence. As Vasubandhu demonstrates in his discussion of the workings of *karman*, the action, which is the cause for its later retribution, depends on previous causes; they, in turn, depend on their causes and so on. Without the intricate combination of all these factors, the seed, as well, will not be produced. This is very clearly demonstrated in Vasubandhu's description of how an action comes about:

> [How does an action come about?] From remembering (an object) (*smṛti*), predilection (*chanda*) arises; from predilection, initial inquiry (*vitarka*) [arises]; from initial inquiry, effort (*prayatna*) [arises]; from effort, [movement of] the wind element (*vāyu*) [arises]; then, what is called "an action" (*karman*) [comes about].[169]

We see then that Relations-B are dependent on other Relations-B both on the level of the seed which is sawn and on the level of the evolution of the fruit.

The second feature of Relations-B that I want to highlight is their inherent moral and agential quality. Relations-B are described as having an innate moral quality. From its inception, each seed is endowed with a positive, a negative or a neutral moral value. As we have seen, however, only positive and negative seeds are powerful enough to produce an effect. This innate moral value determines which fruit this seed will bear. It determines, in other words, the moral quality of that Relation-B as positive or negative. Thus, the moral quality of the seed immediately adds a moral dimension to each and every psychological relation. Memories and recognitions, emotional and behavioral

[169] *AKBh* IX, p.477: *smṛtijo hi cchandaḥ cchandajo vitarko vitarkāt prayatnaḥ prayatnād vāyus tataḥ karmeti. AKBhT* Khu 94a4: *dran pa las ni 'dun pa skye'o/ /'dun pa las ni rtog pa skye'o/ /rnam par rtog pa las ni rab tu 'bad pa'o/ / rab tu 'bad pa las.* Vasubandhu concludes that a self is not required for this process, and this seems to be a response to the Nyāya argument that a persisting self must participate in the process of action, since a predilection arises only from a previous experience of the object desired, and only the person who experienced it can recall it. See Matthew R. Dasti, "Nyāya's Self as Agent and Knower," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy,* ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 116-117.

dispositions, intentions and the actions they lead to – all have a moral quality. For Vasubandhu, therefore, a Relation-B is always a *moral* relation.

As we have seen, Relations-B are not only endowed with a moral quality; they also involve agency in the sense that Vasubandhu gives the term. The seed itself provides the moral quality, but the special transformation of the stream of aggregates, which is the last moment prior to the arising of the effect and its cause – is understood to be its agent. This aspect of Relations-B is the basis for the attribution of agency to conventional persons. And so, each relation consists not only in two elements, but rather in three. We can conclude, therefore, that according to Vasubandhu, Relations-B are always moral, as well as *agential* relations.

Finally, Vasubandhu's model suggests a mechanism that regulates the multitude of seeds that are present simultaneously in the same mind stream, so as to avoid internal conflicts, particularly moral contradiction. All potential Relations-B inhabit the mind in a dormant form as latent dispositions. The aggregate energy of the entirety of seeds is carried from moment to moment in a causal way by the present mind moment, as is revealed by the first characteristic of Relations-B (their dependency). Which seed will be activated in any given moment is determined by the various conditions at the moment before its final maturation. In particular, the maturation of seeds is subject to the laws of proximity, quantity and intensity. When the right conditions appear in the mind stream – that is, when the special mind moment or special transformation of the stream (*cittaviśeṣa*, *saṃtati-pariṇāma-viśeṣa*) that acts as the implementer of the initial cause arises – the seed matures into a fruit, thus forming a new psychological relation. In this way, the theory of seeds explains how, without asserting a permanent self, it is possible for diverse, and even contradictory, desires, wishes, habits, memories and so on, to populate one mind stream, while allowing for the exercising of coherent courses

of action. I believe, that this unique model of psychological continuity found in the *AKBh* suggests a new way to understand personal identity and agency in the absence of a permanent self. It thus provides new avenues to address some of the problems that reductionist theories of personal identity need to address. In some of the cases it seems that this theory of identity resolves the problem in a different way, as I will show in the final comparative chapter.

Chapter 4

The Mechanism of *karman* and the Nature of Moral Action

Perhaps the most basic element in moral agency is the capacity of the agent to act. It is expected from a reductionist theory of agency, therefore, to explain how selfless action is possible and to address questions concerning the relation between the agent and the actions he performs. While these issues do not seem to attract attention from Parfit and his successors, Vasubandhu did seem to be aware of the difficulties. Whereas his direct philosophical treatment is rather limited, what I will show in the following pages is that Vasubandhu's indirect discussion of these issues in the Chapter on *karman* (*karma-nirdeśa*) of the *AKBh* offers a sophisticated account of action under the no-self premise.

At first sight, Vasubandhu's view on the relations between agents and actions seems to be ambiguous, and even contradictory. It is in the context of discussing the way reincarnation takes place without an enduring self which reincarnates, that Vasubandhu spells out one view on the subject. He quotes a saying by the Buddha, in support of a certain understanding of this relation: "Actions exist, the ripened effects [that actions bring forth] exist, but no agent (*kāraka*) is perceived, which abandons these aggregates and puts together again other aggregates, apart from the causal relationship of the factors."[170] In other words, according to this saying, actions and their results exist, but

[170] *AKBh* III:18a, p. 129: *evaṃ tūktaṃ bhagavatā "asti karmāsti vipākaḥ kārakas tu nopalabhyate ya imāṃś ca skandhān nikṣipati anyāṃś ca skandhān pratisaṃdadhāty anyatra dharmasaṃketāt* / …". *AKBhT* Ku 122b6: *bcom ldan 'das kyis 'di skad du/ las ni yod do/ /rnam par smin pa ni yod do/ /chos su brdar btags pa ma gtogs pa gang phung po 'di dag 'dor zhing phung po gzhan dag tu nying mtshams sbyor bar byed pa'i byed pa po ni mi dmigs so.* "This was said by the Bhagavat: 'action exists, the ripened effect exists, but no agent which abandons these aggregates and holds together again other aggregates is perceived, apart from the designations of factors."

there is no agent who performs the action. This statement, which may be said to describe in a nutshell the problem of agency in the Buddhist thought, raises a number of questions in this regard. What is the ontological status of actions? Do actions exist independently of agents? Can actions be ascribed to agents at all? Some of these points, and Vasubandhu's theories concerning these points, have been discussed in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. The perplexity, however, grows stronger, as we come upon another claim regarding the relation between the agent and his actions, this time pronounced by Vasubandhu himself. "As [the action (*kāra*)] is not distinct from the existence of a person," he states in a way that seems to contradict the previous claim, "the action of a person is the person [itself]."[171] That is, according to the last statement, both action and the agent exist, but in fact, they are the same. This last description seems to express the idea that there is a certain overlap between persons and actions: either that actions are identical in some way, yet to be explored, with the persons who perform them, or (according to a stronger claim) persons are identical with their actions, in the sense that they are constituted by the latter; in other words: persons are nothing but the actions they perform.

Considering the fact that action plays such a crucial role in the Buddhist path – action is a central concept in moral theory, metaphysics, cosmology – it is curious that the relation between actions and agents is hardly discussed in the fourth chapter of the *AKBh*, the chapter that is dedicated to the functioning of *karman*, or action. In this part of Vasubandhu's work, actions are primarily examined in isolation from the broader notion of an agent. To use the image of a well-known Buddhist metaphor, in which the mutual dependency of beings is likened to the mutual dependency of the different parts

[171] *AKBh* II:56d, p. 95: *puruṣabhāvavyatirekāt puruṣakāraḥ puruṣa eva. AKBhT* Ku 96b4: *skyes bu'i ngo bo las mi gzhan pa'i phyir skyes bu byed pa ni skyes bu nyid yin no.* "As [the action] is not distinct from the existence of a person, the action of a person is [nothing but] the person."

of the body: in the Chapter on *karman*, action is examined as if it were a hand without a body. This, however, seems to be intentional, as Vasubandhu reveals in one place in the chapter, when he is asked about the identity of the recipient of actions, and more specifically, about the person *whose* life is taken by the act of killing. Vasubandhu does not reply, but rather states, "I will consider [the meaning of the entity marked by] the pronoun 'whose' in [the treatise on the refutation of] the theory of persons (*pudgalavāda*) [namely, the *ĀVP*]."[172] It is to be expected, therefore, that a philosophical notion of the agent will not appear in the Chapter on *karman*, as Vasubandhu seems to have intended to set aside any treatment of the concepts of person, agent and recipient of actions to the *ĀVP*, which in this dissertation has already been examined in Chapter 2. This seems indeed to be Vasubandhu's general attitude in his discussion of action. Nevertheless, Vasubandhu does comment on this question shortly when he explains who the person who gives is (i.e., the person who exercises generosity). Vasubandhu writes:

> [The one who gives is] a bodily and vocal action together with that which causes the action to arise… the bundle [of mind (*citta*) and mental concomitants (*caitasika*), i.e. the mentality of a person].[173]

Vasubandhu then quotes a stanza, whose terminology directly links his analysis to the account of agency given in the *ĀVP*, in that it reduces the agent to the stream of

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[172] *AKBh IV:73ab, p. 243: kasyā tajjīvitaṃ yas tadabhāvān mṛto bhavati / kasyeti ṣaṣṭhīṃ pudgalavāde vicārayiṣyāmaḥ. AKBhT* Ku 203b5: *de med pas gang zhig 'chi bar 'gyur ba'i srog de gang yin zhe na/ gang gi zhes bya ba'i drug pa ni gang zag tu smra ba dgag par dpyad par bya'o/ /* "[Q:] To whom does this life belong, who dies by its non-existence? [A:] We will examine [the meaning of] the sixth pronoun 'whose' in [the treatise on the refutation of] the theory of persons."

[173] *AKBh* IV:113c, p. 268: *kiṃ punas tat syād yena dīyate* / ***kāyavākkarma sotthānaṃ*** *kiṃ punas tad utthānam* / *yena kalāpena tad utthāpyate. AKBhT* Ku 221b2-3: *gang gis sbyin par byed pa de yang gang zhig ce na/ lus dang ngag la slong dang bcas/ / slong ba yang gang zhig ce na/ tshogs gang gis de slong bar byed pa'o.* "[Q:] Now, who may be the one by whom [giving] is given? [A:] A bodily and vocal action together with an arising. [Q:] But what is this arising? [A:] [The arising] is the bundle [of mind (*citta*) and mental concomitants (*caitasika*)] by which that [action] is arisen."

aggregates and suggests that from that perspective, a human action translates into a process which takes place in the corresponding stream of aggregates. According to the stanza

> When a human being gives something of his own with a wholesome mind,
> at that moment it is said that the wholesome aggregates [are in the act of] giving.[174]

This comment, which is to the best of my knowledge the only one in the Chapter on *karman* in which Vasubandhu touches on the point, is instructive both in regard to the question of what an action is and with regard to the question of what a person and an agent may be, and it will serve as the starting point for our discussion.

This rather long introduction is intended to present the type of analysis of action that one should expect to see in this part of the *AKBh*. Despite Vasubandhu's limited treatment of the subject in the Chapter on *karman* and his declared postponement of the discussion about the philosophical understanding of the agent (as person) to the final part of the *AKBh*, I will show in the following pages that notions of agency can be extracted from this discussion. To do this, I will employ the terminology of agency that I have extracted from Vasubandhu's treatment of agential conventions, as discussed in Chapter 2 of the dissertation – chiefly, the ultimate and conventional notions of the agent. Whereas in the Chapter on *karman*, the ultimate notion of the agent can be drawn from the notion of the cause (*hetu*) of an action, the conventional agent surfaces on the one hand as a mental concept integral to action, and on the other hand, as the human figure in narrative examples. This twofold notion of agency, thus, clarifies the nature of the relation between agents and actions. In light of these findings, I will argue (in a

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[174] Ibid.: *śubhena manasā dravyaṃ svaṃ dadāti yadā pumān / tat kṣaṇaṃ kuśalāḥ skandhāḥ dānam ity abhidhīyate //. AKBhT* Ku 221b3: *gang tshe skyes bu dge yid kyis/ /rang gi rdzas ngag sbyin byed pa/ /de tshe dge ba'i phung po rnams/ /sbyin pa zhes ni brjod pa yin.* "When a human being gives something of his own with a wholesome mind, at that moment it is said that the wholesome aggregates [are in the act of] giving." See sub-section 2.3 above for a discussion of Vasubandhu's account of agential conventions.

similar fashion to the way I argued in Chapter 2) that in Vasubandhu's analysis of action, the notion of a conventional self or an "I" is indispensable to normative ethics, in that moral and immoral actions require a mental concept of "I" in order to occur.

Before moving to the core of the chapter, a few remarks are in place. First, one of the central philosophical problems that attracted the attention of Western scholars in the theory of *karman*, and which has bearing on the issue of agency to a large extent as well, is the problem of free will and determinism. Despite the close affinity between these two issues, my inspection of *karman* will not extend to the question of free action. The Buddhist view on this issue, as it may be reconstructed from the thought of Vasubandhu, has been widely examined and debated in recent works by Karin Meyers[175] and Jonathan Gold.[176] In addition, several other recent studies on this subject have suggested an interpretation of the Buddhist approach to free will and determinism based on other classical sources.[177] For this reason, I will not go into this topic in the framework of this study.

Second, it should be mentioned that the action theory that the Buddhist traditions developed through the idea of *karman* is saturated with details and closely linked to

[175] Karin Meyers, "Freedom and Self-Control: Free Will in South Asian Buddhism".

[176] Jonathan Gold, *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 180-188.

[177] Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves: Freedom and Agency in Light of the Two Truths," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 41-67; Jay L. Garfield, "Just Another Word for Nothing Left to Lose: Freedom, Agency and Ethics for Mādhyamikas," in *Free Will, Agency and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 164-185. For an overview of earlier Western scholarship on free will and determinism in Buddhism, see Riccardo Repetti, "Recent Buddhist Theories of Free Will: Compatibilism, Incompatibilism, and Beyond." *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 21 (2014): 272-345; Riccardo Repetti, "Buddhist Hard Determinism: No Self, No Free Will, No Responsibility," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 19 (2012): 130-197; Riccardo Repetti, "Buddhist Reductionism and Free Will: Paleo-Compatibilism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 19 (2012): 33-95; Riccardo Repetti, "Earlier Buddhist Theories of Free Will: Compatibilism," *Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 17 (2010): 277-310.

numerous other Buddhist doctrines. The Chapter on *karman* in the *AKBh* indicates this fact in the many scholastic debates, philosophical views and layers of the theory it delineates. The following analysis of *karman* will, naturally, not be exhaustive of the topic; I will concentrate only on those aspects and elements that in my mind, are directly relevant to the notion of moral agent.[178] One of the aspects of *karman* that I will not touch on, although I find it highly intriguing and pertinent to the understanding of how actions and agents are connected, is the retribution of *karman*, which according to Buddhist accounts shapes the future experiences and psychology of the agent. I refer the reader to other studies, which explore the implications of *karmic* retribution for the question of personhood.[179]

4.1. Action Reduced

The paragraph on "the one who gives" that I have quoted above exemplifies Vasubandhu's approach to the understanding of action. Simply put, his description reduces what is commonly known as action, as well as what is commonly known as agent, into the basic elements in which they consist. The reduction of the agent is already familiar and reiterates ideas which are found in the *ĀVP* and were discussed in

[178] A concise overview of the content of the Chapter on *karman* in the *AKBh* can be found in James Paul McDermott, *Development in the Early Buddhist Concept of Kamma/Karma* (New Delhi : Munshiram Manoharlal, 1984), 127-143 and in KL Dhammajoti's "Summary and Discussion of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣya*," in Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012), Vol. I, 28-33; for a thorough overview of the Sarvāstivāda views on *karman* as they appear in the chapter, see Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, Third Revised Edition (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Hong Kong, 2007), 480-535.

[179] The following studies make claims on the role of *karmic* retribution in the constitution of the person in general, and of the agent in particular. Lynken Ghose, "Karma and the Possibility of Purification: An Ethical and Psychological Analysis of the Doctrine of Karma in Buddhism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 35, no. 2 (2007): 259-290; Damien Keown, "Karma, Character, and Consequentialism," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 24, no. 2 (1996): 329-350; Matthew MacKenzie, "Enacting Selves, Enacting Worlds: On the Buddhist Theory of Karma," *Philosophy East and West* 63, no. 2 (2013): 194-212.

Chapter 2. Meaning, a being who performs an action is a conventional designation for a collection of aggregates; giving is, thus, an agential convention, reducible to the different processes, which take place in those aggregates. The reduction of human action, however, is new and differs in terminology from the way action is analyzed in the *ĀVP*. In the paragraph on "the one who gives", Vasubandhu analyzes the action into two elements: a physical or vocal action and the mental event, which leads to this action. Action is thus reduced temporally (an action is explained as a process of two consecutive events), as well as to the concurrent psychophysical elements which operate in one action (mental components versus physical components – bodily and vocal).

An elaboration of this view of action, which has been expressed in the paragraph on "the one who gives", is found at the beginning of the Chapter on *karman*. Vasubandhu first classifies the varieties of action according to a number of schemes. One classification is the classical Buddhist classification into the three categories of (1) bodily actions (*kāyakarman*), (2) vocal actions (*vākkarman*) and (3) mental actions (*manaskarman*), namely, actions performed by means of the body, through speech and by thinking. The three types of action are included in Vasubandhu's general definition, which states that action is "volition and that which follows from volition".[180] It is explained by Vasubandhu that volition (*cetanā*) is mental action, from which bodily and vocal actions, the two actions subsequent to intention (*cetayitvā*), arise.[181] Vasubandhu discusses each of the three types of action in turn.

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[180] *AKBh* IV:1b, p. 192: *kiṃ punas tat karmety āha* ***cetanā tatkṛtaṃ ca tat*** / *sūtra uktaṃ "dve karmaṇī cetanā karma cetayitvā ce"ti*. *AKBhT* Ku 166a4: *las de yang gang zhig ce na/ de ni sems pa dang des byas/ /mdo las ni gnyis te/ sems pa dang bsams pa'i las so zhes gang gsungs pa la.* "What is an action? It is volition and that which is produced by it. It is said in the sutra: 'there are two types of action: action which is volition, and [action which occurs] having had volition'"

[181] *AKBh* IV:1cd, p. 192: ***cetanā mānasaṃ karma*** *cetanā manaskarmeti veditavyam* / ***tajjaṃ vākkāyakarmaṇī*** // *yattaccetanājanitaṃ cetayitvā karmety uktaṃ kāyavākkarmaṇī te veditavye. AKBhT* Ku 166a7-166b1: *sems pa yid kyi las yin no/ /sems pa ni yid kyi las yin no zhes bya bar rig par bya'o/ /des bskyed lus dang ngag gi las/ /sems las skyes*

Before elaborating on this, however, one must be aware of another major Abhidharmic classification of action, which is central to the theory of action in the *AKBh*. This is the classification into informative (*vijñapti*) and non-informative (*avijñapti*) actions. Informative actions are actions which can be observed by others and convey the intentions of the agent. Bodily and vocal actions, which manifest through the physicality and voice of the agent, belong to this group. Non-informative actions are those actions which cannot be observed by others and thus do not reveal the agent's intention. Mental actions are the quintessential case; however, according to the Sarvāstivāda school, each bodily and physical informative action also gives rise to a correspondent non-informative action, which is a special material factor that is active in the agent's stream of aggregate and allows for the results of the action to come about. This type of non-informative action is likewise non-observable. Vasubandhu does not accept the Sarvāstivāda account of non-informative action as a special material factor; however, he still makes use of the concept of non-informative action, only that he understands it as a special transformation of the stream of aggregates.[182]

Let us return to the categories of bodily, vocal and mental actions. Vasubandhu develops his interpretation of what a bodily action is in response to two competing views. The first view, expressed by the Buddhist school of the *Vātsīputrīya*s, maintains that a bodily action is a movement (*gati*). The act of raising a hand, for example, is the movement of the hand from one position – directed downwards – to another position –

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pa gang yin pa bsams pa'i las zhes gsungs pa de dag ni lus dang ngag gi las su rig par bya'o. "**Volition is mental action**. 'Volition is mental action' – this should be known. **That which arises from it is bodily and vocal actions**. It is stated in the verse that that which has been arisen from volition is action which follows from volition – it should be known that these are bodily and vocal actions."

[182] The term *vijñapti* has a wider sense in the thought of Vasubandhu, especially in connection with his Yogācāra idealistic doctrines, where it signifies the nature of experience as "representation-only" or "ideation-only". See on that Bruce Cameron Hall, "The Meaning of *vijñapti* in Vasubandhu's Concept of Mind," *Journal of the Association of Buddhist Studies* 9, no. 1 (1986): 7-24.

directed upwards. It has already been shown in the examination of agential conventions, that for Vasubandhu a movement that is attributed to agents, such as walking, is not a continuous phenomenon performed by a persisting self, but rather the appearance of the changing stream of aggregates in different places. Ordinary people mistakenly see in the consecutive reappearance of the stream of aggregates a unity of agency and a unity of action. Here, Vasubandhu delves into this point and justifies his view philosophically. In reply to the *Vātsīputrīya*s, he argues that bodily action cannot be a movement, since logically a movement requires a persisting entity that can change place or state. Yet according to Buddhist teachings, all entities are impermanent. The Sautrāntika school holds that *dharma*s, the basic factors of ultimate reality, are characterized by momentariness,[183] and according to the Sarvāstivāda view *dharma*s come into existence, remain for a brisk moment, and then disappear. Thus ultimately, entities exist for only a moment, before they cease to exist and give way to new momentary entities.[184] Movement, which is by definition a temporal phenomenon, cannot take place in a world in which there are only momentary occurrences. Vasubandhu concludes that action is not a movement, but rather a "shape" (*saṃsthāna*).[185] Action as movement is, thus, a provisional designation (*prajñapti*), which is reducible to momentary forms.

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[183] *AKBh* IV:2c, p. 193: ***na gatir yasmāt saṃskṛtaṃ kṣaṇikaṃ***. *AKbhT* Ku 166b2: *'gro min gang phyir 'dus byas ni/ /skad cig pa yin zhes bya ba brjod do.* "There is no movement, since the conditioned elements are momentary."

[184] This argument rests on Vasubandhu's understanding of momentariness, which itself became a topic of controversy among the schools of the Abhidharma, which is also documented and analyzed in the *AKBh*. On the development of the doctrine of momentariness, see Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist metaphysics: The making of a philosophical tradition* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 59-66. On the polemic regarding momentariness in the *AKBh*, see Jonathan Gold, *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 104-110.

[185] *AKBh* IV:2c, p. 192: *cittavaśena kāyasya tathā tathā saṃsthānaṃ* ***kāyavijñaptiḥ***. *AKBhT* Ku 166b1-2: *sems kyi dbang gis lus de dang de ltar gnas pa ni lus kyi rnam par rig byed yin no.* "**Informative bodily action** is such and such a shape of the body [which occurs] through the power of the mind."; *AKBh* IV:3b, p. 194: *tasmān nāsti bhāvānāṃ vināśahetuḥ svayam eva tu bhaṅguratvād vinaśyanta* [Schm. emends *-ntaḥ*] *utpannamātrā vinaśyantīti siddha eṣāṃ kṣaṇabhaṅgaḥ kṣaṇabhaṅgāc ca gatyabhāvaḥ / gatyabhimānas tu deśāntareṣu nirantarotpattau*

This last view is shared with the proponents of the Sarvāstivāda school, who argue along with Vasubandhu that action is a shape rather than a movement. However, here too we find an additional point of disagreement, this time between Vasubandhu and the Sarvāstivāda school. The latter argues that the momentary material entities, which form together the allegedly continuous movement, are real entities (*dravya*); in other words, they are ultimately existing factors (*dharma*). Vasubandhu disputes this stance and argues that the momentary shapes are themselves provisional designations (*prajñapti*); qualities such as long, short, big, small and so on, which are attributed to shapes, are in fact designations of collections of real entities (*dravya*).[186] In summary, Vasubandhu reduces bodily actions, as they are ordinarily conceived, twice. First, he argues for a

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tṛṇajvālāvat / gatyabhāve ca "saṃsthānaṃ kāyavijñapti"riti siddham. AKBhT Ku 167b3-5: *de lta bas na dngos po rnams 'jig pa la rgyu ni med kyi rang nyid 'jig pa'i ngang can yin pa'i phyir 'jig pa na byung ba tsam gyis 'jig pa'i phyir 'di dag skad cig ma la 'jig par yang grub la skad cig ma la 'jig pa'i phyir 'gro ba yang med do/ /yul gzhan dag tu 'dab chags par 'byung ba las 'gro bar mngon pa'i nga rgyal byed par zad de rtswa'i me bzhin no/ /'gro ba med na lus kyi rnam par rig byed de dbyibs yin no zhes bya bar grub bo/ /* "Therefore, there is no cause of annihilation for existing things. Rather, they perish of themselves due to their being transitory. [Since] it is established that they perish being merely produced, [it is also established that] they decay in a moment. Because they decay in a moment, [it is also established that] there is no movement. The erroneous conception of movement is in the constant arising in adjacent places, like the flame which burns the straw. As there is no movement, it is established that bodily informative action is shape."

[186] *AKBh* IV:3b-c, pp. 194-195: *nāsti saṃsthānaṃ dravyata iti sautrāntikāḥ / ekadiṅmukhe hi bhūyasi varṇa utpanne dīrghaṃ rūpam iti prajñapyate / tam evāpekṣyālpīyasi hrasvam iti / caturdiśaṃ bhūyasi caturasram iti / sarvatra same vṛttam iti / evaṃ sarvam… tasmān nāsti dravyataḥ saṃsthānam. AKBhT* Ku 167b5-168a4: *mdo sde pa rnams na re dbyibs ni rdzas su med de/ phyogs gcig gi sgor kha dog phal cher byung ba la gzugs ring por zhes 'dogs par byed/ de nyid la ltos nas nyung ngur byung ba la thung du zhes 'dogs par byed/ phyogs bzhir mang por byung ba la gru bzhi zhes 'dogs par byed/ thams cad du mnyam pa na lham pa zhes 'dogs par byed de/ thams cad kyang de dang 'dra'o/ /… de lta bas na dbyibs ni rdzas su med do.* "The Sautrāntikas say that shape does not exist as a real entity. When [a certain] color arises in a greater mass in one direction, it is provisionally designated as a "long body"; with respect to that [the color], when [it arises] in a smaller mass, [it is designated as] "short"; when [the color arises] in a greater mass in four directions, [it is designated as] "square"; when [the color arises] in the same mass everywhere, [it is designated as] "round" [*AKBhT*: "square"]. So are all [shapes]… therefore, shape is not a real entity."

temporal reduction into momentary shapes, and second, he argues for a spatial reduction of the momentary shapes into their fundamental constituents.[187]

Vasubandhu follows a similar method when he investigates the nature of vocal action. According to his definition, vocal action is sound, whose essence is being "discourse", or "speech".[188] This point is further developed in the second chapter of the *AKBh*, where Vasubandhu clarifies how articulated sound (*vāc*), words (*nāman*), and discourse (*śabda*) should be understood. There he explains that speech is an articulated sound that points at a referent, or causes one to understand a referent.[189] In his discussion of sound, the point is stressed that human vocal expressions, which manifest through sounds, do not occur in a single moment. Thus, the sound of speech exists in several moments, or to put it plainly, speech takes place over time.[190] This means that vocal action, like bodily action, is not a real entity, but a composite. This composite is made up of syllables (*vyañjana*), which according to Vasubandhu are real entities (*dravya*).[191] To use the words of Vasubandhu's analogy, a vocal phrase is a set of

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[187] *AKBh* IV:3c, p. 195: *sautrāntikāḥ kāṃ kāyavijñaptiṃ prajñapayanti / saṃsthānam eva hi te kāyavijñarptiṃ prajñapayanti / natu punar dravyataḥ. AKBhT* Ku 168b3: *mdo sde pa… gang la lus kyi rnam par rig byed du 'dogs par byed ce na/ de dag ni dbyibs kho na la lus kyis rnam par rig byed 'dogs par byed la rdzas su ni ma yin no.* "What bodily informative action do the followers of the Sautrāntika school point out? It is shape alone, and not a real entity, that they point out as bodily informative action."

[188] *AKBh* IV:3d, p. 196: ***vāgvijñaptis tu vāgdhvaniḥ*** // *vāksvabhāvo yaḥ śabdaḥ saiva vāgvijñaptiḥ. AKBhT* Ku 169a1-2: *ngag rnams rig byed 'di ngag sgra/ /ngag gi rang bzhin gyi sgra gang yin pa de nyid ngag gi rnam par rig byed yin no.* "Vocal informative action is vocal sound (*dhvani*). That discourse (*śabda*) which is the defining nature of speech (*vak*) is vocal informative action."

[189] *AKBh* II:47ab, p. 80: *naiva ghoṣamātraṃ vāg yena tu ghoṣeṇārthaḥ pratīyate sa ghoṣo vāk. AKBhT* Ku 84b6: *sgra tsam kho na ni ngag ma yin gyi sgra gang gis don go bar 'gyur ba'i sgra de dag yin no.* "Speech is not merely an articulated sound; rather, that articulated sound by which a referent is recognized is the articulated sound which is speech."

[190] *AKBh* II:47ab, p. 81: *na khalv api śabdānāṃ sāmagryam asti kṣaṇaikamilanam. AKBhT* Ku 85a3: *yang sgra rnams ni tshogs pa med la chos gcig la cha shas kyi skyed pa.* "It is not the case that the complete assemblage of the words (*śabda*) comes together in one moment (Tib.: in one factor)."

[191] Ibid.: *atrārtheṣu kṛtāvadhiḥ śabdo nāma nāmnā* [Schm. emends *nāmnāṁ*] *ca racanāviśeṣo gātheti nāmasaṃniśritā bhavati; racanāviśeṣaś ca dravyāntaraṃ nopapadyate / paṅktivac cittānupūrvyavac ca / astu vā*

syllables following each other, just as a line of ants is merely a series of ants positioned one after the other. Thus, vocal action, just like bodily action, is temporally reducible to more basic entities.

Although it might be expected that the conclusion of this move would be that bodily and vocal actions do not exist, this is not what Vasubandhu aims at. He does not deny the existence of bodily or vocal actions. The question then presents itself, what should be considered as the action, given that it is merely a collection of consecutive momentary entities. To put it differently, which part in the series of ultimately existing entities constitutive of action (or which element outside of it) is to be understood as the action? Vasubandhu's solution is to locate the action in the initial cause in the temporal chain, the volition (*cetanā*[192]). He writes that

> Action whose basis is the body is bodily action, the volition which leads the body here and there.[193]

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vyañjanamātrasya dravyāntarabhāvaparikalpanā. AKBhT Ku 85b1-2: *der yang don rnams la mtshams bcad pa'i sa* [emnded: *sgra*] *ni ming yin la/ ming rnams bkod pa'i khyad par yang tshigs su bcad pa yin pas ming la brten pa yin no/ /bkod pa'i khyad par yang rdzas gzhan du mi 'thad de phreng ba lta bu dang sems kyi rim pa bzhin no/ /yi ge tsam zhig rdzas gzhan gyi dngos por yongs su rtog pa yin du chug.* "In this respect, a name is a word which is appointed to referents (*artha*); and a verse is a particular arrangement of names, [and therefore,] is reliant on names. But this particular arrangement does not fit as a separate real thing, just as a line and a succession of mind moments [do not fit as a separate thing above and beyond their constitutive members]. Or let it be so that a mere syllable is the formation of the existence of a separate real thing."

[192] Volition (*cetanā*) is a principal concept in Buddhist thought in general, and in the thought of the Abhidharma in particular. Vasubandhu writes in *AKBh* II:24, p. 54: ***cetanā*** *cittābhisaṃskāro manaskarma*. *AKBhT* Ku 64b4: *sems pa ni sems mngon par 'du byed pa'o.* "Volition [is] mental action which is the shaping of the mind". The term is translated into English in various ways. I chose to translate *cetanā* as "volition" in order to maintain a clear distinction between *cetanā* and *āśaya*, which I translate as "intent". On the notion of *cetanā* in early Buddhism and in the writings of Vasubandhu, and for a discussion about its translation into English, see Karin Meyers, "Freedom and Self-Control: Free Will in South Asian Buddhism", 138-254. For an extensive investigation of this term in the writings of the Theravāda tradition and its development from the early thought of India, see Nalini Devdas, *Cetanā and the Dynamics of Volition in Theravāda Buddhism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2008).

[193] *AKBh* IV:3c, p. 195: *kāyādhiṣṭhānaṃ karma kāyakarma yā cetanā kāyasya tatra tatra praṇetrī. AKBhT* Ku 168b3-4: *lus la brten pa'i las ni lus kyi las te/ de dang der lus 'jug par byed pa'i sems pa gang yin pa'o.*

That is to say, actions performed by means of the body are essentially volitions that lead to a movement in the body. This particular type of volition is connected with the body by way of having it as its basis. Vasubandhu does not explicitly say the same about vocal action, but it is clear from the rest of his treatment of action, that the same applies to vocal action as well. Since mental action is defined as volition, this reductionist move is of course irrelevant to this type of action – it is in itself momentary and irreducible, as we will also see below. [194]

To sum up, the examination of action shows that Vasubandhu not only reduces the person and the agent to their fundamental constituents, but also the various actions they perform. He analyzes bodily and vocal actions in such a way, as to show that these are composites of momentary (and in the case of bodily action, also spatially distinct) real entities.[195] It is interesting to notice the significance of this move, as it questions the claims put forth by proponents of the extreme claim. If one holds that the person is to be reduced into momentary discrete agents, one must consider the consequences of this view for action, as this kind of extreme reductionism risks subverting the very idea of agency. In this case, more thought must be given to understanding the way action is to

[194] Here it is interesting to note the philosophical debate concerning mental action that developed in Western philosophy. Galen Strawson, for example, criticizes the very idea of mental action, on the grounds that mental activity, such as making decisions, having an idea or remembering, is something that impinges upon the agent without the agent's intention. See Galen Strawson, "Mental Ballistics: The Involuntariness of Spontaneity," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 103, no. 1 (2003): 227–256. Cf. Alfred R. Mele, "Agency and Mental Action," *Philosophical Perspectives* 11 (1997): 231–249, who argues for the plausibility of mental action, and Pamela Hieronymi, "Two Kinds of Agency," in *Mental Actions*, eds. Lucy O'Brien and Matthew Soteriou, 138-62 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) who argues that mental agency should be understood as cases in which we settle the question of whether to do something or to act in a certain way.

[195] This reductive approach manifests in yet another treatment of action with high relevancy to ethics, namely, in livelihood, which is said to be not an entity in and of itself, but rather merely a collection of bodily and verbal actions. The idea of livelihood is thus reduced to its basic "constituents", as is the case with actions of body and speech. See on this *AKBh* IV:86.

function under the extreme claim, with Vasubandhu's theory being one possible solution, which will be done in the final chapter of this dissertation.

One important question that poses itself in the text of the *AKBh*, following Vasubandhu's equating of action with the intention that precedes it, concerns the distinction between bodily and vocal actions, on the one hand, and mental action (which, as we have seen, is defined as volition), on the other. The question is this: how does the theory of action formulated by Vasubandhu allow for clear differentiation between a simple mental volition and the observable actions that arise as a result of that volition? Normally, the concept of volition is understood in the Abhidharma thought as thought-concomitant (i.e., a factor that occurs simultaneously with a mind moment, *citta*), which serves as the impulse of an action. But in order to account for such a distinction, Vasubandhu defines two types of volition. The first type of volition is the "conceptual volition" (*saṃkalpa-cetanā*[196]), which sets in train the entire process of action. According to Vasubandhu, this is a volitional action (*cetanā-karman*), which is equivalent to mental action. Vasubandhu illustrates this volition by presenting a discursive thought, which forms this volition: "I shall perform such and such an action" (*evaṃ caivaṃ ca kariṣyāmi*). The other type of volition is called a volition of doing (*kriyā cetanā*), and it arises following the conceptual volition.[197] This volition is the

[196] As the primary meaning of *saṃkalpa* revolves around the semantic field of "purpose", "aim", "determination", and "resolve", the term *saṃkalpa-cetanā* is translated many times as "pure" volition, or volition "which is resolve". I choose to translate this term as "conceptual volition", following a secondary sense of "*saṃkalpa*" as "idea", "conception", or "notion" in order to highlight the fact that this type of volition involves a linguistic-conceptual thinking (particularly, one that rests on the notion of a conventional "I").

[197] According to Maria Heim's study of the Pāli equivalent *kiriyā cetanā* in the Pāli Canon and the Theravāda writings, this volition is a certain type of factor, which is neither the result of karma nor productive of it, and signifies the pure activity (that is, activity which does not produce *karman* and suffering) that *arhat*s engage in. I couldn't find echoes of this view in the *AKBh* and Vasubandhu seems to understand this concept differently. See Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 63-65.

impulse that moves the parts of the body or makes speech uttered in accordance with the first volition, the conceptual volition.[198] In short, conceptual volition is a thought, a mental action, which expresses a certain intention to perform an action. The volition which is identified as a bodily or vocal action, at the same time, is a "silent" non-discursive volition, yet one that follows a conceptual volition. Thus, bodily and vocal actions involve, in fact, two volitions: one which sets the general purpose as a preparation for the action, and another which serves as the impulse that precedes immediately the action. Mental action, at the same time, is understood as a conceptual volition. The center of gravity of an action is the conceptual volition that propels it, and in light of the reductionist view of action, Vasubandhu sees the conceptual volition as the action itself. Now the question of the agent-action relation can be reframed as the question concerning the relation between the agent and the conceptual volition, which initiates the action. To arrive at an understanding of the nature of this relation, I will now examine how the conceptual volition is related to the two notions of agency, the ultimate and the conventional, and to the theory of seeds discussed earlier.

4.2. Action and the Ultimate Notion of Agency

Since a clear-cut philosophical examination of the person and the agent is scarce in the Chapter on *karman*, it is in indirect ways that aspects of moral action are woven into the concept of selfless agency – both from its ultimate and its conventional sides. As for the

[198] *AKBh* IV:3c, p. 195: *saṃkalpacetanā pūrvaṃ bhavaty evaṃ caivaṃ ca kariṣyāmīti / tathā cetayitvā paścāt kriyā cetanotpadyate / yayā kāyaḥ preryate sā 'sau cetayitvā karmety ucyate. AKBhT* Ku 168b5: *'di dang 'di lta bu zhig bya'o snyam pa'i kun du rtog pa ni sngar 'byung la/ de ltar bsams nas de'i 'og tu gang gis lus 'jug par byed par bya ba'i sems pa skye bar 'gyur te/ de ni bsam pa'i las zhes bya'o.* "Conceptual volition, 'I shall perform such and such an action', comes into being first. Thus, having thought ['I shall perform such and such an action'], afterwards, a volition of doing arises. It is said that that through which the body is set into motion is an action which follows from volition."

ultimate agent, I suggest that its place in the working of action is explained by Vasubandhu by referring to the notion of a cause (*hetu*). As I have showed in Chapter 2, the primary cause of any event which takes place in the stream of aggregates, is considered by Vasubandhu to be the ultimate "agent" of this event, to which Vasubandhu ascribes the two features of performing the action and of being the owner of the action. Recall that in terms of the theory of seeds, this cause is tantamount to the "special mind moment" (*cittaviśeṣa*) in the transformation of the mind, which immediately precedes the event. To follow this analogy in Vasubandhu's analysis of action, the ultimate agent of an action would be the immediate cause which gives rise to the action, an idea that Vasubandhu indeed develops.

The discussion in which Vasubandhu elaborates on his understanding of the causal mechanism that underlies action begins with an objection to his action theory. The difficulty is related to a seeming contradiction between two principles accepted by Vasubandhu. The first principle is that informative actions cannot evolve from certain mental events, which are abandoned and purified at a particular stage in the spiritual path which is called "the path of seeing" (*darśana-mārga*). These mental events cannot produce informative actions, because they are "turned inwards" (*antar-mukha-pravṛtta*), thus it is explained.[199] More on that will be said below. The second principle is that wrong (*mithyā*) mental, bodily and vocal actions are performed under false view

[199] *AKBh* IV:8b, p. 202: *savitarkavicāreṇa hi cittena* ***vijñaptiḥ*** *samutthāpyate / tacca dvitīyādiṣu dhyāneṣu nāsti bhāvanāprahātavyena cotthāpyate / darśanaprahātavyasyāntarmukhapravṛttatvāt. AKBhT* Ku 173b6-7: *rtog pa dang dpyod pa dang bcas pa'i sems kyis rnam par rig byed kun nas slong bar byed na/ de yang bsam gtan gnyis pa la sogs pa dag na med do/ /bsgom pas spang bar bya bas slong bar byed kyi de kha nang du bltas pa'i phyir mthong bas spang bar bya ba ni ma yin no.* "Informative [action] is caused to arise by mental events which involve initial inquiry and investigation. These, however, are absent in the second meditation and so forth [i.e., higher meditations], and are brought forth by [a mental event] to be abandoned by the path of cultivation [*AKBhT*: but not by mental events to be abandoned by the path of insight]; since [a mental event] to be abandoned by the path of insight is turned inwards [i.e., towards mental objects]."

(*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*; the view which denies the truth of the law of *karman*, the truth of suffering, etc.). False view, however, is defined as a mental event to be abandoned by the path of insight (*darśana-prahātavya*). According to the objection, these two principles contradict each other, since although false view is abandoned by the path of insight, it is nevertheless the case that informative actions are caused by it.[200]

In reply to this objection Vasubandhu describes the relation between informative bodily and vocal actions and their causes, with specific regard to the nature of the latter. Vasubandhu identifies two types of causes, on account of which an informative bodily or vocal action comes into being. The causal origination (*hetu-samutthāna*), the first cause or primary mover (*pravartaka*), is said to project the action, to set into motion the process that culminates in the action. Following the causal origination is a second cause, the origination in the moment (*tatkṣaṇa-samutthāna*), which is the cause that is active at the very moment in which the action takes place.[201] To illustrate this and clarify the role of each of the two causes (particularly, the second cause, which might be considered as superfluous), Vasubandhu gives an example of someone who performs an action, but dies before the action is carried out. In this case, when the person dies before he comes

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[200] *AKBh* IV:9d, p. 203: *yad uktaṃ darśanaprahātavyaṃ cittaṃ vijñapter asamutthāpakam iti / kiṃ tarhi* ***bhagavatoktaṃ*** *"tato 'pi mithyādṛṣter mithyāsaṃkalpaḥ prabhavati mithyā vāg mithyākarmānta"mity evam ādi. AKBhT* Ku 174b4-5: *mthong nas spang bar bya ba'i sems ni rnam par rig byed kun nas slong bar byed pa ma yin no zhes gang bshad pa/ 'o na ci'i phyir bcom ldan 'das kyis log par lta ba de las ni log par rtog pa dang log pa'i ngag dang log pa'i las kyi mtha' 'byung bar 'gyur ro zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa gsungs she na.* "It was said that a mental event which is to be abandoned by the path of seeing does not cause informative [actions] to arise. Now, why did the Bhagavat proclaim: 'From false view, wrong thought, wrong speech, and the extreme of wrong action come forth' and so on?"

[201] *AKBh* IV:10cd, p. 203: *hetusamutthānaṃ* ***pravartakam*** *ākṣepakatvāt* / *tatkṣaṇasamutthānam* ***anuvartakaṃ*** *kriyākālānuvartanāt*. *AKBhT* Ku 174b6-7: *rgyu'i kun nas slong ba ni 'phen par byed pa yin pa'i phyir rab tu 'jug par byed pa yin no/ /de'i dus kyis kun nas slong ba ni bya ba'i dus su/ mthun par 'jug pa'i phyir rjes su 'jug par byed pa yin no.* "Causal origination is the primary mover, since it projects [the action]. Origination in the moment is the secondary mover, since it follows [after the primary mover] at the time of the action."

to act, the action does not take place, although it has been projected by the first cause.[202] Yaśomitra comments on this passage, suggesting a scenario, in which someone intends to walk to a village. The causal origination involves a conceptual decision, "I will go the village" (*grāmaṃ gamiṣyāmi*); the origination in the moment executes the action.[203] If the person dies on the way to the village, the action is not carried out, despite the initial decision.[204] There are two causes effecting the occurrence of action, then, and consequently the question arises, which of them is its ultimate agent. If we follow Vasubandhu's definition of the ultimate agent as the "special mind moment" that immediately precedes the agential event, then this must be the second of the two, i.e., the origination in the moment (*tatkṣaṇa-samutthāna*). And although Vasubandhu does not indicate this point clearly, since his explanations of agential events rely on the seed-special mind moment-fruit sequence, I would suggest that the first of the two causes, causal origination (*hetu-samutthāna*), is the "seed" from which the action originates.[205]

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[202] Ibid.: *kim idānīṃ tasya tasyāṃ kriyāyāṃ sāmarthyam / tena hi vinā 'sau mṛtasyeva na syād ākṣiptā 'pi satī. AKBhT* Ku 174b7: *da ni bya ba de la de'i nus pa ci zhig yod/ 'phangs su zin kyang de med na shi ba bzhin du de yod par mi 'gyur ro.* "[Q:] Now, what is its [the origination in the moment] efficacy with respect to the action? [A:] Without it, [the action] would not take place, even if [initially] projected [by the causal origination], as in [the case of] death."

[203] The principle of double-stage volition that this theory puts forth seems to allow it to explain certain cases, which Buddhist theories that equate the action with the single volition with which it correlates are not successful in explaining. Maria Heim notices this consequence in the theory of agency to which Buddhaghosa adheres, when she writes that "[T]his location of intention in body, speech, and mind closes the gap between action and intention. Intention does not come first and then culminates in action; intention cannot fail to issue an action. If intention is an essential element of action, I cannot say things like this: I intended to get to class on time but then stopped and chatted with a friend and so failed to do so." (Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014], 42). See also her discussion on action and volition on pp. 39-46.

[204] *AKVy* IV:10cd, p. 600: *tadyathā / kaścid grāmaṃ gamiṣyāmīty ākṣiptakriyāntarā mriyet / tasyānuvartakacittābhāvād gamanaṃ na bhavati / tadvat.* "For instance, someone may die in the middle of a projected doing [of the intention] 'I shall go to the village'. Because of the absence of his mental event which is the secondary mover [the origination in the moment], the going does not come into being. In this manner."

[205] The terminology proper (that is, the usage of the term *hetu* in *hetu-samutthāna*) suggests otherwise: that the ultimate agent of the action should be equated with causal origination; but from a doctrinal point of view, as well as

A great deal can be learnt about the ultimate agent of an action by the way Vasubandhu characterizes the mental events that can serve as the origination in the moment of an action and also by the way he restricts other mental events, which cannot serve as origination in the moment. When Vasubandhu turns to enumerate these restrictions, he uses relatively complex technical vocabulary, which allows for the classification of mental events according to the spiritual levels in which they are eradicated and purified. I will not enter here into the thicket of the various stages of the path; suffice it is to say that the two stages mentioned by Vasubandhu – "the path of insight into the truths" (*darśana-mārga*) and "the path of cultivation" (*bhāvanā-mārga*) – are advanced stages, in which the practitioner eradicates mental states that hinder awakening, before he finally achieves liberation from *saṃsāra*. More interesting and important, in my opinion, is to understand the characteristics of mental events, which qualify as ultimate agents. Vasubandhu gives an exhaustive list of mental events by dividing them into four possible categories: those which can only be an originating cause (a "seed" of an action, as I understand it), those that can only be an origination in the moment (i.e., an ultimate agent), those mental events that can be both, and those that cannot be any of the two originations and do not participate in the performing of actions.

Mental events that can serve exclusively as ultimate agents, and cannot serve as an originating cause, are the five groups of consciousness (*vijñānakāya*):[206] visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustatory

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from a philosophical point of view, this is unsuitable. Such interpretation will not be in agreement with the principles of the theory of seeds and, philosophically speaking, will lead to the absurd conclusion that the ultimate agent sometimes exerts control over the action (when the action is actualized), while at other times does not.

[206] On the meaning of the aggregate of consciousness, see Chapter 2 above.

consciousness and tactile consciousness.[207] Yaśomitra glosses in his commentary, that these are excluded from being originating causes, by reason of not involving conceptualizing activity (*vikalpa*);[208] and indeed Vasubandhu characterizes the five groups of consciousness as lacking the two types of conceptualizing of (1) the examination that operates in the mental consciousness (*nirūpaṇa*; that is, the recognition of ideas), and (2) the capacity for mental recollection (*anusmaraṇa*; that is, the activity of bringing to memory past impressions).[209]

This requirement, that the originating cause must have the capacity to perform conceptualizing activity, is corroborated by the exposition of the mental events which can be exclusively a causal origination. These are said to be mental events that are abandoned by the path of insight (*darśanaheya*). They are described, once again, as the cause of the mental process, which gives rise to informative bodily or vocal action. It is

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[207] *AKBh* IV:11d, p. 204: ***pañcakaṃ tv anuvartakam*** // *pañca vijñānakāyā anuvartakā eva. AKBhT* Ku 175a5-6: *lnga ni rjes su 'jug byed yin/ /rnam par shes pa'i tshogs lnga ni rjes su 'jug par byed pa kho na yin no.* "The five [groups of consciousness] are secondary movers [origination in the moment]. The five groups of consciousness are only secondary movers [origination in the moment]."

[208] *AKVy* IV:11d, p. 603: *pañcakaṃ tv anuvartakam iti avadhāraṇam avikalpakatvāt.* "The restriction [that] 'the five [groups of consciousness] are secondary movers [i.e., origination in the moment]' is because they are without conceptualizing activity."

[209] *AKBh* I:33, p.22: *yadi pañca vijñānakāyāḥ savitarkāḥ savicārāḥ katham avikalpakā ity ucyante* / ***nirūpaṇānusmaraṇavikalpenāvikalpakāḥ*** / *trividhaḥ kila vikalpaḥ* / *svabhāvābhinirūpaṇānusmaraṇavikalpaḥ* / *tad eṣāṃ svabhāvavikalpo 'sti* / *netarau* / *tasmād avikalpakā ity ucyante. AKBhT* Ku 42b4-6: *gal te rnam par shes pa'i tshogs ba lnga po rnams rtog pa dang dpyod pa dang bcas pa dag yin na/ ji ltar na rnam par rtog pa med pa dag ces bya zhe na/ nges par rtog dang rjes dran pa'i/ /rnam par rtog pa rnams mi rtog /rnam par rtog pa ni rnam pa gsum mo zhes grag ste/ ngo bo nyid dang/ nges par rtog pa dang/ rjes su dran ba'i rnam par rtog pa'o/ /de bas na de dag la ngo bo nyid kyi rtog pa yod kyi gzhan dag* [*ma*?] *yin te/ de lta bas na rnam par rtog pa med pa dag ces bya ste.* "If the five groups of consciousness consist in initial inquiry (*vitarka*) and investigation (*vicāra*), why is it that they are said to be without conceptualizing activity (*avikalpaka*)? They are without conceptualizing activity by the lack of conceptualizing activity of determining (*nirūpaṇa*) and of mental recollection (*anusmaraṇa*). It is maintained that there are three types of conceptualizing activity – conceptualizing activity in its nature, conceptualizing activity consisting of determining (*abhinirūpaṇa*), and conceptualizing activity consisting in mental recollection. That [conceptualizing activity] of those [groups of consciousness] is conceptualizing activity in its nature, but not the other two [conceptualizing activities]. Therefore, they are said to be without conceptualizing activity."

claimed that mental events that belong to this group cannot serve as the origination in the moment, since the latter is "directed outwards" (*bahir-mukha-pravṛtta*), namely, it engages with external objects – a capacity which mental events that are abandoned by the path of insight do not have. It is not clear from the above, whether it is a requirement from causal origination that it will be "directed inwards" (*antar-mukha-pravṛtta*), namely, that it will be engaged with mental objects, or whether all that is claimed is that ultimate agents must be directed outwards. In any case, it can be inferred at this point that ultimate agents are "directed outwards".

Vasubandhu then mentions a third option: some mental events can serve both as causal origination and as causes in the moment (ultimate agent). These are events that belong to the group of mental consciousnesses (*manovijñāna*).[210] Vasubandhu does not explain why it is that these mental events can serve as both types of causes; Yaśomitra, however, glosses that mental consciousness has the capability of engaging with external objects, as well as with internal objects, and in addition, it can conceptualize.[211] Finally, there are mental events that do not satisfy the requirements of any of the two causes. These are mental events which are the retribution of *karman* (*vipākaja*). Vasubandhu explains that mental events of this kind occur without the "shaping of the mind" (*abhhisaṃskāra*).[212] On the last expression Yaśomitra comments that the absence of the

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[210] *AKBh* IV:11bc, p. 204: ***ubhayaṃ punaḥ // mānasaṃ bhāvanāheyaṃ*** / ***bhāvanāheyaṃ punar*** *manovijñānam* ***ubhayaṃ*** *bhavati / pravartakaṃ cānuvartakaṃ ca. AKBhT* Ku 175a5: *yid ni/ bsgom pas spang bya gnyi ga yin/ /yid kyi rnam par shes pa bsgom pas spang bar bya ba ni gnyi ga yin te/ rab tu 'jug par byed pa yang yin la rjes su 'jug par byed pa yang yin no.* "Mind (*manas*) which is to be abandoned by the path of cultivation is both. Mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*) to be abandoned by the path of cultivation is both – primary mover and secondary mover".

[211] *AKVy* IV:11bc, p. 603: *pravartakaṃ cānuvartakaṃ ceti / antarbahirmukhapravṛttatvāt*. "Primary mover and secondary mover: because of being engaged in turning [both] inwards and outwards."

[212] *AKBh* IV:12d, p 205: ***nobhayaṃ tu vipāpkajam*** // *vipākajaṃ tu cittaṃ naiva pravartakaṃ nānuvartakaṃ nirabhisaṃskāravāhitvāt. AKBhT* Ku 175b6-7: *rnam smin las skyes gnyi ga min/ /rnam par smin pa las skyes pa'i sems ni mngon par 'du bya ba med par 'jug ba nyid kyi phyir rab tu 'jug par byed pa yang ma yin la rjes su 'jug par*

shaping of the mind means that these mental events lack the necessary endeavor (*prayatna*) or power of causality (*saṃskāra*) in order to be either causal origination or an ultimate agent.[213]

We can see, then, that cause in the moment (the ultimate agent) is characterized as being directed outwards, in the sense that it engages with external objects, and as having a certain power or endeavor to bring about results by way of causality. The originating cause of an action (or: its "seed"), at the same time, is characterized as a mental event that necessarily involves conceptualizing; which may be (or must be) directed inwards, that is, occupied with mental objects; and that is furnished with an active force to initiate the action. This description may sound abstract to the point that the mental events in question seem obscure entities, but going back to the illustrations given by Vasubandhu and Yaśomitra will prove useful in showing what this all boils down to. Recall that in the example of the man who goes to the village, the "seed" is the thought, whose content is the volition, "I shall go to the village". In my understanding, this thought engages in conceptualizing activity, in that it uses notions of composite entities, such as "village" and "I", as part of planning an action, and it is directed inwards, in that it envisions a certain mental image of a future state of affairs, rather than examining present external objects. In addition, if I understand Vasubandhu and Yaśomitra right, this mental event has a pragmatic force, which induces the agential process, that is, sets in motion the series of actions that culminates in the arrival to the village. The ultimate agent is the cause operative in the bodily or vocal process at the moment in which the

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byed pa yang ma yin no. "Born from the ripening [of *karman*], however, is none of the two. A mind moment which is born from the ripening [of *karman*] is neither a primary mover [i.e., causal origination] nor a secondary mover [i.e., origination in the moment]; this is because it does not produce the shaping of the mind."

[213] *AKVy* IV:12d, p. 604: *nirabhisaṃskāravāhitvād iti / abhāvo hi saṃskārasya prayatnasya nirabhisaṃskāraṃ.* "Because of not producing the shaping of the mind: the nonexistence of the power of causality, i.e., of endeavor [is] the non-shaping of the mind."

action culminates or is actualized, namely, when the person steps into the geographical area of the village.[214]

If this description sounds familiar, I believe this is because it echoes the description of volitions that has been examined in sub-section 4.1 above. The similarity is striking: the conceptual volition and the originating cause are described as the origin from which the action evolves, and both include an intention that translates into a conceptual preposition; the volition of action and the cause in the moment, at the same time, are both causal forces that exert their power at the moment in which the action actually takes place; and both members of the pairs are essential for an action to take place. Moreover, the illustrations given concerning the function of each of the pairs bear a resemblance, which indicates that there might be a connection between the two. This connection is also attested textually. Yaśomitra comments that the originating cause which determines the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of the action is tantamount to the volition that leads to the action.[215] It is my opinion, therefore, in Vasubandhu's system of thought, "causal origination" and "conceptual volition" are two terms that can be used interchangeably in reference to the first mental event which sets in motion the process from which, eventually, action arises (i.e., the seed of the action), whereas "origination in the moment" and "action volition" are two terms that point at the endeavor that activates the action in the very moment it takes place and refers to the ultimate agent. In fact, it seems that with respect to action, the four terms of "causal origination", "primary mover", "conceptual volition", and "the seed" can be used

[214] This is another reason to understand the origination in the moment as the ultimate agent of the action, since of the two causes, it is the one which exercises direct control over it; the causal origination may or may not lead to the eventual culmination of the action.

[215] *AKVy* IV:9d, *p. 599: yadi samutthānavaśād iti vistaraḥ / cetanāyā eva kuśalākuśalatvam ity anenābhiprāyeṇa.* "'If [a bodily or vocal action is wholesome or unwholesome] according to the originating cause' – this is an elaboration: because of the very volition; 'wholesome or unwholesome': by that meaning (*ity abhiprāya*)."

interchangeably to describe the point from which actions originate, and in light of the reductionist move – the action itself.[216]

Before concluding the discussion on the ultimate agent in relation to actions, it is worthwhile to note the central place that moral evaluation occupies in the "seed"-agent-action sequence. In the course of inspecting the causality of informative bodily and vocal actions, two questions arise concerning the moral significance of actions. First, with regard to the two causes (the causal origination and the origination in the moment): do they share the same moral quality (which can be wholesome, unwholesome or neutral), or are they independent in this regard? In other words, is there a moral connection between the two?[217] Second, the question poses itself, which of the two causes determines the moral nature of the action performed. Does an action receive its moral value from the causal origination or is it determined by the origination in the moment, from which the action manifests directly?[218] The answer given to the first question is that from a moral point of view, the originating cause and the cause in the moment are independent. The originating cause may be wholesome, while the origination in the moment is unwholesome, or vice versa, and they can also have the

[216] This leads to an interesting, if not absurd, view, on which the core of the action, ultimately speaking, antedates its agent.

[217] *AKBh* IV:11d, p. 204: *kiṃ khalu yathā pravartakaṃ tathaivānuvartakaṃ bhavati*. *AKBhT* Ku 175a7: *yang ci rab tu 'jug par byed pa ji lta bar rjes su 'jug par byed pa yang de dang 'dra 'am zhe na.* "Now, is [the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of] the secondary mover [i.e., the origination in the moment] in accordance with [the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of] the primary mover [i.e., the causal origination]?"

[218] *AKBh* IV:12d, p. 205: *kim idānīṃ yathā pravartakaṃ tathā vijñaptir āhosvid yathā 'nuvartakam. AKBhT* Ku 175b7: *da ni ci rab tu 'jug par byed pa ji lta bar rnam par rig byed kyang de dang 'dra 'am/ 'on te rjes su 'jug par byed pa ji lta ba bzhin du yin.* "Now, is [the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of] the informative [action] in accordance with [the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of] the primary mover [i.e., the causal origination], or in accordance with [the wholesomeness or unwholesomeness of] the secondary mover [i.e., the origination in the moment]?"

same moral quality.[219] The answer given to the second question states, that the moral quality of an action is determined based on the moral quality of the originating cause, independent of the moral quality of the origination in the moment.[220] Accordingly, a wholesome causal origination (namely, a wholesome conceptual volition, a wholesome ultimate agent) results in a wholesome action, and conversely an unwholesome originating cause will necessarily result in an unwholesome action. Thus, it is important to notice that beyond the various characteristics that have been mentioned so far, the "seed" is seen as carrying an inherent moral dimension, which is either wholesome, unwholesome or neutral, and this moral dimension is then mediated by the origination in the moment, the ultimate agent (see more on this topic in sub-section 3.4 above).

4.3 Action and the Conventional Agent

As we see, an explicit treatment of the notion of agent in philosophical terms is minimal in the Chapter on *karman*. To learn what agency means requires an indirect reading,

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[219] *AKBh* IV:12ab, p. 204: *nāyam ekāntam* / ***pravartake śubhādau hi syāt tridhā 'py anuvartakam*** / *kuśale* ***pravartake*** *kuśalākuśalāvyākṛtam* ***anuvartakaṃ*** *syāt* / *evam akuśale cāvyākṛte ca. AKBhT* Ku 175a7-175b1: *'di ni nges pa med de/ rab tu 'jug byed dge sogs las/ /rjes 'jug byed kyang rnam gsum 'gyur/ /rab tu 'jug par byed pa dge ba las kyang rjes su 'jug par byed pa dge ba dang mi dge ba dang lung du ma bstan par 'gyur la/ mi dge ba dang lung du ma bstan pa la yang de dang 'dra'o.* "This [i.e., the moral relationship between the primary mover and the secondary mover] is indefinite. With a wholesome primary mover and so on [an unwholesome primary mover, a non-defined primary mover], the secondary mover may be in three ways. With a wholesome primary mover, the secondary mover may be wholesome, unwholesome or non-defined. The same is true for unwholesome [primary mover] and non-defined [primary mover]."

[220] *AKBh* IV:12d, p. 205: *yathā pravartaka tathā vijñaptir na tu yathā darśanaprahātavyam / bhāvanāheyāntaritatvāt*. *AKBhT* Ku 176a2-3: *rab tu 'jug par byed pa ji lta bar rnam par rig byed kyang de dang 'dra mod kyi bsgom pas spang bar bya bas bar du gcod pa'i phyir mthong bas spang bar bya ba ji lta ba bzhin ni ma yin no.* "The informative action is [wholesome or unwholesome] according to the primary mover, but not according to [the primary mover which is] to be abandoned by the path of seeing; because [the two are] separated by [another primary mover, which is] to be abandoned by the path of cultivation." Yaśomitra explains in detail the mechanism that operates with regard to primary movers, which are to be abandoned by the path of seeing, and the reasons they cannot serve as the final primary movers. I will not develop this point here, as it is not directly relevant to the discussion. See on this *AKVy* IV:12d, p. 605.

which in the case of the ultimate notion of agency, I suggested, can be satisfactorily carried out by investigating the notion of the cause of the action. When it comes to the understanding of the conventional agent in connection to action, the Chapter on *karman* demands a similar indirect approach from the reader. As a methodological starting point to the examination of the moral agent on the conventional level, I will suggest two elements that have already proved to be a fertile ground for this purpose: the image of the conventional person-agent as reflected in the narrative of action, and the mental (deluded) notion of an "I". Broadly speaking, the narrative image of the agent portrays it from a third-person type of picture, in a similar fashion to the account we find in the *ĀVP* and was covered in Chapter 2 of the dissertation. But while the first-person perspective is missing from the *ĀVP*, the mental notion of "I" which one finds in the Chapter on *karman*, naturally involves a first-person perspective, through invoking a mental self-perception of the agent.[221] Following the examination of this element, I will argue that its inclusion in the account of action demonstrates, that a notion of the conventional self is essential for Buddhist ethics – not only as a motivation for action (as I argued in Chapter 2), but here chiefly as an ingredient in the mechanism of action, without which action cannot evolve.

[221] As Jonardon Ganeri rightly points out, the mere grammatical usage of the pronoun "I" does not necessarily mean that the word genuinely refers to an object, or even to a psychological sense of a first-person perspective. This objection may be raised all the more against cases in which the pronoun is an inseparable part of the verb, such as in the case of "*gamiṣyāmi*" that we will meet below. Ganeri is in the opinion, however, that for Vasubandhu (of the *Pañcaskandhaka*, "The Treatise on the Five Aggregates") the usage of the pronoun "I" does indicate a reference to an inner subject, albeit an erroneous one. My argument here relies precisely on such an interpretation of Vasubandhu. See Jonardon Ganeri, "Subjectivity, Selfhood and the Use of the Word 'I'," in *Self, no self?: Perspectives from analytical, phenomenological, and Indian traditions*, ed. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 186-189.

4.3.1 Action and the Narrative Depiction of the Conventional Agent

The first way in which the conventional agent manifests in the Chapter on *karman* is in the narrative figure of human agent in short examples. These examples serve as literary devices that clarify and illustrate in concrete terms abstract doctrinal principles of action. Actions are, after all, the result of animate activity, and these short narratives exemplify how human beings engage in actions. This way, they clarify different aspects of the theory of action and the ethical theory advocated by the *AKBh*. They show, for example, how a person prepares for an action, performs it and concludes it; how he may act unintentionally; in which cases he may engage in complex activity, which consist, in fact, in several adjacent actions, and so on. In terms of the dichotomy between a first-person perspective and a third-person perspective, these narratives treat the conventional moral agent primarily from the latter perspective – but not only. To show how it is done, I will now survey some of the more prominent examples in the Chapter on *karman*.

A central aspect of the theory of action which is exemplified by a narrative episode about a conventional agent, is the analysis of action into its three principal stages: preparatory (*prayoga*) actions, the principal (*maula*) path of action (*karmapatha*), and the consecutive (*pṛṣṭha*) actions. In order to elucidate what constitutes each of the stages, Vasubandhu begins with an example about an act of killing:

> Now, from when until when are the limits of the preparatory actions, the principal path of action and the consecutive actions? When someone, desiring to kill an animal, rises from the seat, takes the money for payment, goes [to the market], touches [the animal], buys the animal, leads it [to the house], nourishes it [Tibetan: remembers (it)], brings [it] into the house, seizes a knife to hit, gives one or two strokes – as long as he does not deprive [it] of life, that is preparatory action.
>
> The informative [action] and the simultaneous non-informative [action] at the time of the striking with which he deprives [the animal] of its life are the principal path of action. For one is touched by the disgrace of killing

> through two causes – through the preparatory action and through the accomplished result of dying.
>
> The moments of non-informative action thereafter are the consecutive action; and as long as he tears [Tibetan: the skin of] the animal, washes it, sells it, cooks it, eats it, or proclaims [the deed], his informative actions are also consecutive actions.[222]

In this example, one can see that the person who acts (although his name is not stated as is the case with the examples in the *ĀVP*) is taken in the most conventional sense: an enduring, continuous agent, whose identity is not questioned or reduced. This narrative serves as the basis for a more elaborate discussion about the nature of the three stages, which makes use of the concrete terms that the example provides. It is said, for instance, that the same explanation of action is applicable to other types of bodily and vocal actions. Here, the discussion is about the ten unwholesome paths of action (*akuśala-karmapatha*, that is, the ten most noticeable harming actions) and therefore this claim applies in particular to the actions of stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and so on.[223] Then, in the case of the mental paths of action – these are covetousness (*abhidhyā*),

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[222] *AKBh* IV:68c, p. 239: *atha kuto yāvad eṣāṃ prayogamaulapṛṣṭhānāṃ vyavasthānam / yadā tāvad iha kaścit paśuṃ hantukāmo mañcakād uttiṣṭhati mūlyaṃ gṛhṇāti gacchaty āmṛśati paśuṃ krīṇāty ānayati puṣṇāti praveśayati nihantuṃ śāstram ādatte prahāram ekaṃ dadāti dvau vā yāvan na jīvitād vyaparopayati tāvat prayogaḥ / yena tu prahāreṇa jīvitād vyaparopayati tatra yā vijñaptis tatkṣaṇikā cā 'vijñaptir ayaṃ maulaḥ karmapathaḥ / dvābhyāṃ hi kāraṇābhyāṃ prāṇātipātāvadyena spṛśyate prayogataḥ mṛte sati phalaparipūritaś ca / tata ūrdhvam avijñaptikṣaṇāḥ pṛṣṭhaṃ bhavanti / yāvac ca taṃ paśuṃ kuṣṇāti śodhayati vikrīṇīte pacati khādayaty anukīrtayati vā tāvad asya vijñaptikṣaṇā api pṛṣṭhaṃ bhavanti. AKBhT* Ku 200a6-200b2: *yang ji tsam gyis na sbyor ba dang dngos dang mjug 'di dag rnam par bzhag ce na/ 'di ltar re zhig 'di na kha cig phyugs gsod par 'dod la/ khri la sogs pa las ldang bar byed/ rin len par byed/ 'gro bar byed/ nom par byed; phyugs nyo bar byed/ 'khrid par byed/ dran par byed/ 'dzud par byed/ gnod par* [del. *byed/*] *mtshon len par byed/* [del. *mtshon len*] *gcig gam lan gnyis 'debs par byed pa nas ji srid du srog gcod par mi byed pa de srid du ni sbyor ba yin no/ /bsnun pa gang gis srog gcod par byed pa de'i tshe'i rnam par rig byed dang/ de'i skad cig gi rnam par rig byed ma yin pa gang yin pa de ni las kyi lam dngos yin no/ /rgyu gnyis kyis ni srog gcod pa'i kha na ma tho bas reg par 'gyur te/ sbyor ba dang 'bras bu yongs su rdzogs pas so/ /de phyin chad kyi rnam par rig byed ma yin pa'i skad cig ma rnams ni mjug yin no/ ji srid du phyugs de'i pags pa 'chu ba'am/ bkru bshal byed pa 'am/ 'tshong ba'am/ 'tshed pa'am/ za ba'am rjes su sgrogs pa de srid du ni de'i rnam par rig byed kyi skad cig ma dag kyang mjug yin no//*

[223] Ibid.: *evam anyeṣv api yathāsaṃbhavaṃ yojyam*. *AKBhT* Ku 200b3: *de bzhin du gzhan drug la yang ci rigs par sbyar bar bya'o.* "In such a manner it is to be applied, respectively, also to other [types of actions]."

hatred (*vyāpāda*) and false view (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*) – the path of action consists only of the principal path of action. The preparatory actions and consecutive actions are said to be missing.[224] Finally, several scholastic questions are asked; for example: is the path of action constituted at the moment in which the animal dies or at the moment in which it is dead? Does it happen that a path of action is the preparatory action or the consecutive action of another path of action?[225]

To answer the latter question, Vasubandhu uses another concrete example, in which a conventional person acts. This example shows, in a somewhat humoristic way, how one person may engage in all of the ten paths of action one after the other, in preparation of a main path of action.

> The ten paths of action are [possibly] also the preparatory actions of taking life. For instance, for the purpose of killing an enemy, causing this to occur, [someone] may sacrifice an animal, having taken the property of another; he may sleep with [the enemy's] wife in order that she also [perform] the killing; with lying, slander, harsh speech, and sweet words, he may create a dispute [between the enemy] and his friends, who may be ready to rescue him; he may covet [the enemy's] property; and on this occasion, may [develop] ill will [towards the enemy]; on account of the killing, he may increase [his] wrong view.[226]

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[224] Ibid.: *abhidhyādīnāṃ nāsti prayogo na pṛṣṭhaṃ saṃmukhībhāvamātrāt karmapathaḥ. AKBhT* Ku 200b3: *brnab sems la sogs pa ni mngon du gyur pa tsam gyis las kyi lam du 'gyur ba'i phyir sbyor ba yang med la mjug kyang med do*. "Covetousness and so on [hatred and false view] do not have a preparatory action, nor a consecutive action, because they become a path of action by their mere manifestation" (I follow the Tibetan rendering).

[225] Ibid., p.240: *karmapatho 'py anyasya prayogaḥ pṛṣṭhaṃ ca bhavati*. *AKBhT* Ku 201a2: *las kyi lam gzhan gyi sbyor ba'am mjug las kyi lam gzhan yin pa yang yod dam zhe na* / yod de. "Is there a path of action which is also the preparatory or consecutive action of another [path of action]? [Tibetan: There is]" (I follow the Tibetan rendering).

[226] Ibid.: *prāṇātipātasya daśāpi karmapathāḥ prayogaḥ* / *yathā ca śatror vadhārthaṃ kṛtyaṃ* [Schm. proposes *kṛtyāṃ*] *samupasthāpayan paśunā baliṃ kuryāt parakīyaṃ kṛtvā* [Schm. emends according to *AKVy*, *kṛ = hṛ*] *dāreṣu cāsya vipratipadyeta tair eva tadghātanārtham anṛtapiśunaparuṣasāntvaiś cāsya mitrabhedaṃ kuryād yānyasya paritrāṇāya kalperan abhidhyāṃ ca tatsva* [Schm. emends, following *AKVy*, *tatsve*] *kuryāt tatraiva* [*AKVy*: *taddravyakhāmini*] *ca vyāpādaṃ tadvadhārthaṃ ca mithyādṛṣṭiṃ bṛṃhayed iti. AKBhT* Ku 201a2-4: *srog gcod pa'i sbyor ba las kyi lam bcu tshar yang yin te/ dper na dgra gsad pa'i phyir gshed byed gsad bar gzhan gyi nor 'grogs nas phyugs kyis gtor ma/ byed pa dang/ de nyid kyis de gsod du gzhug pa'i phyir de'i chung ma la nyal po byed pa dang/ de la gang dag yongs su skyob par 'gyur ba de'i mdza' bo la brdzun dang/ phra ma dang/ tshig rtsub po dang/ kyal pa dag gis dbyen byed pa dang/ de'i nor la brnab sems byed pa dang/ de nyid la gnod sems byed pa dang/ de gsad pa'i phyir log pa'i lta ba 'phel bar byed pa lta bu ste*.

Here again, from a third-person perspective and using conventional terms, the moral agent is described as an enduring person who persists through time and performs different actions. Examples which employ the figure of the conventional agent are also used to settle moral issues. One such issue concerns the status of a person who kills, but dies before the murdered person dies or at the same time as the murdered person does. Is an agent who takes part in such an unfortunate incident considered as someone who completed the action and will experience its results, or considered otherwise? Vasubandhu clarifies:

> This is said: "Can it happen that [someone] performed the preparatory action, accomplished the result, but would not be touched by the disgrace of taking life? – It can be. For instance, the murderer may die before or at the same time [as he kills].[227]

Another moral issue, which is dealt by referring to a concrete example is this: what happens when an action, a killing for example, is committed through a mistake in identity, that is, when the person killed is not the one whom the perpetrator intended to kill? The context of this question is a discussion about the nature of five particularly severe unwholesome actions known as "actions with immediate retribution" (*ānantarya-karman*): the killing of one's mother or father, the killing of a perfected being (*arhat*), creating schism in the spiritual community, and malevolent wounding the body of a Buddha. Does an action which is defined as one with immediate retribution carry the particularly heavy consequences, if it is done while mistaking one person for another?

Taking the killing of one's mother as an example, Vasubandhu explains that both in the case when one wants to kill one's mother, but instead kills another person, and in

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[227] *AKBh* IV:72ab, p. 242: *ata evocyate "syāt prayogaṃ kuryāt phalaṃ ca paripūrayen na ca prāṇātipātāvadyena spṛśyate / āha / syāt yathāpi tadvyaparopakaḥ pūrvaṃ saha vā kālaṃ kuryād" iti. AKBhT* Ku 203a3-4: *sbyor ba yang byas la 'bras bu yang yongs su rdzogs par gyur kyang srog gcod pa'i kha na ma tho bas reg par mi 'gyur ba lta mchis sam/ bka' stsal pa yod de/ 'di lta ste gsod pa po sngar ram mnyam du shi bar gyur pa lta bu'o zhes gsungs so.*

the case when one wants to kill a person other than one's mother, but mistakenly kills one's mother, the consequences of an action with immediate retribution are not acquired. In other words, to fully perform an unwholesome action with immediate retribution, an agent needs to have the correct intention, as well as correctly identifying the object of the action. When any of them is disrupted through a mistake in the identity of the object, the action is not fully performed and not regarded as one with immediate retribution. Vasubandhu illustrates this principle by describing two scenarios that rely on a third-person notion of conventional agents:

> Even if [someone] had made the preparatory action [to kill] his mother, but then caused the death of another woman, there would not be immediate retribution. Even if having made the preparatory action to kill someone who is not his mother, he then killed her, then, too, there would not be [immediate retribution]. An example is the killing of the mother who were hiding below the couch [and was killed by her son, who mistook her for another woman]; and the son of the washerman who killed his father through the preparatory action intended to kill a mosquito.[228]

To sum up, the scenarios described above incorporate a conventional third-person image of an agent, and by that illuminate various theoretical aspects of action and of the theory of *karman*. This is not an entirely new or unexpected way to clarify ideas in moral philosophy. Vasubandhu himself uses this method in addressing the issue of agential conventions in the *ĀVP*, as discussed earlier in Chapter 2. However, unlike his uncompromising doctrinal commitments in the debates with the non-Buddhists in the *ĀVP*, it seems that here Vasubandhu is not under the constraint to avoid the first-person perspective by all means. One can learn this from the final example I will mention here, and also from Vasubandhu's abundant use of the first-person perspective, when he discusses the role of volition (which I will develop in the nest sub-section). By narrating

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[228] *AKBh* IV:103d, p. 263: *yadi mātari prayogaṃ kṛtvā 'nyāṃ mārayen na syād ānantaryam* / *amātṛprayogeṇa mārayet tathāpi na syāt* / *mañcatalāvalīnamātṛmāraṇaṃ cātrodāhāryaṃ dhāvakasya ca putreṇa maśaka prayogeṇa piturmāraṇaṃ ca. AKBhT* Ku 217b5-6: *gal te ma la sbyor ba byas nas gzhan bsad na yang mtshams med par mi 'gyur la ma ma yin pa la sbyor ba byas nas ma bsad na yang mtshams med par 'gyur te/ ma khri'u 'i 'og na 'dug pa bsad pa dang/ khrus pa'i bus sbrang bu la sbyor ba byas pas pha bsad pa dper bya'o.*

the last scenario, Vasubandhu aims at clarifying the *karmic* relations within a group of people who act for the same purpose. Here, the question discussed is: "When many [individuals], all of them, strike in order to kill others in an attack, hunting, or assault by an army, and one [person] takes life, who becomes associated with it?".[229] Vasubandhu replies:

> In the case of armies and so on, because [all the individuals have] one aim, all are connected [with the action] as the one who destroys. Because [of having] one aim, everyone becomes associated [with the action] exactly as the one who destroys. Because of the [one] aim, they mutually perform the preliminary actions (*prayoktāro bhavanti*). [Q:] Now, one who is led by force [to participate] – how about him? [A:] He too becomes associated, except for one who goes, having determined so: "[I shall go] as long as I shall not kill a living being, even on account of [losing my] life."[230]

Here one can see that the example touches on doctrinal principles related to action and agency by employing the image of conventional moral agents. But it should be noted that at the same time, it also incorporates into the account a subjective dimension, by describing an inner resolution of the agent. In light of Vasubandhu's explanation of action so far, this resolution can also be identified as a conceptual volition (although it is not stated by Vasubandhu in the example). In any case, the subjective dimension is arrived at, first and foremost, by drawing on the first-person perspective, or in other words, on the concept of "I" or the self, which acts (the agent in the example resolves that *he* should avoid the killing, not that such and such a soldier should avoid it). This usage of the personal "I", I shall argue in what follows, is in the *AKBh* an inherent part of action.

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[229] *AKBh* IV:72cd, p. 243: *yat senāpātamṛgayāvaskandheṣu pareṣāṃ vadhārthaṃ bahavaḥ samagrāḥ patanty ekaś ca prāṇātipātaṃ karoti kas tena samanvāgato bhavati.*

[230] *AKBh* IV:72cd, p. 243: ***senādiṣv ekakāryatvāt sarve karttṛvadanv itāḥ*** // *yathaiva hi* ***karttā*** *tathā* ***sarve*** *samanvāgatā bhavanty* ***ekakāryatvāt*** / *arthato hi te 'nyonyaṃ prayoktāro bhavanti* / *yas tarhi balān nīyate so 'pi samanvāgato bhavaty anyatra ya evaṃ niścitya yāyāt yāvaj jīvitahetor api prāṇinaṃ na hanişyāmīti. AKBhT* Ku 203a6-7: *dmag la sogs par don gcig phyir/ /thams cad byed pa blo bzhin ldan/ /don gcig pa'i phyir thams cad byed pa po ji lta ba bzhin ldan par 'gyur te/ de dag ni don gyis na phan tshun du sbyor bar byed pa yin no/ /'o na gang zhig nan gyis khrid pa de ji lta bu zhe na/ de yang ldan par 'gyur ba ste/ gang zhig 'di snyam du sog* [emend. *srog*] gi *phyir yang srog chags mi gsod de zhes bya bar nges bar byas te 'gro ba ni ma gtogs so.*

4.3.2 The Personal "I" and the Intentional Dimension of Actions

Alongside the narrative depiction of the conventional agent, a second major way in which the conventional agent surfaces in Vasubandhu's account of action, is the appearance of the linguistic concept of "I" as part of the conceptual volition. The conceptual volition, the reader may recall, is the very action itself according to the *AKBh*. The clearest indication that Vasubandhu incorporates a first-person perspective into the theory of action appears already in his explanation of conceptual volition (*saṃkalpa-cetanā*), as discussed in sub-section 4.1 above. A conceptual volition is the resolve "I shall do such and such an action" (*evaṃ caivaṃ ca kariṣyāmi*). We also saw how Yaśomitra relies on this definition to elaborate on the meaning of causal origination with the example of the man who undertakes to go to the village, thinking: "I will go the village" (*grāmaṃ gamiṣyāmi*). Another case which shows that actions evolve from a conceptual volition that rests on a notion of "I", appears in Vasubandhu's explication of killing and its results. The claim is that someone who kills a realized being (*arhat*) bears the consequences for the action, even if the murderer kills without knowing that he is killing a realized being. The reason, it is explained, is that the action is determined when the person who kills resolves to kill, thinking: "I will kill" (*aham hanmi*). The conceptual volition, as the cause of origination, thus incorporates a first-person notion of selfhood.

But there are two other aspects in the account of action of the *AKBh*, which involve a first-person perspective by incorporating the subjective concept of a conventional acting "I". The first is "intent" (*āśaya*), whose function in the performing of action is said to be aiming (*abhiprāya*). Vasubandhu explains in a passage dedicated to the retribution of an action, that the gravity of an action (in terms of the effects it brings about) depends on a number of conditions (*kāraṇa*). Among these is intent, which is described as aiming

"such and such I would do, such and such I shall not do" (*evaṃ caivaṃ ca kuryām evaṃ caivaṃ ca na kariṣyāmi*).[231] It is explained that certain types of intents may render the action heavier in terms of the results it brings about, while others may render it lighter.

A closely related idea, which in the *AKBh* often appears side by side the idea of intent is the idea of "undertaking" (*samādāna*). In my understanding, undertaking is a particular type of intent, which is generated by agents in connection with morally wholesome and unwholesome actions. It is used in the *AKBh* to refer to the intent that precedes non-informative actions, which belong to the groups of restraint (*saṃvara*), non-restraint (*asaṃvara*) or neither-restraint-nor-non-restraint (*naivāsaṃvara-nāsaṃvara*). With regard to all of them, undertaking is described as a verbal resolution, which involves an identification with an acting "I". Thus, in discussing the duration of time that the non-informative actions of restraint and non-restraint last, the *AKBh* presents the claim that restraint endures for a defined period of time, while non-restraint lasts for the rest of one's life. The reason is given, that unlike restraint, a person does not undertake (*samādatte*) non-restraint by saying "I would remain non-restrained for one day and night" (*aham ahorātram asaṃvṛtaḥ syām*).[232] To the contrary, one acquires non-restraint by acting with the intent (*āśaya*) of always acting badly, not with the intent of acting badly for a limited period of time.[233] In the case of restraint, however, one acquires it due to a ceremonial application of the power of undertaking (*samādāna*), i.e.

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[231] *AKBh* IV:119, p. 271.

[232] *AKBh* IV:27d, p. 213.

[233] Ibid.: *yady api naivam ādatte tathāpy atyantavipannenāśayena tāṃ kriyāṃ prakurvann asaṃvaraṃ pratilabhate na kālāntaravipannena. AKBhT* Ku 181a6-7: *gal te de ltar mi len mod kyi 'on kyang gtan du log par zhugs pa'i bsam pas bya ba de byed pa na sdom pa ma yin pa 'thob par 'gyur gyi dus gzhan gyi bar du log bar zhugs pas ni ma yin no.* "Although a person does not take [non-restraint] in this way, nevertheless performing this act with an intent which has gone wrong forever, not with [an intent] which has gone wrong for a limited amount of time, he obtains non-restraint."

stating that the undertaking of the restraint is for a certain period of time, and that it is obtained by an intent (*āśaya*), which is not "forever".[234]

Similarly, the undertaking of the non-informative action of neither-restraint-nor-non-restraint involves the notion of the conventional "I". The *AKBh* explains that an action of this kind is produced by undertaking (*samādāna*) such a decision as "I shall not eat before paying homage to the Buddha" (*buddham avanditvā na bhokṣye*) or "I shall give alms food for one day, one month, or one half of a month on a regular basis" (*tithimāsārdhamāsabhaktāni nityaṃ kariṣyāmi*).[235] In agreement with all that has been said so far, when Vasubandhu discusses a certain sub-type of restraint, which involves observing a fast of one day and one night, he mentions a rule to be followed by someone who previously undertook (*pūrva-kṛta-samādāna*) the vow "I shall amass [merit] on the eighth day on a regular basis" (*nityam aṣṭabhyām upaceṣyāmi*). Such a person should keep the fast, even if he had eaten.[236]

Thoughts that involve a first-person perspective are also the basis for five reservations that should be avoided by a person who undertakes restraint. Vasubandhu explains, that restraint should be free from restrictions (*niyama*), such as: "I will abstain [from the restraint] with regard to certain beings" (*amuṣmāt sattvād viramāmi*), "[I will

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[234] Ibid.: *upavāsasaṃvaras tu samādānabalādhānād anātyantike 'py āśaye labhyata eva / saṃvarārthitvāt. AKBhT* Ku 181a7: *bsnyen gnas pa'i sdom pa ni gtan du ba'i bsam pa ma yin yang sdom pa don du gnyer ba'i phyir yang dab* [emend. *dag*] *par len pa'i stobs bskyed pas 'thob pa nyid do.* "But the restraint of [temporary] fasting is taken even with an intent being not perpetual, because of having the force of the undertaking due to requesting the restraint."

[235] *AKBh* IV:37cd, p. 222: *athavā samādānam ādatte buddham avanditvā na bhokṣye tithimāsārdhamāsabhaktāni vā nityaṃ kariṣyāmītyādi. AKBhT* Ku 188b2-3: *yang na sangs rgyas la phyag ma 'tshal gyi bar du zas mi bza'o/ /tshes sam zla ba gcig gam zla ba phyed cing rtag tu zas dag sbyin par bya'o zhes bya ba de lta bu la sogs pa'i yi dam bcas pa'am.* "Or else he undertakes: 'I shall not eat before paying homage to the Buddha, or I shall donate alms food for one day, one month, or half a month on a regular basis', and so on."

[236] *AKBh* IV:28, p. 213: *yas tu pūrvakṛtasamādāno nityam aṣṭabhyām upaceṣyāmīti sa bhuktvāpi gṛhṇīyāt. AKBhT* Ku 181b5-6: *gang gis tshes brgyad la rtag tu bsnyen gnas la gnas par bya'o zhes sngon yang dag par blang bar byas pa de ni zas zos nas kyang mnod par bya'o.* "But someone who previously undertook: 'I shall amass [merit] on the eighth day of the month on a regular basis', even having eaten, he may take the vows."

abstain from the restraint] with regard to certain parts [of the restraint]" (*amuṣmād aṅgād*), "[I will abstain from the restraint] in a particular place" (*amusmin deśe*) and others.[237] It can be seen, therefore, that in the *AKBh*, Vasubandhu consistently describes intent and undertaking using statements, which involve the first-person perspective of a conventional "I".

It is important to notice how essential these two elements are for the performance of action, particularly moral action. Intent is an indispensable component in the mechanism through which the non-informative action of restraint is generated. As part of defending the Sautrāntika view that non-informative action does not exist as a *sui generis* factor (*dharma*), but is rather a transformation of the stream of aggregates, Vasubandhu replaces this special factor of non-informative action with intent, whose force is explained to have the function of propelling and maintaining non-informative actions.[238] Intent and undertaking are also seen as necessary conditions for performing actions of non-restraint, that is, unwholesome non-informative actions. The *AKBh* explains that eunuchs, in whom "the intent to commit evil is not firm enough", are incapable of engaging in non-restraint, and so are the beings who inhabit the continent

[237] *AKBh* IV:36ab, p. 220.

[238] *AKBh* IV:4ab, p. 198: *yady evam ihāpy evaṃ kiṃ na gṛhyate mārgasamāpanno vināpy avijñaptyā tadrūpam āśayaṃ ca āśrayaṃ* [sic] *ca pratilabhate yasya pratilambhāt vyutthito 'pi na punar mithyāvāgādiṣu pravartate samyagvāgādiṣu ca pravartate. AKBhT* Ku 171b3-4: *gal te de lta na go 'di la yang de bzhin du lam la snyoms par zhugs pas rnam par rig byed ma yin pa med bzhin du gang zhig thob pa'i phyir langs na yang log pa'i ngag la sogs pa dag la ni mi 'jug la/ yang dag pa'i ngag la sogs pa dag la ni 'jug par 'gyur ba de lta bu'i bsam pa dang lus thob par 'gyur te.* "If this is the case, why not maintain also here as follows: one who accomplished the path, the material body – even without non-informative [matter] – acquires such an intent and such a basis, and because of that acquisition, after he emerged from meditation, he does not engage anymore in false speech and so on, and engages in right speech and so on."

of Uttarakuru, who cannot engage in non-restraint because they are missing undertaking, which generates the absence of the restraint.[239]

In light of the various accounts of intent and undertaking surveyed above, I believe that there are good reasons to conclude that, first, according to the *AKBh*, these two elements play an important role in the way actions come into being, to the point that without them non-informative actions cannot occur, and consequently *karmic* retribution cannot take place; and second, that these two elements inherently involve and express the first-person perspective of a conventional "I".[240] Together with the description of the conceptual volition as inherently involving a first-person conceptual planning, it seems to me that just as the concept of "I" is essential for the motivation to act morally, it is essential, from the point of view of the *AKBh*, for practically acting morally or immorally, whether this is informative or non-informative action, whether the action is bodily, vocal or mental.

Before leaving this topic, there is one question that may come up with regard to the three elements and require a short clarification. Since all of the three – i.e., conceptual

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[239] *AKBh* IV:43b, p. 226: *asaṃvaras tarhi kasmān nāsti / pāpe 'py asthirāśayatvāt. AKBhT* Ku 191a6: *'o na sdom pa ma yin pa ci'i phyir med ce na/ sdig pa la yang bsam pa mi brtan pa'i phyir dang.* "Why is there no non-restraint? Because of not having a firm intent also in doing evil"; ibid.: *uttarakauravāṇāṃ samādānasamādhyabhāvāt pāpakriyāśayābhāvāc ca saṃvarāsaṃvarābhāvaḥ. AKBhT* Ku 191a6-7: *byang gi sgra mi snyan pa rnams la ni yang dag par len pa dang ting nge 'dzin med pa'i phyir dang/ sdig pa bya ba'i bsam pa med pa'i phyir sdom pa dang sdom pa ma yin pa med do.* "There are no restraint and non-restraint for the inhabitants of Uttarakuru, because the undertaking and concentration are missing and because the intent to perform evil is missing."

[240] For the sake of accuracy, I should mention that there is one single place in the *AKBh* (VIII:30), in which Vasubandhu gives a somewhat different description of intent which lacks a reference to an intending "I". This is the intent which underlies the four immeasurables (*apramāṇa*) – loving kindness (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), joy (*muditā*) and equanimity (*upekṣā*) – and is directed towards other beings, for example: "may sentient beings be happy!" (*sukhitā vata sattvā iti… santv iti*). This account is at odds with Vasubandhu's basic definition of intent as the resolution "I shall do such and such an action", and nowhere in the *AKBh*, to the best of my knowledge, does he touch on this apparent abnormality. One possible explanation for the second type of intent could be that intent in realized beings is free of the concept of "I", as possessing intent is clearly attributed also to spiritually developed beings, such as Buddhas and bodhisattvas (*AKBh* II:44, IV:4b, VI:34ab, VI:45b). This solution, however, is not attested in the *AKBh*.

volition, intent and undertaking – are described as that component which initiates the action thorough verbal resolution, it seems that the three fulfill the same function, and so at least two of them may be redundant. The way the three are connected is, therefore, curious. Do conceptual volition, intent and undertaking completely overlap each other from a theoretical point of view? Are they different ways to speak about different facets of the same phenomenon? Or are they, perhaps, complementary, in determining the trajectory of an action in different stages of its development? Unfortunately, in the *AKBh* Vasubandhu does not clarify this point explicitly.[241] A possible and partial explanation is offered by La Vallée Poussin, who quotes the Chinese scholar and translator Puguang (7th century AD). Puguang composed one of the major classical Chinese commentaries on the *AKBh*, in which he comments: "Intent (*āśaya*) consists of predilection (*chanda*) or of resolution (*adhimukti*) or of predilection and resolution… The basis (*āśraya*) is the volition (*cetanā*) occurring at the same time as the intent (*āśaya*). [Volition] serves as the basis of the intent".[242] According to Puguang, then, conceptual volition is the basis of intent. In what sense it is its basis? This particular quote does not clarify, but it does make clear that intent and the volition occur at the same time, according to Puguang.

My impression, as I have noted earlier, is that undertaking is a particular case of intent, which is connected with wholesome and unwholesome non-informative actions and has the connotation of a formal expression of intent. How these two are

[241] It is interesting to note further that in the *Karma-siddhi-prakaraṇa* (*The Treatise on karman*), Vasubandhu adopts three additional concepts – deliberation (*gati-cetanā*), decision (*niścaya-cetanā*) and movement volition (*kiraṇa-cetanā*) - to describe the various types of volitions which project an action. See on that James Paul McDermott, *Development in the Early Buddhist Concept of Kamma/Karma*, 138-139, and Étienne Lamotte and Leo M. Pruden, trans., *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa: The Treatise on Action by Vasubandhu* (Berkeley: Asian Humanitites Press, 1987), 26-27.

[242] Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, p. 1515, fn. 96.

distinguished from conceptual volition may require further study of commentarial works. In any case, the fact that in the *AKBh* three different concepts that are related to action involve a verbal representation of the conceptual "I" demonstrates even more vehemently, in my opinion, that the notion of "I" is essential for action, and consequently for agency.

Another thing that this consistent occurrence of the first-person perspective shows, I hold, is that it is more than likely that its absence from the *ĀVP* is intentional, as I have also suggested in Chapter 2 of this study. As I have demonstrated, in the *ĀVP* Vasubandhu discusses agency and agential conventions almost solely from the third-person perspective. In fact, the notions of volition (*cetanā*), intent (*āśaya*) and undertaking (*samādāna*), which are so central to action, are entirely missing from the *ĀVP*, although agential conventions constitute such a central theme of inquiry.[243] This is significant, considering the fact that in the *ĀVP*, Vasubandhu touches upon various types of action, including thinking, remembering, walking, controlling a cow, as well as the general idea of performing actions and the mechanism of *karman*. Moreover, it is instructive to see that in describing the stages that lead to the movement of the body, namely, to bodily action, Vasubandhu covers the consecutive stages of (1) memory (*smṛti*), (2) predilection (*chanda*), (3) initial inquiry (*vitarka*), (4) effort (*prayatna*), (5) the movement of the wind (*vāyu*) channel, and finally (6) the bodily movement;[244] however, he does not include in this account any aspect of intentionality – neither by

[243] More accurately, the term "intent" is used by Vasubandhu a number of times in the ninth chapter of the *AKBh*, but none of these occurrences is in the psychological sense of the mental force which projects an action, but rather in reference to the intention an author of a scriptural text had and the meaning he intended to transmit.

[244] *AKBh* IX, p.477: *smṛtijo hi cchandaḥ cchandajo vitarko vitarkāt prayatnaḥ prayatnād vāyus tataḥ karmeti. AKBhT* Khu 94a4: *dran pa las ni 'dun pa skye'o/ /'dun pa las ni rtog pa skye'o/ /rnam par rtog pa las ni rab tu 'bad pa'o/ /rab tu 'bad pa las.* "From remembering (an object) (*smṛti*), predilection (*chanda*) arises; from predilection, initial inquiry (*vitarka*) [arises]; from initial inquiry, effort (*prayatna*) [arises]; from effort, [movement of] the wind element (*vāyu*) [arises]; then, what is called "an action" (*karman*) [comes about]." See also sub-section 3.4 above.

reference to volition (*cetanā*), which in the Chapter of *karman* is taken as the very action itself, nor through involving the ideas of intent (*āśaya*) or undertaking (*samādāna*).[245] The most reasonable explanation for this clear gap between the *ĀVP* and the Chapter on *karman*, I think, is that in the *ĀVP* Vasubandhu attempted to avoid as much as possible any reference to the first-person perspective.

[245] If one follows Puguang's commentary, then predilection (*chanda*) might be considered as the factor that has the function of planning and perhaps, in this context, substitutes intent. This, however, is not mentioned in any way in the *ĀVP* itself.

Chapter 5

Comparative Discussion: The Metaphysics of the Person and Moral Agency in Light of Vasubandhu's Abhidharmic Thought

How would Vasubandhu have responded to Parfit's metaphysics of the self and his reductionist views on ethics? How would he have responded to the critics of Parfit's theories? The answers to these questions are presumably destined to remain forever unknown – at least for non-omniscient scholars, such as the author of these lines. Yet such questions are the ground on which ideas in comparative philosophy grow, and some of these ideas it is truly worthwhile investigating. In this final chapter, I will endeavor to develop a comparative investigation of Vasubandhu's philosophy of agency in light of contemporary philosophical scholarship on personal identity and ethics.

The comparative discussion will revolve around two focal points. The first point of investigation concerns Vasubandhu's metaphysical view of the person and how it may be characterized through the lens of the Western philosophical discourse on self and identity. Based on the observations made in the previous chapters, I will defend the view that Vasubandhu's approach towards the person is best characterized as reductionist (as opposed to non-reductionist and eliminativist, concepts which I will explain below).

As a second point of comparison I will concentrate on the reductionist account of agency that the *AKBh* advocates. On the basis of the arguments and views that I have extracted from the *AKBh*, I will reconstruct a Vasubandhvian theory of agency, which I will compare with Parfit's reductionist treatment of agency. I will examine its possible contribution to the contemporary debate on personal identity and ethics, and how it relates to the criticism leveled at reductionist theories in ethics. In this part of the discussion I will dwell in particular on the criterion of personal identity, which defines the boundaries, unity and autonomy of the agent.

The purpose for this investigation is twofold. First, I intend this inspection to engage with the contemporary debate concerning the Buddhist view of the person. In this regard, I will contribute the perspective which is derived from my understanding of the theory of agency in the *AKBh*. Second, since I will argue below that the *AKBh* displays a reductionist view of the person (both according to Parfitian standards and according to Buddhist standards), this examination substantiates the analogy between Vasubandhu and Parfit and hence provides the rationale to conduct a comparative study of the two, as will be the case in the second half of this chapter. In certain cases, the comparative move will involve a "reconstruction" of Vasubandhu's view through the lens of Western philosophical terms and problems. However, I hope this is done carefully, trying to remain as loyal as possible to the premises of Vasubandhu's philosophy, as they manifested in the previous chapters.

5.1 Vasubandhu's Metaphysical View of the Person: Reductionist, Non-Reductionist or Eliminativist?

The depiction of the agent which I drew in the previous three chapters, shows the multilayeredness of Vasubandhu's analysis of the person. It is not only from an

ontological point of view that the status of the person is determined; epistemological and ethical claims also take part in deciding its exact manner of existence and its place in the metaphysical contexture. To what extent, then, is the analogy between Parfit's reductionist theory and Vasubandhu's no-self theory valid? Scholars who investigated this point raised the following question: does Vasubandhu reduce the person to more basic elements (the aggregates, the *dharma*s), while retaining the existence of the person (like Parfit does)? Or does Vasubandhu, in reducing the person, intended to argue that persons are entirely non-existent? According to Parfit's typology, the first alternative is termed "reductionist", whereas the second alternative is "eliminativist". Clarifying this point is important both for an accurate understanding of Vasubandhu's philosophy and for legitimately establishing an analogy between Vasubandhu and Parfit on the ontology of the person.[246] The first sub-section below considers this question in Parfitian terms. That is, it discusses whether Vasubandhu's view should be characterized as a reductionist theory or as an eliminativist theory.

The second sub-section aims at understanding Vasubandhu according to the terminology of Buddhism. Here I employ the terms of "conventional reality" (*saṃvṛti-satya*) and "ultimate reality" (*paramārtha-satya*). The idea of "conventional reality" signifies reality as it is perceived in accordance with our ordinary pre-philosophical intuitions. The idea of "ultimate reality" signifies reality as it conforms with an unbiased analysis of what ultimately exists. Hence, the equivalent question in Buddhist

[246] This is the theoretical importance of the distinction. Mark Siderits explains that pragmatically speaking, the difference between an eliminativist and a reductionist approach translates into the role that the entities in question play in human life. Whereas eliminated entities – for example, demons that are said to cause a certain disease – lack pragmatic utility for human beings, reducible entities – such as persons – still hold some pragmatic usefulness and are therefore maintained in the way we relate to the world with our language. See Mark Siderits, "Buddhist Reductionism," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 4 (1997): 456.

terms will be this. Does Vasubandhu regard provisional designations as real in some way, or does he regard them as entirely illusory or fictitious and therefore nonexistent?

5.1.1 The Existential Status of the Person in Parfitian Terms

In the past three decades, since the publication of *Reasons and Persons*, some attempts have been made to analyze the Buddhist view of no-self using Parfit's terminology. The scholars who engaged in these attempts have been using two particular terms to characterize the Buddhist view of persons. These terms are derived from Parfit's taxonomy of metaphysical positions regarding personal identity and were used initially by Parfit himself, when he analyzed the Buddhist understanding of persons with some passages from the Buddhist sources that were available to him in English. Parfit mentioned in fact three types of positions, which he called **Reductionism**, **Non-Reductionism** and **Eliminativism**;[247] but only the latter two were applied to the Buddhist view. The meaning of reductionism and non-reductionism has been clarified in detail in Chapter 1 of this work; here, let me just summarize how Parfit understands them, adding a few comments on the third concept of eliminativism.

A **non-reductionist** theory of personal identity, according to Parfit, holds that the identity of persons is a basic entity that cannot be described using other terms. It is a *sui generis* entity. The identity of persons is, thus, a fact that cannot be reduced to, or expressed by, other facts, and only this fact alone can account for personal identity. **Reductionist** theories, on the other hand, maintain that the identity of persons is not something that exists above and beyond the various basic components of which a person is made up. In fact, according to reductionist theories, personal identity can be reduced

[247] Derek Parfit, "The Unimportance of Identity," in *Identity*, ed. Henry Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 16-17.

to other, more basic facts about the person. When we know these impersonal facts, we know all there is to know about that person. No further fact is required to understand the identity of the person. On the basis of reductionism, Parfit introduces the third type of metaphysical theories about the self: **eliminativism**. Eliminativism agrees with reductionism in maintaining that personal identity can be reduced to more basic facts about the person. But whereas reductionist theories maintain that although persons are reducible in this way, persons nevertheless do exist, eliminativist theories hold that the reducibility of persons implies that a person is a redundant concept, which should therefore be eliminated from our ontology. In other words, eliminativists argue that persons do not exist. Only the basic components, which constitute the person, exist.

Parfit makes the first claim on how Buddhism should fit in this schema. Initially, in *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit argues that the Buddha would have agreed with his theory[248] - that is, in respect to personal identity, Parfit takes Buddhism to be a reductionist theory. Later on, however, Parfit maintains a different interpretation. This time, he suggests that Buddhist texts demonstrate a philosophy that denies the existence of persons altogether and hence classifies the Buddhist view as a type of eliminativism.[249] Parfit's analysis of the Buddhist metaphysical view of persons paved the way for several other interpretations by scholars of Buddhism, who attempted to classify the Buddhist view using his terminology. It should be noted, however, as

[248] Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 273: "I claim that, when we ask what persons are, and how they continue to exist, the fundamental question is a choice between two views. On one view, we are separately existing entities, distinct from our brain and bodies and our experiences, and entities whose existence must be all-or-nothing. The other view is the Reductionist View. And I claim that, of these, the second view is true. As Appendix J shows, *Buddha would have agreed*. The Reductionist View is not merely part of one cultural tradition. It may be, as I have claimed, the true view about all people at all times." (Italics in original)

[249] Derek Parfit, "The Unimportance of Identity," 17: "Consider next *Eliminative* Reductionism. Such a view is sometimes a response to arguments against the Identifying view… In the case of persons, some Buddhist texts take an Eliminative view. According to these texts (4) There really aren't such things as persons: there are only brains and bodies, and thoughts and other experiences."

Charles Goodman has pointed out, that the various accounts differ not only in their classification of the Buddhist view as reductionist or eliminativist, but also in the way they understand the philosophical meaning of the categories themselves.[250]

Roy Perrett, James Duerlinger and Mark Siderits support the reductionist interpretation of Buddhism. Perrett[251] follows Parfit's definition of reductionism. He understands reductionist theories as theories, which maintain that "[p]ersonal identity just consists in the holding of certain facts that can be described without making reference to personal identity" (p. 373, quoting Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, p. 210). Citing Parfit's later classification of Buddhism as an eliminativist theory, Perrett understands eliminativism as the view that persons do not exist at all. It differs, once again, from reductionism, in that according to the latter, persons do exist, only that such entities need not be recognized by "any adequate conceptual scheme". In the light of these definitions, Perrett concludes that

> Most Indian Buddhist philosophers (including the Theravādins, the Vaibhāṣikas, the Sautrāntikas, the Yogācārins, and the Svātantrika-Mādhyamikas) take the latter view [reductionism] and hence are all plausibly classifiable as reductionists about personal identity. (p. 377)

James Duerlinger[252] is in the same opinion as Perrett and holds that most Buddhist schools can be classified as reductionist. Unlike Perrett, Duerlinger considers in his discussion only the two alternatives of reductionism versus non-reductionism – the reason for ignoring the eliminativist position being most probably the fact that his article had been composed before Parfit raised his second, eliminativist reading of Buddhism. Even though Duerlinger does not consider the alternative of eliminativism,

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[250] Charles Goodman, "Vaibhāṣika Metaphoricalism," *Philosophy East and West* 55, no. 3 (2005): 377.

[251] Roy Perrett, "Personal Identity, Minimalism, and Madhyamaka," *Philosophy East and West* 52, no. 3 (2002).

[252] James Duerlinger, "Reductionist and Nonreductionist Theories of Persons in Indian Buddhist Philosophy," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 21, no. 1 (1997).

he does two things which pertain to the issue in question. First, he elaborates – slightly more than Perrett does – on the meaning of reductionism and non-reductionism (in accordance with Parfit's definitions). Secondly, he discusses in particular Vasubandhu's view of the self. Thus, in explaining what a reductionist stance is, Duerlinger enumerates two principles that according to Parfit characterize a reductionist theory: (1) with regard to our existence, reductionist theories claim that it can be reduced to the existence of a brain and a body and a chain of physical and mental events; and (2) with regard to personal identity over time, reductionist theories claim that our identity can be reduced to the more particular, impersonal facts (i.e., facts which do not presuppose personal identity) mentioned in the first principle (p. 81-82).[253] non-reductionist theories are, then, those theories which reject the two theses mentioned above.

Duerlinger allows himself a certain freedom to digress from Parfit's view of reductionism. Whereas in Parfit's thought the two points that were mentioned concern personal identity over time, or *diachronic identity*, Duerlinger extends the sense of reductionism to the *synchronic* level, namely, to the unity of a person within a given moment. This second meaning of reductionism, which according to Duerlinger, is implicit in Parfit's thesis, means that at any given moment our unity as persons can be reduced to the more particular elements in which we consist (p. 82). With this theoretical framework in mind, Duerlinger then analyzes Vasubandhu's position with regard to the problem of synchronic and diachronic personal identity and arrives at the conclusion that Vasubandhu's view on personal identity should be classified as reductionist (p. 83).

[253] The way in which Duerlinger portrays the two elements in Parfit's characterization of reductionism is somewhat different than the way I understand it. On this see Chapter 1.1.1 above.

While Perrett and Duerlinger adhere, to varying degrees, to Parfit's definitions of non-reductionism, reductionism and eliminativism, Siderits situates the concepts in a rather different schema, which emphasizes the significance of language and semantics in distinguishing between the last two.[254] According to Siderits, reductionism is an approach which holds that certain concepts in our language are superfluous. They are superfluous insofar as they can be replaced by more particular notions, in such a way that a complete description of reality is possible, even without applying the former. The entities to which these concepts refer are shown, therefore, to be ontologically nonessential and consequently they "have no place in our ultimate ontology," in Siderits' words. However, these concepts can still be more or less accurately translated into the terms of our ultimate ontology. In addition, they are useful in some ways to human discourse and communication. Therefore, they need not be eliminated from our language altogether (p. 455-456).

Eliminativism, on the other hand, is, according to Siderits, an equivalent philosophical approach, which prescribes the elimination of those discourses, which make use of concepts that are not part of our ultimate ontology. Yet Siderits qualifies this definition: according to his interpretation, the eliminativist razor pertains only to such instances in which the superfluous concepts cannot be systematically reduced to the basic concepts of our ultimate ontology, and hence are not useful to us. This means that according to him, reductionism and eliminativism are not mutually exclusive. We can apply a reductionist approach with regard to some entities, while at the same time adopt an eliminativist attitude towards others (p. 456-457). Since there are some cases

[254] Mark Siderits, "Buddhist Reductionism," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 4 (1997). Siderits' interpretation of Buddhism as reductionism is accepted by Wolfgang Fasching, who does not defend it further, in Wolfgang Fasching, "'I am the Nature of Seeing': Phenomenological Reflections on the Indian Notion of Witness-Consciousness," in *Self, no self?: Perspectives from analytical, phenomenological, and Indian traditions,* ed. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson and Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 196-197.

in which concepts that cannot be systematically reduced to our ontology are still retained by human discourse due to their usefulness, Siderits concludes that "reductionism and eliminativism represent the ends of a continuum, with a middle range of cases in which it may be indeterminate whether the entities of the old theory are being reduced to, or eliminated in favor of, the entities of the new theory" (p. 457).

As for the Buddhist theory of no-self, Siderits proposes that this is a reductionist theory, because discourses about persons and personal identity can be systematically translated into our ultimate ontology (the ontology of brain cells, physical particles etc.; in the case of Buddhism, the ultimate ontology of *dharma*s) and because they are useful to human life (for the efficiency of verbal communication, for example; 466-468). In other words, discourses about persons in Buddhism fulfill the two criteria. Siderits also suggests that the Buddhist theory of no-self is a middle way between non-reductionism, which asserts the ultimate existence of a self, and eliminativism, which entirely denies its existence. The principle of no-self rejects the ultimate existence of a self, but retains its conventional sense. For this reason and because the concept of a person is retained by Buddhism (on the conventional level), Buddhism, according to Siderits, is a reductionist theory with regard to persons, rather than non-reductionist, or eliminativist.

We see, then, that Perrett, Duerlinger and Siderits maintain that by and large, the Buddhist view on personhood, including that of Vasubandhu and the Sautrāntika school, should be understood as reductionist. In other words, they hold that most Buddhist schools, with a particular emphasis on the tenet which Vasubandhu supports, accept the existence of a person on one level, and this means that they do not argue against its existence. At the same time, the person, according to this interpretation, is accepted as an entity that can be translated into more basic entities and that should not be considered as a final element in the ultimate ontology of Buddhism.

This is, however, not the only interpretation that contemporary scholarship adopted. Philosophers, such as James Giles and Jim Stone, argue for an eliminativist interpretation of the Buddhist view of the self. Giles departs from similar assumptions and Buddhist scriptures as the ones that Siderits reads, but arrives at a different conclusion. Like Siderits, Giles approaches the subject from the perspective of the two truths and affirms the centrality of the two levels of discourse – particularly, the linguistic aspect of the two levels of reality – to the understanding of the Buddhist view. But from the assertion that the "I" or "self" are merely linguistic constructions with no ultimate referent, he concludes that the view it encapsulates should be classified as a form of eliminativism, rather than as reductionism. Giles sees the similarity between reductionism and the Buddhist theory of no-self in that both reject the idea of a self "which somehow exists beyond the bounds of experience" (p. 175).

There is, nonetheless, one major difference between the two views, according to Giles. Reductionist theories are theories about the self and as such, they seek to provide an account of personal identity. Eliminativist theories, on the other hand, are not theories about the self. On the contrary: they reject the idea of the self and any theory about the self as untenable (p. 175). This basic difference finds expression in two central ways, according to Giles: first, after reducing the self and its identity to their most basic components, reductionist theories turn to reaffirm their existence, whereas eliminativist theories, such as the Buddhist no-self theory, do not make this further step of re-establishing the self and its identity (ibid.); second, while reductionist theories presuppose a certain view of the self "into which it must now force the structure of human existence" – a presupposition that is necessarily implied by their commitment to re-establishing the self – eliminativist theories do not hold to premises of this kind (p. 176).

Following the distinction which he had just made between the two types of theories, Giles characterizes the Buddhist theory of no-self as eliminativist. Quoting a passage from the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* of the Buddhist Pāli Canon, Giles indicates that he takes the conventional truth (in non-Mahāyānist, that is, early Buddhist schools, like the Sautrāntika) to be that discourse, in which words that are used by "mutual agreement" are true, and the ultimate truth as that discourse, in which words refer to the "elements" (*dhamma*) and are true because of the real existence of the elements. The self does not exist as an element on the ultimate level, for it cannot be identified with any particular element; but also a self which is constituted by a collection of elements, Giles claims, does not ultimately exist, since the self cannot be identified with a collection of elements either. There is simply nothing in the world which can be regarded as an enduring self. The concepts that we use in order to talk about selves and persons on the conventional level, such as proper names and personal pronouns, are true by virtue of our mutual agreement on their usage. And yet, Giles emphasizes, these conventional terms are not selves or persons; they are only linguistic terms. For this reason, Giles maintains that the (non-Mahāyānist) Buddhist teachings not only reduce the person into its basic constituents, but at the same time, completely negate its existence, and hence should be regarded as eliminativist (ibid.).

Finally, another thinker who ascribes an eliminativist position to Buddhism is Jim Stone.[255] Stone's philosophical move is very different from that of Giles. Rather than a claim about the nature of the Buddhist view of personal identity, Giles' is a general argument against the tenability of reductionism. Giles argues that of the three possible ontological approaches to the status of the person – i.e., realism (that is, non-

[255] Jim Stone, "Parfit and the Buddha: Why there are no people." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 48, no. 3 (1988); Jim Stone, "Why there still are no people." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70, no. 1 (2005).

reductionism), reductionism and eliminativism – the latter is the only acceptable ontological view of selves. Buddhism, for Giles, is merely an example of such a theory, which cannot be plausibly seen as reductionist – since reductionism as such is untenable. Accordingly, the details of Stone's argument, although interesting from a philosophical point of view, are of less interest to us here, since this argument does not expand on the nature of the Buddhist view of no-self from a Buddhist perspective, or based on Buddhist texts.

In conclusion, we can see that recent debates about the exact characterization of the Buddhist theory of no-self, which started with Parfit's distinction between reductionism, non-reductionism and eliminativism, takes two main sides: reductionism versus eliminativism. At the same time, the opinions differ not only as to the ontological status of personhood in Buddhism, but more fundamentally, about how each of the categories should be philosophically understood. In general, there are so far two main approaches in this regard, the ontological approach (Perrett and Duerlinger on one side, Giles on the other) and the semantic approach (Siderits).

To understand the claims I will make in favor of the reductionist interpretation, it is important to notice here that the two approaches are by large independent of each other. It may be claimed by the linguist, for example, that persons (or wholes in general) do not exist from an ontological point of view, yet as a concept they may be meaningful and translate into our ultimate ontology in ways that justify maintaining them, rather than eliminating them. Similarly, certain concepts may be sentenced to be eliminated from a semantic point view (because they are not useful for human affairs, for example), although ontologically their existence may be affirmed. The first of these claims, however – that a concept is to be maintained due to its usefulness and because it can translate into entities from the ultimate ontology, although a corresponding entity

does not ultimately exist ontologically – is unlikely to be accepted by an ontologist, such as Giles. He would probably argue that the inconsistency is precisely the indication that we suffer from ignorance, under whose influence we think in concepts which are not in accordance with reality. That, he would argue, is a sign for ideas that we should eliminate, since they are mistaken in not representing accurately the way things ultimately exist and constitute a hindrance in the spiritual path. In like manner, the ontologist might also oppose the second claim, since in his view an ontological existence is the criterion for regarding this entity as real, regardless of whether it is conceptually useful to human beings or not.

5.1.2 The Existential Status of the Person in Buddhist Terms

Before attempting to compare Vasubandhu with Parfit, therefore, a preliminary question needs to be considered. This is the question of the relation between the conventional and ultimate truths in the *AKBh*, according to Vasubandhu's own terms. As I showed in Chapter 2, Vasubandhu's well-known definition of the conventional and ultimate realities states that conventional entities are those entities that cease to exist when broken into pieces or alternatively, when analyzed mentally. Ultimate entities, on the other hand, are basic entities that cannot be separated further into parts, either physically or by means of mental analysis. It should be recalled that a person, for Vasubandhu, is a provisional designation (*prajñapti*), namely, a concept which has no direct referent on the ultimate level. As such, it belongs to the conventional reality only. The person, however, is designated based on ultimate entities, namely, the *dharma*s, and upon the five aggregates (*skandha*) of *dharma*s, to which he refers interchangeably as the "stream of aggregates" (*skandhasaṃtāna*). And so, one question that arises in contemporary

scholarly literature, in this regard, concerns the ontological status of the conventional person, in light of the schema of the two truths.

Jonardon Ganeri has shown how different interpreters understand this relation.[256] Mark Siderits (in agreement with his view and approach that have been discussed above) argues that according to Vasubandhu, only the five aggregates are ontologically real, whereas persons do not exist ultimately, since "person" is a mere concept. In his words:

> The Buddhist reductionist claims that "person" is a mere convenient designator for a complex causal series of impermanent, impersonal psychophysical elements. That is, ultimately there are no persons, only physical objects, feelings, perceptions, volitions and consciousnesses… given our interests, it is generally more convenient to use the one term for such a series, hence the conventional truth of such claims as that there are persons and that persons endure over time. But all such claims are ultimately false. Ultimately there are only impersonal psychophysical elements in causal relation.[257]

A contrary understanding is that of James Duerlinger, who argues that according to Vasubandhu, persons, like aggregates, are ultimately existent, precisely because persons rely ontologically on their aggregates. As Duerlinger puts it,

> Vasubandhu does not reject the view that persons ultimately exist. For he too believes that conventionally real persons ultimately exist by reason of being the same in existence as collections of aggregates.[258]

Ganeri himself argues that the distinction between the person and the aggregates is not a distinction between mere appearance and reality, but rather between two concepts of objectivity. It is, therefore, not the case that persons are merely conceptual fictions. Persons are objects, which are mediated through concepts, but that does not mean they

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[256] Jonardon Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 166.

[257] Siderits, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 24-25.

[258] Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, 21.

are unreal. What it means is that persons and aggregates are two different perspectives through which we experience the world, and both of them are real. Ganeri explains his position in this way:

> Vasubandhu's statement that persons are "real with reference to conception" is to be taken as saying that one can think in a person-involving way only as long as one does not analyse or "mentally divide" the person into a flow of experience. As soon as one entertains the analysis, one no longer thinks in terms of a conceptual scheme that involves persons; one no longer sees the world this way. So Vasubandhu's view is not that there are no persons, but that person-involving conceptual schemes are unstable, in the sense defined [i.e. when one investigates a person into its component *skandha*, the concept of an "I" falls away].[259]

Ganeri's interpretation clearly states that conventional persons – their existence represented by the usage of provisional designations – are real. Interestingly enough, both Siderits and Duerlinger, as we have seen, maintain a reductionist interpretation of Vasubandhu and avowedly acknowledge the reality of persons on the conventional reality. I, therefore, understand Duerlinger as claiming that the reality (that is, the non-illusoriness) of conventional persons is due to the ultimate existence of the aggregates, and Siderits as claiming that, although on the ultimate level persons are not to be found, nevertheless discourses about conventional persons are true on the conventional level, thus making persons real conventionally.

As I understand Ganeri's claim, he offers a third way to think about the status of the person, in addition to the ontological and semantic approaches. This is the epistemological approach. An object can be said to be real, if it is experienced from one perspective or another – ultimately or conventionally. From the epistemological outlook, one can think in a person-involving way and experience the world through the lens of persons. This renders the latter real, and the view upheld by Vasubandhu

[259] Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul*, 172.

reductionist, in the sense that his intention is not to eliminate altogether the conceptual scheme of persons as illusory.

In the case of the epistemological approach to persons, as well, it is interesting to see that it is independent from the ontological criterion. Even if persons, examined from the ontological point of view, are eliminated from the ontological system as non-existent, being part of the human conceptual scheme grants them the status of being real. From an ontological point of view, however, it may be argued (as in the case of the semantic criterion), that if a certain entity (or set of entities) cannot be proved to be ultimately existent, this entails that any perspective which takes this entity as objective and real is infected with ignorance – a mental affliction that ought to be eliminated as well. To this, an epistemologist such as Ganeri may reply that such a rigid ontological attitude is not supported by claims and views expressed in the *AKBh*, and therefore cannot apply in the case of Vasubandhu.

5.1.3 An Ethical Case for the Reductionist Interpretation

The ontological, epistemological and semantic approaches are, in my opinion, all interesting ways to interpret the Buddhist view of the person, and to argue for reductionism or eliminativism. My way to examine this point, and to argue for the reductionist interpretation, would be to demonstrate how the conventional person is seen by Vasubandhu on the ethical plane. Does Vasubandhu reject this concept as incompatible with ethics? Or does he acknowledge this concept in moral theory? I argue that not only does he acknowledge the concept of person in ethics; in fact, what my reading of the *AKBh* in the previous chapters demonstrates is that Vasubandhu relies on this notion for his theory of moral agency. Since his conception of the moral agent, which is essential to Buddhist ethics, cannot stand without the notion of person, it must

be the case that Vasubandhu reduces the person, but does not maintain an eliminativist view of persons.

For the purpose of this discussion, I will accept Giles' characterization of reductionism and eliminativism. That is, I will understand reductionism and eliminativism as two theories that reject the idea of a self as an entity which exists beyond the boundaries of experience, and will assume that the difference between the two is that reductionist theories provide an account of personal identity, whereas eliminativist theories reject the idea of the self and any theory about the self as untenable.

My first claim is that Vasubandhu is reductionist with regard to persons, since he does not entirely reject the wrong view of an enduring self (*satkāyadṛṣṭi*) as morally unwholesome. In the *AKBh*, Vasubandhu enumerates five kinds of wrong views (*dṛṣṭi*), which include the wrong view of an enduring self, the wrong view of holding to the extremes (*anta-grāha-dṛṣṭi*), false view (*mithyā-dṛṣṭi*), esteeming of views (*dṛṣṭi-parāmarśa*), and over-esteeming of moral conduct and religious practices (*śīla-vrata-parāmarśa*). He claims that all of the wrong views misrepresent reality this way or another – most of them by affirming things which do not exist, but one wrong view (false view) by negating things which do exist.[260] However, only the wrong views of an enduring self and of holding to the extremes are said to be morally neutral (*avyākṛta*). The remaining three views are said to be, in certain states (in the realm of desire, *kāma-*

[260] *AKBh* V:7, p. 282: *sarvaiva hi viparītasvabhāvapravṛttā dṛṣṭir mithyādṛṣṭiḥ ekaiva tūktā / atiśayavattvāt durgandhakṣatavat / eṣā hy apavādikā anyās tu samāropikāḥ. AKBhT* Ku 229b7-230a1: *log par zhugs pa'i lta ba thams cad log par lta ba yin pa las mar drang ba bzhin du ha cang chabs chen po dang ldan pa'i phyir gcig kho na bshad de/ 'di ni skur pa 'debs par byed pa yin la/ gzhan dag ni sgro 'dogs par byed pa yin no//* "Indeed, every wrong view that is engaged in a state of being which is contrary [to reality] is a false view, but only one is declared [as such], because it is excessive, like an ill-smelling wound. For this [wrong view] denies [the reality of things], whereas the other [wrong views] superimpose [on reality things which are not real]."

dhatu), unwholesome (*aśubha*, *akuśala*).[261] Consequently, maintaining that suffering (*duḥkha*) does not exist (a false view),[262] or that the world was created by a creator god (an over-esteeming of moral conduct and religious practices)[263] are unwholesome views. They should be eliminated because of their moral consequences.

By contrast, the view that the person exists (the wrong view of an enduring self) and even the view that the person is eternal (a wrong view of holding to the extremes)[264] are not unwholesome. They are morally neutral. In other words, from a moral point of view, these concepts can be retained. Not only that: maintaining these concepts can prove beneficial in leading one into the spiritual practice and to following ethics, and thus it may even be useful to keep these concepts, in spite of the fact that from an ontological point of view they misrepresent reality. This idea, by the way, resonates with Siderits' suggestion that concepts that are useful to human beings, if they also translate into our ultimate ontology, need not be eliminated, but may be reduced. In both cases, the criterion for reducing a concept rather than eliminating it is independent of its

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[261] *AKBh* V:19d, p. 291: ***śeṣās tv ihāśubhāḥ*** // *śeṣās tv aśubhā anuśayāḥ kāmadhātāv akuśalāḥ. AKBhT* Ku 236a6: *lhag ma rnams 'dir mi dge ba'o/ /phra rgyas lhag ma rnams ni 'dod pa'i khams na mi dge ba dag yin no/ /* "The remaining [latent tendencies] here are bad. The remaining latent tendencies in the realm of desire are bad, unwholesome."

[262] *AKBh* V:7, p. 282: *sati duḥkhādisatye nāstīti dṛṣṭir mithyādṛṣṭiḥ. AKBhT* Ku 229b7: *sdug bsngal ba la sogs pa'i bden pa yod na med do zhes bya ba ni log par lta ba'o/ /* "The truth of suffering and so forth being real, the view [which holds] that it does not exist is false view."

[263] Ibid.: *ahetau hetudṛṣṭir amārge mārgadṛṣṭiḥ śīlavṛtaparāmarśaḥ / tadyathā maheśvaro na hetur lokānām / taṃ ca hetuṃ paśyati prajāpatim anyaṃ vā. AKBhT* Ku 230a3-4: *rgyu ma yin pa la rgyur lta ba dang/ lam ma yin pa la lam du lta ba ni tshul khrims dang brdul zhugs mchog tu 'dzin pa yin te/ 'di lta ste/ dbang phyug chen po'am/ skye dgu'i bdag po'am/ gzhan yang rung ste/ 'jig rten rnams kyi rgyu ma yin na de la yang rgyur lta ba dang.* "Seeing a cause in what is not a cause and seeing a path in what is not a path – this is the over-esteeming of moral conduct and religious practices. It is thus: the god Maheśvara is not the cause of the worlds, but [over-esteeming of moral conduct and religious practices] sees him – or Prajāpati or another [god] – as the cause [of the worlds]."

[264] Ibid.: *tasyaivātmābhimatasya vastuno dhruvadṛṣṭir ucchedadṛṣṭir vā 'ntagrāhadṛṣṭiḥ. AKBhT* Ku 229b6-7: *bdag tu mngon par 'dod pa'i dngos po de nyid la rtag par lta ba'am/ chad par lta ba ni mthar 'dzin par lta ba ste/* "Seeing the permanence or seeing the destruction of the object which is assented to as the self is the wrong view of holding to an extreme".

existential status. Thus, while ideas, such as the idea that the world was created by a creator god, must be rejected, the idea of a self needs not be rejected. The fact that Vasubandhu does not eliminate the concept of a person on ethical grounds, I argue, indicates that his view is reductionist.

But, as we see, it is not only that Vasubandhu does not reject the notion of a conventional person on the basis of its importance for ethics. This concept also plays a central role in his account of moral agency – and this is my second claim: a reductionist interpretation of Vasubandhu is more plausible, since his view on agency and ethics relies heavily on the notion of a conventional person. Let me shortly reiterate some of the ways in which the notion of the conventional person is significant in agency. The conventional person who is designated by a particular name, is the one who is said to act when a certain causal transformation occurs in the stream of aggregates; the personal sense of agency, constituted by an identification with an enduring "I", is an essential component in forming the motivation to act for the future; moral theory and moral guidelines apply to persons and are explained and exemplified in reference to conventional persons; and from the first-person perspective, the notion of an enduring self is at the heart of the volition (*cetanā*) and intent (*āśaya*) to act, as well as of undertaking (*samādāna*), without which actions do not take place.

The conventional notion of the person (seen from the third-person and the first-person perspectives) is clearly a central pillar in Vasubandhu's understanding of agency and ethics. Thus Giles' claim that the Buddhist theory of no-self does not reaffirm the existence of the self and its identity after reducing them to their basic components, as well as his claim that Buddhism does not presuppose a certain view of the self "into which it must now force the structure of human existence", are not supported by the

account of agency that is found in the *AKBh*. Consequently, it is more plausible to take Vasubandhu's view concerning persons as reductionism.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the special connection between the conventional notion of the self and the conceptual volition (*saṃkalpa-cetanā*) to act, which entails that the former is accommodated in the latter. This connection is characterized by a special dependency: the ultimate factor of volition is dependent, in its content, upon the conventional notion of enduring self or "I". As it has been shown, conceptual volition is defined by Vasubandhu and Yaśomitra as the resolution "I shall make such and such an action", a thought which involves the first-person perspective of an "I". Karin Meyers, in her analysis of autonomy and agency in the Abhidharma literature, aptly remarks that certain *dharma*s (e.g., shame [*hrī*] and apprehension [*apatrāpya*]), which are ultimate, impersonal factors, are "self-referencing", that is, "they presuppose the notion of oneself as a morally responsible agent."[265]

The same is true for conceptual volition, and this is my third claim in favor of the reductionist interpretation. Volition is an impersonal *dharma*, an ultimate entity; but at the same time, it presupposes the notions of a conventional person and a conventional agent in such a way, that if these notions are rejected, conceptual volition loses its very essence, according to Vasubandhu's definition. In fact, it ceases to have the function of a volition. This kind of dependency means that if one admits the existence of the ultimate ontology of Buddhism, as the eliminativist does, one must also admit the truth of the conventional person, whose notion is presupposed by various ultimately existing entities (but denied by the eliminativist). Conversely, in adopting the eliminativist interpretation and rejecting the conventional person as entirely non-existent, one immediately undermines essential aspects of the ultimate level, which, according to the

[265] Karin Meyers, "Free Persons, Empty Selves: Freedom and Agency in Light of the Two Truths," 63.

premises of eliminativism itself, truly exists. Thus, in light of Vasubandhu's action theory, the eliminativist interpretation is self-defeating. It involves inconsistency among its premises. The only consistent interpretation is reductionism, which admits the existence of the ultimate level of ontology, and at the same time accepts the notion of conventional person and the conventional agent that are presupposed by the ultimate factor of volition.

5.2 A Buddhist Reductionist Theory of Agency

In the previous section I argued in favor of a reductionist interpretation of Vasubandhu, with the aim of establishing a common philosophical ground between his thought and the thought of Parfit. The following comparative part will focus on the similarities as well as the differences between the two philosophical views concerning personal identity and agency, and the philosophical implications they have. The first question that I examine is what kind of criterion of personal identity Vasubandhu formulates. As has been explained, the criterion of personal identity defines the conditions under which a person at time X and a person at time Y can be said to be the same person. I will argue that in the *AKBh*, Vasubandhu formulates a psycho-physical criterion of identity which synthesizes the psychological criterion with a biological criterion of identity. Following that, I will discuss specific problem cases and objections to Parfit's views and some ways in which they may be addressed on the basis of Vasubandhu's theory of agency.

5.2.1 The Seed-Fruit Causality and the Psycho-Physical Criterion of Identity

Among the various ideas and doctrines in Vasubandhu's thought that have been surveyed in the previous chapters there are several, which account for the continuity of

the person and need to be taken into consideration, when attempting to understand Vasubandhu's criterion of personal identity. One doctrine, and in my opinion the most relevant, is the theory of seeds, which accounts for most, if not all, cases of psychological and physical continuity. Another doctrine to be considered is the law of *karman*. This theory, which is also a subset of the theory of seeds, explains the continuity that holds between intentions and actions, on the one hand, and actions and their various results in the life of the agent, on the other hand. To these two doctrines, one should add the idea that agents are unified over time, if only mentally, by the act of designating the five aggregates by a name, or by the notions of "I" and "self". Finally, another unifying element is the narrative that establishes an identity between various stages in the acting of the agent. However, this idea is not articulated by Vasubandhu. As I see it, he only employs narratives as a means to clarify doctrinal ideas, without reflecting upon them philosophically, let alone defining or considering them as factors in the unity of persons. Nonetheless, this idea is worth mentioning, as theoretically it can be compared with certain Western criteria of identity.

The psychological criterion of identity, which was adopted and developed by Parfit as part of his reductionist theory, has already been discussed in Chapter 1. There are, however, two other major families of criteria, which were developed by Western philosophy to account for personal identity and which I would like to shortly present before I examine the criterion of identity that emerges from Vasubandhu's philosophy. The biological view on personal identity argues that our essence lies in our biology, rather than in our psychology. As human beings, we are a certain type of organism throughout our entire life (whereas psychological relations may be reduced, disappear altogether for periods of times, such as in the case of dementia or comma, and so forth). The proponents of the biological criterion suggest, therefore, that what constitutes our

identity is our continuity as biological organisms. According to the biological criterion, a person X at one temporal point is identical to a person Y at a different temporal point, if Y's biological organism is continuous with X's biological organism. Psychological relations may also hold between the two, of course, but the essential criterion for the identity of the person is the inheritance of the same life-sustaining functions.

Alongside the psychological and biological criteria, a third criterion is the narrative criterion of identity. According to the narrative view, an important aspect of our identity is the way we perceive ourselves through the story that we tell about our life and biography, our values, expectations and hopes, our actions and our relationships with other people, and so on. The narrative *weaves* the sequence of events together, giving them a kind of coherence.[266] This aspect of identity is lost in merely metaphysical criteria, such as the psychological and the biological criteria, yet according to the proponents of the narrative view, this aspect is what makes our identity meaningful and turns us into unique and genuine agents. The self-told story of the agent is, thus, the basis for the narrative criterion, according to which different actions, experiences, or psychological characteristics are to be attributed to some person when they are part of the self-told story of his life (pp. 96-97).

Philosophers who discussed the problem of personal endurance, sought to answer one or more of three interrelated questions, when they formulated their criterion of personal identity: (1) What are the conditions, under which a person at temporal point x and a person at temporal point y can be identified as one and the same person? (called by Schechtman "the re-identification question"; pp. 1-2); (2) What matters to us in maintaining our identity or in our personal survival? (the motivational question, on which the answer to question (1) rests); and (3) What are the conditions under which

[266] Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves*, 96.

various physical and psychological characteristics, experiences, and actions may be properly attributed to a certain person? (called by Schechtman "the characterization question", ibid.). I suggest that to unearth the particular kind of criterion that underlies Vasubandhu's approach to the problem of identity, there is a need to treat these questions first.

Let us examine the second of those questions first. What matters in survival according to Vasubandhu? Many of the aspects of our personality, which Vasubandhu might consider as those we should care about in survival, are revealed in his philosophical debates. These are the issues that were on his opponent's mind and most probably seemed important enough for Vasubandhu to include them in the *ĀVP*. It can be claimed – with a high degree of confidence, in my opinion – that certain psychological relations are significant in this regard. The opponent cares about such things as retaining memories, recognizing objects we know from the past, and in general, about personal psychological coherence over time, as it is reflected in his inquiry about the consistency of mental associations. The fact that this psychological continuity matters is seen not only in the opponent's concern about the way these can practically take place, but also in the various objections he raises about the issue of who the owner of these psychological features is.

The survival of our psychological makeup, however, is not the only thing that matters in survival, as the debate in the *ĀVP* shows. Much attention is paid to the continuity of action and agency, or in other words, to the survival of our "agential makeup". One side of this concern is related to the basic problem of accomplishing a continuous action, while maintaining one identity. The case discussed is the act of walking of Devadatta, but one can think of more complex actions, and ones that are morally significant – from saving life to meditating over a period of time – which

require temporal continuity and consistency. Another side of the agential concern is, moreover, the inheritance of *karmic* retribution. Vasubandhu's opponent seems to care a lot about the survival of the person who acts and later enjoys the results of the action and about the capacity of an action to yield results. This concern is reflected also in the motivational concern with regard to the reasons we have to perform actions, which has been extensively discussed earlier in the dissertation. By its nature, such agential continuity exceeds the boundaries of psychological continuity, since it involves physical continuity, and even psycho-physical continuity (actions, as they are explained by Vasubandhu, involve interactions between the material aggregate and the four mental aggregates). Thus, under Vasubandhu's premises and in light of the law of *karman*, when someone thinks about being the same person, what matters to him is not only that he retains the same psychological content (his memories, recognizing the people he loves, etc.), but also the personality his actions constitute and the various experiences he deserves to experience by virtue of the actions he performs. The person's actions are, therefore, essential to who he is, that is, to his identity.

It is important to notice that agential identity is here a first-order concern. What I mean is that, unlike some psychological criteria of identity, for example, those of Locke and Parfit, which take psychological continuity to be the primary or first-order criterion, which then serves as the condition for ascribing agency, responsibility and so forth – for Vasubandhu and his opponent, agential continuity has an independent status, which is not "parasitic" on psychological continuity. Agential continuity matters on its own and is not derived only from the psychological facts about a person.

Let me return to the first of the three questions: under which conditions, can a person X at one temporal point be reidentified as a person Y at another temporal point? Given that what matters in survival is psychological and agential continuity, it is my opinion

that the foundation for a Vasubandhvian criterion of personal identity lies in the seed-fruit causality, which is described in Vasubandhu's theory of seeds. This causality, I showed earlier, accounts for psychological relations (experiences and their memories, mental associations, the reoccurrence of emotional tendencies, etc.) and for agential-*karmic* relations. It explains how all these can take place within one stream of aggregates, without there being an enduring self. Vasubandhu states that the causal continuity that holds within a stream of aggregates, namely the seed-fruit causality, is unique and can only occur within that stream, and not between different streams.[267] That is, that causality accounts for the unique identity over time of one stream of aggregates. A simple formulation of a criterion of identity based on Vasubandhu's theory of seeds would then be: X at t_1 is the same person as Y at t_2 if and only if *X's* stream of aggregates is continuous with Y's stream of aggregates, where this continuity consists in relations of seeds (*bīja*) and fruits (*phala*), and the cumulative potential (*śakti*, *sāmarthya*) they produce.

At first glance, it is tempting to classify this criterion of personal identity as belonging to the family of psychological criteria. Special attention, however, should be paid to the fact that the stream of aggregates consists in the psychological *and* the physical aspects of the person, and that aside from certain exceptional circumstances (which I will discuss below), for Vasubandhu, a person is always a collection of five

[267] *AKBh* IX, p. 472: *katham idānīm anyena cetasā dṛṣṭam anyat smarati / evaṃ hi devadattacetasā dṛṣṭaṃ yajñadattacetaḥ smaret / nāsambandhāt / na hi tayoḥ saṃbandho 'sti akāryakāraṇabhāvād yathaikasaṃtānikayoḥ. AKBhT* Khu 91a2-3: *da ni ji ltar na sems gzhan gyis mthong la gzhan gyis dran de ltar na ni lha sbyin gyis sems kyis mthong la mchod sbyin gyis sems kyis dran par 'gyur ro/ /ma yin te 'brel pa med pa'i phyir ro/ /de gnyis ni rgyu dang 'bras bur ma gyur pa'i phyir ji ltar na rgyud gcig la yod pa'i rgyu dang 'bras bur 'brel ba ni med do/ /* "[Q:] Now, how is it that one [mind moment] remembers [something] that was seen by another mind moment? For in this way, a mind moment by [a person named] Yajñadatta might remember something that was seen by a mind moment by [another person named] Devadatta. [A:] This is not so, due to the lack of [causal] connection. For due to the absence of a cause-and-effect relation, the two do not have a connection [*AKBhT*: of cause and effect], such as the one that two single streams have [among themselves]."

aggregates.[268] It should also be noted that the idea of seed-fruit relation is applicable not only to psychological continuity but also to physical continuity, and to the continuity that the two establish together. As I mentioned, agency in Vasubandhu's thought is not merely psychological, but psycho-physical, and the continuity of agency is accounted for by the theory of seeds. It seems, therefore, that what we find here is a hybrid criterion, one which synthesizes the psychological view and a rudimentary version of the biological view, and thereby encompasses psychological continuity and physical continuity as interrelated dimensions of personal identity. As I will show, this view on identity can respond to various points of criticism leveled at the merely psychological view in different ways.

The last of the three questions concerning the criterion of identity is the characterization question: What are the conditions under which various physical and psychological characteristics, experiences, and actions may be properly attributed to one person? Here, also, Vasubandhu provides a clear and detailed account. We attribute characteristics, experiences, actions and so forth to ourselves and to others on the basis of the five aggregates and the provisional designation (*prajñapti*) we apply to them. This means, that although the psycho-physical criterion of identity suffices to account for personal identity over time, the attribution process involves an identification through a conventional concept, as discussed in details in Chapter 2 above. To fully understand how Vasubandhu accounts for personal identity, this element needs also to be

[268] A person consists in five aggregates during his lifetime, and also while in the intermediate existence (*antarā-bhava*) between two lifetimes (See on that *AKBh* III:13cd, p. 124: *bhavo hi nāmāviśeṣeṇa pañcopādānaskandhāḥ / sa eva caturdhā bhidyate / antarābhavo yathoktaḥ* […]. *AKBhT* Ku 119b4: *srid pa zhes bya ba ni bye brag med par nye bar len pa'i phung po lnga po dag go/ /da ni rnam pa bzhir dbye ste/ srid pa bar ma ni ji skad bshad pa'o/ /* "That which is called 'existence' is, without distinction, the five aggregates of grasping. This is divided into four: the intermediate existence, as explained before…"). Two exceptions for this general rule are (1) the state of immateriality (*arūpya-dhatu*), in which the person is devoid of a material body, and (2) the state and attainment of no-cognition (*asaṃjñika, asaṃjñi-samāpatti*), in which the person is devoid of mental activity.

considered. The attribution is not attained through a complete narrative which encompasses the many details of the agent's biography, but rather through the simple act of attaching a provisional designation to the stream of aggregates, which are the agent. It is a self-told story just as much as it is a story told by others. Still the attribution which is achieved through this act is important to the conventional identity of the agent and to various conventions of agency. Thus, in addition to the psycho-physical criterion, what we seem to have here can be described as a simple version of the narrative criterion, which amounts to the conventional concepts which are used to designate the person.

To recapitulate, according to my reading of Vasubandhu, the criterion of identity that the *AKBh* employs is a psycho-physical criterion, which consists in relations of seeds and fruits that constitute together one stream of aggregates. To follow this criterion, a person *X* at t_1 is the same person as *Y* at t_2 just in case *X's* stream of aggregates is continuous with *Y*'s stream of aggregates, where this continuity consists in relations of seeds and fruits, and the cumulative potential they produce. Additionally, the idea of provisional designation explains how we attribute characteristics, actions and so on to ourselves and others.

5.2.2 Specific Objections and Replies from Vasubandhu's Theory of Agency

In this last section, my aim is to create a cross-philosophical dialogue between Vasubandhu's theory of agency and contemporary reductionist theories of agency by discussing some of the problem cases and objections that were raised against the latter. I will concentrate on four cases only, although I see the potential for a wider and more extensive discussion, which unfortunately is beyond the scope of this dissertation. The first two objections that I will touch on are directed at the view that personal identity

can be established on the basis of psychological relations, without assuming an enduring self. The last two objections are directed more specifically against the possibility of accounting for agency under a no-self premise. In dealing with these objections and problem cases, I will suggest possible replies based on Vasubandhu's criterion of identity and theory of agency.

Interruption of Memory and Permanent Vegetative State

It has been mentioned that Parfit's psychological criterion is a development of an earlier psychological criterion offered by John Locke. It should be remembered that Locke saw the basis of our identification in the memories we carry with us and claimed that a person X is a later stage of a person Y, when X has memories of Y's experiences. This view led to the problem of the loss of memory. According to this problem, under the assumptions of Locke's criterion, at times in which the memory of a person is interrupted or inactive, this person would not be identical with himself. Locke, who mentions this issue, describes it as follows:

> But that which seems to make the difficulty is this, that this consciousness being interrupted always by forgetfulness, there being no moment of our lives wherein we have the whole train of our past actions before our eyes in one view, but even the best memories losing the sight of one part whilst they are viewing another… and in sound sleep, having no thoughts at all, or at least none with that consciousness which remarks our waking thoughts ;– I say, in all these cases, our consciousness being interrupted, and we losing the sight of our past selves, doubts are raised whether we are the same thinking thing, i.e. the same substance or no. [269]

Locke stresses in particular states of amnesia, from which we have no memories at all:

> But yet possibly it will still be objected, "Suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life beyond a possibility of retrieving them, so that perhaps I shall never be conscious of them again; yet am I not the same

[269] John Locke (1689), "Of Identity and Diversity" (Ch. XXVII), §10, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1995), 247.

> person that did those actions, had those thoughts that I once was conscious of, though I have now forgot them?"[270]

In other words, the problem is that if we assume that the identity of persons is assessed based on the continuity of memory, the consequence is that any part of our life from which we have no memories – during sleep, times we are unconscious, etc. – is not part of who we are. However, we normally do assume that we persist even when we are asleep or unconscious, when we are in states from which we have no memories.

Parfit's reformulation of the criterion is designed to address this issue by including psychological connections other than memories and by introducing the idea of psychological continuity, which can bridge lost strong psychological connections. Nevertheless, David Shoemaker shows how a similar problem can arise with regard to Parfit's psychological criterion. As a counter-example to the view that psychological continuity accounts for personal identity, Shoemaker discusses the unfortunate scenario of permanent vegetative state, a disorder in which patients with severe brain damage are in a wakeful unconscious state. He writes:

> [S]uppose I were in a horrible accident and went into a permanent vegetative state (PVS). Wouldn't *I* then be in a PVS? If so, then if personhood necessarily involves having a certain sort of developed psychology (e.g., a psychology capable, at the least, of self-reflection), it can't be my essence; instead, being a person would be like being a child, or a teenager, something one becomes and may also outlive (called a "phase sortal" in the literature).[271]

This version of the problem, as the others, points at the problem that unconscious states pose for psychological criteria of identity. How would Vasubandhu have reacted to this problem? In the *AKBh*, a similar issue arises in two cases, in which the mental

[270] Ibid., "Of Identity and Diversity" (Ch. XXVII), §20, 252.

[271] David Shoemaker, "Personal Identity and Ethics," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/identity-ethics (accessed May 9, 2016).

stream is interrupted and stops operating for a period of time. One is the state of existence which is called "the state of no-cognition" (*āsaṃjñika)*, and the other is a high meditational achievement which is called "the attainment of no-cognition" (*asaṃjñi-samāpatti*). As the names indicate, the difference between the two is that the former is a state of existence (like the existence of a human being or an animal), whereas the latter is a meditative experience. Both of them, in any case, are described as involving the cessation of mind and the factors that accompany the mind.[272] Vasubandhu adds that the beings who are born into the state of no-cognition, have cognition at birth and at the time of their death, before they pass into a new state of existence.[273] In between, they lack cognition. Their state is compared to a state of sleeping: "Then [when their time in

[272] *AKBh* II:41bc, p. 68: ***āsaṃjñikam asaṃjñiṣu*** / ***nirodhaś cittacaittānāṃ*** *asaṃjñisattveṣu deveṣūpapannānāṃ yaś* ***cittacaittānāṃ nirodhas*** *tad āsaṃjñikaṃ nāma dravyaṃ yena cittacaittā anāgate 'dhvani kālāntaraṃ saṃnirudhyante notpattuṃ labhante* / *nadītoyasaṃnirodhavat*. *AKBhT* Ku 74b6-7: *'du shes med pa pa 'du shes/ /med par sems dang sems byung rnams/ /'gog pa'o/ /'du shes med pa'i lha rnams kyi nang du skye ba dag gi sems dang sems las byung ba rnams 'gog pa gang yin pa de ni 'du shes med pa pa zhes bya ba'i rdzas yin te/ gang gis ma 'ongs pa'i dus kyi sems dang sems las byung ba rnams dus gzhan gyi bar du klung gi chu 'gog pa bzhin du 'gog cing skyer mi ster ba'o/ /* "The state of no-cognition is the cessation of mind and mental concomitants in those who are without cognition. The cessation of mind and mental concomitants gained among the gods who are beings without cognition is the ultimate entity called 'the state of no-cognition', by which future mind and mental concomitants are obstructed at another time [and are] unable to be produced, like the obstruction of water in a river"; *AKBh* II42a, p. 69: ***tathā 'saṃjñisamāpattiḥ*** *asaṃjñināṃ samāpattir asaṃjñā vety asaṃjñisamāpattiḥ / sā 'pi cittacaittānāṃ nirodhaḥ. AKBhT* Ku 75a6-7: *de bzhin 'du shes med snyoms 'jug / 'du shes med pa rnams kyi snyoms par 'jug pa'am 'du shes med pa can yin pas 'du shes med pa'i snyoms par 'jug pa ste/ de yang sems dang sems las byung ba rnams kyi 'gog pa yin no/ /* "Similarly, [as the state of no-cognition] the attainment of no-cognition. The attainment of no-cognition is the attainment of those who are without cognition, or [the attainment which is with] no cognition. This, as well, is the cessation of mind and mental concomitants."

[273] *AKBh* II:41d, p. 68: *kiṃ punas tenaiva kadācit saṃjñino bhavanti* / *bhavanty upapattikāle cyutikāle ca. AKBhT* Ku 75a1-2: *ci de dag nam yang 'du shes can du mi 'gyur ram zhe na/ skye ba'i dus dang 'chi 'phos pa'i dus na 'gyur te/* "Do [the persons at the state of no-cognition, *asaṃjñisattvāḥ*] ever become cognizing? They become [cognizing] at the time of birth and at the time of perishing." (*AKBhT*: "Do they [the persons at the state of no-cognition, *asaṃjñisattvāḥ*] never become cognizing?")

the state of no-cognition ends], as if awoken from a long sleep, they perish and arrive at the realm of desire and not anywhere else".[274]

Here a question, which is relevant to our topic, arises with regard to the resuming of the mental activity, after it has been interrupted: "How then does it happen that the mind arises again from a mind that has been interrupted for a long time?"[275] Vasubandhu's reply shows his unique way of addressing this problem through his psycho-physical causality, which relies on the theory of seeds:[276]

> The teachers of the past said: "How does it happen that in the case of the material body of those who have reached [the realm of] immateriality – [a material body] which has ceased for a long time – material body arises again? It arises again from [the continuity of] the mind, and not from the material body. Likewise, the mind, too, arises again from [the continuity of] the material body together with its sense organs, and not from the mind. It is thus: the two, the mind and the material body with its sense organs, are the seeds of each other".[277]

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[274] Ibid.: *te ca tato dīrghasvapnavyutthitā iva cyutvā kāmadhātāv upapadyante nānyatra. AKBhT* Ku 75a2-3: *de dag kyang yun ring por gnyid kyis log pa las sangs pa bzhin du de nas shi 'phos nas* […] *'dod pa'i khams su skye bar 'gyur te/ gzhan du ni ma yin no/ /*

[275] *AKBh* II:44d, p. 72: *katham idānīṃ bahukālaṃ niruddhāc cittāt punar api cittaṃ jāyate?*

[276] The reply that I consider here is but one of several competing views that are mentioned in the *AKBh* as partaking in the Buddhist debate on this topic. Paul Griffiths surveys the different opinions and consults the commentaries by Yaśomitra and Sthiramati in his article "On Being Mindless: The Debate on the Reemergence of Consciousness from the Attainment of Cessation in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* and Its Commentaries," *Philosophy East and West* 33, no. 4 (1983): 379-394. The same issue in the Pāli *sutta*s and the thought of Buddhaghosa is discussed in Peter Harvey, "The Mind-Body Relationship in Pāli Buddhism: A Philosophical Investigation," *Asian Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (1993): 29-41. The problem is put in a wider context and its solution in Vasubandhu's *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa* is examined in Stefan Anacker, "Vasubandhu's *Karmasiddhiprakaraṇa* and the Problem of the Highest Meditations," *Philosophy East and West* 22, no. 3 (1972): 257-258. Griffiths understands the cited sections as referring to the problem of the attainment of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*), a similar meditative state, which I do not discuss here but is addressed by Vasubandhu in the same section of the *AKBh*. On this state see the comprehensive study of Griffiths: Paul Griffiths, *On Being Mindless: Buddhist Meditation and the Body-Mind Problem* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1986), esp. pp. 31-75.

[277] Ibid.: *kathaṃ tāvad ārūpyopapannānāṃ ciraniruddhe 'pi rūpe punar api rūpaṃ jāyate / cittād eva hi taj jāyate, na rūpāt / evaṃ cittam apy asmād eva sendriyāt kāyāj jāyate na cittāt / anyonyabījakaṃ hy etad ubhayaṃ yaduta cittaṃ ca sendriyaś ca kāya iti* ***pūrvācāryāḥ****. AKBhT* Ku 77b7-78a2: *sngon gyi slob dpon gzhan dag na re ni re zhig gzugs med par skyes pa rnams kyi gzugs 'gags nas ring du lon na yang gzugs ji ltar skye zhe na/ de ni sems kho na las skye'i*

Vasubandhu starts, then, by discussing another problem of continuity, which arises with regard to the immaterial state of existence – a state, in which persons possess mental activity, but are devoid of a material body. This issue does not pose a problem for psychological criteria of identity, since the material body is not part of what determines our identity, but it does pose a problem for Vasubandhu, who sees the continuity of the person as the continuity of the stream of aggregates. In this case, according to Vasubandhu, the continuity of the body is supported by the continuity of the mind, and when the body reemerges, it does so on the basis of mental activity. The problem of psychological interruption is addressed in a similar way. What allows for the continuity of the person (or the stream of aggregates) in the absence of mental activity is the continuity of the respective material body with its sense organs, from which mental activity then reappears. Consequently, Vasubandhu may argue, when mental activity is missing, the identity of the person is maintained inasmuch as there is physical continuity.

This account may lead, of course, to a number of questions and objections, to which Vasubandhu needs to respond. One of the main problems, perhaps, is the issue of the connection between mental entities and physical entities: how can entities of different qualities produce each other?[278] This is a problem which Vasubandhu does not seem to consider in the *AKBh.*[279] In any case, his approach to the problem of the interruption of

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gzugs las ni ma yin/ de bzhin du sems kyang dbang po dang bcas pa'i lus 'di kho na las skye'i sems las ni ma yin te/ di lta ste; sems dang dbang po dang bcas pa'i lus gnyis ni phan tshun sa bon can yin no zhes zer ro/ /

[278] And indeed, this objection is brought up by Sthiramati in his commentary to the *AKBh*, alas, without a constructive attempt to address it. See Paul Griffiths, "On Being Mindless: The Debate on the Reemergence of Consciousness from the Attainment of Cessation in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* and Its Commentaries": 383-384.

[279] Paul Griffiths interprets the mind-body relations that are at work in Buddhism in light of the entirety of the debate (but contrary to the Sautrāntika view) as parallelism, "that view which states that physical and mental events run along in parallel streams, contemporaneous with each other but without causal connection, since it is not possible for events as radically different as the mental and the physical to causally influence one another." (Ibid.: 389).

mental activity enables him to account for personal identity in states of this kind. The person at the state of awareness is identical with the person at the unconscious state, because there is a continuity of the material body which sustains this person's identity. Vasubandhu concludes his explanation by quoting an old saying, which alludes to his theory of seeds: the mind and the body can serve as the seed – that is, as the cause – of each other. This, I believe, gives further support to my interpretation that Vasubandhu offers a psycho-physical criterion of identity, in which psychological continuity and physical continuity complement each other and in which both are essential parts of the criterion which determines the survival of the person.

The Psychological Criterion of Personal Identity Presupposes Identity

One of the earliest objections against the psychological criterion of identity, originally directed at Locke's memory criterion, is that the way it is formulated presupposes identity. That is, the claim that psychological connections are indicative of, or is an evidence for, personal endurance involves the fallacy of begging the question in that the notion of personal identity it relies on assumes that psychological connection constitutes identity. Simply put, it assumes that one can remember only one's own memories, that one can act only on one's own earlier intentions. This objection was famously raised by Joseph Butler, who wrote:

> But though consciousness of what is past does thus ascertain our personal identity to ourselves… one should really think it self-evident, that consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute, personal identity; any more than knowledge, in any other case, can constitute truth which it presupposes… though present consciousness of what we at present do and feel is necessary to our being the persons we now are, yet present consciousness of past actions or feelings is not necessary to

> our being the same persons who performed those actions, or had those feelings.[280]

What Butler argues is that having a consciousness of the past does not necessarily mean that that remembered past is "mine". All it shows is that I remember someone's, or maybe just some, past action, experience or feeling.

To avoid this fallacy, Parfit introduces the concept of quasi-memory, which is not committed to the assumption that one's memories can only be of one's own experiences. He explains the concept of quasi-memories as follows:

> I have an accurate quasi-memory of a past experience if (1) I seem to remember having an experience, (2) *someone* did have this experience, and (3) my apparent memory is causally dependent, in the right kind of way, on that past experience.
>
> On this definition, ordinary memories are a sub-class of quasi-memories. They are quasi-memories of our own past experiences.
>
> We do not quasi-remember other people's past experiences. But we might begin to do so.[281]

Thus, Parfit's solution is to cast off the assumption of identity from the concept of memory, in order that it can now stand on its own.

Vasubandhu's philosophical position is somewhat different. In the first place, the assumption that psychological continuity, much like agential continuity, entails personal identity is a given, which is presented by his philosophical opponents. It should be remembered that Vasubandhu's opponent claims for the existence of an enduring self by arguing that certain psychological, agential and physical continuous processes, which are ordinarily attributed to an enduring self, occur in reality and need to be accounted for. Thus, in Vasubandhu's case, the seed-fruit relations (Relations-B) is

[280] Joseph Butler, "Of Personal Identity," in *The Analogy of Religion* (London: Printed for John and Paul Knapton, at the Crown in Ludgate Street, 1736), 314.

[281] Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 220.

indicative of personal endurance, because it explains how personal identity – which, it is already accepted, involves connections of memory, recognition and so on – is constituted under a no-self premise. In other words, in the context in which Vasubandhu writes, the concepts of memory, recognition, *karman* and so forth already presuppose personal identity (and in fact, Vasubandhu is accused by his philosophical opponents of presupposing too little, not too much).

At the same time, as I understand Vasubandhu, his account of the person and the agent explains why it makes sense for a criterion of personal identity to depart from the presupposition that there is personal identity. First, for Vasubandhu, one of the initial premises is that as human beings, we experience the world conventionally through the lens of continuous persons, persons who are identical with themselves over time. This is true both for the way we psychologically experience others and the way we experience "ourselves". This means, that on the conventional level, personal identity is a given, or one could say, an axiom – and this given is not denied.

Secondly, the conventional concepts on the basis of which we attribute identity to persons, are not arbitrary but rather correspond to those ultimate causal processes that for Vasubandhu are the basis for the criterion of identity, that is, processes like remembering, recognizing past objects, *karmic* retribution and so on. That is the concepts which underlie the criterion of identity may presuppose personal identity, because there is an agreement between them.

Finally, Vasubandhu suggests that the kind of causality that operates within one stream of aggregates is essentially different from other types of causality, such as the causality that holds between two different streams of aggregates, that is, between two different people. As pointed out earlier in this chapter he claims that one person will not remember something that another person experienced, "because of the lack of [causal]

connection". According to him, "there is no connection between the two, due to the absence of cause and effect relation, such as the one which connects between two [mind moments] of one stream".[282]

It may be argued, however, that this last claim is in itself weak, since it is exposed to the same objection with which we are dealing here. That is, if Vasubandhu's criterion of identity relies on a concept of causality which is said to connect exclusively mind moments within one single stream of aggregates, then part of this concept is that streams of aggregates can only be connected with themselves. Or in other words, Vasubandhu claims that the causality, which indicates that a person *X* is continuous with a person *Y*, can only connect the same stream of aggregates, and this, it may be argued, is begging the question.

Yet, Vasubandhu could reply that identifying the right type of causality is a necessary condition for formulating a criterion of identity. If we want to be able to tell under which conditions two persons are one the same person, we must distinguish between types of causality and reveal which type of causality operates within one stream of aggregates. There is no need to remove the assumption of identity; rather, philosophers need to identify the right type of causality for identity. This type of causality, he might add, is the seed-fruit causality, which by definition does not connect different persons, hence indicates personal identity.

The Unity of Agency

As discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, some strong philosophical objections against Parfit's reductionism come from Christine Korsgaard, who argues that Parfit's

[282] See fn. 268 above.

view of the person undermines moral agency. She places emphasis on the practical requirement that the moral agent be unified in order to act and on the implication that in reductionism, persons become passive experiencers, who lack agency. Let me deal with each of the two objections in turn. With regard to the unification of the agent, Korsgaard argues:

> Your conception of yourself as a unified agent is not based on a metaphysical theory, nor on a unity of which you are conscious. Its grounds are practical, and it has two elements. First, there is the raw necessity of eliminating conflict among your various motives… You are a unified person at any given time because you must act, and you have only one body with which to act.
>
> The second element of this pragmatic unity is the unity implicit in the standpoint from which you deliberate and choose. It may be that what actually happens when you make a choice is that the strongest of your conflicting desires wins. But that is not the way you think of it when you deliberate. When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all your desires, something that is you, and that chooses which one to act on.[283]

Korsgaard argues that from a practical point of view, one has reasons for regarding oneself as the same rational agent over time. One practical reason is the eliminating of conflict among competing desires, intentions and so on. Another practical reason is the deliberating standpoint, which requires the agent to identify with an enduring unifying self.

Vasubandhu's theory of agency sheds a new light on these claims and offers an alternative account, which explains how these practical requirements are met. The first requirement is addressed by the mechanism which underlies the seed-fruit causality. This mechanism, as I showed in Chapter 3 above, is designed to resolve conflicts among mind moments of different moral quality, both synchronically and diachronically. Therefore, I think it is safe to say that Vasubandhu was aware of

[283] Christine M. Korsgaard, "Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit": 109-110.

potential inner conflicts. Although his emphasis is on conflicts between moral qualities of mind moments, the mechanism of seeds addresses conflicts that endanger both the synchronic and diachronic unity of the agent in general. As agents, we have indeed various, and even conflicting, intentions and desires, and we may deliberate and struggle for a long amount of time before acting on any of them. But at the moment of acting, only one seed is actualized. Like our desires, intentions and reasons to act, the way this specific seed is actualized is not random, but is regulated by rules, which form coherency and consistency: the seeds, which are the more numerous (*bahutara*) or "heavy" (*guru*), the more intense (*paṭutara*) or repetitious (*abhyasta*), and the most recent (*āsannatara*), are actualized first. It is, therefore, in contrast to Korsgaard first premise, simply unnecessary to assert an independent self as an arbitrator.

Vasubandhu's account also shows that Korsgaard's second demand does not require that one thinks of oneself as a unified agent. It is true, as I showed in Chapter 2, that for an agential convention as self-interested concern for the future, one needs to assume an enduring identity. But the reason is motivational: this identification is required in order to provide a rationale to act for the future out of self-interest. The pure act of deliberation, on the other hand, does not require an enduring self. All that it requires is a mind moment which consists in the sense of individuality – like the one that Vasubandhu explains to be "inflicted by ignorance, pervaded by the primordial 'sense of individuality' and whose object is its own stream of aggregates". The presence of such a mind moment is sufficient to give rise to the feeling that Korsgaard identifies and describes by saying that "it is as if there were something over and above all your desires, something that is you". However, the "self" who chooses how to act ("I shall do such and such an action") does not need to actually be "over and above" the conflicting desires. The mind moment which gives the sense of individuality, according to

Vasubandhu, is at the same level as the competing desires and intentions. Like them, it is momentary, takes part in the constant change that the stream of aggregates undergoes and functions according to the causal principles of the theory of seeds. And that is all that is necessary, from a practical point of view, to establish the unity of the agent and the standpoint of deliberation.

Korsgaard's second objection is that Parfit's reductionism turns the person into a center of passive experiences. Agency thus becomes yet another experience, and in doing so, Parfit deprives the person of his agency. In Korsgaard's words, "I believe that Parfit's arguments depend on viewing the person primarily as a locus of experience, and agency as a form of experience" (p.103). She elaborates:

> From the theoretical standpoint, an action may be viewed as just another experience, and the assertion that it has a subject may be, as Parfit says, "because of the way we talk." But from the practical point of view, actions and choices must be viewed as having agents and choosers. This is what makes them, in our eyes, our own actions and choices rather than events that befall us… This does not mean that our existence as agents is asserted as a further fact, or requires a separately existing entity that should be discernible from the theoretical point of view. It is rather that from the practical point of view our relationship to our actions and choices is essentially authorial: from it, we view them as our own. I believe that when we think about the way in which our own lives matter to us personally, we think of ourselves in this way. We think of living our lives, and even of having our experiences, as something that we do. And it is this important feature of our sense of our identity that Parfit's account leaves out. (pp. 120-121)

I think that the debate in the *ĀVP* is sensitive to exactly these kinds of intuitions, and as a result Vasubandhu's reductionist view offers an agent-centered conception of personal identity, as much as it consists in the experiencing aspect of personhood. I have already explained in detail how I see the role of action and agency in Vasubandhu's conception of the person, when I discussed his criterion of personal identity earlier in this chapter and his account for the relation between agents and their action in Chapter 4. Hence, I will not develop this point here again. I will just say, that by responding to his

philosophical opponent's practical concerns regarding the continuity of action, the retribution of actions and so on, Vasubandhu's conception of the person seems to anticipate the objections raised by Korsgaard in this regard and to set forth a view which denies the self as an ultimately existing "further fact", but which acknowledges, at the same time, that actions matter to who we are and that they are an important factor in shaping our personhood. By incorporating agency into his reductionist view of the person, Vasubandhu immediately responds to this group of objections raised by Korsgaard

Commitment to Ethics

In what way is it possible for an agent to stay moral over time without having an enduring self? How can the agent uphold his promises and moral commitment, when his continuity relies on changing psychological relations? These are the questions that Daniel Palmer asks in his article on Parfit's reductionist view and the effects it has on our consideration of moral commitment.[284] I have described Palmer's take on these problems in details in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Let me shortly summarize his qualms, before examining Vasubandhu's view on the matter. Provided that deliberation concerning morality relies not on enduring personal identity, but on psychological continuity and connectedness, which come in degrees and decay over time, argues Palmer, our moral commitment will also be subject to degrees and decay. This, however, goes against the notions of promise and moral commitment, which by definition last over time, through personal changes and without decaying. Palmer explains the problem as follows:

[284] Daniel E. Palmer, "Parfit, the Reductionist View, and Moral Commitment"

> The real problem here is that if commitments such as promises are to have any practical hold over us, we must take them as having two features. First, the force of a promise holds precisely in so far as we suppose that it will hold through various changes in psychological character. Indeed, the primary reason that we ask others to make promises is in order to assure ourselves that they will remain committed in spite of such psychological changes…
>
> Second, I would maintain that common moral deliberation presupposes that promises and other commitments cannot be degenerate in the way that Parfit's View entails that they are. That is, if commitments are to practically have any hold over us we cannot suppose that they change their degree of strength over time.

Vasubandhu discusses a similar problem in the Chapter on *karman*, where he is asked by a proponent of the Sarvāstivāda school, how restraint, which is a form of moral obligation, is maintained without presupposing the existence of an ultimate entity (*dravya*), which is the restraint (the proponent accepts the view that an enduring self does not exist). Vasubandhu replies in the following way:

> [Observing] the *pratimokṣa* restraint may also be possible [without the non-informative matter]. That volition (*cetanā*) with which the promise (*abhyupagama*) has been made in accordance with the ceremony restrains the body or speech from [performing] a prohibited action.
>
> You might say that another [later] mind moment would not be restrained [and hence the agent would not keep his moral commitment]. This is not so. Because of its proximity [*AKVy*: the presence of the volition which restrains the body and mind] in the memory [*AKVy*: "I have abstained from taking life and so forth"] at the time of acting [*AKVy*: when the thought of taking life and so forth approaches] through its cultivation [*AKVy*: the cultivation of the mental stream], there would also be the state of a dike (*setu-bhāva*): having called to mind repeatedly the vow to avoid the action (*akriyāṃ pratijñāṃ*) he is ashamed so as not to create a bad disposition, and this itself is the purport of its undertaking (*samādāna*).[285]

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[285] *AKBh* IV:4ab, p. 199: *prātimokṣasaṃvaro 'pi syāt yayā cetanayā vidhipūrvaṃ kṛtvā 'bhyupagamaḥ pratiṣiddhāt karmaṇaḥ kāyavācau saṃvṛṇoti / anyacitto na saṃvṛtaḥ syād iti cet / na / tadbhāvanayā kriyākāle smarataḥ tatpratyupasthānāt setubhāvo 'pi syād akriyāṃ pratijñāṃ saṃsmṛtya saṃsmṛtya lajjito dauḥśīlyākaraṇāt ityartham eva ca tasyāḥ samādānam. AKBhT* Ku 171b6-172a1: *so sor thar pa'i sdom par yang 'gyur te, sems pa gang gis cho ga sngon du btang ba'i khas blangs te las bkag nas lus dang ngag dag sdom par byed do/ /gal te sems gzhan dang ldan na ma bsdams par 'gyur ro zhe na, ma yin te/ de la goms par byas pa'i dus su dran pa nye bar gnas pa'i phyir ro/ /chu lon gyi ngo bor yang 'gyur te, ngo tsa shes pas mi bya bar dam/ /bcas pa yang dag par dran zhing yang dag par dran nas 'chal pa'i tsul khrims mi byed pa'i phyir te/ de lta bu kho na'i don du de yang dag par len pa yang yin no*; *AKVy* IV:4b, p. 589: *vidhipūrvam iti / śīlagrahaṇavidhipūrvaṃ / anyacitto na saṃvṛtaḥ syād iti cet / yadi sā*

To explain how moral commitment is possible – and in what sense it is possible – without asserting an enduring self or an ultimate entity of "commitment" (that is, restraint/ *saṃvara*, in the terms of the *AKBh*), Vasubandhu draws on two of the theories I have surveyed: the theory of seeds and the theory of *karman*. First, keeping promises relies on the working of memory. When the agent faces a situation, in which he ought to act according to his moral values, this situation triggers a recollection of the promise to act morally. This recollection, then, leads the agent to follow his moral commitment. The way in which recollection and memory function is explained by the seed-fruit causality. Therefore, the various principles that explain how past experiences give rise to memory or recollection also explain what it means to be committed to ethics. In short, the commitment to ethics is a seed, which remains dormant until the right conditions arise (facing a situation which requires a moral reaction). Then, it yields the fruit in the form of a memory, which dictates acting according to the moral principles. As a dormant seed it takes part in the cumulative causal energy (*śakti*, *sāmarthya*) of the totality of seeds in the stream of aggregates.

From another perspective, the commitment to ethics is a volition (*cetanā*), which materializes in the form of a mental resolution, such as "I shall avoid from such and such an action". As such, it serves as the conceptual volition (*saṃkalpa-cetanā*) for the moral action (or restraint from immoral action) and can explain, according to the principles of Vasubandhu's action theory, how they manifest, that is, how the commitment is kept. In short, again, the commitment to ethics (for example, "I shall avoid killing") is a "conceptual volition" which propels the series of actions that lead

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cetanā saṃvaraḥ / tasmāc cetanācittād anyacitto na saṃvṛtaḥ syāt yathā cetanā yā kāyavācau saṃvṛṇoti nāsau tadānīm astīti / na tadbhāvanayeti vistaraḥ / naitad evaṃ / tadbhāvanayā cittasaṃtānabhāvanayā kriyākāle prāṇātipātādicitte pratyupasthite smarataḥ ahaṃ prāṇātipātādibhyaḥ prativirata iti pratyupasthitasmṛteḥ / tatpratyupasthānād yayā cetanayā kāyavācau saṃvṛṇoti / tasyāḥ sammukhībhāvāt.

eventually, when the appropriate conditions come into being (one faces a situation, in which one can choose to kill or to avoid from killing), to a "volition of doing" (*kriyā cetanā*; to avoid killing in that particular situation). The action that ensues corresponds with the two volitions, and the agent restraints himself and avoids from killing.

What I find interesting in this account of moral commitment is that it is comprehensive in such a way as to also explain cases in which the agent fails to keep his moral commitment. In keeping with Vasubandhu's account of memory, there might be situations in which the complete set of conditions for the arising of the memory will not be present and consequently, the agent will fail to remember his commitment. Additionally, certain factors may be present that will prevent the agent's commitment to his moral principles. I suggest that similar to the person who dies on the way to the village, and consequently does not arrive there, in spite of his initial resolution, so also certain conflicting desires or emotional patterns may come in the way and overcome the obligation, causing the agent to break his commitments to ethics. It is part of the reality of moral agency that people change their minds, forget what they promised years or decades ago, or face dilemmas which require that they deviate from their original commitment. Thus, Palmer's conception of moral commitment as something that cannot degenerate and holds through changes seems to me too rigid; in reality, commitments do degenerate under certain circumstances and not always survive changes in the personality of the agent – but this also follows certain patterns. A good theory of agency should be able to accommodate also these cases. I think that the theory that Vasubandhu offers does that successfully.

In conclusion, Vasubandhu's understanding of agency sheds new light on some of the issues in relation with the subject of personal identity and ethics, which have been debated by contemporary Western philosophers in recent works. Through elaborating

on the way in which actions take place, on the relation between the conventional person and the elements the person is reduced to, and on the way in which the continuity of the person is achieved without an enduring self, Vasubandhu spells out a different type of criterion of identity and is able to respond to philosophical problems, which arise in ethics following the reductionist move, in different ways than those considered by contemporary philosophers.

Conclusion

In the current study I was interested to understand how philosophies that hold a reductionist view in respect to persons and deny the existence of an enduring self handle the question of how, and in what sense, being a moral agent is possible. Over the course of the dissertation this question has been examined in the framework of Vasubandhu's Abhidharmic thought from several angles and with reference to various doctrinal principles. I suggested that methodologically speaking, Vasubandhu aims – particularly in the *ĀVP* – to retain our conventional concept of agency "as is", but seeks to explain it using impersonal language and impersonal metaphysics. What Vasubandhu is forced to give up, however, is explaining agency without reference to impersonal psychology, or put simply, without assuming a sense of a separate and enduring identity that is held by the agent.

To understand how Vasubandhu explains selfless agency, the study dwelled on three key doctrines and their relationship to agency, and to personhood in general: the model of the five aggregates (*skandha*), the theory of seeds (*bīja*) and the mechanism of action, or *karman*. When Vasubandhu reduces the person (and the agent) into basic entities, he does so on the basis of the five aggregates. A person is a stream of aggregates, designated by a name. Vasubandhu utilizes this model to explain how conventions of agency are made possible without an enduring self. An agential event is an event which occurs within one or more of the aggregates that constitute the stream, and which is then attributed to the person who is designated on the basis of the aggregates. The picture that emerges from this explanation is of two notions of agents: the conventional agent is the person to whom the agential act or event is conventionally attributed; the ultimate

agent, at the same time, is the primary cause of the agential event, a special mind moment, which precedes the action or event in the stream of aggregates.

This reductionist account, while clarifying certain points, raises other questions. One important set of questions concerns the unity of the agent: what unifies the various ultimate causes into one concerted agent? What coordinates them synchronically and diachronically? And what accounts for the agent's identity over time? The first clause of the question has been answered in part by Vasubandhu's description of the conventional agent. There is a sense in which agents are unified by virtue of the name they are given. However, the question of unification is primarily a metaphysical one. I showed that in the *AKBh* Vasubandhu addresses the metaphysical question by applying the theory of seeds. The mechanism that this theory describes organizes the various agential and non-agential events in a person without the guiding hand of an independent self. The mechanism coordinates the myriad events synchronically (enabling incompatible factors to be accommodated by the same person at the same time), diachronically (enabling the various factors to occur one after the other coherently and without causing a conflict), and morally (allowing wholesome and unwholesome states to be present synchronically and follow each other diachronically).

In addition to coordinating the various factors, the causal relations that this operating mechanism produces unify the person in a causal way. The mechanism expressed by the theory of seeds constitutes a moral unification, due to the fact that the relations of seeds and fruits carry with them a moral quality, and also an agential unification, as the relations of seeds and fruits are mediated by the "special mind moment" or "special transformation of the stream of aggregates", which, according to Vasubandhu, is the ultimate agent. Thus, the person is deconstructed by being reduced to more basic facts,

with an emphasis on facts of agency, but at the same time, is reconstructed again into a metaphysically and epistemologically coordinated agent.

The question then arises, how do agents (both on the ultimate and on the conventional level) stand in relation to action? And prior to that, what *is* selfless action? These questions, I suggested, are addressed by the mechanism of *karman*. Vasubandhu reduces actions to their basic temporal parts and asserts that of the different parts, the core of the action is the conceptual volition that sets it in motion. The action is actualized, however, through a second volition, the volition of doing. The two volitions correlate with two types of causes that Vasubandhu describes: the conceptual volition correlates with what Vasubandhu calls "causal origination" and the volition of doing correlates with "the origination in the moment". On this view of action, I suggested, the ultimate agent is tantamount to the volition of doing, i.e. the origination in the moment. The conceptual volition or causal origination, at the same time, fits well within the conceptual framework provided by the theory of seeds as the "seed", which gives rise to the "fruit", the action. The conventional agent takes part, as well, in the process of action, on this view. The conceptual volition is described as consisting in a resolution to act, which is articulated by employing the first-person pronoun "I". Thus, the conventional agent participates in the action as the conceptual and psychological element of the first cause of action.

To conclude, the selfless theory of agency that Vasubandhu develops integrates a number of philosophical doctrines and theories. These explain the many aspects of being a moral agent under a no-self thesis, starting from how our ordinary concepts of agency and agent make sense, through a metaphysical elucidation of the working of action and the mechanism that unifies the agent, and up to the psychology of agency and acting.

Vasubandhu's methodological approach of trying to adhere to the ordinary view of moral agency, recasting it as little as possible has its benefits – primarily, it allows us to make sense of moral agency of ordinary beings in the different stages of the spiritual path up to liberation – but it also has its drawbacks. One major flaw in this strategy is that it tends to neglect the sense of agency in spiritual stages, which transcend the ordinary elements that Vasubandhu includes in his theory, such as the ordinary identification with an enduring self, the pre-liberated mode of acting that is subject the law of *karman,* or the causality that regulates the life in *saṃsāra* and which *nirvāṇa* is said to be free of. This raises all the many questions that relate to what Jay Garfield terms "awakened action":[286] how do practitioners beyond training (*aśaikṣa*) or perfected beings (*arhat*) come to act? Why do they undertake actions for the future, normatively speaking? What accounts for their agential unity? Are they to be considered as moral agents, at all? These questions, to the best of my knowledge, do not receive answers in the *AKBh.*

Drawing on the picture that emerges from the study, I would contend that perfected beings do not satisfy the conditions for being a moral agent in Vasubandhu's sense of moral agency. It seems that the agency of perfected beings is precluded both conventionally and ultimately. First, perfected beings are said to be free from any deluded conception of an "I' or a "self", which fulfils an essential part of what is required for being a conventional agent (i.e. acting), and this rules out the possibility that perfected beings are agents in the conventional sense of the term. At the same time, the state of *nirvāṇa* or cessation (*nirodha*) is said to be unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), that

[286] Jay L. Garfield, "Hey, Buddha! Don't Think! Just Act!—A Response to Bronwyn Finnigan," *Philosophy East and West* 61, no. 1 (2011): 174-183.

is, free from having a cause or an effect[287] – and this rules out also the possibility that perfected beings partake in agency in the ultimate sense of the term. It seems, therefore, that from the point of view of Vasubandhu's theory of agency, perfected beings do not meet the conditions to be agents.[288]

This picture seems to accord with Garfield's suggestion that in Buddhist theory, buddhas are not moral agents at all;[289] his claim that "Buddhist ethics is all about what an ordinary being needs to do to become a Buddha… But a buddha has already accomplished this," and that consequently, "a buddha is neither an agent nor a subject of ethical assessment, and so is not a moral agent" seems to be confirmed by the Vasubandhvian account of moral agency as I sketched it in the present study. If this hypothesis accurately reflects what Vasubandhu thinks about moral agency, then the validity and applicability of concepts of agency, as well as of the theory of agency that emerges from the *AKBh*, is limited to the stages of the spiritual path prior to liberation. In any case, I believe that these points require further contemplation and deeper investigation, that I hope will be carried out in further studies.

The second purpose of this work was to examine how agency, as conceived in the *AKBh*, can enter into dialogue with Western reductionist accounts of persons. Drawing on some of the main features of Vasubandhu's theory of agency, I claimed that in light of the latter, a reductionist interpretation of Vasubandhu is more plausible than an

[287] The notions of *nirvāṇa* and of cessation are, naturally, much more complex than the way I present them here, and in fact receive various interpretations in the Abhidharma thought. For a developed and more comprehensive presentation of these ideas, see Bhikkhu KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, Third Revised Edition* (Hong Kong: Centre of Buddhist Studies, The University of Honk Kong, 2007), 613-648; Louis de la Vallée Poussin and Gelong Lodrö Sangpo Vasubandhu, trans., *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and its (Auto) Commentary*, pp. 340-343, n. 64 and 65.

[288] Cf. Maria Heim, *The Forerunner of All Things: Buddhaghosa on Mind, Intention, and Agency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 63-65, who finds indications in the Pāli Canon and the Theravāda writings for the pure activity of *arhat*s, perfected beings (activity which does not produce *karman* and suffering).

[289] Jay L. Garfield, "Hey, Buddha! Don't Think! Just Act!—A Response to Bronwyn Finnigan,": 183, n. 3

eliminativist interpretation. Furthermore, as a reductionist and impersonal account of moral agency, Vasubandhu's theory can participate in current debates on moral issues, and shed new light on certain issues, sometimes by reformulating the question. The ways in which Vasubandhu's theory fills the gap between the no-self thesis and the requirements of moral agency can fit in well with the current study of the topic.

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Appendix: Summary of Results

(1) Chapter 1 analyzes Derek Parfit's reductionist view of personal identity and its implications for agency under the premises of his thesis, particularly, that persons lack an enduring personal identity. This examination reveals that Parfit's reductionism leads to various conceptual, metaphysical and practical problems with respect to moral agency and that Parfit, as well as other philosophers, pointed at, and attempted to resolve, some of these problems in contemporary literature.

(2) Chapter 2 examines the argumentation that Vasubandhu employs in order to establish the possibility of moral agency under the Buddhist principle of no-self. According to the findings, Vasubandhu relies primarily on the Buddhist model of the five aggregates, but in certain cases, also refers to the deluded sense of self, which normally indicates an identification with a self.

(3) Chapter 3 inspects the question of how Buddhism, and Vasubandhu in particular, addresses the issue of person identity over time. This reveals that the most comprehensive theory used by Vasubandhu to this end is the theory of seeds. The identity of persons over time depicted in this way, involves an inherent dimension of agential and moral identity.

(4) The subject-matter of Chapter 4 is the relationship between moral agents and moral actions. According to the examination, the relationship between the two is dealt with in Vasubandhu's articulation of the theory of *karman*. The nature of the relation is such, that the ultimate agent is understood as the volition and origination in the moment of the agential event, whereas the conventional agent participates in the action through the notion of "I" in the initial volition that leads to the agential event.

(5) Chapter 5 examines Vasubandhu's view of personal identity through the lens of modern Western theories of identity. The comparison suggests that Vasubandhu's view of persons is best understood as reductionism and that his criterion of identity is best understood as psycho-physical. These observations points to the possibility of employing elements from Vasubandhu's thought to address various philosophical problems contemplated by contemporary Western thinkers.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation has been composed independently by me and that all information derived from the published and unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and bibliographical list. As of the time of submitting this dissertation, no publications have been derived from it.

Oren Hanner