

ASPECTS OF THE BUDDHIST THEORY OF THE EXTERNAL WORLD AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS IN BUDDHISM

D. J. Kalupahana

IT may not be surprising to see the teachings embodied in the Upanisadic texts lending themselves to a wide variety of interpretations because these texts record the utterances of a variety of religious teachers and philosophers. But it is certainly surprising to see how early Buddhism representing the ideas attributed to one individual, namely, Siddhartha Gautama, came to be interpreted in different ways by thinkers who were advocates of totally divergent philosophical systems, ranging from the most extreme forms of realism to unqualified forms of idealism. The purport of this paper is to examine one of the most important theories of early Buddhism namely, the theory of the external world which, in the course of time, underwent many changes and gave rise to different systems within the fold of Buddhism.

There is no doubt that the problems connected with the nature of perception and of the physical world have given rise to divergent systems of thought such as Realism, Phenomenalism, and Idealism. Therefore an examination of the problems of perception and of the external world, as they appear in the earliest Buddhist records, namely, the Pali Nikayas and the Chinese Agamas, will serve as a starting point in our discussion.

For the Buddha, the problem of perception was one of paramount importance, for he realised that all the misery and unhappiness in this world are due to the unwholesome tendencies generated by sense perception. It produced attachment which was the root cause of most of the suffering in this world. At the same time, the Buddha realised that a proper understanding of the operation of the sensory process would enable man to detect these evils and eradicate them thus paving the way for the attainment of perfect happiness. Hence, in the Samyutta Nikaya, the higher life (*brahmacariya*), lived under the guidance of the Buddha, is said to be aimed at understanding the process of perception.¹

D. J. Kalupahana, M. A. (Ceylon), Ph. D. (Lond.) is a Lecturer in Pali and Buddhist Civilization at the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya.

¹ *Samyutta Nikāya*, ed. M. Leon Feer, (London: Pali Text Society, 1960 reprint) (Hereinafter abbreviated *S*) 4. 138.

The theory of sense perception is represented in the special application of the causal principle, consisting of twelve factors, by the phrase *salāyatana* (*liu ju ch'u* 六入處). The term *āyatana* which, to use a term from modern psychology, means a 'gateway',¹ denotes both the sense organ as well as the sense object². The former is called the internal 'gateway' (*ajjhattika āyatana*, *nei ju ch'u* 內入處) and the latter, the external 'gateway' (*bāhira āyatana*, *wei ju ch'u* 外入處).³ The origin of sense perception or cognition from this subject-object relationship is described in an oft recurring statement in the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. It runs thus: "Depending on eye and visible form there arises visual consciousness; the concurrence of the three is contact; depending on contact is feeling; what one feels, one senses (that is, one recognizes); what one senses, one thinks about; . . ."⁴

A more elaborate account giving a strictly causal explanation of the process of perception than the one quoted earlier, is found in the *Mahā Hatthipadopama Sutta*. Here it is held that visual cognition, for example, results from the presence of three conditions, namely, (a) the existence of an unimpaired internal visual organ, (b) the entry of the external visible form into the range of vision and (c) an appropriate act of attention on the part of the mind⁵. All these conditions should be satisfied for any act of perception to be possible. Thus, it is maintained that if condition (a) alone is satisfied but not (b) and (c) there would be no perception; likewise, if conditions (a) and (b) alone are satisfied and not condition (c) perception would not be possible⁶.

Condition (a) represents a more precise definition of the first of the conditions given in the oft recurring formula of perception.

¹ Munn, Norman L., *Psychology. The Fundamentals of Human Adjustment*, (London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., Fourth Edition, 1961) 507.

² *Compendium of Philosophy*, (being a translation . . . of the Adhidhammatthasangaha) by Shwe Zan Aung and Mrs. C. A. F. Rhys Davids, (London: Pali Text Society, 1963 reprint) 183, note 1.

³ *Majjhima Nikāya*, ed. V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, (London: Pali Text Society, 1948) (abbreviated *M*) 1. 190; *Chung A-han Ching* (abbreviated *Chung* Fascicle 7; Sutra 2 (in *Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo*, abbreviated *TD*, edited by J. Takakusu and K. Watanabe, Tokyo: The Taisho Issai-kyō Kankō Kwai, 1924-9, 1. 467a).

⁴ *M* I. 111-2; *Chung* 28: 3 (*TD* 1. 504b).

⁵ *M* I. 190; *Chung* 7: 2 (*TD* 1. 477a).

⁶ Loc. cit.

This definition takes into account the possibility of a distortion of perception if the sense organ were not to be in perfect condition. Of special significance is the adjective 'internal' (*ajjhattika*, *nei 𑀅𑀲*) because it is not the mere existence of the sense organ but the perfect condition of the internal structure of the sense organ that is important for the genesis of perception without distortion.¹ The Chinese version seems to imply a person whose visual organ is unimpaired.²

Condition (b) is defined differently in the Pali Nikāyas and the Chinese Āgamas. The Pali version emphasises the coming of the external object into proper focus or within the range of vision. The word *āpātha* occurring in the Pali text may be derived from *a* with causative or Class X of \sqrt{path} (to go, to throw, to send) meaning sphere or range (of sense organ), hence synonymous with *visaya* or *gocara*.³ But along with this, the *Critical Pali Dictionary* as well as the *Pali English Dictionary*,⁴ suggest another meaning, namely, "to become clear." The Chinese version more specifically gives this meaning when it maintains that "the external object should be illuminated by light."⁵ In the later Buddhist texts, light (*āloka*), which purports to illuminate the object, has been laid down as a separate condition necessary for the genesis of perception.⁶ This idea gained currency during the later period that the word *ābhāsa* (light) came to replace the earlier term *āpātha*.⁷

The third condition necessary for the production of perception is given as attention. The Pali text uses the phrase *tajjo samannāhāro*, where *tajja* means "born, of that" and *samannāhāra* connotes the idea of "bringing in together" (*sam + anu + ā + √hr*). E. R. Saratchandra has raised the question as to whether the phrase *tajja samannāhāra* refers to the automatic act of sensory attention brought about by the intensity of the stimulus or whether

¹ Loc. cit.

² Loc. cit.

³ *A Critical Pali Dictionary*, ed. V. Trenckner, Dines Anderson, Helmer Smith, and others, (Copenhagen: The Royal Academy of Sciences and Letters, 1924), 101.2.

⁴ Ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and W. Stede, (London: Pali Text Society, 1959 reprint) 102b.

⁵ *Chung* 7: 2 (TD 1,467a),

⁶ *Aryasālistamba-sūtra*, ed. L. de la Vallée Poussin in *Theorie des Douze Causes* (Gand: La Faculté des philosophie et lettres, 1913) 85. See also *Mādhyamīkavṛttih*, ed. L. de la Vallée Poussin, (St. Petersburg: Academie Imperiale des Sciences, 1903) (Hereinafter abbreviated *MKV*) 567.

⁷ *Mahāvastu* ed. E. Senart, (Paris: L'Imprimerie Nationale, 1882-7) 3.66; 1. 6; *Sikṣāsamuccaya*, ed. C. Bendall, (St. Petersburg: 1902) 128, 129, 151, etc.

it meant a deliberate act directed by interest¹. On the basis of the Sanskrit tradition he is inclined to accept the former interpretation and he rejects the traditional explanation given by Buddhaghosa². His argument is based on the passages in the *Sālistamba-sūtra*³ and *Mādhyamikavṛtti*⁴ where the phrase *tajjamasikāra* occurs instead of *tajjōsamannāhāra*. Saratchandra's contention that *tajjasa-mannāhāra* refers to the automatic act of sensory attention seems to depend on the undue emphasis laid on the term *tajja* to the neglect of the term *samannāhāra*. It may be noted that both terms *samannāhāra* and *mannasikāra* express an active meaning and this is also supported by the Chinese rendering of the Āgama passage which has *nien* (念), a character meaning "to think, to remember, to recall." It is true that consciousness is aroused by the contact of the sense organ and the sense object as indicated by the term *tajja*, but that itself without an act directed by interest would not produce a complete perception. Therefore, the term *tajja-samannāhāra* may be taken as implying both sensory excitation and deliberate act directed by interest on the part of the percipient.

The Nikāyas and Āgamas refer to the six kinds of perceptions, namely, visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile and mental.⁵ The *Mahā Tanhāsāṅkhaya Sutta* maintains that they are so reckoned because of the different causes that produce them.⁶ Thus, perception that arises depending on the visual organ and visible form is known as visual perception⁷. Elsewhere it is pointed out that the five sense organs (*pañc'indriyāni*, *wu ken* 五根)—excluding mind (*man'indriya*, *i ken* 意根)—have different sensory fields and do not encroach upon or share the sensory fields of one another⁸. But mind (*mano*, *i 意*) can survey all the spheres and is a coordinat-ing factor of the different perceptions, a form of *sensus communis*⁹.

It is interesting to note that this description of perception is generally accepted by almost all the later schools of Buddhism. But the interpretation they give to the subject—object relationship and especially to the nature of the external object has differed widely

¹ *Buddhist Psychology of Perception*, (Colombo: The Ceylon University Press, 1958) 21.

² *Papañcasūdanī* (Majjhima Nikāyaṭṭhakathā), ed. J. H. Woods and D. Kosambi, (London: Pali Text Society, 1928) 2. 229.

³ 85.

⁴ 567

⁵ *M* 1. 53; *Chung* 8: 2 (TD 1.51c).

⁶ *M* 1. 259; *Chung* 54:2 (TD 1. 767a).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *M* 1.295; *Chung* 58:2 (TD 1. 791b.)

⁹ *Ibid.*

and it would be interesting to examine these differences and trace the causes that led to these differences so that in the end it would be possible to determine the nature of the philosophical standpoints to which these schools are committed.

Let us examine the philosophical implications of the statement of the theory of perception as given in the early Buddhist sutras. When this is done and a proper assessment of the philosophical standpoint of early Buddhism has been made, it would be easy to find out in what respects it differs from the interpretation given in the later Buddhist schools.

Examining the various descriptions of the nature of the world found in the early Buddhist texts, many of the modern scholars have come to the conclusion that early Buddhism as represented in the Pali Nikāyas and Chinese Āgamas is a form of realism¹. But this seems to be a rather hasty conclusion arrived at without examining the levels of understanding and the nature of the people to whom the Buddha's discourses were addressed. It is well to remember here that a good part of the discourses of the Buddha were addressed to the trainee (*sekha*), to the uneducated ordinary man (*assutavā puthujjano*), rather than to the person with some kind of philosophical maturity. In such cases the Buddha was careful not to drag in epistemological problems and confuse his understanding. Instead, his teaching was based on a kind of commonsense realism, a realism which, according to a modern definition, takes for granted a premise such as "that sense experience reports a true and uninterrupted, if limited, account of objects; that it is possible to have faith and direct knowledge of the actual world"². An attempt to safeguard his own philosophical standpoint by denying the real existence and direct perception of the external world was not going to be of much benefit in the matter of instructing the ordinary householder (*gihī*) who is prone to enjoy the pleasures of sense (*kāmabhogi*). Therefore one may not be justified in trying to

¹ Stcherbatsky, T. I., *The Central Conception of Buddhism and the Meaning of the Word "Dharma"*, (London: The Royal Asiatic Society, 1923) 54; Murti, T. R. V., *Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., Second Edition, 1960) 54. The most recent research also has tended to favour this interpretation, see Karunadasa, Y., *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, (Colombo: Department of Cultural Affairs, 1967) 176.

² See *Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. D. D. Runes, (New York: Philosophical Library, no date) art. Realism.

present the Buddha's philosophical standpoint based on discourses which were addressed to such an audience.

On the other hand, we find discourses of the Buddha where he emphasised the fact that the knowledge of the external world is dependent on the activities of the senses. It is stated in many places that as far as the individual is concerned both the origin and cessation of the world are "within this fathom long conscious body."¹ Statements such as these were made with the hope of emphasising the efficacy of human exertion in the matter of changing the pattern of one's own life, rather than with the intention of justifying the idealist standpoint that the external world does not exist when not perceived.

But there certainly are discourses, which the Buddha addressed to the more philosophically mature minds, as well as records of discussions, which the Buddha had with some of the non-Buddhist philosophers of his time. It is to these discourses and records of discussions that we have to turn to in our assessment of the Buddha's philosophical standpoint. These are the discussions where philosophers like Jāṇussoṇi² and philosopher monarchs like Pāyāsī³ figure. In these discussions and discourses, unlike those referred to earlier where the Buddha adopted a realistic interpretation of the world, we find the Buddha, with a keen awareness of the epistemological problems, avoiding all kinds of metaphysical theories and postulates. This attitude is very clearly depicted in the philosophical discussion which the Buddha had with Jāṇussoṇi regarding the definition of "everything" (*sabbam, i chieh* 一切), wherein the Buddha maintains that if one were to speculate on the nature of reality by depending on data available through sources other than sense perception one would be transgressing the limits of experience (*avisaya, fei ching chieh* 非境界).⁴ It purports to reject all speculative theories which go beyond the data of sensory experience, thus emphasising the empiricist attitude.

¹ S 1. 62; *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, ed. Richard Morris, (London: Pali Text Society, 1885-1900) 2. 48.

² S 1. 76.

³ *Dīgha Nikāya*, ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. Estlin Carpenter, (London: Pali Text Society, 1938) (Hereinafter abbreviated *D*) 2. 316 ff; *Ch'ang A-han Ching* (abbreviated *Ch'ang*) 7 (*TD* 1. 42b ff).

⁴ S 4. 15; *Tsa A-han Ching* (abbreviated *Tsa*) 13:17 (*TD* 2. 91b). See also Kalupahana, D. J., "A Buddhist Tract on Empiricism" in *Philosophy East and West*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press) 19:1 (January 1969) 65-67.

The recognition of the external object, which is not 'ideal', eliminates the possibility of reading idealism into the early Buddhist texts. At the same time the emphasis on sense contact, or to use a term from modern philosophy, sense data (*phassa, ch'u*), prevents any attempt to see any form of realism in those same texts. Statements to the effect that conceptions, theories or speculations regarding the nature of the external world should not be based on anything transcending sense perception or sense data (*aññatra phassā, pu yuan ch'u*)¹ lead to the irresistible conclusion that early Buddhism, while indirectly rejecting realism as well as idealism, presented a phenomenistic account of the world. This phenomenistic standpoint which denied a reality behind phenomena was the mainstay of the Buddhist rejection of the *ātma*-theories of the pre-Buddhistic thinkers.

But coming down to the period of the Abhidharma we find a gradual change in this philosophical outlook. The origin of the Abhidharma has been traced to the attempt to preserve the fundamental teachings of the Buddha by resorting to the method of collecting and classifying and at times elaborating the advanced teachings,² a tendency which was noticeable even in the sūtras of the Nikāyas and the Āgamas³. This process of collecting and classifying left the Buddhists with categories such as *skandha, dhātu, āyatana, indriya, satya*, etc. These constitute the subject-matter of all major works on Abhidharma. Empirical reality came to be reckoned in terms of material (*rūpa*) and mental (*citta, caitta, or cetasika*) facts. After this, it became necessary to give a definition of each one of these dharmas coming under treatment. Thus, matter (*rūpa*) came to be regarded as non-mental (*cittaviprayukta* or *cittavippayutta, acetasika*).⁴ Such definitions led to a clear demarcation between material and mental facts. Moreover, these material and mental facts came to be regarded as realities (*paramattha* or

¹ S 2. 33; Tsa 14:1 (TD 2. 94a); also *Ch'ang* 12:1 (TD 1. 76a).

² *Abhidharmadīpa*, ed. P. S. Jaini, (Patna: Kashi Prasad Jayaswal Research Institute, 1959) Introduction 29 ff.

³ Cf. D 3. 117 ff; *Ch'ang* 20: 1 (TD 1. 72c ff); D 3. 272 ff; *Ch'ang* 8:2 (TD 1. 49b ff); M 2. 243 ff; *Chung* 52: 1 (TD 1. 752c ff).

⁴ *Dhammasaṅgani*, ed E. Muller, (London: Pali Text Society, 1885) 125, 206-210, etc. But in the Sarvāstivāda the term *cittaviprayukta* was used to denote a category of dharmas which was drawn up later on, see Jaini, *Abhidharmadīpa*, Introduction, 93 ff.

paramārtha).¹ Thus the philosophy of the Adhidharma assumed the form of a *naive realism* or *pluralism*. This necessitated a change in the Ābhidharmika theory of perception too.

As if to answer the question "How is it that mind which is of a completely different nature, came to be sensitive to matter"? the Ābhidharmikas divided matter into gross matter (*mahābhūta*) and subtle matter (*upādārūpa*), i. e., matter which was derived from gross matter, and they maintained that the sense organs as well as the phenomena they are sensitive to are subtle matter.² Thus, what is perceived is only subtle matter; gross matter is a reality which cannot be settled by any possible observation or experience. This is the standpoint of the realist. This was very different from the philosophical outlook of early Buddhism.

The process of change initiated during the period of the Adhidharma did not stop at that. Philosophical speculation continued in the wake of the emergence of such pluralistic and realistic schools such as those of the Vaiśeṣika, and we find Ābhidharmikas too being influenced by their speculations. For example, the atomic theory, without apparently any antecedent history in the early Buddhist texts, appears during the time of the Adhidharma and absorbed the attention of most of the Buddhists. The acceptance of this atomic theory created innumerable problems for the Ābhidharmikas, and the attempts to solve these led to the emergence of many conflicting views and hence different schools within the fold of Buddhism.

A very lucid account of the atomic theories of the realist as well as the semi-realist schools is given by their opponents, the idealists³. These accounts are important not only because they present a concise and clear description of the atomic theories, but also because they examine and lay bare the defects and deficiencies of these theories. In the main, there were three atomic

¹ *Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*, in the *Journal of the Pali Text Society* (London: Pali Text Society, 1884) 1.

Tattha vuttābhidhammatthā catudhā paramatthato,
cittaṃ cetasikaṃ rūpaṃ nibbānam iti sabbathā.

² See Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, 33 ff.

³ *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi, Viṃsatikā et Triṃsikā*, avec le commentaire de Sthiramati, . . . publié . . . par Sylvain Lévi, (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honore Champion 1925) (Herein after abbreviated *Siddhi—Levi*) 6 ff: *Alambanapariksa and Vṛtti* by Dīṅnāga with the commentary of Dharmapāla, restored into Sanskrit . . . by N. Aiyaswami Sastri, (Adyar: Adyar Library, 1942) 3 ff.

theories which are mentioned in Vasubandhu's *Viññaptimātratāsiddhi*. They are as follows:-

- 1 The object of perception is the (material) form consisting of parts (*avayavirūpa*) — the theory attributed to the Vaiśeṣika school.
- 2 The object of perception is the aggregate (*saṅghāta*) of atoms (*paramāṇu*) — the theory held by the Sārvastivādins.
- 3 The object of perception is an aggregate of atoms which have coalesced (*sañcita*) into one unit — the theory upheld by the Sautrāntikas.

The first no doubt is the Vaiśeṣika theory. Although the object is not described here in terms of atoms (*paramāṇu*), but only as a form (*rūpa*) consisting of parts (*avayava*), the Vaiśeṣikas recognized the existence of indivisible and eternal atoms which were considered to be suprasensible and bereft of magnitude. It is only when the suprasensible atoms combine themselves into a group of three or more that they assume magnitude and become perceptible. Thus the smallest group of atoms which has magnitude (*mahattva*) and colour (*udbhūtarūpa*) and which is perceptible is the tetrad (*trayāṇuka*).¹

The Vaiśeṣikas may be described as thoroughgoing realists since they made a concerted attempt to prove that the complex whole (*avayavin*), though composed of parts (*avayava*), is different from each and all of them (*dravyāntara*),² and is directly perceived. According to them the parts as well as the whole are real. Thus the belief in the unity (*ekatva*) of the external object mentioned in the *Viññaptimātratāsiddhi* (*Viṃśatikā-bhāṣya*) of Vasubandhu, is a reference to the Vaiśeṣika belief in the unity of atoms in a compounded whole.³

The next theory is that of the Sārvastivādins. Referring to their theory of the external object, Vasubandhu says:

¹ 6. f.

² *Vaiśeṣika Sūtra* iv. 1. 6: see also Bhaduri, S., *Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Metaphysics*, (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1947) 143; Chatterjee, S. C., *The Nyāya Theory of Knowledge*, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1953) 160—170.

³ Bhaduri, op. cit., p. 230.

⁴ *Viññapti* (Levi) 6.

“It is neither a multiplicity (*anekaṃ*) because the atoms are not perceived when taken individually (*pratyeka*). Nor is it their aggregate because (the aggregate of) atoms do not constitute one (unitary) substance.”¹ Here there are two aspects of the atomic theory of the Vaibhāṣikas being criticised by Vasubandhu. L. de la Vallee Poussin seems to think that only the first of these aspects represents the Sarvastivāda theory, for he says: “L’ objet de la connaissance est les *paramāṇus*, *pratyekaṃ*, theorie Sarvastivādin,”² and attributes the second aspect to the Sautrāntikas.³ It is rather difficult to believe that there was any school which upheld the view that the individual (*pratyeka*) atoms (*paramaṇu*) constitute the object of perception, for all the schools were agreed in maintaining that the atoms *per se* are suprasensible (*atindriya*). The view that individual atoms become the object of perception is not permissible according to Hsuan Tsang’s version of the *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi* which de la Vallee Poussin himself was translating into French. Here it is said that “Les anciens Sarvastivādins pensant que les atoms pris individuellement, mais lorsqu’ils sont agglomerés, sont la ‘condition en qualité’ d’objet de la connaissance.”⁴ The implication is that the individual atoms *exist*, but that they could serve as object-conditions only when they are in aggregates. But still, if we are to consider the two problems referred to in the *Vīmasatikā* as two aspects of the same theory, the Sarvastivāda theory may seem paradoxical in that it recognizes the reality of individual atoms which go to form the perceptible aggregate, yet such an aggregate is not considered to be a unitary substance but only a multiplicity. But this aspect of the Sarvastivāda theory has been overlooked in a recent publication on the atomic theory of the Buddhists.⁵ Here it has been pointed out that the Vaibhāṣikas postulated two kinds of atoms, viz, the *dravya-paramaṇu* (the unitary atom) and the *saṅghāta-paramaṇu* (the aggregate atom, i. e. the molecule). But the passage quoted in support of this does not refer to *saṅghāta-paramaṇu* but only to *saṅghāta-rupa*

¹ Ibid., 6--7.

² *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*, La Siddhi de Hsuan-Tsang, traduite et annotée par L. de la Vallee Poussin, (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Guethner, 1928-9) (Herein after abbreviated *Siddhi* — Poussin) 44.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. See also *L’Abhidarmakosa de Vasubandhu*, traduite et annotée par L. de la Vallee Poussin, (Paris: Societe Belge d’Etudes Orientales, 1923-31) 3.213.

⁵ Karunadasa, *Buddhist Analysis of Matter*, 143.

(aggregate form).¹ Yet there is a statement which runs thus: *ta eva te saṅghātāḥ paramaṇavaḥ sprsyante yatha rūpayanta iti.*² Here the word *saṅghāta* is used only as an adjective to refer to the atoms which have formed into a group and immediately after this statement is a pointed reference to the fact that these aggregates cannot be considered as unitary substances (*saṅghātā eva naikā ity arthah*).³ If so, unitary atoms (*dravya-paramāṇu*) are not considered as constituting *one* aggregate atom or molecule (*saṅghāta-paramāṇu*), but only an aggregate form (*saṅghāta-rūpa*) of atoms. The terms *saṅghāta-paramāṇu* and *saṅghāta-rūpa* are used as synonyms for *sthūla rūpa* (gross form).⁴

Thus, it is important to note that according to the Sarvastivāda theory, the atoms exist individually, and that when they are in aggregate form (*saṅghāta-rūpa*) they are perceptible or become the object-condition (*ālambanapratyaya*) of consciousness. But this aggregate is not to be considered atom-wise a unity (*eka*); it is only a multiplicity (*aneka*). Thus the difference between the Vaiśeṣika and the Vaibhāṣika theories is that, according to the former, the individual atoms go to form one whole, a unity, while according to the latter, the indivisible atoms forming an aggregate do not represent a unity but only a multiplicity. This paradoxical view of the Vaibhāṣikas was severely criticised by Vasubandhu in his *Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*.

The neo-Sarvastivādins, led by Saṅghabhadra, seem to have attempted to solve this problem by maintaining that "the individual atoms (*ekaikaparamāṇu*), when they do not depend on others (*anyanirapekṣa*), are imperceptible (*atīndriya*), but that they are grasped by the senses (*indriyagrāha*) when they are in a multitude (*bahavaḥ*) and when they depend on each other (*parasparāpekṣāḥ*) for their existence."⁵ This being the view of the neo-Sarvastivādins it is not surprising that de la Vallee Poussin failed to find any mention of it in the *Abhidharmakosa* of Vasubandhu,⁶ but only in Sthiramati's commentary on the *Triṃśikā*.⁷

¹ *Abhidharmakosavyākhyā (Sphutārthā)*, ed. U. Wogihara, (Tokyo: Publishing Association of Abhidharmakosavyākhyā, 1932-6) 85.

² *Ibid*

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ *Siddhi* (Poussin) 45

⁵ *Siddhi* (Levi) 16.

⁶ *Siddhi* (Poussin) 45, note 1.

⁷ See above note 50.

The third theory, namely, that postulated by the Sautrāntikas, represents yet another attempt to solve the problems arising from the atomic theory of the Sarvastivādins. Unlike the Vaiśeṣikas, the Sautrāntikas refused to accept the view that the 'whole', consisting of 'parts' (*avayava*) is directly perceived by the senses. Neither could they reconcile themselves to the theory of the Sarvastivādins. Therefore, they maintained that while the atoms are indivisible units, they could coalesce or mingle together to form an object. Thus while the Sarvastivādins believed in the aggregation of atoms (*saṅghāta*), the Sautrāntikas advocated the coalescence of atoms (*sañcita, saṃyoga*).¹ It may be pointed out that, although de la Vallee Poussin has not been able to see any difference between these two theories and considered the terms *saṅghāta* and *sancita* as synonyms,² Vasubandhu's *Vimśatikā* treats them as two different theories.³ But unlike the Vaiśeṣikas and the two groups of Sarvastivādins, the Sautrāntikas maintained that this object is not directly perceived.

It may be clear from the above description that in spite of the differences in the three schools of thought, there is one postulate common to all, namely, that the indivisible atom is imperceptible, that is, it does not serve as the object of perception. What serves as the object of perception is made up of the indivisible atoms. It was mentioned that the Ābhidharmikas, like the Vaiśeṣikas, were realists and believed that the external object or form (*rūpa*) is non-mental (*cittaviprayukta, acetasika*). But this commonsense realism could not easily be maintained at a time when philosophical inquiry had attained a very high degree of maturity. Thus we find even some of the adherents of the Vaiśeṣika school making concessions to this philosophical inquiry and trying to maintain that perception is partly inferential.⁴

The Sautrāntikas, by maintaining that the external object is not directly known and that it is known only through representations, deprived physical objects of much of the reality ascribed

¹ *Siddhi* (Levi) 7; *Ālambanaparīksā*, 4.

² *Siddhi* (Poussin) 44.

³ *Siddhi* (Levi) 6-7.

⁴ Bhaduri, *Studies in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika Metaphysics*, 229 ff.

to them by commonsense. This led to a twofold development represented by the two schools of thought, the Mādhyamika and the Yogācāra.

Once a philosopher has gone so far as to deprive the physical objects of the reality which human beings are acquainted with through sense perception, two alternatives remain open to him. Either he may maintain that their nature is completely unknown and that we do not know anything about them. Or else he may maintain that they are merely ideas and that nothing exists outside the mind.¹

The dialectic of Nāgārjuna and his followers was directed at proving the first alternative. They vehemently criticised the view that there is an aspect of reality in phenomena, an aspect which may be called "thing-in-itself" (*sva bhāvo*).² Dialectical arguments were adduced by them to expose the inherent contradictions in empirical propositions: the conflict between thesis and anti-thesis.³ This negation of empirical propositions was carried to such an extent that the other Buddhist schools considered this to be a form of nihilism.⁴ Although the reality of the empirical was negated, the Madhyamikas could not overlook the fact that causality (*pratityasamutpāda*) was considered to be one of the central teachings of the Buddha. Yet in early Buddhism, causality was considered to be the empirical reality. Thus the Mādhyamika negation of empirical reality would have implied the negation of the validity of causality. To overcome this discrepancy, the Mādhyamikas described causality in epithets such as 'non - ceasing' (*anirodham*), 'non - arising' (*anutpādām*), etc.⁵ thereby trying to show that it transcended empirical description. Hence, their philosophy may be described as a form of *transcendentalism*. Considering the fact that the aim of Mādhyamika philosophy was to provide a philosophical basis for the monistic (*advaya*) teachings of later Buddhism, especially as embodied in the Prajñāpāramitā texts, one may be able to justify the intention of the Mādhyamikas when they criticised the reality of the empirical world.

¹ Edwards and Pap, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, 150.

² MKV 260.

³ Murti, *Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, 136.

⁴ *Abhidharmadīpa*, 270.

⁵ MKV 3.

The Buddhists who upheld a form of realism could not escape this philosophical inquiry. The problem raised was how far the sense datum corresponded to the physical object which was considered to be the external reality.

In similar circumstances, the tendency had been to maintain that in spite of their correspondence they are distinct. This philosophical theory is generally called (epistemological) dualism.¹ The dualism consisted in the recognition of 'primary' and 'secondary' natures in phenomena. This was the kind of dualism advocated by the Vaibhāṣikas in their attempt to solve the problems arising from the acceptance of real external objects. They maintained that the 'primary' nature (*svabhāva*) or the "thing-in-itself" (*sva bhāvo*) was real, whereas the 'secondary' nature (*lakṣaṇa*) which characterizes our sense data was unreal. This epistemological dualism assumed the form of a *metaphysical dualism* when the Vaibhāṣikas insisted on the real existence of the "thing-in-itself" (*sva bhāvo*) during the past, present and future and believed that the characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) were subject to change and transformation (*anyathātvā*).² The dualism of the Vaibhāṣikas was therefore very different from the realism of the Ābhīdharmikas. The acceptance of the unchanging or eternal substance behind the perceptible characteristics in phenomena brought them very much closer to the substantialist view (*ātmavāda*) of the Upaniṣadic thinkers. Thus we find not only the Mādhyamikas,³ but also the Ābhīdharmikas themselves,⁴ criticizing the Vaibhāṣika view as heretical.

As a protest against the substantialist and realist views of the Vaibhāṣikas, we find the emergence of the Sautrāntikas who were generally known as 'representationists' (*bāhyārthānumeyavāda*).⁵ They did not deny the reality of the external world, but emphasised the fact that it is not directly perceived, and that it is inferred by the series of impressions left in the mind by the momentary object, i. e. *representationism*. As a result of the apparent similarity between the Sautrāntika and phenomenalist standpoints, the Sautrāntikas were believed to be closer to early Buddhism than the

¹ Edwards, P. and Pap, A., *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy*, (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., Ninth Printing, December 1963) 149-9.

² *Abhidharmadīpa*, 259-260.

³ *MKV* 259.

⁴ *Kathāvatthu*, ed. A. C. Taylor, (London: Pali Text Society, 1894-7) 1.115 ff.

⁵ *Sarvadarsanasamgraha*, ed. V. S. Abhyankar, (Poona: The Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1924) 19.

Sarvāstivādins. Yet, the acceptance of the logical theories of momentariness and atomism clearly distinguished them from the empiricism of early Buddhism.

While the Mādhyamikas maintained that the real nature of the external object is not known and that it transcends empirical description, the Yogacāra school believed that the external object is merely an idea and that nothing exists outside the mind. In the *Vīṃśatikā*, Vasubandhu is seen employing dialectical arguments against the realist views on the nature of the external world. The atomic theories of the three schools of thought, the Vaiśeṣika, the Vaiśbhāṣika and the Sautrāntika, are here subjected to the severest form of criticism. The arguments are mostly dialectical. Vasubandhu not only denied the validity of sense perception, but even the possibility of sense experience. He held the view that sense perception is the result of false discrimination. Even extrasensory perceptions such as the "knowledge of the thought processes of others" (*paracittavidāṃjñānaṃ*), which according to early Buddhism was a more valid form of perception than sense perception, came to be invalidated by the arguments of Vasubandhu. As in sense perception, here too, Vasubandhu pointed out, there is a discrimination as subject (*svacitta*) and object (*paracitta*).¹ Ultimate reality, for him, is ideation only (*viññaptimātra*), without the duality of subject and object which is realized by the Buddha.² This is a form of *absolutic idealism*.

As against this absolute form of idealism of Vasubandhu, we find the emergence of the school of thought which may be better described as *immaterialism* and which was advocated by Vasubandhu's pupil Diñnaga. In his *Ālambanaparīkṣā*,³ Diñnaga too examines the atomic theories of the realist schools mentioned above. But the arguments that he adduces against these theories are mostly epistemological in character. For example, taking the Vaiśeṣika theory of the external object, Diñnaga points out that the atoms (*aṇu*) are not the causes of the perception (*viññapti*) of the object (*viśaya*) because the nature of the atoms is not reflected in consciousness.⁴ The argument is that though atoms are considered as causes of consciousness, they do not possess the form reflected

¹ *Siddhi* (Levi) 10.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ālambanaparīkṣā*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

in consciousness because atoms themselves have no form and are imperceptible, although the object (*viṣaya*) consisting of the atoms may have form and may be perceptible. Thus Dinnāga's denial was only of the materiality or substantiality of the external object, rather than of the sense data. What is important to note is that sensation, which may be described as an element of fact (*artha*) and which is external (*bāhya*), is not denied by Dinnāga. His denial pertains only to the materiality, not to the externality of the object. According to him, from time immemorial this objective aspect (*viṣayarūpa*) and the force which transforms consciousness into this subject-object relationship, that is, the sense organ, continue to be mutually conditioned.¹ Here there is no denial of the validity of perception, as in the philosophy of Vasubandhu the denial is only of matter. And his idealism may therefore be properly called immaterialism.²

The above analysis should amply illustrate how early Buddhism, starting as a form of phenomenalism, gave rise to different schools of thought such as realism, metaphysical dualism, representationism, transcendentalism, idealism and immaterialism, all arising as a result of the differences of opinion expressed on the nature of the external world.

¹ Ibid.

² See Kalupahana, D. J., "Dinnāga's Immaterialism," in *Philosophy East and West*, April, 1970 (in the Press.).