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# VASUBANDHU'S ILLUSION ARGUMENT AND THE PARASITISM OF ILLUSION UPON VERIDICAL EXPERIENCE

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Vasubandhu, an advocate of the idealist Yogācāra school of Buddhism, argues that the non-existence of external objects can be inferred from the appearance of non-existent things in perceptual illusion. The idealist view and the argument from illusion are criticized by Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara, proponents of the realist Nyāya school, on the grounds that illusory experience is parasitic upon veridical experience. I will first examine Vasubandhu's inference from illusion and then evaluate the Nyāya parasitism objections. I will argue that the parasitism objection successfully defeats Vasubandhu's argument, but does not decisively prove that the idealist view is false.

## *The Inference from Illusion*

The inference from illusion appears at the beginning of the *Vimśatikā*, where Vasubandhu states:

This is consciousness only, because there is the appearance of non-existent things, just as a person with cataracts sees non-existent hairs, moons, et cetera.<sup>1</sup>

Because of the dense, elliptical style of Vasubandhu's text, it is not immediately apparent how this amounts to an argument for idealism. It is, however, a positive inference, designed to establish conclusively that external objects do not exist. The example of perceptual illusion is not cited here merely to cast doubt on our other cognitions; it is cited as evidence supporting the unstated premise that everything that appears is non-existent outside the mind. It follows from the appearance of these seemingly external objects that they are merely appearances in the mind.

In order to see the force of this argument, one must first understand a few basic principles of Indian epistemology. A cognition is considered knowledge if and only if it is generated by a source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Inference and perception are accepted as sources of knowledge by both the Yogācāra school and their realist opponents (including Naiyāyikas as well as realist schools of Buddhism). In an inference, some inferential subject (*pakṣa*) is known to be qualified by the probandum (*sādhya*) through two other cognitions: (1) the cognition that the *pakṣa* is qualified by the prover (*hetu* or *sādhana*) and (2) the cognition of a universal pervasion (*vyāpti*) between the prover and the probandum (i.e., anything qualified by the prover is also

qualified by the probandum). These two cognitions produce a cognition of the *pakṣa* as qualified by the probandum, which is considered knowledge, given that cognitions (1) and (2) are *pramāṇa*-generated.

This inferential pattern can be illustrated by the standard example, the inference of fire on the mountain from the observation of smoke there:

- (1) Hp                      There is smoke on the mountain.
- (2) (x) (Hx → Sx)    Everywhere there is smoke there is fire.
- (3) Sp                      There is fire on the mountain.

The *pakṣa* (p) is the mountain, the prover (H) is smokiness, and the probandum (S) is being fiery. Both (1) and (2) in this example can be generated by perception. We know (1) because we see that there is smoke on the mountain. We know (2) because we have had perception of many examples where smoke and fire are found together and there are no known counterexamples.<sup>2</sup>

Although there are those who reject the possibility of knowledge of universal pervasion on the grounds that, given our inability to perceive every case, there remains the possibility of a counterexample,<sup>3</sup> both the Buddhists and the Nyāya school accept that a cognition of a pervasion is admissible as knowledge when there is one known positive correlation and there are no known counterexamples. Of course, observation of a single undisputed counterexample would show that the alleged pervasion does not hold. In that case, the inference is unsound and its conclusion cannot be considered knowledge. Such a counterexample cannot, however, come from within the inferential subject (*pakṣa*). The smoke on the mountain cannot be cited as a counterexample to the inference of fire from smoke on that very mountain!

Vasubandhu's inference follows the same inferential pattern. The inferential subject is "this," which refers to everything in the (allegedly external) world. The prover is "appearing." The pervasion, between "appearing" and "being non-existent outside the mind" (henceforth, NEOM), is not stated explicitly, but is implied by Vasubandhu's statement that the appearance of non-existent things is the reason for concluding that things in the world are mind-only. The argument can thus be reconstructed as follows:

- (1) Aw                      Things in the world appear.
- (2) (x)(Ax → Nx)    Everything that appears is NEOM.
- (3) Nw                      Things in the world are NEOM.

In this form, Vasubandhu's argument is problematic because it is not entirely clear what is included in the inferential subject. The commentary begins by stating that things in the three worlds are mind-only, so it is tempting to think that the word "this" in the inference refers literally to everything in the world.<sup>4</sup> However, in this interpretation the inferential subject would include the illusion example, depriving the pervasion of supporting evidence, given that the example cannot come from within the inferential subject. However, while Vasubandhu's goal is indeed to prove

that everything is mind-only, the *pakṣa* in this inference should be restricted to only those things that are alleged to be external to the mind. We all agree that illusions do not exist outside the mind; these are thus available as evidence. It is only allegedly external objects that still need to be proved to be mind-only.

Although the argument is formally valid, premise (2) would obviously be unacceptable to any realist and seems to clash with common sense. There is, however, some positive evidence in favor of (2), namely all examples of perceptual illusion. Vasubandhu mentions the example of a person with cataracts, who sees what seem to be hairs but which are merely mental images. There are also many other examples, such as dreams, hallucinations, mirages, and illusions, where there are appearances that we all agree are not caused by objects external to the mind. There is thus a large body of positive evidence in favor of the pervasion. The premise could, of course, be defeated by a single undisputed example of something that appears and that also exists outside the mind. A realist would surely want to cite as counterexamples things like the desk before me, maintaining that my cognitions are, in many cases, caused by objects external to the mind. Such examples, however, are not available as counterexamples in this inference, because the status of the desk (and everything else that is alleged to be external) is at issue here. The desk is contained within the *pakṣa*; citing it as a counterexample would be like trying to refute the pervasion between smoke and fire by citing the smoke on the mountain as a counterexample. Because it is in dispute whether or not my cognition of the desk is caused by an external object, it can hardly serve as a known example of a cognition caused by an external object.

Vasubandhu considers the objection that certain aspects of our experience are difficult to explain from his view that things do not exist outside the mind. He focuses on three key components of our experience:<sup>5</sup>

- (1) determination in time and space
- (2) intersubjectivity
- (3) causal efficacy

The realist theory holds that our cognitions are caused by objects external to the mind. This explains spatial, temporal, and causal regularity, as well as the fact that multiple cognizers can have the experience of a common object. I see my desk in the same place as yesterday because the desk continued to exist in the same place during the period between the perceptions. When others look at the desk they also have cognitions of the desk because a single object causes all of these cognitions. The reason I can sit at this desk and write is because it exists external to my mind, unlike the hallucination of a desk that cannot be used for writing. The external object explains all of these facts. The idealist theory rejects such external objects, and so the idealist owes us an explanation of these three facts of our experience.

Vasubandhu explains all of these aspects of our experience on the basis of karma. Our experience exhibits intersubjectivity and spatial, temporal, and causal regularity because past actions condition our current experience. In the storehouse

consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*), there is an accumulation of habit-energy (*vāsanā*) deposited by previous action. These give rise to moving consciousness (*pravṛtti-vijñāna*), where the mind takes on various forms that have the false appearance of being external.<sup>6</sup> The desk exhibits spatial and temporal continuity because my previous actions have produced such subliminal dispositions as give rise to cognitions that exhibit such continuity. The reason that many cognizers can see the same desk is that they have very similar karmic impressions, which harmonize just so as to produce the intersubjective experiences.<sup>7</sup> The desk is useful for writing because the same karma that gives rise to visual cognitions of the desk also gives rise (upon the exercise of desire) to such cognitions as are consistent with my sitting at the desk and writing. Indeed, Vasubandhu points out, even in a dream we can have the fulfillment of desire by an object that does not exist except as an appearance in the mind.<sup>8</sup> Life is like a very vivid and shared dream, whose coherence is the result of the karmic impressions of many past actions. In this way, the idealist can explain all three facts about our experience. Indeed, Vasubandhu insists, his theory is simpler, for he only posits one type of entity, while the realist must posit a whole realm of objects existing outside the mind in addition to the mind itself and all of its contents.<sup>9</sup>

To the objection that fulfillment of desire by objects in dreams is itself not a real fulfillment of desire, Vasubandhu responds that those who are dreaming do not know they are dreaming.<sup>10</sup> Objects in waking experience can fulfill a function within waking experience, and objects in dreams can fulfill a function within the dream. When one awakens from the dream, one sees that neither the object nor its fruit were real. When one wakes up to enlightenment, one realizes the same thing about waking experience. Our current waking experience will be sublated in *nirvāṇa* experience as our waking experience sublates the dream. I will argue that this analogy has mixed success as a defense of idealism. It shows that idealism is not impossible, but it cannot successfully refute the Nyāya objections to Vasubandhu's inference.

### *The Parasitism Objection to Idealism*

The basic intuition behind the parasitism objection is that illusory experience is in some way parasitic upon veridical experience. This intuition forms the basis for two different arguments against the idealist in the commentaries on the *Nyāya-Sūtra*. The first is a general argument against the coherence of the view that every cognition is illusory, and the second is a more narrow attack on the cogency of Vasubandhu's inference from illusion. We will first examine the broad objection to the idealist view.

The parasitism argument, as an attack on the idealist thesis that everything is mind-only, is based on a principle we can formulate as follows:

(P1) If a person S has an illusory experience of x, then S must have had a previous veridical cognition of x.

For instance, when I dream of a horse, this illusory experience is made possible by my previous veridical experiences of horses in the waking state. A memory impression (*saṃskāra*) made by the veridical experience is a necessary condition for the dream experience, because the dream experience is constructed out of the information contained in the memory impression. Vātsyāyana explains as follows:

An erroneous cognition . . . has for its basis a principal cognition (*pradhāna*). One has, for instance, the erroneous cognition, "This is a man," in a tree trunk, which is not a man, and such a cognition has for its basis a principal cognition. In fact [if it is supposed that] a man is never actually perceived, there can never be produced [an erroneous cognition] of a man in what is not a man.<sup>11</sup>

The principal cognition in this case is the previous veridical cognition of a man. This creates a memory impression that is later revived when the tree trunk (which has a similar shape) is cognized. The illusion is created because there is a fusion of these two cognitions. If (P1) is correct, then Vasubandhu's thesis that everything is an illusion would be impossible. If all cognitions were illusory, then there would be no memory impressions available to create the illusions, because there could be no principal cognitions to create the memory impressions.

It could be objected against this argument that sometimes objects appear in dreams that have never been experienced in waking life. For instance, one may dream of a unicorn, even though such a thing has never been observed in waking life. A defender of the Nyāya theory has a good response to this objection, however. The cognition of the unicorn in a dream is made possible by two principal cognitions, namely the cognition of a horse and the cognition of a horn. These are put together to produce the false cognition of the unicorn in a dream. False cognition thus requires a previous cognition of at least the parts of the thing falsely cognized. The Buddhist could argue that a cognition of any object can be produced out of a set of simple phenomenal qualities like blue and smooth, but there still must be the previous experience of these simple phenomenal qualities in order for the illusion to occur, and these, the Naiyāyika will insist, must not be illusory experiences.

Vasubandhu might complain that the Nyāya objection mischaracterizes his view. He does not say that the things we experience are illusory, only that their apparent property of being external to the mind is an illusion. A thing is imagined to be distinct from the mind that perceives it, but it is actually a mere disturbance in that mind. This disturbance, which Vasubandhu calls the dependent nature (*paratantra-svabhāva*) of the thing, has a form that has the false appearance of being external to the mind. This externality is what Vasubandhu calls the imagined nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) of the thing, while its perfected nature (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*) is just the mind itself. The imagined nature does not exist at all, but the mind itself does exist, as does the disturbed form that afflicts it. Hence, it is only the externality of the object that is illusory.<sup>12</sup>

The parasitism argument can, however, also be employed against the claim that externality is an illusion. The great Advaita philosopher Śaṅkara argues that

when the Buddhists say “that which is the content of an internal awareness appears as though external” they are

assuming the existence of an external thing even while they deny it. . . . For they use the phrase “as though” . . . because they too become aware of a cognition appearing externally. . . . For nobody speaks thus: “Viṣṇumitra appears like the son of a barren woman.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Vasubandhu, the form that the mind takes on when disturbed by karmic dispositions cannot look like an external thing, if an external thing does not exist. The parasitism argument cannot be avoided by holding that only the externality of the object is illusory.

There is, however, a satisfactory answer to both Śāṅkara and the Naiyāyikas. The parasitism principle (P1) is adopted because an illusory experience of *x* requires a memory impression, which can only be produced by a previous experience of *x*. It does not, however, follow from this that this previous experience must be veridical, because memory impressions can also be produced by illusory experiences. For instance, even if my only experience of snakes came from dreams, I could still mistake a rope for a snake, because the previous dream experiences of snakes could provide the necessary memory impression. We can thus deny (P1) and replace it with

(P1') If a person *S* has an illusory experience of *x*, then *S* must have had a previous experience of *x* (whether veridical or not).

This follows from the need for a memory disposition to provide the content of the illusion, but it recognizes the possibility that a memory disposition may be created by an illusory experience. This principle, however, unlike (P1), does not imply that an external object must exist in order for the illusion to occur.

It might be objected at this point that there is an infinite regress looming. The dream experience of the snake also requires a memory impression, which must have been created by a previous experience of a snake. If that previous experience is also illusory, then yet another previous illusory experience is needed, and so on. The regress, however, is non-vicious. Given the infinity of time, there is always room for there to have been another previous illusory experience grounding each illusion, ad infinitum. The Buddhist view is that there is indeed a beginningless cycle; all of our experiences of things as external are illusory, and each has its basis in a previous illusory experience of things as external.<sup>14</sup> This cycle ends in the *nirvāṇa* experience when the false externality is no longer imagined and the true nature of things as mind-only is experienced directly.

None of this proves that Vasubandhu's thesis is correct. Indeed, the account may, for some, strain the bounds of credulity, and this may become an issue in assessing whose theory is really the simpler. However, it does show that (P1) is not any more warranted than (P1'). We are therefore not justified in saying that veridical experience is a necessary condition for illusory experience. Idealism is not decisively defeated by the parasitism objection.

## *The Parasitism Objection to the Inference from Illusion*

The parasitism objection based on (P1) fails to refute idealism, but the denial of external objects still requires proof. The inference from illusion, which is supposed to provide that proof, is supported by examples of illusion. Both Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara, however, object to the argument on the grounds that these examples are not available as evidence, because knowledge of the non-existence of the object of an illusion is only available on the condition that there is knowledge of the existence of some other object. They appeal here to a different parasitism principle:

(P2) If a person S knows that a cognition of x is an illusion, then S must know that a cognition of something else y is veridical.

This is different from (P1) because it claims not that the illusion itself is parasitic upon veridical cognition but that *knowledge* of illusion is parasitic upon knowledge of reality. This principle (if true) does not, therefore, show that illusion is impossible according to the idealist view, but it undermines the supporting example upon which Vasubandhu's inference from illusion crucially depends. It thus shows that this inference is unsound.

In order to see the force of the objection, we need to examine more carefully how the premises of the argument from illusion are supported. Uddyotakara gives the following version of the argument in the *Nyāya-Vārtika*:

Apprehension itself constitutes the proof; that is, what proves the fact that the things apprehended in the waking state are non-existent apart from consciousness is the phenomenon of apprehension itself, the apprehension in dreams serving as the corroborative instance.<sup>15</sup>

This is actually better than Vasubandhu's version, which, as we noted above, has some ambiguity regarding the inferential subject, which, according to one interpretation, is problematic because it includes the supporting example. We eliminated that difficulty by restricting the inferential subject to only those entities alleged to be external by the realist. Uddyotakara chooses to focus instead on the dream example. The inferential subject in his version includes all of the objects of waking experience (hereafter, OWE), while the objects of dream experience remain available as evidence. The realist again cannot cite any undisputed counterexamples, since all objects of waking experience are at issue.

To appreciate the Nyāya objection to this inference, we must examine how the pervasion is supported. The argument can be reconstructed as follows:

- (1) Aw                      OWE are apprehended.
- (2) (x)(Ax → Nx)      Everything that is apprehended is NEOM.
- (3) Nw                      OWE are NEOM.

The pervasion stated in (2) is supported by a series of examples, such as

Ae and Ne The dream elephant is apprehended, but is NEOM.

For the inference to be sound, premise (2) must not only be true, it must be known, and therefore the examples that support (2) must also be also be known. We thus need to have both of the following:

K(Ae) It is known that the elephant is apprehended.

K(Ne) It is known that the elephant is NEOM.

The knowledge that the elephant is non-existent is needed in order to support the pervasion stated in (2), and the difficulty for the inference arises when we ask how that knowledge is obtained.

How do we know that the elephant in the dream is non-existent outside the mind? Uddyotakara points out that this knowledge is not typically available to the dreamer. As Vasubandhu has said, the dreamer does not know she is dreaming. This knowledge occurs only when she awakens and no longer apprehends the object. Uddyotakara argues that this implies that objects of waking experience exist outside the mind:

Non-apprehension is found to have the power [to support the example] only under circumstances contrary to what you allege, because non-apprehension of things can prove that they do not exist, only if apprehension be taken as proof that things do exist.<sup>16</sup>

The Buddhist wants to use the non-apprehension of dream objects in the waking state to prove that they do not really exist. This is what produces the correlation that supports the pervasion stated in (2). However, if it is true that non-apprehension in the waking state is in an indicator of non-existence, then apprehension must be an indicator of existence, otherwise there would be no contrast between what is apprehended and what is not apprehended. If there is no contrast, then non-apprehension cannot provide support for the example, and the inference fails. If there is such a contrast, then at least some external objects must exist, and this contradicts the intended conclusion of the inference. Either way, the inference is unsound.

We can see the problem more clearly by looking at an example. Imagine that I have a dream of an elephant and then awaken to see my desk before me. Here is a summary of the relevant facts in the dream state and the waking state:

Dream Experience:	Ae	K(Ae)		
	Ne	~K(Ne)		
Waking Experience:	~Ae	K(~Ae)	Ad	K(Ad)
	Ne	K(Ne)	Nd?	K(Nd)?
			~Nd?	K(~Nd)?

It is clear that, even in the dream, the elephant is known to appear. We might worry about the fact that the elephant does not appear in the waking state, where the infer-

ence is made, but this is not a problem, because we still remember that the elephant appeared in the dream. It is important to note, however, that the inference cannot be made in the dream, since it is not known at that time that the elephant is non-existent. Only in the waking state can we get the example, and therein lies the problem.

In waking experience, we know that the elephant does not exist outside the mind. We also know that the elephant is not apprehended, but the desk is. The other propositions (indicated above by question marks) are mutually contradictory. The contradictions occur because, according to Uddyotakara, (P2) implies the following conditional:

$$K(Ne) \rightarrow K(\sim Nd)$$

If I know that the elephant is non-existent, I must also know that the desk exists. It follows from this that we can only use the dream elephant as an example if the desk before me exists. Consequently, the inference from illusion is either unsupported or leads to a contradiction. The desk is included in the *pakṣa*, and so, if the inference is sound, it follows that  $K(Nd)$ . From this follows the obvious contradictions that the desk both does and does not exist and that these two contradictory facts are both known to be true. If we try to avoid the contradictions by denying  $K(\sim Nd)$  then we cannot establish that  $K(Ne)$ , and so the pervasion stated in (2) remains unsupported and the inference fails. Furthermore, we now have

$$K(Ad) \text{ and } K(\sim Nd)$$

The desk can now serve as a counterexample to the general pervasion stated in (2), and this also defeats the inference.

Can the consequences of this objection be avoided by invoking the analogy between achieving *nirvāṇa* and waking up from a dream? Those who are dreaming do not know that they are dreaming. Because of this, there is no problem with maintaining the contrast between (1) dream experience as false relative to waking life and (2) waking experience as veridical relative to the dream but false relative to the *nirvāṇa* experience. Hence, we can support the non-existence of the dream object on the basis of non-apprehension in the waking state, because we affirm the existence of the waking objects relative to the dream. Nonetheless, there is no contradiction, because we assert that waking objects are non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience, and this is what our inference proves.

This strategy may look promising at first, but it cannot succeed in saving this inference. Here are the relevant facts in *nirvāṇa* experience:

$$\begin{array}{llll} \text{Nirvāṇa Experience: } & \sim Ae & K(\sim Ae) & \sim Ad & K(\sim Ad) \\ & Ne & K(Ne) & Nd & K(Nd) \end{array}$$

In the *nirvāṇa* experience, both the dream elephant and the desk are non-existent outside the mind, and both of these facts are known. Neither the dream elephant nor

the desk is apprehended as an object in the *nirvāṇa* experience, since there is neither a subject nor an object, but rather an entirely undisturbed store-consciousness. There is also knowledge of the non-apprehension of both the elephant and the desk. Having seen through the illusion, the enlightened one experiences only the pure nondual mind itself and so becomes aware of the illusoriness of what previously appeared, as well as its current non-appearance.<sup>17</sup>

Does this help the Buddhist to establish the example in the inference? The Buddhist is trying to draw a distinction between two orders of illusion. Waking experience is a first-order illusion, sublated in the *nirvāṇa* experience. Dream experience, being an illusion within another illusion, is a second-order illusion; it is sublated by waking experience, which in turn is sublated in *nirvāṇa*. The Buddhist can maintain that it is not necessary for the desk to exist in order for the dream elephant to be known to be non-existent, because there is a contrast between the desk and the dream elephant: the desk is a first-order illusion that is not yet sublated, while the dream is a second-order illusion already sublated. We mistakenly continue to regard the desk as external when we apprehend it, but we deny this externality to the elephant, which we no longer apprehend. This allows for the establishment of the example, even though we remain mistaken about the status of the desk until *nirvāṇa* experience reveals that it does not exist apart from the mind either.

The problem is that for the analogy to save the inference we need access to information that is only available in *nirvāṇa* experience. Just as the dreamer does not know within the dream that the elephant is non-existent outside the mind, we do not yet have access to the experience that would reveal that there are two orders of illusion. The inference is offered not to the enlightened, who already know through perception that there are no external objects, but rather to those of us who are not yet convinced that external objects are an illusion. It is supposed to convince us, in the waking state, that the objects experienced in that state are false just like the objects in dreams. The problem is that the example supporting the pervasion is not available at the waking level, because we don't have access to *nirvāṇa* experience. For one who had access to the information that makes the inference possible, there would be no need for the inference, since the non-externality of objects would be directly known through perception.

It might be thought that the testimony of an enlightened one could support the examples needed to establish the pervasion. If we believe the testimony of the Buddha regarding the existence of a nondual *nirvāṇa* experience, then we can draw the distinction between the dream elephant as a second-order illusion and the desk as a first-order illusion. Such testimony, however, could itself form the basis for the rejection of external objects. In that case, again, no inference would be needed. If, on the other hand, there were doubt about such testimony (as there invariably is, given the divergent testimony of mystics from various traditions), then an inference might be offered to dispel the doubt. However, in that case the example could not be supported by testimony without falling into circularity.

The Buddhist might try to argue that there are two different kinds of non-existence, ( $N_1$ ) non-existence relative to waking experience and ( $N_2$ ) non-existence

relative to *nirvāṇa*. The elephant in the dream is discovered in waking experience to be non-existent relative to waking experience. The desk is admitted to be existent relative to waking experience, which allows us to maintain, in keeping with (P2), that the elephant is non-existent. However, we regard the desk as non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience. The inference from illusion then looks like this:

- (1)  $Aw$
- (2)  $(x)(Ax \rightarrow N_1x)$
- (3)  $N_1w$

The supporting example for (2) is

$Ae$  and  $N_1e$

The elephant appears and is non-existent relative to waking experience. The conclusion (3) is that everything in waking experience is non-existent relative to waking experience. The problem is that this is not the conclusion we wanted. We set out to prove not that the desk is non-existent relative to waking experience but that it is non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience. We wanted to *accept* the existence of the desk relative to waking experience in order to avoid the difficulty created by the parasitism principle (P2).

We might then try to reformulate the argument to get the conclusion that the desk is non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience. We need to rewrite the pervasion in (2) to indicate a universal correlation between “appearing” and “being non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa*.” The inference from illusion would then look like this:

- (1')  $Aw$
- (2')  $(x)(Ax \rightarrow N_2x)$
- (3')  $N_2w$

This is the conclusion that we wanted. Everything in waking experience is non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience. This conclusion also no longer conflicts with our affirmation that the desk exists relative to waking experience. The problem is that we have no example available in our ordinary waking experience to support the pervasion stated in (2'). We would need something like:

$K(Ae)$  and  $K(N_2e)$

The elephant is apprehended and the elephant is non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience. This would be useful if we already had access to *nirvāṇa* experience. Although the Naiyāyika might object that we cannot establish  $K(N_2e)$  even in *nirvāṇa* experience because we would need apprehension of something else which does exist in *nirvāṇa* experience, Vasubandhu can respond that the nondual mind itself is experienced by the enlightened one. This does exist and is apprehended, so

the example can be established. The fundamental problem, however, remains: the inference cannot work on the basis of mere waking experience, because in waking experience we only know (N<sub>1</sub>e) that the elephant is non-existent relative to waking experience. We need to establish (N<sub>2</sub>e) that it is non-existent relative to *nirvāṇa* experience. For this, we would already need to have access to *nirvāṇa* experience and the inference would be redundant.

### *Conclusion*

Vasubandhu's inference for idealism is ingenious, but it fails because the pervasion cannot be supported without assuming the contrary of the conclusion intended to be proved by the inference. This does not prove that idealism is false; it merely proves that the inference from illusion does not work. The objection based on principle (P1) that illusion is dependent on previous veridical experience is not effective, because it remains possible that each illusion depends upon previous illusory experiences in an infinite chain. Vasubandhu's view that externality is an illusion in all cases is thus not incoherent. However, the inference from illusion is defeated by the objection based on (P2), because our ability to establish that a particular cognition is illusory is dependent on an awareness that some other cognition is veridical. In this way, parasitism considerations succeed in undermining the inference from illusion but not in decisively refuting Vasubandhu's view that everything is mind-only.

### Notes

1 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā* 1:

vijñapti-mātram etad asad-artha-avabhāsanāt. yathā taimirakasya asat-keśa-candra-ādi-darśanam.

Sanskrit text from *Vijñapti-Mātratā-Siddhiḥ*, ed. Swami Maheswarananda (Calcutta: Visvabharati, 1939). The translation of the passage is my own. My discussion of Vasubandhu's views is informed, however, by translations of the *Viṃśatikā*, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti*, *Triṃśatikā*, and *Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa* by Thomas Kochumuttom, in *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience: A New Translation and Interpretation of the Works of Vasubandhu the Yogācārin* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982), and also by translations of these same texts by Stefan Anacker, in *Seven Works of Vasubandhu: The Buddhist Psychological Doctor* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984). I have also consulted Jay Garfield's translation of *Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa* from the Tibetan and his commentary on it (*Asian Philosophy* 7 (2) [1997]: 133–154).

2 – For an account of the Indian inferential pattern, see B. K. Matilal, *The Character of Logic in India* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 4–30, and Stephen Phillips, *Classical Indian Metaphysics* (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 55–56.

- 3 – The materialist Cārvāka school is the main advocate of this position in the Indian tradition. See *Sarva-Darśana-Saṃgraha*, trans. E. B. Cowell and A. E. Gough (Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1976), pp. 2–11.
- 4 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti* 1. The three worlds are the desire realm, the form realm, and the formless realm.
- 5 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti* 2.
- 6 – Vasubandhu, *Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa* 6–9.
- 7 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti* 3.
- 8 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti* 4.
- 9 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti* 7.
- 10 – Vasubandhu, *Viṃśatikā-Vṛtti* 17.
- 11 – Vātsyāyana, *Nyāya-Sūtra-Bhāṣya* 4.2.35, trans. Mrinalkanti Gangopadhyaya (Calcutta: Indian Studies, 1982).
- 12 – Vasubandhu, *Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa*, 1–5.
- 13 – Śāṅkara, *Brahma-Sūtra-Bhāṣya* 2.2.28, trans. Swami Gambhirananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1965).
- 14 – The doctrine that *saṃsāra* is beginningless is found in the Pāli Canon (see, e.g., *Samyutta-Nikāya* 14), as well as in the Yogācāra literature (see, e.g., *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra* 52). Vasubandhu’s account of cyclic existence is that each experience is conditioned by grasping and action in response to a previous illusory experience of an external object. This action deposits into the *ālaya-vijñāna* more habit-energy (*vāsanā*), which later ripens, giving rise to further mental activity, which is again mistaken for an external object (see Vasubandhu, *Triṃśatikā* 18–19). In the *Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra* it is stated many times that this cycle is beginningless (see, for instance, *Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra* II.38, II.43, and VI.220), and this doctrine is even specifically linked to the possibility of illusion, when the world is compared to an illusory city of *gandharvas*, seen by deluded people “owing to their attachment to the memory of a city preserved in seed from beginningless time.” (*Laṅkāvatāra-Sūtra* II.90, trans. D. T. Suzuki [Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1932], p. 79). This shows how the doctrine of a beginningless chain of action and illusion can be used to explain the availability, at any given point in the chain, of the memory impression necessary for the production of the illusion.
- 15 – Uddyotakara, *Nyāya-Vārtika* 4.2.33. All translations from the *Nyāya-Vārtika* are from Gangānātha Jhā, *The Nyāya-Sūtras of Gauṭama: With the Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana and the Vārtika of Uddyotakara* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1984).
- 16 – Uddyotakara, *Nyāya-Vārtika* 4.2.33.
- 17 – Vasubandhu, *Tri-Svabhāva-Nirdeśa* 27–34.