A Buddhist Response to the Quality-Combination Problem for Panpsychism

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Abhidharma Buddhist Responses to Combination Problems

Contemporary interest in panpsychism is driven by the intractability of the "hard problem" of consciousness (Chalmers 1996). Contemporary panpsychists, for example Nagel (1998) and Strawson (1999) contend that our current conceptions of mind and body, mental and physical are radically inadequate and in need of revision. In light of this, it could be useful to look beyond the Western philosophical tradition, to those traditions that have grappled, and continue to grapple, with cognate problems. I believe that the Classical Abhidharma Buddhist tradition is quite germane here for several reasons. First, what makes this Buddhist tradition especially attractive to panpsychism is because its revisionary metaphysics regards mental atoms as part of the basic furniture of the universe. And second, the Abhidharma Buddhists emphasise that the mental is almost a universal feature of living beings.

Abstract

Abhidharma Buddhist philosophy presents a version of panprotopsychism. The Abhidharma argue that protophenomenal properties are among the fundamental building blocks of the universe. Protophenomenal properties are not themselves phenomenal (there is nothing it is like to have them) but they collectively constitute phenomenal properties. This version of panprotopsychism, I contend, is originally proposed by Vasubandhu in his formulation of the Sautrāntika doctrine in the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāsya,* and later modified by rich insights from Yogācāra philosophers like Asaṅga, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. The challenge for them is to show how ordinary conscious experiences result from protoconscious elements in the absence of self and indeed all other persisting and substantial entities. The most pressing group of problems for the Sautrāntika-Yogācāra view, like all other panpsychist views, is what Seager calls 'the combination problem' (1995). There are at least three versions of the problem delineated in Chalmers: the subject combination problem, the quality combination problem and structure combination problem (2016, 182-4). In this paper I will focus on the quality combination problem. The Abhidharma Buddhist does have to face the other versions of the combination problem, I will briefly suggest how these might be approached by an Abhidharma Buddhist in the concluding section of the paper. I will not have the space to develop those solutions here. In Section 1, I sketch the Abhidharma Buddhist version of panprotopsychism and its account of conscious experience. In the next Section, I evaluate whether the Abhidharma panprotopsychist account of conscious experience solves the quality combination problem. In the last and closing Section, I look at

other versions of the combination problem, primarily the subject combination problem and the structural problem and provide a sketch of the Abhidharma Buddhist might respond to these.

Section 1: Abidharma Panprotopsychism

The Buddhist analysis of experience reveals that what we experience as a temporally extended, uninterrupted, flow of phenomena is, in fact, a rapidly occurring sequence of causally connected events each with its particular discrete object; much the same way a rapidly projected sequence of juxtaposed discrete images is perceived as a movie. Sentient experience is explained in terms of impermanent mental and physical states and processes (*skandhas*) that arise and cease in a causal sequence. The distinctive contribution of the Ābhidharmikas is that they reduce the extent and the time scale of the *skandhas* to regard them as aggregations of discrete momentary events or *dharmas*. These discrete momentary conscious events (*dharmas*) exist only for an instant or moment (*kṣaṇa*), where a moment is the limit of time. There are various opinions regarding the duration of a moment. Vasubandhu says that there are sixty-four moments in the time that it takes for a healthy man to snap his fingers (*Abhidharmakośabhāsyam* 3.85b-c)[1]; others even say that billions of mind moments elapse in the time it takes for lightning to flash or eye to blink. Abhidharma produces a complete account of reality and conscious experience in terms of this single category of ultimately real entities (*dharmas*).

According to Sautrāntika-Yogācāra *dharmas* are not composite entities: they are simple, without spatial or temporal parts. They exist wholly at a point in space and /or time. They claim that *dharmas* are of two kinds: conditioned and unconditioned. Among the conditioned *dharmas*, there are material (*rūpa*) and mental (*citta*, *caitta,* etc.) *dharmas.* Material *dharmas* (*rūpa*) are in space, but consciousness 'not having a mass, is not situated in a place' (1.43a–b). Mental *dharmas*, are not in space but only in time. Mental and material

[1] Chapters 1-8 of the *Abhidharmakośabhāsyam* are divided into verses; I shall cite passages from them by verse numbers that would match any version in Sanskrit or English. Ch. 9 is in prose; I shall cite passages from it by page numbers in Pruden's English translation.

dharmas are not extended in time. Each *dharma* exists only for one moment, where a moment is some extremely short, but finite, length of time (4.2d). All *dharmas* are embedded in the causal order: each one has causes, and is by itself, and in conjunction with other dharmas, capable of producing effects (2.5a). Indeed, Vasubandhu claims that causal efficacy is the criterion of ultimate reality (Gold, 2021). Vasubandhu argues that medium-sized physical objects that we normally regard as real like jars, heaps, streams, persons, etc., are composites or aggregates of *dharmas*. These composites, he argues, do not exist in the ultimate sense, they are real only with reference to conception (*prajñapti-sat*); only *dharmas* exist in the ultimate sense (*paramartha*-sat) (6.4). But, then, one may ask: what are these *dharmas*, these ultimate constituents of reality? Vasubandhu tells us what they are not. *Dharmas* are not substances, since substances are independent existents. According to the Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination (*Pratītyasamutpāda*) there are no independent existents; everything that exists is conditioned by its causes. Furthermore, *dharmas* are not universals, for Vasubandhu argues against the existence of universals (2.41a).

Contemporary Buddhist philosophers have proposed that the best way to understand a *dharma* is to think of it as 'an elementary quality or event or condition' (Goodman, 393) or 'a thin property' (Ganeri 2001, 99), a 'trope' in contemporary analytic philosophy: e.g., the particular white of this wall rather than whiteness as such. Tropes, like physical objects, are particulars, as they are located in a particular time and space, though not necessarily so. They can be individuated as primitive particulars without spatio-temporal dimensions (Maurin 2014). They are unlike universals, in that they are not wholly present in each instance although they point to groups of identical things. However, in some sense, they share features with universals, in that they are 'ways objects are'. Trope theorists believe that both particulars and universals can be understood as aggregates or sets of tropes. So, for example, we can think of Parfit as the bundle of tropes of Parfit's shape, Parfit's height, Parfit's logical acumen, etc. and similarly we can think of intelligence as bundle of Parfit's intelligence, Strawson's intelligence, Quine's intelligence, etc. The Abhidharma analyse the middle-sized mental and physical objects as bundles of tropes. But even the tropes such as Parfit's intelligence and Parfit's height are not individual *dharmas*. Instead, Parfit is a certain height in virtue of many tiny *dharmas* which are atomic in the sense that they have no parts. Parfit's intelligence, similarly, is nothing over and above the aggregate of many tiny *dharmas*, such as the *dharmas* of intelligence and logical acumen. Parfit himself is nothing over and above the *dharmas* that make him up. Thus there is a sense in which there are no persons no mental

properties and no physical properties, just *dharmas*. The talk about tropes is useful from a panpsychist point of view; it keeps the metaphysics of substance and universals at an arm's length.

Dreyfus (2011) suggests that mental *dharmas* are to be thought of as "phenomenologically basic" features that constitute conscious experience. This does not, however, mean that the phenomenological features are readily available in ordinary introspection. The claim is that mental *dharmas* are in principle available in first-person experience, though discerning the individual *dharmas* as such would require meditation practice. Indeed, some *dharmas* are better thought of as subliminal mental factors that can be brought to the surface only through sustained meditation practice. In this sense, I think that mental *dharmas* are best understood as protophenomenal features that combine to produce ordinary phenomenal experiences, like feeling envious or seeing red. The Abhidharma schools disagree about the number, classification, and role of these features in experience. So the Abhidharma philosophers take great pains to provide ever new lists and classifications of mental dharmas and detailed arguments to justify the proposed revision. However, Abhidharma schools agree on the starting point for grouping the mental factors: They are primarily classified as good (*kusala*), bad (*akusala*), and neutral (*abyākata*). Good (*kusala*) is defined as that which is "salutary, blameless, skillful" (Atthasālinī, 62−3) and thus reduces suffering. Bad (*akusala*) is just the opposite; it is unhelpful, blameworthy, unskillful and augments suffering. Some mental factors are wholesome or good in themselves, e.g., compassion, wisdom, etc.; others are unwholesome or bad in themselves, e.g., anger, greed, craving, etc.; and yet others are neutral e.g., equanimity, resolve, etc. The moral valence of a given conscious state or thought, i.e., whether it is good or bad, is determined by the moral valence of mental factors that comprise conscious thought and experience. For example, a thought associated with compassion would be good because compassion is a good factor; a thought associated with equanimity would be indifferent because equanimity is disinterested; a thought associated with greed and ignorance would be bad because greed and ignorance are bad factors.

Such a trope-theoretic interpretation of *dharmas* has been used to reconstruct an Abhidharma account of the physical world (Goodman 2004) by an appeal to the notion of Humean supervenience (Lewis 1986: ix). Humean supervenience is the view that everything

supervenes on spatio-temporal distribution of intrinsic properties. Weatherson (2015) offers a useful analogy to understand this thesis. Imagine that the world is like a giant video monitor. The facts about a monitor's appearance supervene, plausibly, on intrinsic qualities of the pixels, together with facts about the spatial arrangement of the pixels. Humean supervenience offers a nice visual image to think about the Buddhist universe in which everything supervenes on the configuration of *dharmas* in space-time. But the image should not be taken to suggest a perfect match. Causation and necessary connections play an important role in Buddhist metaphysics, so they are certainly not Humean in Lewis' sense of the term.

For Buddhist epistemology generally, sensory perception is the paradigm of conscious experience. So, I will use sense perception as a paradigm case to illustrate the Abhidharma Buddhist account of the conscious experience. According to most Abhidharma schools, sensory perception is always object-directed i.e., it is *of* something. Sensory perception is brought about by an interaction among the sense faculties (e.g., eye), the corresponding type of consciousness (e.g., visual consciousness) and their appropriate sense objects (e.g., form, colour, etc.). There are six kinds of consciousnesses: five corresponding to the sensory organs and the sixth the mental awareness (awareness of thoughts, feelings, etc.). The Abidharma analysis of perception is distinctive in ways. According to it, some (usually 5-10) universal mental features accompany every conscious mental state: contact, feeling, intention, attention, dispositions, etc. The role of these mental features in conscious experience becomes obvious if we take into account the fact that the mere coming together of an object and sense faculty is not sufficient for a conscious experience to arise. A cognitive event is initiated by contact, which the Ābhidharmikas describe as a relation between a sense faculty and sense object giving rise to a sensory consciousness. Such sensory consciousness, according to these philosophers, is always associated with affect or feeling. The object may be felt as pleasant or unpleasant or neutral, but it is never sensed without arousing feeling. Furthermore, each conscious state is also goal-directed in that it is always associated with volition or an intention to act. This together with feeling is responsible for determining the ethical quality of consciousness, that is to say, whether it decreases or increases suffering.

Attention is the mental factor that is responsible for orienting consciousness towards its object, in that it guides other mental features towards the object of consciousness (Thompson 2014, 38). The senses always process a steady stream of sensory impressions; some clusters of these impressions generate a representational form of the object when attention directs the universal mental features towards it. Attention thus is necessary but not sufficient for conscious experience. The Abhidharma has a long list of these occasional mental factors; indeed, there are significant disputes on exactly how many there are. A few of these occasional features are: anger, greed, mindfulness, compassion, wisdom, etc. Each of these features when accompanying a conscious state has the ability to affect the character of the experience. Ganeri explains this succinctly:

> The great elegance and attraction of the [Abhidharma] theory lies in the fact that simultaneously it recognises the irreducibility of the phenomenal character of experience, it admits the joint contribution of sensation and conceptualisation in the constitution of experience, it acknowledges that experience is, as it were, saturated with affect, that appraisal is built into the fabric of experience, it maintains that every experience has, as a basic ingredient, a capacity or tendency to combine in various ways with various others, and it makes the attention intrinsic to experience (2012,127).

The Yogācāra account of mind adds two further consciousnesses to the six kinds of conscious states accepted by the Abhidharma schools mentioned earlier. These are the basic or storehouse consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) and the afflictive mentation or ego-consciousness (*kliṣṭa-manas*). The first is a constant and neutral baseline consciousness that serves as repository of all basic habits, tendencies, and karmic latencies accumulated by the individual. The doctrine of basic consciousness is in large part an attempt to show that there is mental continuity in conscious streams lifetimes despite the *dharma* ontology in which there is no enduring substance. The ego-consciousness, on the other hand, is an innate sense of self arising from the apprehension of basic consciousness as being a self (Dreyfus and Thompson 2007, 97). This self, however, is not an ontological reality: it is merely a conceptual fabrication resulting from the (mis)apprehension of basic consciousness.

In addition to these two new kinds of consciousnesses the Abhidharma-Yogācāra philosopher Dignāga introduces the notion of 'self-awareness' in *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, his seminal work. He defines self-awareness as a mode of awareness that provides immediate, non-conceptual access to how things subjectively appear to the mind. Dignāga was the first classical Indian philosopher to articulate the idea that consciousness requires reflexive awareness. Reflexive awareness can be understood as a unique kind of mental perception posited by the early Sautrāntika philosophers. Dharmakīrti explains this idea by appeal to a representational theory of perception: perception of an object is mediated by the direct apprehension of the mental representation that reveals an aspect (*ākāra*) of the object (Dreyfus 1997). Although the form of an object is produced by a causal link between the object and a sense organ, the form itself is a feature of the experience, not a feature of the object of experience. This unique contribution of this Buddhist is that the representational form of the object does double duty as phenomenal form of the experience. That is to say, the mediating representation is Janus-faced. Dignāga's dual-aspect theory can be brought in to explicate this further. On this view perception is a cognitive episode that grasps an object, e.g., an apple. Suppose you are an apple lover. The perception in its arising is associated with a pleasant feeling which is immediately grasped as what-it-is-like for you to perceive the apple, the prospect of enjoying its red colour, shape and perhaps even tasting it. Thus, this single cognitive episode must involve two aspects: the objective form and the subjective form. The first that is the objective form (*grāhyākāra*) is the representation of the external object and the second that is the subjective form (*grāhakākāra*) is the grasping or holding of this representational or objective form. The phenomenal form reveals itself in self-awareness. Dharmakīrti puts this by saying that when we are aware of something we are simultaneously aware of the awareness (*Pramāṇavārttika*, III: 266). Basic consciousness and reflexive self-awareness are essential to explain full-bodied conscious experience, whereas ego-consciousness plays the role of explaining away the imaginary subject, the self. The phenomenal form constitutes the what-it-is-likeness of a sensory experience, which is thought of as what-it-is-like for someone, but that's an illusion. There is a 'what-it-is-like' of a sensory experience that is fully explained by the reflexive awareness of the aggregate of

mental *dharmas* (feeling, intention, etc.) that invariably accompany sensory *dharmas*. Let me use an example to lay out the details of the Sautrāntika-Yogācāra inspired account of conscious experiences.

Consider a present conscious experience of enjoying a glass of wine. The sensory *dharmas* that constitute its fruity fragrance, pale colour, light texture, cool touch, etc., are simultaneously provided by various sense consciousnesses. But there are countless many other wine-relevant *dharmas* available in the basic consciousness that have resulted from previous encounters with wine, for example, *dharmas* of taste, the pleasant feeling associated with drinking alcohol, the intention to drink wine, etc. The conscious experience of drinking wine does not arise in the first moment of sensory contact; rather, this sensory contact sets off a chain of horizontal and vertical processes that might, depending on the availability of universal and occasional mental factors, especially the desire to drink wine result in the production of the representational form of the experience of drinking wine. The presentation of wine gives rise to sensible qualities that constitute aroma, color, taste, and so on. These sensible qualities horizontally cause contiguous corresponding (aroma, color, taste, etc.) *dharmas* in the next moment. At the same time they vertically cause processes in the basic consciousness, which activate wine-relevant *dharmas* (for example, desire to drink wine, taste, the accompanying rush of alcohol, etc.). These vertical activations produce new horizontal series. At a unique and propitious moment when all the relevant *dharmas* are co-present together with the requisite universal mental features (and other occasional mental factors) the representational form of drinking wine is produced. Intention, although itself a universal mental feature, a *dharma* has a double role: it binds together the relevant *dharmas* to produce the representational form the object. Attention too has a double role. It is again, a universal mental feature, a *dharma*, and also the power to transform a given representational form of the object into a phenomenal form of the experience. In other words, the production of the representational-cum-phenomenal form, which encompasses the objective and the subjective aspects, coincides with the experience of drinking wine and the awareness of the experience of drinking wine. To summarize: a conscious experience of drinking wine and the awareness of that experience are simultaneously produced as a result of the production of the representational-cum-phenomenal form of the object, which supervenes on co-temporal *dharmas* that are vertically present at that moment.

That completes my description of the Abhidharma account of conscious experience. The question then is: Does this account offer a solution to the quality combination problem?

Section 2: The Quality combination problem

Ordinary phenomenal qualities such as what it is like to drink wine, see red, and so on are macroqualities. The quality combination problem is: How do microqualities combine to yield macroqualities? The Abhidharma panprotopsychist is faced with the quality combination problem: how do microqualities (*dharmas*, in this case) combine together to yield macroqualities? There is of course also the palette problem. Given that there are only a limited number of microqualities (Vasubandhu analyses and catalogues 75 dharmas), how is it that we can account for the vast array of phenomenal macroqualities that we experience? Chalmers (2016, 184-5) also notes another version of the combination problem faced by panprotopsychism: how can non-experiences constitute experiences? The non-experiential-experiential gap seems just as wide as the physical-experiential gap? How might our Abhidharma Buddhists respond to genuine concerns. I will offer some answers on behalf of our Buddhists to each of these versions of the quality combination problem.

But before I do that I must address a contemporary response to the quality combination problem. Although Siderits (2011) is not discussing panprotopsychism, the Abhidharma view of conscious experiences developed in the paper suggests that the quality combination can be dismissed as macroqualities are just useful fictions. Vasubandhu says discrete momentary events or '*dharmas'* are the only ultimate existents, and they alone are objects of knowledge. What then would he say about the status of macroqualities that supervene on these ultimately real *dharmas*? Siderits' (2011) version of Abhidharma reductionism suggests that like all composites, phenomenal macroqualities that are given in experience, like redness and roundness, are at most useful fictions. This particular implication of the Buddhist view is disturbing. Is Siderits right? This question is not an easy one to answer since the treatment of consciousness is equivocal in Abhidharma Buddhist literature. Consciousness in this literature is sometimes conceived of as a single *dharma*, other times a conscious experience is an assembly of *dharmas*, and other times consciousness is conceived of as one of the psychophysical aggregates (*skandhas*). *Citta*, which is usually translated as consciousness, sometimes signifies a single conscious *dharma* but is also used to signify what we would call an ordinary conscious experience. For example, envy (*īrṣyā)* is unwholesome consciousness (*akusalacitta*) which is consciousness accompanied by hatred (one of the unwholesome roots). Ordinary conscious experience of envy involves several

factors (*cetasikas*): negative feelings (*vedanā*), intention (*cetanā*) to act in a certain way towards the envied subject and so on, but these factors are not ordinarily experienced as separate factors, they form the whole experience of feeling envious.[2]

Ronkin (2018) presents a model of the Abhidharma account of *citta*:

> The archetype of the operation of consciousness is citta as experienced in the process of sensory perception that, in Abhidharma (as in Buddhism in general), is deemed the paradigm of sentient experience. *Citta* can never be experienced as bare consciousness in its own origination moment, for consciousness is always intentional, directed to a particular object that is cognized by means of certain mental factors. *Citta*, therefore, always occurs associated with its appropriate *cetasikas* or mental factors that perform diverse functions and that emerge and cease together with it, having the same object (either sensuous or mental) and grounded in the same sense faculty. Any given consciousness moment—also signified by the very term *citta*—is thus a unique assemblage of *citta* and its associated mental factors such as feeling, conceptualization, volition, or attention, to name several of those required in any thought process. Each assemblage is conscious of just one object, arises for a brief instant and then falls away, followed by another *citta* combination that picks up a different object by means of its particular associated mental factors.

The key claim here is that a conscious *dharma* (e.g. a sensation arising from contact between a sensory organ and an object) can never be experienced in its own right. Ordinary conscious experience, on this view, is a unique assembly of various mental factors (feeling, intention, etc.) that arise and cease together with the sensation. Thus, although the mental factors

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[2] Buddhist technical terms like '*Citta'* have complex meanings and aren't easily mapped onto contemporary English philosophical terms. This is because the revisionist metaphysics and distinctive moral phenomenology advocated by Abhidharma philosophers dictates a unique typology of mental states which is very different from our contemporary philosophical usage. Paying attention to nuances in the Buddhist terms may not only help us understand what the classical Buddhist philosophers have to say, but also enrich our contemporary philosophical usage.

(*dharmas*) constituting it are simultaneously present in the same temporal moment an ordinary conscious experience is not itself a single *dharma* (See Ganeri 2012, 127) and Chadha (2015, 548-9). The Abhidharma Reductionist seems to be committed to the following inconsistent triad:

1. Everything that is a composite is unreal.
2. Conscious experiences are real.
3. Conscious experiences are composites.

The Abhidharma Reductionist, according to Siderits, must accept 1 and so must reject either 2 or 3. It's not always clear whether Siderits thinks Buddhists should reject 2 or 3. On the one hand, Siderits notes that Abhidharma Reductionism does not stand in the way of affirming the ultimate existence of conscious *dharmas* (2011, 314-5), which suggests rejecting 3. However, there is a problem with rejecting 3 because even though conscious *dharmas* are simple, they are not ordinarily experienced as simple *dharmas*. For example, although *hiri* (usually translated as shame) is a simple conscious *dharma*, we do not experience it as such. *Hiri* is accompanied by other dharmas, positive feeling (*vedanā*) and intention to avoid evil acts (*cetanā*) and these *dharmas* are part and parcel of the experience of *hiri* (anticipatory guilt), they are not experienced as separate *dharmas*. Ordinary conscious experiences are composites of multiple dharmas. Indeed, rejecting 3 also requires Siderits to reject that ordinary sensory perceptions, are ultimately real. Siderits can choose to focus on other examples from the tradition. But, the onus is on him to offer an alternative analysis of conscious experiences as simple *dharmas* on behalf of the Abhidharma which does not appeal to sensory perceptions or any other ordinary conscious experiences.

On the other hand, if Siderits recommends rejecting 2, then the Buddhist must maintain that conscious experiences are at most useful fictions. Siderits seems not concerned by this implication. He suggests that Buddhist Reductionists do not have a good explanation of the phenomenal aspect of our conscious states. Siderits asks: How can the Buddhist Reductionist explain the phenomenality of conscious experiences? He offers the following as a solution to Reductionist:

> By way of an abductive inference from the global availability of objects. Since global availability is just an aggregation of distinct causal pathways, it will come as no surprise that consciousness is a conceptual fiction, a single entity posited in order to simplify the task of data management. Just as it seems to us that there is a chair when the parts are assembled in a certain way, so it seems to us that there is the conscious state of seeing a chair in my path to the door when the chair is made available not only to the action-guidance system (as in blind-sight) but also to the memory system, the speech system, etc. We can thus understand why it is that, despite there being no such thing as what-it-is-like-ness, it would seem to us that there is such a thing. Subjectivity is a useful fiction (2011, 326-7).

Buddhist Reductionism, according to Siderits, implies that ultimately there is no subjectivity, and no conscious experiences. These are just useful fictions, like persons, pots and chariots. Siderits writes:

> The Buddhist Reductionist stance on consciousness and the self depends crucially on mereological reductionism, the view that the composite entities of our folk ontology are conceptual fictions, conventionally but not ultimately real (2011, 315).

Siderits might not be worried by this implication, but I think that the Ābhidharmikas would want to backtrack and reconsider the commitments that led them to the conclusion that phenomenal conscious states and ordinary conscious experiences are just useful fictions. This is exactly why the later Ābhidharmikas introduced the notion reflexive awareness of conscious experiences. Consciousness, by nature is reflexively aware. This applies as much to individual conscious *dharmas* as well as macrophenomenal qualities. Expert meditators can discern and introspect individual *dharmas*. But most of us who are not fortunate to have those special powers are able to discern and introspect macrophenomenal qualities. For most of us *dharmas* are best charactersied as protophenomenal atoms that are in principle phenomenologically available, but not really available as such. In the light of this, I think the Abhidharma Buddhists are likely to reject 1.

There are key elements of the Abhidharma tradition that run strongly against the idea that conscious experiences are merely useful fictions. Conscious mental states are responsible for guiding behaviour and action; for example, my conscious experience of *hiri* partly consists in my forming the intention to avoid evil acts and partly in feeling good about

forming that intention and perhaps more. Such an experiential state is a mereological whole of many *dharmas* (*hiri*, *vedanā*, *cetanā*, etc.) but this whole is causally efficacious. Therefore, it must be regarded as real by the criterion for reality adopted by the Ābhidharmikas (Gold, 2018). Since conscious experiences are causally efficacious, they are good candidates for being real. Furthermore, Abhidharma is distinctive insofar as it aims to provide the theoretical counterpart to the Buddhist practice of meditation and, more broadly, a systematic account of conscious experience (Ronkin, SEP, 2018). If conscious experiences are not ultimately real, it's unclear why the Abhidharma should be so committed to providing a careful first-person description of conscious experience. Siderits' version of Buddhist Reductionism might be taken to force the Abhidharma to its logical conclusion and deny the reality of conscious experiences, but I doubt that the Ābhidharmikas would want to go that far. Rather, I think the Abhidharma would want to re-examine the analysis that has lead them to this conclusion and be cautious about endorsing a thoroughgoing mereological nihilism of the kind advocated by Siderits. This is the reason why I think the later Ābhidharmikas specifically introduced the notion of reflexivity or self-awareness of conscious states. It gives the Abhidharma a way of showing that subjectivity is not fictitious, it captures the first-person aspect of ordinary everyday conscious experience as well as that of expert meditators extraordinary conscious experiences.

With that response set aside we can now return to the quality combination problem. In the last Section I hinted that microqualities are themselves embedded in a causal nexus with other horizontal and vertical microqualities. The vertical causal relations are most relevant to the solution to the quality combination problem. The horizontal causal relations are responsible for constantly renewing the microqualities moment by moment on account of the Abhidharma commitment to momentariness, *dharmas* exist only for a moment. The vertical causal relations that obtain between co-temporal *dharmas* across multiple simultaneously co-evolving series of *dharmas* are responsible for the production of macroqualities. Although causal relation are ubiquitous in the Abhidharma universe, Vasubandhu is careful to distinguish between various kinds of causal relations. According to Vasubandhu (2.65b), 'the great elements are the cause of derived form [perceptible qualities] in five ways: the cause of arising, the tutelage cause, the cause of abiding, the sustaining cause, and the strengthening cause'. Four of these causes have to do with the horizontal series of *dharmas* explaining the existence and continual regeneration of new *dharmas* which is responsible for sustaining a given *dharma* series. The odd man out in the list of causes is the '*niśraya* (support) *hetu'*

which Pruden translates as ‘tutelage cause’. The idea here is to think of this cause as a supporting base just the same as a teacher supports a student to develop her potential. Goodman clarifies that in suggesting this Vasubandhu is preempting something like the notion of supervenience base (2004, 398-9). The individual dharmas constitute the supervenience base for the macroqualities that we ordinarily experience. But the macroqualities are no less real for that reason, consciousnesses at different levels are not distinct from each other. We don't notice the specific conscious experiences of the individual *dharmas* only because we lack the right kind of attention training for precise introspective tracking individual *dharmas*. Expert meditators who have the right kind of training, according to the Abhidharma, are able to introspectively track individual *dharmas*. Most of us ordinary human beings can only introspectively track the a macrophenomenal experiences which have their own subjective character which is supervenient on the individual *dharmas* but we cannot ordinarily track the contribution of individual *dharmas*.To sum up, I think that the Abhidharma have plenty of resources that can be harnessed to provide a satisfactory solution to the quality combination problem or at least show that there is nothing mysterious about the relation between the macroqualities that we are familiar with in ordinary experience and the microqualities that constitute them.

Except there is of course the palette problem. Given that there are only a limited palette of microqualities (individual *dharmas* in Abhidharma speak), how do they combine to yield the vast array of macroqualities? This issue is in the forefront of Abhidharma philosophers who constantly argued about the number, classification and groupings of the basic dharmas. The lists of dharmas are thought of as ever expanding, no list is final and settled. Western scholars find it difficult to appreciate the Buddhist affinity for lists and the apparent endlessness of its classifications is often met with exasperation. Gethin (1992) offers a much more careful and sympathetic treatment of the Abhidharma use of lists. He shows how summary lists allow the Buddhist teachings to be expressed both in brief and extensively, and how they stimulate further exposition. Maria Heim argues that lists give license for improvisation and creative work, the term for list, *mātikā*, also means “mother,” and in this sense, a list is pregnant with possibilities. And so it should be. Gethin advises that the Abhidharma method constant revision of the result of their analysis of wholes into parts undermines our constant but pointless tendency to fix basic constiuents of the world of experience once and for all. The restless reexamination of these arrangements through

proliferating lists is itself a method for destabilizing our yearning for a fixed and stable sense of the world.

> Of course, the danger is that when, in our attempts to undo our reifying of the world, we break it up into parts, we might then take the parts as real and begin to reify the world again, if in a different way....It seems to me that the early Abhidhamma authors sought to avoid precisely this same danger through the elaboration of the various *mātikās*. Try to grasp the world of the *Dhammasaṅgaṇī*, or the *Paṭṭhāna*, and it runs through one's fingers. In short, the indefinite expansions based on the *mātikās* continually remind those using them that it is of the nature of things that no single way of breaking up and analyzing the world can ever be final (1992,165).

What is being suggested here is that there is no easy solution to the palette problem, the open ended lists is a way of acknowledging that no list of the microphenomenal features is final. Since there is no fixed set of microphenomenal properties, the suggestion that we can solve the palette problem is misguided. It is an ongoing enterprise and that's way it should be given the open-endedness of the kind of analyses that might be forthcoming.

There is one last issue: the experiential/non-experiential gap. The Abhidharma analysis suggests that protophenomenal properties are not in principle non-experiential so there is no unfathomable gap here. The protophenomenal can be grasped through extensive meditation practice, but that route may not sound very attractive to analytically minded philosophers. But some Buddhist philosophers also suggest that the protophenomenal basic *dharmas* can also be known through reasoning and analysis together with a reading of Buddhist texts. That is all I will have to say about the aspects of the quality combination problem.

3. The Subject Combination problem

Even if you agree with me that the Abhidharma philosophy can potentially solve the quality combination problem, there is more that needs to be done to address the other aspects of the combination problems: the subject combination problem and the structure combination problem.

Jonardon Ganeri suggests that the subject combination problem challenge on behalf of Abhidharma/Abhidhamma panpsychists in his recent work. The way to build subjects, Ganeri suggests, is to start with impersonal microphenomenal features, *dharmas*, that are not yet themselves subject., The *dharmas* by themselves have phenomenal properties but no subjective character, so this is clearly not an attempt to build subjects out of micro-subjects, rather it proposes to build subjects out of impersonal *dharmas*. The solution to the subject combination problem faced by the Buddhists, Ganeri suggests, can be resolved by providing cognitive processes or mechanisms that organize and maintain impersonal *dharmas* in a centre-periphery structure, "… for whenever a system of such features has that structure the positional conception of self is available to it" (2020, 132). The Buddhist no-self doctrine implies that there is no independently existing 'self' or 'subject' over and above the *dharmas* organised in a certain way. Following Buddhaghosa, Ganeri argues that attention is a structuring principle in conscious experience, and it is because of "attention that conscious experience has the sort of centre-periphery structure that sustains the positional conception of self" (Ibid., 135). So, it seems that the Abhidharma can solve the subject combination problem by exploiting the centering function of attention.

The centering function of attention suffices to highlight or 'pick out' one or more conscious states that constitute experience. But since attention is itself a *dharma* (conscious event) among many other *dharmas* that constitute experience, the structuring function of attention cannot deliver a subject of experiences or a positional conception of self. The subject of experience is a totally new kind of existent, an emergent entity, which cannot be understood in terms of the nature of fundamental components, the *dharmas* and their combination. In Chapter 9 of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* Vasubandhu argues not only against the Naiyāyikas (Hindu opponennts) who posit the self as a separate subject of experience but also against the fellow Buddhists Pudgalvādins (Personalists) who posit the existence of emergent subject of experiences, persons, that depend on *dharmas*, but are not totally reducible to the *dharmas*. Vasubandhu's challenge to the Personalists is to explain clearly the sense in which persons "depend on" *dharmas*. Unless the Abhidharma panpsychists can clarify how *dharmas* that lack a subjective character can combine to produce a subject, they have not solved the subject combination problem satisfactorily. Ganeri is aware of that this Abhidharma solution is not totally satisfactory. He presents an implicit objection to this view by referring Pessoa's theory of heteronymic simulation, according to which, only subjects can build other subjects. Any system with the capacity to create and simulate heteronyms is an Ego Machine. But the Ego machine is already a self-

conscious being, an I. So the only question is how an I can be 'an other I'(Ibid. 136). This solution is not available to our Abhidharma Buddhists.

I suggest that it might be better for the Abhidharma panprotopsychist to deal with the subject combination problem by embracing wholesale eliminativism about the subject. This, Chalmers claims, raises concerns about whether they also need to eliminate phenomenal properties since they are conceived as what it is like for a subject. Macrophenomenal properties are defined as the phenomenal properties of entities, such as humans (Chalmers 2016, 181). The definition of 'what it is like' with the 'what it is like for a subject' is an assumption in Western analytic philosophy that is open to challenge. I have challenged this assumption (see Chadha 2018) to show that the Abdhidharma Buddhist can consistently embrace wholesale eliminativsm about subjects without eliminating phenomenal properties. In this paper, I have proposed a new conception of macrpphenomenal properties on behalf of Abhidharma Buddhists that is not dependent on subjects of experience (see Section 2). The Abhidharma Buddhist argue that macrophenomenal properties can be thought of as a bundle of dharmas (tropes). Attention does play an important role in producing the cognition, it transforms a selected bundle of *dharmas* into a cognition that by its nature, according to our Abhidharma Buddhits, is reflexively self aware. The idea sounds foreign to our modern ears and is not easily comprehended. The most I can offer for now is an analogy. Just as light simply arising with luminosity (*prakāśa*) as its nature, so too we can think of cognition as simply arising with luminosity, or consciousness, as its nature. Since it has two forms within it, that of itself (phenomenal form)and that of its object (representational form), its consciousness means that it arises with those two forms shining forth within it.

4. Conclusion

This leaves us with the structure combination problem. The most pressing aspect of the structure combination problem is the structural mismatch problem. Macrophysical structure (in the brain, say) seems entirely different from the macrophenomenal structure we experience. This structural mismatch problem is based on the assumption that the macrophenomenal structure is inherited from the microphenomenal structure which in turn closely corresponds to the microphysical structure. But again this assumption is rejected by our Abhidharma Buddhists. The microphenomenal structure in this case is not inherited from the microphysical structure, the protophenomenal exists independently of the microphysical.

So, the version of the structure problem relevant for the Abhidharma panprotopsychist is how do the protophenomenal tropes combine to produce the macrophenomenal properties. In section 2 I have provided some clues as to how this problem might be addressed, though I have not offered a full account.

The task of the paper was to show that the Abhidharma Buddhist metaphysics offers a plausible version of panprotopsychism which can potentially solve the various combination problems.

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