**AN EPISTEMOLOGY BASED ON VASUBANDHU**

**INTRODUCTION**This essay draws extensively upon the analysis given by Le Manh That, in The Philosophy of Vasubandhu (Ho Chi Minh City: Nha Xuat Ban Thanh Pho). Herein I have reproduced my understanding of Vasubandhu's position and drawn out some implications. While I have sometimes gone beyond what Vasubandhu actually says in the attempt to bring out relevance, I have not knowingly gone against him.  
  
Vasubandhu rejected the most significant epistemological theories of his day and advanced his own views that were remarkably modern. His theories are on the one hand pivotal to the whole history of Buddhist thought and on the other hand widely misunderstood and misrepresented. The theories that he rejected included

* the correspondence theory of meaning,
* the contention that objects of perception are inexpressible, and
* the theory of pure idealism.

He is by no means alone in the history of ideas in adopting these positions, but when he advanced them in the 4th century CE (9th - 10th BE), they were radical in the context of Buddhist psychology and epistemology up to that date. This is also a matter of contemporary relevance because some of the positions that he rejected are still widely held today and are, in many quarters, regarded as the hallmark of the Buddhist outlook. Vasubandhu, however, is certainly one of the greatest Buddhist philosophers and we still have much to learn from him. From him stem the lineages of at least four major schools of Buddhism, albeit that on the issues that follow, he has often been misconstrued even by those who purport to follow him.  
  
WHAT VASUBANDHU REJECTED  
Firstly, let us briefly look at the theory of pure idealism. This is the notion that only the mind exists and that all the things that are experienced as being of the world are actually projections of mind. The idealist tendency in philosophy is the tendency to value ideas as more real than entities in the world. For much of history, Vasubandhu was taken to be an advocate of some such view and, as a consequence, idealist ideas have become very widely established in the doctrines of a number of Buddhist schools. Buddhism has become associated with a wide genera of theories about the unreality or voidness of the world around us and Vasubandhu is frequently cited as the source of all these various species of idealism, but this appears simply to be based upon the misconstrual of what he wrote. It is rather tragic that such a great thinker should have been so extensively misunderstood.  
  
Let us turn to the correspondence theory. What is that? It is the idea that the meaning that a word carries derives principally from the entity in the concrete world designated by the word. In broad, epistemology is the philosophy of meaning. Meaning is the relationship between things in our heads and things out there. From a common sense point of view, therefore, things are meaningful inasmuch as they accurately represent what is the case in the out-there world. Also, we are all quite familiar with the idea of naming things. This is a table. That is a chair. The word table must, therefore, derive its meaning from that wooden thing out there that we use in a variety of familiar ways. In the correspondence theory, then, the word table is meaningful inasmuch as it both (a) designates and (b) represents in speech that well known item in the dining room. Not so, says Vasubandhu.  
  
In this essay I will try to explain why he says this, why it matters, and what the implications may be for understanding Dharma. The implications also bear upon the nature of religious discourse in general, upon the way we should understand our relation to the world around us, and the nature of science. Along the way we will also throw some light on the idealism question and upon the related idea of the expressibility or inexpressibility of objects of perception.  
  
Before we look at what Vasubandhu asserts, let us look at some of the problems that arise from the correspondence theory that may make it worth rejecting. The most obvious of these is that we have words for things that do not exist. "Unicorn" is an example. We also have words for things that in some sense are true, unlike the unicorn, but which do not exist empirically: or we could say, for things that are but that do not exist. They have being but they do not have existence. A good example here is "infinity". We can have a clear idea what infinity means but this cannot have been derived from observation since we can never observe and certainly not measure infinity empirically. Being contains more things than existence does.  
  
There are also words or expressions like "my last night's dream" that do convey a meaning from the speaker to the listener but which cannot be deriving that meaning from dependence upon the listener's access to observation of the item so designated. To put this last point pedantically, if A speaks to B, about A's dream, B may well find what A says just as meaningful and acceptable as if A were talking about the table they are sitting across, which could not be the case if the meaning of the words used to designate the dream depended upon ability to empirically encounter the entity that supposedly provides the meaning content of the words. The apparent obviousness yet inherent inadequacy of the correspondence theory has led to all manner of muddles in philosophy, as it also does in everyday speech.  
  
Vasubandhu lived approximately 315-395CE / 858-938BE. Before his time the correspondence theory (henceforth CT) had cause a good deal of havoc in Buddhist philosophical circles, not only for those who espoused it, but also for those who saw the necessity to refute it, but could not find a satisfactory alternative, or went about the problem in ways that created even more difficulties than they resolved. Thus the Vaibhasika group, in an attempt to uphold the correspondence theory, asserted that any grammatically correct denoting phrase or word must stand for something. This would be a reasonable proposition if the CT were correct. We can see that this assertion comes close to idealism in the sense that it rather implies that the words are more real than the entities, or, at least, that if we can create a word, then an entity must be found to correspond to it. Battle was joined over this contention and this battle crystalized around a debate about what it was that might correspond to the word "birth". What is it that the word "birth" designates in such expressions as "I saw the birth of my son". All will agree that the sentence is grammatically sound and that it may give us accurate information about something that did actually occur, but what is the entity that corresponds to the noun "birth". This particular focus of the debate derives, of course, from the fact that the word "birth" (jati) plays a pivotal role in a number of other key Buddhist theories such as dependent origination and karma and rebirth. Frequently it is the no-birth realm that is depicted as the goal of religious striving. If the term "birth" were to turn out to be devoid of meaning, this could present significant problems in other areas of Buddhist thought.  
  
In passing, we can note that there is a train of thought in the modern contemporary interpretation of Buddhism that addresses this same problem and attempts to solve it by asserting that nouns are just verbs in disguise; that, in actuality, there are no things at all, but only processes. Thus the word tree then becomes a shorthand for the process of something growing from a particular sort of seed, developing branches and so forth. While this proposition certainly invites a shift of perspective; a change of attitude toward the things around us; it does not really shift the basic epistemological problem. We would still be faced with the question: wherein lies the meaningfulness of the asserted processes. All that has been done is to substitute processes for entities, but the question of what makes them meaningful remains. One can imagine a CT grounded in processes just as easily as one grounded in entities, so, although this is interesting, it does not get us off the hook.  
  
For reasons such as those we have already reviewed, many of the great Buddhist thinkers felt intuitively that the CT was wrong and the challenge became to come up with a satisfactory substitute, or, at least, with an explanation of its deficiencies. Arguably, far too much effort went into the latter (its deficiencies) and too little into the former (an alternative). This brings us to the famous dialogue between Nagasena and King Milinda about the nature of a chariot. Nagasena, through a form of Socratic dialogue, leads the King to agree that the meaning of the word chariot does not derive from nor inhere in the wheel, nor in the axle, nor in the platform, nor in any of the multitude of components into which a chariot can be deconstructed. By this means he is able to demonstrate to his own and the king's satisfaction that the word chariot, and so, by implication, all other denoting words and phrases, does not correspond to an entity in the real world but is merely "a denotation, an appellation, a description, an expression, a name" (sankhaa sannaa pannatti vohaaro naamam pavattati). In other words, words are just conventional and do not have any necessary relation to objects that are themselves reducible to component parts, which is also to say, things that are dependently originated.  
  
Now Nagasena's reasoning has had long currency in the Buddhist world. Deconstruction of the object has been resorted to both as a philosophical strategy and as a meditative technique. Many have, for instance, taken this to be the primary purpose of the skandha doctrine, taking it to be a deconstruction of the individual. This is taken to demonstrate that just as, really, there is no such thing as a chariot, so there is really no such thing as "a self, a being, a soul, or a lifespan" as it says in the Diamond Sutra. All this, therefore, feeds into the teachings on non-self (anatma) and on voidness (shunyata). It also, however, led to theories that only non-reducible entities are perceptible and that composite entities are imputations upon the perception of collections of component non-reducibles. Non-reducibles are what might be called atoms and a variety of atomic theories developed in early Buddhist thought. Vasubandhu devotes some space to refuting them by demonstrating their internal inconsistencies. In this respect his thinking again seems remarkably modern, demonstrating by logic rather than observation, which, in his day was impractical, that atoms must themselves be deconstructible. He also makes the rather obvious point that, as a matter of fact, atoms are not perceptible. He further, and this is quite important in terms of the CT, points out that we never see all the atoms of anything. Thus when we say, "I see a tree" we have only seen some of the leaves. The imputation "tree" cannot, therefore, be a result of aggregating all the components. Indeed, two people, or the same person at two times, could agree that they had seen the same tree when, in fact, looking from two different angles, there was not a single component item that was common to both the assemblages, the one seen by one of them and the other by the other. Yet both truly saw the same tree. The line of attack that depends upon deconstructing the object and thereby demonstrating that in some sense it does not exist is not, therefore, entirely satisfactory philosophically.  
  
The argument used by Nagasena is, however, to this day, regarded as holy writ by many Buddhists. We will see some more of its flaws, arguably even more fatal than those just noted, in a moment. Before that, however, let us spend a little more time on what the consequences of Nagasena's approach to demolishing the CT were. Let us first recapitulate that Nagasena's approach is to deconstruct the object itself. There can be no correspondence if there is nothing in the real world to correspond to. To repeat, we can see that this begins to move us in the direction of idealism. If words do not designate anything, as in the case of "chariot" then perhaps that is because there are no things for them to designate. By unhooking words from the concrete world, Nagasena opens the door for the deluge of ideas that question, and soon deny, the existence of the concrete world itself. Words are to be treated as pure convention, unhooked from things in the world and this is justified by the deconstructionist argument that seems to show that the idea of "things in the world" is itself only a convention. Actually things are void of inherent existence. The term void comes to equate with the designation "dependently originated". In the philosophy of the day, this meant that everything except nirvana had to be void. Some say that these ideas contain the epitome of Buddhist wisdom. Others see them as having been a source of endless confusion and blame it for adding to Buddhism's only partially deserved reputation for nihilism. Certainly they have had one evident effect: they have generated a flood of further words, many of which certainly seem to bear very little connection to entities in the real world.  
  
After Nagasena, the next step in the development of the deconstructionist approach was taken by another member of the Naga clan, Arjuna by name. Nagarjuna lived in the 1 century CE, 7th BE. Nagarjuna spelt out the implications of Nagasena's logic in full. He did not just apply it to entities, he deconstructed processes as well. Although it is anachronisitic to call Nagarjuna a Mahayana philosopher, his work paved the way for the Madhyamika notion of shunyata and all that flowed from that. Nagarjuna did, however, also have the good grace to see that if the things designated by words are all void, then this would have to go for the things designated by the designations "void", "mind" and even "Nagarjuna's theory" as well. Some see this as evidence of the glorious perfection and finality of his thought. Others think it as more reasonable to take it that Nagarjuna, as an honest man, having advanced this particular line of argument as far as it will go, is, in effect, saying, "This is as far as I have got. These are the problems that remain to be solved."  
  
Both are correct, but in different ways. There certainly remained something to be solved. At the same time, it is true that Nagarjuna had mined that seam to exhaustion. The deconstructionist approach did not really solve the problem. A different tack was required. One extreme is to say that entities are real and meaningfulness in language must derive directly from them. The other extreme is to say that entities are unreal and language is purely conventional. Because Vasubandhu began by denying the first of these propositions, people assumed that he must support the second. He did not.  
  
Let us consider another serious flaw in the argument of Nagasena. The problem is that when Nagasena asks the king "Are the wheels the chariot?" the king is only able to reply "No, reverend sir," because both the king and Nagasena know, and know that the other knows, what the word "chariot" means. But if there is no thing, or no non-void thing, that gives meaning to the word chariot, how can they know what the word means and how could, then, the king answer the question? The deconstruction of the term chariot itself depends upon chariot being a meaningful term. Whence, then, that meaning? This is a fatal flaw in the argument, at least insofar as Nagasena's rhetoric can be said to address the problem of the CT. It does not provide a solution to the problems presented by that theory, merely a confirmation of them. We will remember that many of these problems stem from the existence of words for non-existent objects. Even if Nagasena's argument, and, a fortiori, Nagajuna's arguments are all accepted, in this context all they do is to multiply the number of meaningful words for which no corresponding entities can be found. This, in itself, does nothing to elucidate the source of that meaningfulness.  
  
In fact, what the two Nagas did was to attempt, and, one could say, valiantly, to solve the problem via an assault upon the status, ontological if not existential, of the entities supposedly designated. This does not, however, help us to know what it is that words do actually do. All it does is to make the problem more acute. But it does cast a shadow of doubt over the existence of the concrete world and this is not altogether helpful. Since the Nagas, just like anybody else, still had to get up in the morning and go about their duties in the midst of the concrete world, this doubt created its own paradoxes. It led to the theory of Two Truths. This enables one to feel very profound while asserting that Nagarjuna's theory is both true and untrue at the same time. It is said that it is true on the absolute plane and untrue on the relative plane. This provides a logical solution, but do the terms "relative plane" and "absolute plane" correspond to anything in the real world? Ah well, since the world does not exist absolutely it does not matter. Well, that might be logical but it is not helpful. Instead of solving the problem, it merely sweeps it under a thick philosophical carpet. It does not encourage us to complete Nagarjuna's work, only to enshrine his incomplete achievement.  
  
In passing, we can comment that this tendency to enshrine rather than understand is one of the less endearing features of religious discourse. Piety is essentially a virtue. However there is a kind of pious reverence that leads people to act as though this or that great person was omniscient and could not, therefore, possibly have got anything wrong, and so concludes that the problems they left outstanding should be enshrined as holy mysteries rather than solved. Really, this sort of thing is demeaning rather than elevating of the person in question. Truly great thinkers are interested in the matter in hand, not in their own status and they want those they influence to grow, mature, and learn to think clearly for themselves, not to be stunted by awe, glorious as the sentiment of awe sometimes is. We stand in awe at the scientific achievements of Ptolemy, even though almost all of his theories are now superseded. In religion, however, propositions are expected to stand for all time. This is unwise.  
  
Well, Vasubandhu was puzzled, but not daunted by all this. Coming along a couple of centuries after Nagarjuna he was in a position to review all that had gone before. It seemed quite clear that the CT had to go, but equally clear that the deconstructionist argument had run its course. What other solution could there be? One possibility was the theory of Dignaga. If the things themselves were not to be deconstructed, perhaps the words and concepts could be. Dignaga advanced the idea that there is such a thing as pure perception. He defined perception as cognition free from verbal construction. In this scheme, we perceive something and if we speak of what we perceive, the speech is after the event. The perception itself is inexpressible and words are, therefore, demoted to a rather feeble status. This line of thought has also had a long currency in Buddhist circles and lies behind all the rhetoric about enlightenment being a matter of direct perception free from mental constructions, about the inexpressibility of the sublime state, and generally about how thinking stands in the way of enlightenment. Well, Vasubandhu did not think much of that idea either. For Vasubandhu, to perceive is to know and to know is to know that one knows and to know that one knows is to be able to express what it is that one knows. Perception cannot, therefore, be inexpressible in principle. A corollary of this line, which is somewhat confirmatory of Vasubandhu's position, is the fact that a perception can be more or less correct or more or less mistaken and we can know that a perception has been mistaken. A perception is mistaken if it does not correspond with what is there. If I perceive a snake, but it turns out to be a piece of hose pipe, I have been mistaken. We can see from this simple point that in Vasubandhu's theory there is room for the things in the world to exist and to provide in themselves the criterion of truth and, at the same time, for those things to not be the source of the meaning of the words, since the meaning of words can, and generally does, depart from the truth of the things themselves, at least in some degree.  
  
WHAT VASUBANDHU ASSERTED  
So what is the source of the meaning in the words? Since, for Vasubandhu, perceiving and knowing are closely related if not actually synonymous, Vasubandhu asked himself "When we think we are perceiving something, what is it that we actually perceive?" What is the tree that we perceive. Is it the tree that exists in the garden? The answer has to be, at least, "not exactly". What we perceive is an approximation of what is there. What we perceive, therefore, has to be a construction. It has to be knowledge rather than an entity. Or rather, it has to be whatever it is that causes us to have the knowledge that we have. Perception is not a process of reproduction, like a camera taking a picture. Perception is a process of being ***caused to know*** something. On the basis of perception, knowledge forms. Words, then, designate that knowledge. Their meaning derives from that process of being caused to know. The process can be valid or invalid according to conditions. It is therefore possible for us to be caused to know something that turns out in fact to be false. Each act of perception, however, does not stand alone, but builds upon what is already known. The tree that we see, therefore, is the tree that we know rather than the tree that is there. If our perception is acute, it may cause us to know that the tree before us is not quite the tree that we know. This will cause us to know a new tree. Even this new tree, however, will still only be at best an approximation to the tree that is actually there.  
  
Thus, we can see that Vasubandhu's theory of knowledge and perception avoids the pitfalls of idealism. It does not assert that there is no world out there. It does, however, assert that what we perceive is not what is out there. Yet neither is it completely cut off from what is out there. We live through a continuous process of refining perceptions. Life causes us to know. With each increment, our knowledge base develops. Many increments, doubtless, lead us in the direction of truth. There are many, however, that lead us astray. Knowledge, however, is intrinsically expressible. The task of expressing it may tax our talents sometimes in practice, but it is always expressible in principle. This means that what is perceived is always communicable. That does not mean that it always is communicated. When A communicates to B, B is experiencing a process of perception. B is being made to know something. However, this interpersonal process is no more – and often less – infallible than any other perception. Further, since the meaning of words does not, as we have just seen, exactly correspond to what is there, there are plenty of opportunities for the well known pitfalls of communication, specifically misunderstanding on the one hand and collusive delusion on the other.  
  
Misunderstanding occurs in the following way. A's perception of "tree" is inexact. B's notion of tree is also inexact, but, quite likely, in a different way. A says "tree" meaning a Scandinavian pine. B hears tree and is caused to know an ornamental cherry. These two are, as we say, on different wavelengths. Collusive delusion occurs, on the other hand, when A and B both know they are talking about ornamental cherries when in fact what exists in the real world is a Scandinavian pine. In the matter of trees, this sort of thing is irritating. In human affairs, it can be disastrous, being the basis of scapegoating, bigotry, dogmatism and all manner of folly.  
  
So Vasubandhu places epistemology at the centre of what it means to be human. We are, in his view, quintessentially, beings that know and that know that they know and that express that knowing, even though it may be wrong. We are each caught up in an endless procedure of perceiving and these perceptions feed our knowing. They inform us. Our ideas are not replicas of the world out there: they are constructs that are being ceaselessly refined. Delusion, as a spiritual failing, is not to be construed in terms of the inexactitude of our perceptions, since such inexactitudes are the common lot of what it is to be human and will characterise even the most enlightened individual. Delusion is, rather, to be discerned in rigidities of attitude that prevent us from "being caused to know" anything new. In broad outline, this theory has similarities to Kelly's ideas about personal constructs and to Popper's ideas about the progress of science as a sequence of constructs in which absolute truth is not available, but in which theories can always be refuted. It is the process of refutation – the process of being caused to know something unexpected, something incongruent with what one already knew, that is the engine of progress.  
  
Vasubandhu came to his approach through a study of logic. He wrote a number of works on logic and these were important contributions to the advance of that discipline in Indian philosophy. In particular he simplified and clarified the nature of the syllogism, which is the basic unit of deductive logic. In Vasubandhu's schema, the form of the syllogism is as follows. If a class "h" is permeated by a quality or attribute "s", and if an instance "x" is an instance of class "h", then s is an attribute of x. This puts the syllogism into a three point form similar to that used in logic nowadays, viz:

1. All h are s
2. x is an h
3. x is s

Thus, to use the common example,

1. all smoke is fire indicating
2. there is smoke
3. therefore, there is fire

Vasubandhu's work put Indian logic onto what we can recognise as a modern footing, and, we must remember, this was seventeen hundred years ago. We are not directly concerned with his work on logic here, but there is an important aspect of it that is relevant to the epistemological questions we have been considering. Vasubandhu defined perception as that which causes us to know. Now it is fairly clear that logic is also something that causes us to know. In the above example, we are caused to know that there is fire and this is an advance upon the knowledge given in perception that there is smoke. So, we might ask, are perception and logic alternatives? Is it that logic is one way of coming to know something while perception is another way. This has some ring of common sense to it. We can imagine a conversation in which one person says, "I worked out that Fred must have been at the meeting because he was not at home and he had taken his briefcase" and the other person says, "Yes, I saw him at the meeting." These two people have both been caused to know that Fred is at the meeting, one by means of logic and the other by means of perception.  
  
On the other hand, it may not be quite like that. After all, both of them did rely upon perceptions. The three point syllogism relies upon the second item being provided by observation. It appears, therefore, that logic and perception work together. If logic requires perception, is it also the case that perception requires logic? Vasubandhu concluded that such was in fact the case. This might initially seem counter-intuitive, but let us analyse what happens. When we "see a tree" we do not, as we established earlier, ever see the whole tree. It is not the case that we ever see all the atoms of the tree. The perception of tree does not come about, therefore, by summation of the totality. This is one of the basic flaws in the CT. What we do see is some part of the tree. In an instance we considered earlier, it can even be the case that two observers both see the same tree without either of them having seen anything that the other one saw. One sees leaves on one side of the tree and the other sees leaves on the other side. Both, however, quite legitimately can be said to have seen the same tree. Vasubandhu concludes that there is an element of logic in all perceptions. The perception operates as though the observer went through a process of the following kind:

1. All massed leaves within a certain range of dimensions are tree-indicating
2. There is a mass of leaves whose dimensions fall within the said range
3. Therefore, that is a tree.

In other words, perception is a logical process; or, perception and logic work hand in glove with one another. Not only is this borne out by the instance in which two people see the same thing from different data, it also satisfactorily covers the case where a person sees different things from identical data. My towel in the bathroom could look exactly the same as Sally's towel. It is easy to mistake one for the other when they are hanging on the rail. Yet there truly are two different towels and when I look at the towel on the rail, I see "Sally's towel" or I see "my towel", even though the data being received by my eye is identical. Thus there is a logical process involved in the perception: a process that is capable of instantly marshalling other information known to me. We can understand from this, therefore, that logic and perception are not, in Vasubandhu's view, two alternative ways of knowing, but more like two dimensions of a single process in which perceiving always involves a logical element, without which recognition would not occur, and logic always involves a perceptual element, without which knowledge of generalities would never crystallise into knowledge of specific instances and so would remain useless. Logic and perception are two dimensions of a single process of being caused to know something or other. We can understand from this just how profoundly epistemological Vasubandhu's whole philosophy is.  
  
Now we need to build into these ideas the fact that what is known may be invalid. In fact, it is almost certain that everything we "know" is invalid inasmuch as it is a construction based upon the information that we have internalised through the perception process including its built in logic and any such construction is not, in fact, going to correspond exactly to what is "out there". This means that the object or product of perception and of knowledge is not something that exists. It is simply a knowledge. The fact that Vasubandhu spells out this point is one of the reasons why he is mistakenly taken for an idealist. However, the fact that he asserts that the object of perception is not something that exists does not mean that he thinks things in the world do not exist. It means that he thinks that what perception produces is knowledge not something that exists. Knowledge is essentially a characteristic of the self. To know something is also to know that one knows, so it is also, in a trivial sense, a self-knowledge.  
  
So perception is defined as the process that causes us to know. Perception has its own internal logic. The term "internal logic" here is more than an analogy, since the structure of the logic of perception is the same as the structure of formal logic and logic cannot be defined as anything other than a structure. Therefore the internal logic of perception is truly a logic. This logic of perception and its product can be expressed. Perception is, therefore, intimately linked to language, language being the coding system used to store and communicate knowledge. The knowledge yielded by perception can be expressed in language. The language can, in principle, adequately describe the product of perception, but this does not correspond precisely with what is there in the world nor is the language that a given individual has at his disposal necessarily adequate to the task of expression in a particular instance. The product of perception is not something that exists: it is simply a knowledge. This knowledge may be experienced as an image or as a formulation. In either case it amounts to a mental construction. The process of construction is not in conscious awareness as it occurs, but the product is, and the logic of any particular construction can always, in principle, be reconstructed by reflection. Knowledge gained from perception is mistaken, in the sense that it does not perfectly correspond with what exists. Knowledge may be extended by the use of formal logic, but logic is never independent of perception since it is always dependent upon the knowledge that was provided by perception. This extending of knowledge is the normal mode of encounter with the world. We rarely encounter anything that seems to us utterly new. Most of the time we are actually in the business of refining or confirming past perceptions rather than having entirely new ones. Our encounter with the world is, therefore, guided by our personal constructs, or samskaras, which are constantly being put to the test. Since what we are caused to know by perception is not exactly what exists, what we know is always, in some degree, false, and it is, therefore, falsifyable. The falsification of an existing knowledge – i.e. the coming to awareness that something that was known is in fact wrong – comes about in the same way as any other "coming to know", i.e. via perception or its logical extension. This falsification process is very significant in our lives. Openness to it is a form of enlightenment.  
  
Since, to know, is also to know that one knows, the knowledges that we have through perception constitute all that can pass for a self. The self is composed of products of perception. Self-knowledge is, in fact, to know what it is that one knows. This is also to know that such knowledge does not constitute knowledge of a self that exists. The knowledges that one knows one knows are not permanent or final. All samskaras are impermanent. Samskaras constitute the nearest thing there is to a self, but samskaras are not an existent self. In fact, the knowledge that constitutes self-knowledge does not refer to a self at all but to our constructs of what is other that we have been caused to know about by perception and its logical extensions. The real existing things, which samskaras purport to be knowledge of, are not self. They are the other things in our world which have their own existence and their own reasons. Enlightenment, in this schema, means to know what one knows, to know that it is impermanent and not self and to know that the real things are other. While this could technically be called a form of self-knowledge, it is not knowledge of an existent self, so that terminology is misleading.  
  
Perception is guided by existing knowledge. It is, therefore, a closed loop within which occurrence of the falsification of existing knowledge plays a key role. Our knowledge of the world is only extended via such falsifications. The tendency of the mind is not to yield an existing construct until one has been made to know that it is false. There is, therefore, a conservative tendency within the perceptual process. Perception can be more or less acute as can the logic process that augments it. If perception is dulled, the conservative tendency is normally capable of providing existing knowledge in substitution for fresh experience. This gives our world a sense of stability that belies reality. It also gives rise to the illusion of an enduring self since our "knowing that we know" reveals a constancy of knowledge. The more enlightened person does not have this experience since they are constantly being caused to know that what they thought they knew is, or has already become, inaccurate. They, therefore, have freshness and vibrancy, but not constancy.  
  
All of this knowing is, in principle expressible. This means that it is encodable. Language and perception are intimately related. Words can be perfectly adequate to perception, but this does not mean that they are adequate to the existent things. There is, therefore, no correspondence that could provide a sound basis for the meaning of words and there can be words for things that do not exist. Indeed, since knowledges caused by perception are diverse, their cross fertilisation in the process of extension through logic can yield, in principle, an infinite range of fantasy. Inasmuch as logic is itself an extended form of perception, we can also accurately speak of fantasy as perception, although it is not perception of anything that exists. The object of perception is not something that exists, it is a knowledge. Knowledge can be false. We can entertain false knowledge. We can even entertain false knowledge deliberately all the while knowing it to be false. This process can be enjoyable. It provides us with the capacity for imagination and fun. It takes us into the realm of "what if..." This means that constructs can be formed that are unlikely to be validated by experiential perceptions. Our ability to speculate in such ways is, however, very useful.  
  
Here it may be valuable to speak of extended perception or what J.L.Moreno called "surplus reality". This realm of surplus reality plays an extremely important role in human life. It is not just a producer of individual speculations that, on the one hand, have sometimes been the genesis of spectacular breakthroughs in scientific knowledge, such as the theories of Einstein, and, on the other, provide much of the fun in life; it is also, in its collective manifestation, the basis of culture. Money, for instance, is an extended perception or surplus reality. Since most money is a fiduciary issue, it does not represent anything that exists out there. Yet it is not inaccurate to say that a person perceives money. Furthermore, the perception of money is a major motivating force in people's lives. Indeed, most of the major organising factors in our lives are extensions or abstractions of this type. We may say that a country, for instance, is a kind of fiduciary issue. So long as everybody continues to believe in it, it continues to function and can be the basis for people's most noble and most base visions and passions. The same may be said for religious vision. The extended perception of surplus reality shapes our lives, debasing or sublimating our raw passions and shaping our behaviour for ill or good.  
  
Let us go back to the matter of the built-in logic in perception. When I see "Sally's towel" in the bathroom, if pressed, I can say, "Well, I knew it was not mine because I know that mine is in the washing machine." However, at the time when I glance at the rack, I am not necessarily conscious of this logic. I just see what I know to be Sally's towel. What this implies is either that the logic of perception proceeds at the speed of light, or that the logical element in the perception was already in place before the sensory impression of "red clothe over there" occurred. The latter is, of course, the probable explanation. We are already pre-informed or pre-disposed to see things as such and such. Predisposition is a major factor in how we experience our world. It is both very convenient and highly misleading. In the bathroom case, it saves me from the embarrassment of using somebody else's towel. At the same time, we can readily see how it can lead us into self-deception. It is just conceivable that some kind person has unbeknown to me finished off the washing and very thoughtfully brought my towel back and hung it on the bathroom rack for me, even folding it neatly, just like Sally does – so it is just possible that it really was my towel after all. We can also see, therefore, how predisposition is set up by prior perceptions or the lack of them. It is only because I perceived my towel going into the washing machine and did not see anybody else take it out, and because of a series of other perceptions that have convinced me that there are only two red towels in this house, namely Sally's and my own, that I see the one on the rack as Sally's. Predisposition is, therefore, (a) very significant and (b) itself a product of perception. It is a knowing, though one that is often false. All propaganda relies upon this principle. In a war, for instance, there is much government propaganda, on each side, that is designed to predispose people to see certain classes of human beings not as such but as "the enemy". Advertising works on similar principles.  
  
CONCLUSION  
Vasubandhu was a very important philosopher in the history of Buddhism. His philosophy is epistemological: that is, it examines the question of meaning. It rejects many commonly held ideas including a number that are still thought by many people to be of the essence of Buddhism. It sets up perception and logic as inseparable elements in a process of coming to know. It shows how knowledge and language are closely linked and true knowledge is not inexpressible in principle. It assumes that there is a real world but it asserts that direct perception thereof is not possible; all perceptions are partly inference. It shows how perception builds upon experience. It shows how we are easily deceived and how enlightenment is not so much an ability to avoid such deception as a knowledge of its inevitability that permits us to unhook ourselves from over-reliance upon its products. All samskaras are unsatisfactory. All samskaras are impermanent. The real things are not-self.  
  
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