

Western Idealism Through Indian Eyes: A Cittamātra Reading of Berkeley, Kant and Schopenhauer

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Abstract I experiment with a non-standard approach to comparative philosophy, using Indian Buddhist cittamātra philosophy, as a lens for exploring the history of Western idealism.

Introduction: Metahermeneutic Preliminaries

This is an essay in metaphilosophy, in which I use one philosophical tradition as a lens through which to examine another. So it is already one level an abstraction from the already rarefied plane of metaphysics. But the principal agenda is yet one level more abstract: What I really aim to accomplish in this discussion is a reconception of the range of possibilities and the methodology of comparative philosophy and cross-cultural hermeneutics – a kind of meta-meta-metaphysics, if you will. So I begin with a discussion of the nature of and problems associated with cross-cultural hermeneutics and comparative philosophy in particular, and then we will get down to business at a number of more fundamental levels.

Comparative philosophy has acquired a somewhat deservedly bad reputation of late (e.g. Klein 1995; Tuck 1990; Larson and Deutsch 1989). It has been noted that it too often functions as an arm of Orientalism in the most pejorative sense of that term – as an appropriation of expertise on non-Western traditions by Western scholars, with a consequent disempowerment of their non-Western colleagues. Moreover, it has been noted, comparative philosophy often imports hermeneutical and philosophical methods to the study of non-Western texts that succeed in distorting or simply missing the significance of those texts or the meaningfulness of the claims they make and arguments they proffer in their home cultures. In addition it has been noted that the interpretive lens privileged in most comparative philosophy is a distinctively Western lens, taking for granted a horizon of interpretation which itself should be a matter for contention in comparing multiple traditions. Finally, and as a closely related matter, it has been charged that in comparing philosophical texts and views, the Western texts, views and arguments are typically taken as the standards against which non-Western texts are compared, and with respect to which are inevitably found either wanting, or, in the most generous case, found

to approximate – the latter serving as the highest (and most patronising) accolade vindicating the comparativist’s attention to a tradition beyond his or her own.

All of these charges are, of course, overly broad, tarring with a single brush a wide range of philosophical activity. Nonetheless, there is enough truth in each of them, and truth in each case with respect to enough of the literature comprised under this rubric to take them all seriously. I have argued elsewhere (Garfield 2002) that the enterprise of cross-cultural interpretation, and *inter alia* comparative philosophy as a wing of that enterprise, is in need of a new model of scholarship – a conversational model that takes as its model not the interpretation of fixed canonical texts by readers, but rather discussion of texts-in-being-read by colleagues, in which active interchange between scholars with shared concerns and presumed comparable authority address questions of mutual interest. In such a conversation neither party can take his or her tradition, texts, or conceptual framework for granted as providing a privileged or Archimedean standpoint from which to approach the other. The goals of such interchange are then not simply to *compare* texts for the sake of comparison, but rather to further understanding to the benefit of participants in each tradition, and perhaps to erode the boundaries between traditions in a non-hegemonic fashion.

But such conversations require more than good faith, shared interests and mutual respect. They require the willingness of each participant to take seriously – as a moment in the dialectic, though not as its endpoint – the possibility of interpreting his/her own tradition and texts from the standpoint of the other. For even though the goal of conversational cross-cultural interpretation is the displacement of both text and tradition as the fundamental units of analysis in favour of scholarly interactions, and the abandonment of particular traditions as privileged contexts for those interactions, that is a goal to be achieved, and not a situation to be presupposed at the outset of hermeneutic practice. We must begin where we find ourselves, and that is in a situation in which Western scholars have succeeded in taking their own tradition as privileged, and have avoided the task of providing access to that tradition to their non-Western interlocutors, thus doubly impeding collegial progress. We must therefore strive to make our texts available on terms accessible to our cross-cultural colleagues, and strive self-consciously to see these texts from a distant point of view, the better to problematise them in the larger context we seek to create.¹

It is therefore necessary first not entirely to *abandon* comparative philosophy, but to *use it*, albeit in a self-undermining way – in a way that will at the same time provide remedial equity to traditions too often placed in the object position under the comparative subjective lens and provide the kind of window into both the Western tradition and its hermeneutic practice for at least some of our non-Western colleagues. I therefore propose to take up the challenge implicit in this set of charges and to subject a slice of Western philosophy to the comparative method from the standpoint of an Indian tradition. I will take the Indian analysis for granted as the standard against which to measure the Western tradition; I will, insofar as is possible, adopt an Indo-Tibetan standard of interpretation and doxography as I approach the Western texts; and I will self-consciously adopt readings of the Indian text I use derived from the Indo-Tibetan doxographic/philosophical tradition.

Now, I cannot go all the way: I cannot shed my identity as a Western philosopher; I can pretend neither to the same distance from my target texts nor the same proximity to my lens presumed in ordinary comparative philosophy. And I come to the task with a self-conscious metaphilosophical agenda that is inevitably distorting of the ground-level project. The real philosophical activity I await will require practitioners of a non-Western tradition to have a go at ours themselves, as a prelude to an open dialogue among equals. Some of this is already happening, with interesting results (Chakrabarti 1996 is a good example). I believe – and I hope that this exercise will demonstrate – that we can learn a great deal about our own tradition and can prepare ourselves for such an open conversation by seeing it from the vantage point of another. Comparative philosophy, when done properly, can still be genuinely revelatory to all parties to the dialogue, and can assist in bringing the resources of all traditions in play in preparation for a circumstance when such comparative exercises will be passé and a plurality of traditions, each conscious of its own history and of the histories of those with which it interacts can interact through collective activity.

My case study will involve the examination of a fragment of the history of Western transcendental idealism, viz., the development of the account of representation beginning with Berkeley, going through Kant and concluding with Schopenhauer. The lens through which I intend to examine this history, and the framework in which I propose to reconstruct the story of this evolution is provided by the metaphysical account of phenomena developed by Vasubandhu in *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*—that is, the doctrine of the three natures that forms the basis of the doctrine that came to be called *cittamatra*, or mind-only (sometimes also referred to as *viññānavāda* or *viññāpta-matra*, the way of consciousness, or consciousness-only). I will argue that when we examine Western idealism (or this slice of it) from this classical Indian vantage point, we can discern a definite and somewhat surprising progressivity in the Western tradition, a progressivity invisible without that lens, and one which reveals this episode in the history of our tradition as a progressive approximation to Vasubandhu's own analysis.

In order to launch this venture, I must first defend what was once a non-controversial claim – that *cittamatra* in Vasubandhu's formulation is in fact a Buddhist idealism. I will then briefly sketch the outlines of Vasubandhu's own formulation of that idealism, emphasising his analysis of phenomena as three-natured. With this framework in hand, I will argue that Berkeley's idealism respects the *parikalpita-svabhāva*; that Kant adds to this an appreciation of the importance of *paratantra-svabhāva*, and that Schopenhauer completes the tradition by emphasising the importance not only of these two natures, but of the *parinipanna-svabhāva* as well. Hence we will be able to see, through this Indian lens the respect in which the Western tradition can be seen as progressive. I hope we will then see both the value of privileging non-Western as well as Western traditions for the purposes of cross-cultural analysis, and the possibility of reading texts from very different traditions together, despite their different contexts.

Cittamatra Is Idealism

It has become something of a fashion lately to argue that cittamatra is not idealist (Kalupahana 1987; Kochumuttom 1982; Dunne 1996; Lusthaus 1996; Powers 1996). Some argue that it is a form of pragmatism; others that it is a neutral monism; still others that it is completely continuous with Madhyamaka, as a doctrine of the emptiness of all phenomena. While it is true that simply saying that *all this is mind only* is not by itself, in a Buddhist context, enough to indict a school as idealist, given the plethora of metaphorical or qualified readings available for such formulae, I think that there are absolutely compelling internal and doxographic arguments for reading Vasubandhu and his fellow travellers as idealists in a strong sense of that term.

First let us be clear about what idealism in the relevant sense is, so that we do not find ourselves merely quibbling about terms. Idealism is a contrastive ontology: It is the assignment to the mind and to mental phenomena a fundamental reality independent of that of external objects, while denying to apparently external phenomena a merely dependent status – a second-class existence as objects of and as wholly dependent upon mind. Now there are different grades of idealism. As we shall see, Berkeley, Kant and Schopenhauer, for instance, diverge dramatically on points of detail, and if we were to add Hegel, Fichte, Bradley and the early Wittgenstein to the discussion still more divergence among idealists would be apparent. But these figures are unanimous in urging that the mind, or the transcendental subject exists prior to and independently of any of its objects, and that its objects exist only as its objects, and insofar as they are characterised as objects, in no way externally to consciousness.

When Kochumuttom, Anacker, Kalupahana, Lusthaus and Powers deny that Vasubandhu or Asanga are idealists, they intend to deny them precisely this view – that objects of consciousness have a special, lower-grade existence, while mind has a first-grade existence, is a necessary condition of the existence of those objects, and is independent of their existence. Consider these remarks:

It [Yogācāra] is *not* idealism. The mind is not the only *reality* according to them. . .

Unfortunately the standard *interpretation* of Yogācāra (especially of the Vimsatika) treats it as a form of idealism, which then renders all of the Yogācārin arguments silly. . . [T]heir ontological position is neither materialist nor idealist, but rather ontological silence. . . (Lusthaus 26/6/1996)

I have never read a Yogācārin text that ever made the claim that mind creates physical things. . .

The point of refuting *objects* is to eliminate the appropriative consciousness that generates them qua appropriational goals. It is not to deny the objects in order to reify the consciousness. If Tibetan commentators say otherwise, they need to go back to school. (Lusthaus 27/6/1996)

Tibetan commentators do in fact commonly characterise Yogācāra writers as holding a view that everything exists in the mind, but Asanga, Vasubandhu et al. never say this, as far as I'm aware. . . [I]n my opinion their [Tibetan doxographers'] presentation of Yogācāra creates a view with which the proponents of the system would not agree. (Powers 30/7/1996)²

There are indeed passages in the Yogācāra literature which apparently support an idealistic monism. But I maintain that the entire system, when understood in terms of realistic pluralism, makes better sense and that, therefore, even those passages which apparently support idealist monism, have to be reinterpreted in accordance with realistic pluralism. . . . It positively holds that individuals are real as well as mutually independent beings. (Kochumuttom 1982: 3)

There was a time when one could simply take it for granted that the Cittamatra or Yogācāra school (I will use the terms interchangeably here despite good doxographic reasons for distinguishing both their intension and extension)³ is the school of Buddhist idealism. However academic fashions and imperatives are such that once a position is regarded as obvious it seems that attacking it becomes mandatory. And so now we must defend the obvious. Taking John Dunne's (30/6/1996) and John Powers' (1/7/1996) point, and following on from various points made in Garfield (1996) I refrain from ascribing a common philosophical position to all of those referred to in Indo-Tibetan doxographies as Yogācārins. Here I restrict my gaze to Vasubandhu, and more particularly to the position he articulates and defends in *Vimśatika* and *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*. These are probably his last two works and they present the most articulate and explicit statement of his ontology. I will also allude to *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya*, which presents the most complete elaboration of his ontology and epistemology. I would argue that Vasubandhu's idealism is shared by Sthiramati, and is accurately characterised by Candrakīrti, Tsong Khapa and mKhas grub, among others. Consider the following verses:

1. All this is appearance only
Because of the appearance of the non-existent.
Just someone with cataracts
Sees hairs, the moon and other nonexistents.
16. Perception is like a dream, etc.
That is, when it occurs
The object it distinguishes does not appear.
So, how can one call this perception? (*Vimśatika*)⁴

Vasubandhu in this text explicitly asserts that the entire phenomenal world is in fact *consciousness only* and that the objects that appear to us are *non-existent* like the hairs seen by the proverbial cataract patient. What is apparently the perception of external objects is actually more like a dream – the confusion of mere phantoms of the mind with physical objects.

20. Whatever is an object
Of conceptual thought,
That is thoroughly imaginary.
Without any entity, it does not exist. (*Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*)
5. What is the imagination of the non-existent?
Since what is imagined absolutely never
Exists in the way it is imagined,
It is mind that constructs that illusion.

36. Through the perception of mind-only
 One achieves the non-perception of objects;
 Through the non-perception of objects
 There is also the non-perception of mind. (*Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*)

In *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa* as well, Vasubandhu emphasises the illusory character of external objects and the reality of the mind as the source of that illusion. He further emphasises that the mind as it appears in introspection is no more real than external objects. It, too, is merely a phantom object of pure subjectivity which is the only reality.⁵ This emphasis on the reality of consciousness and the unreality of its objects runs throughout to *Madhyāntavibhāga-bhāṣya* as well.⁶ The following verse and its commentary is apposite:

I:3. Consciousness is the appearance of
 Objects, sentient beings, self and representation.
 Arising entirely this way, it is without object.
 Being without that, it itself is non-existent. (Bi, 4b–c)

Here, when an object appears it appears as form, etc. When a sentient being appears it appears as sense powers in one's own and in others' mental continua. When the self appears, it appears as an afflicted mind, etc., and is like that because of having afflictions. The appearances of representations are the six consciousnesses. It says *It is without object*, since when objects and sentient beings appear they are all nonexistent, and when self and representations appear they appear falsely. Since it is without object, the grasping consciousness is nonexistent. (Bi, 4c–e)

I:4 Since it exists as the construction
 Of the completely nonexistent,
 It is thus not existent, yet not completely non-existent. (Bi, 4e)
 So, how has appearance arisen, since it is non-existent – It is only illusion, but it is not completely non-existent. Therefore though it does not entirely exist, it gives rise to desire.
 So, (Bi 4e)
 I:4d Through eliminating it, one can expect liberation. (Bi, 4e–f).

Note that Vasubandhu specifically asserts in these remarks and in many other points in these texts that the mind is real and persists even from the standpoint of nirvana – that is, in its guise as *alaya-vijñāna* the mind exists *per se* and not as an illusion. Moreover, he asserts that the nature of all apparently external phenomena, when they are correctly understood is seen to be mental – that they are purely appearances to the mind. Finally, he asserts that while the mind is a necessary condition for the appearance of phenomena, the mind exists anterior to – and will exist in a purified state posterior to – the appearance of objects:

27. Even the thought, *All this is appearance only*
 Involves an object.
 And anything that places something in front of it
 Is not grounded in this-only.

28. When no object is apprehended
 By consciousness,
 Then grounded in appearance-only
 With no object there is no grasping subject.
29. Then with no mind and no object
 With supramundane knowledge,⁷
 It is transformation of the basis,
 And the end of the two adversities.
30. It is uncontaminated,
 An inconceivable and stable sphere.
 It is blissful, the liberation body,
 And is called the Accomplished one's dharma body.

This position is as idealist as one can imagine. Indeed it is hard to imagine Vasubandhu being read in any other way. I emphasise here that this does not rely on any second or third hand authority of later doxographers (though to be sure it is in agreement of the unanimous verdict both of critics and followers of Vasubandhu in the Indo-Tibetan tradition). I am simply reading the texts themselves and taking Vasubandhu at face value.⁸

Vasubandhu's Cittamatra Idealism

While it is easy to clinch the argument in favour of reading Vasubandhu as an idealist, that does not tell us precisely what variety of idealist he is. For idealism comes in many varieties determined by the precise characterisation of phenomena and of their relation to the mind representing them. We will see this variety played out in the history of Western idealism in a moment. But let us first quickly present the distinctive features of Vasubandhu's own presentation. Here we rely on the precise articulation of *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*.

We will not here present a complete exegesis of this complex work, but simply note the features of the idealism Vasubandhu presents that will be crucial for our comparative task. In this text Vasubandhu articulates his view of what it is for a phenomenon to be ideal. He argues that each phenomenon has three distinct natures, each of which is implicated by ideality.

First, each such object has an imagined nature (*parikalpita-svabhāva/kun btags kyi rang bzhin*). To have such a nature is to be merely imaginary. More precisely, for Vasubandhu insofar as any phenomenon is ideal, its status as an external object is merely imagined. We see physical objects, and even our mind as an object of introspection, as existing external to us. But that status is illusory. These things therefore – conceived as external to the mind – are imaginary in nature.

Second, each phenomenon is asserted by Vasubandhu to have an other-dependent (*paratantra-svabhāva/gzhen dbang gi rang bzhin*) nature. That is, for an object to be ideal is for it to exist in dependence upon the mind. If a thing were independent

of mind, it would fail to be ideal in the requisite sense. This aspect of Vasubandhu's idealism emphasises the fact that while an object of consciousness may be imaginary *qua* external, independent object, it is a *real* object of consciousness, and has a kind of existence – existence as a mental act, or as the intentional – though not distinct and independent – object of a mental act, even though it fails to have the kind of existence it may be naively thought to have – *viz.*, external, independent existence.⁹

Finally, each object of consciousness has a consummate nature (*paranispanna-svabhāva/yonḡ su grub pa'i rang bzhin*). This is the nature a thing is seen to have when it and its ideal status are completely understood. The consummate nature is the absence of the imagined nature – it is the fact of a thing's not existing as distinct from mind and the fact that even though a thing appears to exist in dependence upon mind, even the duality and distinction suggested by the relation of dependence is illusory – phenomena are not, when seen from this final perspective, as much *dependent upon* mind, as they are aspects of it. One way to sharpen this point is to say that the other-dependent nature from one standpoint distinguishes mind and object as mutually *other* (hence its name). That very distinction preserves part of the perspective of the imagined nature, *viz.*, its duality of subject and object. But from the standpoint of the consummate nature it reveals the non-difference of object from mind, in virtue of its non-externality. The consummate nature hence reflects a complete understanding of objects *qua* ideal and an abandonment of the subject-object duality apparent in the imagined.¹⁰

Let us pause at this point for some clarifications and amplifications. First, while Vasubandhu presents these as three distinct natures that all phenomena have in virtue of their ideality, they are not presented as *independent*. Rather they are mutually implicative. It would be impossible to have one of them and not the others. They are, as it were, three aspects of ideality, which together make sense of that notion, and are made sense of by it. Second, they are as much epistemological in character as they are ontological. This is not surprising in virtue of the tightly intertwined relation between epistemology and ontology in the Buddhist philosophical tradition, a feature characteristic of idealistic philosophy quite generally, including the idealism of the West to which we will turn in a moment.

So, when we say that the consummate nature is the nature a thing is seen to have when it is completely understood we use an epistemological entree into an ontological insight – things as they *really are* are empty of the subject-object duality and are empty of any real distinction from the mind through which they are imagined. Likewise when we characterise the ontology of the imagined nature we approach it through consideration of the way things appear to consciousness. This interpenetration of epistemological and ontological concerns is unavoidable in this context and may be partially responsible for the erroneous view that there is no ontological import whatever in Cittamatra.¹¹

Finally, let us emphasise that for Vasubandhu the central ontological-epistemological claim of *trisvabhāva* theory is not that all phenomena are ideal; that is almost taken for granted by this point (though it is defended at greater length in *Vimsatika* and its commentary). Rather that *what it is to be ideal is to be characterised by the three natures*. This text is hence an exploration of the structure of idealism itself.

Let us now use that exploration as a guide to the history of Western idealism and see what we can learn about our own traditions.

Berkeley and Parikalpita-Svabhāva

The history of modern Western idealism properly begins with Berkeley, and the *locus classicus* for the articulation of his brand of that doctrine, which we might, following Kant, call *dogmatic idealism* is the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*. There, Berkeley famously argues that “there is no such thing as matter” (p. 12) and that nothing exists but minds and the contents of those minds (pp. 77ff.). In the dialogues Berkeley castigates both the doctrine that we could have any knowledge of external phenomena and the doctrine that the conception of external phenomena is even coherent. All of this is by way of a defence of idealism, and the details of that defence can be left to one side for the moment and for the purposes of this investigation. For what concerns us is not so much the arguments Berkeley marshals for his ontological-epistemological position, or their success, but the structure of the position itself, and its historical relation to that which displaced it.

Berkeley’s idealism is characterised by the following central principles: (1) Ideas are immediately perceived by the mind, and like the mind themselves in which they reside, they are real (pp. 45ff.). (2) Nothing external to a mind is ever perceived, and no such thing is even possible (ibid.). (3) Space and spatiality, and externality quite generally – though they may be thought to characterise the objects of our perception, are entirely illusory, and necessarily so (ibid.: 55ff.).

A crucial tenet that emerges from this cursory summary of Berkeley’s views is the claim that to the extent that we represent the objects of our awareness as existing outside of us, in any sense, we are necessarily wrong. To put the point in Vasubandhu’s terms, the externality of phenomena, in virtue of their ideality, is an imagined nature. Kant criticises Berkeley on just this point, referring to Berkeley as *degrading bodies to mere illusion* (p. B71) and arguing that he *regards things in space as merely imaginary entities* (p. B274). It is important for our purposes to note that whatever the merits of Berkeley’s idealism, Kant is correct in pointing out that it goes no farther than this. Even if we grant Berkeley the conclusion that all phenomena are ideal, we see that his analysis of what it is to be ideal is unidimensional: He argues that for an apparent material object to be ideal is for it to be merely imaginary. From the standpoint of Vasubandhu this first stab at idealism in the West is a good start, but only one third of the story.

Kant and Paratantra-Svabhava

Kant, as we have already noted, criticises precisely this inadequacy in Berkeley’s theory. With both Descartes’ primitive representational realism (which he calls misleadingly “problematic idealism”) and Berkeley’s primitive dogmatic idealism in view, Kant sets out quite self-consciously to develop an idealism more sophisti-

cated than either, which he calls “transcendental idealism.” In the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues that when we characterise a thing as a representation, and hence as an object for subjectivity we must represent it both as empirically real and as transcendently ideal.

It would be folly in an essay of this scope to attempt to sketch even the vaguest outlines of Kant’s entire system of transcendental idealism, or even of that part articulated in the transcendental aesthetic and transcendental analytic, which is most relevant to present concerns. Instead, I will make the necessary exegetical claims quickly and dogmatically: In recognising the compatibility – and indeed the mutual entailment between – transcendental ideality and empirical reality, Kant is acknowledging that any coherent account of representations must assign them at least (and in his case at most) a dual status. Kant emphasises that from one standpoint, our representations of objects in space and time (including our representations of ourselves in inner sense) must be thought of as empirically real. They are genuinely *outside* of us *qua* objects of representation. Yet at the same time, *qua* representations, they are, from the transcendental perspective, *in* us. Kant emphasises this *twofold* nature of representation in the Transcendental Aesthetic, and it is a central theme in his transcendental idealism:

Our exposition therefore establishes the *reality*, that is, the objective validity, of space in respect of whatever can be presented to us outwardly as object, but also at the same time the *ideality* of space in respect of things when they are considered in themselves through reason. . . . We assert, then, the *empirical reality* of space, as regards all possible outer experience; and yet at the same time we assert its *transcendental ideality* – in other words that it is nothing at all, immediately we withdraw the above condition. . . (pp. A28/B44)

What we are maintaining is. . . the *empirical reality* of time, that is, its objective validity in respect of all objects which allow of ever being given to our senses. . . . On the other hand, we deny to time all claim to absolute reality. . . . This, then, is what constitutes the *transcendental ideality* of time. What we mean by this phrase is that if we abstract from the subjective conditions of sensible intuition, time is nothing. . . (pp. A35–36/B52)

The focus of Kant’s complaint against Berkeley can be seen from this vantage point as a charge that Berkeley simply fails to note this dual character of representations, and so develops what from Kant’s perspective can only be seen as a deficient, one-sided idealism. Kant takes himself to be the first to emphasise both sides of the coin of an idealist theory of representation: While things considered as they appear to us, when seen from a transcendental perspective, are, as Berkeley correctly noted, completely non-existent, Berkeley, according to Kant, failed to note the corollary of this truth, namely, that things, as seen from the point of view of subjectivity, are empirically real, and that their empirical reality and transcendental ideality are mutually implicative.

The two natures Kant distinguishes – empirical reality and transcendental ideality – are quite naturally mapped on to the imagined and the other-dependent nature as these are articulated by Vasubandhu. The empirical reality of objects as characterised by Kant, and hence the reality of space and time themselves, is a merely represented reality, and no part of the objects themselves. When seen from a transcendental point of view – a God’s eye view as Kant himself would put it, and hence from the standpoint of omniscience – such objects and space and time

themselves are *nothing at all*. On the other hand, the kind of reality they *do* have for Kant is reality *qua* representation, and that gives them a kind of *objective validity*. That is, as objects of the mind, as things dependent upon us, they are in fact real. Even God would assent to that. But *that* reality does not guarantee that the reality they *appear to have* is in fact actual. Hence for Kant, their dependent nature is a deeper fact about phenomena than their imagined nature.

Moreover, the relation between these two natures as it is sketched in the First *Critique* maps rather neatly onto the relations between these two natures as it is presented in *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*. Vasubandhu emphasises that the imagined nature simply is the other-dependent nature as it appears to naive consciousness, and that when it is correctly understood, the appearance of things as they are imagined is seen to be merely illusory – that things when properly understood from a vantage point abstracting from the afflictions that determine ordinary subjectivity are completely devoid of the characteristics they are imagined to possess. Nonetheless, he emphasises that to be a phenomenon for an ordinary human consciousness simply *is, inter alia*, to appear through the imagined nature, and to do so *dependent upon* the structure of the human mind. Hence the imagined nature is the dependent nature become appearance. And so it is for Kant. Things appear to us in space and time in dependence upon the structure of human consciousness. So appearing as a real empirical object to consciousness is part and parcel of what it is to be an object of knowledge for a human being. This is what it is for something that is *in fact* a mere mental episode – and so, *as phenomenon* to exist only in dependence upon mind – to appear to us in space and time. But that appearance – though in one sense real *as appearance*, is in another completely illusory. *Parikalpita* and *paratantra svabhāvas* are two sides of the coin of appearance for Vasubandhu. Empirical reality and Transcendental ideality are two sides of the same coin for Kant.

We should note that though for Berkeley things *qua* appearance have only imagined reality, and though we have lined up Kant's empirical reality with Vasubandhu's imagined reality we cannot infer through transitivity that Berkeley and Kant agree that objects of experience are empirically real, as Kant himself emphasises. But that is not surprising. It is not as accurate to say that Berkeley's primitive form of idealism *omits* one of (at least) two characteristics that idealism forces us to ascribe to objects as it is to say that Berkeley *conflates* two characteristics, and in doing so fails to articulate the dependent reality that phenomena in fact have *as a characteristic of those phenomena*. We can hence see Kant as developing a very Vasubhandan critique of Berkeley – forcing a distinction between mutually implicative characteristics, while emphasising their non-duality in the very context of that distinction.¹²

Now a reader of Kant might be impatient at this point with the fact that I have not yet discussed Kant's doctrine of the thing-in-itself. For Kant argues that the phenomena we see have yet another nature, one hidden to us, and independent of their status as objects of experience – a noumenal nature as *Ding an sich*. And a reader of Kant familiar with Vasubandhu might impatiently argue that this noumenal character hints at *parinispāna-svabhāva*. And such a reader would be correct, as far as that goes.

However, I deliberately refrain from ascribing to Kant a doctrine of *trisvabhāva* for two reasons. First, Kant himself is inconsistent on this point.

Sometimes – consistent with the remainder of the critical theory – he asserts that the thing-in-itself is unknowable and uncharacterisable, not even subject to categories such as unity, plurality or existence:

The true correlate of sensibility, the thing in itself, is not known, and cannot be known, through these representations; and in experience no question is ever asked in regard to it. (pp. A30, B45)

... [N]othing whatsoever can be asserted of the thing in itself. . . (pp. A49, B66)

We cannot define any [category] in any real fashion, that is, make the possibility of their object understandable, without at once descending to the conditions of sensibility, and so to the form of appearances – to which, as their sole objects, they must consequently be limited. For if this condition be removed, all meaning. . . falls away. (pp. A241, B300)

The pure categories, apart from formal conditions of sensibility, have only transcendental meaning; nevertheless they may not be employed transcendentially. such employment being in itself impossible, inasmuch as all condition of any employment in judgements are lacking to them, namely the formal conditions of the subsumption of any ostensible object under these concepts. (pp. A248, B305)

At other times he asserts that things-in-themselves exist, and that each phenomenon is an appearance of a thing-in-itself, in manifest contradiction to the framework of the *Critique*:

But our further contention must be duly borne in mind, namely that though we cannot *know* these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position to *think* them as things in themselves.; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears. (p. Bxxvi)

Tracing, explaining and untangling Kant's unclarity on this point would take us far afield. But the most charitable reading of Kant takes the Transcendental Deduction seriously, and hence eschews *any* theorising regarding things-in-themselves.

Second, it is important to note that even if one does take seriously Kant's confused discussions of things-in-themselves, it is clear that this account plays no role in Kant's account of what it is to be an object of experience, and in particular no role in the discussion of the empirical reality of things or of their relationship to consciousness.¹³ But for Vasubandhu this is precisely a central role that each of the three natures must play. For the three natures are each aspects of what it is to be an object in the context of idealism. Just as Kant criticises Berkeley for ignoring the empirical reality of phenomena we will see that Schopenhauer criticises Kant for failing to properly appreciate the reality and role of the thing-in-itself. In encountering Schopenhauer's account we will see what it is for Western idealism to live up to Vasubandhu's demands in this regard.

Schopenhauer and *Parinispāna-svabhāva*

Schopenhauer adopts and extends Kant's transcendental idealism, most notably by bringing the thing-in-itself into the field of knowledge, defending a fundamental non-duality of subject and object from a transcendental point of view, and by arguing

that that non-duality appears as a subject-object duality only at the level of universal illusion. The appearance of that duality, he argues, reflects only our illusion about the truly non-dual nature of reality; the appearance of representations *as* representations is a consequence of that cognitive process grounded in fundamental ontological ignorance. Vasubandhu would be proud.

We can begin by noting Schopenhauer's thoroughgoing commitment to a Kantian idealism as a foundation for his more ambitious ontology and epistemology. Schopenhauer in fact explicitly (albeit a bit confusedly) connects this idealism with Indian views:

That which knows all things and is known by none is the *subject*. It is accordingly the supporter of the world, the universal condition of all that appears, of all objects, and it is always presupposed; for whatever exists, exists only for the subject. (p. 5)

[T]hese two halves [subject and object] are inseparable even in thought, for each of the two has meaning and existence only through and for the other. . . (p. 5)

Past and future. . . are as empty and unreal as any dream; but the present is only the boundary between the two, having neither extension nor duration. In just the same way, we shall also recognise the same emptiness in all the other forms of the principle of sufficient reason, and shall see that, like time, space also, and like this, everything that exists. . . has only a relative existence. . . ; it is Maya, the veil of deception, which covers the eyes of mortals, and causes them to see a world of which one cannot say either that it is or that it is not; for it is like a dream, like the sunshine on the sand which the traveller from a distance takes to be water, or like the piece of rope on the ground which he regards as a snake. (pp. 7–8)

Schopenhauer emphasises the two natures adumbrated by Kant, and indeed emphasises even more explicitly than does Kant their distinctness and mutual implication. He argues that while all representation, in being given as real and external is illusory, *qua representation* all that we experience (at least veridically) is indeed real:

Only [through the] understanding. . . does the world stand out as perception extended in space. (p. 12)

The whole world of objects is and remains representation, and is for this reason wholly and forever conditioned by the subject; in other words it has transcendental ideality. But it is not on that account falsehood or illusion; it presents itself as what is, as representation. . . (p. 15)

But whereas Kant stopped in his analysis of the character of representations with these two natures, Schopenhauer explicitly asserts not only the necessity of positing in thought the thing-in-itself,¹⁴ but also its reality, and indeed *the more complete and genuine reality* of the thing-in-itself. Moreover, Schopenhauer, unlike Kant, but like Vasubandhu, regards this noumenal reality as essential to phenomena conceived as representations. This point must be put delicately: It is not that *qua phenomenon* a thing is represented *as thing-in-itself*. Rather, for Schopenhauer, in providing a full account of what it is to be a phenomenon, we must include its character as it is in itself, and not merely negatively. That noumenal nature is, of course, will.

Phenomenon means representation and nothing more. All representation, be it of whatever kind it may, all *object* is *phenomenon*. But only the *will* is *thing-in-itself*. . . It is that of which all representation, all object, is the phenomenon, the visibility, the *objectivity*. It is the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole. . . (p. 110)

To present Schopenhauer's entire metaphysics of the will would take us far afield. But we can say this much. For Schopenhauer will is far more than personal or psychological. It is an unconscious and undifferentiated force¹⁵ – itself unitary – or at least not plural – which in its multiple manifestations becomes phenomenon. These manifestations include not only objects represented as external, but also the empirical selves we know. Schopenhauer, then, unlike Berkeley for whom our own minds are fundamental subjects, agrees with Vasubandhu that the evolving consciousness is itself as much representation as any of the phenomena it knows as exterior to itself. Ultimate reality is foundational to both empirical subject and empirical object, and is free of that merely apparent duality. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, as for Vasubandhu – and unlike either Berkeley or Kant – the distinction between duality and non-duality marks the distinction between appearance and ultimate reality.

[The will] is free from all *plurality*, although its phenomena in time and space are innumerable. It itself is one, yet not as an object is it one, for the unity of an object is known only in contrast to possible plurality. (p. 113)

We can hence see that the will for Schopenhauer is indeed the consummate reality of (or at least *behind*) all phenomena. Indeed, in a paraphrase of Vasubandhu not at all unfaithful to the spirit of *The World as Will and Representation* we can say that will is what a representation is when its illusory character as external and independent phenomenon is discounted. That is, it is the dependent nature, emptied of the imagined. In Schopenhauer then we see idealism in the West in its fully evolved form. All three natures are present, and are related to one another in precisely the way Vasubandhu argues that they must be. They are represented as distinct, but mutually implicative, and the signal characteristic of the most real, the most fundamental, is the absence of all duality and plurality, and the absence of any external object of consciousness.¹⁶

The Progressive Character of Western Idealism

I have told the story of Western Idealism not as it is told in Western histories of philosophy, but as it would be told by a Cittamatra philosopher, or perhaps as it would be told *to* a Cittamatra philosopher, or perhaps more realistically to a philosopher whose entree into idealist thought was *through* Cittamatra. My aim in telling the story this way is not simply to demonstrate the possibility of *alternative* perspectives on our own tradition, or to show that turnabout can be fair play. Rather, I think that telling the story in this way is in fact illuminating. It shows that and how Western philosophy is progressive – revealing a dynamic at work in this strand of our intellectual history that may have been invisible to us.

The invisibility to which I allude is traceable to two sources: First, proximity and custom. We are simply so close to our own tradition, and so accustomed to the hermeneutic story internal to it that we do not countenance the need for or the possibility of an alternative reading of our history. This is not unique to us, of course. Our

Tibetan colleagues also inhabit a philosophical tradition that develops and understands itself through its own hermeneutic, a hermeneutic that we often challenge when we come as Westerners to the history of Buddhist philosophy. The point is simply that traditions do not problematise their own self-understanding until they come into dialogue not so much with other *ideas* but with other *ways of reading*.

Second, and at a more straightforwardly philosophical level, the construct that reveals this particular progressive dynamic is not thematised within our own tradition. We don't develop *trīsvabhāva* theory as such. For that reason, lacking a vocabulary in which to distinguish theories in this way, we fail to see the distinction, and so miss a crucial dimension of our own increasing sophistication. It is in this sense that the alternative way of reading Vasubandhu offer us is not simply an *alternative*, but a *better* way of seeing our own history. We should not react to such a comparative exercise with shame at our own blindness but with a certain pleasure in the discovery of a deeper dimension to our own heritage than we might hitherto have suspected and the hope that we can contribute similar insights to our interlocutors if we tread with care on contested ground.

Comparative Philosophy as a Road to Conversation

I hope that this has been an example of comparative philosophy done right – providing a reading that sheds light from one tradition upon another. But a crucial component of *doing the right thing* as far as I am concerned is the motivation, the intended next step. For if the enterprise stops here, not enough has been accomplished to make it all worthwhile. We note a surprising relationship between two traditions; we discover a way of conceptualising our own not hitherto considered; we are on the way to understanding idealism itself more deeply. Not bad. The real dividend, however, is the philosophical progress this understanding makes possible. For up to this point, our gaze has been in the direction of the past – that of a historian or a curator of dead traditions. Philosophy is however a live enterprise, both in the West and in the East, and if cross-cultural philosophy is to mean anything and to contribute anything to philosophical progress, it must do so with its gaze turned towards ideas and their development.

To that end, I urge that the kind of exercise in which I have been engaging be seen as a prolegomenon. It is a stage in – to borrow a Gadamerian phrase – the fusion of horizons. The task is to provide a common horizon that can be a background for genuine collaboration and conversation in a joint philosophical venture. The possibilities for such a venture are enormous. The enlargement of the world scholarly community and the range of texts and resources on which it can draw portends a greater philosophical depth and rate of progress. But the condition of the possibility of such progress and of such a future is the establishment of genuine collegiality and conversation, as opposed to contact and the interrogation of informants. And the condition of the possibility of conversation is taking seriously the standpoint and hermeneutic method of one's interlocutor as well as his/her ideas

themselves, and taking seriously one's own tradition not as a lens through which to view another's, but also as specimen under one's colleague's lens at particular moments in the dialectic. That is the point of the present examination and the value of comparative philosophy when it is conceived not as an activity in itself, but rather as a moment in a dialogical dialectic whose apogee is reached at the point where these previous moments are transcended in the collegiality they make possible.

Of course in any intercultural dialogue, and particularly at explicitly comparative moments in the dialectic, one must be alert to the dangers of procrustean beds. One can abuse the comparative method – and the cases of such abuse are legion and are the basis of the bad name comparative philosophy has earned of late. Such abuse leads to dramatic distortion of alien traditions through the imposition of hermeneutic and doxographic frameworks, or philosophical problematics or presuppositions entirely foreign to the traditions themselves. But the danger of abuse is not an argument against careful use. I have urged here that such careful use is not only possible, but desirable. In part this is because of the essential role of comparative philosophy as a rung in a ladder to be discarded by our descendants whose interlocution it may some day be seen to have enabled.¹⁷

Notes

- 1 See Garfield (1998) and Klein (1994) for more on cross-cultural hermeneutics and dialogue.
- 2 See also Powers (1/7/1996). Lusthaus (2/7/1996) even lumps Sthiramati in as a non-idealist exponent of Yogācāra and emphasises that in his view *no* early Yogācāra writer (anybody preceding Dharmakīrti) is an idealist in any sense. Though it would take us well beyond the scope of this paper, it is hard to imagine how anyone reading Sthiramati's commentary on the *Trisikakārikā* could come to this conclusion.
- 3 See Garfield (1997b) for more on this point.
- 4 Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Vasubandhu are my own, from Tibetan (sDe dge edition). The purpose of this essay is neither to engage in a philological examination of Vasubandhu's corpus or the commentarial literature it inspires (in any case, I work in Tibetan and not in Sanskrit, and so that goal is beyond my competence) nor to survey Vasubandhu's entire corpus for evidence of his idealism. I here restrict my gaze to those passages most directly relevant to the comparative enterprise at hand.
- 5 A full exposition of Vasubandhu's treatment of the dual character of mind is beyond the scope of the present essay. See Garfield (1997a) for a complete translation and detailed exposition of *Trisvabhāvanirdeśa*. For now suffice it to say that Vasubandhu, like Kant, argues that the mind figures both as subject and as object. Inasmuch as the mind appears to itself in introspection, it appears with subject–object duality, and the object that appears in such an awareness is for Vasubandhu of exactly the same status as any external object so appearing. On the other hand, he argues, in order to make sense of appearance at all, whether of an external object or the mind, we must posit an independently existing mental continuum in which the appearance is located. Vasubandhu argues that we come to realise the illusory character of the mind as object through first understanding the easier-to-grasp illusory character of external phenomena. But his analysis of the mind as it appears to itself does not undermine in any way his insistence on the reality of the more fundamental purely subjective mind.
- 6 While there is general agreement that Vasubandhu is the author of the commentary that comprises the bulk of this text, the authorship of the root verses of *Madhyāntavibāga* is uncertain. They are traditionally attributed to Maitreya, dictated to Vasubandhu's brother Asanga. They

may have been composed by a fifth or sixth century philosopher named Maitreyanatha. They may have been composed by Asanga. Or they may have been composed by Vasubandhu. I take no position in this debate, but note that Vasubandhu clearly endorses their content, and takes his commentary to provide both an exposition and defence of the position they articulate.

- 7 Here I agree with Anacker's reading of this verse, reading the Tibetan /'jig rten 'das pa'i ye shes med/ as /'jig rten 'das pa'i ye shes/. This appears to be the only coherent reading of this verse.
- 8 This position is quite different from the Madhyamaka position of Nāgārjuna/Candrakīrti according to which both subject and object are empty of essence yet conventionally existent. It would take us far afield to enter into a detailed comparison of these two philosophical schools or to explore their interchanges or the exquisite doxography they inspire. For now suffice it to say whereas the Madhyamaka assign identical ontological status to the mind and its objects and argue that both are empirically real, the Cittamatra sharply distinguish their status, assigning a more fundamental reality to the subject than to its objects. See Garfield (1995) for an exposition of Nāgārjuna's position and Huntington and Wangchen (1991) for an exposition of Candrakīrti's powerful refutation of Vasubandhu. See also Cabezon (1992) for a sense of the Tibetan doxography.
- 9 At this point it is worth noting another interesting difference between Cittamatra and Madhyamaka metaphysics. *Paratantra* involves the notion of causal dependence, and is importantly different from the *parikalpita* in this respect. As Sthiramati emphasises in his commentary on *Trimsika*, in the *parikalpita*, inasmuch as the imagined objects do not even exist, they are not connected by causal links to one another. *Paratantra-svabhāva*, though, is causal in two senses: First, the apparent objects are dependent upon psychological episodes; second the successive mental episodes which are the representations of the objects of experience are causally related to each other. This causal continuum of mental episodes is the evolving and endlessly transforming mind. For the decidedly non-idealistic Madhyamaka, on the other hand, all empirical phenomena, whether mental or physical, are linked in the endless webs of interdependence constituting the world of *pratitya-samutpada*, or dependent origination.
- 10 See Nagao (1991) for more on the Janus-like character of the *paratantra-svabhāva*.
- 11 See also Sellars (1992) for a fine discussion of the interpenetration of metaphysics and epistemology in the context of thinking about mental representation.
- 12 We should also at this point acknowledge a point at which Kant departs from Vasubandhu, and a respect in which he is perhaps closer to Candrakīrti: While Berkeley and Vasubandhu emphasise the *difference* in ontological status between external phenomena and mind, Kant (following Hume) like Candrakīrti, emphasises the *homogeneity* in ontological status between the outer and inner. Just as Candrakīrti emphasises that phenomena and the self are equally conventionally real and ultimately empty, in contradistinction to Vasubandhu's reification of self and consequent nihilism with respect to phenomena, Kant emphasises the empirical reality of both external objects and the self, as well as the transcendental ideality of both, arguing that Berkeley reifies the latter and is nihilistic about the former. Both Kant and Candrakīrti emphasise that these two extreme views are themselves opposite sides of the coin of a too-radical idealism. See Garfield (1993) for a more detailed discussion of this point.
- 13 I say this despite the fact that it is clear that for a variety of reasons – some of them good, and some a bit confused – Kant himself no doubt was committed to an ontological role for noumena.
- 14 See, e.g. Schopenhauer (1969: 98–99, 119).
- 15 To use the term *force* here is dangerous inasmuch as Schopenhauer himself (p. 111) explicitly eschews it. In that eschewal, however, he is concerned to avoid the implication that the Will is somehow on an ontological par with *forces of nature* of the kind posited in physics, either in virtue of being one of them or in virtue of being the single force of some future grand unifying theory. He would argue instead that *those forces* are all phenomenal manifestations of Will. He prefers terms such as *drive* or *impulse*. These, too, have their disadvantages, suggesting intentional content or consciousness, suggestions he also would wish to avoid. So it is important to take the term *force* here in a sense not indicating forces of nature, but rather a kind of metaphysical force prior to nature.

- 16 One should not be misled here into identifying Schopenhauer's will with the *alaya-vijñāna* of the Cittamatra. That would be a mistake. The will is not conscious. Nor is it personal. But then the *alaya-vijñāna* is not an aspect of representation. Rather I am identifying Schopenhauer's assertion that the fundamental nature of all phenomena is will, and hence non-dual, non-spatio-temporal, etc. with Vasubandhu's that the consummate nature of all phenomena is to be empty of externality, duality, etc., and their respective assertions that to be a representation is to have, in addition to an empirical, or imagined nature, and a nature as dependent upon mind a third nature more fundamental than these two in which the dualities implicated in those first two vanish. In fact, if space permitted, it would be fascinating to explore the relation between Schopenhauer's account of the transcendental subject – as opposed to the will – and Vasubandhu's account of the foundation consciousness.
- 17 I thank Dr. Moira Nicholls, Prof. Frank White and Ms. Angela Coventry Round for helpful comments on an earlier draft, and the late Ven. Gen Lobzang Gyatso, Prof. Janet Gyatso and Ms. Karin Meyers for many helpful discussions of Cittamatra and its relation to Western Idealism. I am also deeply grateful to the Ven. Prof. Gareth Sparham for comments on an earlier draft of this paper, for valuable suggestions regarding translations and for extensive interchange regarding Cittamatra philosophy and texts. Thanks also to two anonymous referees for *Sophia* for extremely helpful suggestions.

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