Persons as Weakly Emergent: An Alternative Reading of Vasubandhu's Ontology of Persons

Itsuki Hayashi

PERSONS AS WEAKLY EMERGENT: AN ALTERNATIVE READING OF VASUBANDHU'S ONTOLOGY OF PERSONS

Itsuki Hayashi
Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures
Columbia University
ih2300@columbia.edu

Introduction

According to the Buddhist doctrine of Two Truths, there are no persons in our final ontology, but there are persons in our conventional ontology. What does it mean to say that persons exist conventionally? The Ābhidharmikas say that ultimately there are psychophysical tropes, called *dharma*s, certain collections or combinations of which are conventionally taken to be persons. We would then ask: what kind of reality is conventional reality, and what is the metaphysical relation between conventional reality and ultimate reality as pertains to persons?

Recently there have been various attempts to understand Buddhist philosophy by using contemporary analytical methods and theories. Among the prominent scholars in this field, Mark Siderits claims that, on the Abhidharma metaphysics as articulated by Vasubandhu, conventional reality is a kind of "convenient designator" or "useful fiction" that is "reducible" to ultimate reality. I agree that Vasubandhu's metaphysics supports the claim that conventional reality is both useful and reducible. However, if conventional reality is useful in the way Siderits articulates it, then weak emergentism better captures Vasubandhu's metaphysics than reductionism. The purpose of the present article is to establish this point.

I will first analyze Vasubandhu's definitions of conventional and ultimate realities in his *Abhidharmakośa* and confirm the reductionist reading of the ontology of persons. Second, I will discuss Siderits' justification for thinking in terms of conventional reality, and argue that if conventional reality is useful in the way Siderits has it, then it would be *more* than a convenient designator, hence not quite reducible to ultimate reality. Finally, I will suggest weak emergentism as a coherent interpretation of Vasubandhu's metaphysics, and address possible objections and questions to clarify my thesis.

What I intend to do is to offer a new theory, adopted from contemporary metaphysics, that best represents the metaphysical relation between conventional and ultimate realities in Vasubandhu's philosophy. I do not intend to improve Buddhist metaphysics in light of contemporary analysis or defend weak emergentism generally speaking. Still, the weak emergentist approach contributes to our self-reflection by enabling us to systematically organize our beliefs or conventions. We can thus examine the roles that our conventions play in our lives, how they are related to other conventions and to ultimate reality, and whether we can do without the conventions to purify our thinking. Therefore, thinking about Buddhist philosophy and weak

emergentism serves not only metaphysical analysis but also pragmatic or soteriological purposes.

Vasubandhu's Definition of Conventional and Ultimate Realities

Vasubandhu defines conventional and ultimate realities as follows:

> That of which there is no cognition when broken or other [properties] are removed by the mind is conventionally real, such as a pot and water; that which is otherwise is ultimately real.[1]

We can glean from this definition two important points. First, we have a way of deciding whether a certain thing is conventionally or ultimately real. Conventional reality is something that can be broken down, either physically or mentally, and of which the cognition ceases when it is thus broken down. This renders every partite thing only conventionally real. A pot is conventionally real because when you break a pot, the pot disappears and shards are observed instead. It is a little tricky on the mental side. One suggestion for interpretation is to take Vasubandhu as giving an argument that is similar to Aristotle's "stripping argument," such that, say, if we suppose that water possesses the properties of moistness, coolness, et cetera, then by stripping off in the mind these properties one by one, we would end up having no water—some property cluster with no moistness is no water. Jonardon Ganeri attributes this interpretation to B. K. Matilal, and Ganeri offers an alternative interpretation, which is simply to mentally "zoom in" on water, the result of which is that there would no longer be apprehension of water.[2] Once we zoom in to, say, the atomic level, we would no longer see water but hydrogen and oxygen atoms situated in a certain way. Or, to be consistent in referring to qualities, once we zoom in on water, we would be apprehending individual qualities of water, each of which is not individual water. In any case, in the standard Buddhist analysis of the person, it is said that a person can be broken down (presumably mentally) into five psychophysical aggregates (*skandha*s): form, perception, feeling, volition, and consciousness.[3] And these aggregates are in turn breakable into the ultimate elements of existence, called *dharma*s. With regard to persons, then, we would judge persons to be conventionally real, while the *dharma*s are ultimately real, provided the latter do not allow for further analysis.

Second, we can clearly see some metaphysical relation between conventional reality and ultimate reality. Most generally, the relation is mereological: conventional reality is a kind of a whole, which is constituted by the parts that are ultimately real. The most natural way to characterize Vasubandhu's view is to associate it with ontological reductionism; as Siderits puts it,

> A Reductionist (that is, a reductionist about persons) holds that the existence of a person is really nothing more than just the existence of certain other kinds of things. . . . [I]t [Reductionist theory] holds that a certain sort of thing that is ordinarily thought to exist turns out to be reducible to certain other sorts of things that are in some sense ontologically more basic.[4]

The whole *is nothing more* than the sum of its parts. For instance, a reductionist about the mind would hold that the existence of a mind is really nothing more than just the existence of a brain and a network of a myriad neurophysiological occurrences. Concerning the person and the *dharma*s in Buddhist metaphysics, persons are likewise reducible to *dharma*s.

Ontological reductionism can be further divided into two positions. Jonardon Ganeri discusses David Lewis' distinction between cautious and incautious reductionism. According to this distinction, incautious reductionism is one that says reducible entities are less real than reducing entities, while cautious reductionism does not make such a claim.[5] In a similar vein, Nancey Murphy distinguishes between "ontological reductionism" and "atomist reductionism." Regarding this distinction, ontological reductionism is the view that "as one goes up the hierarchy of levels, no new kinds of metaphysical 'ingredients' need to be added to produce higher-level entities from lower." For example, if ontological reductionism about mental states is true, then there is no need to add "soul" or the like to neurophysiological states to generate mental states. Atomist reductionism, on the other hand, is a "much stronger thesis . . . that only the entities at the lowest level are *really* real. . . . This is the assumption that the atoms have 'ontological priority' over the things they constitute."[6] Vasubandhu is clearly committed to incautious reductionism or atomist reductionism about persons, because only *dharma*s are *really* real while persons are unreal, and *dharma*s have ontological priority over persons.[7] And it is obvious that this is also Siderits' intention when he identifies Vasubandhu as a reductionist, because he goes on to *justify* our continued countenance of persons, and only incautious reductionism or atomist reductionism demands justification for why we should not simply dispense with the unreal.[8]

What I seek to establish is an emergentist interpretation of conventional reality. Emergentism is the view that certain classes of things ontologically depend upon more fundamental classes of things, but are nevertheless irreducible to the latter. If we characterize the emergentist position in the phraseology of the aforementioned quotation by Siderits, it would read:

> An Emergentist (that is, an emergentist about persons) holds that the existence of a person is really *something more than just* the existence of certain other kinds of things. . . . [I]t [Emergentist theory] holds that a certain sort of thing that is ordinarily thought to exist turns out to be emergent from certain other sorts of things that are in some sense ontologically more basic.[9]

In contrast to reductionism, emergentism can be understood as a theory that says the whole is more than the mere sum of its parts. In Buddhist terms, emergentism about persons would hold that persons ontologically depend upon *dharma*s, but are not reducible to *dharma*s. Emegentism can thus be construed as under the banner of "dependent novelty."

Emergentism comes in different versions, since there are different interpretations of "novelty" and of how the relation between emergents and base entities is to be understood. For our purposes, the most important distinction is between strong

emergentism and weak emergentism. Strong emergentism is committed to a robust causal autonomy of the emergent, such that the emergent possesses a novel causal efficacy that is distinct from its base and therefore, in principle, irreducible. Implied from this is the commitment that emergent phenomena are capable of downward causation, where the emergent is capable of causally affecting entities that are homogeneous with the base. For instance, if pain emerges from some neurophysiological interaction, the emergent pain can affect the neurophysiological system in ways that the system itself cannot. Weak emergentism, on the other hand, concedes that the emergent is in principle reducible to its base and therefore epiphenomenal, but still emergent in the sense that a complete reduction is practically impossible except by simulation, hence enjoying "*explanatory* autonomy and irreducibility."[10] I want to suggest that Vasubandhu's conventional reality is best understood as weakly emergent from ultimate reality.[11] As with the distinctions drawn with respect to reductionism, the version I want to suggest is incautious weak emergentism or atomist weak emergentism, which claims that weak emergents are ultimately unreal.

Atomist reductionism and atomist weak emergentism can be discerned by the presence or absence of "explanatory autonomy and irreducibility." For the weak emergentist, there is something novel or unique about conventional reality that cannot be captured in terms of ultimate reality even though ultimately there is no such novelty. The apparent novelty is due to our spiritual and/or cognitive limitations, which also render our experiencing and thinking in terms of conventions inevitable. For the reductionist, on the other hand, what we can capture by means of conventions can also be captured in terms of ultimate reality, but we nevertheless continue to use these conventions because they are convenient or useful. So, if a convention is indispensable or inexplicable in terms of ultimate reality, then we should say it is weakly emergent from, rather than simply reducible to, ultimate reality. Siderits' main justification for accepting the conventional reality of persons is called "consequentialist justification." In the next two sections I will elucidate the justification and show that, if the justification is successful, the person convention has epistemic autonomy vis-à-vis *skandhas/dharmas* and therefore is better understood as weak emergent rather than reducible.

Conventional Reality as Useful Fiction: The Consequentialist Justification

The general thrust of Siderits' consequentialist justification for allowing persons as conventionally real is that the convention of person allows us to more effectively minimize future suffering than if there were no such convention. Since it is an indisputable fact that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is to eradicate all suffering from the universe, the convention that effectively promotes this goal is justifiable. In short, persons count as conventionally real because it is morally useful to countenance persons rather than *skandha*s or *dharma*s. Below, I will introduce Siderits' main arguments for the person convention with respect to oneself and the person convention with respect to others, and show how both of these are morally useful.

The consequentialist argument is adduced firstly in response to what Derek Parfit calls the Extreme Claim, which is the claim that "if Reductionism is true then egoistic concern for one's future states is never rationally justifiable."[12] The charge is that since reductionism has it that there are really no persons but just psychophysical aggregates in some causal sequence, it would be irrational for anyone to do anything to promote the welfare of anyone in the future. Since whatever aggregate that will be in my bed tomorrow morning will not be *me,* I have no reason to go to the bathroom now so that nobody would have to wake up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom or, in the worst-case scenario, wake up in a disastrous condition the next morning. Siderits' response is as follows:

> Identification with and appropriation of the states—past, present and future—in a causal series is justified on the grounds that this better promotes maximization of overall welfare than the available alternatives. . . . It is adoption of the personhood stance as a whole—coming to treat a causal series as a unified system of identification and appropriation—that is justified. This justification is impersonal: pain is bad, and adoption of this stance helps minimize pain.[13]

And also:

> I strive especially to avoid future suffering in *this* causal series not because its states are somehow connected to my self . . . but because its states are those the welfare of which present strivings stand the best chance of affecting.[14]

So by adopting the convention of enduring person, the reductionist can make sense of egoistic concern, though in a somewhat mitigated form. I have reason to go to the bathroom now because, through the adoption of the person convention, I know both that I can prevent the occurrence of some future pain by doing so and I am best suited for it.

With respect to concern for others, Siderits says we are to help others when we are "well-situated" to do so,[15] and when doing so would better promote global welfare than helping ourselves. The person convention with respect to others becomes significant here; rather than treating all pleasures and pains on a par, Siderits recommends that we think in terms of persons so as to be partial toward dear ones, not out of personal attachment but because, knowing better how to tend to those intimate people, we stand the best chance of affecting them. With this reasoning Siderits also defends reductionism against an objection called the saintliness objection. The objection is that, given the impersonal ethics of the reductionist, the reductionist must always act so as to maximize global welfare.[16] This would imply that the reductionist must not brush his teeth because the time is better spent saving dying children in the hospital or elsewhere. In short, the reductionist must act as saints do, but we are not saints; so if "ought" implies "can," then by transposition reductionism cannot sustain its ethics.

In response to this objection, Siderits answers that human nature may be such as to be best able to contribute to overall welfare when allowed to prioritize intimate people rather than being completely impartial. He calls this "maximization strategy":

> According to this strategy, it is a fact of human nature that we are best able to contribute to overall welfare if a significant portion of our efforts goes into pursuing personal projects and honoring commitments to particular others. . . . So utilitarianism, rather than insisting that we pursue the barren life of the moral saint, encourages us to forge rich and rewarding personal lives.[17]

I do not know if the practice of impartially motivated partiality in fact will or is likely to promote global welfare rather than trying to exercise radical altruism, but it serves Siderits' general aim for moderateness; the person convention with respect to others supports a very moderate ethics, which basically vindicates courses of action that accord with our partial inclinations so long as they are not partially motivated.

Siderits uses the same reasoning, the maximization strategy, to justify using the person convention with respect to both oneself and others. If being partial toward one's own future or intimate ones really has more utility than being completely impartial, then the person convention is useful and we have good reason to countenance persons even though they are not ultimately real. Now, is the convention dispensable, such that we can still have a moral life without it, even though it might be less effective? Siderits does not discuss this in connection with Vasubandhu's philosophy, but elsewhere, when expounding upon Nāgasena's philosophy in the *Milindapañha,* he goes so far as to say that the person convention is necessary, lest "it would be a disaster."[18] A student who does not identify with a future exam-taker would see no reason to study instead of going for a drink. A criminal who walks out of prison and does not identify with the person who underwent sincere repentance for the previous ten years would see no reason to appease his violent urges. If people really were so catastrophically egoistical in these ways, the person convention would indeed be indispensable for leading a moral life. So there would be something about the person convention that ultimate reality lacks, as far as the average (allegedly egoistic) moral agents are concerned. In any case, Siderits might not think that this view about human moral nature is not shared by Vasubandhu. Let us take a look at Siderits' treatment of the "alienation problem" to see, more decisively, that the consequentialist justification supports weak emergentism better than reductionism.

The Person Convention as Uniquely Useful

Siderits addresses Paul Williams' objection to reductionism, called "the alienation problem." The alienation problem points out that genuine moral concern toward other persons requires a wholehearted belief in their reality rather than merely as fictitious entities. The essence of the alienation problem is captured by Williams' claim that "to help others effectively requires *not* that we discount their individuality as the persons they are but actually to focus on that individuality most closely."[19] The reductionist, who only countenances impersonal distress and suffering, would not be able to exercise genuine care toward those in need of help. There is an intuitive appeal here. We would feel much more inclined to give a donation to orphans in a distant land if we are provided with pictures and some biographical details of

children to whom the donation would purportedly be spent rather than if we just were asked to help starving children. Of course, the objection can easily be answered by raising the point that the Buddhist accepts persons as conventionally real so that we can, conventionally, focus on individuality rather than discounting it. We have already seen Siderits argue in this way in the preceding section. Easily also, however, the objection can be strengthened by saying that to help others effectively it is not enough to take their individuality as a mere convenient fiction but that we need to believe wholeheartedly in their reality.

Siderits answers that reductionism is compatible with genuine engagement with the person-regarding attitude, though in an *ironic* way. The claim is that we can have genuine feeling toward fellow persons while knowing for a fact that there are no persons: "The Buddhist Reductionist holds that, like the sophisticated urbanist, we can induce and maintain belief in a useful fiction while knowing it for what it is. . . . We are smart enough to do two things at once."[20] Just as an urbanist can take genuine pride in the city he lives in while knowing that the city is a fiction standing for the collection of all the things that the city is constituted by, so, too, the reductionist can hold genuine feelings toward fellow persons while knowing that they are fictions standing for collections of *dharma*s. So, "ironic engagement" captures the sense of allowing some distance from the conventions so as to avoid reification or excessive attachment, even though it is nevertheless a genuine engagement.

Here, the usefulness of the person convention is roughly the same as the one appealed to earlier. Earlier it was said that the person convention is useful for maximizing utility; we can better contribute to global welfare by endorsing the person convention than without. Now we are saying that the person convention helps us help others more effectively than without the convention. This point is conspicuous from the *disanalogy* between the sophisticated urbanist and the ironic engager of the person convention. Siderits tells us that the sophisticated urbanist can take genuine pride in his city even though he knows that the city is nothing over and above all the particular things that are in it. This is convenient not only in the sense that it is easier to refer to the city than to enumerate every particular thing of the city in which the urbanist takes pride, but also in the sense that he *could* enumerate all those things and take pride in them without difference in meaning. Now in the case of the person convention, can one be equally engaged in people and certain collections of *dharma*s? If the answer is yes, the person convention would be ill motivated, for it would endorse ironic rather than non-ironic engagement for the sake of mere convenience. If the answer is no, then there is a disanalogy. Siderits seems to think that effective moral engagement requires the person convention, so the convention makes our moral affairs not more convenient but qualitatively better; there is something extra in the convention that reality by itself fails to evoke.

So far I have been trying to point out that the person convention may be a useful fiction insofar as global welfare is better promoted with it than without it, but for precisely that reason it is not straightforwardly reducible; by adopting the convention we are making our moral life not easier but possible. The result of this observation is that, provided the person is supposed to be mereologically reducible to *dharma*s, the

whole turns out to be *more* than the mere combination of parts. But this means that there is at least one sense in which the person is not reducible to *dharma*s. This is bad. If we want to save the person convention, reductionism will not quite capture the relationship between conventions and their underlying realities. But we do not want to accept non-reductionism either, because that is tantamount to conceding that persons exist separately from *dharma*s, thus destroying the Buddhist metaphysical thesis. This is why I want to suggest weak emergentism, which is a middle position between reductionism and non-reductionism. Let us now proceed to discuss this theory.

The Weak Emergentist Solution

As mentioned earlier, the slogan of emergentism is "dependent novelty." It is the middle position between reductionism and non-reductionism in that like reductionism it holds that the emergent is dependent on its base, and like non-reductionism it holds that the emergent is something novel, being more than the mere collection of some other kind of entities. Of the two versions of emergentism, strong and weak, we should avoid strong emergentism for the same reason that we want to avoid non-reductionism. Strong emergentism holds that even though the emergent is dependent upon its base, it is nevertheless irreducible and causally autonomous. Irreducibility and causal autonomy are sufficient to make the emergent an ultimate reality, so while opponents like some Cārvāka physicalists or Pudgalavāda Buddhists might endorse strong emergentism about persons, Vasubandhu should not.[21] To find a theory that is compatible with Vasubandhu's metaphysics, we should look into weak emergentism.

Weak emergentism is the view that emergent entities are in principle reducible to their bases, but have explanatory autonomy with regard to the latter. Mark Bedau, the founder and leading proponent of weak emergentism, characterizes weak emergentism as follows:

> The system's global behavior derives just from the operation of micro-level processes, but the micro-level interactions are interwoven in such a complicated network that the global behavior has no simple explanation.[22]

> In other words, they have *explanatory* autonomy and irreducibility, due to the complex way in which the iteration and aggregation of context-dependent micro interactions generate the macro phenomena.[23]

> A core concept of weak emergence concerns properties that in principle are underivable except by finite feasible simulation.[24]

Complex networks of micro-entities generate macro behaviors that appear to be inexplicable in terms of individual micro-entities and their functions—water molecules have their peculiar polarity and liquidity that appear to be irreducible to the behaviors of hydrogen and oxygen atoms taken individually. Although the recent advent of scientific analysis has succeeded in accounting for the peculiarities of

chemical aggregates in terms of their micro-constituents,[25] this does not alter the fact that the reduction remains something theoretical and unfeasible in everyday affairs with complex systems, still less in the case of the vastly complex causal web of neurophysical states that generate mental states. Hence the slogan of weak emergentism: "in principle irreducible in practice."[26]

Now, Vasubandhu's conventional reality can be interpreted as weakly emergent from ultimate reality. With the reductionist, the weak emergentist accepts that, ultimately, there is no separate fact with regard to persons other than the existence of *dharma*s. However, due to obstacles preventing us from penetrating into how things ultimately are, the conventions remain practically irreducible. The "obstacles" involved are not merely epistemological as in Bedau's characterization of weak emergentism; in the Buddhist version, the obstacles would include poor spiritual vision, which prevents us not only from directly apprehending the *dharma*s but also from being properly engaged therewith. Thus, in the weak emergentist interpretation of conventional reality, we are justified in continuing to use the person convention not because it is convenient or because it is morally useful, but simply because average human beings would be lost in confusion without it.[27] Still, the natural and inevitable adoption of the person convention has the advantage of allowing us to morally engage with fellow sentient beings, and this is a good thing because without the convention we would be very inefficient in contributing to the general welfare. Of course, for someone who is spiritually and cognitively accomplished, there is nothing particularly unique or useful about the convention. The convention for such a person is straightforwardly reducible to *dharma*s, and does not take part in her experience, though she can refer to it for the purpose of communication.

Several objections can be made to the weak emergentist interpretation. First, one may object that the person convention might be no more morally desirable than not having the convention. Perhaps we might indeed behave more efficiently if we pay special attention to ourselves and intimate ones, but can we expect ourselves to be able to remain only ironically engaged and not be attached to them while justifying, endorsing, and practicing partiality every day? I think this is a serious objection, as history seems to pose a massive counterevidence against such optimism. If ironic engagement is likely to turn into a *hypocritical* engagement, the person convention could not be recommended as useful. So the person convention would in the end be a dangerous fiction. Siderits' thesis would be replaced by eliminativism, and mine by error theory.

This criticism can be answered by addressing another objection. One might object that the "novelty" adduced for the person convention as weak emergent does not really count. A reductionist can agree that a painting appears to have some aesthetic qualities that are absent in each of the patches of color that constitute the painting, because these qualities are what the painting possesses not intrinsically but extrinsically in relation to viewers. Likewise, whatever qualities persons ostensibly possess are really subjective impositions by fellow moral agents and do not count as evidence of emergence. I have two lines of response to this objection. First, I argue that it might be a powerful objection against weak emergentism in general, but I am not

defending weak emergentism in general. As in Bedau's characterization, weak emergents enjoy *explanatory* autonomy as far as *practice* is concerned, and these features are clearly extrinsic in relation to epistemic agents. So, if there are weak emergents at all, the person convention should be included. The second line of response invokes causation. Up to this point our discussion has emphasized how we adopt and evaluate conventions, but there is also an aspect in which the conventions make us respond in certain ways. Thus, the person convention has the apparently novel causal efficacy to elicit moral engagement, while the *skandha*s that underlie the convention fail to have the same effect. The novelty is only apparent because those with a fully developed spiritual capacity would be led to moral engagement by the *skandha*s alone, without depending on conventions. With this the first objection can be answered. Even if the person convention failed to be morally advantageous, there is still something novel about the convention in that it has causal efficacy that ultimate reality lacks, as far as average moral agents are concerned. Therefore, weak emergentism better represents the convention of persons than reductionism, whether or not the consequential justification is sound.

Conclusion

I agree with Siderits that Vasubandhu's conventional reality is reducible to ultimate reality. However, given Siderits' representation of the doctrine, I have argued that it is better regarded as a version of weak emergentism than reductionism. This is because, according to the consequentialist justification, the convention is something more than a collection of ultimate reals. The weak emergentist interpretation has the additional virtue that it remains intact even if the consequentialist justification turns out to be unsuccessful.

According to the weak emergentist interpretation, a given thing *x* is conventionally real if and only if (1) its existence is really nothing more than just a collection of *dharma*s but (2) has explanatory autonomy and (3) is naturally and inevitably experienced as a unitary and unique thing, due to the spiritual and/or cognitive limitations of the average human being. Thus, the person convention is a weak emergent because persons are really nothing more than collections of *dharma*s, but possess apparently peculiar qualities that have moral implications, and are naturally and inevitably regarded as unitary entities by average human beings. Importantly, the condition is not that the convention should be useful in some way, but that it be epistemically unique. It is this feature by which we can continue to attribute a broadly reductionistic worldview (which includes weak emergentism) to Vasubandhu even if the person convention turns out to be morally problematic.

In closing, I would like briefly to point out a general implication of the weak emergentist reading of conventional reality. As we can clearly see from the previous discussion, a salient feature of weak emergentism is agent-dependence. It is for the average human being that the person convention is weakly emergent, while it is merely reducible for the enlightened. But we also know that "the average human being" is a very abstract concept. People may experience and think differently

because of variance in the degree of cognitive and spiritual status, or simply due to cultural differences. Through a weak emergentist analysis of conventional reality, we can systematically organize the conventions in accordance with the metaphysics of *dharma*s. We can expect to obtain a hierarchy of emergence, where higher, more complex conventions emerge from the lower, basic levels, with the level of *dharma*s being at the bottom. This would enable us to examine conventions in their relation to other strata of emergence and ultimately to *dharma*s, and also to identify and evaluate the peculiarities and practical implications of each convention. Most importantly, we can evaluate the pros and cons of the emergent peculiarities of a convention and consider whether we can discard it from our belief system while retaining the pros and discontinuing the cons. For instance, we can ask ourselves if we can discontinue thinking in terms of persons while retaining moral effectiveness and discarding partiality. In this way, weak emergentism helps us refine our conventions and progress toward enlightenment.

Notes

1 – *Yatra bhinne na tadbuddhir anyāpohe dhiyā ca tat/ ghaṭāmbuvat saṃvṛtisat paramārthasad anyathā//* (Vasubandhu 1972, p. 889).

2 – Ganeri 2007, pp. 171–172.

3 – See, e.g., Nāgasena's explanation in *Milindapañha*: "in respect of me, 'Nāgasena' functions as just a counter, an expression, convenient designation, mere name for the hair of my head, hair of my body[,] . . . brain of the head, *rūpa,* feeling, perception, volition, and consciousness. But ultimately there is no person to be found" (quotation taken from Siderits 2007, p. 54).

4 – Siderits 2015, p. 9.

5 – For Lewis' distinction between cautious and incautious reductionism, I am relying on Ganeri 2012, p. 142.

6 – Murphy 2010, p. 82.

7 – From Vasubandhu's assertion, "Persons are conceptually real *(prajñaptisat),* like heaps and streams," Ganeri argues that there is no evidence that Vasubandhu took conceptual reality to be ultimately unreal, but it is unlikely that Vasubandhu or any Buddhists allowed conceptual entities to have ultimate reality. Conceptual entities include universals and wholes (as opposed to parts), and Vasubandhu enthusiastically rejects the ultimate reality of the latter. For Ganeri's argument, see Ganeri 2007, p. 166.

8 – Incautious reductionism or atomist reductionism says the reducing entities are unreal but somehow not thereby dispensed with; eliminativism is the view that says we should simply dispense with them. For a defense of eliminativism, see Merricks 2001.

9 – Cf. Siderits 2015, p. 9.

10 – Bedau 2008, p. 160.

11 – Strong emergentism is incompatible with Vasubandhu's metaphysics for two reasons. First, Vasubandhu would not accept the strong emergentist thesis that emergents can have causal autonomy, since that would come dangerously close to accepting them as ultimately real. Second, strong emergentism is most properly attributed to personalism *(pudgalavāda),* which Vasubandhu enthusiastically rejects. For personalism as a version of strong emergentism, see Ganeri 2012, p. 163. For Vasubandhu's refutation of personalism, see Duerlinger 2003, pp. 74–87.

12 – Siderits 2015, p. 37 n.

13 – Ibid., pp. 57–58.

14 – Ibid., p. 59.

15 – Ibid., p. 103.

16 – That the reductionist seemingly must adopt something like a global utilitarianism is a corollary of the Extreme Claim.

17 – Siderits 2003, p. 104.

18 – See Siderits 2007, pp. 58–64.

19 – Ibid., p. 93.

20 – Ibid., p. 109.

21 – For the account of strong emergentism in later Cārvāka physicalism, see Ganeri 2012, pp. 69–97.

22 – Bedau 2008, p. 160.

23 – Ibid.

24 – Ibid., p. 163.

25 – McLaughlin 2008, p. 23.

26 – Bedau 2010, p. 56.

27 – Something similar to my main point is expressed by Georges Dreyfus and Jay L. Garfield: "We are the kind of beings for whom it is not possible but to organize our experiences through a schema such as causality." See Dreyfus and Garfield 2011, p. 119.

References

Bedau, Mark A. 2008. "Downward Causation and Autonomy in Weak Emergence." In Mark A. Bedau and Paul Humphreys, eds., *Emergence: Contemporary Readings in Philosophy and Science.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

———. 2010. "Weak Emergence and Context-Sensitive Reduction." In Antonella Corradini and Timothy O'Connor, eds., *Emergence in Science and Philosophy.* New York and London: Routledge.

Broad, C. D. 1925. *The Mind and Its Place in Nature.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Dreyfus, Georges, and Jay L. Garfield. 2011. "Madhyamaka and Classical Greek Skepticism." In The Cowherds, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duerlinger, James. 2003. *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self."* London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon.

Ganeri, Jonardon. 2007. *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2012. *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McLaughlin, Brian P. 2008. "The Rise and Fall of British Emergentism." In Mark A. Bedau and Paul Humphreys, eds., *Emergence: Contemporary Readings in Philosophy and Science.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Merricks, Trenton. 2001. *Objects and Persons.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murphy, Nancey. 2010. "Reductionism and Emergence: A Critical Perspective." In Nancey Murphy and Christopher C. Knight, eds., *Human Identity at the Intersection of Science, Technology and Religion.* Farnham, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ramsey, William. [2003]. "Eliminative Materialism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2013 edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2013/entries/materialism-eliminative/.

Siderits, Mark. 2007. *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction.* Aldershot, England and Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

———. 2015. *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*, 2nd ed. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

Vasubandhu, Dvārikādāsa Śāstrī (Svāmī). 1972. *Abhidharmakośa and Bhāṣya of Acharya Vasubandhu with Sphutārtha Commentary of Ācārya Yaśomitra.* Varanasi: Bauddha Bharati.