

Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons

Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self"

James Duerlinger

INDIAN BUDDHIST THEORIES OF PERSONS

In this book, Vasubandhu's classic work "Refutation of the Theory of a Self" is translated and provided with an introduction and commentary. The translation, the first into a modern Western language from the Sanskrit text, is intended for use by those who wish to begin a careful philosophical study of Indian Buddhist theories of persons. Special features of the introduction and commentary are their extensive explanations of the arguments for the theories of persons of Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins, the Buddhist philosophers whose theory is the central target of Vasubandhu's refutation of the theory of a self.

James Duerlinger has taught in the Philosophy Department at the University of Iowa since 1971. He has published on topics in Greek philosophy, philosophy of religion, and Buddhist philosophy, which are also his current teaching and research interests.

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1 Introduction to the Translation	1
2 Translation of Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self"	71
Section 1: Vasubandhu's theory of persons	71
Section 2: Vasubandhu's objections to the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons	73
Section 3: Vasubandhu's replies to the objections of the Pudgalavādins	86
Section 4: Vasubandhu's replies to the objections of the Tīrthikas and objections to their arguments	96
Section 5: Concluding verses	111
3 Commentary on Section 1: Vasubandhu's theory of persons	122
4 Commentary on Section 2: Vasubandhu's objections to the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons	131
5 Commentary on Section 3: Vasubandhu's replies to objections by the Pudgalavādins	206

CONTENTS

6	Commentary on Section 4: Vasubandhu's replies to the objections of the Tīrthikas	238
	<i>Bibliography</i>	299
	<i>Index</i>	303

PREFACE

The “Refutation of the Theory of a Self” is an Indian treatise (fourth or fifth century CE) on the selflessness of persons that was composed by a Buddhist philosopher known as Vasubandhu. The “Refutation,” as I will call it, is basically an attempt to refute the view that persons are selves. In this book I offer a Translation of the “Refutation,” along with an Introduction and Commentary, for the use of readers who wish to begin detailed research on Indian Buddhist theories of persons by making a careful philosophical study of this classic of Indian Buddhist philosophy. The Translation is the first into a modern Western language to be made from the Sanskrit text and avoids errors I believe to be contained in earlier translations, which were based on a Sanskrit commentary (sixth century CE) by Yaśomitra, and either the Tibetan translation by Jinamitra and dPal brtsegs (twelfth century CE) or the Chinese translations by Paramārtha (sixth century), and by Xúanzàng (seventh century CE).

In the Introduction I provide readers with information and explanations that will introduce them to the main three kinds of Indian Buddhist theories of persons and enable them to do a careful philosophical study of the “Refutation.” In the Translation an attempt is made both to translate terms in a way that will promote a better understanding of the theses and arguments it contains and to help readers through its more difficult passages by indicating in brackets key unexpressed parts of the theses and arguments it contains. The notes to the Translation explain the translation and call attention to problems I believe to exist with previous modern translations. In the Commentary, the theses and arguments contained in the “Refutation” are explained and assessed.

In the “Refutation” Vasubandhu first argues that we are not selves, which are persons who can be identified without reference to the collections of aggregates that comprise their bodies and minds, and that, nonetheless, we do ultimately exist, since we are the same in existence as the collections of these aggregates. Then he presents a series of objections to the theory of the Pudgalavādins, who belong to the Indian Buddhist schools in which it is claimed that, even though we are not independently identifiable, we

ultimately exist without being the same in existence as collections of such aggregates. Then Vasubandhu replies to their objections to his own theory of persons. Finally, he replies to objections raised by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, non-Buddhist Indian philosophers who claim that we are selves in the sense that we are substances that exist independently of our bodies and momentary mental states.

Vasubandhu not only discusses and rejects the theories of persons put forward by the Pudgalavādins and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, but also dismisses, in a single sentence, the thesis of Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mādhyamika school of Indian Buddhism, that no phenomena ultimately exist, as an adequate basis for a theory of persons. In Nāgārjuna's extant works (second century CE) a Buddhist theory of persons is not presented in any great detail. But in the seventh century CE Candrakīrti worked out the implications of Nāgārjuna's thesis for the interpretation of the Buddha's theory of persons. This interpretation became the basis of the only Buddhist critique, other than that of the Pudgalavādins, of interpretations of the sort presented by Vasubandhu. The three basic kinds of Indian Buddhist theories of persons are those presented by Vasubandhu, the Pudgalavādins, and Candrakīrti. Since one of my objectives in the Introduction and Commentary of this book is to provide readers of the "Refutation" with an introduction to the three different kinds of Indian Buddhist theories of persons, I have intermittently included brief discussions of Candrakīrti's interpretation of the Buddha's theory and his opposition to the interpretations of Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins. At some point I hope to provide readers with a translation of Candrakīrti's discussion of the selflessness of persons, along with an introduction and commentary of the sort presented here. What I have to say in this book about Candrakīrti's objections to the sorts of theories of persons held by Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins, therefore, may have to be revised in the light of my further research on his discussion. But my portrayal of his own theory, I believe, is on the mark, and will serve the purpose of a presentation of the three main Indian Buddhist theories of persons.

Elaborate explanations of the other parts of the philosophies of the Pudgalavādins, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, and Candrakīrti are not presented in this book because they would have unnecessarily lengthened and complicated my discussion and because they are not needed for the sort of examination of the theses and arguments in the "Refutation" undertaken here. The exact nature of the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons, I believe, has not yet been explained by scholars. Although I think that I have here correctly explained the nature of their theory, much more needs to be done to ground this explanation in more detailed examinations of the Buddhist sources than could be included in a book primarily devoted to an account of Vasubandhu's "Refutation." The theories of persons of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas and Candrakīrti are generally better understood, and my

PREFACE

accounts of them owe a great deal to the work of Indian, Tibetan, and Western scholars.

For the sake of readers unfamiliar with the Sanskrit language I have attempted to keep the use of anglicized Sanskrit words and names to a minimum. However, since readers who are new to this subject and wish to continue their study of Indian Buddhist theories of persons need to become familiar with at least some of the most common and/or important Sanskrit words and names used in our source materials, I have retained Sanskrit names of Indian philosophers, philosophical schools, and many texts, as well as a few well-known Buddhist Sanskrit technical terms (such as *nirvāṇa*, *saṃsāra*, *sūtra*, etc.). I have also added, in parentheses, after the first occurrence of my translations of the most important technical terms, the Sanskrit terms being translated. Since there do not exist standardized translations of Buddhist Sanskrit terms into English, readers without a familiarity with these Sanskrit terms need to learn them in order to negotiate the secondary literature and English translations of Sanskrit philosophical texts. Readers who need help in the task of mastering the recognition and pronunciation of Sanskrit terms are encouraged to read the Introduction to Monier Williams' *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1899, esp. xxxvi). For readers who also require a general introduction to Indian Buddhist thought I recommend *The Foundations of Buddhism*, by Rupert Gethin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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I also wish to thank Professors Panyot Butchvarov, Richard Fumerton, Paul Hackett, Michael Myers, Jonardon Ganeri, James Powell, and David Stern for their comments on earlier drafts of the Introduction. Professor N. H. Samtani met with me regularly in Sarnath, India, in February and March 1993 to check my translation of the “Refutation.” His attention to detail and concern that my English renderings of Sanskrit words be faithful to their Abhidharma definitions provided me with the opportunity to rethink many of my attempts to render Vasubandhu’s technical terminology into a suitable philosophical idiom. His kindness in this matter is a good example of his Buddhist practice. I wish to thank Mr Michael Olson, who worked with me as a research assistant for two years, during which time he made detailed criticisms of the first draft of my translation of the “Refutation” and translated for me numerous passages from the Chinese

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Finally, I wish to express my appreciation to all of the Tibetan Buddhist scholar-monks and their Western students with whom I have had the opportunity to study Buddhism over the years. It is to them that I dedicate this volume.

INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSLATION

Vasubandhu's "Refutation" and the central philosophical questions about which Indian Buddhist theories of persons are concerned

The text translated in this book is a Buddhist treatise on "the selflessness of persons" (*pudgalanairātmya*) composed by Vasubandhu, who is generally regarded as one of the most important philosophers of the scholastic period of Buddhist thought in India.¹ The treatise, which I will call the "Refutation," after its full title, "Refutation of the Theory of a Self," deals with philosophical questions about persons that are different from, but closely related to, a number of important philosophical questions about persons discussed in the West. For this reason it should be of considerable interest not only to Buddhists and scholars of Buddhism, but also to those who are familiar with the relevant discussions in Western philosophy. Although not all of the philosophical questions discussed by the Indian Buddhists are explicitly raised in the "Refutation," I believe that a careful study of this treatise is the best way to gain initial access to them. To facilitate this access this Introduction begins with a sketch of these questions and how they are related to the study of Vasubandhu's treatise.

According to the Indian Buddhists, when we conceive ourselves from the first-person singular perspective and ascribe attributes to ourselves in dependence upon our bodies and minds,² we create a false appearance of ourselves as selves, the acceptance of which appearance is the root cause of our suffering. Vasubandhu agrees with the Pudgalavādins, his Buddhist opponents in the "Refutation," that the selves we falsely appear to be are persons who can be identified independently of our bodies and minds. His chief non-Buddhist opponents, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, believe that we are selves of this sort, since they claim that we are substances that exist apart from our bodies and minds. The most basic philosophical issue Vasubandhu addresses, therefore, is whether or not we are selves. Whether or not the acceptance of a false appearance of ourselves as selves is the root cause of our suffering is a further issue, of course, but it is not an issue Vasubandhu

discusses. Nor does he discuss whether or not we actually create such an appearance when we conceive ourselves from the first-person singular perceptive and ascribe attributes to ourselves. An issue he does raise, however, concerns in what form we ultimately exist if we do not exist as entities that can be independently identified. In the “Refutation,” discussion of this issue takes the form of a debate with the Pudgalavādins. According to Vasubandhu, our ultimate existence – the existence we possess apart from being conceived – is the existence of the bodies and minds in dependence upon which we are conceived. According to the Pudgalavādins, we ultimately exist without being the same in existence as our bodies and minds and without being separate substances.

There are, in addition, Indian Buddhists who believe that we do not ultimately exist. The most articulate of these Buddhists, Candrakīrti, thinks that we suffer because we give assent to our false appearance of existing by ourselves, apart from being conceived. So another issue that is discussed by the Indian Buddhists is whether or not we ultimately exist. This issue is only alluded to in the “Refutation,” but it is important to a proper assessment of the central issue it does concern, which is whether or not, if we cannot be identified independently of our bodies and minds, we can still exist independently of our bodies and minds.

Because Candrakīrti believes that nothing ultimately exists, he thinks that first-person singular reference to ourselves does not depend upon a reference to something that ultimately exists. This does not mean that he thinks that “I” is not a referring expression. Rather, it means that it refers to a mentally constructed “I” and to nothing else. Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins believe that first-person singular reference to us is possible because it is also a reference to something that ultimately exists. So another issue that arises from a consideration of Indian Buddhist theories of persons is whether or not first-person singular reference to ourselves is possible if we are not the same in existence as something that exists apart from being conceived.

These disagreements about whether or not we ultimately exist, and if we do, in what form we ultimately exist, and if we do not, whether reference to ourselves is possible, cannot be settled without an answer to the more general question of what it means to exist. Although most Indian Buddhist philosophers agree that what exists can enter into causal relationships with other things, they do not all define existence in this way. Different conceptions of existence play a crucial role in Buddhist debates about the existence of persons. One view is that to exist is to be a substance or an attribute of a substance, and another is that it is to be either a substance or a collection of substances conceived for practical purposes as a distinct entity of some sort. A third view is that it is to exist apart from being conceived, and a fourth is that it is to exist in dependence upon being conceived.

There is also a set of issues that arise from the arguments used by those who propound the different theories of persons presented in the

“Refutation.” Among these are questions about how exactly appeals to our conventional ascriptions of attributes to ourselves are to count for or against theories concerning our mode of existence and/or identity. Vasubandhu’s opponents seem to believe that his theory, that we are the same in existence as our bodies and minds, should be rejected because it fails to account for our intuitions concerning the subjects of the attributes we ascribe to ourselves. Such attributes include our being the same at different times (and in different lives), being single entities rather than many, remembering objects experienced in the past, having perceptions, feelings and other mental states, being agents of actions who experience the results of our actions, etc. At issue here is whether or not the form in which we ultimately exist undermines these ascriptions of attributes. Vasubandhu argues that the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas’ theory, that we are separate substances, cannot be used to explain ascriptions of these attributes to ourselves, and that the Pudgalavādins’ theory, that we ultimately exist without being either separate substances or the same in existence as our bodies and minds, is both logically incoherent and contrary to the teachings of the Buddha. He believes that the intuitions upon which the objections to his theory are based are expressions of our mistaken view of ourselves.

An issue raised by Candrakīrti concerns whether or not, if we ultimately exist, our ascriptions of these attributes to ourselves can be explained. He believes, following the lead of Nāgārjuna, the founder of the Mādhyamika school of Buddhist philosophers, that if we ultimately exist, we possess natures of our own by virtue of which we exist, and so, cannot enter into causal relationships with other phenomena, for which reason we could not come to be, cease to be, change, or perform any of the functions we, as persons, are believed to perform. This issue, although not discussed in the “Refutation,” is relevant to an assessment of the debate between Vasubandhu and his opponents concerning the form in which we ultimately exist.

Finally, there are different views concerning knowledge of our existence. The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas think that we are known to exist as separate substances by means of inference. In the “Refutation,” Vasubandhu attempts to show that a number of these inferences are incorrect. Vasubandhu believes that knowledge of our existence apart from being conceived is knowledge of the existence of our bodies and minds. The Pudgalavādins think that by means of perception we are known to exist apart from being conceived without being separate substances or being the same in existence as our bodies and minds. In the “Refutation,” Vasubandhu challenges their account of how we are known to exist if we exist in this way. Candrakīrti thinks that we are known to exist only as part of the conceptual scheme that creates us. However, both Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins can ask how, if we do not ultimately exist, knowledge of our existence is even possible, and if so, how.

This is a very brief statement of the central philosophical questions to which a study of the “Refutation” gives rise. In this Introduction and in the Commentary I will explain how they arise when the treatise is carefully read and its theses and arguments are carefully assessed.

The Sanskrit text and its translation

Vasubandhu probably composed the “Refutation” as a separate work, and then added it, as a ninth chapter or appendix, either to his *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*), which I will call the *Treasury*, or to his *Commentary on the Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*), which I will simply call the *Commentary*.³ Although many scholars have assigned to this treatise the title, “An Examination of the Person” (*Pudgalaviniścāyaḥ*), which was used by Yaśomitra, one of the Indian Buddhist commentators of the *Treasury*, the title that Vasubandhu himself uses is “Refutation of the Theory of a Self” (*ātmaavādapraṭiśedha*).⁴ The *Treasury*, its *Commentary*, and the “Refutation” were composed in India during the fourth or fifth century CE. In the *Treasury* the theses (*siddhānta*-s) that typify those held in the Vaibhāṣika (Exposition follower) schools of Indian Buddhism are explained. In the *Commentary* these theses are evaluated from the point of view of the teachings of the Buddha in his sūtras (discourses) and on the basis of independent reasoning. The Vaibhāṣika schools are the schools named after a work called the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (*Great Exposition*), a second century CE compendium of Indian Buddhist philosophy.⁵ The school of Indian Buddhist philosophy from whose point of view Vasubandhu composed most of the *Commentary* and the “Refutation” is called the “Sautrāntika” (Sūtra follower) school.

Sanskrit copies of the *Treasury* and its *Commentary*, which included the “Refutation,” were discovered in Tibet in 1936 by Rahula Samkrtyayana.⁶ Before that time modern scholars were in possession only of a Sanskrit copy of Yaśomitra’s commentary (sixth century CE) on the *Treasury*, called *Gloss of Full Meaning on the Treasury of Knowledge* (*Sphuṭārthābhidharmakośavyākhyā*), which I will hereafter call the *Gloss*.⁷ The manuscripts found by Samkrtyayana were first edited in 1967 by Prahlad Pradhan,⁸ and then in 1970–3 by Dwarikadas Shastri.⁹ For my translation of the “Refutation” I consulted the editions of both Pradhan and Shastri, as well as the corrected reprint of Pradhan’s edition made by Aruna Halder in 1975,¹⁰ Yaśomitra’s *Gloss*, and the careful work done by Akira Hirakawa, *et al.*¹¹ and Yasunori Ejima¹² on the Sanskrit text of Pradhan’s edition. My Translation is an extensive revision of a translation I did that was first published in 1988.¹³

The “Refutation” was translated once into Tibetan¹⁴ and twice into Chinese.¹⁵ Yaśomitra’s *Gloss* is the only commentary that seems to have survived in Sanskrit. There are three Chinese commentaries on the Chinese

translations, composed by Pû-guâng, Fâ-bâu, and Yuán-huî,¹⁶ that still exist. There were commentaries on the *Treasury* and/or *Commentary* written in Sanskrit by Saṃghabhadra, Sthirāmati, Pūrṇavardhana, Śamathadeva, Dignāga, and Vinītadeva. Although the original Sanskrit texts have been lost, they exist in Tibetan translation. Among these commentaries, those composed by Saṃghabhadra, Sthirāmati, and Vinītadeva do not deal with the “Refutation.” Since the commentary of Śamathadeva deals primarily with the identification of the sūtras quoted in the “Refutation,” and Dignāga’s commentary on the “Refutation” is brief and merely quotes some of its arguments, they do not provide useful information pertinent to the present study, which concerns its philosophical import. The commentary on the “Refutation” composed by Pūrṇavardhana has not been consulted, since I first learned of it after my own work on the treatise had been completed.

In reliance upon Yaśomitra’s *Gloss* and the Tibetan translation, Theodore Stcherbatsky composed an interpretative English translation, entitled “The Soul Theory of the Buddhists.”¹⁷ A French translation, by Louis de La Vallée Poussin¹⁸ is based on Yaśomitra’s *Gloss*, the Chinese translations by Paramārtha and by Xúanzàng, and the commentaries by Pû-guâng, Fâ-bâu, and Yuán-huî. (The commentary of Pūrṇavardhana, which in the Tibetan translation is included as the last portion of the commentary on the eighth chapter of the *Treasury*, is not mentioned by Stcherbatsky or by La Vallée Poussin. It may have been overlooked by them, as it was by me, because it is included as part of his commentary on the eighth chapter of the *Treasury*.) There is also a complete English translation of La Vallée Poussin’s translation made by Leo Pruden.¹⁹ However, these earlier translations, which were not based on the Sanskrit text, do not in my opinion always accurately convey the meaning of important theses and arguments in the Sanskrit original. Although I disagree on many substantive points with these translations, I have not taken readers through all of the tedious details about where, how, and why I disagree, except for crucial passages. My major disagreements with these translations are for the most part included in my notes to the Translation, although some are also discussed in the Commentary on the Translation. The pioneering work of Stcherbatsky and La Vallée Poussin was a great achievement, but our understanding of Indian Buddhist philosophy has now advanced to the point at which its errors need to be corrected. Nonetheless, I gratefully acknowledge that without the help of their work I might easily have gone astray in my reading of the text in numerous passages. Relatively little has appeared in print more recently to advance our understanding of the “Refutation” as a Buddhist treatise on the selflessness of persons.²⁰

Vasubandhu’s abbreviated style of composition in the “Refutation” is suitable for study by scholarly monks steeped in Buddhist doctrine and privy to oral traditions of commentary, but it creates difficulties of

translation for a Western readership. These difficulties, along with the apparent absence in modern times of an oral commentarial tradition on the text, are surely two of the reasons this very important work of Indian Buddhist philosophy has not received the detailed philosophical attention it deserves. In my Translation I have often in brackets included words, phrases, and sentences that I believe will help readers to grasp unexpressed parts of the theses and arguments presented in the text. The additions most often are made in reliance upon information supplied by Yaśomitra's *Gloss*, though I also rely on the commentaries of Pû-guāng, Fâ-bâu, and Yuán-huî when their views seem reasonable and helpful, but at times I simply supply what the context of argument seems to demand or our current knowledge of Indian Buddhist philosophy seems to require. Readers may read the text without my bracketed additions because I have translated the text so that it can stand alone and be read without them. To make grammatical sense of the unembellished Translation readers need to reinterpret punctuation and capitalization required for the readability of the expanded translation.

Because the argument of Vasubandhu's treatise is often presented in an abbreviated debate style, Stcherbatsky and La Vallée Poussin chose to translate it as a philosophical dialog between proponents of different schools of Indian philosophy. But translating the "Refutation" as a dialog of this sort creates the impression, which I believe to be false, that Vasubandhu meant to compose a dialog instead of a treatise in which brief statements of opposing theses and arguments are alternatively presented. My Translation does not reproduce every question and answer that occurs in the text, since many add nothing to the course of the argument. But I have retained the question and answer format when the question raises a significant point. When direct discourse is used to have the opponents put forth an objection, reply or question, we may assume that the words used are being attributed to the opponents. When indirect discourse is used to have the opponents put forth an objection, reply or question, the words may be Vasubandhu's paraphrase. Although my unembellished translation slightly alters the literary style of the text, I believe that it accurately captures its philosophical nuances and shows its character as an Indian Buddhist polemical treatise on the selflessness of persons.

Throughout I have tried to avoid distortions engendered by the use of special Western philosophical terms and theories that have often been used to translate Indian Buddhist philosophical terms and to explain Indian Buddhist philosophical views. The use of this terminology and explanations of this sort, in my opinion, have in the past seriously compromised our attempts to understand clearly the indigenous philosophical concerns of the Indian philosophers. This purging of special Western philosophical terminology and theory I assume to be necessary in a genuine effort to understand the "Refutation" in the way it was understood by the Indian

Buddhist philosophers themselves. I have not, however, restricted myself to the use of traditional Indian Buddhist classifications and explanations. I believe that the terminology I introduce is easy to understand and not based on a special Western philosophical prototype, and that the classifications and explanations I employ, which are grounded in careful analyses of the theses and arguments presented in the "Refutation," are needed for a better analytical understanding of the philosophical issues it raises. So readers will not find in the Introduction and the Commentary a mere summary of the theses and arguments employed in the "Refutation." It has been my intention to give readers of Vasubandhu's treatise an opportunity to consider some of the actual issues with which it is concerned from an Indian Buddhist point of view. Although I have surely not dealt with all of these issues and perhaps only scratched the surface of those with which I do deal, I hope to have provided a platform from which further work on them can be done.

The use of unfamiliar English and Sanskritized English expressions to translate technical philosophical Sanskrit terms is also avoided. Such translations, which are seldom carefully explained in terms Western readers can easily understand, I believe to have unnecessarily obscured the meanings of their Sanskrit originals and to have overly complicated the attempt of those without a knowledge of Sanskrit to do a careful study of Indian Buddhist philosophical texts. In addition, section headings are supplied, numbered according to related issues raised in the "Refutation," as an aid to reference and to comprehension of the twists and turns of Vasubandhu's argumentation. For the purposes of spoken reference to sections the numbers may be orally cited without mention of the periods. So Section 2.1.1, for instance, would be cited as two one one, and so on. The sequence of numbers used to mark the subsections of each major section usually indicates, in order, the introduction of a new objection or reply, different arguments devoted primarily to the same objection or reply, and disagreements about these arguments. The numbering depends upon my own interpretation of the significance and place of an argument within the course of the argumentation of which it is a part. To obtain an overview of the argumentation of the "Refutation" readers need only to read the section headings in the order presented.

Readers who seek information about the scriptural sources of quotations in the text and about philological matters may consult the extensive notes La Vallée Poussin added to his French translation, which were translated by Pruden. I do not attempt to reproduce the work he has done on these matters. The notes of Stcherbatsky that deal with questions of meaning are sometimes helpful, but they are brief and of little help for close philosophical analysis. The notes to my Translation include explanations of translations and additions, sources consulted for the additions, or clarifications of the meanings of theses and arguments.

The Buddha formulated his theory of persons as a part of his theory about what causes suffering and how to destroy this cause. His theory is that the root cause of suffering is that persons give assent to a naturally occurring false appearance of themselves as selves and that they can eliminate this assent by meditating on the selflessness of persons. Section 1 of the Translation contains a brief statement of Vasubandhu's interpretation of the Buddha's theory of persons. According to his interpretation, persons are not "selves" in the sense that they are not persons who can be identified independently of the phenomena that comprise their bodies and minds. He argues that, nonetheless, persons ultimately exist, since they are the same in existence as these phenomena, which do really exist.²¹ Section 2 contains Vasubandhu's objections to the interpretation of the Buddha's theory of persons put forward by the Pudgalavādins. The Pudgalavādins, I believe, may be characterized as the Indian Buddhist philosophers who, while agreeing that persons are not selves in the above sense, deny that persons are the same in existence as the phenomena that comprise their bodies and minds, since they can exist by themselves without possessing any character or identity at all.²² According to Xúanzàng, a Chinese monk who traveled to India in the seventh century CE, about a quarter of the monks in India belonged to the Sāṃmitīya school, which is one of the Pudgalavādin schools. Vasubandhu, following tradition, calls the Pudgalavādins the "Vātsīputrīyas" (followers of Vātsīputra).²³ Section 3 is primarily concerned with Vasubandhu's replies to the Pudgalavādins' objections to his own interpretation of the Buddha's theory. In Section 4 Vasubandhu replies to the objections of the non-Buddhist Indian philosophers he calls the "Tīrthikas" (Forders).²⁴ These philosophers claim that persons are selves in the sense of being substances that exist apart from their bodies and minds. In Section 4, Vasubandhu also presents objections of his own to their arguments for the existence of selves of this sort, which we may call "separate substances." The only non-Buddhist Indian philosophers whose views Vasubandhu considers in Section 4, I believe, are those of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas.

The theories of persons of the Pudgalavādins and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas

It seems clear that Vasubandhu composed the "Refutation" primarily for the purpose of purging Buddhism of what he took to be the Pudgalavādins' heretical interpretation of the Buddha's theory that persons are not selves. For this purpose, in the greater part of the "Refutation" he presents objections to their interpretation and replies to their objections to the sort of interpretation he himself accepts. He then devotes the last part of the work to replies to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas' objections to his theory. Although his purpose in the "Refutation" is to purge Buddhism of the Pudgalavādins'

heresy, he includes replies to the objections presented by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas, I suspect, because he believes that it may have been their objections that led the Pudgalavādins to reject the sort of interpretation of the Buddha's theory of persons presented by Vasubandhu and to substitute a theory that, as we shall see, closely resembles the one held by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas. The ways in which the theory of the Pudgalavādins resembles that of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas are explained later in this Introduction and in the Commentary.

Our knowledge of the theories of persons presented by the Pudgalavādins and the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas is not exhausted by what Vasubandhu reports in the "Refutation," and a consideration of our other sources of information would be helpful in understanding Vasubandhu's critique of their theories.

One text that scholars believe to be composed from the viewpoint of a Pudgalavādin school and to contain information about its theory of persons is the *Sāṃmitīyanikāya Śāstra*, a pre-sixth century CE treatise preserved only in Chinese translation.²⁵ Since Yaśomitra identifies the Pudgalavādin school with which Vasubandhu contends in the "Refutation" as the Āryasāṃmitīyas, Vasubandhu's opponent in the "Refutation" could be the school from whose point of view the *Sāṃmitīyanikāya Śāstra* was composed.²⁶

The *Sāṃmitīyanikāya Śāstra* is basically a discussion of two questions, one concerning Buddhist views about the existence of persons and the other concerning Buddhist views about the possibility of a transitional state of persons between rebirths. In its discussion of the first question, seven opinions are considered and rejected concerning the existence of persons. The persons concerning whose existence different opinions are considered are "persons conceived from a basis" (*āśrayaprajñaptapudgala*), which seems to be equivalent to the idea that they are persons who are "conventional realities" (*samvṛtisatya*-s).²⁷ That the Sāṃmitīyas assume that persons are conventional realities does not mean, however, that they assume them to be conventional realities in the sense in which they are defined in the *Treasury* and *Commentary*. Indeed, in Section 2.1.1 of the "Refutation" the Pudgalavādins are made to deny that persons are conventional realities in that sense. Later in this Introduction I shall take up the question of the sense in which the Sāṃmitīyas, and indeed, all Pudgalavādins, believe that persons are conventional realities. The seven rejected opinions about the existence of conventionally real persons are (1) that although the aggregates exist, persons do not, (2) that persons neither do nor do not exist, (3) that persons really exist (i.e. exist as substances), (4) that persons and their aggregates are the same, (5) that persons and their aggregates are other than one another, (6) that persons are permanent phenomena, and (7) that persons are impermanent phenomena.

After rejecting the above-mentioned seven opinions about the existence of persons conceived from a basis, the Sāṃmitīyas distinguish persons of

this sort from persons conceived from transition and from persons conceived from cessation. Since the basis upon which persons are conceived are the “aggregates” (*skandha*-s), the fact that these aggregates, which are impermanent, form a causal continuum over time enables persons to be conceived as the same persons at different times. Since, as well, the causal continuum of the aggregates that are the basis upon which persons are conceived ceases to exist when “final release from *saṃsāra*” (*parinirvāṇa*) is reached, persons are conceived, even after the continuum of their aggregates has ceased, by reference to the cessation of that continuum. In the “Refutation,” the Pudgalavādins are represented as holding the view that persons are conceived in reliance upon aggregates that belong to them, are acquired by them, and exist in the present. How exactly this view is related to the view, expressed in the *Sāṃmitīyanikāya Śāstra*, that there are these three kinds of persons, will be explained below.

Another work that contains information relevant to an understanding of Indian Buddhist theories of persons has been attributed to the Pudgalavādins by Thích Thiên Châu.²⁸ This work, whose Sanskrit name was probably the *Tridharmaka Śāstra*, seems to have survived only in two fourth century CE Chinese translations. It contains a summary of Buddhist views composed by Vasubhadra and a commentary on the summary composed by Sanghasena. The work as a whole is divided into three parts, which are divided into three sections, which are divided into three topics, etc. Of the basic nine sections, three are concerned with positive qualities the acquisition of which facilitates the attainment of “*nirvāṇa*” (release from *saṃsāra*), three are concerned with negative qualities the retention of which keeps us in “*saṃsāra*” (the rebirth cycle), and three are concerned with the basic phenomena the knowledge of which enables us to attain *nirvāṇa*. Among the negative qualities the retention of which keeps us in *saṃsāra* the following are mentioned: ignorance of phenomena that are “inexplicable” (*avaktavya*),²⁹ and doubt concerning the three “realities” (*satya*-s).³⁰

Inexplicable phenomena, the ignorance of which keeps us in *saṃsāra*, are persons who are conceived in dependence upon (1) the fact that they acquire aggregates, (2) the fact that the aggregates they acquire exist in the past, present, and future, or (3) the fact that they have ceased acquiring aggregates.³¹ If these persons are inexplicable in the sense that persons are said to be inexplicable in the “Refutation,” they are persons who are neither other than nor the same as the collections of aggregates in dependence upon which they are conceived. The aggregates are the substances of which the bodies and minds of persons are composed. The three ways inexplicable persons are said to be conceived are comparable to the three kinds of persons mentioned in the *Sāṃmitīyanikāya Śāstra*.³² We may also assume, I believe, that the Pudgalavādins think that the persons who are conceived in these three ways are conventional realities.

That persons, just insofar as they are conceived, are thought to be conventional realities is not contradicted by the claim, made in the *Tridharmaka Śāstra*, that doubt concerning the three realities prevents us from escaping saṃsāra. Among the realities mentioned there are conventional reality, which is equated with worldly convention, ultimate reality, which is equated with the causally unconditioned phenomenon called nirvāṇa, and the reality that includes all of the causally conditioned phenomena that comprise suffering, the origin of suffering and the path to nirvāṇa. This third reality, which seems to have been called “the reality of phenomena that possess defining characteristics” (*lakṣaṇasatya*), and ultimate reality, so conceived, include all of the substances (*dravya*-s) that are called ultimate realities by those who belonged to the closely allied Vaibhāṣika schools.³³ It seems that in order to retain the motif of dividing topics into three divisions, the doctrine that there are two realities, ultimate and conventional, is redescribed in the *Tridharmaka Śāstra* as three. According to this threefold division of realities, persons will be conventional realities, which are unlike other conventional realities insofar as they are inexplicable.³⁴

In addition to the *Sāṃmitīyanikāya Śāstra* and the *Tridharmaka Śāstra*, there are a number of works composed by the Buddhists in which the theory of persons of the Pudgalavādins is presented and criticized. The works included, in addition to the “Refutation” of Vasubandhu, are Moggaliputta-tissa’s *Kathāvatthu* (second century CE),³⁵ Devaśarman’s *Vijñānakāya* (second century CE),³⁶ Harivarman’s *Satyasiddhi Śāstra* (third century CE),³⁷ Asaṅga’s *Mahāyānasūtralamkāra* (fifth century CE),³⁸ Bhāvaviveka’s *Madhyamakahrdayavṛtti*, along with its commentary, the *Tarkajvālā* (sixth century CE),³⁹ Candrakīrti’s *Madhyamakāvatāra* and *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (seventh century CE),⁴⁰ Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (eighth century CE),⁴¹ and Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasaṃgraha*, along with Kamalaśīla’s *Pañjika* commentary on Śāntarakṣita’s work (eighth century CE).⁴² Among these sources, the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Vijñānakāya* and the *Satyasiddhi Śāstra* were composed before Vasubandhu’s “Refutation” was composed. So it should be to them that we look for antecedents of Vasubandhu’s critique of the Pudgalavādins’ theory of persons.

In the first chapter of the *Kathāvatthu*, an extensive and very stylized debate between the proponents of the Pudgalavādins’ theory of persons and the Theravādin theory is presented. Since it was not composed in Sanskrit, it is not a likely source upon which Vasubandhu draws in the “Refutation,” but it does seem to represent the Pudgalavādins’ theory of persons more or less in the form in which Vasubandhu represents it.⁴³ In the first chapter of the *Kathāvatthu* many of the same arguments used by Vasubandhu in the “Refutation” appear, albeit in a peculiar form, devised to facilitate memorization.⁴⁴ The major thrust of the *Kathāvatthu* critique of the Pudgalavādins’ theory of persons is that conventionally real persons

do not, as they claim, ultimately exist, since they do not exist in the way ultimate things exist, and are not known to exist in the way other ultimate things are known to exist. To exist in the way ultimate things exist, the Theravādins seem to assume, is to exist in the way a substance exists. The Pudgalavādins, of course, do not think that persons exist as substances, but *in the way* substances exist, which is apart from being conceived. To exist ultimately is to exist apart from being conceived. The Theravādins, apparently, do not think that anything possesses ultimate existence other than substances.

The Theravādins themselves surely also believe that in some sense conventional realities ultimately exist. But the ultimate existence of conventional realities, they think, is the existence of the collections of substances in dependence upon which they are conceived as single entities. From this point of view, their main criticisms of the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons are that if conventionally real persons are neither other than nor the same in existence as collections of substances, they do not possess ultimate existence, since they are neither substances nor collections of substances, and are not known to exist since they are not known to exist in the way substances are known to exist. So understood, their main objections to the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons are basically the same as those put forward by Vasubandhu in the "Refutation." Their objections, however, are more difficult to understand because of the convoluted form in which they are presented.

The other major issue taken up in the *Kathāvatthu* concerns how, if inexplicable persons ultimately exist, they can be, as the Pudgalavādins claim, neither the same nor different in different lives. Vasubandhu does not discuss the Pudgalavādins' claim, that persons are neither the same nor different in different lives, but he does criticize their claim that the only way to explain the convention that persons are reborn is to suppose that they are inexplicable phenomena.

In the second chapter of the *Vijñānakāya* a debate between the Pudgalavādins and their opponents is represented. The arguments of this chapter are similar to, but simpler than, the arguments of the first chapter of the *Kathāvatthu*. If Vasubandhu studied the *Vijñānakāya*, however, his study did not have much influence on his argumentation in the "Refutation," which is much more extensive and more carefully articulated. In the *Vijñānakāya* the arguments primarily turn on questions about whether or not the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons is consistent with the Buddha's different classifications of persons, about whether or not it can explain the relationship between persons in one of their rebirths and these same persons in another rebirth, and about whether or not it is consistent with the Buddha's classifications of phenomena. In the "Refutation" Vasubandhu totally ignores arguments of the first kind, but does include arguments of the second and third kinds. He first concentrates upon

questions of the internal consistency of the Pudgalavādins' theory, and then upon scriptural refutations, after which he takes up their objections to his own theory.

The arguments in Sections 34 and 35 of the first chapter of the *Satyasiddhi Śāstra* are much more like those in the "Refutation" in a number of important respects. The English translation and paraphrase by N. Aiyaswami Shastri contains some of the same basic arguments used by Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins in the "Refutation," although they are formulated slightly differently and occur in a slightly different context and order. In fact, some of the same quotations from the Buddha's sūtras are employed. In Section 34 a series of scriptural objections is advanced against the Pudgalavādin theory that a person is inexplicable, some of which Vasubandhu employs in the "Refutation." Then in Section 35 a number of Pudgalavādin arguments for the existence of an inexplicable person are presented and objections to these arguments are posed.⁴⁵ But the arguments in these sections are not so rigorously formulated as they are in the "Refutation." Nonetheless, the strong similarities between some of the arguments in these sections and arguments in the "Refutation" suggest either that Vasubandhu was familiar with the *Satyasiddhi Śāstra*, that the author of the *Satyasiddhi Śāstra* was familiar with Vasubandhu's examination in the "Refutation," or that both examinations were based on an earlier examination that has been lost.

The later polemical treatments of the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons, for the most part, seem to draw upon Vasubandhu's "Refutation" or upon these other earlier treatments. Indeed, La Vallée Poussin often calls attention in the notes to his translation of the "Refutation" to similarities between its arguments and the arguments in these later works. Except for the arguments in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamakāvatāra*, which are directed against theories of persons of the sort held by Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins, and for the arguments in Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha*, along with Kamalaśīla's commentary on them, which call attention to the most basic issue involved in the dispute between the Pudgalavādins and their Buddhist critics concerning the existence of inexplicable persons, I will not be concerned here with these later developments, which is a topic that cries out for special study.

Among more recent secondary sources, relatively brief discussions of the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons are presented by Edward Conze, Nalinaksha Dutt, S. N. Dube, and L. S. Cousins.⁴⁶ More extensive treatments of the Pudgalavādins' theory of persons are to be found in Thích Thiên Châu's *The Early Literature of the Personalists* and Leonard Priestley's *Pudgalavāda Buddhism*. Although I have consulted all of these secondary sources in my attempts to clarify the debate between Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins, and I have found all helpful in different ways, I failed to find in them what I consider to be clear philosophical

accounts of the theories of persons of the Pudgalavādins and their Buddhist critics, and hence, a clear philosophical understanding of what exactly the debate is about.

The key to understanding their different theories of persons and the philosophical issues involved in the dispute between them, I believe, is that Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins actually agree that persons are conventional realities that ultimately exist, but disagree about the form in which persons ultimately exist, and so, about what can and cannot be a conventional reality. That they agree that persons are conventional realities I concluded from my study of the surviving works of the Pudgalavādins themselves and their early Buddhist critics. I found Priestley's *Pudgalavāda Buddhism* to be especially helpful to me in the process of arriving at this conclusion.⁴⁷ That Vasubandhu and the Pudgalavādins agree that conventionally real persons ultimately exist was finally called to my attention when I realized that the major criticism of their theories by the philosophers belonging to the Mādhyamika (middle way follower) schools of Indian Buddhist philosophy is that they assume that persons ultimately exist.⁴⁸

The only non-Buddhist theory of persons Vasubandhu seems to discuss explicitly in the "Refutation" is that of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy. Although nominally distinct, the Vaiśeṣika and Nyāya schools of philosophy are usually treated as a single school, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school, whose metaphysical views are most often presented by the Vaiśeṣikas and whose epistemological and logical views are usually presented by the Naiyāyikas. The root texts of this school are Kaṇāda's *Vaiśeṣika Sūtras* (sixth century BCE) and Gotama's *Nyāya Sūtras* (sixth century BCE).⁴⁹ Vasubandhu is likely to have studied the theory of persons presented in these seminal works, as well as the elucidation of the Vaiśeṣika theory of persons by Praśastapāda in his *Padārthadharmasamgraha* (second century CE)⁵⁰ and the elucidation of the Nyāya theory of persons by Vātsyāyana in his *Nyāya Bhāṣya* (second century CE).⁵¹ In Gotama's *Nyāya Sūtras* the principal arguments for the existence of a self occur in Book I, Chapter 1 and in Book III, Chapter 1. In Kaṇāda's *Vaiśeṣika Sūtras* the principal arguments occur in Book III, Chapters 1 and 2.⁵² Readers will find a study of these texts very helpful for an assessment of Vasubandhu's replies to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika school objections to his theory of persons and his own objections to their theory. There are, moreover, a number of later treatises that develop the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika arguments for the existence of the self that may be consulted for elaborations of the objections of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas to the sort of theory of persons presented by Vasubandhu.⁵³

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas claim that, from the point of view of their ultimate reality, persons are "selves" in the sense of being permanent and partless separate substances, and that, through contact with an internal organ (*manas*), these selves become conceivers of objects. By means of becoming

conceivers of objects, they acquire characters of a kind only such entities can possess and begin to function as agents of bodily motion. The existence of selves is known by means of a correct inference from the existence of the characters and agency they possess. In Section 4 of the “Refutation” a variety of arguments used by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas to prove the existence of selves are presented, many of which are made the basis of objections to Vasubandhu’s theory of persons. Although consciousness of objects is made a proof of the existence of selves, it is not thought that selves are by their own natures conscious of objects. The practical goal of the practice of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy is to free persons from consciousness of objects, since suffering is the inevitable consequence of consciousness of objects. But in India, among those who identify selves with owners or possessors of consciousness and agents of bodily motion, the essentialist viewpoint predominates. The Jains, Pūrva Mīmāṃsās, Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedāntins, and Dvaita Vedāntins all hold versions of the theory that selves by their own natures are conscious of objects and are agents of bodily motion.

Another non-Buddhist theory of persons to which Vasubandhu alludes, according to Yaśomitra, is that of the Sāṃkhyas. The basic text in which the Sāṃkhyas’ theory of persons is presented is the *Sāṃkhyakārikas* (fifth century CE), which is attributed to Īśvarakṛṣṇa. In verses 17–20 of this work, proofs of the existence, nature, and number of selves are presented.⁵⁴ Although this text may have been composed about the time Vasubandhu composed the *Treasury*, the doctrines it contains are quite ancient. So we may assume that Vasubandhu is familiar with the theory of persons it contains, even if he does not openly criticize it in the “Refutation.” The Sāṃkhyas claim that there are just two basic kinds of substances. The first kind is a “self” (*puruṣa* or *ātman*), which they believe to be a permanent and partless consciousness that is a subject that can exist without an object, that can exist without an owner or possessor, and that cannot itself be made an object of consciousness. The second kind of substance is an unmanifest form of “matter” (*prakṛti*) that, for the enjoyment of selves, causes itself, by combining its three causally inseparable fundamental “constituents” or “qualities” (*guṇa*-s) in different ways, to evolve into different kinds of objects for subjects to witness. The first of these evolutes is an agent “intellect” (*buddhi*), which causes itself to evolve into “a mind that conceives an I” (*ahaṃkāra*), which mind, in dependence upon how its own causally inseparable three constituents are combined, causes itself to evolve into many other kinds of objects for selves to witness. The practical goal of the Sāṃkhya philosophy is for persons to become free from the illusion that they are objects of consciousness. The Sāṃkhyas’ pluralistic version of selves as permanent and partless instances of pure consciousnesses is later transformed by the Advaita Vedāntins into a theory according to which every self is in the last analysis one universal permanent and partless consciousness that is identical to “absolute reality” (*brahman*).

The Indian Buddhist philosophical schools and the two realities

The traditional Buddhist classification of the Buddhist philosophical schools is to some extent an artificial creation of later Buddhist scholars. But the classification does serve the purpose of placing the theses and arguments contained in Vasubandhu's "Refutation" into an Indian Buddhist philosophical context without getting bogged down in difficult questions concerning the interpretation of the views of particular philosophers. The four major philosophical schools are called the "Vaibhāṣika" (Exposition follower) school, the "Sautrāntika" (Sūtra follower) school, the "Cittamātrika" (Mind Only follower) school,⁵⁵ and the "Mādhyamika" (Middle Way follower) school.⁵⁶ Each of the four Buddhist philosophical schools is in fact a collection of two or more schools whose most fundamental theses are very similar.

In the Indian Buddhist philosophical schools, it is clearly asserted or implied that all phenomena known to exist are classified as either "conventional realities" (*saṃvṛtisatya*-s) or "ultimate realities" (*paramārthasatya*-s), even though the distinction between these realities may not be stressed in their extant literature. The distinction needs to be incorporated into the theories set out in the different schools because it is made in the Buddha's sūtras. The two realities, in general, may be characterized as two ways in which objects known to exist possess reality. The etymology of *saṃvṛti* in *saṃvṛtisatya* suggests that a conventional reality, or perhaps the mind that apprehends it, conceals or hides an ultimate reality. In a generic sense, I suggest, a conventional reality may be said to be the conventional nature of an object established by conventional means, apart from the use of the sort of analysis that reveals its ultimate nature or reality, which is known by means of such an analysis. This is not a very informative account, but it is about all that can be said about the general meaning of the terms. In all schools it is agreed that we need to rely upon both conventional realities and ultimate realities in order to traverse the path to nirvāṇa. It is important to rely on conventional realities, for instance, for the purpose of explaining what the problem of suffering is and how to solve it. In particular, the Buddha taught his disciples to rely on conventional realities in their practice of morality. Although we are not agents of actions or subjects of experience in the domain of ultimate realities, for instance, we are such agents and subjects in the domain of the conventional realities, which are the foundation of the practice of morality. We are to rely on ultimate realities in the practice of wisdom on the path, he taught, insofar as direct yogic perception of ultimate realities is the means by which we can effectively eliminate the mistaken view of a self, which is the root cause of suffering in saṃsāra. Different interpretations of the exact natures of the two realities are presented in most of the Indian Buddhist philosophical schools. The Pudgalavādins' interpretation, however, will need to be reconstructed on

the basis of what is said in the *Tridharmaka Śāstra* about the three realities and the fact that many of their theses are comparable to those held in other Vaibhāṣika schools.

In all Indian Buddhist philosophical schools other than the Pudgalavāda schools, phenomena known to exist are also classified as either “causally conditioned” (*saṃskṛta*) or “causally unconditioned” (*asaṃskṛta*), as “impermanent” (*anitya*) or “permanent” (*nitya*), as one of the twelve “bases of perception” (*āyatana*-s) and as one of the eighteen “elements” (*dhātu*-s).⁵⁷ The Pudgalavādins claim that there are, in addition, phenomena that are “inexplicable” (*avaktavya*). According to most Vaibhāṣika schools, and perhaps to the Sautrāntika school from whose perspective Vasubandhu composed the bulk of the *Commentary*, there are four kinds of phenomena that are causally conditioned and impermanent: “bodily forms” (*rūpa*-s), “minds” (*citta*-s), “mental factors” (*caitta*-s), and “causal factors not associated with minds or mental factors” (*viprayuktasaṃskāra*-s). Moreover, there are three kinds of phenomena that are causally unconditioned and permanent: space, cessations not brought about by analysis, and cessations brought about by analysis. Nirvāṇa, which is included as one of the cessations brought about by analysis, is the cessation of all suffering and saṃsāra.

In the Indian Buddhist philosophical schools it is believed that the twelve bases of perception are six kinds of organs of perception, five of which are sense-organs and one of which is a “mental organ” (*manas*), and six kinds of objects of direct perception, each of which consists of different kinds of objects directly apprehended by means of one of the organs of perception. When the minds that directly apprehend these objects by means of these organs are added to the list, one mind answering to each of the six organs, the resultant eighteen phenomena are called “the elements.” The same phenomena are contained in both the classification into twelve bases of perception and the classification into eighteen elements, since the six minds included in the latter classification are counted in the former classification as objects directly apprehended by means of the mental organ.

A classification of causally conditioned and impermanent phenomena that is accepted in all schools is employed in the context of an analysis of the phenomena of which bodies and minds are composed. It is the classification of causally conditioned and impermanent phenomena into the following five “aggregates” (*skandha*-s): “bodily forms” (*rūpa*-s), “feeling” (*vedanā*), “discrimination” (*saṃjñā*), “volitional forces” (*saṃskāra*-s), and “consciousness” (*viññāna*).⁵⁸ The aggregate of bodily forms includes all of the most basic bodily phenomena in dependence upon which the Buddha believed we conceive bodies. If these bodies are the bodies of persons, the aggregate of bodily forms includes the sense-organs. The remaining aggregates include all of the most basic mental phenomena in dependence upon which he believed we conceive minds. A more detailed account of

Vasubandhu's explanation of the aggregates will be presented later in this Introduction.

Most Indian Buddhist scholars have distinguished eighteen different Vaibhāṣika schools.⁵⁹ For our purposes these may be divided into fourteen orthodox Vaibhāṣika schools and four Pudgalavādin schools.⁶⁰ According to the orthodox Vaibhāṣika schools, what we normally call bodies are collections of elements that are “substantially real” (*dravyasat*). There are two sorts of elements of bodies, those that are themselves “substances” (*dravya*-s), which always exist together in differently configured inseparable combinations, and the combinations themselves, of which it is said that they cannot be physically or mentally broken down into their constituent substances. In all bodies other than the sense-organs, the most basic configuration of inseparable elements is that some, the “primary elements” (*mahābhūta*-s), provide an underlying support (*āśraya*) for others, called the “secondary elements” (*bhautika*-s). The sense-organs, by contrast, are differently configured inseparable combinations of subtle forms of the four primary elements known as earth, air or wind, fire, and water. In addition, what we normally call minds are composed of temporally partless mental substances. These mental substances also exist together in inseparable combinations. One of them, called “mind” (*citta*), is the underlying support for the others, called “mental factors” (*caitta*-s).

We need not here explore any further the orthodox Vaibhāṣika account of the elements of which bodies and minds are composed or attempt to pursue the many the questions it raises.⁶¹ Nor do we need to explore Vasubandhu's critique of this account. However, since to my knowledge Vasubandhu does not explain what is meant by “substantially real” (*dravyasat*) and “substance” (*dravya*) and these terms play an important role in the argumentation of the “Refutation,” we need to employ an interpretation of their meaning if we are to get a clear understanding of that argumentation. The interpretation that I believe explains their use in the “Refutation” is (1) that substantially real phenomena are phenomena that possess natures of their own by virtue of which they exist and can be identified independently of one another, (2) that substances and inseparable combinations of substances are substantially real phenomena, (3) that substances are the basic kinds of phenomena that exist, and (4) that among substances, those that are causally conditioned exist in inseparable combinations with others, and those that are causally unconditioned do not.⁶² Among the substances that the orthodox Vaibhāṣikas believe to exist are seventy-two kinds of causally conditioned phenomena and three kinds of causally unconditioned phenomena. The seventy-two kinds of causally conditioned phenomena are the phenomena that are included in the five aggregates of which bodies and minds are composed. The causally unconditioned phenomena are, as mentioned above, space, cessations occasioned by analysis, and cessations not occasioned by analysis.⁶³

Substantially real phenomena, which are also called phenomena that possess substantial reality (*dravyasiddhi*), are to be distinguished from phenomena whose reality is substantially established (*dravyasiddha*). Substantially established realities are entities whose identities are mentally constructed, but exist by reason of being composed of different kinds of substances in dependence upon which their identity is constructed.⁶⁴ They are unlike inseparable combinations of substances insofar as they lack separate identities. On the basis of Vasubandhu's account of their views in the *Treasury*, I believe, it may be inferred that the orthodox Vaibhāṣikas think that all and only substantial realities are ultimate realities, while all and only substantially established realities are conventional realities.

In verse 4 of Book VI of the *Treasury*, the orthodox Vaibhāṣika schools' interpretation of the Buddha's doctrine of the two realities is presented. The interpretation, which Vasubandhu endorses in the *Commentary*, consists of a pair of definitions in which we are given the means by which to determine whether an object known to exist is a conventional reality or an ultimate reality. It is said that an object of knowledge is a conventional reality just in case it is no longer conceived to be what it is conceived to be if analyzed or broken into parts. The implication is that a conventional reality is an object of knowledge that does not possess an identity by itself, but instead possesses an identity in dependence upon possessing parts the collection of which is the basis of its being conceived as a single entity of some sort. It is not implied that a conventional reality does not exist apart from being conceived, since what has been shown is only that the mind has superimposed an identity upon a collection of phenomena conceived by that mind as its parts. The standard example of a conventional reality is a pot, since when subjected to analysis or breakage it is no longer conceived as a pot. A person is another example. If the phenomena in a collection of phenomena upon which an identity is superimposed lose their identities when analyzed into parts or broken into parts, they too are conventional realities. This process of analysis or physical breakage of the object continues until the mind arrives at phenomena whose identity is not lost when analyzed or broken into parts.

An ultimate reality, by contrast, is an object of knowledge whose identity is retained if analyzed or broken into parts. Because ultimate realities are substantially real phenomena, they exist and have identities apart from being conceived. Although Vasubandhu himself seems to reject the Vaibhāṣikas' view that the ultimate realities of which bodies are composed are spatially unextended, he does accept the idea that there are, in some sense, minimally sized phenomena of which they are composed and that they are ultimate realities. Since in Section 4.8 of the "Refutation" he implies that the five aggregates in their uncontaminated forms are substances, in Section 2.1 that bodily forms, which are included in the collection of aggregates, are substantially real phenomena, and in Section 2.1.5

that the four primary elements are substances, I assume that he accepts the Vaibhāṣika view that the aggregates and the four elements are substances, and so, are ultimate realities.⁶⁵

The Pudgalavādin schools do not accept the orthodox Vaibhāṣika identification of ultimate realities with substantial realities, or of conventional realities with substantially established realities. In Section 2.1.1 of the “Refutation” the Pudgalavādins are in effect made to deny that persons are either substantial realities or substantially established realities. This denial, however, does not mean that they deny that persons are conventional realities. Rather, the reason for their denial is that they believe that conventional realities may be either substantially established or inexplicable, and that persons are of the second kind.⁶⁶ What is inexplicable, therefore, is basically what ultimately exists without being a substantial reality or a substantially established reality. Since substantial realities and substantially established realities exhaust the entities that possess separate identities, it is clear that ultimately existent inexplicable phenomena are entities without separate identities.

In the “Refutation” the idea of inexplicable persons is usually conveyed by the statements that persons neither are nor are not the aggregates, and that persons neither are nor are not other than the aggregates. But “are the aggregates” and “are not other than the aggregates” in these statements mean “are the same in existence as collections of aggregates,” and “are not the aggregates” means “are other than collections of aggregates as a separate substance.” The assumption is that what exists is either a collection of aggregates (which are substances) or a substance. This “logic” of being and not being the aggregates and of being other and not being other than the aggregates is grounded in the orthodox Vaibhāṣika belief that everything that exists is a substantial reality or a substantially established reality. The Pudgalavādins are basically claiming that this “logic” excludes the existence of entities without separate identities, and so, excludes the existence of persons.

When the Pudgalavādins say in the “Refutation” that persons exist, they are assuming that persons are inexplicable phenomena and that the existence they possess is ultimate existence. This is the existence, I believe, that the Pudgalavādins of the *Kathāvatthu* called “existing in the way an ultimate thing exists.” We need to be clear, however, what this means. The meaning is that although inexplicable persons, insofar as they are conceived, exist in dependence upon aggregates, they do exist apart from the aggregates and from being conceived in dependence upon aggregates as entities that lack separate identities. So inexplicable persons are conventional realities insofar as they are conceived in dependence upon collections of aggregates, but ultimately exist insofar as they exist apart from being conceived, as entities without separate identities. We do exist by ourselves, in other words, but insofar as we do, we cannot be conceived. Because we