

sarvam and *asti*
in Sarvāstivāda Philosophy

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Abstract

This dissertation argues that the Sarvāstivāda axiom *sarvam asti* is best read not primarily as an existential thesis about “the three times,” but as a higher-order thesis about the completeness of predication. On this reconstruction, *sarvam* marks the completeness of what may truly be predicated of a conditioned *dharma*, while *asti* functions as a tenseless copula and, in relevant contexts, carries truth-conditional force: for a *dharma* to *be* is, here, for it to *have* its defining properties. A conditioned *dharma* is thus nothing over and above the complete set of properties that define it and may be truly predicated of it.

Methodologically, the dissertation offers a philosophical-historical reconstruction guided by philological stratigraphy. It treats Sarvāstivāda and related materials as layered records of philosophical debate from which the functions of *sarvam*, *asti*, causality, and temporal predication may be reconstructed. It centres on Vaibhāṣika sources, especially the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, while also drawing on the *Kathāvatthu*, the *Milindapañha*, and comparative evidence from Sanskrit, Pāli, and Chinese renderings of *asti* (“is/has”). Central to the argument is British Library Gāndhārī manuscript BL 28, whose debate scene shows that what is at stake in *sarvam asti* is not merely an inventory of existents, but the conditions under which one may legitimately and truthfully say what a *dharma* is or has.

On this basis, the dissertation reconstructs a distinction between external or generative causality, which brings a *dharma* into occurrence, and internal or definitional causality, by which a *dharma* analytically unfolds its inherent properties. It further argues that the twelve *āyatana*s function as the canonical inventory delimiting and exhausting the predicational domain. The familiar tri-temporal reading thus emerges as a specific articulation of this broader account of completeness, causal explanation, and true predication.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother,
for her unwavering love, support, and understanding.

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Abbreviations

Abbr.	Full Name
AHŚ	Abhidharmahr̥dayasāstra 阿毘曇心論 T 1550
AKBh	Abhidharmakośabhāṣya (ed. Pradhan)
AKBh (tr. P)	Abhidharmakośabhāṣya 阿毘達磨俱舍釋論 T 1559 (真諦譯)
AKBh (tr. Xz)	Abhidharmakośabhāṣya 阿毘達磨俱舍論 T 1558 (玄奘譯)
AMVŚ	Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāsāstra 大毗婆沙論 T 1545
ĀVBSŚ	Āryavasumitrabodhisattvasaṅgītiśāstra 尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論 T 1549
AVŚ	Abhidharmavibhāṣāsāstra 阿毘曇毘婆沙論 T 1546
BL 28	British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragment 28 (ed. Cox)
DBhS	Daśabhūmikasūtra 十住經 T 286
DhSk	Dharmaskandha 阿毘達磨法蘊足論 T 1537
DhTrDhS	Dharmatrāṭadhyānasūtra 達摩多羅禪經 T 618
DN	Dīghanikāya (Pāli) (ed. Rhys Davids)
EĀ	Ekottarikāgama 增壹阿含 T 125
JñPr	Jñānaprasthāna 阿毘達磨發智論 T 1544
Kv	Kathāvatthu (Pāli) (ed. Taylor)
Kv-a	Kathāvatthupparakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā (ed. Jayawickrama)
MĀ	Madhyamāgama 中阿含經 T 26
Mil	Milindapañha (Pāli) (ed. Trenckner); 那先比丘經 T 1670B
MKK	Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 中論 T 1564
MN	Majjhimanikāya (Pāli) (ed. Trenckner)
MPP	Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra 大般若波羅蜜多經 T 220
MppŚ	Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa 大智度論 T 1509/25
MRKŚ	Mahāratnakūṭasūtra 大寶積經 T 310
MVMS	Mahāvaiṣṭyamaḥsaṃnipātasūtra 大方等大集經 T 397

Abbr.	Full Name
NyAŚ	Nyāyānusāraśāstra 阿毘達磨順正理論 T 1562
LaPP	Larger Prajñāpāramitā 摩訶般若波羅蜜經 T 223
PrP	Prakaraṇapāda 阿毘達磨品類足論 T 1542
PVSV	Pramāṇavārttikasvavṛtti (ed. Gnoli)
PVVŚ	Pañcavastukavibhāṣāśāstra 五事毘婆沙論 T 1555
SĀ (tr. G)	Saṃyuktāgama 雜阿含經 T 99
SaṅgP	Saṅgītiparyāya 阿毘達磨集異門足論 T 1536
SAHŚ	Saṃyuktābhīdharmahr̥dayaśāstra 雜阿毘曇心論 T 1552
ŚAŚ	Śāriputrābhīdharmasāstra 舍利弗阿毘曇論 T 1548
SN	Saṃyuttanikāya (Pāli) (ed. Feer)
TŚŚ	Tattvasiddhiśāstra 成實論 T 1636
VDPS	Vaiśeṣikadaśapadārthaśāstra 勝宗十句義論 T 2138
VkP	Vākyapadīya (ed. Houben)
VsudS	Vasudhārasūtra 持世經 T 482
Vimm	Vimuttimagga 解脫道論 T 1648
YBh	Yogācārabhūmiśāstra 瑜伽師地論 T 1579
BAv	Mahāvaiṣṭyabuddhāvataṃsakasūtra 大方廣佛華嚴經 T 278

0 Prolegomenon: A Glimpse into Abhidharma in Gandhāra

British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragment 28 preserves a rare early scene of Buddhist scholastic debate in Gandhāra. Centred on the Sarvāstivāda formula *sarvam asti*, the fragment brings into focus the question that animates this dissertation: not simply whether something “exists,” but what may truthfully be said of a *dharma*, under what constraints, and in what sense. Collett Cox’s 2025 critical edition, the result of years of painstaking decipherment, enables a return to this material with much greater philological precision.¹

0.1 British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragment 28: A Predicational Grammar of *sarvam asti*

Gāndhārī manuscripts constitute the earliest stratum of Buddhist manuscript evidence (no later than the third century CE), and BL 28 comes from Gandhāra, the Sarvāstivāda heartland. Taken together, its early date and regional provenance make it a rare witness to Sarvāstivāda debate during a formative period of the school’s scholastic development.

Cox (2025, 3–6) highlights three key dimensions of BL 28: (1) it witnesses an early form of the scholarly genre called *śāstra*; (2) it preserves a vivid and intense scene of early sectarian Buddhist controversy; (3) it reveals the complexity of Sarvāstivāda’s own intellectual development. Any new material that deepens our understanding along any one of these dimensions would already be invaluable; BL 28, however, offers illumination on all three at once, making it an unusually rich witness for the present study.

This Prolegomenon takes BL 28 as a point of return: it reconstructs the manuscript’s place within the early history of sectarian controversy and draws out the consequences of its argumentative texture for the interpretive strategy developed in the chapters that follow. A close reading of the points around which the axiom *sarvam asti* is repeatedly debated in this fragment shows that the operative focus of Sarvāstivāda argumentation is not merely bare

¹ “British Library Kharoṣṭhī Fragment 28” is the Library’s catalogue designation. Throughout this study, I refer to the fragment itself as BL 28 for brevity, while references to Cox’s published critical edition of the fragment (text, translation, and apparatus) are cited under the abbreviation BLKF28 (= Cox 2025), unless otherwise indicated. Cox’s edition appeared shortly after the initial submission of this dissertation; the present Prolegomenon was added to take account of it.

existence, but the conditions of legitimate predication. The same focal points are preserved in the *Kathāvatthu* and the *Milindapañha*—this will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.² The metaphysical premises and inferences operative in this series of debates likewise constitute the basis on which the Vaibhāṣikas develop various lines of reasoning in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*; this can be seen throughout my dissertation. BL 28 is also significant because it provides a basis for rereading Chinese Abhidharma translations against Indian-language evidence. Since these debates hinge on Indo-Aryan verbal forms, much is difficult to preserve in Chinese translation—especially in Sarvāstivāda sources, where arguments often turn on uses and analyses of *asti*. Below, I show how the argumentative logic displayed in BL 28 enables a fresh reading of *sarvam asti* in the *Samyuktābhidharmahṛdaya* (《雜阿毘曇心論》, SAHŚ).³

0.2 Re-reading *sarvam asti*: Completeness, Sayability, and Truth Conditions

The traditional “ontology-centred” reading does not fully display the philosophical purport of *sarvam asti*, because it treats the slogan chiefly as an existential assertion and thereby obscures its higher-order dimension: the question of what may truly be predicated of a *dharma*.⁴

Accordingly, I propose that when the Sarvāstivādins set down *sarvam asti* as a philosophical axiom, what they meant to express was not only that *dharmanas* exist across the three times, but also, and indeed more fundamentally, that each conditioned *dharma* is complete with respect to the predicates proper to it. In other words, *sarvam asti* means that each conditioned *dharma* is complete: *asti* is to be understood as a copula and, at the same time, as pointing to the truth value of the predication expressed by the sentence; *sarvam*, by contrast, is to be read as a predicate meaning “complete” or “exhaustive.”

Grounded in the determinacy of *svabhāva*, this completeness provides the metaphysical truth conditions for predicating “what a *dharma* is.” On this reading, *sarvam* refers to the

² For the continuity between BL 28 and the later polemical scenes preserved in the *Kathāvatthu* and the *Milindapañha*, see Chapter 3 (esp. §3.3 and §3.4).

³ This line of rereading Chinese renderings of *asti* (有/是) is pursued in Chapter 3 (esp. §3.2.1 and §3.3.3).

⁴ Here “higher-order” is used in a limited sense, to mark that *sarvam asti* concerns what may be truly predicated of a conditioned *dharma*, not merely whether such a *dharma* exists. The formal restatement is given in Chapter 1 and Appendix A.

self-sufficient, non-confused domain of attributes of each *dharma*; *asti* marks the predicational relation by which those attributes may be legitimately predicated and stated. Thus, at any stage of the three times, analytic propositions about what a *dharma* is have determinate truth conditions. This way of understanding *sarvam asti* is strongly supported by the Sarvāstivādins who appear in BL 28.⁵

Both my reconstruction and the debate preserved in BL 28 suggest shifting the question from “being/non-being” to the higher-order level of “sayable/unsayable” (*vaktavya/avaktavya*)—that is, from whether a *dharma* is or is not, to whether and how one may legitimately predicate what it is.⁶ Traditionally, *sarvam asti* has been read as a first-order ontological slogan about “the real existence of the three times.” What I aim to show is another reading, closer to Abhidharma reasoning and argumentative practice. As for *sarvam*, it points not only outward to “everything in the universe,” but also inward to “the complete set of predications that a single *dharma*, in itself, possesses.” As for *asti*, it is not exhausted by delivering a verdict on whether a given *dharma* exists; in the present context, it functions as a higher-order copula that licenses predication—marking that “here one may speak in this way about what a *dharma* is,” i.e. that it “has *astitā*.” From the Sarvāstivāda standpoint, then, when they put forward “*sarvam asti*,” they were not content to debate whether some *dharma* is or is not, but went further to ask what, precisely, a *dharma* is—and how our discourse about “what it is” can count as sayable, and can be true.

Understood in this way, *sarvam asti* is not only a cosmological declaration that “everything exists,” but also the claim that “each *dharma* possesses the complete predications it ought to possess, and these predications can be legitimately stated.” Hence, *sarvam asti* is better glossed as “there is all (that a *dharma* ought to have),” not an unqualified “there is everything.”

⁵ For *svabhāva* as grounding truth conditions for analytic propositions about “what a *dharma* is,” and for the role of *asti* in establishing truth-values, see Chapter 2 (esp. §2.1.3.2 and §2.1.5.2) and Chapter 4 (§4.2.4.5).

⁶ The concept of sayability (*vaktavya*) and its role in the Sarvāstivāda theory of predication are developed in Chapters 2–4; for its initial formulation, see §2.1.5.

My reinterpretation of this axiom is clearly displayed in the debate recorded in BL 28: what unfolds around “*sarvam asti*” is not a merely formal “ontological proclamation,” but a discussion of completeness concerning “how [something] is”—a clause-by-clause analysis along seven dimensions: temporality, locality, aspect, causal activity, mode, cause, and condition (*sarvakāla*, *sarvatra*, *sarvagareṇa*, *sarvakaraṇena*, *sarvabhava*, *sarvaheduha*, *sarvapracaye*).⁷ These seven dimensions are not independent propositions but a layered explication of *sarvam* as completeness.⁸ That is to say, when we state *sarvam asti*, we are in fact stating that each conditioned *dharma* “is complete, in respect of temporal properties, and can be predicated as it truly is; in respect of spatial properties, likewise; and in respect of its aspects, functions, types, causes, and conditions, likewise.” *sarvam* is thus effectively a collective term for these seven sets of categories. On this basis, when we attempt to express the Sarvāstivāda axiom more fully—namely, “all *dharms* are complete”—we may even expand *sarvam asti* into *sarvam sarvam asti*: the first *sarvam* means “complete,” the second *sarvam* means “all *dharms*”; and *asti* functions as a higher-order copula, which does not directly decide “whether there is,” but guarantees “one may say so (and must say it truthfully).”

It is precisely on the point of “completeness” that we can understand why, in BL 28, the opponent (the anti-Sarvāstivādin) designs his *reductio* the way he does. If these *reductios* are to strike the Sarvāstivāda doctrine, they must target “the internal completeness of a single *dharma*.” The opponent does not misconstrue *sarvam* as cosmological “ubiquity”; he aims straight at the completeness claimed by the Sarvāstivādins—this can be seen clearly from the fact that he always keeps his attack within the same category. For example:

⁷ Cox, BLKF28, 137: *icheaṣi vatu sar(*va)(*m a)st(*i) • sarvakale sarvam asti • sarvatra sarvam asti • sarvagareṇa (*sarvam a)sti • sarvakaraṇena sarvam asti • sarvabhava sarvam asti • sarvaheduha sarvam asti • sarvapracaye sarvam asti •*

Editorial conventions. When quoting the Gāndhārī text, I follow Cox’s edition. Parentheses indicate reconstructed *akṣaras*; asterisk marks uncertain or partially preserved *akṣaras* (and is also used for line readings in Cox’s apparatus); ellipses mark illegible stretches; and a mid-dot (•) marks the beginning or end of an incomplete line.

⁸ For the dissertation’s fuller treatment of BL 28’s seven categories (and their later Vaibhāṣika redevelopment), and for the introduction of *sarvam sarvam asti*, see §1.1.1, §2.3.2 and §3.1.4.1, §3.1.4.3, §3.2.2.3, §4.2.4.5.2, and Appendix A.

“If *sarvatra sarvam asti*, then the form-*āyatana* is in the eye-*āyatana*.”⁹ “If *sarveṣu sarvam asti*, then a damaged *indriya* has a future intact *indriya*.”¹⁰

Why do these examples deliberately not cross domains? Because the target is not “whether there is,” but “how far can complete predication be extrapolated without breaking the Abhidharma’s classificatory bottom line—the distinction between own-nature and other-nature (*svabhāva/parabhāva*).” Each *reductio* therefore manufactures a conclusion within the same kind of domain: if “completeness” is as the Sarvāstivādins claim, then the completeness of one *dharma* would run through all *dharmanas* of the same kind, ending in the absurdity that “own-nature is in other-nature, and other-nature is in own-nature.” From here, the text naturally gathers itself into *kiṃcid asti, kiṃcin nāsti*: this does not mean a return to an ontological verdict of “existence/non-existence,” but argues that the Sarvāstivādins have to retract the extrapolation of “all” (a universal). And the Sarvāstivāda responses to this series of *reductios* therefore need to limit *sarvam asti* firmly to the completeness of each *dharma*, i.e. to what is valid only within the dimension of that single *dharma*’s *svabhāva*. This, in turn, resonates with Cox’s discussion of how the Sarvāstivāda theory of *svabhāva* gradually grows out of its discussion of *bhāva*. Accordingly, in mature Sarvāstivāda philosophy, the metaphysical basis for taking a “*dharma*” to mean a discrete and individual *dharma*, each with its own distinctive *svabhāva*, begins with the defence of this principle of “completeness” in early debate. Thus, with respect to the *svabhāva* of a *dharma*, its predication is complete; but this does not mean that any *dharma* can carry “all the predicates in the universe.” In a word: what makes a *dharma* a *dharma* lies precisely in the completeness of its internal predication.¹¹

The same key also unlocks the crux of “the three times.” In the manuscript we read:

⁹ Cox, BLKF28, 184: *sarvatra sarvam asti di • tena uvahaḍāḍria sarvaṃ vatu na cakhuḍāḍriaṃ vatu • sarvatra sa(*rva)(*m a)sti ...*

¹⁰ Cox, BLKF28, 184: *sarveṣu sarvam asti di • tena uvahaḍāḍria sarvaṃ vatu na bhinaḍriaṃ vatu • sarveṣu sa(*rva)(*m a)sti ...sarveṣu kiṃca asti kiṃca nasti ki nu khu de vatava sarve asti •*

¹¹ For how non-confusion and the *svabhāva/parabhāva* boundary function in these *reductios* (and the role of *kiṃcid asti, kiṃcin nāsti*), see §2.1.1.2 and Chapter 4 (esp. §4.1.3 and §4.2.4.5.2).

“Only the past may be said to be past; only the future may be said to be future; only the present may be said to be present.”¹²

If one fixes *asti* as “exist,” then the logic that unfolds afterwards can only seem to sink into a morass, and the philosophy of both sides in the debate loses its original sharpness; but if one reads *asti* back as a copula/license for predication, then it becomes considerably clear: the Sarvāstivādins are using present-tense *asti* to legitimately attach the predicates “past/future/present,” rather than declaring the persistence of some “past thing.” A sentence such as “an Arhat has past greed, hatred, and delusion” is sayable only because two conditions converge: by definition, it belongs to the complete set of predicates of the concept “Arhat” (where “past” means “without causal efficacy”); and by experience, the three characteristics (about to arise/presently active/already cut off) provide a truth-threshold. Thus, “completeness (*pariniṣpannasthatā*) → license (*astitā*) → establishment (*abhiniṣpanna*)” and “dependent origination—efficacy” merge into a single, testable procedure.¹³

Returning again to the seven sets of categories: once they are read as “different dimensions of completeness,” many *reductios* that otherwise look “strange” become clear. For example, the case “a hell-being (*nairayikabhāva*) has (*asti*) four other forms (*bhāva*):” if one insists on reading *asti* as “exists as,” the sentence almost becomes ill-formed; but if one reads *asti* as “license for predication,” and acknowledges the polysemy of *bhāva* in early texts (it can mean both “nature/*svabhāva*” and “mode/form”), then the attack is really asking: when you claim “completeness,” in what “domain” are you claiming it? In other words, when you say “a hell-being is complete,” do you mean that each hell-being is individually complete, or that they, as one class of “beings” (*bhāva*), are complete? A *svabhāva*-domain? A mode-domain? A locality-domain? Or a containment-domain? Once one crosses a boundary, does one immediately violate the bottom line of “non-confusion”? This has less to do with reading *asti* as an “existence-verb,” and more to do with reading it as “a marker of predicability.”

¹² Cox, BLKF28, 160: *adiḍa adiḍam eva vatava • anagaḍa ana[77](*gaḍam e)v(*a) v(*a)tava • pracupana pracupanam eva vatava.*

¹³ For the verb-tense reasoning on *atthi/asti* and the predicational reading of the three times (including the “only the past may be said to be past” formula), see Chapter 3 (esp. §3.1.4.3, §3.3.2, and §3.4.2.1).

Read in this way, BL 28 no longer presents a dispute about “whether everything exists,” but a dense offensive-and-defensive exchange concerning *svabhāva*, concerning the legality of predication, classificatory boundaries, and truth conditions. Only from this perspective can we explain, one by one, why the opponent always uses examples within the same kind of domain, why “*svabhāva/parabhāva*” and “non-confusion” recur so frequently, and why the debate closes with *kiṃcid asti, kiṃcin nāsti*. In other words, if we return to the real philosophical scene presented by BL 28, we find that, at least with respect to this series of issues, both the Sarvāstivādins and their opponents converge on a shared operative understanding of *sarvam asti*: it means “there is all (that a *dharma* ought to have),” and cannot be read merely as “there is all (the entire universe).”

As the comparison with Cox’s rendering below will show, the traditional reading of *sarvam asti* from the angle of “existence” can be raised to a higher-order reading centred on “completeness”—one that better fits the debate-moment of early sectarian philosophical history “captured” by BL 28. At the same time, this makes it clearer that the higher-order reading of Sarvāstivāda philosophy I advocate here is not a negation of the traditional first-order reading, but an inclusion: my purpose is not to deny the existential, ontological sense in which *sarvam asti* has been read, but to explain more accurately how this philosophical axiom can, across dimensions of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, and soteriology, ground the most basic Buddhist doctrines. Such a refined and yet vast philosophical enterprise cannot be adequately described merely by making “exists/does not exist”—in a physical, first-order sense—the sole variable.

In sum, only by freeing *asti* from a one-way reading as “existence,” and reading it as a higher-order copula that marks “sayability” and “completeness,” can one truly grasp the subtlety of this text. The Sarvāstivādins and their opponents are not engaged in a coarse-grained ontological tug-of-war about “what there is in the universe,” but are carefully constructing a precise philosophical system about “how we can truly, legitimately, and completely speak of all *dharms*.” As Frege and Russell suggested, a meaningful “existence” question must ultimately be cashed out as the question of a concept’s instantiation—i.e. a question of predica-

tional logic. This Gāndhārī manuscript is a vivid historical witness to that deep philosophical insight.

My reading of the Gāndhārī manuscript is powerfully corroborated by another key document, whose importance lies in the fact that its author, Dharmatrāta, is himself a Sarvāstivāda master from Gandhāra. This document is the *Samyuktābhidharmahṛdaya* (《雜阿毘曇心論》). It provides a precious “internal perspective” for understanding the core proposition *sarvam asti*. Interestingly, Cox has also cited this passage to support her “ontological” interpretation, making it an excellent case for testing the strengths and weaknesses of two interpretive paths.¹⁴ As the discussion below will unfold, our fundamental divergence again concentrates on one and the same core question: in this passage, should *asti* be taken as an “existence-verb,” or as a copula that performs predication? The original text reads:

問：為有一切有、為無？

答：當知一切有，非有一切相，一切無一切，無有他相法。

此有是薩婆多所立。一切者，謂十二入。彼諸入有自相，非餘一切相，所作別故……以是故說一切法不雜。

一切世悉有，不違其所應，

……有三世薩婆多。此薩婆多所立。(CBETA 2025.R3, T28, no. 1552, p. 963a20–b4)

To keep translation and interpretation distinct, I provide below (i) a strictly literal translation (kept close to the Chinese wording and intentionally non-committal on whether 有/*asti* functions existentially or copularly) and (ii) an interpretative rendering that makes explicit the predicative reading defended in what follows on the basis of BL 28.

(i) Literal translation.

Question: Is it the case that “all is” (一切有), or is it not [the case]?

Answer (verse): One should know: “all is”; it is not [the case that] “all characteristics are.” Each [*dharma*] is without [being] all; there is no *dharma* with another’s characteristics.

¹⁴ Cox (2025, 143–144) renders the passage as follows: “[Verse] One should know that everything exists, but [everything] does not exist with the characteristics of everything. Everything is without [the characteristics of] everything [because] no factor exists that has the characteristics of another. This is [the sense of] ‘exists’ established by the Sarvāstivādins. [That is to say, the term] ‘everything’ refers to the twelve sense spheres. [Each of] these sense spheres exists with its own characteristic and not [with the characteristics of] others because the activities performed by all characteristics differ. Therefore, it is explained that all factors are not confused. [Verse] Everything, [that is to say,] the time periods exist; this does not contradict what is reasonable [and] has been taught by the Silent One. ... ‘Sarvāstivāda’ [has the sense that] the three time periods exist; this is established by the Sarvāstivāda.” Throughout, Cox takes “有” as “exists,” yielding a consistently existential reading. The literal and interpretive renderings given below in the main text are designed to show that the same Chinese wording also sustains a copular-predicational construal.

(Prose): This “is” is what the Sarvāstivādins establish. “All” refers to the twelve *āyatanas*. Those *āyatanas* have their own characteristics, not all the characteristics of others, because their activities differ [...]. Therefore it is said that all *dharma*s are not mixed.

(Verse): In all times, all is; it does not contradict what is appropriate [to each] [...].

(Prose): [There are] the three times, [according to] the Sarvāstivādins. This is what the Sarvāstivādins establish.

(ii) **Interpretive rendering for the present argument.**

Question: Does “all is” mean that every characteristic belongs to every *dharma*, or not?

Answer (verse): It should be understood that “all is” does not mean that every characteristic belongs to every *dharma*; rather, each *dharma* has the characteristics proper to itself, and no *dharma* bears the characteristics of another.

(Prose): This [implication of] “is” is what the Sarvāstivādins establish. “All” refers to the twelve *āyatanas*. Those *āyatanas* have their own characteristics, not all the characteristics of others, because what each does differs [...]. Therefore, to say that all *dharma*s have their own characteristics is not to say that they are mixed.

(Verse): In all times, all is; it does not contradict what is appropriate to each [...].

(Prose): [There are] the three times, according to the Sarvāstivādins. This is what the Sarvāstivādins establish.

The literal wording already distinguishes what belongs to each *dharma* from what belongs to others. The interpretive rendering simply foregrounds the aspect of that distinction that is most relevant to the present argument. An existential construal may still treat the passage as immediately underwriting the familiar tri-temporal gloss, and I do not deny that such a gloss can be drawn from it. My claim, however, is that the argumentative sequence of the passage is better explained if *asti* is first read in its copular-predicational force: the prose immediately delimits “all” by the twelve *āyatanas* and explicates that “all” through the contrast between “their own characteristics” and “the characteristics of others.” On this reading, what is at issue is not an undifferentiated totality of properties, but the determinate characteristics proper to each *dharma*.

The primary advantage of this reading lies in the way it better accounts for the passage’s argumentative sequence. The text first rejects the idea that “all is” means the indiscriminate possession of all characteristics, then delimits “all” by the twelve *āyatanas*, and finally explains that delimitation through the contrast between “their own characteristics” and “the characteristics of others.” On this reading, the appeal to the three times does not replace that earlier argument but extends it: the tri-temporal gloss articulates one consequence of a more basic claim about what may properly be affirmed of each *dharma*. The issue is therefore

not simply whether *dharmas* exist, but how their non-mixed, determinate characteristics are to be specified.

0.3 What It Is to Be a *dharma*: Property, Domain, and Predicational License

As I understand it—and as I repeatedly argue through BL 28—what early sectarian Buddhists cared about was not “what exists,” but under what conditions one may or may not speak in this way about what a *dharma* is or has—namely, the concept of “*yanyi*” (言依) itself. This is even inscribed in the title *Kathāvatthu*: its literal meaning is precisely “*yanyi*” (Skt. *kathā-vastu*). The English title *The Points of Controversy*, suggesting a “list of disputed points,” clearly extracts it from the Abhidharma terminological context; I would rather understand it as an analysis of “what predication depends on (*yanyi*).”¹⁵

A Sarvāstivāda discussion of *yanyi* appears in **Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāśāstra* (*AMVŚ),
juan 15:

Question: By what is the nature of “*yanyi*” (言依) to be defined?

Answer: The *Prakaraṇapāda* states that “*yanyi*” is covered by the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the five *skandhas*.

Question: “Speech” is just utterance, and that on which it depends is name. It should therefore be covered by one *dhātu*, one *āyatana*, and one *skandha*. Why, then, is it said to be covered by the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the five *skandhas*?

Answer: That treatise ought to have said that “*yanyi*” is covered by one *dhātu*, one *āyatana*, and one *skandha*. Yet when it says that it is covered by the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the five *skandhas*, it is speaking thus in reliance on the mutual causal chain. For speech depends on name, and name depends on meaning; and meaning is, in turn, the indirect mutual basis of speech. Because meaning contains within itself the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the five *skandhas*—and because both speaker and hearer are concerned with meaning—therefore that treatise, relying on the mutual causal chain, speaks of the nature of “*yanyi*”. Some say that “*yanyi*” consists in name and in the meaning spoken; hence it contains the eighteen *dhātus*, etc., since “*yanyi*”, name, and meaning mutually depend on one another.

問：「言依」以何為自性？

答：品類足說「言依」十八界十二處五蘊所攝。

問：「言」即是語，彼依是名。但應一界一處一蘊所攝。何故言十八界十二處五蘊所攝耶？

答：彼論應說「言依」一界一處一蘊所攝。而言十八界十二處五蘊所攝者，依展轉因故作是說。謂語依名轉，名依義轉。義是「言」展轉依。義中具有十八界十二處五蘊故。說者聽者皆為於義。是故彼論依展轉因說「言依」自性。有說「言依」是名及所說義。是故具有十八界等。以「言依」名及義轉故。(CBETA 2025.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 74a20–b2)

¹⁵ For the philosophical debates in the *Kathāvatthu* as derivations of the BL 28 scene, and for the systematic link that connects predication with causal/explanatory structure, see §4.2.4.

Placing this passage at the end of this prolegomenon draws the focus of what has been pursued back to a question that is, for the entire Abhidharma philosophical movement, both the most plain and the most central: “By what right, and within what boundaries, do we say what a *dharmā* ‘is’?”

The Vaibhāṣika answer unfolds on two levels. The opposing side argues: speech—i.e. propositions, i.e. the language we utter—depends on name, i.e. concepts; therefore the basis of a proposition should be covered by one *dhātu*, one *āyatana*, one *skandha*. The Vaibhāṣikas reply: the opponent is not wrong, but this only captures the most immediate dependence of propositions, and does not explain the real dependence—what propositions truly depend on is meaning (*artha*), i.e. the essence of each *dharmā*. The Vaibhāṣikas describe the relation between the basis of a proposition and the proposition itself as a “mutual causal” chain: speech depends on name; name depends on meaning; and meaning, as the indirect mutual basis of speech, contains within itself the eighteen *dhātus*, twelve *āyatanas*, and five *skandhas*. Therefore, “relying on the mutual causal chain,” the “nature” of *yanyī* can be said to be “covered by” the eighteen *dhātus*, etc.

Here, the Vaibhāṣikas’ phrase “relying on the mutual causal chain” to speak “of the nature of *yanyī*” is extremely precise: it indicates, first, that the basis on which a proposition about a *dharmā* can be established—namely, the *artha* of that *dharmā*—is not “all” itself (the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the five *skandhas* are Sarvāstivāda explanations of “all,” as will be clarified). Rather, one speaks by means of these complete conceptual frameworks (the eighteen *dhātus*, the twelve *āyatanas*, and the five *skandhas*).

Following this syntactic chain, I align *juan* 15 of *AMVŚ “meaning → name → speech” chain with the three-stage metaphysical grammar I propose for early Sarvāstivāda in BL 28: “completeness (*parinipanaṭhāda*) → predicational license (*astitva*) → predicational establishment (*abhinipana*).” Meaning/*svabhāva* provides each *dharmā*’s complete domain of predication; name inserts words into that domain and grants license; speech, within that license, achieves establishment. In this sense, I reread *sarvam asti* from an “ontological slogan” into

a predicational grammar: *sarvam* does not mean “the totality of all things in the universe,” but “the complete predicational structure encoded by each *dharma*’s *svabhāva*”; *asti* is not a first-order predicate of “existence,” but a higher-order copula that grants predication the qualification of being sayable/establishable (*astitva/astitā*).¹⁶

More concretely, “relying on the mutual causal chain to speak of the nature of *yanyi*” is not meant to identify meaning with “all.” It indicates that one can truthfully state what a *dharma* is because meaning/*svabhāva* is complete, while *āyatana/dhātu/skandha* are three equivalent frameworks that “say the sayable domain in full.” In other words: in Vaibhāṣika context, “all (*sarva*)” is the name of a domain (one can switch between twelve *āyatanas*, eighteen *dhātus*, five *skandhas* [and, when needed, the unconditioned]); meaning is the content that is complete within that domain. Hence we can, relying on the mutual causal chain, say that “the nature of *yanyi*” is covered by *āyatana/dhātu/skandha*, while still maintaining the fact that *yanyi*, as a speech/name activity, belongs only to one *dhātu*, one *āyatana*, one *skandha*.

In this grammar, *AMVŚ *juan* 15’s “meaning contains the eighteen *dhātus*, twelve *āyatanas*, five *skandhas*” resonates with *juan* 73’s “What is ‘all’? ...I say ‘all’ is the twelve *āyatanas* ...or: ‘all’ is the eighteen *dhātus* ...or: the five *skandhas* and the unconditioned”: “all (*sarva*)” is not the whole universe, but the completeness of a domain.¹⁷

The twelve *āyatanas*, the eighteen *dhātus*, and the five *skandhas* (when taken as exhaustive, they must include the unconditioned) are not three unrelated lists, but three intertranslatable and mutually covering frameworks for the same “sayable domain.” Together they point to, and “exhaust,” the same “sayable domain” (i.e. meaning/*svabhāva*). For example: starting from the twelve *āyatanas*, one can align them with the eighteen *dhātus* by explicitly introducing the six consciousness-*dhātus*; conversely, one can re-decompose the elements of

¹⁶ Cox, BLKF28, 160: *na sarvam asti • na sarva nasti • adīda anathadāidria a(*ṇa)(*tha)dāidria(*m e)v(*a) vatava • bhinaidria bhinaidriam eva vatava • annaidria annaidriam eva vatava • pracupana pracupanam eva vatava • vatava chi atita atitam eva vatava • anagaḍa anagaḍam eva vatava • pracupana pracupanam eva vatava • ... lakṣana va astiḍa • sarva ta ca asti me ajātva chad(*a) (*ḍi) ...*

¹⁷ For the dissertation’s systematic articulation of this “complete predication” grammar (including *anūsaya*, *adhvan*, and stage logic), see Chapter 4 (esp. §4.1 and §4.3–§4.4) and Appendix A.

āyatana/dhātu as “form, feeling, perception, formations, consciousness” and thereby obtain the five *skandhas* (and, to match the coverage of the first two, one must include the unconditioned). It is like three map-projections of the same terrain: different partitions, different units, yet they cover and depict the same land, and can be translated one-to-one.

Thus, these three isomorphic “coordinates” jointly delimit the range of legitimate predication: definitional attributes of meaning/*svabhāva* can be grasped completely from the perspective of *āyatana*, *dhātu*, or *skandha*; any predication that goes beyond these coordinates loses its legitimacy. Therefore, when I say “*yanyi* is covered by eighteen *dhātus*/twelve *āyatanas*/five *skandhas*,” I do not mean “speech is everywhere,” but “one can, through three equivalent doors, say the sayable domain in full.” At the same time, with respect to the most immediate dependence (name), each concrete statement still belongs only to one *dhātu/āyatana/skandha*, reminding us to plant our feet on name as the direct dependence; but when we define by the indirect mutual dependence (meaning), these three intertranslatable frameworks disclose a complete domain. In other words, what is complete is the conditions and the license—not an identification of the individual with the whole.

From here, looking back at BL 28, the move “from ‘everything exists’ to ‘has all’” is no longer a merely rhetorical reversal, but a methodological shift: Sarvāstivāda philosophical labour should no longer be understood as counting “what there is” in the world, but as defining “how, within what boundaries, and under what conditions we can say what the world ‘is,’” and making such saying testable and justifiable. In this shift: *sarvam* = the complete predicational domain encoded by each *dharma*’s *svabhāva*; *asti* = the license that grants predication the right to be said in this way; the seven declarations = the modal unfolding of this completeness; “speech does not go beyond the eighteen *dhātus*, etc.” = the regulation not to overstep the domain; *kiṃcid asti, kiṃcin nāsti* = the closure of conditional predication. Along this line, *AMVŚ *juan* 15’s two-level distinction about *yanyi* supplies a particularly revealing internal gloss to the grammar of this thesis: by the direct dependence (name), one establishes (and it belongs to one *dhātu*); by the indirect mutual dependence (meaning), one has a domain (the completeness of *āyatana/dhātu/skandha*).

As the lingering echo of a coda, I state once more “all” and “is”: “all” refers to the domain—the world of predicates; “is” refers to the license of predication. *Dharmas* are complete by *svabhāva*; completeness is framed by *āyatana/dhātu/skandha*; license and establishment unfold along seven modalities; the opponent’s *reductios*, seeking “unrestricted inclusion/ubiquity” by overstepping domains, become the occasion that presses Sarvāstivāda to refine *sarvam asti*. Thus, based on the philosophical derivations recorded in BL 28, the full expression of “*sarvam asti*” is: *sarvam* (completeness) → *sarvam* (*dharmas*) → *asti* (license). I believe that even if the whole Abhidharma philosophical movement has left us only its silhouette, what these masters left to Buddhism is by no means an inventory of existents, but a principled architecture of predication—enabling us, under the proper domain and conditions, to speak truthfully of what a *dharma* is.

The Prolegomenon offers a focused textual demonstration of the higher-order reading through BL 28. Chapter 1 restates the same problem at the level of the dissertation’s overall question, method, and structure.

1 A Survey of Content and Reflection on Methodology

dharmāṇām pravacayam antareṇa nāsti kleśānāṃ yata upasāntaye 'bhyupāyaḥ

— Vasubandhu

A Vaibhāṣika self-portrait in the **Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣāsāstra* (*AMVŚ) is revealing:

We Vaibhāṣikas completely and thoroughly understand the individual and generic properties of the object that is to be known. We compose treatises according to our preference, whether concise or extensive—as long as they truthfully render the properties, they must not be criticised. (*AMVŚ, *juan* 105)¹

Read as a methodological manifesto, this Vaibhāṣika self-portrait foregrounds what is at stake in Abhidharma as an intellectual practice: to know an object is to grasp and to state without confusion both its *individual* and *generic* properties (*svalakṣaṇa/sāmānyalakṣaṇa*). The permissibility of composing a treatise “whether concise or extensive” is thus tied to a norm of *truthful predication*: one may argue at length or in outline, but one must not violate *dharmalakṣaṇa*, the very constraints that fix what can (and cannot) be truly said of a *dharma*. This dissertation takes that norm seriously, and asks what kind of principle could underwrite it.

The Sarvāstivāda axiom *sarvam asti* is often glossed as “every *dharma* exists”—that each *dharma* endures across the past, present, and future. Yet, as the Prolegomenon’s discussion of the British Library Gāndhārī manuscript BL 28 suggests, the earliest polemics around this slogan turn less on a census of existents than on the conditions of legitimate predication: what may be truthfully said of a *dharma*, within which classificatory constraints it may be said, and on what grounds such statements count as true. This dissertation therefore examines whether the familiar first-order gloss might be complemented—and, in certain contexts, clarified—by a higher-order perspective, on which *sarvam* marks the completeness of what may truly be predicated of a conditioned *dharma*, while *asti* functions as the copula and, in this context, as the marker of true predication.

¹ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 105:「謂本論師於所知境具足了達自相、共相，隨欲造論，或略或廣，不違法相，故不應責。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 546b18–20)

By a higher-order reading I do not mean that the dissertation abandons the textual record in favour of a modern logical superstructure. I mean, rather, that the issue is not only which *dharma*s there are, but the complete range of what may truly be predicated of a conditioned *dharma*, and the grounds on which such predication is justified. In that sense, *sarvam asti* concerns not merely the existence of *dharma*s, but the complete range of properties that belong to them by nature.²

Put differently, *sarvam asti* says that, to *be (asti)*, a conditioned *dharma* must already be complete (*sarvam*) with respect to its definition-fixing properties, later gathered under the notion of *svabhāva*.³

With the Prolegomenon’s textual demonstration of the higher-order reading now in place, this chapter restates the same claims as systematic commitments and situates them within a methodological framework.

² For a fuller formal restatement, see Appendix A.

³ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 30:「以一切法自性定故, 諸有為法皆有勝劣, 自體決定。」(CBETA 2025.R1, T27, no. 1545, p. 154b18–20)

*AMVŚ, *juan* 30: “Because every *dharma* is exhaustively determined by its own definitional nature, all *saṃskṛtadharmas*—though they may instantiate similar properties—still fall into gradations of superiority and inferiority, gradations completely settled by that very nature itself (*svabhāva*).”

See also 《阿毘曇心論》卷 1〈1 界品〉:「各自住己性者, 眼自住眼性, 如是一切法應當說。若住者是攝, 故說一切法自性之所攝。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T28, no. 1550, p. 810b11–13)

**Abhidharmahrdayaśāstra* (*AHŚ), *juan* 1, Chapter on the Elements: “Each [*dharma*] resides completely in its own properties: the eye, for instance, resides completely in its own properties of what the eye is. In this same way, one should speak of all *dharma*s. Since ‘residing completely’ implies being ‘nothing more nor less than (攝),’ it is therefore said that all *dharma*s are nothing more nor less than their own properties.”

Unless otherwise indicated, all references to Chinese Buddhist scriptures throughout this dissertation—particularly Chinese translations of Abhidharma treatises—are based on my own critically edited versions. Furthermore, I have provided a complete English translation for every Chinese passage cited. In order not to inflate the overall structure of this dissertation, I have chosen not to create a separate section for every text I have collated; rather, I simply present my critical edition within the footnotes whenever citing these texts. Because surviving Abhidharma manuscripts—especially those from the Vibhāṣā tradition—are extremely rare (among the 58,000 extant Dunhuang manuscripts, only 15 fragmentary items, including abandoned copies 兌廢稿 (BD00342/BD00342V, BD01345V, BD03427(1–6), BD03429(1–2), BD07188, BD08055V, BD08448, BD09392, BD11784, BD14496, S.1721V, S.6825, P.2377V, D̄x00558, and D̄x00570), pertain to Vibhāṣā texts), my editorial work relies primarily on “logical reconstruction”. By carefully recreating the original argumentation of the text, I can determine appropriate punctuation and minor emendations.

Moreover, as there are no other extant complete Vibhāṣā manuscripts in addition to the Kōshōji Manuscripts (興聖寺一切經) for comparison, I seldom make any attempt to modify individual characters; my efforts focus mainly on redividing textual sections and applying new punctuation. Consequently, to avoid overburdening the footnotes, I do not include the full editorial apparatus each time I reproduce the text.

Two textual observations prompt the present inquiry. First, the familiar first-order gloss stems chiefly from Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (AKBh), where he presents *sarvam asti* as a causal postulate: a past action must “still exist” if it is to ripen, so the maxim is folded into a discussion of *anuśaya*—latent dispositions that transmit karmic force. Second, and in striking contrast, the Vaibhāṣikas’ own materials repeatedly frame the maxim in terms of what makes a *dharma* conditioned and what properties belong to it by definition. These are not only questions about whether a *dharma* exists, but about what it is and how it may be truly said.

What emerges, then, is an interpretive fork. For Vasubandhu, *sarvam asti* functions mainly as a link in the causal chain; for the Vaibhāṣikas, it operates as the axiom that grounds every subsequent claim about what a *dharma*—especially a *saṃskṛtadharma*—is. Recognising that deeper, axiomatic role invites us to read the maxim not merely as “every *dharma* exists in three times” but as “every conditioned *dharma* is complete with respect to the properties that truly belong to it.” This higher-order reading does not discard the traditional causal or existential gloss, but re-situates it within a broader account of completeness, predication, and truth.

1.1 Thesis Overview: *sarvam asti* as a Philosophical Axiom

This dissertation argues that *sarvam asti* is best read as a higher-order axiom of complete predication. The reconstruction advanced here concerns, in the first instance, conditioned *dharmanas*; where the language of “completeness” is extended to unconditioned *dharmanas*, it is meant only in a limited definitional sense. *sarvam* marks completeness, while *asti* functions primarily as the copula and, in this context, as the marker of true predication. The familiar tri-temporal gloss is not denied, but re-situated as one consequence of this more basic claim about what a conditioned *dharma* fully is.

The present reading is not offered as a wholesale rejection of the familiar tri-temporal interpretation. Rather, it argues that the temporal reading does not exhaust the philosophical work done by the axiom. Read from the side of copular affirmation and the delimitation

of what may properly be said of a *dharma*, *sarvam asti* helps explain why tri-temporal qualification, too, is articulated in the way it is.

In more formal terms, *asti* may be understood as linking the *dharma* in its primary sense (*mukhyavṛtti*) with what belongs to it in predicate position (*guṇavṛtti*), while *sarvam* marks the completeness of what may be truly predicated in that way.

Because Abhidharma is centred on analysing what a *dharma* is (*dharmapṛavicaya*), it is unsurprising that Sarvāstivādins made *sarvam asti* their master axiom. Their decisive task is to define a *saṃskṛtadharmā*: only by clarifying conditioned phenomena can one grasp dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). Hence, their celebrated query concerning the *saṃskṛtasamskṛtalakṣaṇa*: if “being conditioned” is itself a property, what is the property of that property?

Viewed thus, *sarvam asti* fuses two questions—what properties a *dharma* has and why it has them—into a single higher-order principle. It (i) identifies which *dharmanas* count as *saṃskṛta*, (ii) quantifies into predicate position for being-*saṃskṛta*, and (iii) ranges, at a further tier, over the causal law grounding the entire constellation of a *dharma*’s properties. Appendix A formalises these steps, showing that any faithful symbolic reconstruction of Vaibhāṣika doctrine naturally calls for higher-order calculus.

Throughout the main chapters I therefore retain everyday phrasing—e.g. “this *dharma* possesses that *lakṣaṇa*” or even “this *dharma* is its defining bundle”—while relegating full formal derivations to the appendices. In such sentences the verb “is” is *predicative*, not *identificatory*: it signals analytic inclusion, not numerical identity (thus “the eye is a sense-faculty” means “the eye has the status of a sense-faculty”, not that the two are the self-same entity). Logical precision must also respect ontological tiers: *dharmanas* populate the object domain (*mukhyavṛtti*), their properties fill the predicate domain (*guṇavṛtti*), and the grounds that make those predicates obtain—exemplified by *pratītyasamutpāda*—belong to a third tier. The equivalences proved in the appendices are therefore logical only; they do not collapse subjects, predicates, and grounds into a single ontological category.

A Note on Translation Method

Unless otherwise indicated, quoted passages are translated literally. For a small number of especially compressed or fragmentary passages central to the present argument, I provide a second, clearly labelled interpretive rendering or analytic restatement. Only the first is offered as translation in the strict sense; the second states the construal defended in this dissertation. In literal translations, 相 and *lakṣaṇa* are normally rendered as “characteristic” or “mark”. More analytic terms such as “property” belong, wherever possible, to the author’s own exposition rather than to the translation itself.

The point of importing a higher-order idiom is practical rather than ontological. It gives us a way to speak about *dharma*s as predicates—indeed, about predicates of predicates—without reifying predicates into extra things. In this setting, when we say “this *dharma* is impermanent”, we are not positing an entity called Impermanence alongside the *dharma*; we are registering a way the *dharma* is, and we take that way to be fixed by dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This non-reifying treatment sits comfortably with Buddhism’s anti-substantialist orientation while remaining compatible with Sarvāstivāda’s emphasis on causal efficacy and individuation by *svalakṣaṇa*: it resists substance-reifying talk without denying that *dharma*s do explanatory work.

Concretely, the framework keeps *dharma*-talk in predicate position and lets us ask—and answer—questions such as “What is it for the predicate being-*saṃskṛta* to apply?” and “Why does an entire constellation of predicates obtain together?”. In this way we can discuss properties of properties and the grounds of predication under *pratītyasamutpāda* without inflating the ontology.

In what follows, the phrase “what a *dharma* is” should be read as a compact reference to the entire higher-order task of specifying a conditioned *dharma*’s complete, dependently-originated bundle of defining properties—that is, identifying which properties belong to the bundle, explaining why those properties obtain under *pratītyasamutpāda*, and showing how the bundle taken as a whole grounds the *dharma*’s identity. Because the dissertation ascends

from the second-order floor, the shorthand must not be mistaken for a retreat to first-order metaphysics.

Properly construed in those terms, *sarvam asti* states that a conditioned *dharma* is nothing other than the complete bundle of its causally grounded, intrinsic properties (*svabhāva*). It is no accident that later Madhyamaka critique focuses on *svabhāva* rather than bare existence. A full engagement with Nāgārjuna lies outside the scope of the present dissertation. My narrower claim is that reconstructing *sarvam asti* as a theory of complete predication clarifies more precisely what a Madhyamaka critique would have to target.

1.1.1 *dharmas* as a Bundle without parts: mereological simplicity and predicational complexity

In this dissertation, “property” is a reconstructive term rather than a claim about Sarvāstivāda vocabulary. It gathers together items textually marked as a *dharma*’s own-characteristic, conditioned marks, functions, and tri-temporal qualifications. The aim is not to attribute a modern bundle theory to the Sarvāstivādins, but to make explicit a relation repeatedly articulated in the sources.

With that caveat in place, the term “property bundle” requires immediate clarification, because it might seem to contradict the established Abhidharma view that *dharmas* are simples—the irreducible termini of the chariot-argument analysis. Three misunderstandings must be blocked at the outset. First, “bundle” is not used in a *mereological* sense: a *dharma* is not composed of sub-*dharmas*. Second, the “all” in view is not an unrestricted totality of whatever predicates we might happen to ascribe; rather, it ranges over a fixed and canonically constrained domain of *genuine predication* (to be analysed later via the twelve *āyatanas* and the exclusion of *paralakṣaṇa*).⁴ Third, “bundle” here must not be confused with the *trope-bundle* strategy familiar from contemporary reconstructions of Buddhist bundle theory, where a “bundle” is a mereological sum of compresent tropes invoked to dissolve putative substances (e.g. the “water atom”). On that trope reading, whatever is analysable as a

⁴ See §2.3.2: twelve *āyatanas* as *sarvam*; and the *dharma/dharmin* point.

bundle is *ipso facto* not ultimately real; the ultimately real *dharma*s are the tropes themselves. This is precisely why the present dissertation construes bundling as a matter of *predication* rather than composition.⁵

Against this background, my use of “bundle” is *predicational*. A *dharma* is simple in the mereological sense but complex in the predicational sense: its identity is exhaustively characterised by a determinate field of truth-apt predicates. In this dissertation, a “property” is understood minimally as whatever can occupy predicate position in a true judgement about a *dharma*, not as a detachable component. This minimality is deliberate: it prevents the Lockean “bearer plus attributes” picture from re-entering the system under the guise of “properties”.⁶

This is not an imposed modern model. Vaibhāṣika sources explicitly deny a substratum-plus-properties picture: “*svabhāva* is precisely *lakṣaṇa*, and *lakṣaṇa* is *svabhāva*” (自性即是相, 相即是自性).⁷ Put schematically: there is no “bare” *dharma* to which an essence is later attached; the so-called essence is just the *dharma*’s own definition-fixing predicational profile. This is compatible with treating each *dharma* as grounded in a distinctive *svalakṣaṇa*, while allowing that a *dharma*’s identity conditions are not exhausted by a single monadic predicate but by a determinate closure under analytic entailment within the system.⁸

A particularly pointed Vaibhāṣika response targets exactly the chariot-style worry. If solidity and the like are the “characteristics” of earth, does this not collapse the characterised and the characteristic into one? The answer is: yes—and there is no fault in that. The point is

⁵ For a clear statement of the analysis test (bundles of tropes as mereological sums) and the claim that, in ultimate discourse, “water atom” reduces to an occurrence of wetness, see Mark Siderits, *How Things Are: An Introduction to Buddhist Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), ch. 4.

⁶ Compare Siderits’s warning that the common etymological gloss of *dharma* as what “bears” an intrinsic nature (from *dhṛ*) is misleading precisely because it turns *dharma*s into substances; on his preferred construal, a *dharma* just is the occurrence of its intrinsic nature. See Siderits, *How Things Are*, ch. 4.

⁷ *AMVŚ, *juan* 81: T27, 420c8–9; see also the parallel “體即是相, 相即是體” in *AVŚ.

⁸ This is one sense in which *svabhāva* can be predicationally “complex” without positing qualitative parts: once a *dharma*’s defining characteristic is fixed, many other legitimate predications (e.g. being impermanent, conditioned, etc.) follow as analytic consequences or higher-order qualifications. Siderits makes the parallel point that we need not treat “the many things said of a *dharma*” as competing candidates for its intrinsic nature, since the *dharma* just is the occurrence of that nature. See Siderits, *How Things Are*, ch. 4.

precisely that we cannot speak of a *dharma* as having an essence separable from its legitimate predicates.⁹

A textual anchor: “knowing solidity” and the inseparability of marks

A concrete Abhidharma argument makes the point especially vivid. The *Abhidharmahṛdayasāstra* insists that ordinary people do not in fact know a *dharma*’s characteristic merely by noticing a salient feature such as solidity. If solidity were truly known as the *dharma*-characteristic of earth, then impermanence, suffering, and non-self would also be recognised; failing that, one would (absurdly) attribute permanence, happiness, and self to earth. The lesson is not that these marks are numerically identical, but that the predication that fixes “earth as earth” is inseparable from a wider, determinate predicational profile of conditioned *dharmanas*.¹⁰

Three small examples now illustrate how “bundle” functions without implying parts. They also make explicit a hierarchical ordering: (i) definitional (*samavāyic*) predicates that are internal and essential, (ii) conjunctive (*saṃyogic*) predicates that are external and accidental, and (iii) higher-order (*adhvabheda*) qualifications that index the former without adding a new ontic layer. The three anticipate the Vaibhāṣika contrast between (i) definitional inherence (*samavāya*), (ii) contingent conjunction (*saṃyoga*), and (iii) higher-order temporal qualification (*adhvabheda*), to be analysed in detail later.¹¹

(1) Definitional predicates: *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* (samavāyic; internal; essential profile).

When a *dharma* is classified as conditioned (*saṃskṛta*), it is thereby placed under a definitional profile that includes being subject to characteristic marks such as arising, duration, decay, and cessation. These are not “pieces” that compose the *dharma*; rather, they are predicates that belong to it in virtue of what “conditioned *dharma*” means within

⁹ 《五事毘婆沙論》卷1〈分別色品〉：「問：若堅性等是地等相，所相、能相豈不成一？答：許此成一亦有何過？故毘婆沙作如是說：自性、我、物、相、本性等，名言雖殊而義無別，不可說諸法離自性有相。如說涅槃寂靜為相，非離寂靜別有涅槃。此亦應然，故無有過。此中堅性，即堅分堅體；約種類說，堅性是地界。然此堅性差別無邊，謂內法中爪髮等異，外法中有銅錫等殊。又內法中手足等堅異，外法亦爾，故堅性無邊。」 (CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1555, p. 990b12-20)

¹⁰ AHŚ, T1550, 809a11–25. For how this “fixedness” connects to Vaibhāṣika *avadhāraṇa*/決定, see §2.1.2.4.

¹¹ See §4.2, especially §4.2.2 and §4.2.3, for the two ways of being and the discussion of *dravyataḥ/vastunaḥ* and the nine properties.

the system. Their actual manifestation still depends on causal conditions and stage-structure, but their membership in the *dharma*'s defining profile does not. This is exactly the sense in which the bundle is both analytically complete and yet compatible with real causal unfolding: necessity at the level of identity-conditions, eventuation at the level of instantiation.

(2) Conjunctive predicates: affliction as *saṃyoga* (external; accidental). By contrast, statements such as “a mind-moment is afflicted” (e.g. *kliṣṭo 'sti*) are true only when a *dharmic* item is conjoined with defilement. The predicate here does not enter the *dharma*'s definition in the way *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* does; it attaches through association and can be undone. *Saṃyogic* predication thus tracks external or stage-bound conjunctions, and its very loosenability is what makes liberation intelligible: a truth of conjunction need not be a truth of essence.

(3) Higher-order qualification: temporal segmentation as a predicate of predicates.

Finally, the familiar past/present/future triad is best understood, in Vaibhāṣika terms, not as an additional layer of substance but as a higher-order qualification. Once a definitional predicate belongs to a *dharma* (by *samavāya*), that predicate can itself be indexed as past, present, or future according to the causal stage at which it is in force. In this way, temporal segmentation operates as a property of properties, layering a second-order predication over the *samavāyic* bundle. This is one reason why a time-centric reading of *sarvam asti* risks mistaking a derivative qualification for the primary thesis.¹²

With this clarification in place, the guiding claim of the dissertation can be stated without inviting the chariot-style misunderstanding: to say that a *dharma* is “complete” is not to say that it is a composite, but that what it is is exhausted by the totality of its own legit-

¹² This higher-order move also blocks a familiar objection to Sarvāstivāda eternalism: if one treats a *dharma* as a persisting bearer that exists in all three times while only “manifesting” its nature at one time, one risks reintroducing the substance model (and, with it, qualitative or temporal parts). For a contemporary formulation of this objection against Vasumitra's appeal to efficacy, see Siderits, *How Things Are*, ch. 7 (Time).

imate predicates, and that *asti* functions as the copular hinge that licenses and constrains such predication.

1.1.2 *sarvam asti* and Its Structural Commitments

Every Sarvāstivāda text begins from the same conviction: a conditioned *dharma* is complete—nothing over and above the full bundle of properties that make it what it is. Read from this higher-order vantage, the maxim *sarvam asti* does not merely declare “all exists”; it adds a stricter nuance: to *be* (*asti*) is to instantiate everything within one’s own definitional scope. In this sense, the system is bundle-based—identity is exhaustively determined by the total property-set—yet it is not the austere bundle theory of contemporary metaphysics, because the set is reflexively gathered under an additional predicate, 本法 (“root *dharma*”), which *names* rather than *underlies* the bundle.

That shift yields an immediate philosophical dividend. Once completeness is taken as the pivot, seven structural commitments come into view. I present them as an expository reconstruction of premises that recur throughout Vaibhāṣika argumentation; for ease of reference, I will refer to them as Commitments 1–7 below. What follows is only a preview; Chapters 2–4 unpack each commitment in detail and demonstrate, case by case, how the higher-order reading grounds them.

(1) No substance apart from properties¹³

Higher-order link. Because the identity-conditions for any *dharma* are exhausted by the totality of its intrinsically grounded predicates, there is no leftover “bearer” beyond that bundle; the so-called substance is nothing over and above the self-locking set of properties.

Doctrinal relevance. (1) The claim dovetails with the pan-Buddhist rejection of a permanent *dharmī/ātman* and provides the metaphysical footing on which Vaibhāṣikas defend bundle theory against Naiyāyika or Vaiśeṣika substratum models. (2) It also helps specify the target of Nāgārjuna’s celebrated critique that any entity endowed with an intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*) would be caught in self-contradiction (see MKK chapter 15). Vaibhāṣikas distinguish two modes of “being”: *samavāyic astitva*, the inseparable presence of defining properties, and *saṃyogic astitva*, the contingent conjunction of extrinsic factors. Only the former constitutes *svabhāva*. Hence, within the bundle-theoretic framework, a *dharma*, its *svabhāva*,

¹³ Although Śāṅkaranandana is a comparatively late figure (fl. 900–1000 CE), he captures the same bundle-theoretic insight in a single line: *dharmair bhāvaḥ pṛthagbhāvo na bāhyasiddhim ṛcchati* (Any individualised substance becomes what it is with its properties; it has nothing to do with external factors). See Gudrun Bühnemann, “Identifizierung von Sanskrittexten Śāṅkaranandanas”, in *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasien* 24 (1980): 191–198, at 195.

and its mode of samavāyic *asti* are one and the same analytic package—“having” and “being” are unified, leaving no logical gap for Nāgārjuna’s paradox to gain purchase.

(2) A lone property is inert

Higher-order link. A single feature becomes intelligible only as a member of its native bundle; absent that membership it lacks the inferential anchors that confer individuating force.

Doctrinal relevance. Only through bundle-membership can each *dharma* qualify for a determinate *svabhāva*; hence, the doctrine explains why apparent property-fragments have no independent causal or epistemic efficacy.

(3) Truth is analytic

Higher-order link. Because a *dharma* is nothing over and above its complete bundle of intrinsically grounded properties, every predicate that can be *truly* asserted of that *dharma* is already contained in the very concept of the *dharma*. Hence, every true judgement about a *dharma* is, by definition, an *analytic* proposition.

Doctrinal relevance. Correct cognition is therefore *yathābhūta* (truth-conforming): to “see” a single property is to uncover part of what the concept entails, and the progressive clarification of such analytic truths is precisely what erodes *avidyā* and leads to liberation.

(4) Partial cognition can still be true

Higher-order link. Because any authentic predicate is entailed by the concept of the whole bundle, grasping one property *ipso facto* secures a proportionate grasp of the entire bundle’s truth conditions.¹⁴

Doctrinal relevance. This underwrites the Abhidharma claim that ordinary, piecemeal perception can nevertheless be *yathābhūta*: even narrow insight erodes *avidyā* insofar as it reveals an analytically guaranteed slice of the real.

(5) Causation equals explanation

Higher-order link. Phase-markers such as “cause”, “result”, or “function” are themselves predicates housed inside the same bundle, so giving a causal account of a *dharma* amounts to listing its essential intrinsic properties.

Doctrinal relevance. This collapses the gap between ontology and explanation and fulfils the Vaibhāṣika programme of re-expressing the entire cosmos as one interlocking causal syntax.

(6) Dual aspects without dual entities

Higher-order link. Taking the bundle timelessly (*dravyataḥ*) or phase-by-phase (*vastunaḥ*) is a meta-choice about how the same predicates are grouped, not evidence for two ontic strata.

Doctrinal relevance. The move disarms Nāgārjuna’s charge that possessing *svabhāva* entails perdurance: arising and ceasing are just two predicates among the many that constitute the very same bundle.

(7) Past, present, and future come last

¹⁴ Grammarians proposed similarly that we can only know an object through its properties or predicates, but this is based on a different line of reasoning. Cf. Matilal, *Epistemology, Logic, and Grammar*, 83: “Ontological substance, as a follower of Vyāḍi sees it, is something which lies beyond our grasp. We cannot perceive or understand ‘form-less’ (*nirūpa*) substance without reference to some kind of ‘form’ or quality or property. Whenever we want to refer to any substance (in a natural language) we use a nominalised word, and implied in this word there lies a sense, a ‘quality’, which accounts for this use. In other words, a nominalised expression in this theory is a pointer to some substance (physical or mythical), but this pointing is done always through some ‘quality’ or property, known as its ‘ground for application’ (*pravṛtti-nimitta*).”

Higher-order link. “Past”, “present”, and “future” function only as phase-labels appended to predicates that are already fixed in the bundle; temporality is therefore a *predicate of predicates*, not an extra dimension in which those predicates subsist.

Doctrinal relevance. Among the Vaibhāṣikas’ several explanations of *sarvam*, the reading that equates it with the three *adhvans* was only one option and never occupied the centre of their doctrinal cluster. It rose to seeming primacy only after Vasubandhu foregrounded that version—recasting *sarvam asti* as a first-order thesis about past-and-future existents—and then criticised the view thus narrowed. In the Vaibhāṣikas’ broader account the three temporal indices are merely intrinsic predicates within the bundle of a conditioned *dharma*; they secure karmic continuity without claiming that a past entity is literally present now, and without reducing the maxim to a single temporal slogan.

Taken together, the seven structural commitments converge on two tightly linked questions: metaphysically, what a conditioned *dharma* is, and epistemologically, how such a *dharma* can be known with certainty. Both paths ultimately meet in a single soteriological claim: only a complete understanding of conditioned *dharmanas* dispels ignorance and makes liberation possible. Because the decisive step in escaping *saṃsāra* is to grasp *pratītyasamutpāda* (dependent arising), the Sarvāstivādins ground their entire philosophical project in the analysis of conditioned *dharmanas*—entities that are nothing other than the concrete embodiment of dependent origination itself (see § 2.1.2).

Historically, the commitments listed above reflect a methodological shift. Early Ābhidharmikas approached the issue at the first order, simply listing the attributes of a *saṃskṛta-dharma*. The Sarvāstivādins radicalised the project by moving one logical tier higher: they asked what it means for a *property itself* to be conditioned and insisted that to know any property is to know its cause. In that shift, Abhidharma becomes unmistakably higher-order: it investigates *predicates*, not substrata. The phrase “facing the *dharma*” (*abhi-dharma*) acquires new resonance: one “faces” a *dharma* only by formulating analytic propositions that unfold its complete predicate-structure, and the copula *asti* is the grammatical hinge that performs the unfolding.

That higher-order reorientation also helps explain why later debates increasingly fastened on one downstream entailment of the slogan, namely its tri-temporal interpretation. The formula *sarvam asti* carries a double semantic burden. Vasubandhu recasts the Vaibhāṣika slogan as the startling claim that “past and future *dharmanas* exist right now in exactly

the same way as present *dharma*s do”.¹⁵ Stated that bluntly, the thesis becomes dialectically fragile within the Abhidharma context and invites immediate critique. Sensing this exposure, Vasubandhu takes a further step: he suggests that *asti* here might function merely as an indeclinable particle (*nipāta*), stripped of existential force.¹⁶

The Vaibhāṣikas themselves, however, never rejected the temporal triad—they accept that *sarvam* can designate the aggregate of *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*. What they insisted upon is that this triad is only *one* subset of a much wider notion. At a logically prior level *sarvam* means *completeness*, and “to exist” no longer signifies the endurance of a thing but the necessary instantiation of the *whole* bundle of intrinsic, definition-constituting properties that make a conditioned *dharma* what it is—a thesis that is already higher-order in character. In the interpretation adopted here, the tri-temporal rubric therefore becomes an important but secondary dimension *within* completeness, not the maxim’s ultimate point. Indeed, early sources often equate *sarvam* with the twelve *āyatana*s, a catalogue intended to exhaust the universe of possible predicates; the later Vaibhāṣikas simply inherit and systematise that intuition.

Seen in this light, the familiar dispute between Vaibhāṣikas and Vasubandhu shifts focus. When paraphrasing the Vaibhāṣikas’ axiom, Vasubandhu intentionally reverses the proposition “*sarvam asti*” into “*asti sarvam*” in order to construe *asti* purely as a first-order verb of present-tense existence; the Vaibhāṣikas, however, retain “*sarvam asti*” with *asti* functioning as a timeless copula. Their “existential” claim is not that a past entity is somehow present now, but that the attribute “pastness” truly belongs in the *dharma*’s complete bundle. Likewise for “future” and “present”: each is a predicate marking a causal phase, not a separate mode of being. Time is relocated from the domain of objects to the domain of properties, and thus folded back into the analytic programme. Because causal explanation and property-analysis are thereby rendered isomorphic, the same bundle can be surveyed either timelessly or event-wise. This blocks both naïve substantialism and naïve eternalism.

¹⁵ Prahlad Pradhan, ed. *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu* (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), 299–300; CBETA 2020.Q3, T29, no. 1558, p. 105b26–c20.

¹⁶ Pradhan, AKBh, 298; CBETA 2020.Q3, T29, no. 1558, p. 105b4–26.

In sum: The Sarvāstivāda axiom *sarvam asti* is best understood not as a blunt ontological claim about three times, but as a higher-order axiom of complete predication. It directs analysis to where definitional profiles meet causal grounding, i.e. where predication becomes explainable under *pratītyasamutpāda*.

1.2 Methodological Reflections: A Philosophical-Historical Approach

Because this dissertation deals with a philosophical-historical topic—namely, how *sarvam asti* evolved through layered disputes in early Buddhist sectarianism, culminating in the Vaibhāṣika stance and Vasubandhu’s critique—my principal method is a careful historical reconstruction of evolving arguments. Concretely, I examine how notions of *sarvam asti* and, secondarily, *adhvan* (time or phases) were shaped by controversies among early Buddhist schools (Kāśyapīya, Vibhajyavāda, Sthaviravāda, etc.), refined in the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika lineage, and subsequently challenged by the Sautrāntikas, all the way through the *Milindapañha* (Mil), *Kathāvatthu* (Kv), *AMVŚ, AKBh, and *Nyāyānusārasāstra (*NyAŚ).

1.2.1 Logical Re-expression as a Second Research Tool

The philosophical-historical reconstruction sketched above proceeds chiefly through philological stratigraphy, but in this dissertation it is supplemented, where needed, by logical re-expression. I introduce it not to replace historical analysis, but to restate, in a controlled and explicit way, the formal commitments already implicit in Vaibhāṣika argumentation.¹⁷ In the present context, this supplementary restatement serves two limited purposes: it clarifies the level at which certain claims operate, and it makes it easier to test their internal coherence.

The Sarvāstivāda notion of a *dharma*’s “completeness” (*sarvam asti*) may be stated schematically as:

$$sarvam\ asti(x) := \forall F (Fx \leftrightarrow \Box_{asti}(x, F)).$$

¹⁷ Full axioms and derivations are given in Appendices A–B; the historical discussion in the main chapters does not presuppose them.

Here Fx means that x has property F , while $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$ means that F belongs to x by definitional necessity in the Sarvāstivāda sense, that is, as inseparable from x 's own nature. The biconditional states that the genuine predicates of x are neither more nor less than those grounded in its nature. In this sense, a conditioned *dharma* is complete: what can truly be predicated of it coincides with what defines it.

Because $\forall F$ ranges over predicates, the claim is second-order in logical form. That point matters here only in one limited sense: *sarvam asti* is concerned not merely with whether a conditioned *dharma* is, but with what it is and with what may truly be said of it. The familiar tri-temporal gloss is therefore not denied, but re-situated as one implication of a more basic claim about complete predication.

Since Sarvāstivāda works with a bundle account of conditioned *dharms*, the same *dharma* may appear either as subject of predication or as a predicate borne by another *dharma*. I therefore use “property” as a cover term for whatever can occupy predicate position in Abhidharma discourse (for example, *lakṣaṇa* or *svabhāva*); this is a methodological convenience for formal regimentation, not a claim that these notions are simply identical.

1.2.2 From Symbols Back to Texts

Logical formalisation can distil an argument to a crisp formula—*sarvam asti* (x), for example—but a symbol preserves only the *terminus* of a much longer journey. That journey winds through centuries of compilation, redaction, and inter-sectarian debate whose traces survive—if only in fragments—within the sources.¹⁸ Recovering it therefore requires a return from symbols to texts, armed with the awareness that Abhidharma literature is a palimpsest: later Vaibhāṣikas embed fresh material in older compilations, Sautrāntika editors reshape inherited passages, and Vasubandhu cites rivals with surgical selectivity. As a result, Mil, Kv, the monumental *AMVŚ, and Vasubandhu's AKBh present not a tidy chronological dossier but a collage in which voices from different centuries speak side by side.

¹⁸ A concrete illustration is BL 28, discussed in the Prolegomenon (§0.1).

To navigate that collage, this study couples two tools. **Philological stratigraphy** teases out seams, repetitions, and cross-references that betray successive cycles of proposal, objection, and rejoinder, while **logical formalisation** translates each contested thesis into an explicit hierarchy of concepts so that hidden premises and shifts of abstraction come into view. Only when these tools work in tandem can one extract from the argumentative corpus a micro-history of debate—one that shows how every round of exchange progressively sharpened the twin ideals of *completeness* and *analyticity*.

In short, a symbol such as *sarvam asti* (x) is the *terminus*, not the origin, of its own history. Logical formalisation can tell us what follows *if* the axiom is granted, but only a *text-bound* reconstruction can show *why* the axiom was ever found compelling—or challenging—at specific moments, in specific communities, and with specific doctrinal stakes. The pages that follow therefore leave aside further formal micro-analyses and pivot to the stratigraphy of argumentation. By watching how mnemonic lists, editorial grafts, and translational choices successively reshape the same core idea, we will see that the Vaibhāṣika equation of *completeness* with *analyticity* was not a timeless theorem but a historical achievement.¹⁹

Only against that layered backdrop can we *first* recover what the Vaibhāṣikas were actually claiming with *sarvam asti*—that every conditioned *dharma* is (*asti*) *complete* (*sarvam*). Only once this higher-order metaphysics is clear can we weigh later critiques for what they genuinely engage and, just as importantly, for what they leave untouched. Those critics—often pursuing their own evolving programmes—typically isolated one tractable first-order entailment (for instance, the continued efficacy of past *dharma*s), reformulated it in their preferred idiom, and then challenged that reformulation. Such a strategy is neither illegitimate nor “mistaken”: it clarifies their own commitments as much as it tested Vaibhāṣika claims. Our task is simply to keep three layers distinct: the Vaibhāṣika axiom itself, the specific downstream thesis selected for debate, and the conceptual aims that shaped each critic’s choice of target.

¹⁹ Curiously, this mirrors a tension within Vaibhāṣika thought itself: although every truth within the *saṃsāric* world is deemed *analytic*, the coming-to-be of that world is acknowledged as a single, grand *synthetic* fact—an exception that proves the rule (see § 4.2.4.2).

Clarifying a doctrine’s purpose—“*why it is so*”—is therefore inseparable from clarifying “*what it is*”, a unity the Vaibhāṣikas took as axiomatic. Seen in this light, their project is not merely a philosophy of “everything exists”, but a philosophy of *fully determinate property-bundles*: to analyse any single *dharma* is, in effect, to retrace that structure of completeness. Contextual reading thus restores the doctrine’s living pulse and prevents it from being reduced to one derivative claim whose refutation—however fruitful in another framework—should not be mistaken for the collapse of the whole Vaibhāṣika edifice.

1.2.3 Case-Study Roadmap: How History Shaped an Abhidharma Axiom

The evolution of the Sarvāstivāda maxim *sarvam asti* offers a compact test-case, because every layer of the extant record—mnemonic lists, editorial redactions, biographical hero-making, and the semantics of three different classical languages—has left a measurable mark on the doctrine’s eventual shape. The following pages survey four such layers in turn.

1. Mnemonic Lists and the Birth of Exhaustive Investigation.

Many modern reconstructions of the inception of Abhidharma begin with the terse mnemonic lists called *mātrkā*s.²⁰ A *mātrkā* remains a bare *aide-mémoire*—a catalogue of every attribute a given *dharma* might possess—until compilers cease asking *which* items belong on the list and begin asking *why* any item belongs there at all.²¹

Between roughly the third century before the Common Era and the first century of the Common Era, these lists fused with an institutional drive towards ever finer classification. One monumental outcome was the *Abhidharmamahāvibhāṣā-śāstra*, whose redactors assembled—without regard to sectarian affiliation—every proposition and argument that could

²⁰ For more historical surveys, see Rupert Gettin, “The Mātikās: Memorization, Mindfulness, and the List”, in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 158–162; Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas: Early Buddhist Theories on Existence* (Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995), 8; Richard F. Gombrich, *Theravāda Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 35; Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics: The Making of a Philosophical Tradition* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 27–30; Bart Dessein, “‘Thus Have I Heard’ and Other Claims to Authenticity: Development of Rhetorical Devices in the Sarvāstivāda Śaṭpādābhidharma Texts”, in *Zen Buddhist Rhetoric in China, Korea, and Japan*, ed. Christoph Anderl (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 142–145; and Bhikkhu Anālayo, *The Dawn of Abhidharma*, 21–28.

²¹ Anālayo, *The Dawn of Abhidharma*, 167; Dessein, “Thus Have I Heard”, 145.

illuminate what a *dharma* is. In the process, they collapsed discussions spanning several centuries into a single synthetic colloquy.

Precisely here the task of **philological stratigraphy** begins: by aligning the textual layers preserved in Mil and Kv with the intrinsic logic of each dispute, it restores a simple litany to its original argumentative context, uncovering the stratified sequence of proposals, rebuttals, and rejoinders. Such reconstruction shows how concepts that later anchor Vaibhāṣika philosophy—including a causal reading of *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, and *anāgata*, the related notions of *kāritra* and *avasthā*, and ultimately the maxim *sarvam asti*—matured only through protracted controversy. The ambition to know a *dharma* exhaustively can thus never be detached from its matrix in the *mātrkā* tradition: *sarvam* sets the standard of completeness, while *asti* registers the analytic necessity that every true predication about a *dharma* is already satisfied within its own bundle of properties.

2. Editorial Flattening and the Illusion of Synchronic Debate.

Redactional practice in Abhidharma literature did not stop with *AMVŚ, whose conflation of earlier and later voices already obscures the chronological order in which arguments first arose. For centuries thereafter, Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika scholars interpolated, excised, or annotated AKBh, adapting it to their own doctrinal programmes (see § 3.2.1). Only by tracing how a single claim is subjected to serial objections, concessions, and restatements can we recover a logical progression and, with caution, a relative chronology—without which the very moment when *sarvam asti* was first *formulated* or later *reinterpreted* remains invisible. This recognition also warns us against treating AKBh as the unquestioned culmination or final answer of the Abhidharma project; rather, the work must be returned to the web of debates—across schools and even among thinkers within the same school—that continued to shape, contest, and refine its doctrines.

3. Biographical Appropriation and the Elevation of Vasumitra.

Historiography further complicates the picture when personal legend is folded back into textual authority. Travel records recount how the Sarvāstivādins of Kaśmīra promoted Vasu-

mitra to quasi-mythic status precisely because his *kāritra* theory supported their stance on the three times.²² Early Mahāyāna *sūtras* already speak of a “Vasumitra Bodhisattva,” while later sources fold this figure together with the Vasumitra associated with the *Vibhāṣā* tradition.²³ Recognising this conflation restores Vasumitra’s teaching to its broader genealogy—including debts to sectarian Buddhist traditions—and guards the historian against treating his contribution as a bolt from the blue.

4. Linguistic Mediation and the Semantics of Existence.

Finally, linguistic ecology shapes doctrine no less than editorial policy. Early Gāndhārī scholastic fragments prefer nominal compounds such as *X-bhava* where Pāli or Sanskrit would use a finite copula; tenseless nominals dovetail with the Vaibhāṣika claim that “past”, “present”, and “future” are merely intra-bundle modes. Classical Chinese, the medium through which most Abhidharma is now read, lacks a single lexical counterpart to the Sanskrit root *√as*. Translators oscillate between “有” and “是”: the former straddles “there exists X” and “X possesses Y-properties”, whereas the latter frames a predication “X is Y” with an implicit truth-value. Every rendering of *sarvam asti* therefore foregrounds now its existential, now its attributive, now its identificatory dimensions, but never all three at once (see § 3.2.1.1 and § 3.3.3.1). Which graph the translator chooses also reveals which side of an analytic biconditional is being granted grammatical privilege.

Taken together, these four layers—mnemonic practice aimed at exhaustive categorisation, editorial strategy, biographical politics, and linguistic medium—vividly map the distinct historical terrains across which philological stratigraphy must navigate in the study of Abhidharma intellectual history. A purely formal reconstruction would overlook the pressures that produced the axiom in the first place, whereas a purely chronological narrative would leave its internal logic opaque. Only by braiding the two strands can we understand how the Sarvāstivādins turned lists into ontology, how later critics such as Vasubandhu could

²² Willems, Dessein, and Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism*, 241.

²³ For an early Bodhisattva Vasumitra, see the *Weiri zanan jing*/惟日雜難經 (T17, no. 760, 608c24–609a20). For the later Kaśmīran narrative that elevates Vasumitra as the authoritative arbiter of the *Vibhāṣā*, see the *Datang Xiyuji* (T51, no. 2087, 886c18–887a5).

both inherit and misunderstand that ontology, and why any modern appraisal must refuse to treat *sarvam asti* as either a timeless platitude or a single, easily refuted existential claim.

1.3 Literature Review

Modern scholarship on Sarvāstivāda has usually been organised around one dominant question: in what sense do past and future *dharma*s “exist”? That question cannot be avoided in the present dissertation, but it does not by itself capture the full burden of the Vaibhāṣika axiom *sarvam asti*. As the preceding sections of Chapter 1 have already suggested, the issue is also how this axiom governs the truthful specification of a conditioned *dharma*: what *sarvam* ranges over, what *asti* does grammatically and philosophically, and how temporal qualifications are grounded within a *dharma*’s causal career. For that reason, the most relevant secondary literature is not simply the literature on “three-time existence,” but five overlapping conversations: the classic philological tradition that canonised the tri-temporal reading; source-critical work on the formation and stratification of Abhidharma; new Gāndhārī and re-collated Chinese evidence that reopens the semantics of *sarvam* and *asti*; ontological studies of *dharma*, *svabhāva*, *kāritra*, and causal explanation; and a limited body of philosophical reconstruction and clarificatory vocabulary relevant to the logical re-expression outlined in §1.2.1.

1.3.1 The Classical Framing: Sarvāstivāda as a Doctrine of Three-Time Existence

The modern problem-field was set above all by Stcherbatsky (1923), La Vallée Poussin’s translation of the *Abhidharmakośa* (1923/1971), and his related studies (1925, 1937), which together established the now familiar picture of Sarvāstivāda as the school that affirms the existence of past, present, and future *dharma*s. That framing remains indispensable because later debates, especially as mediated through Vasubandhu, really do present the issue in these terms. Frauwallner (1995) and Willemen, Dessein, and Cox (1997) carried this line forward by embedding the doctrine in a broader history of Indian scholasticism, while Fukuhara (1965), Watanabe (1989), and Yinshun (2011) continue to shape relative chronologies and source criticism. For Chapter 3 in particular, the critical work of Akimoto Masaru (2016), Nasu Enshō

(2011–13), and Shiga Kiyokuni (2015, 2016) on time-related materials remain the basic textual starting points.

What makes this older scholarship important, however, is not only that it provides the dominant interpretation against which the present study argues. It also explains why the question of “three-time existence” came to dominate the field in the first place. The present dissertation accepts that the tri-temporal gloss is a real and historically consequential interpretation, especially in later doxographical and polemical contexts. What it disputes is the further step by which that downstream gloss is treated as the primary meaning of the axiom itself.

1.3.2 Abhidharma Formation, Stratification, and the Ideal of Exhaustive Analysis

A second body of work is crucial because this dissertation treats *sarvam asti* not as an isolated slogan but as the condensed expression of a larger Abhidharma ambition: the exhaustive analysis of *dharma*s. Here scholarship on *mātrkā*s, list culture, and textual growth matters as much as explicit discussions of time. Gethin’s studies of *mātrkā*s and mnemonic structures, especially his 1992 essay on memorization, together with Anālayo (2014), show that Abhidharma develops out of enumerative and mnemonic practices governed by ideals of completeness, systematisation, and exhaustive discernment. Dessein’s study of rhetorical formation and authenticity claims in Sarvāstivāda scholastic literature (2012) is likewise important because it clarifies the formation of scholastic structures and the claims of scriptural legitimacy attached to them. In this respect, Anālayo’s emphasis on “comprehensiveness” is especially close to the present dissertation’s reading of *sarvam* as completeness rather than as mere unrestricted quantification.

The same point is reinforced by editions and studies that broaden the textual base beyond the best-known Kośa/Vibhāṣā materials. Stache-Rosen and Mittal (1968), Dietz (1984, 2004), and Nasu’s work on the *Abhidharmadīpa* (2004) help show that Sarvāstivāda concerns cannot be reduced to a single time-doctrine: different textual strata and genres emphasise different explanatory burdens, including classificatory, causal, and property-oriented ones.

This source-critical literature underwrites the dissertation’s insistence that one must distinguish the original axiom, later orthodox restatement, and subsequent polemical target.

1.3.3 Gāndhārī Manuscripts and Chinese Translation as Evidence for a Predicational Reading

The most important recent shift in the field comes from newly available Gāndhārī and freshly re-read Chinese evidence. Early Gāndhārī scholastic fragments, especially BL 15 and BL 28, have made it much harder to assume that Sarvāstivāda discourse was originally organised around a simple existential contrast between what exists and what does not. Cox’s studies (2013, 2014, 2025) draw particular attention to nominalised and predicational constructions whose force is not exhausted by the English verb “to exist,” while Salomon (2018) provides the broader Gandhāran textual setting. Cox’s 2025 edition of BL 28 is decisive for the present dissertation because it furnishes the textual basis for reading “three times” as only one dimension of a broader claim about completeness.

Chinese translation history is equally important. Because Classical Chinese does not map neatly onto Sanskrit *asti*, translation choices between “有”, “是”, and related forms preserve different possibilities of subject, predicate, possession, and truth-apt assertion. Chapters 3 and 4 therefore treat the divergence between Xuanzang’s and Paramārtha’s renderings not as a purely lexical matter but as evidence for different ways of parsing the Sarvāstivāda claim. The present dissertation extends this line of inquiry by working from critically recollated Chinese passages rather than from received punctuation alone. In methodological terms, then, Gāndhārī and Chinese do not merely add new data; they destabilise the long-standing habit of reading *sarvam asti* as though its philosophical burden were already transparent in the Kośa’s later doxographical idiom.

1.3.4 From Time-Doctrine to Ontology, Causality, and Predication

If the newer textual evidence reopens the grammar of the axiom, a parallel body of scholarship allows its metaphysical stakes to be posed more sharply. Before those stakes can be specified, however, the relevant unit must be clearer: what sort of item is a *dharma*, and how

is it analysed? Gethin's study of *dhamma* in early Buddhism (2004) and Karunadasa's *The Dhamma Theory* (1996), from different angles, frame Abhidhamma as an attempt to specify phenomena through defining characteristics, classificatory place, and conditional functions. Nyanaponika Thera's *Abhidhamma Studies* points in the same direction by insisting that analysis is incomplete unless relations are also stated. Ronkin's account of early Buddhist metaphysics (2005) reinforces this occurrence-oriented and anti-substantialist picture. Together these studies situate the dissertation's language of a "bundle without parts" within a broader Buddhist context rather than making it appear as a merely imported analytic model.

Across these questions, Cox's *Disputed Dharmas* (1995) remains the most important bridge work for the present dissertation, because it shows how disputes over existence, *bhāva* and *svabhāva*, temporal determination, and causal efficacy turn taxonomic Abhidharma categories into ontological and causal claims. Cox's later essay "From Category to Ontology" (2004) sharpens that trajectory by showing how Abhidharma reflection moves from classificatory schemes to questions about what a *dharma* is, how *svabhāva* functions, and how causal efficacy (*kāritra*, *sāmarthya*) enters the analysis. Dessein's 2007 study of the three times further loosens a merely temporal reading by interpreting the three *adhvas* as differentiated modes or states rather than three ontological "regions."

Throughout Chapters 2–4, the dissertation also relies on Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti's *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma* (4th rev. ed., 2009) as the most serviceable synthetic guide to Sarvāstivāda categories, canonical inventories, and sectarian variants. Dhammajoti does not advance the present completeness reading, but his discussions of *svabhāva* as grounding the identity of each *dharma*, of the twelve *āyatana*s as an exhaustive framework of classification, and of *kāritra* and *sāmarthya* as distinct modes of causal efficacy remain recurring points of reference in Chapters 2 and 3.

Read retrospectively, Ye's "From Scepticism to Nihilism" (2019) is useful at a further turning point in this discussion. Ye formulates a "confinement principle" according to which any definition or description confines its assumed referent to the very state specified by the

concept: the thing must conform to the concept and remain precisely as the concept characterizes it. On that reconstruction, *svabhāva* is what is fixed as the concept's own referent and is therefore pressed toward permanence and independence. Ye himself contrasts this with the Sarvāstivāda view of *svabhāva* as the enduring basis of differentiated activities. In the terms of the present study, Ye is most illuminating where a *dharma's svabhāva* is taken to exhaust what that *dharma* is: from that point onward, Nāgārjuna's pressure falls not only on doctrines of existence or temporality, but on the very possibility that a *dharma's* identity can be fully fixed by a concept and yet remain causally intelligible.

Once that pressure on ontological determination is in view, a further cluster of studies becomes relevant as the dissertation turns more explicitly to predication and relation. Siderits (2022, ch. 4) is valuable because his reconstruction of Buddhist bundle theory offers a contemporary analogue for non-substantialist property analysis, even though the present study does not adopt his trope framework as such. Because Chapter 1 also introduces logical re-expression as a secondary research tool, a small body of analytic philosophy also has a legitimate place here, though only as clarificatory vocabulary. Frege and Russell matter insofar as they distinguish copular predication from bare existential assertion and treat existence as concept-instantiation rather than as an ordinary first-order property of objects. Kripke's later gloss on that contrast, together with his discussion of necessary *a posteriori* identities, helps clarify a distinction important to this dissertation: the difference between the metaphysical determination of a *dharma's* profile and our epistemic route to grasping it. Trueman (2021) is especially useful in supplying a contemporary vocabulary of predication, containment, and higher-order form, above all in helping keep object-talk distinct from property-talk. In a more historically comparative register, Bronkhorst's studies of Abhidharma–Vaiśeṣika interaction and Jaini's analysis of Vaibhāṣika theories of words and meanings remain useful for the later discussions of predication, linguistic analysis, and metaphysical description in Chapters 3 and 4. These studies do not by themselves decide the meaning of *sarvam asti*; their value lies in clarifying the logical level at which the present reconstruction operates.

1.3.5 Recent Pressure Tests: Gold, Siderits, and Rospatt

Three recent interlocutors require explicit treatment because the dissertation argues with them in a sustained way rather than citing them merely for background. Jonathan C. Gold’s reconstruction of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* debate in *Paving the Great Way* (2014), especially “Against the Times,” is the clearest contemporary statement of the view that *sarvam asti* is fundamentally a first-order thesis of tri-temporal existence. Gold is therefore indispensable not because he confirms the present argument, but because he reconstructs with exemplary clarity the downstream, Kośa-centred perspective that the dissertation seeks to re-situate. The disagreement pursued here is not that Gold misreads Vasubandhu; it is that Vasubandhu’s polemical reformulation should not be treated as the whole semantic horizon of the Vaibhāṣika axiom.

Siderits’s chapter on time in *How Things Are* (2022) serves a different function. It translates the Sarvāstivāda/Sautrāntika dispute into contemporary metaphysical terms—presentism versus eternalism—and develops the strongest recent objections to the Vaibhāṣika position in those terms. This makes his work an ideal pressure test for the present reconstruction. The dissertation accepts the force of these objections against a one-level, objectual reading of “past and future *dharma*s exist,” but argues that they lose much of their grip once *asti* is re-read as a de-temporalised copula and temporal language as phase-indexing within a *dharma*’s causal career.

Alexander von Rospatt’s *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness* (1995) is equally important, though in a different register. His great strength lies in refusing to treat momentariness as a single undifferentiated doctrine and in tracing multiple argumentative routes by which it becomes philosophically compelling. That methodological pluralism strongly supports the present dissertation’s refusal to let *kṣaṇikatva* monopolise the interpretation of Sarvāstivāda. At the same time, the dissertation argues that Rospatt’s history of momentariness can be further sharpened by recognising the plurality of Sarvāstivāda causal models and the special importance of *avasthā*-based analysis.

These three studies are discussed at length in Appendix C because they mark the points at which the dissertation’s reconstruction must show its strength. Gold tests the thesis against the dominant Kośa-centred interpretation; Siderits tests it against contemporary analytic objections; Rospatt tests it against the historiography of momentariness. Together they define the modern debate-space within which the present argument positions itself.

1.3.6 The Gap Addressed by the Present Dissertation

What remains missing in the existing literature is not philology alone, nor metaphysics alone, but a reading that brings philological stratigraphy and controlled logical re-expression into the same frame without collapsing historical evidence into modern philosophical theory. The older tradition accurately explains why Sarvāstivāda came to be identified with “three-time existence”; newer Gāndhārī and Chinese evidence shows that this cannot simply be treated as the axiom’s original or exhaustive sense; ontological and comparative studies make it possible to redescribe *dharma*, *svabhāva*, and *kāritra* in terms of predication, causal articulation, and property-structure; and a limited analytic vocabulary clarifies the higher-order level at which the present reconstruction operates. The contribution of the dissertation is therefore not to replace source criticism with formalism, but to reconnect source criticism, manuscript evidence, translation analysis, doctrinal history, and controlled metaphysical reconstruction, so that *sarvam asti* can be read not as a flat existential slogan but as the organising axiom of a Sarvāstivāda theory of complete and truthful predication.

The present dissertation’s claim is therefore neither that the conventional tri-temporal gloss is simply false nor that recent philosophical reconstructions are irrelevant. It is, rather, that in Vaibhāṣika materials the tri-temporal gloss is best understood as a secondary, downstream specification of a more basic commitment: *sarvam asti* primarily secures the complete and truthful predication of the conditioned *dharma*, and only on that basis the distinctive allocation of temporal predicates within its causal career.

1.4 Outline of the Following Chapters

Chapter 2 – *sarvam asti* in Depth and Breadth: Metaphysical Grounding and Universal Scope

Chapter 2 develops the dissertation’s central reconstruction from within Vaibhāṣika sources. It begins with *asti*, arguing that in the relevant contexts it functions primarily as a copula and as a marker of truthful predication rather than as a simple existence-verb. It then turns to *sarvam*, understood not as an unrestricted totality but as the complete predicational domain of a conditioned *dharma*, and examines how this domain is delimited through the twelve *āyatana*s and the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa*s. The later parts of the chapter connect completeness to causality, *pratīyasamutpāda*, and a Buddhist analogue of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, before showing why the three temporal predicates are best read as subordinate specifications within a *dharma*’s broader causal and predicational profile. In this way, Chapter 2 establishes the conceptual basis for the dissertation’s claim that *sarvam asti* is, in the first instance, a higher-order thesis about complete predication.

Chapter 3 – *addhā/adhvan* and *atthi/asti* Reasoning in Pre- and Non-Vaibhāṣika Texts

Chapter 3 tests this reconstruction against pre- and non-Vaibhāṣika materials, especially the *Milindapañha*, the *Kathāvatthu*, and Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. Rather than treating sectarian slogans as fixed starting points, it reconstructs the smaller derivational moves by which *addhā/adhvan* and *atthi/asti* became tied to the later slogan that “everything exists in the three times.” The chapter shows how, once the bundle-theoretic, copular, and dual-aspect assumptions of Vaibhāṣika reasoning recede from view, stage-predicates are increasingly reinterpreted as temporal regions and *sarvam asti* as a first-order existential thesis. A separate discussion of Paramārtha’s and Xuanzang’s Chinese renderings illustrates how translation choices register different views of predication, temporal designation, and doctrinal economy. The chapter closes by situating these developments within broader debates about internal causation and cross-traditional interaction, thereby preparing the return to Vaibhāṣika sources in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 – What It Means to Be a *dharma*: Dual Aspects as *dravyataḥ* and *vastunaḥ*

Chapter 4 returns to Vaibhāṣika materials and asks what it means for a conditioned *dharma* to be what it is. It argues that the school addresses this question through a dual-aspect model: the same *dharma*, considered *dravyataḥ*, names a timelessly fixed predicational identity; considered *vastunaḥ*, it names the eventive instantiation of that identity within causal succession. On this basis the chapter reconsiders *sarvam asti* as a copular proposition, examines the relation between *astitva/sattā*, *svabhāva*, and conditioned status, and analyses the nine properties of the conditioned, the relation between causation and predication, the three *adhvans*, and the logic of *avasthā*. The aim is not to oppose permanence and impermanence as rival doctrines, but to show how Vaibhāṣika thought coordinates definitional stability with conditioned arising. Chapter 4 therefore supplies the dissertation’s fullest account of how complete predication, causal process, and temporal determination belong to one and the same theory of the conditioned *dharma*.

A note on the three appendices:

While the main chapters remain historical and philological in orientation, the appendices serve three supplementary purposes. **Appendix A** restates the dissertation’s reconstruction in a controlled higher-order notation. **Appendix B**, written in a *more geometrico* style, reformulates the same reconstruction as a sequence of propositions and demonstrations. **Appendix C** gathers extended responses to three recent interlocutors—Gold on the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and the tri-temporal gloss, Siderits on presentist challenges, and Rospatt on momentariness—whose readings define the principal contemporary pressure points for the present argument. None of these appendices is required for following the historical argument of Chapters 2–4, but together they make explicit the logical structure, inferential consequences, and contemporary defensibility of the thesis.

Methodologically, higher-order notation is used only as a clarificatory device, not as a historiographic claim about what Sarvāstivādins themselves explicitly formalised. The reconstruction remains constrained by the primary sources: where a passage supports the

proposed reading, it is used as positive evidence; where it resists the reading, the resistance is recorded rather than explained away. Unless otherwise noted, key terms (e.g. *svabhāva*, *astitva*, *saṃskṛta*) are interpreted in the sense attested in the Vaibhāṣika materials under discussion.

2 *sarvam asti* in Depth and Breadth: Metaphysical Grounding and Universal Scope

yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati.

— The Buddha

While the previous chapter illustrated how modern scholars have variously emphasised time, property, or both, this chapter investigates the internal logic of *sarvam asti* from the Sarvāstivāda perspective.

Our focus will be on clarifying why *sarvam* implies the entirety of a *dharma*'s properties,¹ and how *asti* functions as a copulative operator that renders all true statements about those properties analytically valid. By situating *sarvam asti* within broader Abhidharma debates, we will see how this phrase stands at the heart of the Sarvāstivādins' understanding of causality, definition, and the path to liberation.²

As argued in the Prolegomenon through the debate preserved in BL 28, what is at stake in *sarvam asti* is less the bare question of “what exists” than the conditions under which we may legitimately and truthfully say what a *dharma* is or has. In this way the inquiry shifts from “does *X* exist?” to “what is *X*?” and even “why is *X* thus?” For this reason—and to mitigate the persistent temptation to read *asti* as a simple existence-verb—I begin with *asti*: its role as a copula and as a truth-conditional operator. With this in place, we can then turn to *sarvam* as the delimitation of the predicational domain (especially through the twelve *āyatana*s) and to the way in which completeness is articulated through *pratītyasamutpāda*.

Since the Prolegomenon has already discussed Dharmatrāta's *Samyuktābhidharmahṛdaya* gloss on *sarvam asti* (and the interpretive divergence it exposes), I will not repeat that

¹ For a further discussion on how the Sarvāstivādins define *dharma* as possessing *svabhāva*, see Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, 173.

² This chapter develops in detail the commitments previewed in §1.1.2: §2.1 addresses the analytic character of true predication and the copular function of *asti* (Commitments 3 and 5); §2.2 establishes the bundle-theoretic identity of *dharma*s and the possessive reading of 有 (Commitments 1 and 7); §2.3 delimits the predication-domain through the twelve *āyatana*s (Commitment 4); §2.4 derives the Buddhist analogue of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (Commitment 5) and the subordinate status of temporal predicates (Commitment 7).

translation here. Instead, I will foreground a different kind of evidence—BL 28’s explicit concern with tense, predication, and the “sayability” conditions of *asti*—which directly motivates the theoretical architecture of the present chapter.

2.1 Introducing *sarvam asti* Once Again

2.1.1 The Metaphysical Scheme of *asti*

This introduces another core philosophical question: when we aim to understand *dharma*, among the various propositions about what *dharma* is, which ones are true? We cannot achieve liberation merely by recognising a *dharma*; we must correctly understand what a *dharma* is—in other words, grasp the *yathābhūta* (“the reality as it is”) of a *dharma*—to attain liberation.³

2.1.1.1 Analytic Proposition and *yathābhūta*

The Sarvāstivādins not only established a metaphysical framework through the concept of *sarvam*, thereby laying the philosophical foundation for the Buddhist understanding of all *dharmanas* in the world and the law of dependent origination, but, more importantly, as their philosophy evolved, they recognised the necessity to go beyond two main tasks:

(1) **Explaining the world**—i.e. formulating propositions about it.

(2) **Providing a metaphysical foundation** for these explanations—i.e. elucidating how propositions are philosophically possible, which involves defining the explanandum and the explanans.

They identified the need for a third crucial step:

(3) **Determining the truth-values** of propositions—i.e. discussing the criteria by which the truth or falsity of propositions can be assessed.

³ Throughout the thesis, I use “copula” for the grammatical role of *asti*, “predicational license” for the philosophical role inferred from that grammar, and “truth-conditions” for the semantic upshot of that role. These are not competing claims, but three descriptions of the same reconstructed function at different levels. Likewise, *sarvam* is used in two correlated senses: extensional (“all *dharmanas*” / the canonical inventory) and intensional (“the complete predicate-set proper to a *dharma*”).

If Sarvāstivāda philosophy had been satisfied with completing tasks (1) and (2), then the concept of *sarvam*, along with its associated deductions, would have sufficed, and naming the Sarvāstivāda school simply as “Sarvavāda” would have been adequate. However, the emphasis on *asti* reveals that it holds a unique position within their philosophy. If *asti* were merely intended to denote simple “existence”, it would be redundant, as Sanskrit syntax often omits *asti*; the mere presence of a noun in the nominative case already carries existential commitment in ordinary discourse.⁴

Thus, the Sarvāstivādins’ emphasis on *asti* clearly holds deeper philosophical significance, which brings us to the third step. To advance to step (3) and complete the philosophical system, the concept of *asti* becomes essential. *asti* serves two key roles:

On the one hand, it explains *dharma* from the perspective of its attributes, elucidating the metaphysical structure of the internal and definitional causal events through which a *dharma* unfolds its properties.

On the other hand, it establishes criteria for truth-values, providing the metaphysical infrastructure necessary for evaluating propositions.

In addressing the philosophical needs introduced by step (3), the Sarvāstivādins raised an essential question: if understanding the *yathābhūta* of a *dharma* determines the truth or falsity of propositions about that *dharma*, what does it mean to understand the *yathābhūta* of a *dharma*? *As should be clear, posing the question in these terms propels the inquiry onto a higher-order metaphysical plane.* Simply put, it means understanding what a *dharma* can be and what it cannot be. By starting with the concept of a *dharma*, we can analyse which properties can

⁴ Mocci and Pontillo (2020) offer an alternative approach. They argue that Pāṇini does not analyse nominal sentences with a copula in the first place. They note that while later commentators, such as Kātyāyana, suggest a copula is understood, Pāṇini allows for nominal sentences without a finite verb. They show that Pāṇini’s rule A 2.3.46 generates nominative endings in nominal sentences without a zero-copula, thus challenging the traditional view. See Davide Mocci and Tiziana Pontillo, “A Controversial Provision for the Nominative Ending: Nominal Sentences and Aṣṭādhyāyī 2.3.46”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 140, no. 1 (2020): 47–79.

This grammatical point is crucial, for if the inclusion of *asti* is not a grammatical necessity, its deliberate emphasis in the Sarvāstivāda axiom must be motivated by philosophy. It therefore strengthens the argument that *asti* is not there simply to posit existence, but to serve a more profound function: namely, to act as a higher-order logical operator that establishes both the completeness of a *dharma*’s properties and the immutable truth of analytic statements about it.

truly be attributed to it and which cannot. Once we formulate analytic propositions about what a *dharma* is,⁵ we can assert that these statements are necessarily true, indicating that we have understood the *yathābhūta* of that *dharma*.

2.1.1.2 The Role of *asti* in Establishing Truth-Values

In the Prolegomenon, we briefly discussed the metaphysical implications of *sarvam*. Here, when addressing analytic propositions and the *yathābhūta* of *dharma*, the keyword that encapsulates this philosophical reasoning is *asti*. The Sarvāstivādins incorporated *sarvam* and *asti* into their school's name because, in laying a comprehensive and profound metaphysical foundation for early Buddhist teachings, these terms represented their philosophical endeavours in a highly condensed and abstract way.

In this context, *sarvam* is predicated of *dharma*, especially *saṃskṛtadharma*, and *asti* serves as a copulative verb, linking the subject *dharma* with its predicates, which refer to its properties. Consequently, an *asti*-centred proposition indicates an analytic statement about what a *dharma* is if, and only if, the properties that *asti* unfolds can be genuinely attributed to the *dharma*—that is, the properties are inherently included in the *dharma*.

For the Sarvāstivādins, anyone who aspires to liberation from suffering must cultivate the intellectual ability to analytically understand what a *dharma* is, as there is no other path to liberation. By incorporating the gnomic present-tense verb *asti* into the compound *sarvāsti*, they emphasise that analytic propositions about *dharma*—expressed through *asti*—possess immutable truth-values.⁶ In other words, *asti* signifies an atemporal, necessary, and sufficient relationship between the subject and predicate.⁷

⁵ In the present argument, an analytic proposition is one in which the predicate belongs to the admissible profile of the subject and is thus true in virtue of what that *dharma* can be. The point here is not only containment, in a broadly Leibnizian sense, but the determination of the truth-conditions of propositions about a *dharma*. For a more justificatory register of analyticity, cf. Gilead Bar-Elli, “Analyticity and Justification in Frege”, *Erkenntnis* 73 (2010): 165–84.

⁶ Siderits provides a detailed discussion on the profound connection between truth-making and the *svabhāva* of *dharma* for the Ābhidharmikas in “Causation, ‘Humean’ Causation, and Emptiness”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, no. 4 (2014): 433–449.

⁷ In modern analytic philosophy, it is widely recognised that the copula in logical form is **tenseless**—it serves only as a structural connector between subject and predicate, rather than a time-bound verb. See, for example, Peter Geach, “Assertion”, *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 4 (1965): 449–465, who emphasises that the copula itself does not carry tense or assertive force. By insisting on *asti* in the **present tense** and disallowing

More importantly, the very name “Sarvāstivāda” itself provides strong linguistic internal evidence for a predicational reading. In the ordinary word-formation of Sanskrit compounds, verbal elements are typically incorporated by means of a participial stem (*sat*), rather than a finite verb form (*asti*). A well-known example from Indian philosophy is *Satkāryavāda*: when the doctrinal core truly concerns “existence” (“the effect exists in the cause”), the name naturally uses the present participial stem *sat* of \sqrt{as} . This suggests that the Sarvāstivādins’ insistence on choosing a full finite verb—inflected for person and tense—namely *asti*, and placing it at the heart of their school name, may invite philosophical attention. This intention arguably goes beyond the basic sense of “existence,” because if the sole purpose were to mean “exists,” then *sat* might have sufficed and would have conformed better to the usual morphological convention. One may even say: if the school’s thesis were merely “everything really exists,” its name would more likely have evolved into something like “Satsarvavāda.”

In addition, general Sanskrit syntactic rules also support the copular function of *asti* here. As the ordering of elements in the compound *Satkāryavāda* indicates, when a \sqrt{as} derivative is meant to foreground “existence,” it tends to appear at the beginning; when it appears at the end, we cannot ignore its copular function—namely, linking subject and predicate. This is comparable to early Buddhist expressions that register different degrees of self-grasping, such as *asmi* and *ayamaḥamasmi*: here *asmi* can only be understood as a copula (“I am”), not as a heavy existential claim. The name “Sarvāstivāda” places the finite verb *asti* at the end of the compound; its structure runs parallel to a subject–predicate (S–P) clause. This makes it plausible that its function is not merely to express the intransitive sense of “existence,” but also (and importantly) to serve as a predicational copula, a logical sign.⁸

any tense variation, the Sarvāstivādins effectively treat *asti* as a **logical operator**—an atemporal, analytic link that guarantees a necessary relationship between *dharma* (subject) and its property (predicate).

⁸ The distinction drawn here between an “existential use” and a “copular use” of *asti* is an etic analytic framework; it is not meant to assume that the linguistic intuition (emic) of ancient Indo-Aryan speakers recognised two sharply distinct verb categories. For Indo-Aryan speakers, “is” and “exists” are, in the first instance, one and the same. Without denying *asti* as an “existence verb” in one respect, I adopt this etic distinction solely in order to foreground its function, within the argumentative structure, as a copula—as the logical marker of “is.”

From the Sarvāstivāda metaphysical perspective, true propositions about *dharma* are inherently analytic because the predicates that can be genuinely applied to *dharma* are inherently included within the concept of *dharma*. Simply put, this is because a *dharma* is complete. Within this metaphysical framework, when we aim to understand *dharma* “as it really is” (*yathābhūtam*), the way we approach *dharma* (*abhimukha-dharma*) is to understand its properties to finally construct analytic propositions about it.

To further develop this line of reasoning, note that if an analytic proposition is true, it remains true regardless of time, location, manner, or perspective. This explains why the present-tense verb *asti* can be used to construct propositions: on the one hand, analytic propositions transcend time and are atemporally true; on the other hand, the present-tense *asti* implies the gnomic present tense, which describes statements whose truth-values are not confined to any particular time period.

At this point, the philosophical debate preserved in BL 28 offers a more concrete vantage-point from which to grasp *asti*. In columns 69–75 we read:

[69] *asti sarva • asti no ca sarva • ye duaḍaśa ayaḍaneha aṣagrahiḍa se asti • [70] (*tra)- y(*a)adhva astiḍa aṣabhina vatava • aṣa adh(*v)a astita di • ya asti ta ha astiḍa vatava • [71] (*ya nasti)i t(*a) nastiḍa ha vatava • sata astiḍa vatava • asata nastiḍa vatava • aḍiḍa anagaḍa pra[72](**cupana va astiḍa di a)d(*i)ḍ(*a) v(*a)ṣ(*ag)e asti • anagaḍa vaṣage asti • aḍiḍa anagaḍa a[73](**ḍiḍana)g(*a)ḍ(*a)bh(*a)v(*a) asti • aḍiḍa anagaḍa grihibhava asti • aḍiḍa anagaḍa aramiya[74]bhava asti • aḍiḍa (*a)nagaḍ(*a) veṣi-abhavo asti • anagaḍa arahaḍabhava asti • [75] (*sar)v(*a)m asti •***

Given the fragmentary state of the manuscript, I present below a diplomatic translation followed by an analytic restatement.

Diplomatic translation.

All is; yet not all is all. Those encompassed within the twelve *āyatanas*—that is. The three *adhvans* are to be spoken of as having *astitā*, undivided (Cox substituted *asti* here with *santi*). Some say the *adhvans* have *astitā*. What is, that is to be spoken of as having is-ness (*astitā*). What is not, that is to be spoken of as having is-not-ness. What is real (*sat*) is to be spoken of as having is-ness; what is unreal (*asat*) is to be spoken of as having is-not-ness. Some further propose: the past, the future, and the present are *asti*. [For example:] “This is last year; this is next year.” Likewise: “this is a former householder,” “this is a future householder”; “this is a former park-keeper,” “this is a future park-keeper”; “this is a former merchant,” “this is a future merchant”; and “this is a future arhat.” *sarvam asti*.

Analytic restatement.

The fragment delimits a domain (the twelve *āyatanas*) and then tracks what can and cannot be affirmed within it. The three *adhvans* belong to this same domain without collapsing into one another. Affirmation and denial (*astitā* / *nāstitā*) track what fits or does not fit the case. The

everyday examples—“this is a former householder,” “this is a future arhat”—demonstrate that *asti* is used in the present tense to affirm past and future subjects. The concluding *sarvam asti* completes the argument: whatever properly falls within the domain can be affirmed.

The analytic restatement is offered as a reading of the fragment, not as a direct translation of each surviving word. Cox’s reading consistently anchors *asti* in a first-order concept of “existence.” Such a framework may look intuitive for certain ontological assertions, but the passage above invites a different emphasis. As the diplomatic translation shows, the text opens with a delimitation: “all is; yet not all is all.” It then specifies the relevant domain (the twelve *āyatanas*), tracks what can and cannot be affirmed within that domain (*astitā / nāstitā*), and marshals everyday linguistic examples in which the present-tense *asti* is applied to past and future subjects. The concluding *sarvam asti* thus appears to cap an argument about the scope and legitimacy of *asti*-affirmations, not simply a claim that things exist.

Consider first the seemingly contradictory opening pair: “*asti sarva • asti no ca sarva.*” Cox renders it as “that which exists is everything, and yet that which exists is not everything” (Cox 2025, 329), and takes it as a restriction on the scope of existence. On the reading defended here, the opening sets a different kind of rule: *sarvam* stipulates completeness within a bounded domain, not an unrestricted totality. This in turn explains the appeal to the twelve *āyatanas*, which function here as the classificatory framework delimiting what can be properly affirmed of a *dharma*. The debate, then, is not exhausted by the question whether past and future entities “exist”; it also concerns whether present-tense *asti* may legitimately be used to affirm past and future subjects.

Second—and most crucially—Cox’s “ontological” framework makes the sentences *(a)d(*i)d(*a) v(*a)ṣ(*ag)e asti* (“a past year exists”) and *anagaḍa vaṣage asti* (“a future year exists”) (Cox 2025, 142) sound exceptionally awkward. This rendering may underplay that one central point of contention in this debate is not “whether a past or future year exists,” but rather “whether we may use the present-tense *asti* to make a true and valid predication of a past or future subject.” If we translate instead “This is last year; this is next year,” it becomes clear that *asti* here functions as a copula, whose role is to connect subject and

predicate. The opponents then marshal a large number of everyday linguistic examples (e.g. “this is a future householder,” “this is a future arhat,” and so on) with a single aim: to demonstrate that speaking, with the present-tense *asti*, about past and future *bhāvas* (“states”) is entirely legitimate and natural.

The Sarvāstivādins’ emphasis on *asti*—used as a timeless present verb—demonstrates that an ordinary copula, which varies according to tense in daily usage, cannot fulfil their theoretical requirement for an analytic-propositional link between propositions and their truth-values, as well as between *dharma*s and attributes. Hence, they insist that in propositions expressing analytic statements, the copula must invariably remain in the present tense. In this sense, *asti* can in fact be regarded as a special logical operator, signifying an atemporal, analytic necessity that obtains between subject and predicate, or between a thing and its properties.

The foregoing analysis—reinforced by the Prolegomenon’s close reading of BL 28 (§ 0.1)—supports a determinate line of interpretation: *asti* in the Sarvāstivāda axiom is not exhausted by existential force. As the text’s own vocabulary suggests—*astitā*, the affirmability tracked by *asti*—its philosophical role is to mark the conditions under which something can be legitimately affirmed of a *dharma*. The question that BL 28’s interlocutors are pressing is therefore not simply “what is there in the universe?” but “what can be completely and legitimately affirmed of a *dharma*, and under what conditions?”

This emphasis is reinforced by BL 28’s insistence on *asti* even where an “existential” rendering becomes especially strained. Regarding the phrase from Line 82–87:

**nasti kica nasti nāma ... adidānagaḍap(*r)acup(*a)n(*a)s(*a)kh(a)ḍ(a) asti di*

Cox takes *nasti* here, at least initially, in a broadly existential sense. In context, however, that reading may not be the most economical. What matters first is that the passage proceeds by asking which *dharma*s are predicable with *asti*. On that reading, the singular *asti* in a plural environment is at least marked and calls for explanation. One plausible possibility is that the form is retained to keep the focus on predicability with *asti* itself. If so, emending *asti* to *santi* may smooth out a feature that is philosophically significant.

Next, we see the *reductio* move made by the opponents: they directly propose that the Sarvāstivādins' thesis is, in other words, simply "everything exists" (*asti sarva*). This rephrasing risks obscuring the Sarvāstivādins' own explication of *sarvam asti*. If we now return to *nasti kica nasti nāma*, it evidently means: "there is nothing that cannot be predicated with *asti*." The subsequent enumeration—past, future, present, and unconditioned—specifies the relevant domain, rather than licensing some boundless universal generalisation. And since unconditioned *dharma*s do not "exist" in the way conditioned *dharma*s do—being outside the causal world of birth, abiding, and cessation—if they too can be legitimately predicated with *asti*, then *asti* here cannot be exhausted by existential force; it must mark the unfolding of a *dharma*'s internal properties and guarantee the truth of the predication.

Furthermore, by emphasising *sarvam asti*, the Sarvāstivādins underscore that, in Abhidharma philosophy, their primary concern is not abstract debates about what exists or does not exist—indeed, such questions were seldom isolated from questions of predication, causality, and classification within their philosophical scope. Instead, their core focus is on analysing what each *dharma* is (*dharmapracicaya*). The use of *asti* unmistakably emphasises the fundamental philosophical pursuit of understanding what a *dharma* truly is—in an analytic sense.

What the foregoing establishes is the operator-side of the axiom: *asti* is not merely an existence-verb, but the copular marker of predicability that secures truth-aptness for analytic claims about a *dharma*'s properties. Yet an operator is only as informative as the domain it operates over. If *asti* tells us how a predication can be legitimate, *sarvam* tells us which predicates belong to a *dharma* in the relevant sense—complete, yet non-confused with others. This is why BL 28 turns, almost immediately, to the twelve *āyatana*s: they provide the canonical inventory through which a *dharma*'s "complete set" of admissible predicates can be delimited. The next section therefore shifts from *asti* to *sarvam*: from the logic of predication to the architecture of its domain.

2.1.2 Metaphysical Background

With the foregoing analysis of *asti* in place—especially its copular force and its role as a truth-conditional marker of predication (*astitā*), brought into relief by the BL 28 debate—we are now in a position to specify what *sarvam* contributes to the axiom *sarvam asti*. This dissertation argues that the Sarvāstivāda axiom *sarvam asti* is best read not as a flat, first-order existential slogan (“everything exists”), but as a higher-order thesis about predication and completeness. *sarvam* does not denote the totality of things but, for each *dharma*, the complete set of intrinsic predicates fixed by that *dharma*’s own *svabhāva*; *asti*, as argued in the previous section, functions primarily as a copular operator that marks such predications as legitimate and truth-apt (*astitā*).⁹ To say *sarvam asti* is therefore to say that every *dharma* is complete with respect to what can be truly said of it: its nature determines a full, non-overlapping field of properties that belong to it and to no other.

I suggest that this completeness is articulated by the Vaibhāṣikas through *pratītyasamutpāda* in two intertwined directions, one external and generative, the other internal and definitional. External/generative dependent origination describes how a conditioned *dharma* is brought into being by a lattice of distinct *dharmanas* whose defining natures it does not share; it explains why this causal episode occurs at all rather than remaining merely possible. Internal/definitional dependent origination, by contrast, explains why that very *dharma* must bear exactly the predicates it does once it has arisen: here what “brings about” the predication is nothing outside the *dharma*, but its own complete bundle of inherent properties. From a Vaibhāṣika perspective, both strands are subsumed under *pratītyasamutpāda*: the first secures genesis and causal efficacy (*kāritra*), the second secures necessitation and the truth of analytic claims about what the *dharma* is. § 2.2.3 will show in detail how the coordination of these two aspects underwrites the claim that a conditioned *dharma* is “complete” (*sarvam*) precisely because, across the three times, it necessarily and sufficiently instantiates all of the

⁹ Cf. Erich Frauwallner’s discussion of *dharma* as “autonomous” properties in *The Philosophy of Buddhism*, trans. Lodrö Sangpo (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2010), 101–106.

predicates grounded in its *svabhāva*. A classic Sarvāstivāda formulation of this idea appears in their interpretation of dependent origination, as stated in *AMVŚ, juan 23:

The Buddha told the *bhikṣus*: “I shall explain for you the *dharma* of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the *dharma* of what has originated dependently (*pratītyasamutpanna*).”

Question: What is the difference between dependent origination and what has originated dependently?

Some say: There is no difference. Why? Because PrP states: “What is dependent origination? It refers to all conditioned *dharmanas*. What is what has originated dependently? It also refers to all conditioned *dharmanas*.” Therefore, we know that these two have no difference.

Some other masters say: Still, they can be differentiated: the difference lies in the designations. This is called *pratītyasamutpāda*, and that is called *pratītyasamutpanna*. Furthermore, the cause is called the *dharma* of dependent origination and the effect is called the *dharma* of what has originated dependently. Just as with cause and effect, so too with such pairs as: that which acts and that which is acted upon; that which accomplishes and that which is accomplished; that which produces and that which is produced; that which transforms and that which is transformed; that which initiates and that which is initiated; that which leads and that which is led; that which sustains and that which is sustained; that which characterises and that which is characterised; that which apprehends and that which is apprehended—you should understand the distinction in the same way.”¹⁰

We can see that, in this passage, *pratītyasamutpāda* is made to encompass both *pratītyasamutpāda* and *pratītyasamutpanna*. The former is an action noun that names the rule-like structure of dependent origination itself; the latter, a past passive participle, names what has come to be under that rule—what has “arisen dependently.” When both are used to refer to a single causal episode undergone by one and the same *dharma*, the basic Sarvāstivāda thesis is already in view: the cause contains, in a definitional sense, all the properties that the effect will realise, and the effect is nothing over and above the complete instantiation of those very properties.

It is particularly noteworthy, in light of Ye’s (2017) study, that in early canonical usage *pratītyasamutpāda*, as an abstract rule, typically does not take *dharma* as its head noun, whereas *pratītyasamutpanna*, as something concrete, is frequently followed by *dharma*. Nāgārjuna later develops this contrast philosophically by aligning the former with abstract emptiness (*śūnyatā*) and the latter with empty things (*śūnya*). Against this background it is

¹⁰ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「佛告苾芻。吾當為汝說緣起法及緣已生法。問緣起法與緣已生法差別云何。有作是言。無有差別。所以者何。品類足論作如是言:云何緣起法。謂一切有為法。云何緣已生法。謂一切有為法。故知此二無有差別。有餘師說。亦有差別。謂名即差別。此名緣起法。彼名緣已生法故。復次。因名緣起法。果名緣已生法。如因果。如是能作所作。能成所成。能生所生。能轉所轉。能起所起。能引所引。能續所續。能相所相。能取所取。應知亦爾。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 118a24–b5)

striking that the Sarvāstivādins deliberately treat *pratītyasamutpāda* itself as a *dharma*. This, I suggest, is precisely in order to secure the internal consistency of their system: the unity and completeness of a *dharma* is preserved across the passage from rule to instantiation. Within the Sarvāstivāda tradition we even find more radical voices, such as Sthavira Pūrṇāśa, who maintains that it is *pratītyasamutpāda* alone, and not *pratītyasamutpanna*, that properly counts as a *dharma*.¹¹

The same quotation also shows that when the text moves from *pratītyasamutpāda* to *pratītyasamutpanna*—from an action noun to a past passive participle fully derived from the same verbal root—these two forms jointly designate the complete causal career of a single *dharma*. The cause, as *pratītyasamutpāda*, already includes all the properties that will be realised; the effect, as *pratītyasamutpanna*, is precisely the state in which those properties have been fully instantiated.¹² In the sequence of causal pairings that follows, the relation between cause and effect is to be read in the same way: for a given *dharma*, nothing beyond this passage from *pratītyasamutpāda* to *pratītyasamutpanna* is required to explain the completeness of its unfolding.

What is especially important for my purposes is that the text then recasts this same structure in a series of 能/所 pairs: that which acts vs. that which is acted upon, that which produces vs. that which is produced, that which characterises vs. that which is characterised, that which apprehends vs. that which is apprehended, and so on. In each pair the first term marks a capacity- or potential-side (能相)—what a *dharma* can do or can be—while the second term names the corresponding realised side (所相), the way in which that capacity is actually instantiated. Read together with the initial cause–effect contrast, the list lays out a general schema: *pratītyasamutpāda* functions as the “object–subject,” the subject-term that carries the full set of properties to be realised, whereas *pratītyasamutpanna* functions as the

¹¹ Pradhan, AKBh, 136: “*sthavirapūrṇāśaḥ kilāha syāt pratītyasamutpādo na pratītyasamutpannā dharmā iti*”.

¹² See Bhikkhu K.L. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 3rd rev. ed. (Hong Kong: Centre for Buddhist Studies, University of Hong Kong, 2007), 47–48, for a discussion on the relationship between *pratītyasamutpanna* and the properties of *saṃskṛtadharmā*.

“property–predicate,” the predicate-term in which those very properties are displayed as realised.¹³

This causal-predicative isomorphism is what I want to emphasise. On the causal side, one and the same *dharma* first appears as a dependence-structure and then as its own concrete unfolding; on the logical side, the same *dharma* first figures as what is to be explained (the subject) and then as the content that explains it (the predicate). In Sarvāstivāda terms, a *dharma* is “complete” because every predicate that truly characterises it is already encoded in its own *pratītyasamutpāda*-structure and is wholly instantiated when that structure yields *pratītyasamutpanna*. In other words, a conditioned *dharma* is nothing more and nothing less than the complete bundle of its inherent properties, and those properties are nothing more and nothing less than that *dharma* itself, considered under the aspect of their full instantiation.¹⁴

As Saṃghabhadra put it:

Because the Buddhas, the World-Honoured Ones, know all *dharmas* in their completeness, this is called unimpeded discernment (or unobstructed wisdom) (*pratisaṃvid*).¹⁵ (*NyAŚ, *juan* 76)

Abhidharma, as the distinctive branch of Buddhist learning that aims at such unimpeded discernment, makes it clear that, at least for the Vaibhāṣikas, *pratisaṃvid* is not a special kind of “analytic” cognition but rather the state in which all *dharmas* are known in their completeness—that is, with the full, determinate field of predicates fixed by each *dharma*’s own nature. What makes this knowledge “unobstructed” is precisely that nothing that truly belongs to a *dharma* is left out, and nothing that does not belong to it is smuggled in.

In *AMVŚ, the philosophical propositions I have thematised as “completeness”, “internal/definitional causality”, and “external/generative causality” are expressed in the Sarvāstivādins’ own terminology as follows:

Because it has causes and conditions, a *dharma* is said not to have change; because it has causes and conditions, a *dharma* is said to have change.

¹³ Ibid., 48.

¹⁴ Recent scholarship has emphasised the close relationship between Sarvāstivāda and Sāṃkhya. A similar notion appears in the *Vyāsaśāstra* on *Yoga Sūtra* III.13: *dharmīnsvaṛūpamātro hi dharmo* (“A property [*dharma*] is nothing more than the essential nature of the entity that possesses it [*dharmīn*].”). Cf. Sthaneshwar Timalina, “Change: Thinking through Sāṃkhya”, *Religions* 13, no. 6 (15 June 2022): 549.

¹⁵ 《阿毘達磨順正理論》卷 76:「諸佛世尊於一切法圓滿知，故名無礙解」(CBETA 2024.R2, T29, no. 1562, p. 752a18–19)

“Because it has causes and conditions, a *dharma* is said not to have change” means that each and every *dharma* abides in its own entity, in itself, as its own thing, with its own nature and its own particular characteristic, without undergoing any transformation.

“Because it has causes and conditions, a *dharma* is said to have change” means that conditioned *dharmanas* arise when they have causal efficacy and cease when they lose that efficacy.¹⁶

In this formulation, the first thesis—“because it has causes and conditions, a *dharma* is said not to have change”—maps onto what I call the internal/definitional dimension of causality: dependence on causes and conditions explains why a *dharma* has, and must have, the very nature and property-set it does, without any fluctuation in that defining bundle. The second thesis—“because it has causes and conditions, a *dharma* is said to have change”—articulates the external/generative dimension: given those same causes and conditions, a conditioned *dharma* comes to have causal efficacy and then ceases to have it in the temporal flow of arising and ceasing. Throughout the dissertation, I focus primarily on this internal/definitional strand, but the external/generative strand must also be kept in view, since only their joint operation explains how *sarvam asti* could function as the Sarvāstivāda foundational axiom.

Before we turn to that ground-laying discussion of causality, however, one concept that lies even closer to *sarvam* requires attention: the twelve *āyatanas*. As BL 28 already hints—“*ye dūaḍāśa ayadāneha {a}sagrahīda se asti*”—once the legitimacy of *asti*-predication is secured, the debate turns immediately to delimiting the domain of what can be so predicated. Any attempt to pin down the meaning of *sarvam asti* is best framed within Buddhist doctrine as a whole, and an oft-quoted but easily overlooked maxim asserts that “all (*sarvam*) amounts to the twelve *āyatanas*.” Since the *āyatanas* constitute the canonical inventory of a *dharma*’s possible predicates, they supply the bridge between the completeness expressed by *sarvam* and the property-based analysis at the heart of this study.

¹⁶ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 39:「有因緣故說無轉變; 有因緣故說有轉變。有因緣故無轉變者, 謂一切法各住自體、自我、自物、自性、自相、無有轉變; 有因緣故有轉變者, 謂有為法得勢時生, 失勢時滅。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 200a19–23)

2.1.2.1 Twelve *āyatana*s as a Complete Categorisation of Properties

In fact, *AMVŚ includes a passage explicitly devoted to the discussion of the relationship among *dharma*s, “all”, “properties”, and the twelve *āyatana*s:

If one wishes to observe the nature and characteristics (xing-xiang, 性相) of *dharma*s, one should rely on the doctrine of the twelve *āyatana*s. By observing all the nature and characteristics that *dharma*s possess through this doctrine of the twelve *āyatana*s, twelve kinds of wisdom-light illuminating the knowables (*jñeya*, rendered in Chinese as *er-yan*, 爾焰) arise, and twelve images of what they really are then appear.

It is like a person who meticulously polishes twelve bright mirrors and hangs them in various directions; when one enters among them, twelve images of oneself appear. In each sentient being’s body, the twelve *āyatana*s are present. One might ask, if each body has twelve *āyatana*s, by what are the twelve *āyatana*s established?” The answer is: Because their intrinsic natures have distinct causal functions.¹⁷

To restate the reasoning here:¹⁸

Understanding *dharma*s is only achievable through the twelve *āyatana*s.¹⁹ This means that understanding *dharma*s is equivalent to grasping or categorising them by the properties (i.e. Xing-xiang 性相) corresponding to the twelve *āyatana*s. The term “all the properties” refers to *dharma*s being complete because the twelve *āyatana*s are complete. The properties categorised through the twelve *āyatana*s must be complete. Since *dharma*s are complete, they are precisely the properties categorised through the twelve *āyatana*s—neither more nor less.²⁰

In the reasoning presented here, it is worth noting that a *dharma* is nothing over and above its defining nature-and-characteristics (i.e. its properties). Therefore, understanding

¹⁷ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 73:「若欲觀察諸法性相, 當依如是十二處教。若依如是十二處教觀察諸法所有性相, 便生十二爾焰智光, 復現十二實義影像。如人瑩拭十二明鏡, 懸在諸方, 若入其中便現十二自身影像。一一有情身中有十二處可得。問: 若一身中有十二處, 云何建立十二處耶? 答: 以彼自性作用別故。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, pp. 378c23–379a1)

¹⁸ Xing-xiang (性相) is rendered literally as “nature and characteristics” in the quotation. In the discussion that follows, I use “properties” as a technical umbrella for what can be truly predicated of a *dharma* (including what the sources call 性/相/自性 in different contexts).

¹⁹ Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 32–43.

²⁰ For a mutual necessary and sufficient relationship between a *dharma* and its properties, see the argument in **Abhidharmavibhāṣāśāstra* (*AVŚ): “(a *dharma*’s) essence is nothing more nor less than its properties, and its properties are nothing more nor less than its essence. One cannot speak of a property of a *dharma* without speaking of its essence.” (《阿毘曇毘婆沙論》卷 44:「體即是相, 相即是體, 諸法不可離體別說相。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1546, p. 334a27–28)) Identical arguments also appear in *AMVŚ: 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 81:「自性即是相, 相即是自性, 自性與相不相離故。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 420c8–9); 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 10:「體即是相, 相即是體, 不應離體別求其相。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 50b10–11).

a *dharma* is equivalent to understanding its properties. In other words, *sarvam asti* conveys that “what a *dharma* is” is equal to “what properties it potentially possesses”. Thus, the properties a *dharma* possesses indicate what it is.

Here it is important to be clear about what is—and is not—being claimed. As the Prolegomenon has already shown through Dharmatrāta’s gloss on *sarvam asti* in SAHŚ (see Prolegomenon § 0.2), “all” (*sarvam*) does not mean an unrestricted totality of properties; it means only the complete bundle of properties that can genuinely be attributed to a given *dharma*, explicitly excluding “the characteristics of another” (他相法). I therefore do not repeat that translation here; the point to retain is simply that the *āyatana*s serve as the canonical framework within which this “all” is delimited.

In the philosophical axiom *sarvam asti*, *sarvam* is closely connected with the concept of the twelve *āyatana*s, which represent a complete categorisation of all possible properties of *dharma*s.²¹ If the axiom *sarvam asti* were taken simply to express that “the twelve *āyatana*s exist”, then this axiom would offer limited metaphysical purchase, because the existence of the twelve *āyatana*s is already included in other propositions and needs no further assertion. A philosophical axiom should serve to better explain other propositions or provide a deeper foundation, not to repeat what is already inherent in them.

What *sarvam asti* adds, on the reading suggested by SAHŚ, is higher-order: it tells us that for each *dharma* there is a complete and exclusive bundle of predicates, exhaustively codified by the twelve *āyatana*s, and that nothing outside this bundle can truly belong to that *dharma*.

In other words, through *sarvam asti* the Sarvāstivādins are not asking whether the twelve *āyatana*s exist—that point is taken for granted. Rather, they are asking: what does it mean to say that *dharma*s “have all”? Evidently, this is a concern that squarely belongs to higher-order

²¹ 《雜阿毘曇心論》卷 11〈10 擇品〉：「此有是薩婆多所立。一切者，謂十二入。彼諸人有自相，非餘一切相，所作別故。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T28, no. 1552, p. 963a24–25)

*SAHŚ: “This ‘to have/*asti*’ is established by the Sarvāstivādins, and ‘all/*sarvam*’ refers to the twelve *āyatana*s. That is to say, what falls in the category of the twelve *āyatana*s has its intrinsic properties (as the complete set), and therefore does not have any other properties, because they do not reside in the same causal event.”

metaphysics. In concrete terms, when we claim that a *dharma* possesses the twelve *āyatana*s, what exactly does this axiom say about the structure of its predicates—what does it explain, and which further propositions does it underwrite?

This is where the Sarvāstivādins' handling of the copula becomes crucial. The “is/*asti*” of *sarvam asti* can be systematically rewritten as “has”. Here, “the *dharma* is complete” is equivalently transformed, through the concept of the twelve *āyatana*s, into “the *dharma* has all the properties categorised through the twelve *āyatana*s”.

In the latter part of the quotation, the *dharma* is metaphorically compared to a person. When a person enters a room where twelve mirrors are hung, he “has” twelve different images (corresponding to all his properties in different aspects). His real image is neither more nor less than these twelve images. Note that in this example, the person “has” twelve images, which highlights that the transformation of the copula from “is” to “has” in this context expresses the possession of properties rather than mere existence.

Furthermore, the passage discusses why the twelve *āyatana*s, central to understanding what a *dharma* is, are established with regard to a *dharma*. The answer is that they are established because a *dharma*'s inherent properties are endowed with different causal functions.

At this very early stage of philosophising, we can already see that *sarvam asti* makes three linked claims:

(1) Completeness of the object

Every conditioned *dharma* just *is* the total bundle of its own defining predicates; nothing about the thing lies outside that bundle, and nothing inside the bundle fails to belong to the thing. This is a higher-order thesis because it ranges over *all* properties a given subject can bear.

(2) Causal double aspect

Dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) guarantees completeness in two complementary ways. *External* (generative) conditions usher the *dharma* onto the stage, while *internal* (definitional) conditions ensure that, once arisen, the *dharma* must possess exactly

those predicates that constitute its nature. Genesis and necessitation are thus two sides of the same causal coin.

(3) Scope fixed by the twelve *āyatana*s

The Sarvāstivādins equate “all” (*sarvam*) with the twelve sense bases, treating them as the canonical inventory of every possible predicate. To say that a *dharma* “has all” therefore means that it instantiates every property falling—by right—within those twelve categories, and none that fall outside. Accordingly, the copula “is” can be rewritten as the possessive “has” without altering the metaphysical content.

From these premises flow the school’s key doctrines: the reciprocity of subject and predicate, the identification of causal explanation with analytic unpacking, and the ideal of unobstructed knowledge, which knows each *dharma* as the fully completed bundle of its properties.

2.1.2.2 The Realm of Properties and Predicates

With *asti* now clarified as a copula that licenses truth-apt predication—rather than as a mere first-order existence-verb—we can ask what, in *sarvam asti*, fixes the domain of what may be predicated. On the present reading, *sarvam* does not denote the totality of things in the universe; it designates, for each *dharma*, the complete range of predicates that belong to it by its own nature. Put schematically: *asti* supplies the logical form of the judgement (“S is P”) and its truth-apt status (*astitā*), whereas *sarvam* specifies how far the predicate-domain extends and how it is delimited. The Sarvāstivāda claim, then, is that a *dharma* is “complete” precisely in the sense that it is nothing over and above this fully determined, non-overlapping bundle of admissible predicates.

They proposed this axiom because they believed that understanding a *dharma* ultimately comes down to understanding what the *dharma* is. In other words, the centre of philosophical gravity shifts toward the realm of properties and predicates, since a *dharma* is disclosed—analytically—through what can and cannot be truly predicated of it. Moreover, focusing on the realm of properties and predicates—and the subsequent understanding

of them—can lead us to an understanding of objects and subjects precisely because the philosophical axiom *sarvam asti* guarantees and explains this relationship.

It is worth noting that the emphasis on the realm of properties and predicates has deep roots in the tradition of Buddhist philosophy. Therefore, before we proceed to analyse how the philosophical axiom *sarvam asti* was developed by the Sarvāstivādins in connection with the fundamental Buddhist doctrine of dependent origination, I would like to revisit the discussions on “completeness” and “complete instantiation of properties” in early Buddhist philosophy and pre-Vaibhāṣika literature. What follows is therefore not a digression, but a brief genealogy: it shows how early Buddhist idioms of “having completely” and Abhidharma reflections on “complete instantiation” supply the conceptual prehistory for the Sarvāstivāda reconfiguration of *sarvam* as a predicational notion.

The texts I will examine come from the *Paṭipannasutta* of the *Samyutta Nikāya*, the *Jñānaprasthāna* (JñPr, 阿毘達磨發智論), and the **Āryavasumitrabodhisattvasaṅgītisāstra* (**ĀVBSS*, 尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論).

It should be noted that discussions about the complete instantiation of properties first appeared in the context of the four stages of awakening. For example, in the *Paṭipannasutta*:

“Monks, there are these five faculties. What are the five? The faculty of faith (*saddhindriyaṃ*), the faculty of energy (*viriyindriyaṃ*), the faculty of mindfulness (*satindriyaṃ*), the faculty of concentration (*samādhindriyaṃ*), the faculty of wisdom (*paññindriyaṃ*)—these, monks, are the five faculties.

With the complete realisation (*samattā paripūrattā*) of these five faculties, one becomes an Arhant. With a lesser degree, one is on the path to the realisation of arahantship; with an even lesser degree, one becomes a non-returner; with an even lesser degree, one is on the path to the realisation of non-returning; with an even lesser degree, one becomes a once-returner; with an even lesser degree, one is on the path to the realisation of once-returning; with an even lesser degree, one becomes a stream-enterer; with an even lesser degree, one is on the path to the realisation of stream-entry. For those, monks, who completely do not have these five faculties altogether and in every way (*sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam natthi*), I declare that such a person stands as an outsider, on the side of the ordinary worldlings.”

pañcimāni, bhikkhave, indriyāni. katamāni pañca? saddhindriyaṃ ... pe ... paññindriyaṃ—imāni kho, bhikkhave, pañcindriyāni.

imesaṃ kho, bhikkhave, pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ samattā paripūrattā arahā hoti, tato mudutarehi arahattaphalasacchikiriyāya paṭipanno hoti, tato mudutarehi anāgāmī hoti, tato mudutarehi anāgāmīphalacchikiriyāya paṭipanno hoti, tato mudutarehi sakadāgāmī hoti, tato mudutarehi sakadāgāmīphalacchikiriyāya paṭipanno hoti, tato mudutarehi sotāpanno hoti, tato mudutarehi sotāpattiṃ phalacchikiriyāya paṭipanno hoti. yassa kho, bhikkhave, imāni pañcindriyāni sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam natthi, tamahaṃ ‘bāhiro puthujjanapakkhe ṭhito’ ti vadāmi. [Samyutta Nikāya 5.202]

It is evident that there is a distinction between the complete and incomplete realisation of the five faculties (*pañcannaṃ indriyānaṃ*), and even a state where they are entirely absent. Regarding those who have realised the *pañcindriyāni*, based on the degree of completeness—in other words, due to differences in the degree of completeness—they are distinguished into four kinds of results realised (*phalāsacchikiriyāya*): Arahant, non-returner, once-returner, and stream-enterer. Although the *Paṭipannasutta* points to degrees of realisation through the five faculties, the Sarvāstivādins later systematically incorporate this line of reasoning into a fully articulated doctrine of *sarvaṃ asti*—asserting that a *dharma* inherently holds all its definitional properties at once.

2.1.2.3 An Early Conception of *sabbaṃ*

A striking feature of the *Paṭipannasutta* is that “complete fulfilment” (*samattā paripūrattā*) is articulated through an idiom of *total absence*: “*yassa kho, bhikkhave, imāni pañcindriyāni sabbena sabbaṃ sabbathā sabbaṃ natthi ...*”. The formula is rhetorically negative, but conceptually it presupposes an affirmative standard: to have the five faculties “altogether” and “in every way” (*sabbena sabbaṃ sabbathā sabbaṃ*) would be to have them *without remainder*. In this setting, *atthi/natthi* functions most naturally as a copular–predicational hinge: it does not merely posit existence, but links the *obtaining* of a determinate set of features (“what one has, fully”) to a judgement about what one *is* (“what one counts as, as a realised person”).

Once this idiom is made explicit, it becomes possible to reconstruct the affirmative pattern that the *sutta*’s negative phrasing leaves implicit—roughly, “*sabbena sabbaṃ sabbathā sabbaṃ atthi*”, i.e. “it obtains completely, altogether and in every relevant respect.” As an early and still relatively uncompressed expression, it preserves nuances that the later Sarvāstivāda formula *sarvaṃ asti* will compress into two words; precisely for that reason it offers an excellent vantage-point for unpacking the later thesis.

The idiom is also philosophically instructive because it contains (at least) *two* distinguishable completeness-operators. “*sabbena sabbaṃ*” marks exhaustiveness *in extent*: the relevant faculty-set is present without remainder. “*sabbathā sabbaṃ*” marks exhaustiveness

across respects: the same totality must obtain in every respect under which the matter is properly assessed. Read this way, *sabbathā* functions as an open-textured marker of “completeness across respects”—a point that becomes strikingly explicit in BL 28, where *sarvam* is unpacked clause by clause along seven dimensions: temporality, locality, aspect, causal activity, mode, cause, and condition (*sarvakāla*, *sarvatra*, *sarvagareṇa*, *sarvakaraṇena*, *sarvabhava*, *sarvaheduha*, *sarvapracyeha*). In this light, *sarvam* can be heard as inheriting the force of “*sabbena sabbam sabbathā sabbam*”: not an unstructured universal, but the claim that what belongs to a thing’s nature must obtain exhaustively, and under the full range of respects under which that nature is intelligibly articulated.

It is precisely this pressure toward “completeness” that becomes philosophically sharpened in the JñPr, where the idiom is no longer embedded in a soteriological description but is turned into an explicit problem about inclusion between property sets:

As for the *dharma*s that *accomplish* a *sotāpanna*: does the fruit of *sotāpanna* encompass those *dharma*s? If the fruit of *sotāpanna* encompasses those *dharma*s, does the *sotāpanna* accomplish those *dharma*s? The same applies to the *sakadāgāmi*, the *anāgāmi*, and the Arahant.
 《阿毘達磨發智論》卷 7:「諸法成就須陀洹，是須陀洹果攝彼法耶？若須陀洹果攝彼法者，須陀洹成就彼法耶？斯陀含、阿那含、阿羅漢亦復如是。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T26, no. 1543, p. 798b25–27)

A brief note on translation is in order. The Chinese repeatedly uses *chengjiu* 成就 here. In the quotation above I translate it literally as “accomplish” (without building further analysis into the translation itself). In isolation this might suggest a generic “attainment,” but in the wake of the *Paṭipannasutta* idiom what is at stake is specifically *complete fulfilment* (*samattā paripūrattā*). Accordingly, the discussion that follows will treat the JñPr questions as operating over *determinate dharma-sets* and their inclusion-relation under 攝 (“encompass/contain”), rather than as a merely loose query about “realisation”.

The philosophical worry now becomes precise. If a practitioner reaches the fruit of *sotāpanna* because the factors constituting the path (*sotāpattimagga*) have been fully instantiated, then one might be tempted to infer that the fruit must “contain” (攝) those very factors. But if the fruit contains the path-factors in full, does the fruit thereby “complete-instantiate”

the path again? The question is not rhetorical: it exposes a real danger that a naïve reading of “completeness” will collapse the distinction between causal generation and definitional constitution, and thereby collapse the distinction between successive stages on the path.

2.1.2.4 The Differentiation of External and Internal Causation

If “completeness” were understood as unrestricted mutual inclusion between cause and effect, the JñPr problem would indeed become destructive: the fully realised fruit would immediately re-instantiate the property-set of the preceding path-stage, thereby reinstating that stage and undermining any genuine progression. This is exactly the sort of inference Sarvāstivādins must block. The decisive move is to differentiate two kinds of causal-explanatory linkage: (i) **external or generative causality**, which explains the arising of a new *dharma* from conditions; and (ii) **internal or definitional causality**, which explains the completion of a *dharma* as *being what it is* through the unfolding/instantiation of its own intrinsic predicates.²²

This differentiation is already visible in Vasumitra’s terse discussion:

Question: When *dharmas* are accomplished (成就), are their characteristics (*dharma-lakṣaṇas*, 法相) also accomplished? If the characteristics of *dharmas* are accomplished, are the *dharmas* accomplished?

Answer: If *dharmas* are accomplished, then their characteristics are accomplished; the manifold characteristics of others (外眾相) are not accomplished. If a *dharma*’s own characteristic (自相) is accomplished, then that *dharma* is accomplished..... the manifold characteristics of others are not accomplished. Only its own characteristic is accomplished.

《尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論》卷 9:「若諸法成就, 彼法相成就耶? 假使諸法相成就者, 彼法成就耶? 答曰: 若諸法成就者, 彼法相成就也, 外眾相不成就。若諸法自相成就, 彼法成就也.....外眾相不成就。彼法自相成就。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1549, p. 791c4–9)

The passage is compressed, but its structural point is clear once we distinguish two events that the Chinese idiom “成就” can blur if read too quickly. There is, first, the *arising* of a *dharma* (*utpāda* as an externally conditioned event); and there is, second, the *completion* of a *dharma* (成就 as the event of its coming to be fully what it is). The former is a matter of external conditions (what Vasumitra excludes as “the manifold characteristics of others”

²² Cf. Frauwallner, *The Philosophy of Buddhism*, 52–61.

(外眾相)); the latter is a matter of the *dharma*'s own intrinsic properties, i.e. the predicates inherent to its concept, which alone govern its definitional unfolding.²³

On this reading, “completeness” is not a licence for cross-stage backtracking. It is a thesis about *internal constitution*: once a *dharma* has arisen, it is fully what it is *through* the complete instantiation of its own intrinsic predicate-bundle. That is why Vasumitra can say, without contradiction, that a *dharma* is “accomplished” by its own *lakṣaṇa*-properties while explicitly excluding the “manifold characteristics of others”. “External” causality may generate the next *dharma*, but it does not enter the definitional bundle that constitutes what the newly arisen *dharma* is.

This resolves the JñPr worry. The complete instantiation of the path-factors (*sotā-pattimaggā*) can be the *external* causal basis for the arising of the fruit-dharma (*sotāpanna*), without implying that the fruit must, as part of its *internal* definition, “contain” the entire property-set of the path. What the fruit “contains” in the relevant metaphysical sense is instead its own intrinsic predicate-bundle; and it is the complete instantiation of that bundle that (internally) constitutes the fruit's being what it is, while its completion can (externally) condition the arising of the next stage (e.g. *sakadāgāmi*). Thus, the path–fruit series is governed by external generation, whereas the “being-so” of each stage is governed by internal completion.

Vasumitra finally expresses the internal notion of completion in a compact definition:

What does “accomplishment” mean? When its own characteristic corresponds (自相相應), this is called “accomplishment”.

《尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論》卷 9:「成就者, 其義云何? 自相相應, 是謂成就。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1549, p. 791c10)

²³ Cf. *Renben yusheng jing* 《人本欲生經》, tr. An Shigao (fl. c. 148–180 CE), the Chinese counterpart to the Pāli *Mahānidāna-sutta*. In *juan 1*, it records:

「生因緣, 阿難! 為老死, 是故說, 是為從是致有是」(CBETA 2025.R1, T01, no. 14, p. 242a17–18).

Birth (*jāti*), Ānanda, is the condition for ageing-and-death; therefore it is said: from this, that comes to be —the very fact of being-this makes it what it is.

Because the overwhelming majority of An Shigao's translations stem from Sarvāstivāda collections, we may plausibly infer that the presentation of dependent origination here, even if not explicitly labelled Sarvāstivāda, is coloured throughout by that school's distinctive metaphysical outlook. I am grateful to Ché Alejandro for bringing this passage to my attention.

Here “自相相應” can be read as naming the predicate-theoretic core of “completeness”: the *dharma* (subject) and its intrinsic properties (predicates) are matched without remainder. In other words, when fully realised, a *dharma* is nothing over and above exactly this *svabhāva*-determined bundle of intrinsic predicates, and this bundle is nothing over and above that very *dharma* (when fully instantiated). The “completeness” thesis is thus a thesis about the internal fixity of subject and predicate, not a thesis that collapses successive *dharmanas* into one another.

In Vaibhāṣika technical vocabulary, such bidirectional fixity is often expressed as “determination” (*avadhāraṇa*/決定). Crucially, the *AMVŚ insists that the *sūtric* idiom “法住法性” is to be understood as a doctrine of determination rather than a doctrine of the unconditioned (“法住法性是決定義，非無為義”). It then glosses “determination” through a paradigmatic causal pairing: “whether the Buddha arises in the world or not, ignorance is determinately the cause of formations, and formations are determinately the fruit of ignorance” (“無明決定是諸行因，諸行決定是無明果”).

What matters here is the structural point: “決定” names a linkage that is fixed in both directions. I suggest that this Vaibhāṣika notion provides the closest indigenous analogue to what, in a modern idiom, we would call a mutual necessary-and-sufficient relation—and it is precisely such determinate linking that makes the copular truth operator *asti* philosophically serviceable in Sarvāstivāda predication.

Since we ordinary people lack the Buddha’s immediate analytic access to *dharmanas* as subjects, our epistemic route typically proceeds from the side of predicates: we stabilise what a *dharma* is by grasping the intrinsic properties that can be truthfully attributed to it. In that context, to ask “What is a *dharma*?” is to ask for the complete predicate-bundle that constitutes it when instantiated. The truth-value of such knowledge is grounded precisely in the claim that, when a *dharma* is complete, subject and intrinsic predicates stand in a fixed, mu-

tually constraining relation. This metaphysical thesis, once refined and compressed by the Sarvāstivādins, is expressed in the formula *sarvam asti*.²⁴

This yields the distinction that governs the next step of the argument: a *dharma* is complete not by inheriting the properties of its causes, but by fully instantiating its own *svabhāva*-grounded predicate-bundle. The task now is to show how this distinction is integrated into a broader account of dependent origination.

2.1.3 External/Generative and Internal/Definitional Causality

The point at issue is now more precise: what it means for dependent origination to govern both the coming-to-be of *dharms* and the way in which a *dharma* is determinately (決定) what it is.

In the case of conditioned *dharms*, both their external causal relationships with other *dharms* and their internal, *svabhāva*-grounded unfolding—i.e. the determinacy with which a *dharma* is nothing over and above its complete intrinsic predicate-bundle—are conditioned by *pratīyasamutpāda*.²⁵ Thus, *pratīyasamutpāda* serves as the metaphysical structure of the world, structuring and thereby defining how phenomena are causally interconnected and emerge in relation to one another. In other words, conditioned *dharms* are explained through *pratīyasamutpāda*.

For Buddhist philosophy, to understand what a *dharma* is is equivalent to comprehending both (i) its external causal relations with (ideally all) other *dharms* and (ii) its internal causal relation between the *dharma* as a subject and (ideally all) its properties as predicates, whose instantiation is treated as “necessary-and-sufficient” (決定) once the *dharma* arises. (Here “subject” and “predicate” name analytic positions within Abhidharma explanation, not an ontological split between a bearer and its attributes.) This causal–metaphysical scheme is well known as one of Buddhism’s most fundamental doctrines.²⁶

²⁴ In § 4.2.2, we will discuss in detail how the Sarvāstivādins interpret the meaning and function of *asti* as “*yukta*” (literally meaning “copulating”).

²⁵ Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 164–165.

²⁶ Saṃghabhadra differentiated *sāmarthya* from *kāritra*: the former, possessed by past and future *dharms*, causes the generation of other entities, while the latter, possessed by present *dharms*, triggers only internal causality. (CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1562, p. 631c11–14.) See Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 158–

However, this leaves one question unanswered: what is the metaphysical status of *pratītyasamutpāda* itself? Through what kind of proposition can we understand dependent origination, rather than merely using it to understand everything else? As will be shown, *pratītyasamutpāda* can be rendered self-explanatory once *sarvam asti* is read not as a first-order existential slogan, but as a higher-order thesis that articulates the completeness/determinacy required for dependent origination to govern both external generation and internal predicational necessitation.

2.1.3.1 Establishing *pratītyasamutpāda* as a Self-explanatory Principle Through *sarvam asti*

If Buddhist philosophy could not show dependent origination to be self-explanatory, then dependent origination would itself have to be explained by appeal to some further principle, generating an explanatory regress. Early Buddhism had already achieved a major philosophical advance by explaining other *dharma*s through dependent origination and by thereby furnishing a causal-metaphysical framework for the world. For the Ābhīdharmikas, however, a further task remained: to show how dependent origination itself is intelligible within the same metaphysical grammar. Only then could the Buddhist conceptual world constructed around dependent origination count as explanatorily secure.²⁷ As we shall see, the Sarvāstivādins seek to show that dependent origination is self-explanatory, and reflexively applicable in its *dharmic* presentation, because its essential property is completeness.

On the present reconstruction, once dependent origination is treated in object-mode as a *dharmic* presentation, the axiom *sarvam asti* requires that it be complete.²⁸ In this sense, *sarvam asti* does not stand beside *pratītyasamutpāda* as a second principle. It articulates, at

159. See also Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 142–144. Note that Cox translated *kāritra* as “activity” and *sāmarthya* as “capability”.

²⁷ For contemporary defences of self-explanatory principles that avoid vicious regress, see Yannic Kappes, “Self-Explanation and Empty-Base Explanation”, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 8, no. 3 (Fall 2022): 436–453; for the role of a terminating explanatory principle, see Alexander R. Pruss, *The Principle of Sufficient Reason: A Reassessment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 41–43.

²⁸ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 24:「造作增長者，顯示此業發起圓滿，從煩惱生，能得果故。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 125b12–14)

*AMVŚ: “‘Causation and unfolding’ indicates that this *karma*, arising into completeness, namely, brought into being through the defilements, is able to bear its result.”

a higher-order level, the completeness that the Vaibhāṣikas take to be internal to dependent origination itself. The very completeness that dependent origination secures for conditioned *dharma*s applies reflexively to its own *dharmic* presentation.²⁹ This is why the same order that secures external generation also secures the internal or definitional unfolding by which a *dharma* is what it is and can therefore become the subject of truth-apt predication.³⁰

A worry about circularity should be addressed here. The order of dependence is explicative rather than generative. I am not arguing that *sarvam asti* first produces dependent origination as an external premise and then appeals back to it for support. Rather, *pratītyasamutpāda* names the causal order itself, while *sarvam asti* articulates the completeness-condition under which that order is intelligible as a field of true predication. Once dependent origination is considered in object-mode for predicative analysis, the same completeness-condition applies reflexively to that *dharmic* presentation as well; the formal counterpart of this move is given in Appendix A, especially §A.0.1 and A.6. The resulting circle is therefore hermeneutic and reflexive, not viciously probative: it makes explicit a closure internal to one system rather than deriving one independent principle from another.

A passage in Vasumitra’s *PrP* is especially instructive:

「因緣法云何? 謂一切法。非因緣法云何? 謂如是法求不可得, 以一切法是因緣故。有因緣法云何? 謂一切有為法。無因緣法云何? 謂無為法。」(CBETA 2025.R3, T26, no. 1542, p. 716b15–18)

If we restore the underlying Indic vocabulary, the dialogue can be reconstructed as follows:

²⁹ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「彼既有為。緣起亦爾。謂五蘊等自相決定說如是言。緣起亦依因果決定。」(CBETA 2025.R1, T27, no. 1545, p. 116c19–20)

*AMVŚ: “Since they (the five aggregates) are conditioned, so too is *pratītyasamutpāda*. The five aggregates are spoken of in this way because of the necessary and sufficient instantiation of their inherent properties, and *pratītyasamutpāda* is similarly spoken of because of the necessity and sufficiency of causality.” In the present reconstruction, such claims are read as applying to the object-mode or *dharmic* presentation of dependent origination, not to the governing principle *qua* law.

³⁰ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 78:「復次生有二種: 一有自性故名為生; 二從緣起故名為生。有自性故名為生者, 生言顯體非滅壞義。從緣起故名為生者, 生言欲顯從緣起義。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 401a28–b2)

*AMVŚ: “Moreover, ‘coming into being’ has two kinds of explanation. First, it is named ‘coming into being’ because it has its own intrinsic nature. Second, it is named ‘coming into being’ because it arises in dependence on conditions. ‘It is named “coming into being” because it has its own intrinsic nature’ means that the word ‘coming into being’ manifests the entity itself, implying that it is not deteriorated. ‘It is named “coming into being” because it arises in dependence on conditions’ means that the word ‘coming into being’ is intended to reveal the meaning of arising from conditions.”

What is *pratītyasamutpāda-dharma*? *sarva-dharma*. What is a non-*pratītyasamutpāda-dharma*? Such a *dharma* is “unfindable” (求不可得), because *sarva-dharma* already coincides with *pratītyasamutpāda*. What is *pratītyasamutpanna-dharma*? *sarva-saṃskṛta-dharma*. What is a non-*pratītyasamutpanna-dharma*? *asaṃskṛta-dharma*.

On the present reading—guided by BL 28—*sarva* in this exchange should not be heard merely as a quantitative “all,” but as the qualitative requirement of completeness that belongs to a *dharma qua dharma*. The dialogue therefore amounts to saying: what is *pratītyasamutpāda-dharma*? It is *sarva*—not “all” as a mere totality, but *sarva* as completeness. If something were not *pratītyasamutpāda-dharma* in this sense, it would be incomplete. But in Sarvāstivāda metaphysical grammar, an incomplete *dharma* is not a possible *dharma*: a “*dharma*” without a determinate *svabhāva*—and hence without a complete definitional profile—is simply not a *dharma*. This is why “non-*pratītyasamutpāda-dharma*” is said to be “unfindable” (求不可得): the very positing of an incomplete *dharma* undermines the category “*dharma*” it claims to instantiate.

Read in this way, *pratītyasamutpāda-dharma* can be glossed as definitional completeness: whatever counts as a *dharma* is, by that very fact, something that can be placed within the same analytic grammar of definition, predication, and truth-apt articulation. This also explains why *asaṃskṛtadharmas* are included under *pratītyasamutpāda-dharma* in the first line of the passage. Although unconditioned *dharmas* such as *ākāśa* or *pratisaṃkhyānirodha* do not undergo birth and cessation, they are nevertheless complete in *svabhāva*: they are fixed and fully determined by their definitions (e.g. “non-obstruction,” “disconnection/離繫”), and in this definitional sense they stand on a par with conditioned *dharmas* as items that are fully articulable as what they are.

The second pair then introduces a further distinction: *pratītyasamutpanna-dharma* is identified with *sarva-saṃskṛta-dharma*. Here *pratītyasamutpanna* marks not definitional completeness but eventive instantiation: the *dharmas* that “arise dependently” in the strict sense are precisely those that enter an episode of arising and ceasing. *Asaṃskṛtadharmas* are “non-*pratītyasamutpanna*” because they do not undergo “arising”; the contrast does not deny their

completeness as *dharma*s, but simply locates them outside the eventive domain that “arisen dependently” designates.

This becomes clearer if we set this causal passage alongside a parallel argument in the sixth chapter of the *PrP*, framed in epistemic vocabulary:

What *dharma*s are those that are completely known by wisdom (*jñānaparijñāta*)? They are all *dharma*s, because all *dharma*s are precisely what wisdom ought to know. What *dharma*s are those that are not completely known by wisdom? No such *dharma* can be found, because there is no *dharma* that is not to be known by wisdom.

《阿毘達磨品類足論》卷 6〈6 辯攝等品〉：「智遍知所遍知法云何？謂一切法皆是智遍知所應知故。非智遍知所遍知法云何？謂如是法求不可得，無法非智所應知故。」(CBETA 2025.R3, T26, no. 1542, p. 715b6–8)

Here again, the only stable universal claim is that “all *dharma*s” fall under the relevant head, while the contrary—“a *dharma* that is not to be known”—is declared “unfindable.” Placed side by side, the two arguments have the same shape: both secure a universal scope (“all *dharma*s”) and treat the negation (“non-*X dharma*”) as self-defeating and hence “unfindable.” This parallel suggests that the universality of *pratītyasamutpāda* is not exhausted by external generation. Rather, *pratītyasamutpāda* functions as the principle under which the very domain of *dharma*s is rendered intelligible and articulable at all. For conditioned *dharma*s, this includes both the external or generative strand and the internal or definitional strand; for unconditioned *dharma*s, it concerns the definitional strand alone.

Seen from this angle, *sarvam asti* is not introduced as a second, independent principle “beyond” dependent origination. It articulates what must already be the case if dependent origination is to do the work that the *PrP* presupposes it does: namely, that *dharma*s falling under its scope are complete in the internal or definitional sense, so that what a *dharma* is is fixed and can be rendered in truth-apt predication. From the perspective of metaphysical construction, the completeness internal to dependent origination is twofold: where generation is in view, it secures the external nexus by which conditioned *dharma*s arise; where definition is in view, it secures the internal necessitation by which a *dharma* is what it is. Because *dharma*s are complete, any genuine predication of what a *dharma* is has a fixed truth-condition, and in that precise sense its truth is analytic—a point to be elaborated below in §2.4.

In summary, from the perspective of *pratītyasamutpāda*, completeness signifies not only the interconnectedness and generation of conditioned things in the world, but also the intelligibility of *dharma*s as such, such that each can be stated in a truth-apt way as what it is. From the perspective of other *dharma*s, completeness means that, on the one hand, from the arising of one conditioned *dharma* we can map the causal nexus woven by other *dharma*s; and, on the other hand, in being what it is, each *dharma* instantiates its full definitional profile without remainder. *Pratītyasamutpāda*'s foundational role in Sarvāstivāda philosophy is thus clarified rather than supplemented by *sarvam asti*: completeness makes explicit how dependent origination secures both causal explanation and truth-apt predication.

2.1.3.2 The Metaphysical Structure of Causality

We will now look more closely at the metaphysical structure of causality. *pratītyasamutpāda* is the cardinal *dharma* that serves as the foundation for understanding the relationships among all other *dharma*s, establishing their causal interconnectedness.³¹ When *pratītyasamutpāda* actualises all of its properties, it does so by causally conditioning all the *dharma*s. This means that all relationships among *dharma*s in the world are ultimately causal relationships; all *dharma*s are causally interconnected. Therefore, the genesis of any *dharma* is inherently dependent on the cosmic network of causality, which is interwoven with all other *dharma*s, highlighting their mutual interconnectedness. This is an external/generative aspect of the “completeness” of *pratītyasamutpāda*. In other words, because *pratītyasamutpāda* is complete, the relationships among all *dharma*s—particularly the pre-conditioned relationship between the appearance of a *dharma* and the causality woven by all other *dharma*s—are entirely and solely explained through *pratītyasamutpāda*.

³¹ For recent scholarly work on the historical development of Buddhist theories of causality from a pan-Buddhist perspective, see Phyllis Granoff, “Chance and Causality: Of Crows, Palm Trees, God and Salvation”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 46, no. 3 (2018): 399–418; Mattia Salvini, “Dependent Arising, Non-arising, and the Mind: MMK 1 and the Abhidharma”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42, no. 4–5 (2014): 471–497; Pradeep P. Gokhale, “Buddhist Approaches to Impermanence: Phenomenal and Noumenal”, *Religions* 12, no. 12 (2021): 1081; and Jan Westerhoff, “Does Causation Entail Emptiness? On a Point of Dispute between Abhidharma and Madhyamaka”, *Asian Journal of Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (2023): 1–18. In particular, Westerhoff's article, which highlights the emphasis on *svabhāva* in Abhidharma in relation to its understanding of causality, resonates with my own emphasis on the “completeness” of *dharma* in Sarvāstivāda philosophy.

Furthermore, *pratītyasamutpāda*, or the law of causality, has an internal/definitional aspect as well. When *pratītyasamutpāda* actualises itself by causally conditioning all *dharma*s, it makes a *dharma*'s being what it is a causal event: after a *dharma* emerges, the way in which it is fixed as this very *dharma*—its *dharma*tā (法性)—is not accidental but determinate (決定), and thus truth-aptly articulable. More precisely, after a *dharma* emerges, it proceeds to actualise the predicates that articulate what it is, and this process is also conditioned by *pratītyasamutpāda*. In other words, what a *dharma* is is also entirely and solely explained through *pratītyasamutpāda*.

In the Sarvāstivādins' own discourse, the discussion about the relationship among *pratītyasamutpāda*, “completeness”, and “necessity and sufficiency”³² is also recorded in *AMVŚ. Notably, the conceptual tools used by the Sarvāstivādins to discuss this set of philosophical propositions are the categories “conditioned *dharma*” and “unconditioned *dharma*”. Given the importance of this discussion, we provide the full translation:

pratītyasamutpāda is an unconditioned *dharma*—so hold the Vibhajyavādins.

Question: On what grounds do they hold this view?

Answer: On the grounds of a *sūtra*. For a *sūtra* says: “Whether the Tathāgata arises in the world or not, a *dharma* abides in its own *dharma*tā (法住法性).” The Buddha himself fully awakened to it, and for the sake of others he revealed it and explained it in detail. Therefore, they conclude that dependent origination is an unconditioned *dharma*.

In order to stop that position, it is made clear that dependent origination is a conditioned *dharma*, because it falls within the three times; and no unconditioned *dharma* falls within the three times.

Question: If the *dharma* of dependent origination is not unconditioned, how should we interpret the *sūtra* they cite?

Answer: The *sūtra* is speaking of the meaning of determination (決定) in cause and fruit. Whether the Buddha arises in the world or not, ignorance is determinately (決定) the cause of formations, and formations are determinately the fruit of ignorance; and so on, up to: birth is determinately the cause of ageing-and-death, and ageing-and-death are determinately the fruit of birth. “A *dharma* abides in its own *dharma*tā” is the meaning of determination, not the meaning of the unconditioned. This is the *sūtra*'s intent.

If it were not so, then the *sūtra* would also say: “Whether the Tathāgata arises in the world or not, a *dharma* abides in its own *dharma*tā: form is invariably form-characteristic, up to consciousness invariably consciousness-characteristic; earth is invariably solidity-characteristic, up to wind invariably motion-characteristic; *harītakī* is invariably bitter in taste; and *kaṭukarohiṇī* is invariably pungent in taste.” Would it follow that the five aggregates and the like are also unconditioned? Since they are conditioned, dependent origination is likewise.

The five aggregates and the like are spoken of in this way because their own characteristics are determinate (自相決定), and dependent origination is likewise spoken of in reliance on the de-

³² Jeffrey D. Watts, “Necessity and Sufficiency in the Buddha’s Causal Schema”, *Philosophy East and West* 32, no. 4 (1982): 407–423. Watts explores the logical structure of necessity and sufficiency in Buddhist causal thought.

termination of causality (因果決定). This treatise is composed in order to stop such heterodox graspings and to make manifest correct reasoning.³³

The dispute here turns on how to read the *sūtric* formula “法住法性.” The Vibhajyavādins take the sentence “whether the Tathāgata arises in the world or not” to suggest that *pratītyasamutpāda* stands beyond causal conditioning; hence they conclude that dependent origination is an unconditioned *dharma*. The *Mahāvibhāṣā*, however, blocks this inference by insisting that the *sūtra* is not speaking of the unconditioned at all, but of determination (決定; *avadhāraṇa*).

What is crucial for the present argument is the way 決定 is glossed in the text: it is first articulated through a paradigmatic causal pairing—“ignorance is determinately the cause of formations, and formations are determinately the fruit of ignorance.” The point is not that a single factor is sufficient to produce an effect in isolation, but that, within the explanatory grammar of dependent origination, causal *roles* are fixed in both directions: to identify ignorance *as* the relevant cause in this nexus is thereby to identify formations *as* its corresponding fruit, and conversely. In this limited but philosophically important sense, 決定 functions as the closest Vaibhāṣika analogue to a mutual necessary-and-sufficient correspondence—an “if-and-only-if” linking of *causal roles* (cause↔fruit), rather than a thesis of strict event-by-event determinism.

The *Mahāvibhāṣā* then immediately extends the same form of fixity to the level of self-characteristics (自相決定): form is invariably form-characteristic, earth solidity-characteristic, wind motion-characteristic, and so on. Taken together, these two deployments of 決定 show what “a *dharma* abides in its own *dharmatā*” is doing for Abhidharma analysis: it secures a two-way constraint that fixes both (i) a *dharma*’s place within the causal nexus (因果決定) and (ii) its definitional profile as what it is (自相決定). And it is precisely

³³ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「緣起是無為，如分別論者。問：彼因何故作如是執？答：彼因經故。謂契經說：如來出世若不出世，法住法性。佛自等覺為他開示乃至廣說。故知緣起是無為法。為止彼宗顯示緣起是有為法，墮三世故，無無為法墮在三世。問：若緣起法非無為者，如何會釋彼所引經？答：經說因果決定義故。謂佛出世若不出世，無明決定是諸行因，諸行決定是無明果。如是乃至生決定是老死因，老死決定是生果。法住法性是決定義，非無為義。經意如是。若不爾者，契經亦說：如來出世若不出世，法住法性：色常色相，乃至識常識相；地常堅相，乃至風常動相；喝梨德鷄常是苦味，羯竹迦盧呬尼常是辛味。豈五蘊等亦是無為？彼既有為，緣起亦爾。謂五蘊等自相決定說如是言。緣起亦依因果決定，作如是說。為止如是他宗異執顯示正理故作斯論。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 116c5–22)

this bidirectional fixity that makes Sarvāstivāda predication philosophically serviceable: once a *dharma* has arisen, what can be truthfully predicated of it is not optional but fixed by its own nature, so that *asti* can function as a truth-conditional copula for analytic claims. In this way, 法住法性, read as 決定, provides the metaphysical form of mutual entailment that the Sarvāstivādins later compress into the axiom *sarvam asti*: completeness as the determinate instantiation of a *dharma*'s own admissible predicate-domain.

The Vibhajyavādins interpret this proposition to mean that such a *dharma* is unconditioned. Their chain of reasoning can be reconstructed as follows:

- P1** The *sūtra* states that, whether or not the Tathāgata arises in the world, the relevant *dharma* “abides in its own *dharma*tā”—i.e. it obtains independently of the Buddha’s appearance and disclosure.
- P2** What obtains in this way is not produced by causes and conditions; it therefore belongs to the domain of the **unconditioned**.
- C** Therefore, *pratīyasamutpāda* must be an unconditioned *dharma*.

In short, for the Vibhajyavādins, the most natural way to explain a *dharma*'s abiding in its own *dharma*tā is to take this abiding to signal that the relevant *dharma* is not produced by causes and conditions—hence, that it is unconditioned. Because the *sūtra* states that this holds “whether the Tathāgata arises in the world or not,” they treat 法住法性 as pointing beyond the conditioned causal stream to a standing principle that is not itself causally conditioned.

The Sarvāstivādins, however, reject this inference. They argue that “a *dharma* abides in its own *dharma*tā” does not imply unconditionedness; rather, it expresses determination (決定; *avadhāraṇa*). Their reasoning is straightforward: the *sūtra*'s point is that, whether the Buddha arises or not, the causal nexus holds in a determinate way—“無明決定是諸行因, 諸行決定是無明果,” and so on. Here 決定 does not mark an extra-causal invariance, but a bidirectional fixing of *causal roles* within dependent origination (cause↔fruit): to fix

ignorance *as* the relevant cause in this nexus is thereby to fix formations *as* its corresponding fruit, and conversely.

More importantly, for the Sarvāstivādins, the “fixedness” expressed by 法住法性 is not an escape from causality but a way of reading causality correctly. This is why *AMVŚ immediately adds that the five aggregates and the like are spoken of “in this way” because their own characteristics are determinate (自相決定), and that dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) itself is spoken of “in this way” because cause and fruit are determinate (因果決定). In other words, what the Vibhāṣīyādins treat as a mark of the unconditioned, the Sarvāstivādins treat as a mark of determinacy that operates both externally (cause↔fruit) and internally (自相決定, grounded in *svabhāva*). Therefore, *pratītyasamutpāda* is not unconditioned; rather, it is a conditioned *dharma* that falls within the three stages of causation, and the *sūtra*’s formula is to be read as articulating the determinacy that obtains *within* causal law, not the unconditioned.

2.1.3.3 The *avyabhicārin* Relation Between *pratītyasamutpāda* and *dharma*

In Sarvāstivāda philosophy, particularly within the Vaibhāṣika tradition, completeness and causality can look like two distinct axioms. However, as the foregoing discussion has shown, the axiom *sarvam asti* is introduced precisely in order to make explicit what is already at work within *pratītyasamutpāda* itself—namely, the completeness and determinacy required for dependent origination to be self-explanatory. At the metaphysical level, these two “axioms” converge on the same structure: a *dharma* is nothing over and above the complete field of what can be truthfully predicated of it, and this field is fixed by its own *svabhāva* (its *dharma*tā, 法性). In Vaibhāṣika terms, this fixity is expressed as determination (決定): what a *dharma* is, and what can be said of it as what it is, stand in a mutually necessary-and-sufficient relation.

A clarification is needed here. The necessity and sufficiency claimed in this dissertation holds at the level of causal-role specification within the dependent origination schema, not at the level of individual event-tokens. To identify ignorance as the relevant cause in a given nexus is thereby to identify formations as its corresponding effect, and vice versa. This does

not entail that any single token of ignorance, taken in isolation, exhausts the concrete conditions for any single token of formations. Rather, the point is that within the explanatory grammar of *pratītyasamutpāda*, causal roles are fixed in both directions: what counts as “the cause” and what counts as “the effect” are reciprocally determined—*avyabhicāra*/決定—and it is this reciprocal determination that the term “mutually necessary and sufficient” is used to capture throughout this dissertation.

At this stage of philosophical development, the Sarvāstivādins therefore clarify “completeness” in terms of determination (決定), thereby sharpening their philosophical stance and laying the foundation for further developments concerning analytic truth and truth-apt predication. The very name “Sarvāstivādin” reflects their insistence that *sarva* be read not as a flat totality but as the metaphysical requirement of completeness that makes Abhidharma analysis possible.

In summary, the completeness of *pratītyasamutpāda* is manifested in two key ways:

Explanation of Appearance (external/generative): Its operation fully accounts for the process by which each conditioned *dharma* appears—i.e. it explains how *saṃskṛta dharmas* arise and cease through causal relations.

Explanation of Essence (internal/definitional): It fully accounts for how each *dharma* is fixed as what it is—i.e. how a *dharma* abides in its own *dharma*tā (法住法性) in the sense of being determinate (決定), so that its definitional unfolding into its own predicates is not optional or accidental but necessary-and-sufficient once the *dharma* has arisen.

Additionally, the statement “*pratītyasamutpāda* is complete” means that its operation is entirely manifested in these two dimensions: the appearance of conditioned *dharmas* and the determinacy by which *dharmas* are what they are. There is no further operation “behind” these events. *pratītyasamutpāda*, as the law-like nexus of conditioning, is fully expressed in the generation of conditioned *dharmas* and in the internal/definitional unfolding that makes each *dharma* truth-aptly articulable as this very *dharma*.

By analysing the arising of each conditioned *dharma*, we can in principle trace the causal network woven by other *dharmanas*. This comprehensive grasp marks the ideal horizon of Abhidharma understanding and, in soteriological terms, the condition for Buddhahood. Similarly, by examining how each *dharma* is determinately what it is—how it “abides in its own *dharmanatā*” in the sense of determination (決定)—we gain deeper insight into the internal/definitional side of causal structure, where causal explanation and analytic articulation coincide.

In total, because the law of causality completely pre-conditions both (i) the relationships among *dharmanas* and (ii) what each *dharma* is, these relationships and the nature of each *dharma* can and must be explained through *pratītyasamutpāda*.³⁴ At the same time, because the nature of *pratītyasamutpāda* is completely manifested in the very events whereby it pre-conditions these relationships and fixes *dharmanas* as what they are, to understand what the law of causality is, we must and can only analyse those relationships and that determinacy.

Therefore, understanding dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and understanding *dharma* are mutually necessary and sufficient conditions. Hence, the Buddha taught: “*yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati*” (“He who sees dependent origination sees *dharma*; he who sees *dharma* sees dependent origination”). This teaching is often taken as a general remark and its logical inner structure is frequently overlooked, with the two clauses treated as a mere rhetorical repetition. However, once the Sarvāstivāda reconstruction is in place—where “seeing *dharma*” means grasping the determinate completeness that makes predication truth-apt, and “seeing dependent origination” means grasping the causal-explanatory nexus that fixes both arising and definitional unfolding—the loop is no longer a tautology but a rigorous biconditional. It shows that the Buddha intended to present the two as mutually necessary and sufficient.³⁵

³⁴ Cf. Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, 56–59.

³⁵ In the later Mahāyāna movement, this teaching was altered to: “*yo, bhikṣavaḥ, pratītyasamutpādaṃ paśyati sa dharmam paśyati; yo dharmam paśyati sa buddham paśyati*”. (see *Sālistambasūtra*, ed. La Vallée Poussin (1913), 69.) This alteration changes the entire logical loop. In the original teaching, understanding dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and understanding *dharma* formed necessary and sufficient conditions for each other. Therefore, *dharma* is complete—because all the attributes that *dharma* possesses are entirely due to dependent origination, and dependent origination is completely embodied in all the attributes that

Through the discussion above, we have seen that the Sarvāstivādins, by interpreting the metaphysical implication of *sarvam* as completeness (and by reading 法住法性 as a doctrine of determination rather than a doctrine of the unconditioned), explain the relationship between *pratīyasamutpāda* and *dharma* in a more systematic way and thereby establish the mutually necessary and sufficient interrelationship between understanding *pratīyasamutpāda* and understanding *dharma*. In this context, the Abhidharma philosophical movement can be seen as an extension of the claim that “seeing *dharma* is seeing dependent origination,” since its guiding question is precisely to analyse what *dharma* is (*dharmapraṇicaya*). More importantly, the Sarvāstivādins construct a continuous path from metaphysics through logic to soteriology: by analysing *dharma*—as what is determinately and completely articulable—one understands dependent origination, and thereby advances toward liberation.³⁶

2.1.4 Echoes in Early Mahāyāna Buddhism

It is worth noting that the idea of “*dharma* is complete” is precisely preserved in one of the earliest Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*, particularly in the doctrine concerning the **ten suchnesses**.³⁷ In the chapter of *Upāyakaṣāya*, the following is stated:

唯佛與佛乃能究盡諸法實相，所謂諸法如是相，如是性，如是體，如是力，如是作，如是因，如是緣，如是果，如是報，如是本末究竟等。

《妙法蓮華經》卷1〈2方便品〉(CBETA 2024.R2, T09, no. 262, p. 5c9–13)

Only the Buddha and (future) Buddhas can fully fathom all *dharma*s as they are (實相), namely: such a characteristic, such a nature, such a substance, such a power, such a function, such a cause, such a condition, such an effect, such a retribution, and such an ultimate consistency from beginning to end.

In Kumārajīva’s translation quoted here, I render “實相” as an *as-they-are* demand on cognition and predication—i.e. in a *yathābhūta*-sense—rather than as an invitation to posit

dharma possesses. Thus, by understanding *dharma*, we can understand dependent origination. However, Mahāyāna Buddhism’s revision of this teaching breaks this logical loop. Understanding dependent origination becomes merely a sufficient condition for understanding *dharma*; the two are no longer mutually necessary and sufficient conditions. Consequently, for Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is neither the need nor the possibility to derive the metaphysical principle that “*dharma* is complete”.

³⁶ Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 587–588. Dhammajoti explains that in Sarvāstivāda thought, the path of insight (*prajñā*) is not merely cognitive clarity but an active force leading to liberation (*vimuktimārga*).

³⁷ For the relationship between the Sarvāstivāda school and early Mahāyāna, see Akira Hirakawa, “The Rise of Mahāyāna Buddhism and Its Relationship to the Worship of Stupas”, *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, the Oriental Library* 22 (1963): 57–106; and Johannes Bronkhorst, “Abhidharma in Early Mahāyāna”, in *Setting Out on the Great Way: Essays on Early Mahāyāna Buddhism* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox, 2018), 119–140.

some hidden metaphysical “aspect” behind appearances. On this reading, the ensuing list divides what it is to know a *dharma* as it is into ten headings: characteristic (相), nature (性), substance/body (體), power (力), function (作), cause (因), condition (緣), effect (果), retribution (報), and consummation/consistency-from-beginning-to-end (本末究竟等).³⁸ This list is best read not as ten detachable “parts” added onto a substrate, but as ten predicational headings under which a *dharma* can be exhaustively articulated; it therefore resonates directly with the Sarvāstivāda claim that a *dharma* just is its complete bundle of truth-apt predicates, and that “completeness” is a matter of leaving no remainder in analytic articulation. In other words (interpretatively), a *dharma* can be said to “have” these ten aspects—not as accidental add-ons, but as ten principal respects under which its complete predicate-bundle is unfolded.

It is well known that Kumārajīva’s translation was most likely based on a version of the *Lotus Sūtra* from the Middle Indo-Aryan language family, which differs significantly from the extant Sanskrit version.³⁹ For instance, in the passage concerning the ten suchnesses, the Sanskrit text lists only five categories. However, we can still observe here a sophisticated restatement by early Mahāyāna philosophers of the Sarvāstivāda idea that to know a *dharma* is to know all its properties that can be attributed with truth to it:

sarvadharmān api tathāgata eva jānāti | ye ca te dharmā yathā ca te dharmā yādṛśās ca te dharmā yallakṣaṇās ca te dharmā yatsvabhāvās ca te dharmāḥ | ye ca yathā ca yādṛśās ca yallakṣaṇās ca yatsvabhāvās ca te dharmā iti |⁴⁰

Only the Tathāgata knows *dharmas* in the complete sense: what these *dharmas* are (*ye*), in what manner they are (*yathā*), of what kind they are (*yādṛśāḥ*), of what characteristics they possess (*yallakṣaṇāḥ*), and of what essential nature they are (*yatsvabhāvāḥ*).

From the Sanskrit text, it becomes clearer that, first and foremost, only the Tathāgata can know a *dharma* with all its predicates. However, we can still ask: what exactly does the Buddha know when he knows a *dharma* with all its predicates? The text provides an

³⁸ I translate 體 as “substance/body” to stay close to the Chinese. The point is not to posit a bearer over and above predicates, but to name one respect under which a *dharma* is articulated.

³⁹ Regarding the discrepancy between Kumārajīva’s translation and the Sanskrit original, see Jean-Noël Robert, “On a Possible Origin of the ‘Ten Suchnesses’ List in Kumārajīva’s Translation of the *Lotus Sūtra*” (Kokusai Bukkyōgaku Daigakuin Daigaku, 2011), 54–72.

⁴⁰ Yasutomo Nishi, *Saddharmapundarīka: Kern-Nanjio’s Edition in Roman Script with Complementary Footnotes* (Chuo Academic Research Institute of Risho Kosei-kai), 30.

answer: the term *sarva* encapsulates the Buddha’s knowledge of a *dharma*, including what it is (*ye*), in what manner it exists (*yathā*), of what kind it is (*yādṛśāḥ*), what characteristics it has (*yallakṣaṇāḥ*), and what its essential nature is (*yatsvabhāvāḥ*). In other words, *sarva* here is not merely a domain-quantifier (“all *dharms*”) but also an index of mode: to know *dharms sarvathā* is to know them under a complete set of predicational respects—i.e. as fully determined (in the Vaibhāṣika sense of 決定) profiles fit for truth-apt articulation.

To put it differently, the Buddha’s knowledge pertains to the realm of property-predicates rather than the realm of object-subjects. Therefore, within the present framework—where a *dharma* is analysed through its truth-apt predicates—we can hear “*sarvadharmān api tathāgata eva jānāti*” as saying: only the Tathāgata knows *dharms* in the *sarva*-sense, i.e. in their conceptual completeness. All of these *y*-phrases together form what is known as *yathābhūta*, which is why we see the “十如是” (ten *yathābhūtas*) in Kumārajīva’s translation. Therefore, *yathābhūta* represents the complete properties of a *dharma* because it refers to all the possible ways in which a *dharma* can be categorised—in other words, all the possible properties that can be attributed to a *dharma*.

Moreover, it is worth noting a significant passage from a Mahāyāna Abhidharma text, the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (*Dacheng Apidamo ji lun* 大乘阿毘達磨集論):

What is *upadeśa*? It is an undistorted explanation of all the profoundly deep and hidden characteristics of *dharms*.

upadeśaḥ katamaḥ / sarvagambhīragūḍhadharmalakṣaṇānām aviparītaṃ vyākhyānam ⁴¹

「何等論議? 若於是處無有顛倒, 解釋一切深隱法相。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T31, no. 1605, p. 686b23–24)

Although this Abhidharma text is traditionally attributed to Asaṅga and belongs to the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition—or, more accurately, the Yogācāra school—the formulation here is philosophically suggestive for the present dissertation. First, *upadeśa* is characterised by *aviparīta* (“non-distorted,” “not inverted”), which is to say: it is a kind of discourse whose central normative demand is truth-apt articulation—getting the *dharma* characteristics right, without error. Second, what is to be explained is not merely “some” features of *dharms*, but *sarva* (all, without remainder) the “profound and hidden” *dharma*

⁴¹ Prahlad Pradhan, ed. *Abhidharmasamuccaya of Asaṅga* (Santiniketan: Visva-Bharati, 1950), 79.

characteristics. In other words, the task is set under a completeness requirement internal to exposition itself: a genuinely adequate *vyākhyāna* must not omit what belongs to the *dharma* domain as such. Read in the light of the foregoing chapters, this is precisely the sort of pressure that makes a predicational framework salient: what matters is how *dharmanas* can be stated, in a non-distorted and exhaustive way, as being thus and so.

Interestingly, in Sthiramati’s commentary on this passage, he also uses similarly precise language to restate this point through the notion of *dharmanatā*:

What is *dharmanatāyukti*? It is *dharmanatā*: the completion (*pariniṣpatti*) of *dharmanatā*, from beginningless time, in *dharmanas* abiding in their own characteristic and common characteristic. Thus is the investigation among *dharmanas*.

*dharmanatāyuktiḥ katamā / anādikālāt svalakṣaṇasāmānyalakṣaṇasthitadharmeṣu yā dharmanatāpariniṣpattiḥ sā dharmanatā // iti dharmeṣu vicāraṇā //*⁴²

「法爾道理者，謂無始時來於自相共相所住法中所有成就法性法爾。如火能燒、水能爛，如是等諸法成就法性法爾。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T31, no. 1606, p. 745b22–25)

Two features are especially worth stressing. First, the key term in Sthiramati’s line is *pariniṣpatti*—“completion,” “accomplishment.” Here, *dharmanatā* is not introduced as a further entity behind *dharmanas*; rather, it is described as something already accomplished in *dharmanas* that abide in their own and common characteristics, and this is said to hold *anādikālāt*, “from beginningless time.” This is exactly the kind of atemporal fixity that our earlier discussion associates with truth-apt predication: what a *dharma* is, as articulated through its defining characteristics, is not a contingent feature that fluctuates with time, but something that can be stated without distortion precisely because it is fixed in that sense.

Second, the Chinese gloss that accompanies this definition famously illustrates the same point with everyday examples (fire burns; water moistens). These examples are not meant to posit an extra “substrate” underlying burning or moistening; they instead express the intuition that a *dharma*’s being such is determinate in the relevant sense: fire’s burning and water’s moistening are not accidental add ons, but the way their *dharmanatā* is intelligibly and stably articulated. In the idiom developed in the preceding sections, this is exactly what makes the Abhidharma project possible as *upadeśa*: once what a *dharma* is can be

⁴² Ibid.

articulated through its *dharma* characteristics without distortion, the discourse can aim at completeness (*sarva*) rather than at a merely partial description.

Clearly, then, when these Mahāyāna materials speak of knowing *dharmanas* “as they are” and of explaining *dharma* characteristics without distortion, they preserve—at least at the level of philosophical orientation—the same core insight that underwrites the Sarvāstivāda emphasis on *sarvam asti*: the decisive work is done not by a brute ontological claim about “what exists,” but by the conditions under which *dharmanas* can be stated truly and exhaustively as what they are.

2.1.5 Metaphysical Structure and Infrastructure

2.1.5.1 Metaphysical Structure

Recalling the concepts introduced at the beginning of this chapter—Metaphysical Structure and Metaphysical Infrastructure—where “Metaphysical Structure” explains how *dharmanas* appear to us via subject–predicate relations⁴³ and “Metaphysical Infrastructure” clarifies why those relational claims can be true or false—grounding them in analytic necessity—we can summarise the above reasoning as follows.

As introduced at the start of this chapter, Metaphysical Structure describes how *dharmanas* present themselves in subject–predicate form, while Metaphysical Infrastructure supplies the truth conditions for those predications by grounding them in analytic necessity. With these distinctions in view, the foregoing reasoning can be summarised as follows:

Metaphysical Structure: To be is to be conceptually complete—that is, to embody (and, for conditioned *dharmanas*, to instantiate) everything that can be truthfully predicated of it. Ac-

⁴³ Interestingly, cognitive and psycholinguistic studies suggest that the prevalence of “X is Y” constructions is not merely an arbitrary feature of certain language families; rather, it arises from the way our minds structure reality. We naturally conceive of entities as interacting with each other or possessing traits, and subject–predicate syntax reflects this pattern with linguistic efficiency. As Steven Pinker succinctly observes, language enables us to express “who did what to whom, what is where, and what is true of what”, corresponding to agents, locations, and descriptions. The “what is true of what” part is precisely the role of a proposition like “X is Y”, which states that something possesses certain properties. The near-universality of this form likely stems from both its communicative usefulness and a deep cognitive predisposition: it is a logical, convenient way to convey information and one that our brains find natural to process. See Steven Pinker, “The Cognitive Niche: Coevolution of Intelligence, Sociality, and Language”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107, suppl. 2 (2010): 8993–8999; and R. M. W. Dixon, *Basic Linguistic Theory*, vol. 1: *Methodology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 100–102.

ording to Sarvāstivāda philosophy, which posits that a *dharma* is complete, a *dharma* is no more and no less than its complete bundle of truth-apt predicates.⁴⁴ However, as ordinary individuals, we have not yet attained the intellectual capacity to analytically understand what each *dharma* truly is—namely, to comprehend all predicates that can be truthfully attributed to a *dharma* by grasping the *dharma*'s essence (*svabhāva*) at once.

This is why Abhidharma analysis, as developed above, proceeds by working through the realm of properties/predicates: it approaches a *dharma* by articulating what can be truly said of it, and by tracing the two causal dimensions that make such articulation possible. On the one hand, a conditioned *dharma* is generated through the external/generative nexus of conditions; on the other hand, once arisen, it unfolds definitionally into its own determinate predicate field. In both directions, *dharms* are “complete” not because each *dharma* contains “everything whatsoever,” but because each *dharma* is exhaustively articulable as what it is—without remainder and without overlap with others—within the field of predicates fixed by its own nature.

2.1.5.2 Metaphysical Infrastructure

In the previous subsection on **Metaphysical Structure**, we discussed the metaphysical significance of **is/asti** as a copular verb—that is, in “**a is b**”, *asti* connects the subject and the predicate, illustrating how **a** exists in the way described by the property **b**. However, beyond revealing the mode of existence of things at the metaphysical level, **is/asti** in the timeless present tense holds a deeper significance: it possesses a verification or truth-conditional function.⁴⁵ This function forms part of the **metaphysical infrastructure**, because only by

⁴⁴ The Buddhist view that “entities are nothing but their properties” can be made coherent if subject terms are treated merely as convenient labels for bundles of properties; the relationship between metaphysics and everyday language remains an open question. See Theodore Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and P. F. Strawson, *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics* (London: Methuen, 1959). Meanwhile, whether reality is genuinely divided into “objects” and “properties” continues to be debated, with scholars examining whether linguistic practices reflect or obscure the world’s underlying structure. See W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960); and Michael Della Rocca, “Essentialism vs. Essentialism: Dealing with Ontological Structure”, *Philosophical Studies* 171, no. 1 (2014): 29–46.

⁴⁵ In Aristotelian logic, a declarative sentence’s copula (“is”) unifies the subject and predicate to form a truth-evaluable statement, making subject–predicate assertions the primary vehicles of truth. Medieval scholastics, such as Aquinas, went so far as to argue that in an affirmative proposition the copula itself signifies the proposition’s truth. See Gyula Klima, “The Semantic Principles Underlying Saint Thomas Aquinas’s Meta-

establishing the possibility of determining the truth-values of propositions on a deeper philosophical foundation can our explanations of the world (**metaphysical structure**) be distinguished as true or false. Only explanations that can be distinguished as true or false are meaningful.

In Sarvāstivāda philosophy, the core concept for determining the possibility of propositional truth-values lies in analyticity—grounded, in Vaibhāṣika terms, in determination (決定). If we develop our understanding of the reality (*yathābhūta*) of a *dharma* through analytic propositions, then such propositions are true. The unfolding of a *dharma*'s inherent properties (*svalakṣaṇa*) corresponding to these propositions is precisely what the *dharma* actually is.

Thus, the propositions expressed by this atemporal *asti* indicate that the predicates referring to properties are inherently contained within the concept of the object referred to by the subject. If these propositions are true, they must necessarily be analytic and atemporally true. Therefore, using the timeless-present-tense *asti* is appropriate regardless of whether the entities or events have occurred in the past or are yet to occur. For example, “Alexander *is* the person who *was* king of Macedonia (336–323 BCE).” Because the temporal profile (“was king 336–323 BCE”) is internal to the predicate, the copula *is* functions tenselessly; the proposition remains true whenever evaluated. This manoeuvre also aligns with the Frege–Russell view that “existence” is not a first-order predicate of individuals but a second-order matter of a concept’s being instantiated (i.e. $\exists x Fx$), which is precisely the role *asti* plays here as a copula linking a subject to its property-bundle, while *sarvam* quantifies over the complete range of predicates.

At this point in our discussion, we can re-examine why the traditional interpretation of *sarvam asti* is less illuminating—though not incorrect. The traditional view suggests that

physics of Being”, *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996): 87–141. In modern analytic terms, predication and truth conditions are closely intertwined: “Truth and predication go together; no sentence is without a predicate, and most sentences ... are understood only if their truth conditions [are specified].” See Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, ed. Kevin Sharpe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 120–140. This highlights the copula’s role in determining how a statement’s truth-value is fixed by the predicate’s application to the subject.

past *dharma*s, future *dharma*s, and present *dharma*s all exist, or that *dharma*s exist in the past, future, and present. This interpretation is problematic because if we understand *atīta* (past), *anāgata* (future), and *pratyutpanna* (present) as temporal concepts, we are using the passage of time as a reference to determine whether a *dharma* is past, future, or present. This means our judgement is based on whether the state or action of a *dharma*, at the time of our observation and proposition, is already completed, yet to begin, or currently ongoing.

In other words, the notions of “past”, “future”, and “present” are determined merely by the event’s relation to the moment of our observation and judgement. This kind of temporality is just **reference time**. If we use reference time to judge whether a *dharma* is past, future, or present, we are actually understanding where the event lies within our **temporal coordinates**.

However, this approach misses what we truly need to evaluate—the actual state of the event that the *dharma* is in.⁴⁶ We need to determine the state of the event itself, not where it falls within our reference timeline. Therefore, I will elaborate later on the point that *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*, as past participles, do not indicate temporal concepts but are closely related to the duality of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *pratītyasamutpanna*. These terms indicate the state of a *dharma* within its internal/definitional causal events.

This is why Vasumitra proposed using the concept of the “causal trigger” (*kāritra*) as the key idea for observing which state a *dharma* occupies within causal time.

Simply put, for Abhidharma philosophy, the task is to understand which state a *dharma* occupies within causal events, rather than determining where the events experienced by a *dharma* lie within the observer’s temporal coordinates.

⁴⁶ In Aristotelian logic, truths involve predicating properties of substances, thus reflecting a world of substances bearing properties. In contemporary terms, this view entails a form of logical realism about structure—the idea that our logical grammar (subjects, predicates, etc.) aligns with “joints” in nature. P. F. Strawson’s descriptive metaphysics similarly assumes that objects and properties in our conceptual scheme correspond to how things objectively are. As J. M. E. Moravcsik puts it, “Grammar reflects logic, logic reflects reality, and predication is the key relation that unifies each of the fields and also provides the links between them.” See J. M. E. Moravcsik, “Strawson on Predication”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 329–48.

2.1.5.3 *sarvam* and *asti* as Structure and Infrastructure

The foregoing discussion has shown that, in Sarvāstivāda philosophy, both *sarvam* and *asti* perform a double philosophical function: they explain what *dharma*s are at the level of **Meta-physical Structure**, and they account for how such explanations are grounded at the level of **Metaphysical Infrastructure**. In this sense, the metaphysics of *sarvam asti* is *higher-order*: it explains the meaning of “completeness”, the meaning of a *dharma*’s attributes, and the very principle that selects those attributes rather than others.

From the standpoint of **Metaphysical Structure**, *sarvam* (“complete”) illustrates that due to the pre-conditioning nature of *pratītyasamutpāda*, the predicates of a *dharma* that can be truthfully attributed to it are inherently contained within the notion of that *dharma* itself, and *vice versa*. This mutual necessity and sufficiency means that understanding a *dharma* involves comprehending the full field of predicates that can be truly attributed to it.

Similarly, *asti* plays a crucial role in this metaphysical framework. While *dharma* is complete, as ordinary individuals, we lack the intellectual capacity to analytically deduce all predicates of a *dharma* by merely contemplating the notion of this *dharma*. Therefore, we dwell in the realm of properties or predicates, rather than the realm of objects or subjects, and our understanding of *dharma* is established through understanding the realm of properties or predicates. In other words, what we can understand is circumscribed by what *asti* unfolds. As noted above, the subject–predicate structure organised around *asti* is the very mode in which a *dharma* discloses itself to us; hence we articulate our insight in the form “*a* is *b*”. It is precisely this “is *b*”—together with the question of what it *is* to be *b*—that Abhidharma philosophy takes as its central concern.

From the perspective of **Metaphysical Infrastructure**, *sarvam* lays the foundational basis for how the law of dependent origination pre-conditions both the external/generative relationships between each *dharma* and all other *dharma*s, and the internal/definitional causal relationships between each *dharma* and the unfolding of all its attributes. Here, *asti* holds deeper significance beyond illustrating the mode of existence of things; it possesses a

verificational or truth-conditional function. Only by establishing the possibility of proposition truth-values on a deeper philosophical foundation can our explanations of the world be distinguished as true or false—only then are they meaningful within this framework.

In Sarvāstivāda philosophy, analyticity—secured by the relevant sense of determination (決定)—is the core concept for determining the possibility of propositional truth-values. If we develop our understanding of the reality (*yathābhūta*) of a *dharma* through analytic propositions, then such propositions are true. The unfolding of a *dharma*'s inherent properties (*svalakṣaṇa*) corresponding to these propositions is precisely what the *dharma* actually is.

Taken together, these claims show how *sarvam asti* functions both as the structure through which *dharmanas* are disclosed—subjects through predicates—and as the infrastructure for assessing the truth of propositions about them. The next section turns to a more direct exposition of the “completeness of *dharma*,” asking how the Sarvāstivāda axiom is better understood in terms of what *dharmanas* **have**, rather than what merely exists, and how *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* can be said to belong to a *dharma* as inherent properties.

2.2 The Completeness of *dharma*

2.2.1 To Have or to Exist

This dissertation argues that *sarvam asti* can be read, in a primary and philosophically productive sense, as expressing the completeness of *dharma*. *sarvam* here names completeness rather than an unrestricted “everything.”⁴⁷ In other words, a *dharma* is exhaustively characterisable by its own determinate set of predicates, and it does not thereby possess all predicates in the universe. This does not deny the standard existential gloss “the three times truly exist”; rather, it re-locates it: once completeness is secured at the level of predication, the so-called three “times”—*atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*—enter as a special subset of a *dharma*'s predicate-bundle. They do not exist as independent objects or subjects, but function

⁴⁷ This corresponds to Commitments 1 and 7 in §1.1.2.

as properties or predicates of *dharmanas*, indicating the stage in which a *dharma* is situated in its own internal and definitional causal event.⁴⁸

A point often overlooked is that *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* are adjectival participles that naturally function as predicates. More importantly, among the 75 *dharmanas* recognised by the Sarvāstivādins, there is no “time” (whether *kāla* or *adhvan*) listed as an object.

The absence of “time” from the *dharma*-inventory is philosophically telling: temporal vocabulary is treated as belonging on the predicate-side of analysis, not as naming an additional entity. This is precisely why early polemics such as the BL 28 debate can take the form of a dispute about whether one may truly predicate, with the present-tense copula, what is “past” or “future” (e.g. “This is last year; this is next year”). The Vaibhāṣika move, developed more fully below, is to read such “past/future/present” terms as phase-predicates internal to a *dharma*’s causal unfolding rather than as externally given temporal containers.

This is another simple but crucial philological point: in classical Chinese, “有” can function both existentially (“there is/are”) and possessively (“to have/to possess”), and the possessive sense is especially salient in earlier usage.⁴⁹ For example, in early Buddhist Chinese translations like the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, 大般涅槃經, we can already find expressions such as “三世有法”⁵⁰ (*three-stages-having-dharma*), which simply means that *dharma* has three stages or can have the three *adhvas* attributed to it. We must not forget that a Chinese translation of a Sanskrit compound should be read in reverse order, as the head of a Sanskrit compound is always at the very end, while in classical Chinese, the head is at the beginning.⁵¹

⁴⁸ A property-based understanding of three *adhvas* has recently gained popularity among scholars. For example, see Philipp A. Maas, “Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Theories of Temporality and the Pātañjala Yoga Theory of Transformation (Pariṇāma)”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 48, no. 5 (November 2020): 963–1003. However, these scholars failed to fully embrace it and still understand *adhvan* as temporal units in their translations of either Sarvāstivāda or Sāṃkhya texts.

⁴⁹ Cf. 大西克也 [Ōnishi Katsuya], “上古漢語『有』字存在句及其時間性質” [“Existential Sentences with ‘You’ in Old Chinese and Their Temporal Nature”], in 語苑探賾-慶祝唐作藩教授九秩華誕文集 [*Explorations in the Language Garden: Festschrift in Honor of Professor Tang Zuopan’s 90th Birthday*], 2021, 481–494.

⁵⁰ 《大般涅槃經》卷 28〈11 師子吼菩薩品〉:「三世有法」(CBETA 2024.R2, T12, no. 374, p. 531a28).

⁵¹ 《出三藏記集》卷 8:「譯梵為秦, 有五失本也。一者梵語盡倒而使從秦, 一失本也。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T55, no. 2145, p. 52b23–24)

Chu sanzang ji ji: “Translating from Sanskrit into Chinese involves five losses of the original. The first is that the Sanskrit word order is completely reversed to follow Chinese usage. This constitutes one such loss of the original.”

In short, the “有” in “三世有” is best read as attributing to *dharma* the three *adhvas* as predicable phases (what it *has*), rather than as introducing an additional ontological claim about the independent existence of “three times.”⁵²

Later discussions will show that the introduction of the concepts *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* was intended not to measure the passage of time according to an observer’s temporal coordinate, but to describe the stages through which a causal event unfolds. Now, I would like to briefly outline why “*dharma* is complete” is the Sarvāstivāda philosophical axiom and how it actually represents the Sarvāstivādins’ rooting in and development of early Buddhist philosophy. In other words, this section will excavate and lay out the metaphysical framework—both the *structure* of Abhidharma explanation (subjects through predicates) and the *infrastructure* that secures truth-aptness for such explanation—that underpins the axiom *sarvam asti*.

2.2.2 *dharmapracaya* as the Principal Concern of Abhidharma

It is widely acknowledged that the core concern of Abhidharma philosophy is analysing what a *dharma* is (*dharmapracaya*).⁵³ One of the most representative statements of this can be found in *AMVŚ:

To analyse the individual characteristics and universal characteristics of each *dharma* is Abhidharma.

分別諸法自相共相是阿毘達磨。⁵⁴

Seen through the lens of *kathāvastu* (言依)—the “domain” and “license” of legitimate discourse foregrounded in the Prolegomenon—this definition already presupposes a semantic constraint: Abhidharma is the disciplined practice of determining which predicates may

⁵² On the linguistic continuum between “to be” and “to have”, see Émile Benveniste, “The Linguistic Functions of ‘to Be’ and ‘to Have’”, in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. Mary Meek (Coral Gables, FL: University of Miami Press, 1971 [1960]), 163–179, who shows that many Indo-European languages originally expressed possession via predicative constructions.

⁵³ Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000), 1900–1, n. 59. Bodhi comments: “An extended example of the opposition between good and bad states is found in MN No. 8, where the Buddha enumerates forty-four pairs of wholesome and unwholesome opposites. The explanation of this enlightenment factor suggests that while ‘discrimination of states’ may be technically identified with *pañña* [e.g. in SN 54.13 (see below) or in the *Dhammasangani*], the initial function of *pañña* as an enlightenment factor is not to discern the three characteristics, etc., but simply to discriminate between the good and bad mental states that become apparent with the deepening of mindfulness.”

⁵⁴ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷1, (CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 1c28–29).

be truthfully and determinately said of a given *dharma*. In this sense, *dharmapracaya* is not merely classificatory; it is a philosophical procedure for securing the very conditions under which statements of the form “a is b” are meaningful and evaluable as true or false.

It is important to note that this very interpretation of *dharmapracaya* emerged after the philosophical developments of the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika school. In early Buddhist philosophy, even before the Vaibhāṣika school became orthodox within Abhidharma, *dharmapracaya* primarily focused on discerning wholesome and unwholesome *dharma*s. However, with the further development of Abhidharma philosophy, this concept was eventually expanded in the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika tradition to encompass discerning what a *dharma* really is (*yathābhūta*), not merely its moral implications.

However, it is also important to note that within the tradition of Abhidharma philosophy, while *dharmapracaya* retained its focus on discerning between wholesome and unwholesome *dharma*s, it actually began to develop new interpretations from a very early stage, including the understanding of dependent origination (*pratīyasamutpāda*). For instance, in early Abhidharma texts, when discussing non-delusion (*amoha*/無癡), the discerning of *dharma* (*dharmapracaya*/擇法覺) was listed together with the understanding of *pratīyasamutpāda* as different designations of non-delusion with the difference being only a matter of emphasis.⁵⁵

The most significant philosophical advancement in this regard is found in the *Dharmaskandha* (DhSk), where *dharmapracaya* is explained in detail, particularly in its relationship to the understanding of dependent origination. It clarifies that the knowledge of *pratī-*

⁵⁵ For example, in the *Sāriputrābhidharmaśāstra* (ŚAŚ), we find: “What is non-delusion? It is clarity. Additionally, non-delusion means being able to bear a mind free of delusion. Moreover, knowing suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path; knowing the priority and posteriority; knowing what is in-between; knowing the internal and external; knowing the arising and cessation of the six sense bases and their great afflictions and liberation; knowing causes; knowing *karma* and its results; and knowing dependent origination”.

《舍利弗阿毘曇論》卷 23〈2 相應品〉：「何謂無癡？若明，是名無癡。復次，無癡，若堪忍離癡心，是名無癡。復次，若知苦集滅道，知前際後際，知前後際、知內，知外，知六觸入集滅大過患出要，知因緣，知業報，知緣生」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1548, pp. 672c28–673a3)

Similarly, in the SaṅgP, the text reads: “What is the good root of non-delusion? What is non-delusion? It is ... knowing dependent origination”.

《阿毘達磨集異門足論》卷 3〈4 三法品〉：「無癡善根者，無癡云何？答...知緣生法智」(CBETA 2024.R2, T26, no. 1536, p. 377a8–16)

tyasamutpāda includes both the knowledge of *pratītyasamutpāda* itself and the knowledge of *dharmas* already conditioned by causes (*pratītyasamutpanna*):

For those who know the *dharma* of dependent origination as it truly is, what is the *dharma* of dependent origination? They say: it consists of the *dharma* of dependent origination and the dependently originated *dharma*; collectively they are called the *dharma* of dependent origination. 能如實知緣生法者，云何緣生法？謂緣起法及緣已生法，總名緣生法。⁵⁶

As we previously discussed when this passage was quoted in the *AMVŚ, this proposition has been interpreted by the Vaibhāṣikas as follows: *pratītyasamutpāda* encompasses both *pratītyasamutpāda* and *pratītyasamutpanna*. The former refers to *pratītyasamutpāda* as the object-subject that contains all its inherent properties, while the latter refers to *pratītyasamutpanna* as the property-predicate that stands for the complete realisation of what *pratītyasamutpāda* can be. Clearly, DhSk foreshadows the later developments in Vaibhāṣika philosophy.⁵⁷

However, if we return to the context of DhSk at the time it was written, we see that when it presents this proposition, *pratītyasamutpāda* refers to dependent origination as the law of causality, whereas *pratītyasamutpanna* refers to conditioned *dharmas* (*saṃskṛtadharmas*)—those *dharmas* governed by the law of dependent origination. The intimate relationship between the understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* and *saṃskṛtadharmas* in Abhidharma philosophy is, in fact, deeply rooted in early Buddhism and directly stems from the Buddha's own teachings:

yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati so dhammaṃ passati; yo dhammaṃ passati so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati.

One who sees dependent origination sees *dhamma*; one who sees *dhamma* sees dependent origination.

In other words, to analyse what a *dharma/dhamma* is, one needs to understand dependent origination—a well-known, even oft-repeated fact. However, we often overlook that this statement consists of two parts; there is a second aspect: to understand what dependent origination is, one needs to analyse *dharma/dhamma*.⁵⁸ It is precisely this proposition,

⁵⁶ 《阿毘達磨法蘊足論》卷 8〈15 覺支品〉, (CBETA 2024.R2, T26, no. 1537, p. 492b4–5).

⁵⁷ For the dating of DhSk, see Willemsen, Dessein, and Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism*, 69.

⁵⁸ In the later Mahāyāna movement, this teaching was altered to: “*yo, bhikṣavaḥ, pratītyasamutpādaṃ paśyati sa dharmam paśyati; yo dharmam paśyati sa buddham paśyati*”. (see *Sālistambasūtra*, ed. La Vallée Poussin

composed of these two parts, that forms one basis for the Sarvāstivādins to propose “*dharma* is complete”.⁵⁹

The first part of this proposition is widely recognised. We can interpret it as: when we understand universal dependent origination/causality, we can comprehend the arising of *dharms* from the perspective of dependent origination—because the genesis of *dharms* is subject to it.

Here, through this proposition, we want to once again highlight a fundamental principle of Buddhist philosophy also implied by it: if event A causes event B—such as event A leading to the occurrence of event B—then understanding the cause is crucial to understanding the effect. In other words, to truly understand what event B is, we must understand its cause, event A. In this metaphysical framework, causes are essential for understanding effects: knowing the cause provides insight into the nature and existence of the effect. This is because the cause holds the essential knowledge that explains why the effect is exactly the way it is, thereby providing a complete explanation of the effect.⁶⁰

The second part is crucial for understanding why *dharma* is complete. However, the process of deriving the philosophical axiom “*dharma* is complete” from the propositions concerning dependent origination and *dharma* is neither simple nor straightforward; it is, in fact,

(1913), 69.) This alteration changes the entire logical loop. In the original teaching, understanding dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and understanding *dharma* formed necessary and sufficient conditions for each other. Therefore, *dharma* is complete—because all the attributes that *dharma* possesses are entirely due to dependent origination, and dependent origination is completely embodied in all the attributes that *dharma* possesses. Thus, by understanding *dharma*, we can understand dependent origination. However, Mahāyāna Buddhism’s revision of this teaching breaks this logical loop. Understanding dependent origination becomes merely a sufficient condition for understanding *dharma*; the two are no longer mutually necessary and sufficient conditions. Consequently, for Mahāyāna Buddhism, there is neither the need nor the possibility to derive the metaphysical principle that “*dharma* is complete”.

⁵⁹ This Abhidharma philosophical approach is deeply rooted in early Buddhist concepts such as “*lokiyapariññā nātāpariññā tiraṇāpariññā pahānapariññā ca*”. However, since the focus of this thesis is primarily on Vaibhāṣika philosophy, a more detailed discussion of its connections to early Buddhist philosophy will be reserved for future papers.

⁶⁰ This principle resonates with similar notions in Western philosophy, particularly those proposed by Spinoza and Leibniz. Spinoza, in his concept of causal determinism, asserts that every effect is intrinsically determined by its cause, which means that understanding an effect involves understanding the nature and essence of its cause. Similarly, Leibniz, in his Principle of Sufficient Reason, posits that nothing happens without a reason, and understanding a phenomenon means knowing the reasons that make it necessarily what it is.

a complex and profound process. To begin unravelling this, we must first examine why the analysis of a *dharma* allows us to understand cosmic dependent origination.

2.2.3 Completeness Relative to Causation

2.2.3.1 External/Generative Causation

Firstly, any conditioned *dharma* arises only in dependence on a nexus of causes and conditions. A causal explanation of the arising of even a single *dharma* therefore already presupposes the universality of *pratīyasamutpāda*: to account for why this *dharma* arises as it does, one must in principle trace the relevant conditions outward into the wider causal web that also sustains other *dharms*. In this sense, analysing the arising of one *dharma* can function as an entry point into the structure of the whole causal order.⁶¹

This claim is metaphysical rather than epistemic: it does not suggest that any finite analyst can, in practice, survey the entire causal web. It says only that the *being-so* of any conditioned *dharma* is fixed by the causal nexus that makes it arise; hence an ideally complete explanation would, in principle, run through that nexus.

Each *dharma* carries within it not only its own attributes but also the imprint of the universal causal chain to which it belongs. This reflects the idea that the interconnectedness of all *dharms* is not external or isolated but embedded within the very existence of each *dharma*. Therefore, a *dharma* is complete because it mirrors the full scope of the universal system of dependent origination.

In this holographic sense, the completeness of a *dharma* lies in its being so and not otherwise, thereby embodying the totality of interconnectedness among all other *dharms*. The full picture of causality—the relationships and conditions that shape all *dharms*—is inher-

⁶¹ 《大寶積經》卷 25:「能於一法和合之中而現一切諸法和合」(CBETA 2024.R2, T11, no. 310, p. 139a6–7)

*MRKŚ: “Within the dependent origination of a single *dharma*, one can see the dependent origination of all *dharms*.”

《大方廣佛華嚴經》卷 28(24 十忍品):「此菩薩深入諸法, 皆悉如幻, 觀緣起法: 於一法中解眾多法, 眾多法中解了一法。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T09, no. 278, p. 580c27–29)

*BAv: “This Bodhisattva profoundly understands that all *dharms* are completely like illusions and contemplates them as dependently arisen: Within a single *dharma*, he comprehends the multitude of *dharms*; and within the multitude of *dharms*, he comprehends the single *dharma*.”

ently present within the nature and arising of each *dharma*. Thus, by understanding one *dharma*, we can, in theory, gain insight into the entire causal framework of the universe. This makes a *dharma* complete not only in its own being but also in its reflection of the grand cosmic network of causes and conditions.

2.2.3.2 Internal/Definitional Causation

Having discussed the external or generative aspects of completeness, we now turn to the internal or definitional completeness of a *dharma*, which is central to understanding the Sarvāstivāda philosophy. Any *dharma* is internally and definitionally complete. That is, dependent origination not only determines the cosmic genesis of *dharmanas* but likewise governs each *dharma*'s own causal events—the complete instantiation of what it is.⁶²

In Vaibhāṣika technical vocabulary, this internal fixity is captured by the notion of “determination” (*avadhāraṇa*/決定): the relation between a *dharma* and its defining property-bundle is fixed in both directions. This bidirectional determination is precisely what makes internal completeness philosophically fruitful: if a predicate is truly attributable to a *dharma*, it is so because it belongs to that *dharma*'s *svabhāva*-determined bundle, and the complete instantiation of that bundle is nothing over and above the *dharma* itself.

This event is considered a causal event because the causal law it follows is definitional. In other words, the object referred to by the subject, as the “to-be-characterised” (*lakṣya*), is the cause—it is the *dharma* that inherently contains all the properties that will unfold. Meanwhile, the properties referred to by the predicate, as the “characterised” (*lakṣita*), are the determinate predicative *dharmanas* of the object, serving as the effect.⁶³

⁶² On Sarvāstivāda metaphysics and the idea that fully knowing a *dharma* entails grasping all causal factors that define it, see David Bastow, “The First Argument for Sarvāstivāda”, *Asian Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (1995): 109–25. Dependent origination thus confers an “internal or definitional completeness”, paralleling (but not identifying with) Sāṅkhya's *satkāryavāda* while rejecting any permanent substance, so that past, present, and future *dharmanas* all have ontological standing within the network of causal relations.

⁶³ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「復次, 因名緣起法, 果名緣已生法。如因果, 如是能作、所作... 能相、所相。」 (CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 118b1–c2)

*AMVŚ: “Further, the cause is called *pratītyasamutpāda*, and the result is called *pratītyasamutpanna*. As with cause and effect, so it is with the instantiator and what is instantiated... with the characterising and the characterised.”

In plain terms, definitional causality can be rephrased as: “Because the subject refers to a certain thing, the predicates that unfold after the subject correspond accordingly.” Here, causality refers to the relationship between the subject and the predicate, or between the object and its properties. The object, referred to by the subject, determines which properties it can and cannot possess, thereby determining which predicates can and cannot be used in propositions about itself. Put differently, the “is” of Sarvāstivāda predication is simultaneously a “has”: to say that a *dharma* is thus is to say that it *has* (instantiates) exactly this determinate bundle of properties, leaving no remainder outside analytic articulation.

2.3 Property and Causality: *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* and the Twelve *āyatanas*

Having argued that *asti* functions as a copular hinge that marks the truth conditions and “sayability” of predication, the next question is no longer whether *dharmanas* exist in some coarse sense, but how the becoming of a conditioned *dharma* can be truthfully described, given that a *dharma* is already nothing over and above the complete bundle of its own predicates.

This section therefore isolates two pieces of Sarvāstivāda apparatus at the intersection of property and causality: (i) the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas*, which thematise the causal activity by which a conditioned *dharma* instantiates its defining predicates; and (ii) the twelve *āyatanas*, which fix the canonical domain within which those predicates are delimited as “all” (*sarvam*). Read together, they make explicit why *sarvam asti* is best understood as a higher-order thesis about complete predication, rather than a merely existential slogan.

2.3.1 A Very Short Introduction to *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa*

In Sarvāstivāda philosophy, arguments about internal or definitional causality are scattered throughout various texts. This dissertation focuses specifically on discussions that hinge on *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* (conditioned characteristics) as the central concept for analysing internal/definitional causality (see § 2.1.2 for details). To serve as an introduction, it is worth quoting a passage from *AMVŚ. In this passage, we can see that for the Sarvāstivādins—especially the

Vaibhāṣikas—within the framework of the philosophical axiom *sarvam asti*, their description of the definitional causation of conditioned *dharma*s faces a primary metaphysical difficulty.

If a *dharma* already completely contains all of its properties—meaning that it is itself the bundle of all the properties that can be attributed to it—then analysing its various properties might seem like analysing the properties of properties. Is such an analysis valid? For example, in the passage we are about to examine, if a *dharma* itself is the property of “being able to be born”, then it can simply explain its own birth through itself.⁶⁴ In that case, is it redundant to further analyse a separate property called “birth” as a concept to understand its birth, or as a cause that leads it to be what it is?

*AMVŚ, *juan* 39, states:

Opponent: When conditioned *dharma*s are born, is this because they are, in their very nature, *birth-capable* (生法) and therefore are born? Or is it because they are *conjoined* (合) with the *birth-characteristic* (生相) and therefore are born?

Sarvāstivādins: What is the problem with either proposal?

Opponent: If it is because they are birth-capable by nature, then the birth-characteristic would be useless. If it is because they are conjoined with the birth-characteristic, then unconditioned *dharma*s too, if conjoined with a birth-characteristic, should be able to be born.

Sarvāstivādins: One should say: they are born because they are birth-capable by nature.

Opponent: If so, then the birth-characteristic would be useless.

Sarvāstivādins: Even if a *dharma* is birth-capable by nature, unless the birth-characteristic is *co-instantiated* with it (生相合), it cannot be born. Hence, at the very moment it is born, it is born through the co-instantiation of the birth-characteristic, and the birth-characteristic is, in this sense, its superior cause of being born. Just as a breakable thing is broken because the breaking-cause operates, and a severable thing is severed because the severing-cause operates, so too, for what is birth-capable, the birth-characteristic brings about its being born.⁶⁵

The opponent further presses the second line of explanation—that a conditioned *dharma* is born *in conjunction with the birth-characteristic* (生相)—and argues that, if this were the case, then unconditioned *dharma*s too should be able to be born were they likewise conjoined with a *birth-characteristic*.

⁶⁴ Throughout this dissertation, I render 生 (and its doctrinal correlates such as *jāti/utpāda*) as “birth/being born” even when the subject is a *dharma*. This “birth” is not biological parturition; it denotes the causal onset of a conditioned *dharma*—i.e. the event in which the *birth-characteristic* (*jāti-lakṣaṇa*/生相) is instantiated.

⁶⁵ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 39:「問: 諸有為法生時, 為體是生法故生? 為與生相合故生耶? 設爾何失? 若體是生法故生者, 生相則應無用。若與生相合故生者, 則無為法生相合, 故亦應可生。答: 應作是說: 體是生法故生。問: 若爾, 生相則應無用。答: 雖體是生法, 若無生相合者則不可生。故彼生時由生相合, 生相是彼生勝因故。如可破法, 破因能破, 及可斷法, 斷因能斷, 故可生法, 生相能生。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, pp. 202c24–203a3)

Opponent: Some say: conditioned *dharmas* are born because they are *conjoined with the birth-characteristic* (生相). If so, then unconditioned *dharmas* too, if conjoined with the *birth-characteristic*, should be able to be born.

Sarvāstivādins: For unconditioned *dharmas* there is no question of being conjoined with a *birth-characteristic*; therefore they cannot be born. For example, space and the like do not break, because no breaking-cause can be conjoined with them; they are not severed, because no severing-cause can be conjoined with them. Similarly, since no *birth-characteristic* can be conjoined with them, they cannot be born; one should understand it in the same way. The *birth-characteristic* has never been conjoined with them.⁶⁶

From the above quotations, we see that when the Sarvāstivādins analyse the internal or definitional causation of a conditioned *dharma* with respect to “birth” (生),⁶⁷ they endorse two claims that must be held together:

1. the *dharma* **is** (in its own entity) *birth-capable* (生法);
2. the *dharma* **has** the *birth-characteristic* (生相), in the sense that its being born consists in the birth-characteristic being **co-instantiated** with it at the very moment of being born (生相合), which is why this characteristic is said to be the pre-eminent cause of its being born.

As previously discussed, under the Sarvāstivāda philosophical axiom that “*dharma* is complete”, “is” and “has” are equivalent for purposes of *definitional* property attribution: to say that a *dharma* *is* thus is to say that it *has* (i.e. includes within its own concept) the corresponding predicate, so that the *dharma* is nothing over and above its own complete predicate-bundle.⁶⁸ We shall bear in mind, however, that this equivalence concerns definitional predication (what belongs to the concept of the *dharma*), not the temporal occurrence of that predicate as an event; in the present case, co-instantiation marks the *dharma*’s becoming true in the causal sequence.

⁶⁶ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 39:「有作是說: 與生相合故生。問: 若爾, 無為與生相合亦應可生。答: 無為無有生相合義, 故不可生。如虛空等, 無破因合, 故不可破, 無斷因合, 故不可斷, 無生相合, 故不可生, 應知亦爾。生相與彼未嘗合故。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 203a3–8)

⁶⁷ The birth-characteristic (*jāti*) is further explained as a causal event, *saṃcārayati*, in the Sarvāstivāda tradition; see AKBh, ed. Pradhan, 76,1–76,2: “*jātir hi yā saṃskārān anāgatād adhvanah pratyutpannam adhvānaṃ saṃcārayati.*”

⁶⁸ On the equivalence of “to be” and “to have” in terms of property attribution, see G. Link, *Algebraic Semantics in Language and Philosophy* (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1998), 275, who also emphasises that predication is “the basic tool for making judgements about the world”. For a more recent survey, see Piotr Stalmaszczyk, “Predication Theory: Introduction”, in *Philosophy and Logic of Predication*, ed. Piotr Stalmaszczyk (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 9–24.

On this view, when we say that a *dharma* is (in entity) birth-capable, it does not follow that it has already been born. The being of any conditioned *dharma* is a process—a process of instantiating (or, in the idiom of this debate, being co-instantiated with) the relevant characteristics that actualise its definitional profile. Therefore, even if a *dharma* is birth-capable in its own nature, it still requires a complete causal event in which the birth-characteristic becomes operative. Just as a seed requires a whole process to become a tree—even if the seed inherently bears the potential for treeness—a *dharma* likewise requires a causal process to realise what it is. The unfolding of a conditioned *dharma* into the distinct characteristics that constitute its very concept is the process by which it finally becomes what it is—the event that the Vaibhāṣikas articulate through notions such as “being”, “completeness”, and *yathābhūta*.

The second quotation sharpens the same point by way of a *reductio*. The opponent treats “conjunction” (合) as if it were an externally attachable factor: if being born were simply a matter of being conjoined with a birth-characteristic, then unconditioned *dharmanas* too should be able to be born were they conjoined with it. The Sarvāstivādins block this move by denying that there is any “meaning” (義) of such conjunction in the case of the unconditioned: a *dharma* cannot be co-instantiated with a characteristic that is not inherent to its own concept. In other words, what can or cannot be predicated of a *dharma*—and hence what can or cannot be instantiated in its causal sequence—is already inscribed in its inherent completeness.

To make this intelligible, the *AMVŚ employs parallel examples: just as something breakable breaks because a breaking-cause can be conjoined with it, and something severable is severed because a severing-cause can be conjoined with it, so too a birth-capable *dharma* is born because the birth-characteristic can be co-instantiated with it. Conversely, unconditioned *dharmanas* such as space cannot break, be severed, or be born precisely because no such conjunction can obtain in their case.

After exploring the Vaibhāṣikas’ treatment of “birth” in terms of birth-capability (生法) and the birth-characteristic (生相), we turn next to the broader implications for how *dharma*s are categorised as “complete” via the twelve *āyatana*s. There, we see how the domain of legitimate predication is fixed without appeal to extrinsic attributes.

Taken together, the Vaibhāṣikas’ position amounts to a genuinely higher-order thesis: for every definitional property that makes a given *dharma* what it is, its realisation in the causal sequence—*i.e.* its instantiation (or co-instantiation) at the relevant stage—is intelligible without positing any additional bearer beyond the predicate-bundle.

2.3.2 Twelve *āyatana*s as *sarvam*

As already established through Dharmatrāta’s argument (and as presupposed by the BL 28 debate), the *sarvam* of *sarvam asti* does *not* denote an unrestricted totality of properties. Rather, it denotes a complete *yet exclusive* bundle of predicates, canonically codified by the twelve *āyatana*s, and thus explicitly excludes “the characteristics of another” (*paralakṣaṇa*/他相法). In other words, the Sarvāstivāda “all” is exhaustive only within a fixed domain of genuine predication; it names everything that can count as a *dharma*’s own defining predicate, while ruling out any putatively “foreign” predicate.

Accordingly, in Sarvāstivāda philosophy, a *saṃskṛtadharma* is nothing other than the instantiation of all the causally grounded properties that can truly be predicated of it—no more and no less. This is why it is called a *dharma* rather than a *dharmin* (the possessor of *dharma*).⁶⁹ Here “*dharma*” denotes an entity that *is* the bundle of its defining predicates, not a substratum that merely *has* them. A *dharma* therefore does not acquire properties from outside itself; every property that can be definitionally attributed to it is already contained within its very concept. Consequently, a *dharma* cannot possess—or be ascribed—a property that is not inherent to that concept. In this sense, every *dharma* is complete, because whatever can be **predicated** of it is intrinsically included in what it is.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Cf. Sthaneshwar Timalina, “Change: Thinking through Sāṅkhya”, *Religions* 13 (2022): 549.

⁷⁰ 《五事毘婆沙論》卷1〈1分別色品〉：「問：若堅性等是地等相，所相、能相豈不成一？答：許此成一亦有何過？故毘婆沙作如是說：自性、我、物、相、本性等，名言雖殊而義無別，不可說諸法離自性有相。如說涅槃寂

In the Sarvāstivādins' own discourse, this metaphysical proposition is deduced through the canonical scheme of the twelve *āyatana*s (sense bases).⁷¹ This exhaustive taxonomy both constrains *sarva* and situates *saṃskṛtadharmas* within a determinate subdomain.⁷²

Accordingly, to say that a conditioned *dharma* is exhaustively analysable is to say that what can be truthfully predicated of it is exhaustively capturable *through* this *āyatana*-framework: what the scheme sorts is precisely the *dharma*'s own intrinsic properties—the very predicates that have standing in the causal nexus—no more and no less.⁷³

Crucially, this is not a merely classificatory convenience. The *AMVŚ explains that the twelve *āyatana*s are “established” (建立) precisely because the intrinsic properties involved

靜為相，非離寂靜別有涅槃。此亦應然，故無有過。此中堅性，即堅分堅體；約種類說，堅性是地界。然此堅性差別無邊，謂內法中爪髮等異，外法中有銅錫等殊。又內法中手足等堅異，外法亦爾，故堅性無邊。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1555, p. 990b12–20)

Pañcavastukavibhāṣāśāstra (PVVŚ): Question: If hardness (*jianxing*, 堅性), etc., are the properties of earth (*dijie*, 地界), etc., would that not make the property (*suoxiang* 所相/predicate) and that which possesses it (*nengxiang* 能相/subject) effectively one?

Answer: Allowing them to be one, what fault would there be? Therefore, the *Vibhāṣā* explains: “Intrinsic essence (*zixing* 自性/*svabhāva*), ‘I’ (*wo* 我/*ātman*) ‘thing’ (*wu* 物/*vastu*), property (*xiang* 相/*lakṣaṇa*), fundamental nature (*benxing* 本性/*prakṛti*), and so forth—although differing in name, do not differ in what they refer to. One cannot speak of *dharma*s’ having properties apart from their essence. For example, we say that *nirvāṇa* has the property of quiescence, but there is no separate *nirvāṇa* apart from quiescence. The same reasoning applies here, so there is no fault.” In this context, hardness can signify the degree of being hard or a hard object. In terms of category, hardness is but earth. Nevertheless, distinctions in hardness are boundless. Within internal *dharma*s, for instance, nails and hair exhibit different forms of hardness; for external *dharma*s, copper and tin differ in hardness, too. Even among internal *dharma*s, the hardness in the hands differs from that in the feet, and so on for external things—hence, hardness is limitless.

See also 《俱舍論頌疏》卷 6〈分別根品二之一〉：「相者，四法相也。此四法相與所相法更互為果，謂此能相相所相故。復因所相能相轉故，故互為果，名俱有因。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T41, no. 1823, p. 853b25–28)

Commentary on Abhidharmakośakārikā: “By ‘property’ (*xiang*, 相), we mean the four properties of the *saṃskṛtadharmas*. These four properties, along with the *dharma* of which they are properties (所相法), enter into mutual causation on account of how predication takes place between a *dharma*/subject and its properties/predicates. Furthermore, because a *dharma*/subject and its properties/predicates can transform one another, they are regarded as being mutually causative, named as co-present cause.”

⁷¹ Erich Frauwallner laid out a detailed discussion of the Sarvāstivādins' incorporation of the theory of *āyatana*. See Erich Frauwallner, *Studies in Abhidharma Literature and the Origins of Buddhist Philosophical Systems*, trans. Sophie Francis Kidd (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 135–48. Cf. Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 111–12.

⁷² 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 44：「有為法攝十一處一處少分。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 229c8–9)

*AMVŚ: *saṃskṛtadharmas* are classified by the twelve *āyatana*s. Of these twelve, eleven fully categorise *saṃskṛtadharmas*, whereas one *āyatana* applies to them only in part.

⁷³ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 73：「一切法性皆攝入此十二處中。若有說言：我能施設別更有法，不攝在此十二處中。彼但有語而無實義。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 378c13–16)

*AMVŚ: “All the properties of *dharma*s are subsumed under these twelve *āyatana*s. If anyone claims, ‘I can posit a distinct entity outside these twelve *āyatana*s’, that claim is nothing more than words without any real referent (i.e. a meaningful object).”

have distinct causal functions (*svabhāva-kārya-bheda*/自性作用別): the scheme tracks differences in what *dharma*s do by nature, not merely differences in how we happen to label them.⁷⁴ This is why, from early Buddhist discourse down to Abhidharma, the bundle of twelve *āyatana*s can serve as the canonical equivalent of “all” (*sarva/sabba*).⁷⁵ In other words, beyond the properties disclosed within this fixed domain, there is nothing further to a *dharma* that could count as a genuine predicable item; and the range of such properties runs from sensory to mental/epistemic, precisely because the *āyatana*s span both.

Within this framework, the Sarvāstivādins introduce an important notion: *āyatana-svalakṣaṇa*. As we have analysed, this compound term does not simply mean “the *svalakṣaṇa* of *āyatana*” (as though the sense base were itself a bearer of some further characteristic); rather, it marks an *āyatana*-indexed account of *svalakṣaṇa*—the understanding of own-characteristic that is realised **through** a given *āyatana*.

According to *AMVŚ, *juan* 13:

According to the *āyatana*'s own-characteristic account (*āyatana-svalakṣaṇa*), each of the five sense-consciousnesses takes only its own characteristic as its object.⁷⁶

Read in this literal form, the sentence makes the intended constraint explicit: the five sense-consciousnesses are confined to *svalakṣaṇa* as their proper object (唯緣自相). And because each of these consciousnesses is indexed to its own *āyatana*, what counts as “its own characteristic” is fixed by the determinate *āyatana*-domain in question. In this way, *āyatana-svalakṣaṇa* names the *āyatana*-relative grasp of *svalakṣaṇa* gained through the five sense bases: *āyatana* functions as the epistemic gateway that both enables cognition and delimits

⁷⁴ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 73:「...問: 若一身中有十二處, 云何建立十二處耶? 答: 以彼自性作用別故。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, pp. 378c23–379a1).

⁷⁵ Cf. Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, 1122. For discussions of the twelve *āyatana*s in early Buddhist philosophy, see Joong Pyo Lee, “근본불교에서 ‘일체 (*sabba*)’ 의 의미” [On the Meaning of *sabba* in Early Buddhism], *한국교수불자연합학회지* [*Journal of the Professors' Buddhist Association of Korea*] 18, no. 1 (2012): 93–122. Lee argues that *sabba*, *sabba-dhamma*, and *sabba-atthita* each have distinct connotations in Early Buddhism—*sabba* being the twelve *āyatana*s, which serve as the illusory basis for the arising of the six *vijñāna*s and, ultimately, the five *skandha*s. For an analysis of how these doctrines influenced Chinese Buddhism, see Weijen Teng, “Kuiji’s Abhidharmic Recontextualization of Chinese Buddhism”, in *Text, History, and Philosophy: Abhidharma across Buddhist Scholastic Traditions*, edited by Bart Dessein and Weijen Teng (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 296–313.

⁷⁶ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 13:「若依處自相說, 則五識唯緣自相」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 65a15)

its proper object, rather than as a further bearer of characteristics over and above the *dharma*s disclosed within it.

Under such philosophical reasoning, the Sarvāstivādins further propose that terms like “the sense bases (*āyatana*s)”, “self-nature (*svabhāva*)”, “self (*ātman*)”, “event (*vastu*)”, “individuality (*dravya*)”, “characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*)”, “part (*bhāga*)”, and “essence (*bhāva*)” are all essentially synonyms. They differ only in terms of the aspect (*ākāra*) under which we analyse a *dharma*.⁷⁷ In short, a *dharma* is complete because what we can know and say of it, in every aspect, is completely inherent within that *dharma*.

As shown, the twelve *āyatana*s effectively capture every property a *dharma* can “have”. Next, we examine how these properties relate to causality—both external and internal—and see why *svalakṣaṇa* necessarily ties back—both physically and conceptually—to *pratītyasamutpāda*.

2.3.3 From *svalakṣaṇa* to Causality

In the previous discussion, we elaborated on the core philosophical foundation of the Sarvāstivāda school, which centres on the relationship between the analysis of *pratītyasamutpāda* and the understanding of *dharma*s as mutually necessary and sufficient conditions.⁷⁸

A *dharma* is said to be complete, meaning that all of its predicates—referring to the properties that can truthfully be attributed to it—are inherently contained within its own

⁷⁷ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 73:「如是名為諸處、自性、我、物、自體、相、分、本性。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 379a9–11)

⁷⁸ On the Sarvāstivāda (and related Abhidharma) view that a *dharma*'s *svalakṣaṇa* is inextricably tied to *pratītyasamutpāda*, see Cox, “From Category to Ontology”, who shows how the Vaibhāṣika conception of *svabhāva* underpins causal efficacy; Takumi Fukuda, “Bhadanta Rāma: A Sautrāntika before Vasubandhu”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 26, no. 2 (2003): 255–70, on debates over the four characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) and their role in dependent origination; Lin Chen-kuo, “Svalakṣaṇa (Particular) and Sāmānyalakṣaṇa (Universal) in Abhidharma and Chinese Yogācāra Buddhism”, in Dessein and Teng, *Text, History, and Philosophy*, 375–95, on later Yogācāra re-interpretations; Bart Dessein, “The Existence of Factors in the Three Time Periods: Sarvāstivāda and Madhyamaka Buddhist Interpretations of Difference in Mode, Characteristic Marks, State, and Mutual Difference”, in *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 60, no. 3 (2007): 331–50, examining Madhyamaka critiques of *svabhāva*; and Y. Karunadasa, *The Dhamma Theory: Philosophical Cornerstone of the Abhidharma* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1996), clarifying how *sabhāva* is a technical term for a *dhamma*'s conditional function. Additionally, see Hideyo Ogawa, “What Is Bhāva? A Grammatical Analysis of the Term Bhāva”, *The Annals of the Research Project Center for the Comparative Study of Logic* (2005), who proposes understanding *bhāva* as a causative derivation of *√bhū*, thus viewing it as a conditioned bundle of properties rather than a fixed essence. Taken together, these studies illustrate how understanding a *dharma*'s *svalakṣaṇa* depends on analysing *pratītyasamutpāda*, and *vice versa*, underscoring their mutually necessary and sufficient relationship.

concept. Therefore, understanding what a *dharma* is, for ordinary people, involves two kinds of knowledge: (1) understanding synthetically the properties and the constant relationship between properties and the *dharma*; and (2) gradually cultivating the ability to analytically deduce a *dharma*'s inherent properties starting from the concept of the *dharma* itself.⁷⁹ The reason these two kinds of knowledge are reliable is that the full realisation of what a *dharma* truly is requires and guarantees the unfolding of properties that are already inherently present within it. The requirement and guarantee stem from the fact that the *dharma* and its properties are mutually necessary and sufficient conditions, which is why it can be said that “a *dharma* is complete”.

The internal causal processes that lead to the complete realisation of a *dharma* are governed by the same principle of dependent origination that governs the broader genesis of all *dharms*. Each *dharma* must unfold all of its inherent properties to truly become what it is, as determined by dependent origination. Consequently, any true proposition about a *dharma* can be analytically deduced from the concept of that *dharma* because all its predicates—its properties and attributes—are metaphysically encompassed within its concept.

In other words, in the Sarvāstivāda metaphysical framework, all genuine predications of what a *dharma* is are ultimately analytic propositions. The truth-value of synthetic cognition depends on whether it ultimately conforms to those analytic determinations. For example, this is like learning about the relationship between the sides of a right triangle through empirical observation in a synthetic manner; if this knowledge conforms to the Pythagorean theorem that is analytically derived from the inherent properties of triangles, then we can say that our prior synthetic judgement holds true.

In this context, the completeness of a *dharma* in terms of internal causation implies that by analysing the *dharma*'s own internal development, we can understand how dependent origination operates at a microcosmic level. This internal completeness ensures that the *dharma* fully realises its essence through its own causal events that unfold its proper-

⁷⁹ Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, 47ff. Ronkin provides a comprehensive account of the synthetic and analytic aspects of the Abhidhamma framework, analysing the concept of *dhammas* as the basic unit of the Abhidhamma system.

ties. Therefore, understanding a *dharma* ultimately involves an analytic reasoning process concerning its properties, which allows us to comprehend the workings of dependent origination within it.

2.3.4 The Completeness of *dharma* and the Twofold Structure of Causality

The discussion so far allows us to state more clearly what is at stake in the Sarvāstivāda claim that *dharma* is complete. From a metaphysical perspective, this claim refines the Buddha's propositions about dependent origination and *dharma* in a more abstract and economical form. By distinguishing completeness **relative to universal causation** from completeness **relative to internal causation**, the Sarvāstivādins articulate a comprehensive account of how each *dharma* embodies the totality of causality.

Firstly, if a *dharma* were not complete in relation to universal causation, we would not be able to gain knowledge of dependent origination by analysing the *dharma*. Since the arising of any conditioned *dharma* is pre-conditioned by a determinate nexus of other *dharms*, each conditioned *dharma* bears, in principle, the imprint of the dependent-origination network relevant to its arising. This implies that by understanding one conditioned *dharma* in its full causal profile, one can situate it within the broader causal structure disclosed by *pratītyasamutpāda*.⁸⁰ However, before attaining Buddhahood—in other words, as we gradually cultivate our understanding of all *dharms*—we can still progressively comprehend the entire causal structure of the universe, albeit in varying degrees of completeness. Therefore, the completeness of a *dharma* in this aspect is essential for the possibility of gaining knowledge of dependent origination through its analysis.

Secondly, if a *dharma* were not complete in relation to internal causation, it would imply that what a *dharma* is is not entirely determined by dependent origination. This would suggest that, within Buddhist philosophy, there exists another governing principle of metaphysical significance that is as important as dependent origination—an implication that is

⁸⁰ On how the Sarvāstivāda expansion of *pratītyasamutpāda* led to viewing each *dharma* as containing the causal imprint of all others, see Eviatar Shulman, “Early Meanings of Dependent-Origination”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, no. 2 (2008): 297–317.

clearly incompatible with the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism. Therefore, the internal causal processes of each *dharma* are fully governed by dependent origination, leading to the complete unfolding of its inherent properties (*svalakṣaṇa*) and their full realisation.⁸¹ Since all genuine predicates of a *dharma* (as delimited within the *āyatana*-codified domain of *sarvam*) are metaphysically contained within the very concept of that *dharma*, understanding a *dharma* becomes, in principle, an analytic task within that domain.

Both of these aspects of completeness are crucial. If *dharma* is not complete in either sense, it contradicts the Buddha's teachings and violates the logic of Buddhist philosophy. The Buddha emphasised that all phenomena arise due to dependent origination, and that understanding this principle is key to understanding the nature of reality. Therefore, the Sarvāstivāda proposition that ***dharma* is complete** reinforces the integral role of dependent origination in determining both the coming-into-being and the being of *dharma*, aligning with the foundational teachings of Buddhism.

Building upon this understanding, we can delve deeper into how the Sarvāstivādins conceptualised causality to support their proposition of the completeness of *dharma*. As discussed before, it is evident that in the Sarvāstivāda philosophical deduction, *pratītyasamutpāda* is actually divided into two types:⁸²

1. **External, Generative Causality:** This explains the arising of a *dharma* and its causal relationship with all other *dharms* in the universe. It reflects how each *dharma* is pre-conditioned by all other *dharms*, forming an interconnected web of causality.
2. **Internal, Definitional Causality:** This explains what a *dharma* is, or what properties can be definitionally attributed to a *dharma*. It concerns the self-causal sufficiency of

⁸¹ For a detailed discussion of how causal relations in Buddhist philosophy can be understood as either conceptual (notional) or existential, see Mattia Salvini, "Dependent Arising, Non-arising, and the Mind: MMK1 and the Abhidharma", *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 42 (2014): 471–497. Although Salvini does not explicitly employ the terms "external generative" versus "internal/definitional", his analysis highlights how Vasubandhu and Nāgārjuna each address these two forms of causality, particularly with regard to *ālambana-pratyaya*. Notably, the conceptual or definitional aspect that Nāgārjuna ascribes to *ālambana-pratyaya* is instead linked by the Vaibhāṣikas to *sahabhū-hetu*. These two concepts further echo Salvini's assertion (p. 479) that the six-*hetu* system and the four-*pratyaya* system "contain different names for the same referents".

⁸² The distinction between internal and external dependent origination is widely seen in the scriptures of early Buddhism, Abhidharma, and Mahāyāna Buddhism, such as CBETA 2024.R2, T16, no. 712, pp. 823c28–824a7, CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 430a18–19, and CBETA 2024.R2, T16, no. 672, p. 600a8–13.

a *dharma*, where dependent origination determines the complete instantiation of its essence.

At this point, we should realise that when the Sarvāstivādins, on a metaphysical basis, restate the Buddha's propositions about dependent origination and *dharma* through their doctrine of *sarvam asti*, they are simultaneously restating another of the Buddha's propositions about causality:

imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti; imassa uppādā idaṃ uppajjati.
asmiṃ sati idaṃ bhavati; asya utpādāt idaṃ utpadyate.

As previously discussed, this proposition has long been regarded as discussing the appearance or existence of *dharms*, but in fact, it actually consists of two parts corresponding to the two types of causality.

If we understand *sati/sati* and *hoti/bhavati* as copulative verbs meaning “to be” and “to become” rather than “to exist”, we find that the first part of the proposition actually describes the **internal, definitional causality** mentioned earlier. The causality described by “*asmiṃ sati idaṃ bhavati*” is: because it is (this *dharma*), therefore it becomes/instantiates such (properties). In other words, the metaphysical principle implied by this proposition is that there is a causal relationship between the subject and its predicates—the *dharma* and its inherent properties.

More importantly, as noted in § 2.1.5, the copula in Sarvāstivāda thought does more than link subject and predicate: it also carries a meta-metaphysical load, signalling the verification or truth conditions of the whole proposition.

If we treat the canonical maxim “*imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti, imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti*” as a self-contained philosophical axiom, the logical relation it codifies can be written in formal notation as

Let $B(x)$ abbreviate the condition expressed by “*imasmiṃ sati/asmiṃ sati*” and $A(x)$ the consequent expressed by “*idaṃ hoti/idaṃ bhavati*”.

$$\forall x[(Bx \rightarrow Ax) \wedge (\neg Bx \rightarrow \neg Ax)]$$

This yields an explicit statement that A and B are each other's necessary *and* sufficient conditions: $\forall x(Bx \leftrightarrow Ax)$. In modern logical parlance, the two predicates are **convertible** or **coextensive**; in Sarvāstivāda terminology they stand in a relation of *sahabhū* (Cf. § 2.1.3.3 and § 4.2.4.3).

For modern readers, causality often means that the cause and effect are two different entities, with the cause leading to the appearance of the effect. But in ancient philosophy—whether in Buddhist philosophy, the philosophy of ancient grammarians, or the Vaiśeṣika school closely related to the grammatical philosophical tradition—causality also occurs within a thing, in the process of the thing realising its own properties. As Bronkhorst notes, a shared philosophical premise in ancient Indian philosophy is that propositions and events are isomorphic.⁸³ This is vividly reflected here: the self-realisation of a thing is a causal event, so in propositions about what the thing is, there is naturally a causal relationship between the subject and the predicate.

As for the second part of the proposition, *asya utpādāt idam utpadyate*, it conspicuously corresponds to the **external, generative causality** discussed earlier. This describes how the arising of one *dharma* leads to the arising of another *dharma*, reflecting the interconnected web of causality among all *dharmanas*.

If both parts of this proposition were used solely to explain the appearance or mere existence of *dharmanas*, it would be inexplicable why the verbs in the first part are copulas (linking verbs). And if one argues that the copulative verbs here also mean “come into being”, it becomes difficult to explain why the same meaning is expressed twice in one proposition.

In short, through the proposition *sarvam asti*—“*dharma* is complete”—the Sarvāstivādin, from a deeper and broader metaphysical perspective, restated the Buddha's two most important philosophical propositions about dependent origination and *dharma*. They combined these two propositions in an extremely elegant and economical way, serving their most fundamental philosophical task: analysing what a *dharma* is.

⁸³ Cf. Johannes Bronkhorst, “The Correspondence Principle and Its Critics”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 41, no. 5 (2013): 491–499.

With this comprehensive view of how each *dharma* embodies the totality of causality, we are poised to delve into more specific aspects of the Sarvāstivādins’ conception of causality in the coming sections. There, we will see how the school systematically connects these causal insights to the path of liberation, epistemic certainty, and beyond.

2.4 Analytic Judgement, Causality, and the Emergence of a Buddhist Principle of Sufficient Reason

2.4.1 A Stemmatology of “the Three Times Exist”⁸⁴

It should be noted that the Sarvāstivādins’ central concern, at least in the materials studied here, is not primarily whether a *dharma* simply exists, but how affirmation, differentiation, and tri-temporal qualification are to be understood. As is well known, in JñPr, the first question posed at the beginning is about what the foremost *dharma* in the world is, rather than whether the foremost *dharma* exists. In the opening statement of *AMVŚ, it is also explicitly stated:

Question: Who composed this treatise? Answer: The Buddha, the World-Honoured One. Why is that? Because the *dharma*tā of what is to be known in all modes is exceedingly profound and subtle—if not the Buddha, the World-Honoured One, the All-Knower, who could fully awaken to it and disclose it?⁸⁵

From the perspective of the Sarvāstivādins, the Buddha composed this treatise to disclose to ordinary people the *dharma*tā of *dharma*s—i.e. how *dharma*s are, how they are to be known, and how they are to be truthfully described—rather than to answer the question of whether *dharma*s exist or not.⁸⁶ In the later text *AHŚ, the author Dharmasreṣṭhin also explicitly states at the very beginning of this treatise:

⁸⁴ Here, “stemmatology” refers to tracing how a phrase is transmitted, interpreted, and ultimately reshaped by later thinkers. For overviews of genealogical textual analysis (often called “stemmatology”), see Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann’s Method*, edited and translated by Glenn W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and Martin L. West, *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique Applicable to Greek and Latin Texts* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1973). Timpanaro details the evolution of Karl Lachmann’s method of reconstructing textual genealogies via manuscript variants, while West provides a concise guide to constructing stemmata and analysing textual relationships. Both works exemplify the core principles behind “stemmatology”.

⁸⁵ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷1:「問: 誰造此論? 答: 佛世尊。所以者何? 以一切種所知法性甚深微妙, 非佛世尊一切智者, 誰能究竟等覺開示。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 1a8–10)

⁸⁶ For a parallel to how “*asti*” in Sanskrit can function primarily as a copula rather than an existential verb, see Charles H. Kahn, *Essays on Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Kahn argues that in ancient Greek, “to be” (*einai*) was used chiefly in a predicative sense—saying *what* something is—rather than as-

What should be understood are the properties of *dharmas*.⁸⁷

From this, we can see why it may be misleading to treat “the three times exist” as the *primary* gloss of *sarvam asti* within Abhidharma, let alone within Sarvāstivāda. To be clear, this does not deny that Sarvāstivādins also defend theses about past, future, and present; it only insists that the flattened slogan “the three times exist” is a later metonymy that collapses a predicative thesis (about completeness within a determinate domain) into a bare existential paraphrase.

However, this digressive or flattened interpretation is not arbitrary. Interpreting *sarvam asti* as “the three periods of time exist” stems from multiple factors. For example, Vasubandhu intentionally interpreted it this way, and his doctrines became authoritative explanations of Abhidharma in later generations. Additionally, most Sarvāstivāda texts have survived only in Chinese translations. The excessive emphasis on original Sanskrit texts has elevated the importance of AKBh, as it is the only complete Abhidharma text extant in its original Sanskrit form. This emphasis has further influenced modern scholars to adopt Vasubandhu’s interpretation.

At the same time, the highly technical nature of the Chinese translations of Abhidharma texts poses significant challenges for scholars who wish to study Sarvāstivāda philosophy through them. Furthermore, modern scholars often anachronistically emphasise the problem of existence when studying ancient philosophy, whereas this issue was not a central concern in ancient times. All these factors have led us away from a more direct, intuitive, and profound understanding of the proposition *sarvam asti*.

However, in this introductory section, I want to emphasise that in ancient Indian philosophy, the shared philosophical concern among various schools was not whether an object

serting bare existence. He notes that the common modern distinction between “is” of predication and “is” of existence does not apply to Greek *einai* and is historically and philosophically misleading. This strongly suggests that “*sarvam asti*” in Sanskrit may likewise be read as “is complete”—emphasising a predicative meaning (“has all properties”) rather than simply “everything exists”. See *ibid.*, chap. 5, for Kahn’s discussion of how ancient Indo-European verbs of “being” typically operate as statements of fact or definition, not separate existential claims.

⁸⁷ 《阿毘曇心論》卷1〈1界品〉：「法相應當知。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1550, p. 809a11)

exists but rather what the object is. Moreover, the philosophical issue represented by *asti* is not about “to exist” but about “to be something that can be attributed to an object”. Needless to say, this “something” as a predicate undoubtedly refers to **properties**.

In other words, from the perspective of ancient Indian philosophy—including Abhidharma philosophers—the task of philosophy is to understand what an object is by comprehending its properties. It is precisely in this philosophical context that the Sarvāstivādins proposed their philosophical axiom: “*dharma* is complete”.

2.4.2 Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Complete Analysability of *dharma*

From the proposition “*dharma* is complete”, we can derive further implications. Specifically, a *dharma* is complete because internal causality determines what can count as its genuine predicates. This means that a *dharma*’s defining properties are fully contained within its own concept. Consequently, the process by which a *dharma* becomes what it is involves an analytic unfolding—the *dharma* manifests its inherent properties through internal causation. This represents an internal and definitional causation, where the very concept of the *dharma* causes all the properties attributed to it to manifest.

Under this view, *sarvam asti* states a strong metaphysical thesis:

1. Our cognition of what a *dharma* is can proceed by *analytic unfolding* of that *dharma* itself.
2. Alternatively, it can proceed *synthetically*, by first grasping its properties and their constant relation to that *dharma*.
3. However, once made fully explicit, this synthetic grasp reduces to an *analytic* truth about that *dharma*.

Therefore, propositions that tell us what a *dharma* is are, ultimately (i.e. metaphysically), analytic within the *sarvam*-domain of genuine predication.

Furthermore, since causality not only externally—in a generative and cosmic sense—conditions the appearance of any *dharma* and establishes causal connections among all *dharmanas* (with distinctions between strong and weak connections, to be discussed in later chap-

ters), but also internally determines what each *dharma* is, every *dharma* can and should be explained from the perspective of causality. On this view, causality analytically unfolds the *dharma* into its inherent properties. This approach constitutes the Buddhist version of the **Principle of Sufficient Reason**.⁸⁸

As a result, within the philosophical domain constructed by *sarvam asti*, we continually discover an expansion of its philosophical depth and breadth. In the metaphysical framework established by *sarvam asti*, each *dharma* needs to be understood and can be understood, aligning with the Principle of Sufficient Reason. Moreover, understanding each *dharma* is an analytic process because propositions about what a *dharma* is are metaphysically analytic. This is because causality, at both the cosmic generative level and the internal definitional level, determines the mutual necessary and sufficient conditions for understanding a *dharma* and comprehending its complete properties.⁸⁹

Therefore, we can say that the Sarvāstivādins, through the proposition *sarvam asti*, not only reinterpreted and unified the Buddha's two foundational propositions about dependent origination and *dharma* in a higher and broader philosophical sense but also further completed the philosophical transformation of Buddhist doctrine—through two strong metaphysical propositions: a Buddhist analogue of the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the complete analysability of *dharma*. These two points played a foundational role in the development of later Buddhist philosophy—even though they are usually hidden deep within propositions and may go unnoticed.

In short, we are all familiar with the ambition of the Abhidharma philosophical movement to analyse each *dharma*, thereby achieving liberation. Now, we can answer why, in the

⁸⁸ On how Buddhist philosophy—particularly in Sarvāstivāda and Sautrāntika contexts—can be compared to Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), see Allison Aitken, "Nāgārjuna and Vasubandhu on the Principle of Sufficient Reason", *Asian Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 19 (2024). Aitken interprets dependent origination as a "proto-PSR" focused on causal explanation and compares two distinct Buddhist outlooks: Vasubandhu's "qualified" PSR—where ultimately real (*paramārtha-sat*) *dharma*s, each possessing intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), serve as the grounding for conventionally real entities—and Nāgārjuna's "unrestricted" PSR, which denies any foundationalist metaphysics by rejecting intrinsic natures in all *dharma*.

⁸⁹ Cf. Commitment 5 ("Causation equals explanation") in §1.1.2.

metaphysical sense, the ambition of the Abhidharma philosophical movement is achievable —because what each *dharma* is can be explained and understood analytically.

The preceding reconstruction might still seem, at first glance, like a modern superimposition on the sources. To show that it rests firmly on the Buddhist record itself, the next section gathers Sarvāstivāda and cognate passages in which authors explicitly link causality with the grasp of a *dharma*'s intrinsic mark (*svalakṣaṇa*) and cast that link in analytic knowledge (*sthānāsthānajñāna*). These texts demonstrate that the higher-order reasoning outlined above is not an anachronistic projection but an indigenous strand of Buddhist scholastic thought.⁹⁰ Important foundational discussions can already be seen in the *Madhyama Āgama* (MĀ, 中阿含經):⁹¹

Venerable Ānanda said, “World-Honoured One, thus does a bhikkhu know the sense bases. How does a bhikkhu know dependent origination?”

The Buddha answered, “Ānanda, if there is a bhikkhu who sees dependent origination and understands the arising from conditions as it truly is: ‘This being, that is; this not being, that is not; with the arising of this, that arises; with the cessation of this, that ceases.’ That is, conditioned by ignorance there are formations, up to conditioned by birth there is ageing and death; if ignorance ceases, formations cease, up to the cessation of birth leading to the cessation of ageing and death. Ānanda, thus does a bhikkhu know dependent origination.”

Venerable Ānanda said, “World-Honoured One, thus does a bhikkhu know dependent origination. How does a bhikkhu know what is possible and what is impossible?”

The Buddha answered, “Ānanda, if there is a bhikkhu who sees what is possible as possible and knows it as it truly is, and sees what is impossible as impossible and knows it as it truly is.”⁹²

The wider discourse (cf. the MN 115 parallel) begins with an analysis of elements (*dhātu*); the present excerpt picks up at the transition from knowing the sense bases (*āyatana*) to knowing dependent origination and, finally, to knowing what is possible and impossible (*sthānāsthānajñāna*). In this *sūtra*, the Buddha explains to Ānanda the four stages encompassed in wisdom: starting from knowing the elements, progressing to knowing the sense

⁹⁰ The Sarvāstivāda view that a *dharma*'s “internal definitional causality” analytically delimits which properties it can or cannot instantiate parallels modern modal metaphysics. There, identifying an entity's essential properties tells us which states are impossible—for example, if being human is essential to Socrates, no scenario exists in which he is non-human. Cf. *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Essential vs. Accidental Properties”, and Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972/1980). Here, as in Sarvāstivāda, knowing an entity's defining nature frames its realm of genuine possibility.

⁹¹ A parallel passage appears in *Majjhima Nikāya* 115, “Bahudhātukasutta”.

⁹² 《中阿含經》卷 47〈3 心品〉:「尊者阿難白曰:「世尊! 如是比丘知處。云何比丘知因緣?」世尊答曰:「阿難! 若有比丘見因緣及從因緣起知如真, 因此有彼, 無此無彼, 此生彼生, 此滅彼滅, 謂緣無明有行乃至緣生有老死; 若無明滅則行滅, 乃至生滅則老死滅。阿難! 如是比丘知因緣。」尊者阿難白曰:「世尊! 如是比丘知因緣。云何比丘知是處、非處?」世尊答曰:「阿難! 若有比丘見處是處知如真, 見非處是非處知如真。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T01, no. 26, p. 723c19–27)

bases, then advancing to understanding dependent origination, and ultimately, based on the understanding of dependent origination, reaching the analytic understanding of what a *dharma* can be and what it cannot be. This enables one to judge the truth or falsity of any proposition concerning that *dharma*.

This clearly demonstrates that the approach of understanding what *dharmas* are in terms of causality—leading to analytic propositions about *dharmas*—is rooted in early Buddhist philosophical speculation. My restatement of the metaphysical foundations of Sarvāstivāda philosophy, using modern philosophical and logical terminology, thus closely aligns with early Buddhist philosophy and precisely corresponds with the path of philosophical development undertaken by the Abhidharma movement. In other words, my philosophical research simultaneously corroborates my research into the history of philosophy.

This also shows the principal methodological aspect of my dissertation: to reconstruct how arguments evolved. Rather than adopting the traditional approach in philosophical historiography, which retrospectively highlights key moments in the development of philosophy with the benefit of hindsight, I begin from the inception of a philosophical theorem. From this starting point, I engage in reasoning from the ground up in a manner that is logically coherent and consistent with the overall principles of Buddhist philosophy. My aim is to examine whether the actual philosophical development of the Sarvāstivāda school represented a philosophically economical solution given the intellectual conditions of the time.⁹³

By “philosophically economical solution”, I refer to the use of the most concise propositions to interconnect the richest speculative content of early Buddhism—even if it does not strictly conform to the formal definitions of “philosophy”—while simultaneously laying

⁹³ On the methodological tension between logical reconstruction and historical contextualism in writing the history of philosophy, see Richard Rorty, “The Historiography of Philosophy: Four Genres”, in *Philosophy in History* (Cambridge University Press, 1984), and Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969). Rorty proposes that rational reconstruction—treating past thinkers as if they were present-day colleagues—can yield philosophically rich dialogues but risks anachronism when modern categories are imposed on earlier texts. By approaching Sarvāstivāda thought in this way, we aim to show how a seemingly modern philosophical notion (e.g. “complete analysability”) can indeed reflect Sarvāstivāda reasoning, while remaining attentive to the historical specificities of the Abhidharma tradition.

a metaphysical foundation for the realisation of Buddhism’s most fundamental doctrines, and expressing this in the most elegant manner possible.

To illustrate with an example, my research method is akin to independently deriving the Pythagorean theorem in order to assess whether Pythagoras’s discovery and proof were a philosophically economical forms of argumentation, rather than verifying the theorem’s validity by substituting specific triangle side lengths in reverse. In other words, I start from logical reasoning and adhere to philosophical principles and overarching frameworks to evaluate the rationality of the arguments and the necessity of their developmental processes, rather than relying solely on subsequent arguments or conclusions.

MĀ lays out a full philosophical cognitive progression: it begins with the perception of the elements (*dhātus*); moves to a grasp of the complete categorical scheme of properties, namely the twelve *āyatana*s; from there proceeds to an understanding of causality (*pratītyasamutpāda*); and finally culminates in the analytic discernment of what *dharma*s are—and are not (*sthānāsthānajñāna*).

This same arc is further elaborated in the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* (MPP), where it is presented as a skilful means possessed by bodhisattvas:

What is called the skilful means of knowing what is possible and what is impossible? It means that bodhisattvas truly comprehend all intrinsic properties that are possible (for a *dharma*), and truly understand all intrinsic properties that are impossible (for a *dharma*). Thus, this is called the skilful means of knowing what is possible and what is impossible.⁹⁴

It is evident that in the development of Buddhist philosophy, the analytic understanding derived from knowing causality/dependent origination is explicitly connected with understanding the intrinsic properties of *dharma*s. This supports our previous reasoning that the knowledge of a *dharma*’s intrinsic properties involves understanding its internal, definitional causality—that is, because it is this *dharma*, it has such properties.

A philosophical development that aligns with our prior argument appears in the **Mahāprajñāpāramitopadeśa* (*MppŚ, 大智度論), where the commentator links the Buddha’s

⁹⁴ 《大般若波羅蜜多經》卷 586:「云何名為是處非處善巧? 謂諸菩薩如實了知所有是處種種自相, 如實了知所有非處種種自相, 如是名為是處非處善巧。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T07, no. 220, p. 1030b26–29)

knowledge-power of what is possible and what is impossible (處非處力) to a determinate grasp of causality within all *dharma*s—a determinacy that, on the present reconstruction, can be read as an analytic grasp of their internal, definitional structure:

By the power of knowing what is possible and what is impossible, the Buddha knows with certainty the causes and results within all *dharma*s.⁹⁵

Here the crucial term is “定知” (to know determinately/with certainty). In this context it need not be read as a merely psychological confidence-claim; rather, it signals that the causal roles (“cause/result”) that obtain “within” a *dharma* are fixed by what can and cannot belong to that *dharma*’s definitional bundle. Put differently: once possibility and impossibility are understood as constraints internal to a *dharma*’s *svabhāva*-grounded predicates, “knows with certainty” closely parallels what I have been calling “analytically knows”.

2.4.3 Different Types of Judgement

It is worth mentioning that Buddhist philosophy also discusses another topic that we have not yet had the opportunity to elaborate on—that is, although theoretically our understanding of what a *dharma* is can and should be analytic, under actual human epistemological conditions, this is not the case. We, as ordinary people, often can only synthetically examine what a *dharma* is after it has unfolded its intrinsic properties.⁹⁶ At the same time, we

⁹⁵ 《大智度論》卷 88 (78 四攝品): 「佛用是處非處力, 定知一切法中因果」(CBETA 2024.R2, T25, no. 1509, p. 683a27–28)

⁹⁶ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 24: 「復次, 諸契經中, 佛為所化說緣起法, 或因為門, 或果為門, 或俱為門。問: 為何所化, 以因為門說緣起法, 乃至為何所化, 以俱為門說緣起法? 答: 為愚因者, 以因為門說緣起法。為愚果者, 以果為門說緣起法。為愚因果者, 以俱為門說緣起法。復次, 為初修業者, 以果為門說緣起法。為超作意者, 以因為門說緣起法。為已慣習者, 以俱為門說緣起法。復次, 為樂略者, 以因為門說緣起法。為樂廣者, 以果為門說緣起法。為樂廣略者, 以俱為門說緣起法。復次, 為利根者, 以因為門說緣起法。為鈍根者, 以果為門說緣起法。為中根者, 以俱為門說緣起法。問: 若為鈍根者, 以果為門說緣起法, 彼便得解者, 後身菩薩, 於諸有情根最為勝, 何因緣故, 以果為門觀緣起法? 答: 過去菩薩過殞伽沙數, 皆以果為門觀緣起法。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 123b19–c7)

*AMVŚ: “Furthermore, in the various canonical discourses, the Buddha taught the principle of dependent origination to different audiences by emphasising either the cause-based approach (an *analytic* gateway), the effect-based approach (a *synthetic* gateway), or both together. One may ask: for which type of audience did he teach dependent origination from the cause-based approach, and so on, up to those for whom he taught both? The answer is: for those ignorant of causes, he taught dependent origination from the cause-based perspective; for those ignorant of effects, he taught it from the effect-based perspective; for those ignorant of both, he employed both approaches. Furthermore, for those just beginning their practice, he elucidated dependent origination from the effect-based gateway; for those able to transcend conceptual engagement, from the cause-based gateway; for those who have become well accustomed, from both. Furthermore, for those who prefer abstraction, he taught it via the cause-based perspective; for those who prefer an expanded

need to observe whether the occurrence of a property is consistently connected with a particular *dharma* over a long period to determine its internal definitional causal relationship. In other words, to understand *svalakṣaṇa* of a *dharma*, we also need to comprehend it based on *pratīyasamutpāda*.

Thus, although our understanding of a *dharma*'s properties is synthetic, it still falls into the category of *a priori* knowledge because we grasp its properties based on the *a priori* category of the law of dependent origination. Therefore, our judgements about a *dharma*'s properties are universally valid, and such judgements can claim a qualified *a priori* warrant within the framework defended here.⁹⁷ In other words, although we arrive at a proposition through our synthetic *a priori* judgement, the proposition itself is analytic; it is just that we ordinary people cannot analytically understand what a *dharma* is but rather what we synthetically judge it to be, which conforms *a priori* to the proposition arrived at through the Buddha's analysis.⁹⁸

Methodological Clarification.

The labels *analytic*, *synthetic*, *a priori*, and *a posteriori* are borrowed from Kant only as heuristic waypoints; no claim is made that early Abhidharma thinkers endorsed Kant's project. In

explanation, via the effect-based perspective; for those who wish for both concise and elaborate detail, he employed both. Likewise, for those with sharp faculties, he used the cause-based approach; for those with dull faculties, the effect-based approach; for those with intermediate faculties, both. One may ask: if teaching from the effect-based perspective enables dull-faculty practitioners to gain understanding, then why does a Bodhisattva in his final birth—who surpasses all beings in spiritual capacity—also contemplate dependent origination from the effect-based perspective? The answer is that in the Bodhisattva's past lives, exceeding the number of Ganges sands, he always observed dependent origination from the effect-based gateway."

⁹⁷ For a parallel in Western philosophy regarding empirically discovered yet necessary truths, see Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. Kripke shows that certain facts—e.g. "Water is H₂O"—are known *a posteriori* but hold necessarily across possible worlds, thus decoupling "necessary vs. contingent" from "vs. *a posteriori*". This resonates with the Buddhist claim that, although we empirically (or synthetically) learn a *dharma*'s internal causal properties, such properties are necessarily (or analytically) included in the very concept of the *dharma*. Kripke's emphasis on rigid designators and essences parallels the Sarvāstivāda notion of the completeness of inherent definitional causality, while the Buddhist focus on soteriological ends offers a distinct context for applying these insights on necessity and reference.

⁹⁸ Ramakrishna Puligandla similarly argues that dependent origination in Buddhism functions as a universal and necessary truth, comparable to Kant's synthetic *a priori*. Although not strictly analytic in Kant's sense, Puligandla calls it a "phenomenological analytic truth", emphasising that it is directly grasped through phenomenological insight and its denial leads to immediate experiential contradiction, thus underscoring its universal validity and necessity (Ramakrishna Puligandla, "What is the Status of the Doctrine of Dependent Origination?", in *Pali Buddhism*, ed. Frank Hoffman and Deegalle Mahinda [London: Routledge, 2013], 175–183).

the present chapter, “**analytic**” refers to judging a *dharma* by unfolding its internal/definitional causality (順觀) *within the canonically delimited domain of genuine predication (sarvam)*, articulated by the twelve *āyatana*s. “**synthetic a priori**” refers to judging a *dharma*’s properties through *dependent origination* as an *a priori* guiding category (逆觀), thereby aiming at modal necessity even though experience is involved; “**synthetic a posteriori**” covers ordinary empirical judgements lacking such grounding. The term “**a priori category**” here designates the law of dependent origination as the regulating schema of such judgement, while “**necessity**”—*within the sarvam-domain*—is secured by the completeness axiom *sarvam asti*. Subsequent sections unpack these correspondences in detail; readers should read all further occurrences of the Kantian labels in this calibrated, cross-cultural sense.

2.4.3.1 Reverse and Forward Contemplation of Causality

In early Buddhist scriptures, the difference between (1) analytically determining a *dharma*’s complete set of its own defining predicates (within *sarvam*) by starting with the very concept of that *dharma*, and (2) synthetically beginning from the *dharma*’s attributes and gradually working backwards to discern what the *dharma* is, was not systematically thematised. Nevertheless, the significance of this distinction was already recognised. For instance, the first *juan* of DĀ states:

When the Bodhisattva contemplates the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination in both reverse and forward order, knowing and seeing them as what they truly are, he thereby realises Anuttarā Samyaksambodhi upon his seat.

「菩薩逆順觀十二因緣，如實知，如實見已，即於座上成阿耨多羅三藐三菩提。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T01, no. 1, p. 7c6–8)

Here, the phrase “順觀因緣” (順觀, literally “forward contemplation of causality”) corresponds to the analytic judgement previously discussed, while “逆觀因緣” (逆觀, literally “reverse contemplation of causality”) denotes the **synthetic** approach. These two methods —“forward” vs. “reverse”—yield the same ultimate knowledge of a *dharma* as what it truly is (如實知) only because, *ontologically*, the respective objects of the analytic and synthetic judgements stand in a mutually necessary and sufficient relationship. In other words, the truth-value of a synthetic proposition rests on the same facts that an analytic proposition es-

establishes, thus ensuring that whether one proceeds from “the *dharma* itself” to its attributes or from its attributes back to “what the *dharma* is”, both lead to the same understanding, thereby qualifying one for the realisation of *anuttarāsamyaksaṃbodhi* (阿耨多羅三藐三菩提).

Reiterating a key Sarvāstivāda principle: the claim that “any conditioned *dharma* is complete” serves as a metaphysical axiom ensuring that either direction—“from the *dharma*’s concept itself to its attributes” or “from its attributes to what the *dharma* is”—ultimately arrives at the same metaphysical truth.

As consistently emphasised, within Sarvāstivāda philosophy, from the standpoint of an analytic proposition, the *dharma* that appears as the subject in a statement (“法”, or *dharma*) is the *cause* of all its attributes, while those attributes collectively constitute its *effect*. Vasubandhu clarifies this in the *Pudgalaviniścayaḥ*:

Why is this called the sixth case? Because it expresses the sense of having.

...Therefore, someone who has is nothing but the cause, then what it has is nothing but the result.

kimarthaiṣā ṣaṣṭhī? svāmyarthā |

【真】又第六別言是何義主為義。

【玄】為依何義說第六聲。此第六聲依屬主義。

.....hetureva tarhi svāmī prāpnoti phalameva ca svam|

【真】若爾主應成財因。財應成主果。

【玄】則因名主。果名能屬。

In our earlier discussion, we have already established that, at least in the Sarvāstivāda philosophy, “to be” (是) and “to have” (有) can be shown to be equivalent concepts. This indicates that, from the perspective of an analytic judgement that starts from the *dharma* itself, a *dharma*—viewed as a bundling of all its definitional attributes—is unequivocally the cause of all those possible attributes when they are unfolded. Conversely, those attributes, when singled out and explicated, become the *dharma*’s result.

Once this point is clear, the Vaibhāṣika explanation of “順觀” (proceeding from the *dharma* to its attributes) and “逆觀” (proceeding from the attributes back to the *dharma*) becomes more intelligible:

Question: How does the Bodhisattva contemplate the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination in forward and reverse order?

Answer: Inferring the effect from the cause is called “forward contemplation”, whereas inferring the cause from the effect is called “reverse contemplation”.

問：云何菩薩順逆觀察十二緣起耶？答：若以因推果，名順觀察；若以果推因，名逆觀察。《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 119b11–13)

Hence, it becomes evident that “forward contemplation” (順觀) actually refers to understanding the *dharma* by proceeding from the *dharma* as the totality to its properties, whereas “reverse contemplation” (逆觀) denotes understanding what the *dharma* is by starting from its properties.

2.4.3.2 Bidirectional Causation between *nāma-rūpa* and *vijñāna*

Naturally, one might ask why a Bodhisattva—having attained *Anuttarā Samyaksambodhi* (and thus analytically able to see what a *dharma* is by recognising all its constitutive properties)—would also employ a synthetic method that starts with its attributes. *AMVŚ provides detailed reasoning on this, which we do not address here for brevity. More crucially, on a deeper metaphysical level, the question is why these “forward” (順觀) and “reverse” (逆觀) contemplations reach the same conclusion about a *dharma*’s nature. The key insight, present from the earliest Buddhist philosophical reflection on causality, is that the material and immaterial aspects of a *dharma* (*nāma-rūpa*) and our discernment (*vijñāna*) of those aspects function as mutual causes.⁹⁹ This bidirectional causality ultimately led the Sarvāstivādins to posit that a *dharma*’s attributes and the *dharma* itself constitute mutually necessary and sufficient conditions. Put simply, each conditioned *dharma* is “complete” (*sarvam asti*), meaning that—within the canonically delimited domain of genuine predication (*sarvam*)—it is nothing over and above its own defining predicates, and those defining predicates are nothing over and above that very *dharma*. Hence, whether one proceeds from the *dharma* or from its attributes, one arrives at the same conclusion concerning what this *dharma* is. This mutual conditioning is already found in early *sūtras*¹⁰⁰ and is further elucidated in *AMVŚ:

⁹⁹ Bhikkhu Anālayo emphasises the reciprocal conditioning between consciousness (*viññāna*) and name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*), illustrating their interdependence with the simile of two bundles of reeds mutually supporting each other, approaching this relationship primarily psychologically, in contrast to my epistemological approach. See Bhikkhu Anālayo, “Consciousness and Dependent Arising”, *Insight Journal* 46 (2020): 55–63.

¹⁰⁰ 《長阿含經》卷 10:「阿難！是故名色緣識，識緣名色」(CBETA 2024.R3, T01, no. 1, p. 61b19–20)

Dīrgha Āgama (DĀ): “Ānanda, therefore these *nāma-rūpa* arise in dependence on *vijñāna*, and (*vijñāna*) arises in dependence on *nāma-rūpa*.”

《雜阿含經》卷 12:「尊者舍利弗復問:「尊者摩訶拘絺羅!先言名色非自作、非他作、非自他作、非非自他作無因作,然彼名色緣識生,而今復言名色緣識,此義云何?」尊者摩訶拘絺羅答言:「今當說譬,如智者因譬得解。譬如三蘆立於空地,展轉相依,而得豎立,若去其一,二亦不立,若去其二,一亦不立,展轉相依,而得豎立,識緣名色亦復如是。展轉相依,而得生長。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T02, no. 99, p. 81a29–b8)

Samyukta Āgama (SĀ): Venerable Śāriputra again asked: “Venerable Mahākausthila, earlier you said that *nāma-rūpa* are not self-caused, not other-caused, not caused by both self and other, nor do they arise without a cause. Nevertheless, *nāma-rūpa* arises in dependence on *vijñāna*. And now you repeat that *nāma-rūpa* arises in dependence on *vijñāna*. What does this mean?” Venerable Mahākausthila replied: “I will offer a simile so the wise may understand. Imagine three reeds placed upright on open ground; by mutually depending on one another, they remain standing. If you remove one, the other two cannot stand; if you remove two, the one left cannot stand. Through reciprocal support, they all remain upright. It is the same

Furthermore, consciousness (*viññāna*) and name-and-form (*nāmarūpa*) are mutually conditional, like two bundles of reeds leaning on one another. Just as an elephant, a horse, or a boat together with its rider/driver depend on one another in turn to reach a destination, so too do consciousness and name-and-form. With consciousness as condition, name-and-form continues in succession; with name-and-form as condition, consciousness finds foundation.

復次，識與名色更互為緣，如二束蘆相依而住，如象馬船與乘御者展轉相依得有所至，識與名色亦復如是。識為緣，故名色續生；名色為緣，識得安住。《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 120a16–19)

Note that I render 更互為緣 here in its more literal sense as “mutually conditional,” rather than importing the idiom of “mutually necessary and sufficient” into the quotation itself. Nevertheless, the passage’s own structure makes the stronger claim available. The reeds simile states the necessity-side explicitly: remove either bundle and the other cannot stand. The concluding pair of clauses then supplies the complementary entailments—and thereby a kind of sufficiency relative to the two explananda explicitly named in the text: name-and-form’s *continued succession* (續生) and consciousness’ *finding a footing* (安住). In this limited but philosophically crucial sense, *viññāna* and *nāmarūpa* stand in a bidirectional determination that closely tracks a mutually necessary-and-sufficient linkage at the level of sustaining/grounding. The Vaibhāṣikas, moreover, do not simply invoke the classic image of mutually supporting reeds to illustrate how *nāmarūpa* (名色) and *viññāna* (識) function as each other’s condition. Rather, they explicitly dissect, on two levels—how attributes are conceptually presented, and how knowledge comes into being—the notion that *nāmarūpa* and *viññāna* are not merely “swapping between left hand and right hand”, but instead act as mutual causes on distinct tiers. We shall explore this approach of explaining co-conditioning by analysing judgements, definitions, and propositions in § 4.2.4.3 on *sahabhūhetu*.

2.4.3.3 Causality as an *a priori* Schema

Next, from the standpoint of the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika tradition, the correctness of so-called “reverse contemplation of causality” (逆觀因緣) requires a further clarification. If such judgements are synthetic in form—that is, if they move from what is manifestly given back to what must be presupposed as its condition—they are not synthetic in the sense of

with *viññāna* and *nāma-rūpa*: each arises in dependence on the other, and by this mutual reliance, they come into being and grow.”

mere empirical conjecture. Rather, they depend upon a *a priori* causal framework that governs what may count as a warranted transition from effect to cause, from predicate to subject, within the *dharmic* field. In this qualified and framework-internal sense, one may describe dependent origination as functioning *a priori*: not as a transcendental form supplied by the subject independently of experience, but as a regulative schema already presupposed in any correct Abhidharma judgement.

This point does not rest on an external analogy to Kant; it arises from within the Buddhist analysis itself. As the preceding discussion has shown, the mutual conditioning of *vi-jñāna* and *nāma-rūpa* indicates that cognitive discernment and the articulated field of what is discerned belong to one and the same causal nexus. A *dharma* is not first encountered as a fully determinate item and only subsequently recognised as causally related. To apprehend a *dharma* as this determinate *dharma* is already to situate it within a causal-predicative order structured by *pratītyasamutpāda*. Reverse contemplation therefore does not impose causality upon otherwise neutral data; it makes explicit the causal order already presupposed in the very intelligibility of the *dharmic* field.

Question: Why, in contemplating Dependent Origination in reverse order, does the Bodhisattva stop at *vi-jñāna* and then turn back? Is it because his power of wisdom is exhausted, or because the knowables (*jñeya*; Chinese: 爾焰)¹⁰¹ are exhausted?

Answer: What fault would there be if so? If one says his power of wisdom is exhausted, that is not reasonable, for the Bodhisattva's wisdom and vision are without limit. If one says the knowables are exhausted, that too is not reasonable, since *saṃskāra* and *avidyā* have not yet been contemplated. Therefore one should say: it is not that his power of wisdom is exhausted, nor that the knowables are exhausted; rather, it is because the Bodhisattva has already contemplated *saṃskāra* and *avidyā* beforehand—namely, in previously contemplating *bhāva* he has thereby already contemplated *saṃskāra*, and in previously contemplating *taṇhā* and *upādāna* he has thereby already contemplated *avidyā*.

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 24:「問: 菩薩何故逆觀緣起? 唯至於識心便轉還, 為智力窮? 為爾焰盡? 設爾何失? 若智力窮, 不應正理: 菩薩智見無邊際故。若爾焰盡, 理亦不然: 行與無明猶未觀故。答: 應作是說: 非智力窮, 非爾焰盡, 但由菩薩於行無明先已觀故, 謂先觀有即已觀行, 先觀愛取已觀無明。」(CBETA 2025.R1, T27, no. 1545, p. 124a26–b3)

¹⁰¹ It should be noted that the concept of *jñeya* is related to the twelve *āyatana*s. Cf. 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 73:「若欲觀察諸法性相, 當依如是十二處教。若依如是十二處教觀察諸法所有性相, 便生十二爾焰智光, 復現十二實義影像。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 378c23–26)

*AMVŚ: If one wishes to see the properties of *dharmas* (諸法性相), one should rely on these teachings concerning the twelve *āyatana*s (十二處). When one sees the complete properties of *dharmas* based on these teachings on the twelve *āyatana*s, then the intellectual illumination of twelve *jñeyas* (爾焰智光) will arise, and thereafter the images of twelve knowledges of what they are (實義) will manifest.

The philosophical force of this passage lies in the structure it presupposes. On the surface, “reverse contemplation” is an inferential movement from what is manifestly available back to what must be posited as its condition. At the level of propositions, this means moving from what is known or knowable (*jñeya*) to the *dharma* by virtue of which it is such. Yet the answer explicitly denies that the Bodhisattva halts at *vijñāna* because the earlier links are unknowable or because his wisdom has reached its limit. Rather, *saṃskāra* and *avidyā* have already been “contemplated beforehand” (先已觀). This priority is not merely temporal. It is logical and methodological: to contemplate *bhāva as bhāva* is already to place it within a nexus in which *saṃskāra* is fixed as its relevant condition; and to contemplate *taṇhā* and *upādāna as* such is already to place them within a nexus in which *avidyā* is fixed as their relevant condition.

This is why reverse contemplation is synthetic only in one respect: it moves discursively from what is given to what is not immediately manifest. Yet the movement is governed throughout by a *a priori* rule of warranted connection. Dependent origination is not here treated as a merely external sequence of events later generalised by observation. It functions, rather, as the framework within which observation can count as cognition of a *dharma* at all. Once that framework is in place, the reverse move from effect-predicates to cause-subjects is licensed in advance. In this qualified sense, causality may be described as *a priori*: not because the Vaibhāṣikas posit a Kantian transcendental subject, but because correct judgement already presupposes a causal-predicative order that is prior to the inferential movement it makes possible.

Accordingly, when contemplation reaches *vijñāna* (識), it need not continue stepwise back to *saṃskāra* (行) or *avidyā* (無明), not because those links lie beyond cognition, but because they have already been secured within the causal schema that renders the reverse series intelligible. Synthetic judgement therefore remains dependent upon a framework that is prior, in this qualified and framework-internal sense, to the very act of synthesis.

2.4.3.4 Vaibhāṣika Discussion of Synthetic and Analytic Judgement

In this sense, dependent origination functions as the regulative *a priori* schema (in the calibrated sense specified above) for synthetic judgement: it is the rule-governed framework by which an ordinary practitioner integrates manifest predicates and infers, in reverse contemplation (逆觀), what the relevant *dharma* is.

Accordingly, although the completeness axiom *sarvam asti* implies that every *genuine* predication of what a *dharma* is is, in principle, an analytic matter, dependent origination explains how one may approach those truths synthetically from the side of manifest properties. When correct, such synthetic judgements are vindicated by—and reducible to—the corresponding analytic determination; when incorrect, they are precisely what the analytic standard corrects. In this qualified sense, synthetic judgements can claim *a priori* validity: not because every synthetic judgement is infallible, but because their warrant consists in being answerable to the same causal–definitional constraints that fix what can count as a *dharma*'s own predicates.¹⁰²

2.4.3.4.1 Buddha vs. Śāriputra: Grades of Judgement This discussion may seem reminiscent of Kant's critical philosophy, but in fact, it is my reiteration of Sarvāstivāda philosophy based on modern philosophical terminology. The relevant *AMVŚ passage can be reconstructively read as marking graded capacities of judgement between the Buddha and Śāriputra:

Question: The Buddha and Śāriputra can both, case by case, infallibly *ascertain*¹⁰³ each of the twelve *āyatana*s. What is the difference between them?

Answer: With respect to these twelve *āyatana*s, the Buddha can, in each case, *ascertain* both their **individual** and **generic** properties. Venerable Śāriputra can, in each case, *ascertain* only their generic properties; he cannot yet, in each case, *ascertain* their individual properties as they really are.

¹⁰² For a broader defence of why distinguishing analytic from synthetic judgements is philosophically compelling (despite Quine's critique), see H. P. Grice and P. F. Strawson, "In Defence of a Dogma", *The Philosophical Review* 65, no. 2 (April 1956): 141–158.

¹⁰³ Here *zhengzhi* (證知) is closely tied, in Abhidharma usage (e.g. in the *Abhidharmakośa* tradition), to knowing *yuktitaḥ*—that is, on rational/analytic grounds rather than merely from the deliverances of sense experience. In this chapter I therefore treat *zhengzhi* as carrying an *a priori* warrant in this qualified sense.

For there are immeasurable sensible distinctions among the *āyatanas*, all of which are included within these twelve, and Śāriputra can know them only when others make them manifest ... Furthermore, regarding the twelve *āyatanas*, the Buddha possesses both the **knowledge of all** (*sarvajñāna*) and the **knowledge of all modes/aspects** (*sarvathājñāna*, also referred to as *sarvākārajñāna*), while Venerable Śāriputra possesses only *sarvajñāna* and lacks *sarvathājñāna* ... Moreover, regarding the twelve *āyatanas*, the Buddha can *ascertain* their exact extent without relying on the six consciousnesses, whereas Venerable Śāriputra must rely on the six consciousnesses ...

Additionally, although Venerable Śāriputra can *ascertain* the twelve *āyatanas* case by case, he must first attend to what the Buddha has ascertained: the Buddha first defines the twelve *āyatanas*, and then Śāriputra discriminates them in accordance with that definition ...

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 74:「問: 佛、舍利子於十二處俱能一一無倒證知。佛、舍利子有何差別? 答: 佛能於此十二處法, 一一證知自相、共相; 尊者舍利子於此十二處法, 唯能一一證知共相, 於彼自相未能一一如實證知。謂有無量諸處差別, 皆攝入此十二處中, 而舍利子須他顯示乃能知故.....復次, 佛於十二處具一切智、一切種智; 尊者舍利子於十二處唯有一切智, 無一切種智。復次, 佛於十二處不依六識而能證知唯有爾所; 尊者舍利子於十二處要依六識方能證知唯有爾所.....復次, 尊者舍利子雖於十二處一一證知, 而要先思惟佛所證法。謂佛先說十二處名, 後隨此名一一分別.....世尊證知十二處相, 不由思惟他所說教故。舍利子雖能證知十二處相, 而與佛智極有差別。是故號佛為無上尊。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, pp. 382c22–383a18)

In conclusion, although Śāriputra can ascertain the properties of the twelve *āyatanas*, there is a vast difference compared to the Buddha's knowledge. Therefore, the Buddha is called the Supreme One.

First, it should be clarified that the Buddha possesses the ability to make analytic judgments about all properties of *dharma*s—both their **individual properties** and **generic properties**.

Using the arguments in the text, the Buddha can, based on his *immediate analytic access* to internal (definitional) causality—namely, the twelve *āyatanas* as categories—analytically discern all of a *dharma*'s individual and generic properties.

On the other hand, Śāriputra possesses the ability to make **synthetic a priori judgments** about the properties of *dharma*s.

According to the text, Śāriputra can, based on the internal (definitional) causality taught by the Buddha—that is, the twelve *āyatanas*—analytically know all of a *dharma*'s generic properties but can only synthetically judge its individual properties.

The difference between Śāriputra and us ordinary people is that his synthetic judgments about a *dharma*'s individual properties are answerable to the same *a priori* schema

of internal causality. Therefore, his synthetic judgements enjoy an *a priori* warrant in this qualified sense, because causality functions here as an *a priori* category.

In contrast, our judgements about a *dharma*'s properties are **synthetic *a posteriori* judgements**, entirely based on our subjective experience and lacking any comparable claim to universal validity.

Thus, the Buddha can, starting from analysing the very concept of any *dharma*, completely know its individual and generic properties without needing to grasp a *dharma*'s properties through *a posteriori* experience.

This is the meaning of “can ascertain what exactly they can be without relying on the six consciousnesses” in the quoted text.¹⁰⁴

Śāriputra's ability to analytically judge properties without relying on *a posteriori* experience is strictly limited to a *dharma*'s generic properties.

In other words, the objects that Śāriputra can analytically grasp are confined to events determined by external (generative) causality—that is, the arising of *dharmanas* and their relationships within the network of dependent origination constituted by other *dharmanas*, along with other generic properties such as impermanence. He cannot analytically grasp a *dharma*'s individual properties determined by internal causality.

It is in this sense that the text distinguishes between **knowledge of all** (*sarvajñāna*) and **knowledge of all modes/aspects** (*sarvathājñāna*). On the reading advanced here, the contrast is not merely quantitative. *Sarvajñāna* concerns the field of *dharmanas* as they arise within dependent origination; *sarvathājñāna* concerns the differentiated modes, characteristics, and determinations under which each *dharma* is to be understood. Śāriputra possesses the former but not the latter: he can discern the occurrence of *dharmanas* and their place in

¹⁰⁴ Jerrold Katz's survey of post-Kantian and post-Quinean debates on the analytic–synthetic distinction offers a refined view of how “analyticity” can depend on semantic rules within a specific conceptual system. See Jerrold J. Katz, “Where Things Now Stand with the Analytic-Synthetic Distinction”, *Synthese* 28, no. 3/4 (1974): 283–319. His approach parallels the idea that in Abhidharma, dependent origination functions as a kind of “conceptual framework” that makes certain judgements (e.g. the Buddha's analytic knowledge of *dharmanas*) valid by virtue of definitional or necessary relations, rather than mere empirical generalisation.

causal sequence, but not the Buddha’s complete discernment of every mode/aspect proper to each *dharma*.

However, as we mentioned earlier, the difference between Śāriputra and us ordinary people is that although he can only synthetically judge a *dharma*’s properties, like us, his synthetic judgements are based on his correct and thorough understanding of dependent origination as an *a priori* category.

Therefore, his **synthetic judgements** about a *dharma*’s properties still enjoy an *a priori* warrant. In contrast, our synthetic judgements lack universal validity because of our incomplete understanding of dependent origination; we may even completely fail to understand what a *dharma*’s properties are based on dependent origination, resulting in entirely erroneous knowledge.

2.4.3.4.2 The Soteriological Path: From Synthetic Experience to Analytic Wisdom The contrast drawn above—between (i) the Buddha’s analytic grasp of both individual and generic properties, (ii) Śāriputra’s synthetic *a priori* grasp of individual properties (alongside an analytic grasp of generic properties), and (iii) ordinary cognition’s synthetic *a posteriori* judgements—corresponds to an explicitly graduated epistemology in *AMVŚ:

Furthermore, if the nature of conditionality is not real, then all *dharmanas* would lack any profound significance. That is to say, when setting forth all *dharmanas*, if one does not subsume them under conditions and examine them accordingly, [the resulting knowledge] is coarse and shallow, easy to comprehend. If, however, one subsumes them under conditions and examines them accordingly, [the resulting knowledge] is more profound than the four great oceans, and only the Buddha’s **knowledge of all modes/aspects** (*sarvathājñāna*; 種智) can ultimately know it.¹⁰⁵

The passage makes the soteriological stakes of judgement-theory explicit.

If one does not read a *dharma*’s presented properties through the lens of its conditions—i.e. through the causal-explanatory schema of dependent origination—one grasps only what is immediately given and thus remains at the level of the “coarse and shallow.”

¹⁰⁵ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 55:「復次若諸緣性非實有者, 則一切法無甚深義。謂若顯示一切法時, 若不攝在諸緣觀察, 則為龜淺易可了知。若攝在緣而觀察者, 則為甚深過四大海, 惟佛種智能究竟知。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 283b5–9)

In the Kantian vocabulary adopted here, such cognition yields synthetic *a posteriori* judgements: predicates are registered piecemeal through sensory encounter, without insight into *why* they belong to the *dharma*.

Once one does subsume *dharmanas* under their conditions, the same phenomena disclose a depth “more profound than the four great oceans.”

This corresponds to the transition from merely empirical synthesis to synthetic *a priori* judgement in the qualified sense argued above: the sensible manifold may still be supplied via the six consciousnesses, yet the *warrant* of the judgement—why these predicates must belong to this *dharma*—is answerable to an *a priori* schema (dependent origination as the law of causality, together with the canonically delimited predicational domain articulated through the *āyatanas*).

Yet even when judgements are governed by this *a priori* schema, ordinary cognition (and, *mutatis mutandis*, even a *śrāvaka* such as Śāriputra) still proceeds by temporally successive syntheses: one must wait for individual properties to be manifested and then integrate them under the causal framework, rather than surveying—in one atemporal analytic stroke—the complete range of admissible predicates.

This is precisely why the text concludes that only the Buddha’s “knowledge of all modes/ aspects” (*sarvathājñāna*) can know the depth *ultimately*: it is omniscience ranging over the predicate-domain (what a *dharma* can be *in every way*), not merely over the subject-domain (what *dharmanas* there are).

This also clarifies the earlier remark that Śāriputra’s synthetic *a priori* judgements depend on “contemplating the *dharmanas* realised by the Buddha”: he requires the Buddha’s prior definition of the *āyatanas* in order for his own rational ascertainment (*yuktitaḥ*) to be possible.

The Buddha, by contrast, does not acquire this framework *a posteriori* as an external definition; he judges “without contemplating any others’ definitions” because the causal and predicational structure is immediately available to him.

In summary, Buddhist practice can be described—epistemologically—as a path from predominantly synthetic *a posteriori* judgements to increasingly refined synthetic *a priori* judgements, and (in the limit case exemplified by Buddhahood) to analytic wisdom: an atemporal grasp of what a *dharma* can and cannot be by analysing the concept of the *dharma* itself.

This explains the soteriological function of the Buddha’s pedagogy: it guides cognition from synthetic apprehension toward analytic discernment by training reflection on causality. As a result, one becomes increasingly able to comprehend, in analytic terms, what a *dharma* can and cannot be.

In other words, even if we reach the level of Śāriputra, we are still synthetically judging what a *dharma* is. However, because we do so through dependent origination as the correct *a priori* schema, our judgements are answerable to—and, when successful, reducible to—the corresponding analytic propositions that can be deduced by analysing the very concept of that *dharma*.¹⁰⁶

Yet, we are still vastly different from true enlightenment—truly knowing all possible properties of *dharms* in an atemporal manner. At the same time, this vast difference can be overcome, although it is, of course, filled with challenges.

2.4.4 The Origin of Our Epistemological Limitation

There is still one important question unanswered: why are there different types of judgement? Or, why are our epistemological abilities or judgement abilities limited? This limitation arises due to two significant challenges related to the two types of dependent origination we have discussed—external (generative) causality and internal (definitional) causality.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ 《阿毘達磨順正理論》卷 32:「云何知佛為化主無限? 於一切界境皆有智故。諸界差別由二種依, 謂依身殊及法差別。佛於諸界差別相中, 有能遍知殊勝智故, 於一切法、一切有情差別境中無礙智轉」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1562, p. 525a21–25)

*NyāŚ: ‘How does one know that the Buddha, as the teacher (化主) of sentient beings, is boundless? It is because he possesses knowledge of all objects (界境). The differences among these objects arise from two bases: one is the difference in identity, and the other is the difference in property. Since the Buddha has a comprehensive and analytic knowledge that fully discerns such distinctions among the objects, his unimpeded discernment manifests regarding differences among all *dharms* and all sentient beings.’

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed examination of how early Buddhist philosophers conceptualised the limits of ordinary perception and the possibility of non-conceptual awareness, see Robert H. Sharf, “Knowing Blue: Early Buddhist Accounts of Non-Conceptual Sense Perception”, *Philosophy East and West* 68, no. 3 (2018): 826–870.

Firstly, on the level of external dependent origination, the causal chains that interconnect all *dharms* in the universe are immensely complex and infinitely expanding. The cosmic-scale web of causes and conditions is so vast and interwoven that, as ordinary beings, we are incapable of fully comprehending or exhausting all the causal relationships that contribute to the arising of any single *dharma*. This horizontal dimension involves the interplay of countless factors across space and time, making it impossible for us to synthetically observe, let alone analytically deduce, all the *dharms* in this universe. Needless to say, we lack the knowledge of all the attributes of a *dharma* solely based on contemplating its concept, without accounting for its relations with all other *dharms*.

Secondly, on the level of internal dependent origination, each *dharma*'s internal causality—that is, the definitional processes through which its own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*/自相) are unfolded—is even more intricate, unfathomable, and expansive. In the regimentation developed throughout this dissertation, this is precisely because every single *dharma* is a bundle of innumerable definition-fixing properties: what a *dharma* is given by the characteristics that can be truthfully predicated of it. Yet this internal dimension is not readily accessible to ordinary understanding. Without the guidance of Buddhist practice—such as meditation,¹⁰⁸ ethical discipline, and the cultivation of wisdom—as well as diligent training of our rational faculties, we cannot disentangle the bundle of a *dharma*'s characteristics as they manifoldly unfold through internal causality. As stated by the Ābhidharmikas in *AMVŚ, juan 78, when they took earth as an example to illustrate this point:

Moreover, the earth's own characteristics have boundless differentiations. Observation of them is not exhausted before one dies; let alone further observing the own characteristics of other *dharms*.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Crosby and Kyaw show how Abhidhamma categories underpin Theravāda meditation by mapping and validating deepening insight. Through three case studies, they illustrate how practitioners use Abhidhamma both to guide each stage of their practice and to interpret meditative experiences, thereby highlighting the inseparability of doctrine and lived meditation. See Kate Crosby and Pyi Phyo Kyaw, "Transformation and Abhidhamma in Three Theravada Meditation Traditions", in *Illuminating the Dharma: Buddhist Studies in Honour of Venerable Professor KL Dhammajoti*, edited by Toshiichi Endo and Mingyuan Gao (Hong Kong: Buddha-Dharma Centre of Hong Kong, 2021), 29–50.

¹⁰⁹ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 78:「且地自相無邊差別, 觀未窮盡而便命終, 況更能觀諸餘自相。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 405b1–2)

Read literally, the passage does not yet speak in the technical idiom of “properties”; it speaks of a *dharma*’s own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*) and their “boundless differentiations”. But this is exactly the point needed here. If even a paradigmatic element such as earth admits of indefinitely many differentiations at the level of its own characteristics, then the internal (definitional) dimension demands ever-greater analytic power—far beyond the reach of ordinary synthetic judgement. In other words: on the Sarvāstivāda picture, the completeness of a *dharma* (its being *fully* what it is) is not in question; what is in question is our epistemic access to that completeness.

Recognising that an exhaustive, one-by-one catalogue of concrete characteristics is in principle unattainable, the Vaibhāṣikas therefore raise the inquiry a logical tier higher, into *higher-order metaphysics*: rather than attempting an impossible enumeration, they ask what it means *as such* for any conditioned characteristic to belong to a *dharma*, and how that belonging is itself grounded. This shift is crucial for the global thesis of this dissertation. If *sarvam asti* is best read as a copular claim of completeness—each conditioned *dharma* instantiates the complete set of its definition-fixing characteristics—then the philosophical task is not merely to list what one happens to observe, but to articulate, at the right level of generality, *which predications are grounded in what the dharma is*.

The vastness of external causal interrelations and the limitlessly expansive internal causal processes together render it beyond the capacity of ordinary individuals to judge what a *dharma*’s complete characteristics are, whether synthetically through *a posteriori* experience or analytically through conceptual reasoning.

In Abhidharma philosophy, overcoming these limitations involves a strong emphasis on developing one’s rational and analytic abilities, as well as learning how to correctly understand the arising of each *dharma* and the unfolding of its own characteristics from the perspective of dependent origination. Since the Buddha is called the Awakened One precisely because he can analytically know, without remainder, what can be truly predicated of any *dharma*, attaining Buddhahood entails not only pursuing the same rational and ana-

lytic capacities but also mastering the understanding of each *dharma*'s arising and inherent nature through the law of causality (see § 2.4.5.3).

From the Vaibhāṣika viewpoint, in addition to the Buddha's direct, analytic way of knowing all of a *dharma*'s characteristics, one may also grasp them in a synthetic manner. This second mode is termed “unimpeded discernment” (*pratisaṃvid*/無礙智). The feature that the Abhidharma definitions foreground is **non-regression** (不退). The idea is not that synthetic judgement somehow dispenses with the demand of completeness; rather, a synthetic grasp counts as “unimpeded” only insofar as it yields propositions that coincide with what would be delivered by the Buddha's analytic grasp of the *same dharma*. Precisely for that reason, the truth-value of these propositions is **necessarily** grounded in what the *dharma* is, and so is secured against regression. PrP (《阿毘達磨品類足論》) explains this point as follows:

What is *dharmaprasaṃvid* (法無礙解)? It is the non-regressing wisdom (不退智) with respect to name-, sentence-, and syllable-bodies. What is *arthaprasaṃvid* (義無礙解)? It is the non-regressing wisdom with respect to ultimate meaning (勝義). What is *niruktiṣaṃvid* (詞無礙解)? It is the non-regressing wisdom with respect to words. What is *pratibhānaprasaṃvid* (辯無礙解)? It is the non-regressing wisdom with respect to speech that is unimpeded and in accordance with reason, and with respect to the free display in meditative absorption (等持自在顯示).

《阿毘達磨品類足論》卷7〈6 辯攝等品〉:「法無礙解云何? 謂於名、句、文身所有不退智。義無礙解云何? 謂於勝義所有不退智。詞無礙解云何? 謂於言詞所有不退智。辯無礙解云何? 謂於無滯應理言詞及於等持自在顯示所有不退智。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T26, no. 1542, p. 719a7–12)

Two points are worth stressing, given that the translation is kept literally close to the text. First, the repeated structure—“the non-regressing wisdom with respect to ...”—highlights that *pratisaṃvid* is marked out by *non-regression* rather than by an explicit mention of “completeness” in the definition. But within the framework defended in this dissertation, these come apart only in description, not in function: non-regression is precisely what one should expect when the predications in question are grounded in the definition-fixing characteristics of a *dharma* (hence necessary, hence not liable to be overturned by further experience).

Second, the domains enumerated in PrP are conspicuously propositional-linguistic: name-, sentence-, and syllable-bodies; words; ultimate meaning; and the ability to express,

without impediment and in accordance with reason, what one has grasped (together with meditative mastery that supports such expression). In other words, unimpeded discernment is not presented as a mute experiential totality; it is concerned with the capacity to correctly construct and articulate predications—to say, in the right syllables, words, and sentences, *what a dharma is*. This aligns with our ongoing emphasis that the principal philosophical task in Abhidharma lies in establishing propositions about what a *dharma* is. Consequently, we must ask: *What, exactly, do these propositions apprehend?* On the global Sarvāstivāda reading argued for in this dissertation, they apprehend the *complete* set of definition-fixing characteristics of a *dharma*: those and only those features whose possession is grounded in what the *dharma is*. Saṃghabhadra offers a further explanation that makes this comprehensive scope explicit:

*NyAŚ (*juan 32*):

How do we know that the Buddha, as the teacher (化主), is boundless? Because he has knowledge with respect to all *dhātu*-objects (界境). The distinctions among the *dhātus* depend on two kinds of bases: the difference of bodies (身殊) and the difference of *dharms*. Because the Buddha has a superior wisdom capable of knowing universally the distinguishing features of the *dhātus*' distinctions, unimpeded discernment (無礙智) turns with respect to the differentiated objects of all *dharms* and all sentient beings.

《阿毘達磨順正理論》卷 32:「云何知佛為化主無限? 於一切界境皆有智故。諸界差別由二種依, 謂依身殊及法差別。佛於諸界差別相中, 有能遍知殊勝智故, 於一切法、一切有情差別境中無礙智轉」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1562, p. 525a21–25)

Here the literal idiom is that of “*dhātu*-objects” (界境) and “differentiated objects” (差別境), together with “the distinguishing features of distinctions” (差別相). This is not yet the regimentation of “complete property-sets”. But the philosophical upshot is the same: to know universally the distinguishing features that structure all such domains is to leave no remainder in what can be truly predicated of any *dharma* across any domain of distinction. That is why, within the Sarvāstivāda framework, the Buddha’s boundlessness as a teacher is tied to the thought that unimpeded discernment can *turn* with respect to all *dharms* and all sentient beings’ differentiated objects: it is comprehensive in scope even when described in the more traditional idiom of “objects” and “distinctions”.

Notably, Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophers later adopted and integrated this idea into their exposition of perfect enlightenment (*samyaksaṃbodhi*). They explicitly hold that “un-

obstructed wisdom” constitutes the broadest knowledge ordinary practitioners can attain through studying and practising the Buddha’s teachings, and that it also forms the essence of perfect enlightenment:

MPP states:

The characteristics to which the Tathāgata awakens are extremely profound, difficult to see and difficult to know. Because the Tathāgata directly awakens to these characteristics, unimpeded discernment turns with respect to all *dharma*s. All Tathāgatas, the rightly and perfectly awakened ones, abide in these characteristics, discriminate and expound the extremely profound Prajñāpāramitā; for sentient beings they gather the characteristics of *dharma*s and, by skilful means, expound them, causing them to obtain unimpeded discernment in Prajñāpāramitā.

《大般若波羅蜜多經》卷 306〈41 佛母品〉：「如來所覺如是諸相，極為甚深，難見難覺，如來現覺如是相故，於一切法無礙智轉。一切如來應正等覺住如是相，分別開示甚深般若波羅蜜多，為諸有情集諸法相，方便開示，令於般若波羅蜜多得無礙智。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T06, no. 220, p. 559b18–23)

This passage is instructive for present purposes because its operative vocabulary remains that of “characteristics” (相), “turning/operation” (轉), “abiding” (住), and “gathering the characteristics of *dharma*s” (集諸法相), rather than being immediately recast in the later metalanguage of “properties” and “property-set synthesis”. What it shows is that unimpeded discernment is framed as (i) grounded in the Tathāgata’s direct awakening to the relevant characteristics, and (ii) communicable through a practice and pedagogy (Prajñāpāramitā) in which those characteristics are “gathered” and “expounded” for sentient beings. This is exactly the route needed to connect the present epistemological discussion to the thesis-wide claim about *sarvam asti*. If *sarvam asti* is a copular thesis of completeness, then the central epistemic problem is how finite beings can approach, without distortion, the complete definition-fixing characteristics that constitute what a *dharma* is. The Sarvāstivāda answer is: by elevating judgement from the ordinary level—where external causal webs and internal differentiations outstrip our capacities—to forms of rationally disciplined and practice-supported cognition, culminating in either the Buddha’s direct analytic grasp or a synthetic but non-regressing, propositional grasp that coincides with it.

Hence, within Sarvāstivāda philosophy, unimpeded discernment still refers to the Buddha’s comprehensive omniscience regarding all *dharma*s, discerned through synthetic judgement. Yet as Mahāyāna thought evolved, this unimpeded discernment was included among

the teachings the Buddha offered, thereby enabling ordinary people to acquire a synthetic understanding of the totality of a *dharma*'s characteristics.¹¹⁰

A still more compressed Mahāyāna formulation appears in the *Vasudhārasūtra* (《持世經》). There the bodhisattva's wisdom concerning all *dharmanas* is presented under four headings: knowing *dharmanas* as they truly are, discerning their causes, grasping their determinate meaning, and understanding their linguistic and sentential formulation.¹¹¹ The value of the passage here is not that it independently proves the present reconstruction. Rather, it preserves, in a compact Mahāyāna register, the same conjunction that has emerged from the foregoing discussion: *yathābhūta*-knowledge, causal explanation, definition-fixing meaning, and propositional articulation.

Seen in this light, the transition to *sthānāsthānajñāna* becomes natural: once the central question is which predicates can and cannot truly belong to a *dharma*, the power of knowing what is possible and what is impossible functions as the analytic discipline governing precisely those determinations.

2.4.5 The Power of Knowing What Is Possible and What Is Impossible: Analyticity and Possibility

In the previous sections, we established *sarvam asti* and connected it to the Buddhist adaptation of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). We now turn to an equally pivotal concept: *sthānāsthānajñānabala*, or the “power of knowing what is possible and what is impossible”. As we will see, this “power” underpins how practitioners discern the internal properties of a *dharma* via analytic reasoning.

In addition to knowledge of all properties/*sarvathājñāna*, this ability to make analytic judgements is referred to as the *sthānāsthānajñānabala*. By developing this power, practi-

¹¹⁰ On how Buddhist thinkers integrate conceptual reasoning with direct experience to overcome ordinary epistemic limitations, see Christian Coseru, “Reason and Experience in Buddhist Epistemology”, in *A Companion to Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. Steven M. Emmanuel (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, 241–255). This perspective illuminates the path from constrained judgements to the sort of unimpeded discernment identified with higher or complete realisation.

¹¹¹ *Vasudhārasūtra* 《持世經》卷 1:「持世! 菩薩摩訶薩見四利, 能修習一切法分別章句慧。何等四? 當善知一切諸法實相, 當分別一切法所因, 當知諸法決定義, 當善知一切法語言、章句, 是為四。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T14, no. 482, p. 643a17–20).

tioners learn to perceive how each *dharma* arises and how its intrinsic properties unfold according to dependent origination, thereby aspiring to achieve the comprehensive analytic knowledge that characterises the rational power of the enlightened one.

2.4.5.1 Why “What Is Possible and What Is Impossible” Implies Analytic Knowledge

To understand why knowing what is possible or impossible counts as analytic knowledge, we must examine the nature of analytic propositions and their relation to definitions and concepts, particularly within Buddhist philosophy and the Sarvāstivāda tradition.

Firstly, and most importantly, analytic knowledge is grounded in the logical structure and definitions of concepts. Analytic propositions are statements that are true by virtue of the meanings of their terms and the logical relationships between them, independent of empirical evidence. For example, “All triangles have three sides” is analytically true because the concept of a triangle inherently includes having three sides.

Similarly, in Buddhist philosophy, when we analyse the individual properties (*sva-lakṣaṇa*) of a *dharma*, we use logical reasoning based on its definition to determine what properties can be truthfully attributed to it and what cannot. This logical examination allows us to know which properties are possible and which are not possible for that *dharma* purely through analysis.

According to Sarvāstivāda philosophy, a *dharma* is complete, meaning that in being what it is, a *dharma* fully instantiates all possible properties contained in its concept. Therefore, knowing what is possible and what is not possible involves knowing all the properties it will unfold. Consequently, judging what is possible and what is not possible ultimately leads to propositions derived from analytic judgements about the same *dharma*. In other words, determining the possibilities and impossibilities for a *dharma* is essentially an analytic process based on its intrinsic nature.

Moreover, knowing what is possible and what is not possible involves necessary truths derived from definitions—a hallmark of analytic knowledge. In an analytic proposition, the predicate is contained within the subject, and its truth is self-evident once the meanings of

the terms are understood. Determining the possibilities for a *dharma* involves understanding the necessary relationships dictated by its definition and the logical implications of those relationships, relying on internal logical consistency rather than external observation.

In conclusion, the knowledge of what is possible and what is not possible refers to analytic knowledge because it is derived from logical analysis of inherent definitions and properties of concepts. This knowledge involves necessary truths independent of empirical observation, relying on the *a priori* examination of logical relationships. In Buddhist philosophy, especially within the Sarvāstivāda school, this analytic approach allows practitioners to understand the intrinsic nature of *dharma*s and their inherent limitations and capabilities. By employing analytic reasoning, one can ascertain the possibilities and impossibilities of phenomena based solely on their definitions, aligning this knowledge with the principles of analytic knowledge.

2.4.5.2 Three Aspects of Analytic Judgement in Buddhism

As we have discussed, Buddhism uses three different concepts—*yuktijñāna*, *sarvathājñāna*, and *sthānāsthānajñāna*—to refer to analytic judgement or knowledge in different respects. Now we are equipped with sufficient conceptual tools to differentiate and elucidate which aspects of analytic propositions are singled out by these three designations, especially in the context of Abhidharma philosophy:

- “*yuktijñāna*/Certified knowledge/證知” emphasises that the truth of an analytic proposition is necessarily *a priori*, highlighting that such propositions are logically necessary and conform to logical forms without empirical verification.
- “*sarvathājñāna*/Knowledge of all properties/一切種智” underscores the completeness and thoroughness of analytic propositions. It emphasises that, starting from the concept of a *dharma*, one can, theoretically (and for the Buddha who possesses this *jñāna*, in actuality), exhaust all attributes that can be attributed to it through analysis.

- “*sthānāsthānajñāna*/Knowledge of what is possible and what is not possible/處非處智” focuses on the content of analytic judgements—the necessity of a *dharma* having certain properties. It pertains to the domain of properties covered when a *dharma* unfolds its own properties, indicating that any properties beyond the boundary of its own domain do not belong to the *dharma*.

Notably, the *Yogācārabhūmi* offers a compact definition of a thing’s “boundary” or “limit” (*vastuparyantatā*, 事邊際性) that makes explicit two constraints that have been implicit in the foregoing discussion of analytic predication: an object counts as having a determinate “boundary” for cognition only insofar as it is grasped both (i) *exhaustively* (*yāvadbhāvikatā*, 盡所有性), i.e. with no remainder beyond its proper classificatory domain, and (ii) *as it is* (*yathāvadbhāvikatā*, 如所有性), i.e. as real/such and rationally warranted.¹¹² Read in these terms, the *Yogācāra* pairing of “exhaustiveness” (盡所有性) and “as-it-is” (如所有性) echoes the two pressures we have separated above: the ideal of completeness articulated by *sarvathājñāna*, and the demand for rational certification articulated by *yuktijñāna*.¹¹³ The very notion of “boundary” (事邊際性) states what is at stake in *sthānāsthānajñāna*, namely, which predicates can—and which cannot—belong to a given *dharma*.

This illustrates how different terms in Buddhist philosophy highlight various facets of analytic knowledge, reinforcing its central role in discerning what is possible and what is

¹¹² 《瑜伽師地論》卷 26 (T30, no. 1579, p. 427b28–c8; CBETA 2025.R3):「云何事邊際性? 謂若所緣盡所有性、如所有性。云何名為盡所有性? 謂色蘊外更無餘色, 受想行識蘊外更無有餘受想行識; 一切有為事, 皆五法所攝; 一切諸法, 界處所攝; 一切所知事, 四聖諦攝。如是名為盡所有性。云何名為如所有性? 謂若所緣是真實性、是真如性, 由四道理, 具道理性。謂觀待道理、作用道理、證成道理、法爾道理。如是若所緣境盡所有性、如所有性, 總說為一事邊際性。」

Literal translation: “What is the property of a thing’s boundary? It is that the object [of cognition] is (a) exhaustive-aspect and (b) as-it-is-aspect. What is the exhaustive-aspect? It is: outside the aggregate of form there is no further form; outside the aggregates of feeling, perception, formations, and consciousness there are no further feeling, perception, formations, or consciousness. All conditioned things are included in the five *dharmas*; all *dharmas* are included in the realms and sense-bases; all knowable matters are included in the Four Noble Truths. This is called the exhaustive-aspect. What is the as-it-is-aspect? It is: the object is reality and suchness; by four rationales it possesses rationality—namely, the rationale of dependence, function, establishment, and naturalness. When the object is both exhaustive-aspect and as-it-is-aspect, this is collectively called the property of a thing’s boundary.”

Paraphrase (for present purposes): to know a *dharma* “up to its limit” is (i) to delimit its admissible predicational domain in a way that leaves no remainder, and (ii) to do so in a truth-tracking way, i.e. one that is rationally warranted rather than merely stipulative.

¹¹³ Compare §2.3.2, where the same classificatory domains (*dhātus*, *āyatanas*) delimit the force of *sarvam*.

not possible for any given *dharma*. This is why Buddhist texts often emphasise that only a fully enlightened being, such as the Buddha, possesses the comprehensive wisdom to know a *dharma*'s complete properties analytically.¹¹⁴

2.4.5.3 The Buddha as the Awakened Analyst

Indeed, the Buddha is called the Awakened One precisely because he can analytically understand what each *dharma* is. Having fully realised the analyticity of what a *dharma* truly is and the entirety of dependent origination, the Buddha can atemporally and analytically comprehend the complete properties of a *dharma* without relying on its empirical unfolding.

As discussed in various scriptures:

The Tathāgata knows what is possible and what is impossible, and knows it as it truly is.¹¹⁵ (*Treatise on the Path to Liberation*, 解脫道論)

When the Tathāgata attained Anuttarā Samyaksambodhi, he observed the Twelve Links of dependent origination and discerned what is possible and what is impossible.¹¹⁶ (**Scripture of Bodhisattva Śīla*, 菩薩善戒經)

Because he is fully aware of what is possible and what is impossible, he is called the Awakened One.¹¹⁷ (**Daśabhūmikasūtra*, 十住經)

He is called the Awakened One because he fully understands what is possible and what is impossible.¹¹⁸ (**Mahāvaiṣṭya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*, 大方廣佛華嚴經)

These passages highlight that the Buddha's enlightening knowledge is characterised by knowing which properties are possible and which are not possible for any *dharma* to instantiate. This profound understanding results from his ability to analytically comprehend how each *dharma* arises and how its individual properties unfold according to causality, setting him apart as the Awakened One.

It is precisely this emphasis on analytic understanding that influenced the development of the “**Ten Powers**” in later Buddhist philosophy. Recognising the paramount importance

¹¹⁴ On the nuanced view of the Buddha's omniscience in Buddhism, see Elisa Freschi's discussion at <https://elisafreschi.com/2017/07/11/first-thoughts-on-omniscience-in-indian-thought/>. Notably, Buddhaghosa explains the Buddha's “all-knowing knowledge” (*sabbāññuta-ñāṇa*) as “his possibility to know without any obstacle whatever he fixed his attention on”, rather than a constant awareness of every trivial fact.

¹¹⁵ 《解脫道論》卷 6〈8 行門品〉:「如來知是處非處, 如實而知」(CBETA 2024.R2, T32, no. 1648, p. 427c3–4)

¹¹⁶ 《菩薩善戒經》卷 9〈6 住品〉:「如來得阿耨多羅三藐三菩提時, 觀十二因緣是處非處」(CBETA 2024.R2, T30, no. 1582, p. 1012b11–12)

¹¹⁷ 《十住經》卷 2〈5 難勝地〉:「善思惟是處非處故, 名為覺者;」(CBETA 2024.R2, T10, no. 286, p. 512b8–9)

¹¹⁸ 《大方廣佛華嚴經》卷 36:「名為覺者, 能觀是處、非處故」(CBETA 2024.R2, T10, no. 279, p. 192a15–16)

of comprehending what a *dharma* is, the “**Power of Knowing What Is Possible and What Is Impossible**” (*sthānāsthānajñāna*) was placed first among the ten. This prioritisation reflects the early Buddhist and Abhidharma focus on analytic judgement—both of *dharmanas* as subjects of judgement, and of what *dharmanas* are as what is predicated of those subjects—underscoring its fundamental role in the path to enlightenment. This is evident in Abhidharma literature, for example, in *AHS, juan 3:

The Buddha has ten wisdoms. The (first) is the power of knowing what is possible and what is impossible; it is named the knowledge of what is possible. By apprehending the true characteristics and the true activities of the *dharmanas*, and by apprehending and knowing that this *dharma* has such a characteristic and such an activity—this is called the knowledge of what is possible and the knowledge of what is impossible.¹¹⁹

Read literally, the text speaks of “true characteristics” (真實相) and “true activities” (真實行), and of knowing a given *dharma* to be “such a characteristic” and “such an activity” (如是相、如是行). It does not yet present this in the explicit idiom of “properties” or “*a priori* deduction”. Nevertheless, within the Abhidharma project as reconstructed throughout this dissertation, these are exactly the two dimensions that must be brought under analytic control if one is to know “what is possible and what is impossible” for a *dharma*: (i) the definitional characteristics that fix what can be truthfully predicated of the *dharma* (what it *is*), and (ii) the lawful patterns in which it can unfold and function (how it *operates* in dependence on causes and conditions). On this regimentation, the “knowledge of what is possible and what is impossible” is best understood as an *analytic* capacity: given the *dharma* as subject, one can determine which predicates and causal courses are admissible and which are ruled out.

In *MppŚ, juan 24, we find an even more direct statement of the comprehensiveness of *sthānāsthānajñāna*:

By the Power of Knowing What Is Possible and What Is Impossible, one determinately knows: from such causes and conditions comes such fruit and retribution. In this, it comprehensively includes the nine powers.

是處不是處力，定知從是因緣出是果報，是中總攝九力。(CBETA 2024.R2, T25, no. 1509, p. 236c20–21)

¹¹⁹ 《阿毘曇心論》卷3〈6智品〉：「佛有十智，是處非處力，是處智名，受諸法真實相、真實行，受知此法如是相、如是行，是謂是處智非處智。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1550, p. 823a6–9)

Again, the literal wording emphasises *determinateness* (定知) rather than explicitly saying “analytic judgement”. But the philosophical point required for my argument is precisely that determinateness about “from such causes and conditions comes such fruit and retribution” marks a cognition that is not merely observationally synthetic. It is a cognition governed by necessity: given a *dharma*’s definitional constitution and the relevant causal conditions, certain results must follow and others cannot. This is why the text can say that the first power “comprehensively includes” the other nine: to know the space of the possible and the impossible is to know, in principle, the entire field of lawful connections that the remaining powers specify in more detail.

Accordingly, in the internal definitional causation formed between subject and predicate, object and property, the power of *sthānāsthānajñāna* is embodied in the ability to analytically deduce all possible properties (predicates) starting from an analysis of the subject (the *dharma*). For Abhidharma philosophers, when we speak of “understanding the *yathābhūta/yathārtha* of a *dharma*”, we are referring to grasping, at the propositional level, what is fixed by these “true characteristics” and “true activities”: which predicates can be truthfully attributed to this *dharma*, and which cannot. This means that by fully analysing the concept of a *dharma* in terms of causality one can deduce its complete properties and understand it as it truly is.¹²⁰

It is precisely because *dharmanas* are to be understood in this analytic, *as-it-is* manner that translators like Paramārtha and Xuanzang, when rendering the opening verse of AKBh, both translated the term “*yathārtham*” using the phrase “in accordance with reason” (如理). This choice emphasises that understanding what a *dharma* is involves comprehending what can be rationally (如理) and truthfully attributed to it. In other words, to understand a *dharma* “as

¹²⁰ Kumārajīva explained this line of reasoning to his disciples when translating *Vimalakīrti*. See《維摩經義疏》卷6〈11 菩薩行品(六)〉:「什公云... 達因果即解緣起, 解緣起則見實相」(CBETA 2024.R3, T38, no. 1781, p. 983a17–18)

Commentary on the Vimalakīrti Sūtra: Venerable Kumārajīva said: “By penetrating cause and effect, one thereby understands dependent origination; and by understanding dependent origination, one sees the real characteristic (實相).”

it truly is” entails conforming to the analytic propositional unfolding of the *dharma*, aligning with rational understanding.

Therefore, in short, the philosophical task of Abhidharma is defined as constructing analytic propositions about what a *dharma* is. Accordingly, the philosophical task of the Sarvāstivādins, especially, is to articulate the metaphysical foundation of this endeavour: namely, that by analytically understanding what a *dharma* is, one can determine what can and cannot be predicated of it. This is because any *dharma* is considered complete, meaning that all properties that can be truthfully attributed to it are contained within the very concept of that *dharma*.

By emphasising analytic understanding and the completeness of *dharmanas*, the Sarvāstivādins reinforce the idea that only through analytic judgement can one fully comprehend what *dharmanas* are without having to deal with the limitlessly expanding realm of synthetic observations. This aligns with our earlier discussion on how the knowledge of what is possible and what is not possible refers to analytic knowledge. In order to achieve this analytic power, one has to follow what the Buddha teaches; thereby, the Ābhidharmikas unite Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology.

Notably, in Kv, a similar proposition is recorded: “*ṭhānāṭhāne yathābhūtaṃ nāṇaṃ tathāgatabalaṃ ariyanti*” (“The noble ones declare that the Tathāgata’s power is the knowledge, as it truly is, regarding what is possible and what is impossible”). Here, the concept of “what is possible and what is not possible” inherently involves the knowledge of the *yathābhūta* of the *dharma*.¹²¹

Thus, when AKBh refers to Abhidharma treatises as *yathārthaśāstra* (philosophical treatises on “as it really is”), Vasubandhu makes it clear that these treatises aim to teach people

¹²¹ I have also noticed that Kit Fine’s discussion of “essence” aligns closely with the “internal definitional causality” I emphasise. See Fine, “Essence and Modality”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 1–16. Fine points out that not all necessary truths pertain to an entity’s essence—some are universally valid necessities (e.g. 2+2=4) but do not address what the entity *is*. By contrast, essential truths are those rooted in the entity’s own definition or nature, mirroring the Abhidharma notion that a *dharma*’s definitional causality preconditions which properties it can and cannot have. Put differently, only by understanding an entity’s essence do we grasp what it can or cannot be. This insight nicely parallels my discussion of a *dharma*’s “completeness”, the analyticity of what a *dharma* is, and its implications for possibility and impossibility.

to ultimately attain the intellectual ability to know all the properties of a *dharma* from the perspective of analytic propositions. This underscores that, in Abhidharma philosophy, analytic knowledge is not merely a method but the very essence of understanding reality. The ability to analytically discern the properties of a *dharma*—to know what it can be and what it cannot be—constitutes true knowledge of its nature. Having shown that *sthānāsthānajñāna* hinges on a *dharma*'s definitional completeness, we can now fully articulate how these insights culminate in a Buddhist presupposition of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

2.4.6 A Buddhist Version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason

Returning to our earlier propositions, this approach supports the proposition that “*dharma* is complete” (**Proposition 1**), meaning that a *dharma* has all properties that can be definitionally attributed to it. Consequently, true propositions about what a *dharma* is are, from a metaphysical perspective, all analytic propositions (**Proposition 2**), meaning that all the predicates that can be truly predicated of this *dharma* are inherently included in the concept of this *dharma*.

These two propositions are intimately connected—they can be seen as two sides of the same coin or as necessary and sufficient conditions for each other:

- **Proposition 1 leads to Proposition 2:** If a *dharma* is complete, then any true proposition about it is analytic because all properties attributed to it with truth are contained in this *dharma*.
- **Proposition 2 leads to Proposition 1:** If propositions about a *dharma* with truth are all analytic, this implies that all the true predicates of this *dharma* are contained within the concept of this *dharma*, affirming the *dharma*'s completeness.

From these two propositions, we derive a crucial philosophical foundation—the **Buddhist version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason** (hereafter, PSR).¹²² This principle as-

¹²² A strikingly similar advocate of PSR can be found in Vaiśeṣika philosophy. In the concluding statement of the **Vaiśeṣikadaśapadārthaśāstra* (*VDPS), it is stated: 「一切是所知，亦即此詮因。」(“Everything is knowable, and it is known by knowing its cause.”) (CBETA 2024.R2, T54, no. 2138, p. 1266a22). For a modern

serts that every *dharma* can be—and must be, if one aims at liberation from *saṃsāra*—fully explained through analysis of its inherent properties determined by causality.¹²³

2.4.6.1 Canonical Roots of the Buddhist PSR

It is worth noting that a *proto*-form of the **PSR** is already presupposed in early Buddhist soteriology. For example, in *Majjhima Nikāya* 149, “Mahāsaḷāyatanika Sutta”, *dhammā* are described as *pariññeyyā*—*to be fully known*.¹²⁴ What is to be known in this “full” manner is *yathābhūta*—*as it has come to be* (“as it really is”)—that is, *dhammā* in their own determinate mode of being. This already commits Buddhist liberation theory to a strong intelligibility claim: there is a fact of the matter about what each *dhamma/dharma* is, and it is in principle knowable—not merely in fragments, but in a way that can bring delusion to an end. In the idiom of this dissertation, this intelligibility claim is what later gets articulated with maximal clarity as a Buddhist presupposition of the **PSR**: reality does not contain brute, reasonless features that would in principle defeat complete understanding.

If we cannot fully know what each *dharma* is, our incomplete understanding will lead to increased delusion and ignorance, keeping us trapped in the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*).

counterpart, see Leibniz, *Monadology* § 32, in *Philosophical Essays*, ed. Ariew and Garber (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 217. Leibniz argues that every fact has a sufficient reason, paralleling the Sarvāstivāda claim that *dharmas* are analysable by inherent properties.

¹²³ Regarding the Buddhist version of PSR, there are countless expressions in Buddhist scriptures. Among the more representative ones is, for example:

《大方等大集經》卷 12〈6 無言菩薩品〉：「若知諸法有因有果，是名慧力。」（“If one knows that all *dharmas* have causes and effects, this is called the power of wisdom.”）（CBETA 2024.R2, T13, no. 397, p. 78b25–26）

Similar content can be found in the third verse of the opening chapter of AKBh:

dharmāṇāṃ pravicyam antareṇa nāsti kleśānāṃ yata upasāntaye ’bhyupāyāḥ | kleśaiś ca bhramati bhavārṇave ’tra lokas taddhetor ata uditaḥ kilaiṣa śāstrā || 1.3 || (Pradhan, AKBh, 2)

(Apart from the analysis of *dharmas*, there are no means to end the afflictions, and due to the afflictions, beings roam in the ocean of existence; therefore, this has indeed been taught by the instructor.)

¹²⁴ *so ye dhammā abhiññā pariññeyyā te dhamme abhiññā parijānāti*. Cf. 《雜阿含經》卷 13：「若法應知、應了者，悉知、悉了。」（CBETA 2024.R2, T02, no. 99, p. 87c5）

“Whatever *dhammā* are to be directly known and fully known, one directly knows and fully knows those *dhammā*.”

Therefore, the demand for a complete understanding of what *dhamma/dharma* is is already established as the core of Buddhist liberation doctrine in early Buddhist philosophy. On this picture, something like the PSR becomes a foundational axiom: only if what is the case is, in principle, *accountable* can a liberation-through-knowledge programme be coherently sustained.

A more explicit Abhidharma articulation of this thought appears at the very beginning of *AHŚ, in a passage that insists that *dharma*-characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*/相) are not only to be known but are the proper object of *determinate* cognition:

It is said: The characteristics of *dharms* should be known. Why should they be known? The characteristics of *dharms* are constant and determinate (常定); one knows the constant and determinate characteristics. He says: (this is) determinate knowledge (定智). If there is determinate knowledge, then the characteristic is determinate (決定). For this reason, it is said that the characteristics of *dharms* should be known.

Question: Worldly people also know the characteristics of *dharms*. Even the most foolish know: earth (has) the solidity-characteristic; water (has) the wetness-characteristic; fire (has) the heat-characteristic; wind (has) the movement-characteristic; space (has) the non-impediment-characteristic; consciousness (has) the non-form-characteristic. All such things should not be (a case of) having already known and then knowing again. If, having already known, one knows again, then this would be endless; but endlessness—this is not so. How, then, is it said that the characteristics of *dharms* should be known?

Answer: Worldly people do not know the characteristics of *dharms*. If worldly people knew the characteristics of *dharms*, then all that is worldly should also be determinate—yet (it is) not determinate. The characteristics of *dharms* are constant and determinate: it cannot be said that one knows the characteristics of *dharms* and yet is not determinate. If it were so, then “not determinate” would also be “determinate”. But it is not so. Therefore worldly people do not know the characteristics of *dharms*.

Furthermore, as for earth’s solidity-characteristic: (there are) the impermanence-characteristic, the suffering-characteristic, and the non-self-characteristic. If it were not so, then the solidity-characteristic should have the permanence-characteristic, the happiness-characteristic, and the self-characteristic. But it is not so. Therefore the solidity-characteristic is precisely the impermanence-characteristic, the suffering-characteristic, and the non-self-characteristic. If worldly people, with respect to earth, know the solidity-characteristic, then the impermanence-characteristic, the suffering-characteristic, and the non-self-characteristic should also be known; yet (they are) not known. Therefore worldly people do not know earth’s solidity-characteristic.

說曰：法相應當知。何故應知？法相者常定，知常定相。彼曰：定智。有定智，相則為決定，以是故，說法相應當知。問：世間亦知法相，此極愚亦知堅相地、濕相水、熱相火、動相風、無礙相空、非色相識，如是一切不應已知復知；若已知復知，此則無窮；無窮者，此事不然。云何說法相應當知？答：世間不知法相。若世間知法相者，一切世間亦應決定而不決定。法相者常定，不可說知法相而不決定。若然者，不決定亦應決定。但不爾，是以世間不知法相。復次堅相地，無常相、苦相、非我相，若不爾者，堅相應有常相、樂相、有我相。而不爾，是故堅相即無常相、苦相、無我相。若世間於地知堅相者，無常相、苦相、無我相亦應知，而不知，是故世間不知地堅相。(CBETA 2024.R2, T28, no. 1550, p. 809a11–25)

With the translation kept close to the Chinese, the argumentative structure becomes clearer—and it is precisely this structure that allows the passage to do the work required for the present chapter.

First, Dharmasreṣṭhin’s opening claim grounds the demand for knowledge in **determinateness**: *dharma*-characteristics are “constant and determinate” (常定), and what is demanded is “determinate knowledge” (定智), i.e. a cognition that is not left hanging in indeterminacy (不決定). The text does *not* yet say, in so many words, that characteristics are “contained in the concept” of a *dharma*; that is the higher-order regimentation developed in this dissertation. But the direction is already fixed: if the characteristics are *constant-and-determinate*, then there is a principled difference between (i) merely picking up some feature in experience and (ii) knowing the characteristic *as such*, in a way that secures it against vacillation and misattribution. This is exactly the kind of determinacy that, when rendered at the logical level of subject and predicate, motivates an Abhidharma-friendly version of the PSR: for any true predication of a characteristic of a *dharma*, there must be a sufficient ground that fixes it as determinate, rather than leaving it as an endlessly revisable appearance.

Second, the question-and-answer exchange is not a mere scholastic digression; it is the soteriological edge of the argument. The interlocutor points out that even the foolish can recite stock characteristics (solidity, wetness, heat, movement, etc.). The worry is that if “knowing” just means repeatedly taking up what has already been taken up (已知復知), then knowledge becomes *endless* (無窮) and so cannot play the role Buddhist liberation theory assigns to it. The answer is uncompromising: worldly people *do not* in fact know *dharma*-characteristics, precisely because their cognition is not *determinate*. This is the exact point at which the text can be made to “click” with the thesis-wide structure of the dissertation: liberating knowledge must be *closed* in the relevant sense—it must reach what is fixed (常定), rather than remaining open-ended like a mere series of further observations.

Third, the earth example shows why this determinateness is not merely a psychological matter but a matter of **what is correctly predicated of the subject**. The passage insists

that, with respect to earth, the solidity-characteristic cannot be treated as an isolated item of knowledge: it is bound up with impermanence, suffering, and non-self (無常、苦、非我). The argumentative point is: if one truly knew earth’s solidity-characteristic, one *should* also know those further characteristics; since ordinary people do not, they do not truly know even the solidity-characteristic. This is precisely the kind of interconnectedness that, once expressed in the idiom of subject and predicate, supports the Abhidharma idea of *analytic* grounding: to know a *dharma*-characteristic *as* a *dharma*-characteristic is to stand under constraints on what may and may not be predicated—and those constraints are not set by further sensory enumeration, but by how the *dharma* is.

At this stage, it is helpful (with due methodological caution) to use Kant’s labels to regiment the epistemic space the Abhidharma text is already carving out.¹²⁵ The AHŚ passage does not itself speak of “analytic” or “*a posteriori*”; nevertheless, it contrasts (i) a potentially endless knowing-by-repeated-acquaintance (已知復知/無窮) with (ii) determinate knowledge (定智/決定) that would prevent the wrong predications (常、樂、我) from being attached to earth. In the framework developed in this dissertation, these correspond to two different ways of relating predicate to subject: a merely synthetic accumulation of what appears, versus an analytic grounding of what is correctly attributable to the *dharma* in virtue of what it is.

Moreover, the earth example also motivates a further distinction that is important for the overall architecture of my argument. Sensory experience can deliver coarse characteristics like solidity; but it does not, by itself, deliver impermanence, suffering, and non-self. To grasp those, one must judge through dependent origination (*pratīyasamutpāda*), i.e. through a causal form of understanding that goes beyond mere sense-data. In my earlier terms, this is the terrain of **synthetic a priori** judgement: it is informed by the category of causality while still requiring a synthesis of concepts. Yet, within Sarvāstivāda metaphysics as reconstructed here, even that is not the endpoint. To fully understand a *dharma* and the complete

¹²⁵ Compare Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A6–7/B10–11, on the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements. See also Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, on how empirical observations can yield knowledge of necessary truths.

bundle of what is truthfully predicable of it, one needs **analytic** judgement in the strict sense: a way of unfolding, from the *dharma* as subject, the whole range of admissible predicates as *fixed* (常定) rather than as an open-ended list.

This is why the PSR is fundamental in Buddhist philosophy in the particular way I am arguing for. By insisting that *dharma*-characteristics are constant-and-determinate (常定), and that genuine knowledge must be determinate (定智/決定), the Abhidharma tradition implicitly commits itself to the idea that there is a sufficient ground for why each true predicate belongs where it does. The Sarvāstivāda metaphysical articulation of this commitment is the thesis of definitional *completeness*: all the properties of a *dharma* that can be truthfully attributed to it are grounded in what that *dharma* is, and can therefore be made explicit in analytic propositions. In this way, *AHS can be read as already uniting Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology under a single requirement: only a grounded, determinate, and ultimately analytic grasp of what a *dharma* is can underwrite the complete knowledge necessary for liberation.¹²⁶

2.4.6.2 PSR as the Metaphysical Backbone of Abhidharma

The PSR is significant because it provides the metaphysical grounding for the entire philosophical project of Abhidharma philosophy. As we have discussed, its fundamental task is to understand what a *dharma* is (*dharma-pravicaya*). The Buddhist version of the PSR plays a double role in this task.

Firstly, it establishes that it is possible to know what a *dharma* is. This possibility is validated by the PSR in conjunction with the Buddhist conception of internal (definitional) causality, which illuminates that an object-subject's being what it is—its unfolding into its properties (predicates)—is a causal event. The PSR assures us that there is a sufficient reason for a *dharma*'s being what it is, grounded in its own essence.

Secondly, the axiom that every *dharma* is complete comes into play. Because each *dharma* is considered complete—that is, because the full set of properties truly attributable to it

¹²⁶ Cf. Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I, Proposition 29, trans. Curley (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985), 434–435.

belongs to its definitional profile—the *dharma* (as subject) provides the sufficient reason, on the internal side, for the properties that can be truly attributed to it. Furthermore, because the instantiated *dharma* is exhaustively articulated through this complete bundle of properties, our knowledge of those properties conversely provides sufficient reason for accounting for what this *dharma* is, and why it is such as it is.

Here, due to the axiom of completeness, if we fail to understand all properties that form the bundle, we will not actually know this bundle, and we will not know this *dharma* as it truly is, because this *dharma* is exactly the bundle of its properties. At this stage, the PSR plays its second role: to further ground the idea that “to account for” means “to completely account for”. This means that a full explanation requires understanding all aspects of a *dharma*. It entails that constructing analytic propositions about a *dharma* is both possible and necessary.

Therefore, by emphasising the PSR and the completeness of *dharms*, the Abhidharma philosophers assert that through analytic judgement, one can fully comprehend what *dharms* are as they truly are (*yathābhūta*). This complete and ultimate understanding is essential because it unites Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology by providing the necessary foundation for liberation through knowledge. And with those critical arguments established, we are now ready to show how understanding *pratīyasamutpāda* and understanding *dharms* converge.

2.4.7 From *pratīyasamutpāda* to *dharma* and Back Again

The proposition that *dharms* are complete makes explicit that knowing dependent origination and knowing *dharms* are mutually necessary and sufficient conditions. This interconnectedness justifies the Abhidharma task of “knowing what a *dharma* is” and demonstrates how accomplishing this task can lead to liberation.¹²⁷ Understanding a *dharma* involves analysing how it unfolds its properties through its internal causality—its definitional dependent origination. Since a *dharma* is what it is, it will necessarily unfold into its inherent individual properties. This unfolding is an event occurring within the *dharma* itself, and un-

¹²⁷ On the interrelatedness and interdependence of *dharms* and dependent origination in Abhidharma, see Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, ch. 5.

derstanding it does not require introducing the concept of time but rather the concept of events, as time is merely the sequence of events. (See § 4.1.4.)

Moreover, the proposition that all true judgements about *dharmanas* are analytic from a metaphysical perspective lays the foundation for the possibility of liberation. It suggests that liberation is attainable because the nature of *dharmanas* can be fully understood through rational analysis of their intrinsic properties as determined by causality.¹²⁸ As we discussed before, even partial understanding—though not necessarily entirely incorrect—leads to increased suffering and strengthens ignorance, ultimately resulting in continued rebirth.

This is exemplified by the notion of the Awakened One—the Buddha—who is called so precisely because he can analytically understand the complete bundle of properties of all *dharmanas*. His enlightenment is characterised by his profound analytic ability to comprehend *a priori* the arising of each *dharma* and the unfolding of its individual properties according to external and internal causality, respectively, without relying on empirical or synthetic observation of their unfolding.

Therefore, these interconnected propositions—the completeness of *dharmanas*, the analyticity of propositions about them, and the Buddhist version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason—collectively provide a robust metaphysical foundation for the Abhidharma philosophical project. They affirm that completely understanding all the properties of a *dharma* is not only possible but also essential for attaining liberation from *saṃsāra*.

This realisation underscores the importance of the analytic approach in Buddhist philosophy. The path to liberation involves not just acknowledging that *dharmanas* are complete or that propositions about them are analytic, but actively engaging in the analytic process of judging each *dharma* through its individual properties and causality.

¹²⁸ This echoes Nyanaponika Thera’s observation in *Abhidhamma Studies* (Kandy, 1976), p. 21, that “an important axiom of Buddhist philosophy: A complete description of a thing requires, besides its analysis, also a statement of its relations to certain other things.” Also, Y. Karuṇadasa uses the phrase “the *dhamma* theory” to describe how the Abhidhamma views each phenomenon as fully explicable via its internal definition and causal factors. See Karuṇadasa, *The Dhamma Theory*, 11–15. He notes that if a *dhamma* were partly undefined, one could never achieve exhaustive insight—a situation contrary to the Abhidharma’s soteriological aims, which demand a complete account of each *dhamma*’s properties.

Equally important, Abhidharma philosophy distinguishes between synthetic *a posteriori* judgement (arbitrary judgements entirely based on sensory experience), synthetic *a priori* judgements (understanding a *dharma*'s properties based on the understanding of dependent origination as an *a priori* category), and analytic judgements, and establishes a progression from synthetic to analytic understanding.¹²⁹ By doing so, practitioners fulfil the Buddhist Principle of Sufficient Reason, which plays a dual role: on the one hand, asserting that for every *dharma*, there is a sufficient explanation rooted in its own concept and causal determinants; and on the other hand, holding that only a complete understanding of a *dharma*'s properties qualifies as a sufficient explanation. This dual role of the PSR ensures that understanding is both possible and necessarily complete, reinforcing the philosophical framework of Abhidharma.

In concluding our exploration in Chapter 2, we have seen how *sarvam* and *asti* jointly frame the Sarvāstivāda understanding of a *dharma*'s property-bundle. *sarvam* does not name an unrestricted totality; it names the *canonically exhaustive yet exclusive* domain of genuine predication—the domain fixed by the twelve *āyatana*s and, by the same token, one that rules out putatively “foreign” predicates (e.g. *paralakṣaṇa*). Within that delimited domain, a conditioned *dharma* is nothing over and above the complete bundle of its own predicates, spanning both definitional aspects and causal phases. Meanwhile, *asti* functions as the copular hinge that marks such predications as truth-evaluable and licensed as what can be said: the resulting propositions are timelessly valid *as definitional truths*, even though the *instantiation* of those predicates occurs as events in the causal sequence. This reflects the Abhidharma's larger philosophical drive: by analysing each *dharma*'s intrinsic predicates and comprehend-

¹²⁹ 《摩訶般若波羅蜜經》卷 1〈1 序品〉：「欲以一切智具足一切種智，當習行般若波羅蜜。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T08, no. 223, p. 219a23–24)

**Larger Prajñāpāramitā* (*LaPP): If one wishes to progress from *sarvajñāna* to the complete realisation of *sarvathājñāna*, one should cultivate and practice Prajñāpāramitā.

《大般涅槃經》卷 3：「我年二十有九，出家學道，三十有六，於菩提樹下，思八聖道究竟源底，成阿耨多羅三藐三菩提，得一切種智。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T01, no. 7, p. 204a18–20)

**Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*: “When I was twenty-nine years old, I left home to study the Path. At thirty-six, beneath the Bodhi tree, I investigated the ultimate root of the Noble Eightfold Path and attained Anuttarāsamyaṅsambodhi, thereby acquiring *sarvathājñāna*.”

ing its arising through dependent origination, one can attain the insight necessary for liberation. Hence, the Abhidharma project exemplifies how rational analysis and practical spiritual goals converge to support enlightenment, demonstrating the enduring significance of **analytic judgement** in Buddhism.

Yet, a key question remains: How did early Abhidharma debates, predating the mature Sarvāstivāda position, pave the way for these core concepts? Chapter 3 will address this by examining **pre- and non-Vaibhāṣika** texts—such as Mil and Kv—which first grappled with tensions between time-based and property-oriented readings of *dharma*s. We shall see how their rudimentary discussions of “past/future” foreshadowed—and indeed spurred—the more refined Sarvāstivāda stance on *sarvam* and *asti*.

3 *addhā/adhvan* and *atthi/asti* Reasoning in Pre- and Non-Vaibhāṣika Texts (*Milindapañha*, *Kathāvatthu*, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*)

Distinguishing the individual properties from universal properties of *dharma*s—this is Abhidharma. (*AMVŚ, *juan* 1)
《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 1:「分別諸法自相共相是阿毘達磨。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 1c28–29)

The Buddha thus spoke to the Venerable Śāriputra: “If a bodhisattva wishes to completely and truthfully know all the properties of all *dharma*s, then this bodhisattva should study *prajñāpāramitā*.” (MPP, *juan* 3)
《大般若波羅蜜多經》卷 3〈2 學觀品〉:「便告具壽舍利子言:「若菩薩摩訶薩欲於一切法等覺一切相, 當學般若波羅蜜多。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T05, no. 220, p. 11c9–11)

Building on Chapter 2’s reconstruction of *sarvam asti* as a claim about predication and completeness (rather than a flat ontological thesis about “what exists”), this chapter excavates an earlier stratum of debates in which the key tools —*addhā/adhvan* and *atthi/asti*—were still contested and unstable.¹ As the Prolegomenon has suggested through the BL 28 polemic, what is at stake is not a coarse-grained inventory of beings, but the conditions under which one may legitimately and truthfully say what a *dharma* is or has.² Accordingly, I treat the later slogan “everything exists in three times” as a secondary compression: it becomes intelligible once we recover the richer logical work done by stage-predicates (“*atīta/anāgata/pratyutpanna*”) and by the copula (*atthi/asti*). This chapter therefore revisits Mil and Kv—and Vasubandhu’s AKBh, which reframes them—to reconstruct those derivational moves.

¹ Where Chapter 2 established the seven commitments from Vaibhāṣika sources, this chapter approaches them *ex negativo*: it tracks what happens when Commitments 1, 6, and 7 are absent. See §1.1.2.

² See Prolegomenon §§0.2–0.3 on BL 28 and the notion of *kathā-vastu*/言依.

3.1 Rethinking Philosophical History

3.1.1 From Doctrinal Positions to Philosophical Derivations

In his study of Sanskrit poetics, McCrea remarks that intellectual history is not best reconstructed by extracting one final definition from each school and then arranging those definitions in sequence. What matters just as much are the smaller derivational moves through which rival readers return to the same terms, the same examples, and often the same lines, while pressing them in different directions.³

The point carries over to Buddhist philosophy. If we begin only with finished sectarian slogans, we easily miss the argumentative pathways by which those slogans became possible. I therefore treat *sarvam asti* less as an isolated conclusion than as a compressed result of repeated debate. To study its history is not simply to list who affirmed or denied it, but to recover how arguments about *atthi/asti*, *addhā/adhvan*, causal sequence, and the status of past *dharma*s gradually converged upon it.

This is also why I do not treat *sarvam asti* here merely as a finished axiom to be restated once more. The more revealing question is how it was derived, what older debates it condensed, and how that condensation itself later became a source of misunderstanding. In this sense the history of the doctrine is inseparable from the history of the problems that forced it into being.

The previous chapter approached *sarvam asti* at the level of mature Vaibhāṣika metaphysics and argued that *sarvam* names completeness rather than a mere inventory of existents. The present chapter moves differently. It follows the earlier argumentative lines through which the copula *atthi/asti* and the temporal vocabulary of *addhā/adhvan* were still unstable, and through which the later formula could be narrowed, sharpened, or partially distorted.

³ Cf. Lawrence J. McCrea, *The Teleology of Poetics in Medieval Kashmir* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 1–11.

Because these debates predate the fully articulated Vaibhāṣika synthesis, the evidence is often fragmentary and polemically mediated. Yet this is not simply a deficiency. It is precisely what makes a philosophical archaeology possible: the texts preserve doctrine in motion, with rival derivations still visible under the later formulae. What follows therefore does not abandon sectarian differences; it approaches them by tracing the derivational moves that produced them.

3.1.2 Abhidharma in a Philosophical-Historical Perspective

In both Northern and Southern canons, Abhidharma (Abhidhamma in Pāli) is eventually counted as one division of the Tripiṭaka. At the same time, it is clearly later than the *sūtras* and *vinayas*, arising out of exegetical analysis, classification, and reflection.⁴ This double status matters for the present chapter. Abhidharma is later, yet it is later in a distinctive way: it looks back upon inherited doctrine and subjects it to a level of analytic pressure that earlier textual layers only begin to show.

That reflective pressure is directed not only toward metaphysics but also toward soteriology. To analyse *dharma*s is, in Abhidharma's own self-understanding, inseparable from the work of loosening *kleśa*. Once liberation depends on knowing what a *dharma* is, questions about predication, causal articulation, and the force of the copula become unavoidable. This is why a chapter on *atthi/asti* and *addhā/adhvan* is not a digression from Abhidharma's central concern, but one way of moving closer to it.

The difficulty, of course, is that the relevant materials are not transmitted as a neat sequence. Indian traditions rarely preserve secure dates; sectarian strata overlap; later texts often absorb earlier controversies; and polemical formats preserve doctrine in refracted form.⁵ These obstacles do not make philosophical history impossible, but they do discourage a simple linear narrative.

⁴ Cf. Anālayo, *The Dawn of Abhidharma*, esp. 9–13, 67–72; Richard Salomon, *The Buddhist Literature of Ancient Gandhāra* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2018), 295–303, 321–330.

⁵ For a concise survey of the dating problem and sectarian layering, see Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 29–37.

At the same time, Abhidharma’s later status within Buddhism means that it became a privileged site for philosophical self-reflection across multiple traditions. It is one reason why so much intellectual energy was later devoted to translating, transmitting, and commenting on these materials, even when the older debates themselves had already become textually layered and historically difficult to date. That later prominence does not solve the historian’s problems; it explains why the materials are rich enough to reward the effort.

For that reason, Sarvāstivāda offers a particularly fruitful foothold. Its later literature preserves unusually explicit reflections on causality, predication, and the analysis of *dharma*s, while earlier and rival materials still allow us to glimpse the derivational pressures out of which those reflections emerged. The present chapter therefore proceeds from the mature Vaibhāṣika baseline backward into earlier argumentative scenes, not because the later position is chronologically first, but because it gives us the clearest vantage from which to recognise what was at stake in the earlier disputes.

3.1.3 Reconstructing the Derivation of *atthi/asti*

In AKBh, Vasubandhu gives the most influential summary of *sarvam asti*, and he does so within a discussion of why *kleśa* appears to remain tied to persons. From his perspective, the doctrine is therefore already implicated in the problem of enduring affliction. Yet when we turn to Vaibhāṣika materials themselves, the discussions of the three *adhvans* that he cites are not originally framed by that question. They emerge first within analyses of what it is to be a *saṃskṛtadharmā*.⁶

This mismatch is historically instructive. Vasubandhu’s report is not useless because it is selective; rather, it is selective in a way that reveals which strand of the older debate had by his time become philosophically salient. In §3.1, I therefore reconstruct a minimal Vaibhāṣika baseline on *adhvan* and *asti*, after which the chapter works archaeologically backward—through AKBh and then through Mil and Kv—to recover earlier moves that made, and sometimes narrowed, the later formula.

⁶ Pradhan, AKBh, 14: “*yatrāprahīṇāste iti varttate | anāgatairebhir eva rāgapratighamānair manobhūmikaiḥ sarvatra vastuni saṃnyutastraiyadhvike |*” See also CBETA 2021.Q4, T27, no. 1545, pp. 393a09–396b23.

My aim is twofold. First, I want to trace how the Vaibhāṣikas arrived at their account of *sarvam asti* through their analyses of *adhvan* and *asti*. Second, I want to keep in view a further question that returns in §4.2.2: whether that account can ultimately sustain the enduring association of *kleśa* with persons. Vasubandhu may well have pressed the doctrine toward that problem more sharply than the Vaibhāṣikas themselves did, but that pressure is part of the history we need to understand, not something to be screened off.

3.1.4 Key Vaibhāṣika Principles on *adhvan* and *asti*

Before we analyse how Vasubandhu interprets the Vaibhāṣika *sarvam asti* philosophy, we need to clarify the fundamental principles that shape Vaibhāṣika analysis of the three *adhvans* and *asti*.

3.1.4.1 A De-Temporalised View of *adhvan*/time

The three *adhvans* are not objects in themselves but properties or states of affairs possessed by objects, namely, *saṃskṛtadharmas*. In other words, the three *adhvans* serve as predicates of *dharms*. As previously discussed, within the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika philosophical tradition, *sarvam* signifies a *dharma*'s complete bundle of properties (predicates), not a subject or object in itself.⁷

From this it follows that the Vaibhāṣika understanding of the three *adhvans* amounts to a “de-temporalised view of time”. The three *adhvans* are not temporal objects, but rather attributes or properties of *dharms*. Their usage does not imply the existence of a reified “time” as an independent object. Instead, these concepts help us describe or interpret a *dharma*'s stage in a causal sequence.

⁷ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 73:「我說一切即十二處……一切法性皆攝入此十二處中。」(CBETA 2019.Q3, T27, no. 1545, p. 378b29–c14)

*AMVŚ: “I propose that *sarvam* refers to the twelve *āyatanas*... Subsumed under these twelve *āyatanas* are but all the properties of *dharms*.”

《雜阿毘曇心論》卷 8:「一切者，謂十二入，於彼自相、共相一切悉知。」(CBETA 2019.Q3, T28, no. 1552, p. 931b25–26)

*SAHŚ: “By *sarvam* I mean the twelve *āyatanas* whereby intrinsic and generic properties are completely known.”

As stated in the 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》: 「問如是三世以何為自性。答以一切有為法為自性。」⁸ (“Question: What is the own nature of these three *adhvas*? Answer: They take all *saṃskṛtadharmas* as their own nature.”) Vaibhāṣika philosophers elaborate further: if “future” had its own intrinsic essence as an object, then whenever “future” emerged, every *dharma* qualified by “future” would arise simultaneously—an obvious impossibility. Thus, “future”, like the other two concepts, cannot be an independent object. Instead, it is a discrete property qualifying a particular *dharma* at a certain causal stage. The Vaibhāṣikas summarise this as “三世一切有”⁹: “all *dharmas* have—or can be designated by—the three *adhvas*”.

Notably, “三世一切有” is the only instance in the *AMVŚ’s discussion of the three *adhvas* that explicitly mentions “一切有” (*sarvam asti*). The proposition is that all conditioned *dharmas* are qualified by the three *adhvas*. According to Vasubandhu, these 三世/three *adhvas* are known as *sarvam*, so “三世一切有” can be expressed as 一切一切有/*sarvam sarvam asti*. Interestingly, expanding “一切有” into “一切一切有” aligns exactly with Dharmatrāta’s citation of the definition of Sarvāstivāda in *SAHŚ 雜阿毘曇心論. In short, from a Vaibhāṣika perspective, “*sarvāsti*” can be further clarified as “*sarvasarvāsti*”. Philosophically, *sarvam sarvam asti* means that each conditioned *dharma* is complete in its property-bundle, a hallmark of the Sarvāstivāda philosophical agenda.

As the Prolegomenon has already shown through BL 28, the formula *sarvam sarvam asti* was not confined to the triad of the three *adhvas*. The fragment expands *sarvam* across temporal, spatial, modal, causal, and conditional registers. I do not repeat the full passage here. For the present argument, what matters is its clear confirmation that *sarvam* operates predicationally: it ranges over the complete set of properties attributable to a *dharma*, not over a bare inventory of things that somehow “exist”.¹⁰

⁸ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 76: CBETA 2023.Q4, T27, no. 1545, p. 393c4–5.

⁹ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 76: CBETA 2019.Q3, T27, no. 1545, p. 394c20.

¹⁰ For the full BL 28 passage and discussion, see the Prolegomenon, esp. §§0.2–0.3.

As expected, the Sautrāntikas objected to the Vaibhāṣika view. They rephrased it as *sarvadā sarvam asti*/一切法一切時有,¹¹ intending this as a critique. Yet, if we recognise that *sarvadā* in Vaibhāṣika philosophy implies atemporality rather than literal eternity, this reinterpretation inadvertently supports our reconstruction of Vaibhāṣika thought. It is, in fact, the Sautrāntikas’ rejection of this nuanced understanding that prompted Vasubandhu to conclude that *sarvam asti* fails to provide a philosophical foundation for the perpetual linkage between *kleśa* and sentient beings. (However, Vasubandhu’s reconstruction did not fully show how the Vaibhāṣikas invoked the doctrine of *sarvam asti* to offer a philosophical account of the enduring entanglement between *kleśa* and sentient beings; a detailed, eventive analysis of *adhvan* that elaborates on this point appears in § 4.1.4 and § 4.4.2.)

3.1.4.2 A *dharma*’s Causal Stages

First, we must reiterate that when discussing the three *adhvans*, the Vaibhāṣika principle of *sarvam asti* does not imply that these three are objects in themselves. Instead, it means that each *saṃskṛtadharma* inherently possesses these three types of properties. To determine which property applies at a given point, we must examine the *dharma*’s position in the causal sequence. In other words, the three *adhvans* serve as conceptual markers indicating a *dharma*’s phase within the chain of cause and effect. The four master theories of the Sarvāstivāda tradition specifically address this issue: how to identify the stage of a *dharma*’s causal progression by observing changes in its properties. This aligns with the fundamental Abhidharma objective—understanding what a *dharma* is. Introducing the concepts of the three *adhvans* helps us pinpoint exactly where in the causal chain a *dharma* stands. As previously noted, for ordinary cognition, grasping what a *dharma* is often relies on synthetic *a priori* judgements, and whether we can form such judgements depends on our ability to com-

¹¹ AKBh, *juan* 20, trans. Xuanzang: 「若一切法一切時有，誰於誰有能生功能？」(in CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 106a15–16) (Rendered as: “If all *dharma*s instantiate all temporal properties, what will have the causal trigger to bring what else into being?”). It is noteworthy that in the currently available Sanskrit edition—where Xuanzang’s rendering implies “*sarvadā sarvam asti*”—there is in fact only a single instance of *sarvam*. It is therefore plausible that the Sanskrit text upon which Xuanzang based his translation preserved an older proposition, *sarvadā sarvam asti*, a usage likewise found in Gāndhāri Abhidharmic fragments (BL 28).

prehend that *dharma* through dependent origination. In this regard, the three *adhvans* are crucial conceptual tools for making those judgements.

Building on this, we can articulate a second Vaibhāṣika principle: the three *adhvans* function as explanatory markers—*explanans*—that qualify a *dharma*'s stage in its causal process. If a *dharma* has completed triggering its effect, we call it “past” (*atīta*). If it is currently triggering its effect, we call it “present” (*pratyutpanna*). If it has not yet done so, it is “future” (*anāgata*). Using this framework, we can determine whether a *dharma* presently leans towards the cause side or the effect side of the causal event. *AMVŚ states:

三世諸法因因果性。隨其所應次第安立。體實恒有無增無減。但依作用說有說無。¹²

Literal translation. *dharmanas* of the three times have cause-nature and effect-nature. According to what is appropriate, they are sequentially established. Their entity truly always exists, with no increase and no decrease. One speaks of “is” and “is not” only on the basis of activity.

Interpretive rendering. Past, present, and future mark positions within a causal sequence: a *dharma* is spoken of as cause- or effect-related according to the role proper to the stage it occupies. What the *dharma* is does not increase or diminish; affirmative and negative speech tracks whether its causal activity is in operation.

The passage distinguishes two levels. What a *dharma* is does not increase or diminish; affirmative and negative speech tracks whether its activity is in operation. On the present reading, the three *adhvans* therefore qualify a *dharma*'s position in a causal sequence rather than positing three separate entities. This does not simply displace the familiar tri-temporal interpretation; rather, it shows how tri-temporal qualification is articulated through activity. In this framework, “有” (*you*) and “無” (*wu*) cannot be taken as literal existence or non-existence of the *dharma*. Instead, they track whether the *dharma*'s activity is in force at a particular stage.¹³

We should also recall that in the foundational Abhidharma text, SaṅgP 阿毘達磨集異門足論, “世/*advhan*” is defined as a specifier that describes the three properties a *sam-skṛtadharma* possesses.¹⁴ As previously noted, our fixation on “existence”, combined with

¹² 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 76: CBETA 2019.Q3, T27, no. 1545, pp. 395c28–396a1.

¹³ For an insightful discussion about the tension between *asat* and *sat*, see Acharya, “‘This World, in the Beginning, was Phenomenally Non-existent’: Āruṇi’s Discourse on Cosmogony in Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.1–VI.7”.

¹⁴ 《阿毘達磨集異門足論》卷 3〈4 三法品〉:「問: 世是何義? 答: 世是顯示諸行增語。」(CBETA 2023.Q4, T26, no. 1536, p. 378c22)

Vasubandhu’s existential reading of Vaibhāṣika thought, may have led us astray, prompting the flattened notion that the Sarvāstivādic “有” plainly means “to exist”.

3.1.4.3 Copula Function of *asti*

The second principle we previously discussed concerns the metaphysical grounding of “有” and its correspondence with the linguistic function of “*asti*”. In the Sarvāstivāda view, the fact that “*asti*” grammatically connects subject and predicate mirrors a metaphysical process: through “*asti*”, a conditioned *dharma* is articulated into its complete bundle of properties. Put differently, when we say, “X is Y”, we are not merely apprehending the object itself but understanding what it is. As emphasised in the previous chapter, Sarvāstivāda philosophy distinguishes between a subject-object (*lakṣya*/能相) dimension, known through *sarvajñāna* (external/generative causality), and a predicate-property (*lakṣita*/所相) dimension, known through *sarvathājñāna* (internal/definitional causality). The latter corresponds precisely to “what it is”.

From the preceding discussions, it is clear that for the Sarvāstivāda tradition, since a *dharma* is fully defined by its complete set of properties, “what it is” can be reframed as “which properties it has”. The Vaibhāṣikas succinctly register this proximity between “being” and what can be predicatively assigned—by treating “有” as something established (施設) on a basis (依)—in *AMVŚ, *juan* 76:

諸積聚事。依實有物。假施設有。時有時無。¹⁵

All bundled entities, relying on what is real, are provisionally posited as “being”; at times they are, at times they are not.

Read in the most literal register, the passage distinguishes (i) a basis described as “what is real” (實有物) from (ii) a “being” (有) that is only set up through provisional positing (假施設). In that designated sense, “being” is said to hold at some times and not at others (時有時無). This is exactly the kind of grounded predication that matters for our present argument: “有/*asti*” is not functioning here as a bare “there is”-claim, but as a copular device that links a

SaṅgP: Question: What is the meaning of *adhvan*? Answer: *adhvan* is a specifier that designates all *saṃskāras* (conditioned phenomena) [indicating their respective causal stages (past, future, or present)].

¹⁵ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 76: CBETA 2019.Q3, T27, no. 1545, p. 396a1–2.

subject to what can (or cannot) be said of it on a real basis. Once the focus is shifted to what is thus predicable, “what it is” is cashed out as “which properties it has”—the predicate–property (*lakṣita*/所相) dimension accessed through *sarvathājñāna*.

In other words, to describe what a *saṃskṛtadharmā* is, we are effectively stating that all of its essential properties inhere by virtue of its nature.¹⁶ Although every *dharma* necessarily bears all three *adhvan* properties in principle, their instantiation is mutually exclusive: once a *vastu* is instantiated as *atīta*, it cannot at that same moment be instantiated as *pratyutpanna* or *anāgata*.

By clarifying these core Vaibhāṣika principles, we gain a more accurate framework for assessing how Vasubandhu’s interpretation of *sarvam asti* emerged and evolved, as well as how his perspective became interwoven into the broader tapestry of Buddhist philosophical discourse. Summarising these Vaibhāṣika principles clarifies how *adhvan* functions as a property rather than a reified entity, and how *asti* operates as a copula linking *dharma* and property—a theme foreshadowed in Chapter 2’s discussion of internal versus external causality. § 3.1.5 now explores how early Vaiśeṣika thought influenced this internal-causality perspective, further enriching the Sarvāstivāda view of *sarvam asti*.

3.1.5 Vaiśeṣika Inputs to Vaibhāṣika Internal Causation

The higher-order role of *asti* also helps us reread an older Buddhist axiom: *asmin sati idaṃ bhavati* (“given this, that becomes”). In much modern discussion the formula is taken chiefly as a statement of external or generative causation, as though it served only to describe how one event brings another into being in the empirical world. That dimension is real, but it is not the only one. Once the Vaibhāṣika distinction between external/generative and internal/definitional causation is in view, the formula can also be heard differently: because something is of such-and-such a nature, certain predicates belong to it and unfold from it. What follows is not merely another item in the world; it is also an articulation of what the thing is.

¹⁶ Cf. Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīya* 3.3.47: “*ātmanā ātmanaṃ bibhṛad asti*.”

Read that way, *asmin sati idaṃ bhavati* names a predicative causality. The point is not that one entity sits next to another in time, but that a *dharma*'s own nature carries with it determinate modes of manifestation. Earlier chapters approached this under the heading of internal or definitional causality. The present point is narrower: the copula *asti* becomes philosophically central because it is the place at which a subject is unfolded into the predicates that belong to it.

Something close to this logic can also be seen in early Vaiśeṣika reflection. Whatever the precise direction of influence, Vaiśeṣika too explores the relation between a thing and the attributes that follow from its nature.¹⁷ The Chinese *VDPS is particularly suggestive here: it does not treat a description such as “short” as a merely accidental label, but analyses the relevant attribute through the causal conditions that ground it.¹⁸ What looks like simple predication is thus already being drawn into a causal idiom.

This also clarifies a grammatical difficulty in *asmin sati idaṃ bhavati*. A locative absolute suggests simultaneity between subordinate and main clauses, whereas straightforward physical causation normally requires temporal succession. The tension eases if the expression is heard, at least in one register, as definitional rather than merely generative: because a *dharma* is this, it thereby manifests these attributes. Cause and effect are not temporally juxtaposed items, but two sides of an analytic articulation.

Once this shift is made, a further Vaibhāṣika thought comes into view. The properties unfolded by *asti* are not all of one kind. Some are static and definitional; others are dynamic, marking the *dharma*'s own unfolding through causal stages. Yet both, so far as they belong to what the *dharma* is, fall within its complete bundle. A conditioned *dharma* is therefore not static first and dynamic only by accidental addition. Its very essence includes both a stable

¹⁷ For the broader question of Abhidharma–Vaiśeṣika interaction, see Johannes Bronkhorst, “Abhidharma and Indian Thinking”, in *Text, History, and Philosophy*, 29–46; and Bronkhorst, “Systematic Philosophy between the Empires: Some Determining Features”, in *Between the Empires: Society in India 300 BCE to 400 CE*, edited by Patrick Olivelle (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 287–313; see also Bronkhorst, “Aśvaghoṣa and Vaiśeṣika”, in *Buddhism and Jainism: Essays in Honour of Dr. Hojun Nagasaki on His Seventieth Birthday* (Kyoto: Heirakuji Shoten, 2005), 590–596 ([235]–[241]).

¹⁸ 《勝宗十句義論》卷1:「短體者，謂以二微果為和合因緣，二體所生，一實，短詮緣因，是名短體。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T54, no. 2138, p. 1263a15–16). Cf. *Vaiśeṣikasūtra* 7.1.23.

aspect and the determinate pattern of its own becoming. This is why the Vaibhāṣikas can speak of a *saṃskṛtadharmā* as at once stable in identity and dynamic in manifestation.

A fuller comparison with Vaiśeṣika belongs to Chapter 4, where the mature system can be set beside non-Buddhist ontologies in a less compressed way. For the present chapter, however, the comparison serves a more limited purpose: it helps make intelligible why the Vaibhāṣikas treat *asti* not as a thin existential verb, but as the point at which a *dharma*'s inner causal articulation becomes sayable.

3.1.6 *adhvan*, *asti*, and the Analytic Baseline

The discussion in §3.1 yields four connected claims that establish the analytic baseline for what follows:

1. **The three *adhvans* are** not independent entities but predicates—specific states that a conditioned *dharma* possesses. They describe aspects of a *dharma*'s causal condition rather than functioning as stand-alone subjects.
2. **The *adhvans* serve** as conceptual markers that locate a *dharma*'s position within its internal causal sequence. By using these markers, Vaibhāṣika thought pinpoints how and where a *dharma*'s essential properties manifest during its causal unfolding.
3. **The copula *asti* functions** as a higher-order operator: it links a given *dharma* to the bundle of predicates that define it. The issue is therefore not the bare claim “X exists”, but the analytic assertion “X is such-and-such”, where the predicate set states what X is.
4. **The static–dynamic distinction affirms** that both kinds of attribute belong to a conditioned *dharma*'s nature. A *dharma*'s capacity to undergo and display change is not extrinsic to it, but grounded in its own essence.

Taken together, these four points provide the analytic baseline for the rest of the chapter. They do not yet settle the later polemical disputes, and they do not by themselves answer the problem of *kleśa* and persons. But they clarify what must be kept in view before Vasubandhu's reformulation, or the earlier debates in Mil and Kv, can be read with any precision:

the three *adhvans* are predicates rather than objects, *asti* is fundamentally copulative rather than merely existential, and a conditioned *dharma* must be approached as both stable in identity and dynamic in its own unfolding.

3.2 Vasubandhu's Interpretation of *sarvam asti*

3.2.1 Philosophical Variants behind Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's Chinese Translations of *Abhidharmakośa*

3.2.1.1 Reflecting on Paramārtha's and Xuanzang's Translations

Having clarified the four key principles established earlier, let us now consider the interpretation that tightly binds “everything” (*sarvam*) to “the three *adhvans*”—specifically, how Vasubandhu defines the Sarvāstivāda school. Examining his own words and their subsequent Chinese translations will shed light on what he really meant. More importantly for the present dissertation, it will also show how different Chinese renderings of *asti* (“有/是/實有”) can quietly steer the reader toward different reconstructions of *sarvam asti*.

tasmād asty evātītānāgatam iti vaibhāṣikāḥ | avaśyaṃ ca kilaitat sarvāstivādena sato 'bhyupagan-tavyam | yasmāt

tadastivādāt sarvāstivādā iṣṭāḥ

ye hi sarvam astīti vadanti atītam anāgataṃ pratyutpannaṃ ca te sarvāstivādāḥ | ye tu kecid asti yat pratyutpannam adattaphalaṃ cātītam karma kiñcin nāsti yad dattaphalam atītam anāgataṃ ceti vibhajya vadanti te vibhajyavādināḥ |¹⁹

【玄奘译】

毘婆沙師。定立去來二世實有。若自謂是說一切有宗決定應許實有去來世。

說三世有故，許說一切有。

以說三世皆定實有故，許是說一切有宗。謂若有人說三世實有，方許彼是說一切有宗。若人唯說有現在世及過去世未與果業，說無未來及過去世已與果業，彼可許為分別說部，非此部攝。²⁰

Xuanzang's Translation (literal)

“The Vaibhāṣika masters definitely establish that the two times, past and future, are really existent. If one calls oneself a member of the school that says ‘everything exists’ (說一切有宗), one must certainly admit the real existence of past and future.

Because (they) say that the three times exist, (they are) acknowledged (as) the school that says ‘everything exists’.

Because (they) say that the three times are all certainly really existent, (they are) acknowledged (as) the school that says ‘everything exists’. That is, only if someone says that the three times really exist do we acknowledge him (as) the school that says ‘everything exists’. If someone only says that there exist the present time and past karma that has not yet given fruit, and says that

¹⁹ Pradhan, AKBh, 296.

²⁰ 《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷 20: CBETA 2021.Q4, T29, no. 1558, p. 104b4–27.

there do not exist the future and past karma that has given fruit, that person may be acknowledged as a Vibhajyavādin and is not included in this school.”

【真谛译】

是故知過去未來是。有毘婆沙師立如此。若人自說我是薩婆多部同學，此義必應信受。何以故？偈曰：由執說一切有，許。

釋曰：若人說一切有，謂過去、未來、現世，虛空、擇滅、非擇滅，許彼為說一切有部。復有餘人說：現世法必有，過去業若未與果是有。若過去業已與果，及未來無果，此皆是無。若如此分別故說三世有，此人非說一切有部攝，是說分別部所攝。²¹

Paramārtha's Translation (literal)

“Thus one knows: past and future *are*. Some Vaibhāṣika masters establish it thus. If someone says of himself, ‘I am a fellow student of the Sarvāstivāda school,’ this meaning must certainly be believed and accepted. Why?

The Kārikā: Because (they) adhere to ‘everything exists’ (說一切有), (they are) acknowledged.

The Bhāṣya: If someone says ‘everything exists’, namely the past, the future, the present, (and) space, *pratisamkhyānirodha*, and *apratisamkhyānirodha*, we acknowledge him as belonging to the Sarvāstivāda. Again there are other people who say: present *dharma*s certainly exist; past *karma*, if it has not yet given fruit, is existent. If past *karma* has already given fruit, and future (*karma*) is without fruit, all of these are nonexistent. If, by thus distinguishing, (one) says the three times exist, this person is not included among the Sarvāstivāda, but is included among the Vibhajyavādins.”

Before analysing the two translations, a preliminary note on Chinese lexical resources is in order. Classical Chinese has no single graph that straightforwardly covers the full range of the Sanskrit root *√as*. In practice, translators distribute the work of *asti* across several graphs, and each choice tends to foreground a different aspect of the Sanskrit. That is why, for our purposes, the choice between “有”, “實有”, and “是” is not merely a stylistic matter but a choice that can shape the metaphysical picture suggested by the translation.²²

- “有” is semantically elastic.²³ In one common pattern, “有 X” functions existentially (roughly: “there is X”). In another, “X 有 Y” functions attributively/ possessively (roughly: “X has Y”). Classical Chinese does not force the translator to decide between these two readings in every context; sometimes it even invites a controlled ambiguity.

²¹ 《阿毘達磨俱舍釋論》卷 14: CBETA 2023.Q4, T29, no. 1559, p. 257c19–27.

²² Cox describes Paramārtha's translation as “very literal”; see Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*, 62–63, n. 36. See also Shuqing Zhang, “Exploring the Intricate Usage and Interpretation Issues of ‘體’ (tǐ) in Xuanzang's Translation of *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*”, *Religions* 14, no. 9 (2023): 1211.

²³ On the overlap between possessive and existential uses of 有, and on the relation between existential construal and predication in Classical Chinese, see James Higginbotham, “Indefiniteness and Predication”, in *The Representation of (In)definiteness*, edited by Eric Reuland and Alice ter Meulen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), 43–70; 李京廉, “英汉存现句中的定指效应研究”, *外国语教学与研究* 41, no. 2 (2009): 99–104; and 李旭平, “汉语‘有’字句和存在命题”, *当代语言学* 22, no. 2 (2020): 182–98.

- “實有” intensifies “有” with “實” (real, substantial). Whatever the underlying Sanskrit nuance, the Chinese construction tends to pull the sentence toward an ontologically emphatic register: what is “實有” is not merely spoken of or conventionally admitted, but is insisted on as *really* the case.
- “是” most naturally serves as a copula that links a subject to what is predicated of it (“X is Y”). Forms such as “是有” and “是無” are especially instructive, because they treat existence and nonexistence as *predicates* applied via the copula (“is existent / is nonexistent”), rather than as bare domain-introducing assertions.

These distinctions matter for the present dissertation because, as argued earlier (see § 1.2.1), the Vaibhāṣika slogan *sarvam asti* can be reconstructed as having two inseparable sides. On the one hand, it supports an existential commitment (there are such *dharma*s); on the other, it supports a predicative commitment (each *dharma* is fixed by what can be truthfully predicated of it). No single Chinese graph cleanly expresses both sides at once. A translator therefore inevitably gives grammatical prominence to one aspect of the Sanskrit, and that prominence can be inherited as a doctrinal emphasis.

Xuanzang’s rendering: the gravitational pull of “實有”.

A noteworthy textual difficulty arises in Xuanzang’s translation. In the pivotal passage defining Sarvāstivāda affiliation—“以說三世皆定實有故，許是說一切有宗。謂若有人說三世實有，方許彼是說一切有宗”—the extant Chinese version restates, in two slightly different wordings, the same criterion for being “acknowledged” (許) as a Sarvāstivādin. Such a conspicuous near-repetition is strikingly rare in Xuanzang’s translation of AKBh, and it invites the question of why it occurs here.

A plausible explanation is that the translation process preserved two attempts at rendering the same decisive criterion (whether by revision left visible or by later redaction). For our purposes, the important point is not to settle a historical conjecture about the transmission, but to notice what the Chinese itself makes salient: the definition of Sarvāstivāda member-

ship is made to hinge, twice over, on affirming that the three times are “really existent” (三世實有).

This pressure toward “real existence” is visible even one sentence earlier. In “去來二世實有”, the phrase “past and future” sits in the subject position and “實有” functions predicatively: past-and-future *are* really existent. Immediately afterwards, however, Xuanzang has “實有去來世”, placing “實有” before the nominal. This second word order more readily reads as an existential assertion: there *really exist* past and future. The difference is subtle, but it is philosophically revealing, because it shows how easily the same Chinese materials can be heard in two directions: (a) existence as a predicate attached to a subject already in view, and (b) existence as a way of putting items into the domain.

Here we can already see the interpretive fork that matters for the whole thesis. If we allow “實有” to do most of the work, the Sarvāstivāda thesis naturally looks like a first-order existential claim: past and future *exist* in a robust, emphatic sense. If, however, we keep in view the broader copular range of *asti* defended in this dissertation, we can also hear “實” differently: not merely as temporal-ontological insistence, but as an insistence that the relevant characterisations (past/future/present, and so on) are not arbitrary or indeterminate but are meant to be *real* and principled ways of classifying conditioned *dharma*s. On this second hearing, “實有” still pushes in an ontological direction, but it does not yet force a purely “timeline-existence” reading.

Paramārtha’s rendering: preserving the copular breadth.

Paramārtha distributes the work of *asti* differently. The passage opens with “是故知過去未來是”—“thus one knows: past and future *are*.” We should not overstate the contrast by pretending that “是” is always and only a copula and “有” is always and only existential; classical Chinese is not so regimented. Still, Paramārtha’s opening choice is telling: it does not immediately foreground “real existence” (實有), but begins with a minimal predicative posture—past and future are something that can be known and affirmed.

Within the same passage, Paramārtha then moves freely among “必有”, “是有”, and “是無”. This flexibility is philosophically revealing. In “是有/是無”, existence and nonexistence appear explicitly in the predicate slot; they are treated as what may correctly be said of a given item (a past karma, a future karma, etc.). This aligns naturally with the copular-completeness reading defended throughout this dissertation: *asti* is the hinge that licenses predication and classification, including the predication “(is) existent” or “(is) nonexistent”. The question then becomes: under what principled conditions may one attach those predicates? That question is precisely what the Abhidharma framework answers by appeal to definitional structure and causal unfolding.

Paramārtha’s inclusion of unconditioned items as a test-case.

The most philosophically important divergence appears when Paramārtha glosses “說一切有” by listing not only the three times (past, future, present) but also space and the two cessations. This list is not explicitly present in the extant Sanskrit as printed, and so it should not be treated as a neutral report of Vasubandhu’s exact wording. But even if we regard it as Paramārtha’s interpretive supplementation, it is highly diagnostic of what kind of reading he takes to be natural. The supplement only makes sense if “說一切有” is heard as covering *all dharmas*, conditioned and unconditioned, and if the relevant “is” is not exhausted by a claim about temporal location.

This is exactly where the dissertation’s main proposal gains traction. On the copular completeness reading, *sarvam asti* says (in effect): for any *dharma*, there is an exhaustive way of specifying what it is. Conditioned *dharmas* are specified by temporal aspects (past/future/present); unconditioned *dharmas* are specified by their own unconditioned markers (space and the two cessations). The three *adhvans* and the three unconditioned items thus behave like a disjunctive set of admissible specifiers: not an inventory of “things located in times”, but a way of mapping the predicate-structure by which *dharmas* are fully classifiable.

Conversely, if one construes *asti* here in a narrowly existential, tri-temporal sense (“exists in the three times”), Paramārtha’s list becomes awkward. Unconditioned *dharmas*, pre-

cisely insofar as they are not generated or ceased, do not naturally fall under temporal characterisation in the same way as conditioned *dharma*s. Yet he explicitly brings them under the umbrella of “說一切有”. The most economical way to accommodate this is to widen the semantic role of *asti* from “exists (somewhere/when)” to “is (such-and-such)”: a copular device that marks categorial placement and predicative articulation.

Translation as philosophical diagnosis.

Taken together, the two translations expose a fault line that is not merely translational but philosophical. Xuanzang’s repeated emphasis on “實有” readily encourages an existential reception of the Sarvāstivāda position; Paramārtha’s freer use of “是/有/是有/是無” keeps open the broader copular range in which existence itself can function as a predicate. Neither translation can, by a single graph, carry the whole semantic load of *asti*. Each therefore gives grammatical prominence to some aspect of the doctrine.

This also helps to clarify how the dissertation’s new reading relates to the traditional tri-temporal interpretation. On the view defended here, the two are not competitors at the same level. The tri-temporal slogan is best understood as a *subset* or *downstream implication* of the copular completeness thesis: once one holds that a conditioned *dharma* is fully fixed by the complete bundle of what may be truthfully predicated of it, one can then articulate part of that bundle in terms of temporal aspects (past/future/present). The translational choices of “有/實有/是” matter because they can make it look as if the temporal reading is the whole story (a pure existence-claim), or, alternatively, can leave room for the broader Abhidharma project of specifying what a *dharma* is by an exhaustive predicate-structure. In this sense, translation here does not merely transmit doctrine; it already performs a philosophical choice about what is to be treated as primary in *sarvam asti*.

3.2.1.2 The Vibhajyavādins and Their Variant of *sarvam asti*

Having shown how Xuanzang and Paramārtha’s translations diverge based on their understanding of *asti*, reflecting different philosophical assumptions, we now turn to the Vibha-

jjavādins, whose own interpretation of *sarvam asti* further illuminates the complexities of this key term.²⁴

As we have seen, Paramārtha’s nuanced handling of *asti* closely aligns with the Vibhāṣika understanding that *sarvam asti* means “a *dharma* is complete”. This completeness encompasses both conditioned and unconditioned *dharmanas*, each defined by the full scope of their respective predicates. Adopting a copulative interpretation reveals why Xuanzang struggled: the philosophical implications are profound. To interpret *asti* existentially, Sautrāntikas would have to exclude all unconditioned *dharmanas*’ specifiers from the *sarvam* list. Paramārtha’s approach clarifies this dilemma by ensuring that “*asti*” consistently denotes what a *dharma* “is”, without introducing any temporal or existential aspect that would bar unconditioned *dharmanas* from inclusion. This careful attention to the nuances of translation, as we shall see, reveals fundamental disagreements about the nature of *asti* and the core tenets of Sarvāstivāda philosophy.

In the passage in question, Vasubandhu mentions the Vibhajjavādins. Judging by the context, the only reason to bring up the Vibhajjavādins at this juncture is that they, too, held their own *sarvam asti* doctrine. Otherwise, Vasubandhu would have had no need to distinguish them from the Sarvāstivādins. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Bhāvivēka later identified the Vibhajjavādins and the Sarvāstivādins as essentially the same group. From Vasubandhu’s perspective, the Vibhajjavādins also endorsed some form of *sarvam asti*. Their version, however, differs from that of the later Sarvāstivādins. Interestingly, Paramārtha’s translation includes a key sentence: “If, by thus distinguishing, (one) says the three times exist, this person is not included among the Sarvāstivāda, but is included among the Vibhajjavādins.” This indicates that the Vibhajjavādins indeed held *sarvam asti* views, but they distinguished certain past *karmas* as “continuing” into the present and likewise recognised a portion of future *karmas* as “extending” into the present. For this reason, they were called

²⁴ Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 68–70, suggests that most early Buddhist sects embraced the doctrine of *sarvam asti* in one way or another, or to varying degrees.

the Vibhajyavādins, and yet they undoubtedly accepted *sarvam asti*—that is, both past and future intersect with the present so that one can use the present-tense *asti* for them.

From Paramārtha’s translation, we know that for the Vibhajyavādins, current *dharma*s, past *karma*s not yet bearing fruit, and future *karma*s that will yield fruit are all considered “presently existing”. In contrast, past *karma*s that have already borne fruit and future *karma*s with no fruit are currently “non-existent”. In other words, the Vibhajyavādins interpreted *asti* as “to exist” or “to persist”, and they treated *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* as adjectives modifying *dharma*s and *karma*s respectively.

3.2.1.3 Sautrāntika Influence and Revisions

If we turn our attention to Xuanzang’s translation and the extant Sanskrit text, we find that in recounting the Vibhajyavādins’ doctrines, “future” is taken as wholly non-existent. This clearly conflicts with the Vibhajyavādins’ teaching. If the future were entirely non-existent, the Vibhajyavādins would have nothing to do with the *sarvam asti* discourse. Hence, the Vibhajyavādins most plausibly supported a version of “past and future existence”. Put differently, Paramārtha’s source may stand closer to an earlier recension. Similar doctrines appear in Kv, further confirming that the Vibhajyavādins upheld their own *sarvam asti*, interpreting *asti* as “exists”.

Another noteworthy detail is that Xuanzang’s rendering treats *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* as nouns (i.e. treating the terms as *adhva*n in nominal form), whereas in Paramārtha’s translation and the extant Sanskrit text they clearly function as adjectives. We noted previously that both Xuanzang’s source²⁵ and the extant Sanskrit text exhibit a strong Sautrāntika influence. This variation in grammatical usage shows that the two Sanskrit texts correspond to different developmental stages of Sautrāntika thought. Setting aside the issue of word classes for now, let us return to the interpretation of *asti*.

²⁵ It has been suggested that Xuanzang personally obtained a Sanskrit manuscript, which would account for differences between the AKBh he translated and the version used by Paramārtha. See *Commentary on the Abhidharmakośakārikā* (《俱舍論頌疏》), *juan 1*, CBETA 2024.R3, T41, no. 1823, p. 813a14–15: 大唐三藏玄奘法師，躬得梵本，再譯真文 (“The Tripiṭaka Master Xuanzang of the Great Tang personally obtained the Sanskrit original and retranslated the authentic text.”).

Since the school that understands *asti* as “to exist”—the Vibhajyavādins—was rejected by the Sarvāstivādins, it indirectly demonstrates that the Sarvāstivādins viewed *asti* as a copula. On the metaphysical level, *asti* expresses how an object is no more and no less than the instantiation of its complete set of properties. On the linguistic level, *asti* mirrors this metaphysical picture at the propositional level: it unfolds the subject into its predicates and ensures the proposition’s truth. As discussed previously, the reason the Sarvāstivādins insisted on incorporating *asti*, conjugated in the present tense, into the very name of their school was precisely to emphasise that the metaphysical statements they make are analytic propositions, permanently valid without temporal conditions.

However, this philosophical picture is disadvantageous for the Sautrāntikas, who believe that only by interpreting *asti* closer to “to exist” can one explain, through *sarvam asti*, the perpetual association of defilements with beings. Given their proximity to the Vibhajyavādins and the latter’s earlier rejection by the Sarvāstivādins, if the Sautrāntikas were to adopt the same stance, they too would be dismissed from the start. Likely for this reason, the Vibhajyavādins’ original stance was altered in the Sautrāntika-transmitted AKBh, so that the future is no longer admitted as existing in the present. This modification distinguishes the Vibhajyavādins from the Sautrāntikas’ own doctrine. Therefore, the modifications in Xuanzang’s and the extant Sanskrit versions, compared to Paramārtha’s, further confirm that these translators relied on different textual traditions reflecting strong sectarian distinctions.

Finally, in the extant Sanskrit text, when mentioning *karmas* that are “non-continuing” (*nāsti*), the modifier *anutpādin*, which should define future *karmas*, has disappeared. This change categorises future *karmas* as *nāsti* altogether. However, our previous analysis shows that the Vibhajyavādins’ distinct name and their mention here—as separate from Sarvāstivāda—stem from their acceptance of *sarvam asti* and their differentiation between continuing and non-continuing elements in both past and future. To assume they completely deny future *karmas*’ existence contradicts logic, philosophical history, and even the text itself. Since we know Vasubandhu mentions the Vibhajyavādins precisely because they endorse

some variant of *sarvam asti*, and Paramārtha’s translation corroborates this, we can infer that the Vibhajyavādins in Vasubandhu’s account must have approved of some form of *sarvam asti*. In other words, the currently available Sanskrit text, as well as the source Xuanzang used, may reflect later recensional reshaping. This also suggests that after Vasubandhu, the Sautrāntikas themselves were dissatisfied with his stance. Of course, the fact that Vasubandhu’s view was seen as wavering by later generations does not imply that he lacked more mature philosophical insight. On the contrary, this seemingly reserved attitude may genuinely reflect the complexity of these issues. In the history of philosophy, a more absolute answer is not always the more correct one.

3.2.2 Vasubandhu’s Interpretation of the Sarvāstivāda Doctrine

Let us return to Vasubandhu’s interpretation of the Sarvāstivāda position:

*ye hi sarvam astīti vadanti atītam anāgataṃ pratyutpannaṃ ca te sarvāstivādāḥ*²⁶

As previously discussed, when Vasubandhu summarises or restates the Sarvāstivāda (especially Vaibhāṣika) philosophy, he does so selectively rather than fully and faithfully. His aim is to recast their views in a form more easily refuted by the Sautrāntikas.²⁷ For example, one striking modification involves moving *asti* from after *sarvam* to before *sarvam* (*asty evātītānāgatam*). We know that when *asti* appears at the end of a sentence, it tends more towards a copulative or predicative function, while placing it at the beginning often imparts a more veridical or existential nuance. Yet, in the philosophical maxim *sarvam asti*, *asti* ought to be at the end. From the outset, then, Vasubandhu’s paraphrase has the effect of diverging from the Vaibhāṣikas’ original formulation.

3.2.2.1 Vasubandhu’s Rhetorical Strategy

At this key juncture, where he characterises “Sarvāstivādins”, Vasubandhu should, in theory, clarify that the Sarvāstivādins’ *asti* should be understood as “to exist” or, more precisely,

²⁶ Pradhan, AKBh, 296.

²⁷ For a discussion of Vasubandhu’s argumentative strategies, see Xin Fang (辛放), “『一切有』と『三世実
有』—『俱舍論』における説一切有部の『実有』学説への論理的变化について” [“All-existing” and “Ex-
istence in three times”: On the Logical Transformations of the Sarvāstivāda Theory of “Existence” in the
Abhidharmakośa], 對法雜誌 5 (December 15, 2024), published by 對法雜誌刊行会.

“to persist into the present”. Interpreted thus, “*ye hi sarvam astīti vadanti atītam anāgataṃ pratyutpannam ca te sarvāstivādāḥ*” would straightforwardly mean: those who claim the past, future, and present all exist are Sarvāstivādins. But we see that Vasubandhu does not move *asti* to the front here, nor does he even include it after enumerating past, future, and present. In other words, he sidesteps the question of whether *asti* belongs at the start or end. If following his earlier explanation (*asty evātītānāgataṃ*), he should have written *asty atītam anāgataṃ pratyutpannam*; if adhering to the Sarvāstivāda formulation (*sarvam asti*), then he should have written *atītam anāgataṃ pratyutpannam asti*. Vasubandhu chooses neither; he simply omits *asti* altogether.

Here we must recall how the Vaibhāṣikas understand *asti*. As previously analysed, the Vaibhāṣikas do not treat *asti* as merely “to exist” but rather as a copula, with “past”, “future”, and “present” functioning as predicates or adjectives. Naturally, distinguishing between “to exist” and “to be” is never absolute, and in Abhidharma history many controversies and interpretations of *sarvam asti* have centred on whether *asti* means “exists” or “persists”. Hence, Vasubandhu’s selective restatement is not baseless. He highlights aspects of Vaibhāṣika theory that are easier for Sautrāntika opponents to challenge. On the one hand, he prepares to refute Vaibhāṣika conclusions; on the other, as mentioned earlier, his historical perspective leads him to believe that the *sarvam asti* axiom emerged to explain why beings remain perennially entangled with defilements.

Thus, viewing *sarvam* as referring to the three time periods felt natural to Vasubandhu, especially given the importance of *adhvan* in Sautrāntika thinking. Yet he also knew this stance could collide with certain Vaibhāṣika principles—hence his careful manoeuvring. At a critical juncture, he omits *asti* entirely, maintaining a deliberate ambiguity.

3.2.2.2 Tensions with Vaibhāṣika Principles

Notably, though Vasubandhu favours an existential understanding of *asti*, he never explicitly endorses a purely existential reading (“*asti = vidyate*”), as later Sautrāntikas (like Yaśomitra) would. This omission suggests he remained partly sympathetic to the Vaibhāṣika copular

sense of *asti*. Rather than asserting “the past, future, and present all exist (in time)”, Vasubandhu reframes their claim in a way that leaves open whether *asti* should mean “to exist” or “to be (something)”. His ambivalence thus echoes the evolving Abhidharma tradition, where Sarvāstivādins themselves debated how best to interpret *asti*.

Because of this ambivalence, Vasubandhu’s *Bhāṣya* leaves room for multiple interpretations of *sarvam asti*. As previously stressed, this semantic twofold possibility is not something Vasubandhu contrived; rather, it arises because Sarvāstivāda tradition itself offered two distinct readings over its history.

Following Vasubandhu’s analysis, let us consider the two indisputable elements in *sarvam asti*: *sarva* and *asti*.

sarva (“all”) refers to *atīta* (past), *anāgata* (future), and *pratyutpanna* (present).

Whether *atīta*, *anāgata*, or *pratyutpanna*, all are equally related to the present indicative form of “to be” (*√as*)—that is, to *asti*.

As noted earlier, the meaning of *sarvam asti* hinges on whether *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* are interpreted as subjects or predicates. In the early Abhidharma tradition, *asti* underwent a transformation: it was initially treated as an intransitive verb denoting existence (with *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* as subjects; see detailed discussion in § 3.4.2), but later, in the Sarvāstivāda philosophy, came to function as a copula connecting a subject (*saṃskṛtadharma*) to its predicates (*atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*). By repositioning or removing *asti*, Vasubandhu subtly shifts the meaning from a **copula** uniting *dharma* and property back to a more **existential** emphasis—aligning with Sautrāntika critiques and echoing earlier sectarian propositions. In § 3.2.2.3, we see how the Vaibhāṣikas themselves tackled such interpretive issues via a threefold classification of *astitva*.

3.2.2.3 The Vaibhāṣikas' Threefold Classification of *astitva*

From a Vaibhāṣika perspective, the copula *asti* (“is” or “has”) can operate with truth-value in three distinct ways,²⁸ reflecting a broader philosophical and linguistic landscape for understanding *sarvam asti*:

1. “is” as inherence (相待有/*samavāya*)²⁹

- *A is B* (B is predicated of A) because A **inherently** contains or possesses B; conversely, A is not C because A lacks or does not contain C.
- In this sense, A’s concept **includes** all its definitional (higher-order) attributes (samavāyic properties).

2. “is” as conjunction (和合有/*saṃyoga*)

- *A is B* (B is predicated of A) because A is **connected** (*saṃyoga*) with another ontologically independent *dharma* B; *A is not C* because it is not connected with C.

²⁸ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷9:「有說三種:一相待有。謂如是事,待此故有,待彼故無。二和合有。謂如是事,在此處有,在彼處無。三時分有。謂如是事,此時分有,彼時分無。有說五:一名有。謂龜毛兔角空花鬘等。二實有。謂一切法各住自性。三假有。謂瓶衣車乘軍林舍等。四和合有。謂於諸蘊和合施設補特伽羅。五相待有。謂此彼岸長短事等。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 42a26–b4)

*AMVŚ: “Some propose three types of ‘is-ness/has-ness’ (*astitva* 有): Inherence (相待有): For a given thing, if it inheres in this, this has it, and others cannot have it. Conjunction (和合有): For a given thing, when it is in conjunction with this, this has it, and others cannot have it. Temporal-segment (時分有): For a given thing, when it is in this time period, others cannot have it. Others propose five types of ‘*astitva*’: Nominal being (名有), referring to things like ‘tortoise hair’, ‘rabbit horns’, or ‘illusory flowers and garlands.’ Real being (實有), meaning each and every *dharma* is complete in its own intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*). Designative being (假有), meaning objects such as jars, clothing, carts, chariots, armies, forests, and dwellings, etc. Conjunctive being (和合有), referring to the person (*pudgala*), which is designated upon the conjunction of its constituent aggregates. Relational being (相待有), referring to phenomena like ‘this shore vs. the other shore’ or ‘long vs. short’, and so on.”

²⁹ *Terminological note on xiangdai you* (相待有). A small but important ambiguity must be flagged in the *AMVŚ passage cited above. The label *xiangdai you* (相待有) occurs twice there—once in the threefold scheme and again in the fivefold scheme—yet the accompanying glosses show that these are not coextensive. In the **threefold** taxonomy, 相待有 is defined as “for such a thing, *relative to this it is* (有), *relative to that it is not* (無)” (待此故有, 待彼故無), which describes an **asymmetric and determinative** constraint on predication: a predicate holds *in virtue of* the appropriate locus and is excluded elsewhere. Functionally, this targets the **exclusive attachment** of definitional predicates to their bearer (what belongs to a *dharma* as its own), which is why the present reconstruction models it as an *inherence*-type determination (*samavāya*) rather than as a merely comparative relation. By contrast, in the **fivefold** taxonomy, 相待有 is illustrated by explicitly comparative oppositions—“this shore / the other shore,” “long / short,” and the like—where the relevant feature arises only through mutual comparison. To avoid conflating these two uses, the discussion below treats *xiangdai you* in the threefold scheme as **determinative (svabhāva-based) predication**, while reserving the **comparative** sense of 相待有 for the fivefold list.

- Here, *A* and *B* are ontologically independent—neither forms part of the other’s definition—so “*A is B*” states only a contingent conjunction rather than an inherent property.

3. “is” as temporal segmentation (時分有/*adhvabheda*)

- *A is B* because *A* currently occupies the causal **stage** in which *B* is instantiated; *A is not B* if it has left that stage or has not yet entered it.
- Crucially, *adhvabhedasattā* operates at a *higher-order*: once a definitional predicate *B* belongs to *A* (by *samavāya*), *B* itself can be further qualified as past, present, or future. Thus, temporal segmentation is a property *of properties*, layering a second-level predication over the *samavāyic* bundle.

In this tripartite model, *samavāyasattā* covers intrinsic, timeless traits, whereas *adhvabhedasattā* adds a higher-order causal-sequential index to each definitional predicate, indicating not only *which* properties belong to a *dharma* but also *when* each property is in force within its causal progression. Together these two aspects capture the **completeness** emphasised in *sarvam asti*: every *dharma* possesses all the attributes it must have and passes through all the causal stages integral to its own identity.

By contrast, *saṃyogasattā* (conjunctive existence) accounts for external or subsequently gained objects that a *dharma* may acquire. In this mode, *A is B* need not imply a higher-order logical property. The *asti* that joins *A* and *B* here does not designate an inherent, inalienable trait but rather a connection that can be loosened or dissolved under the right conditions—such as the eventual uprooting of *kleśa* (defilement). Hence, *saṃyoga* provides the philosophical basis for explaining how “a person **is** afflicted” (*kliṣṭo ’sti*) can be **true** yet not permanent, making liberation possible.

3.2.3 From Vaibhāṣika Taxonomy to Sautrāntika Polemic

The threefold taxonomy of *astitva* has now done two things at once. It has separated intrinsic determination (*samavāya*), contingent conjunction (*saṃyoga*), and phase-indexed qualification (*adhvabheda*); and it has shown why disputes over *asti* are never merely verbal. What is

at issue is how a *dharma* can be said to be what it is, and how that saying becomes narrowed when polemical pressure forces a wider predicational field into more tractable claims about persistence and time.

3.2.3.1 The Vaibhāṣika–Sautrāntika Debate on *asti*

From a Vaibhāṣika perspective, the importance of the threefold taxonomy is not that it gives three disconnected senses of *asti*, but that it shows how several levels of predication can be kept distinct without falling apart. *samavāyasattā* concerns what belongs to a *dharma* definitionally; *saṃyogasattā* concerns contingent conjunctions; *adhvabhedasattā* concerns the temporal qualification of what is already there as part of a *dharma*'s causal career. Vasubandhu's report becomes illuminating precisely at the point where this fuller structure begins to collapse into a more first-order idiom. The question is no longer simply what may be predicated of a *dharma*, but whether past, present, and future things persist.

This is why Dharmatrāta's remarks in *SAHŚ remain so important. He explicitly blocks the misunderstanding that *sarvam asti* means that every *dharma* has all properties indiscriminately. Rather, each *dharma* has its own complete properties, and temporal designation does not abolish that completeness.³⁰ His clarification does not yet eliminate all ambiguity, but it shows that the tri-temporal gloss is already a narrowing of a wider predicational thesis. In that wider thesis, *asti* is retained not because Sanskrit needs a finite verb at all costs, but because the copula marks the claim that the subject is exhaustively articulable through its predicates.

To say this more plainly: Abhidharma is not primarily asking whether a *dharma* is there, but what it is. One may pick out a *dharma* without yet understanding the bundle of features that make it what it is; but *sarvam asti* belongs to the second level. It moves from mere identification to predicative determination. In this sense, the Sarvāstivāda insistence on *asti* is not a grammatical accident. It is a philosophical insistence that truth about a *dharma* has the form of articulated predication.

³⁰ See *SAHŚ, CBETA 2019.Q3, T28, no. 1552, p. 963a20–b4.

This is also why the distinction between knowing a subject and knowing what that subject is cannot be brushed aside as a merely scholastic subtlety. In ordinary recognition we often identify an object before we can say much about it. Abhidharma pushes beyond that first step. Its ideal is not simply that the *dharma* be picked out, but that the predicates belonging to it be made explicit, discriminated, and ultimately integrated into a complete account of what it is.

Read in this light, Vasubandhu's summary is best taken as selective rather than neutral. He preserves a real line of development, but one already sharpened by controversy. The polemical setting encourages *asti* to drift toward persistence and *sarvam* to drift toward the three times. That drift is historically significant; it is not yet the whole Vaibhāṣika picture.

3.2.3.2 The Vaibhāṣika–Sautrāntika Debate on *adhvan*

The same selectivity appears once we turn from *asti* to *adhvan*. Under Vasubandhu's influential formulation, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* are left hanging as adjectives whose head noun is not explicitly stated. Two possibilities then present themselves: the modified noun may be *adhvan*, so that the claim concerns the three time-periods themselves; or it may be the *dharma* (or *karma*) qualified by those predicates. The later history of interpretation turns in no small part on this suppressed noun.

Xuanzang's 三世實有 naturally pushes readers toward the first option, especially because Classical Chinese easily lets 有/*you* sound existential. Yet the wider Sarvāstivāda materials repeatedly favour constructions closer to “having three *adhvans*” than to “the three times exist”.³¹ Once that broader usage is kept in view, the second option becomes harder to dismiss: what is at stake is not the independent subsistence of three temporal containers, but the way a conditioned *dharma* is qualified through past, present, and future stages.

The Chinese word order is not a trivial detail here. When the phrase is heard as “three times really exist”, *asti* is pulled toward a first-order ontological assertion. When it is heard as “a *dharma* has the three *adhvans*”, the older copular logic comes back into view. The very

³¹ See *AMVŚ, T27, no. 1545, pp. 72b25–26, 125a1–2; *AVŚ, T28, no. 1546, p. 294b15.

ease with which the formula can slide between these two hearings helps explain why Vasubandhu's compressed report proved so influential: it preserves just enough ambiguity to support either a more existential or a more predicational reconstruction.

This matters because rival positions already pull in both directions. Dārṣāntika-style readings reify *adhvan* into something like an enduring medium through which *dharma*s travel. Vaibhāṣikas resist this by insisting that *adhvan* is not an object alongside the *dharma*, but a way of marking its own causal progression. To put the contrast schematically: on one view, time is like a road through which events pass; on the other, it is closer to the traveller's own life-course, a way of describing the stages of one ongoing process.

The resulting debate is exactly the sort of pressure under which Vasubandhu's compressed formula becomes possible: the more *adhvan* is treated as a noun-like object, the easier it is for *sarvam* to be flattened into a thesis about tri-temporal existence; the more it is treated as a predicative stage-marker, the more the older copular logic reappears.

What follows, then, is not a fresh restatement of the mature Vaibhāṣika system. It is a movement further back into the debates that prepared its vocabulary. Mil and Kv preserve those debates at a point where the issues are still raw: the status of past *dharma*s, the causal reach of *karma*, the scope of *atthi*, and the temptation to reify *addhā/adhvan*. By turning to them, we can see more clearly how the later slogan commonly paraphrased as "everything exists in three times" emerged from a wider and less stabilised field of argument.

3.3 The Philosophical Reasoning on *addhā* and *atthi* in the *Milindapañha*

This section will begin the historical investigation of how key concepts related to *sarvam asti*, specifically *atthi/asti* and *addhā/adhvan*, were understood and debated *before* the full articulation of the Sarvāstivāda position. We will start by examining Mil, a text that, while not explicitly an Abhidharma work, presents dialogues that prefigure many of the crucial arguments found in later Abhidharma works.³² By analysing the Mil's treatment of *atthi* in relation to

³² Scholars often regard Mil as proto-Abhidharma, given its systematic treatment of no-self, *dharma* theory, and karmic continuity. L. I. Titlin ("Discussion on the Self in 'Milindapañha' on Chariot: New Translation and Comments", *RUDN Journal of Philosophy* 25, no. 2 [2021]: 260–75) shows how the chariot analogy paral-

past *dharmanas* and the concept of *addhā* as “time span”,³³ we will uncover early attempts to grapple with the relationship between a *dharma*’s “being” and its temporal/causal characteristics. This analysis will demonstrate that the later Vaibhāṣika emphasis on *asti* as a copula, signifying an analytic and atemporal relationship between a *dharma* and its properties, was not a sudden innovation, but rather the culmination of a gradual process of conceptual refinement. Furthermore, it will highlight the limitations of interpreting *atthi* solely in existential terms, thus paving the way for a higher-order understanding of the Sarvāstivādin’s “completeness” interpretation of *sarvam asti*.

3.3.1 Introduction

Mil contains a passage offering a subtle analysis of “time spans” (*addhā*), as well as the concepts of past (*atīta*), future (*anāgata*), and present (*paccuppanna*), and of *atthi*. This analysis is significant for several reasons. First, it anticipates—and partly shapes—how the later Kāśyapīya school (known as 飲光部 in Chinese sources³⁴) reasons that “past *dharmanas* persist (*atthi*)”. Second, it also lays a conceptual foundation that the Sarvāstivāda tradition later builds upon, eventually asserting that every *saṃskṛtadharma* inherently includes the property of being “past”. Third, it provides a starting point for the Sautrāntikas’ claim that all three time periods are eternally present.³⁵ In short, this early text’s philosophical discussion helps explain the complex heritage out of which the Sarvāstivādin’s *sarvam asti* eventually emerged.

lels Abhidharma’s reductionist stance; Y. Karunadasa (*The Dhamma Theory*) notes its breakdown of experience mirrors the *Atthasālinī*; and James P. McDermott (“Kamma in the *Milindapañha*”, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 97, no. 4 [1977]: 460–68) argues its advanced *karma* discussions surpass simpler early *sutta* accounts.

³³ Dhammajoti discussed an unidentified Buddhist sect, 譬喻分別師, who proposed a view of permanent time periods. See Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 118–119.

³⁴ For a historical survey based on Chinese sources of Kāśyapīya, see 印順 (Yinshun), 說一切有部為主的論書與論師之研究 [*A Study of the Treatises and Treatise Masters Primarily from the Sarvāstivāda Tradition*] (Beijing: 中華書局 Zhonghua Shuju, 2011). For a survey of relevant archaeological findings, see Muhammad Zahoor and Shakirullah Khan, “Recognition of Ancient Buddhist Sect in Hazara: An Archaeological and Textual Approach”, *Lahore Museum Bulletin* 36, nos. 1&2 (2023): 41–50.

³⁵ Sautrāntikas’ “presentism” has garnered significant scholarly attention. For an overview, see Mark Siderits, *How Things Are: An Introduction to Buddhist Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), chap. 7; and Jan Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 27.

3.3.1.1 Nāgasena on *addhā* and *atthi*

Below is a complete translation of the relevant passage for ease of reference:

rājā āha bhante nāgasena, yaṃ panetaṃ brūsi dīgham addhānanti, kim etaṃ addhānaṃ nāmāti? atīto, mahārāja, addhā, anāgato addhā, paccuppanno addhāti. kiṃ pana, bhante, sabbe addhā atthīti? koci, mahārāja, addhā atthi, koci natthīti. “katamo pana, bhante, atthi, katamo natthīti? ye te, mahārāja, saṅkhārā atītā vigatā niruddhā vipariṇatā, so addhā natthi, ye dhammā vipākā, ye ca vipākadhammadhammā, ye ca aññatra paṭisandhiṃ denti, so addhā atthi. ye sattā kālaṅkatā aññatra uppannā, so ca addhā atthi. ye sattā kālaṅkatā aññatra anuppannā, so addhā natthi. ye ca sattā parinibbutā, so ca addhā natthi parinibbutattāti.”³⁶

Translation:

The king said: “Venerable Nāgasena, you mentioned that ‘the time span is extensive’. What exactly is a ‘time span?’”

Nāgasena replied: “Great King, a time span is past, a time span is future, and a time span is present.”

The king asked: “Venerable Sir, do all (*dhammas*) have a time span?”

Nāgasena replied: “Some do, Great King, and some do not.”

The king asked: “Which ones have it, and which do not?”

Nāgasena answered: “Among past formations, those that have perished, ceased, and transformed—those have no time span. But those that are *vipākā* (the ripening *dhammas*), that are *vipākadhammadhammā* (the *dhammas* that have *vipāka* as their defining property), and that cause rebirth elsewhere—these have a time span. Also, beings who have died and are reborn elsewhere have a time span. Yet beings who have died and are not reborn elsewhere have no time span. And those who have attained final *nirvāṇa* (*parinibbāna*) have no time span either, on account of that final liberation.”

This dialogue centres on the question, “What is a time span (*addhā*)?”—or more precisely, “What does it mean to say that a time span is extensive?” Nāgasena explains that the proposition “the time span is extensive” means that *addhā* is understood as a collective of three adjectives—past, future, and present—none of which can be omitted. When the king follows up, asking “Do all *dhammas* have a time span?”, he is essentially inquiring whether all *dhammas* are “extensive” or enduring.

We now see a crucial parallel with the Sarvāstivādins’ stance. Like the Sarvāstivādins, Nāgasena recognises that a time span (*addhā*) is characterised by the three adjectives past, future, and present. Yet a fundamental difference emerges: Nāgasena does not claim that every conditioned *dharma* inherently possesses all three temporal attributes. For him, if a past *dharma* truly has a *time span*, it means that despite currently being “past”, it remains causally potent, capable of producing future effects that will become “present” in what was

³⁶ V. Trenckner, ed. *Milindapañho* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1880), 49–50.

once merely “future”. In this sense, “having *addhā*” implies an “extensive” quality, signifying the *dharma*’s capacity to reach forward into the future.

By contrast, the Sarvāstivāda position moves beyond Nāgasena’s more limited view. The Sarvāstivādins assert that each *samskṛtadharmā* inherently encompasses past, present, and future phases as part of its very concept. Thus, for the Sarvāstivādins, a *dharma*’s *adhvan* is not contingent upon whether it actually transitions through these temporal stages in practice. Instead, the *dharma*’s completeness—that is, its necessary progression through all three phases of a causal sequence—already ensures that it can be said to have an *adhvan*.

3.3.1.2 Property and Causality

At this point, a potential misunderstanding may arise. Reflecting on Nāgasena’s theory, one might assume that if a past *dharma* “has a time span”, it must somehow already include its future and present aspects. Would this not mean that there is no true distinction between the past state of a *dharma* and its present or future states, threatening to collapse the temporal categories into a paradox where the “past” is always also “future” and “present”? Yet a careful reading of Nāgasena’s example avoids this pitfall. By illustrating a past *dharma* endowed with *vipāka* (ripening potential), Nāgasena shows that recognising a *dharma*’s “time span” does not imply it must reappear as a present *dharma*. Rather, it reveals that we can analytically discern within its conceptual structure the latent capacity to produce a future effect that will manifest as present in due course. In other words, the *dharma*, as a cause, remains past, while the result it leads to will be realised as present at a future point.

Nāgasena’s layered approach—distinguishing cause, effect, and their temporal relationship—demonstrates a subtle reasoning process. He shows how, starting from an empirical fact (the presence of a *vipāka* effect in the present), we can reason backwards (through a form of synthetic judgement) that the past cause had a time span. Then, by further analytic reasoning, we identify within that past cause a property that ensures it can produce a future effect. Although Nāgasena’s reasoning is not fully in the Sarvāstivāda fashion, it prefigures their philosophical project outlined in the previous chapter, where the Sarvāstivādins rely

on *sarvam* and *asti* to guarantee analytic truths. In Sarvāstivāda philosophy, all knowledge of what a *dharma* is must ultimately be encapsulated into analytic propositions. Nāgasena here offers an embryonic version of that approach—albeit without fully embracing that all *dharms* necessarily have all three temporal properties.

In Nāgasena’s understanding, while the “future” and “present” attributes that will manifest belong to the effect itself, it is the cause’s inherent properties that guarantee the eventual appearance of that effect. In this sense, these attributes are implicitly anchored in the cause’s conceptual framework. Crucially, what truly “extends” into the future is not the past *dharma* itself, but the causal event it initiates. As will be discussed in § 3.4.2 below, this idea of causal continuity becomes closely integrated into the concept of *karma*. By distinguishing between the cause and its subsequent effects, Nāgasena elegantly avoids the paradoxical scenario in which the past would simultaneously encompass future and present phases.

When we speak of a past *dharma* with a *vipāka* property, its future result has yet to manifest. Still, we know analytically that it must manifest. From the perspective of Nāgasena’s logic, this past *dharma* is “extensive” or “enduring” because its conceptual content includes a property that guarantees a future, and subsequently a present, effect.³⁷ Although this logic remains underdeveloped compared to the Sarvāstivādins’ robust metaphysical framework—wherein all “what it is” knowledge is essentially analytic—Nāgasena’s reasoning sets an important precedent. He implies that if something is analytically true in concept, it must, at the proper stage, be actualised in reality.

Summarising Nāgasena’s understanding: if a past *dharma* has *adhvan/addhā*, it means that within its conceptual structure, we can identify properties that ensure a future effect. Moreover, the cause and effect differ, avoiding the paradox that the past *dharma* itself must return as present or future. By either observing the realised effect (an empirical or synthetic

³⁷ Modern analytic metaphysicians often contend that “to be is to have causal powers”; see Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, vol. I (London: Macmillan, 1920), 8. If something cannot exert or undergo effects, it fails to be genuinely real; see Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). In Buddhist philosophy, Dharmakīrti similarly identifies causal efficacy (*arthakriyā*) as the sole criterion of ultimate existence, so that entities are real only insofar as they can produce effects; see Vincent Eltschinger, “Dharmakīrti”, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 64, no. 253 (2010): 397–420.

approach) or analytically deriving from the *dharma*'s conceptual structure, we confirm the past *dharma*'s time span, its extensive or enduring character. Yet we must remember that for Nāgasena, this endurance does not entail the ongoing existence of the past *dharma* itself, but rather the extension of the causal event over stages.

In other words, for Nāgasena, determining whether a past *dharma* has an *adhvan/addhā* depends on whether its conceptual structure includes a *vipāka* effect. By contrast, the Sarvāstivādins conclude that every *saṃskṛtadharma* is necessarily endowed with *adhvan*—rendering the question of “does it endure?” irrelevant and shifting the focus instead to identifying which causal stage it occupies. *The root of this divergence is causal vocabulary: Nāgasena works only with external, generative causality, invoking vipāka to test whether a past act can still bear fruit, whereas the later Vaibhāṣikas add a fully articulated internal, definitional causality that makes adhvan an intrinsic predicate of every conditioned dharma.* While we have, in earlier and later parts of this dissertation, extensively discussed the Sarvāstivāda stance, here we remain centred on Nāgasena's line of thought. His reasoning demonstrates how even before the Sarvāstivādins fully developed their system, early thinkers were grappling with the intricacies of temporal attributes, causal potentialities, and analytic understanding.

As indicated above, a “time span” in these early Buddhist philosophical discussions is effectively a collective of three adjectives. *In technical terms, it functions as a higher-order predicate, ranging over the first-order predicates “past”, “future”, and “present”.* Therefore, when we say a *dharma* “has a time span”, we do not mean it literally possesses another ontologically distinct entity; rather, we mean that it can be described by those three adjectives. By analogy, consider “colour” as a collective of adjectives like “red”, “blue”, and so on. When we say “a fruit has colour”, we do not suggest it owns a separate, object-like “colour”. Instead, we mean that the fruit exhibits a *higher-order* visual attribute that can then be specified as red, blue, etc.

Building on this analogy, we now turn to the notion of *atthi*. Since “time span” is the *dharma*'s predicate, *atthi* here cannot refer to the existence of an independent object. In other

words, Vasubandhu—or, more precisely, the Sautrāntikas who follow his line of thought—interpret *sarvam asti* as all three time periods existing eternally; this diverges completely from the philosophical reasoning found in Mil. As we have seen in Nāgasena’s approach, the main subject is a past *dhamma*, while the *addhā* is its predicate. In that framework, *atthi* acts as a copula connecting subject and predicate, object and property. *Here, too, atthi operates at a higher-order: it does not simply assert the being of one entity, but links a subject to an entire class of predicative possibilities.*

At the same time, it is worth noting that Nāgasena’s use of “time span” represents only a *proto-higher-order* move. His past–present–future labels apply to a *dharma* viewed in an **external, generative** karma-sequence—whether the deed has borne, is bearing, or will bear fruit. The later Vaibhāṣikas push the idea one logical tier further: they insist that every **internal, definitional** attribute a *saṃskṛtadharma* instantiates (birth, duration, decay, activity, etc.) can itself be further qualified as past, present, or future. Thus, the entire bundle of first-order predicates becomes the domain over which a second-order “time span” predicate ranges, completing the fully higher-order framework implied by *sarvam asti*.³⁸

At this point, we must consider the underlying question Nāgasena’s reasoning addresses. His theory, which interprets having a “time span” as extending from the past through the future to the present, does not stand on its own. Without a specific controversy or problem prompting it, we would struggle to grasp its purpose. Put simply, Nāgasena’s

³⁸ Philosophers and semanticists often treat predicative “is” as an attribution of a property to a subject—thus “X is red” is typically taken to mean “X has redness”. In Aristotelian metaphysics, accidents inhere in their subject; see J. L. Ackrill, *Aristotle: Categories and De Interpretatione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963). The *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* entry on “Properties” similarly notes that modern analytic philosophers construe predication as indicating the relevant property. Regarding existential clauses, John Lyons observes that statements such as “There is a book on the table” may be paraphrased as “The table has a book”, effectively treating the location as possessor (“A Note on Possessive, Existential and Locative Sentences”, *Foundations of Language* 3, no. 4 [1967]). Ray Freeze formalises this analysis in “Existentials and Other Locatives”, *Language* 68, no. 3 (1992): 553–95, arguing that the possessive *have* derives from *be* plus a locative element. Anna Kampanarou, “Relating BE and HAVE via Transitivity: Evidence from Greek”, *Glossa* 9, no. 1 (2024), shows how *éxi* (‘has’) in Greek appears in existential contexts, while Serena Danesi and Jóhanna Barðdal, *Non-Canonically Case-Marked Subjects* (2018), provide typological data from Russian, Greek, and other languages to illustrate a shared *be*→*have* pattern. Similarly, Latin (*mihi est liber*, “to me is a book”) and Sanskrit (*tasya pustakam asti*, “to him is a book”) lack a separate “have” verb; instead, “to be” plus an oblique case signals possession. Leon Stassen, *Predicative Possession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), surveys numerous cross-linguistic constructions, showing how location- or case-based uses of “to be” convey “to have”.

theory responds to the issue of why a present-tense verb—*atthi*—can serve as the predicate for a past *dharma*. Why would one insist on using *atthi* (a present-tense verb) when describing attributes that relate to a *dharma* that is already past? Judging from Nāgasena’s answer, the question most likely arose in the context of explaining rebirth: how a specific past karma can affect a future karma, how a previous life can bear on the present one, and, conversely, how the present life can in turn condition the next.

In the passage in question, a crucial linguistic detail emerges. The phrase “*ye te, mahārāja, saṅkhārā atītā*” includes “*te*” immediately following “*ye*”, indicating that “*saṅkhārā atītā*” (past conditioning *dharms*/formation) is the central subject. Thus, *atīta* belongs to *saṅkhāra*, not to the subsequent participles *vigata*, *niruddha*, and *vipariṇata*. These participles are not parallel modifiers but describe additional conditions. This makes it clear that the main subject is “past conditioning *dharms*”, and the core question is which of these past *dharms* still have a “time span” or are (*atthi*) extensive. In other words, among past *dharms*, which retain properties that ensure future effects will arise, thereby justifying the use of a present-tense copula *atthi* to denote their ongoing causal event?

3.3.2 Nāgasena’s Arguments Concerning *atthi* and Verb Tense

Following the discussion above, we can see how *addhā/adhvan* in Mil is essentially the aggregate of three adjectives. Thus, to say a *dharma* “has an *adhvan*” does not mean it literally acquires an additional *object* that exists outside this *dharma*. Rather, it means that the *dharma* may be described by these three stage-based adjectives: *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*.

Once we appreciate that *addhā* works as a set of predicates, we turn to the question of *atthi*. If *addhā* is purely an adjectival set, then *atthi* cannot here be read as “existing” in the sense of an independent object’s real presence. Hence, Vasubandhu—or at least the later Sautrāntikas—who interpret *sarvam asti* as “the three periods eternally exist”, diverge markedly from Nāgasena’s line of thought on *addhā* and *atthi*. (See § 3.2 for Vasubandhu’s stance.) For Nāgasena, a “past” *dharma* is the subject, while “time span” (including future and present attributes) is the predicate; *atthi* in that case still functions as a copula, linking

subject and predicates, and object and properties. We again see the twofold nuance of *atthi* as both “has” and “is” (e.g. “a past *dharma* is extensive” vs. “a past *dharma* has extension”).

3.3.2.1 What Problem Was Nāgasena Addressing?

One might ask: if these ideas about “having a time span” are simply conceptual, what specifically compelled Nāgasena to argue that one can describe a “past” *dhamma* via the present-tense *atthi*? The crux is that a past *dharma*—already said to be “no longer present”—normally would be expressed using a past-tense verb. Why then deploy *atthi* in the present tense?

Nāgasena answers: any *dharma* that is “ripening” (*vipākā*), or whose effect eventually unfolds or leads to rebirth in another realm, should be described with the present-tense *atthi*—even if it is “past”. To Nāgasena, as long as a cause’s effect is destined still to appear, we may speak of that cause with *atthi*. Yet this is different from the Sarvāstivāda position, which holds that *all* conditioned *dharmanas* analytically carry past, present, and future phases. Nāgasena’s stance is narrower: only the past *dhamma* as a cause that truly “stretches” into the future by generating a new effect in the future is described as having a time span in the present tense.

Hence, Nāgasena’s main aim was to justify using a present-tense copula (*atthi*) for certain past *dharmanas*—only those that can still yield future fruit. This partial stance differs from the fully general Sarvāstivāda claim that all *dharmanas* contain all times.

3.3.2.2 Definitions Versus Disputable Theses

It is worth highlighting that when one side in a debate proposes a new definition—provided that definition is coherent and not self-contradictory—once a definitional framework is provisionally adopted, the philosophically substantive dispute typically shifts to the consequences it licenses. We should therefore distinguish a *definitional stipulation* from a *thesis that can be debated*.

In this case, the stipulation that “certain past *dharmanas* still retain the capacity to produce future results” functions like a **rule** or **premise** rather than a falsifiable empirical claim. Agreeing to this is akin to playing a card game where the rules declare that a “2” ranks just

below the jokers. Either one accepts this arrangement and plays accordingly, or declines to participate. There is no genuine logical conflict in such a stipulation itself, for it remains consistent with the basic “rational design” of the game—namely, that each card has a unique ranking, and no two different ranks coincide. One might object out of personal taste, but not from a contradiction in reason.³⁹

The **real** controversy emerges when we ask whether this rule lets us assert, *in the present tense*, that “this *dharma* **is** such-and-such”, even though it is classified as “past”. Insisting on using the present-tense *atthi* for some “past *dharma*” is akin to claiming in our analogy that a “2” and an “ace” share the *same* rank. This goes beyond merely accepting the basic rule and demands proper justification. In other words, it requires more rigorous argument, because a subject in the past and a verb in the present tense appear conceptually mutually exclusive.

Stepping back, we see that truly “present” *dharma* naturally pairs with “now-ness” and *atthi*; no special defence is needed. However, for something “past”, we typically use a past-tense verb. The Sautrāntikas, for instance, would eventually say: “It no longer **is**; it **was**.”⁴⁰ By contrast, Nāgasena contends that some past *dharmas* can (or should) still be described with *atthi*—specifically those that produce *vipāka* (ripening). Such past *dharmas* warrant a present-tense description in two cases:

1. **When** their effects are already manifest here and now; or
2. **When** analysis shows that the *dharma* inherently contains the property to generate a future result.

³⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1969) introduced “hinge propositions” as basic certainties that frame all inquiry and are taken for granted without requiring proof (e.g. “There is an external world”). Crispin Wright, in “Facts and Certainty”, *Philosophical Topics* 13, no. 1 (1985): 47–69, examines how these hinge propositions remain exempt from doubt and function as the logical backbone for ordinary claims. Robert J. Fogelin’s “The Logic of Deep Disagreements”, *Informal Logic* 7, no. 1 (1985): 3–11, explores cases where interlocutors share no common ground, so traditional methods of argument cannot resolve their conflict—each side’s core assumptions or “hinges” are simply at odds. By contrast, David J. Chalmers, in “Verbal Disputes”, *Philosophical Review* 120, no. 4 (2011): 515–566, shows that many philosophical clashes may be *merely verbal*, arising from divergent definitions rather than substantive disagreements; once clarified, some disputes dissolve or shift to deeper underlying issues. Finally, Rudolf Carnap’s “Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology”, *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4, no. 11 (1950): 20–40, argues that adopting a particular conceptual framework (e.g. for mathematics or ontology) should be viewed as a *practical choice* rather than a truth-apt thesis. Carnap’s “Principle of Tolerance” stresses that no single framework is uniquely correct; philosophers may legitimately adopt different axioms or linguistic rules according to the purposes of their inquiry.

⁴⁰ Pradhan, AKBh, 299: “*atītaṃ tu yad bhūtapūrvam | anāgataṃ yatsati hetau bhaviṣyati !*”

Any other “past” *dharma* that cannot trigger anything further, in Nāgasena’s view, remains in the domain of the past and is not connected with *atthi* because it *is* not extensive or *does not have addhā*.

In contrast, the Sarvāstivāda position broadens *atthi* to cover all conditioned *dharmanas*, on the grounds that each *dharma* inherently contains within its concept the stage-based properties “past”, “present”, and “future”. By reading these three phases as intrinsic attributes rather than external markers, the Vaibhāṣikas in effect explain *why every definitional property of a conditioned dharma must, of necessity, be instantiated*: the very logic of the concept guarantees that each property will appear across the full causal sequence. Once a *dharma* has completed its causal unfolding, they label it “past”; yet that designation remains *timelessly* valid, such that using the copula “is” (or “has that property”) continues to apply.

3.3.2.3 The Question of Existential Continuity

Within Nāgasena’s logic, then, if a past *dharma* qualifies for *atthi*, it must be specifically a cause leading to a yet-to-be-manifested effect. That implies some force or entity that continues to be “present” until the effect manifests. The text of Mil does not detail exactly what “persists”, but *AMVŚ cites the Kāśyapīya tradition to say that the “body” (*dravya*) of an unripe *vipāka*-cause remains continuously until the effect matures, at which point it ceases in a single instant.⁴¹

In this sense, Nāgasena lets *atthi* slide from a pure copula—simply linking subject and predicate—to a quasi-existential claim that something is *still* persisting. The Sarvāstivādins, by contrast, avoid reading such “existential continuity” into *atthi/asti*. They recast it as a higher-order copulative operator: its role is to state a timelessly valid proposition about a *dharma* and its definitional attributes, not to assert that the *dharma* endures through time.

⁴¹ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 19:「諸異熟因果若未熟，其體恒有。彼果熟已，其體便壞。如飲光部彼作是說。猶如種子，芽若未生，其體恒有，芽生便壞。諸異熟因亦復如是。」(CBETA 2024.R2, T27, no. 1545, p. 96b6–9)

*AMVŚ: Regarding causes and results of ripening (異熟因果): if the effect has not yet matured, the body (其體) [of that cause] remains continuously (恒有). Once the effect has matured, that entity instantly disintegrates (便壞). In the tradition of the Kāśyapīyas, they assert the following analogy: just like a seed, so long as the sprout has not appeared, the seed’s body persists; yet the moment the sprout arises, the seed itself ceases. Similarly, it is so with ripening causes.

As explained in § 2.1.1.1–2, when a proposition is true, the *dharma* and its properties are *yathābhūta*—“just as they are”—without implying temporal survival. On the Sarvāstivāda reading of *sarvam asti*, saying “*X asti*” means: *X already contains, in its very concept, every property—past, present, and future—that belongs to it.*

We must also keep in mind that Nāgasena does not specifically set out to refute or anticipate a fully formed Sarvāstivāda system. Rather, he debates those who deny any present-tense usage of *atthi* for past *dharma*s. Mil does not proclaim an explicit school affiliation, and scholarship suggests that its earliest layers predate the Sarvāstivādins’ doctrinal consolidation. Two points are worth repeating:

Nāgasena’s theory about describing a subset of past *dharma*s with *atthi* is not intended to find an all-encompassing metaphysical framework, whereas the Sarvāstivāda *sarvam asti* does precisely that.

Nāgasena explicitly acknowledges there are past *dharma*s that do not qualify for present-tense description. The Sarvāstivādins, by contrast, generalise that all conditioned *dharma*s carry the “past” attribute as part of their total set of properties.

Thus, we see how Mil yields a preliminary debate that paves the way for the far-reaching doctrine of *sarvam asti*. It is not merely a backward insertion prompted by Sarvāstivāda influence, but an earlier conceptual strand illuminating why *sarvam asti* could later emerge in such a robust, universal form.⁴²

3.3.3 Philosophical Developments in the Chinese *Milindapañha* (*Naxian Biqiu Jing*)

As foreshadowed above, the Chinese text preserves an alternative line of reasoning credited to “Naxian” (那先), which partially overlaps with the Pāli “Nāgasena” yet diverges at key junctures.⁴³ These differences are especially revealing, since they disclose an even broader multiplicity of early Buddhist philosophical explorations—regardless of which specific school each version might represent. To differentiate these two sources, this section refers to argu-

⁴² Guang Xing, “Introduction to the Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra”, *Journal of Buddhist Studies* 6 (2008): 238–39.

⁴³ For a detailed discussion about how Chinese and Pāli versions differ, see Bryan G. Levman, “Revisiting Milindapañha”, *Journal Asiatique*, no. 1 (2021): 107–30.

ments in the Chinese *Naxian Biqiu Jing* (lit. *Nāgasena Bhikṣu Sūtra*) under the name “Naxian”, whereas “Nāgasena” refers to those in the Pāli Mil. Thus, our account of their shared philosophical heritage is enriched, as each source foregrounds unique facets of the tradition’s evolution.

For ease of analysis, it is helpful to distinguish two schematic “directions” implicit in these discussions. First, there is the phenomenological *flow-of-time* schema in which what is “future” becomes “present” and then recedes into “past” (future → present → past). Second, there is a *causal* schema in which a past deed projects efficacy onward, so that a past cause can be said to reach into a future fruition that will later manifest as present (past → future → present). In what follows, I call the former the “forwards” direction (in the sense of time’s apparent flow), and the latter the “backward” direction (in the sense of causal reach or retroactive justification).⁴⁴

3.3.3.1 Naxian’s Arguments about 久 and 有/為

The King further asked Naxian: “What does it mean for something to ‘be extensive’ (久)?”

Naxian replied: “A past event is extensive, and so is a future event, but a present event does not have extension.”

The King said: “Excellent!”

The King then asked Naxian again: “Think more carefully—do they have extension?”

Naxian answered: “Some have extension, some do not.”

The King said: “Which ones have extension? Which ones do not?”

Naxian answered: “Those who have attained the Way and entered (*nirvāṇa*) do not have extension. Those who have not attained the Way and must undergo further births do have extension. A person who, in this life, practises generosity and filial piety will obtain blessings in the life to come.”

The King said: “Excellent, excellent!”

王復問那先:「何等為久者?」

那先言:「以過去事為久, 當來事亦為久; 見在事為無有久。」

王言:「善哉!」

王復問那先言:「審為有久不?」

那先言:「或有久、或無有久。」

王復言:「何等為有久? 何等為無有久?」

那先言:「其得道泥洹者為無久, 未得道當復更死生者為有久。人於今世好布施、孝於父母, 於當來世當得其福。」

王言:「善哉善哉!」⁴⁵

⁴⁴ These labels are heuristic: “forwards” here does *not* mean the everyday “past-to-future” arrow; it names the common-sense picture in which the “future arrives” and the “present slips” into the “past”.

⁴⁵ 《那先比丘經》卷 2: (CBETA 2021.Q4, T32, no. 1670B, p. 711b12–19)

In contrast to the Pāli version—where Nāgasena’s focus is on an event’s “extensiveness” (*addhā*) as a confluence of past, present, and future phases—Naxian in the Chinese text initially distinguishes events as either “extensive” (久) or “instantaneous”, addressing three categories of events: “past”, “future”, and “present”. At first glance, the two discourses seem akin, but a closer look shows a difference in what each text thematises and how “extension” is understood. Crucially, Naxian is not concerned with whether a present-tense copula (“is” or “exists”) may describe a “past phenomenon”. Rather, he asks whether past, future, and present events are enduring or momentary.

Thus, Naxian’s position can be paraphrased as follows: past events accumulate and move inexorably *forwards* into more and more distant layers of the past—especially since new events continually join the “past” category—and therefore they cannot be mere instants. Future events likewise lie ahead in an ever-lengthening progression of possibilities, so they, too, are extensive. Only the present, being evanescent and quickly disappearing, is non-extensive.

By contrast, the Pāli Nāgasena takes “extension” to mean that a *past dharma* (cause) triggers effects in the *future*, which then manifest as the *present*. In other words, “extending” to Nāgasena essentially follows the *backward* direction: from the past → the future → culminating in the present. Naxian, conversely, frames a continuum in the *forwards* direction: from the future, through the present, into the past. His initial point is not about how to say “the past now is (or persists)”; instead, he claims that past events keep receding, and future events keep arriving in an unbroken chain, with the present as a mere flash between them.

Even so, note how Naxian still uses a present-tense verb “為” (“is”) to describe “past events are extensive”. He regards their extensiveness as a permanently valid statement: once something is deemed “past”, it perpetually remains so, irrespective of any shift in time—hinting, in a preliminary way, at the Sarvāstivādins’ eventual strategy of employing a timeless present-tense *asti* for all *dharmas*, though in a different context.

3.3.3.2 A Further Shift: Naxian's Second Proposition

Later in the Chinese text, Naxian refines his argument, reversing the direction of extension by 180 degrees. At first, he claimed that an event labelled “past” remains so indefinitely. Yet on further reflection—“think more carefully”—Naxian realises that some “past” events will indeed reappear as “present” at a future date. For instance, those who have reached *nirvāṇa* do not return, hence no extension; those who are still unenlightened will undergo another birth, thereby “extending” *backwards* rather than simply disappearing into the ever-more remote past.

Doctrinally speaking, this pivot arises from the developing Buddhist causal theory—especially the concept of rebirth. Once rebirth is admitted, “past” is no longer destined solely to drift forwards into deeper and deeper layers of the past; it can also “come back” at a future moment. Hence, Naxian’s second thesis overturns the first by introducing the *backward* flow: if a person has not attained *nirvāṇa*, they reappear as a new “present”.

Compared with the Pāli version, the Chinese text still treats the same individual (*puḍgala*) as recurring. The Pāli Nāgasena, by contrast, more sharply differentiates cause from fruit (*vipāka*), so that the “past cause” and “future result” are not literally the same entity. If they were identical, we would face a paradox whereby a “past” phenomenon instantly becomes “future”. Indeed, resolving that paradox is one sign of Pāli Nāgasena’s more advanced stage of causal analysis. Naxian’s approach that appears less systematised and involves fewer concepts likely represents an earlier phase before that refinement.

This transition—from purely “past moves ever further away” to “some past events re-emerge in the future”—illustrates how the notion of rebirth contributed to increasingly sophisticated temporal models. In the earliest conceptualisations, “three periods” (三世) were closely entangled with karmic causality and transmigration.⁴⁶ As we shall see in the sections

⁴⁶ Cf. Collett Cox, “Dependent Origination: Its Elaboration in Early Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma Texts”, in *Researches in Indian and Buddhist Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Professor Alex Wayman*, ed. R.K. Sharma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993), 119–141. Cox argues that the early Sarvāstivāda texts progressively reinterpret dependent origination from a principle explaining rebirth into a general causal theory underlying all *dharma*s.

(§§ 4.3 and 4.4) concerning “De-Temporalising Time”, *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, and *anāgata* do not necessarily denote objective chronological partitions so much as successive “generations” or “stages” that a *saṃskṛtadharma* traverses.

3.3.4 Nāgasena and Naxian in Comparison

Another pertinent distinction emerges between Naxian’s two propositions and Nāgasena’s arguments in the Pāli Mil: in Naxian’s first proposition, he addresses “extensiveness” (久) without explicitly referencing “time span” (*adhvan/addhā*). Only in his second proposition does he hint that a “past phenomenon” might reappear in the present. On the Pāli side, however, the text systematically interprets “past phenomena” through the lens of “time span”, contending that only those which bring about future fruit (and eventually present manifestation) actually *have* time span. Anything that fails to continue producing effects is not “extensive”.

On the surface, Nāgasena’s view seems to echo the Sarvāstivāda claim that “a past *dharma* already contains its future and present aspects”. The crucial difference is scope. Nāgasena (and the Chinese Naxian) apply this idea only to those past *dharma*s that will in fact ripen again—i.e. whose karmic force is still operative. The Sarvāstivādins, by contrast, *universalise* what later becomes their “containment principle”: *every* conditioned *dharma* is deemed *complete*, and therefore already embraces its past, present, and future phases, whether or not it will ever produce a further effect. In early Pāli and Chinese discussions we can see the germ of this principle, but it is only in the mature Sarvāstivāda system that the logic is extended to all phenomena without exception.

Additionally, as argued previously, the Sarvāstivādins treat *adhvan* as a predicate: past, present, and future are adjectives, not independent “time objects”. The same adjectival insight is already visible in two early sources, yet each exploits it differently. Nāgasena transforms the triad into an explicit higher-order predicate that he calls a “time span” (*adhvan*), whereas the Chinese *Naxian* text adopts a different lens, classifying events as “extensive” or “instantaneous” without coining a separate time-span category. This contrast shows that

the raw idea—time as an adjectival property—was shared; what the later Vaibhāṣikas contribute is the move to universalise it, assigning an *adhvan* label to every definitional attribute of every conditioned *dharma*.

Overall, the two-level progression in the Chinese text—from a purely “one-directional” time flow to a realisation that “past events” can also “turn around” and become “present”—demonstrates how early attempts to define “extensive” were re-examined in light of karmic causality and rebirth. Naxian’s simpler approach stands for an earlier transitional phase, whereas the Pāli Nāgasena refines the analysis by identifying the cause–fruit distinction and emphasising that the same phenomenon is not literally re-entering the future.

Both lines of reasoning, in different ways, prefigure the Sarvāstivāda *sarvam asti* stance: every *saṃskṛtadharmā* ultimately contains the triad of “past, present, and future”. While the Chinese *Milanwang Wenjing* does not declare that principle in full generality, it anticipates many conceptual moves that point in the Sarvāstivāda direction.

3.3.4.1 *atthi* and the Past *dhamma*

In both the Chinese and Pāli versions of Mil, Naxian and Nāgasena each find ways to justify using the present-tense *shi* (為/是) and *atthi* for what is grammatically a “past *dharma*”. However, Naxian in the Chinese text is not specifically defending the proposition “we may validly use *shi* (present tense) for a past *dharma*”, but rather explaining that a past *dharma* possesses a timeless attribute of being past—namely “what it is” is being past—which requires a present-tense copula to express its supratemporal validity. Although Naxian’s immediate aim is not to demonstrate the legitimacy of using *shi* for the past, the very fact that he presents a past *dharma* as “being X” in a timeless sense strongly anticipates the later Sarvāstivāda understanding of *asti*. Indeed, we might even say that the Sarvāstivādins’ notion of *asti* ultimately rests on a proposition that the conceptual content (or “bundle of all its properties”) inherent in a given object (the subject) can be truly predicated of it—so that “all *dharms* are complete” (i.e. *sarvam asti*). In that metaphysical framework, the relationship between an

object and its attributes must be articulated with the present-tense *asti*, conveying the timeless or “geometrical”, as Spinoza might say, the truth-value of an analytic proposition.

By contrast, the Pāli Nāgasena’s theory directly tackles the question of why we may use *atthi* in the present tense when the subject of the sentence is a “past *dharma*”. Evidently, Nāgasena’s defence of that usage arises because the notion that “once a *dharma* has become past, any further statements about it must be put in the past tense” already existed as an objection ... It is quite plausible that the position Naxian articulates in the Chinese text (though not primarily aimed at validating present-tense reference to the past) ended up providing the conceptual scaffolding that certain opponents later challenged. The core of that challenge was metaphysical: if a past *karma* has truly passed, it is non-existent, so how can it still produce a future effect? It therefore became necessary to justify predicating some form of present reality—captured by *atthi*—of a past cause. Thus, Pāli Nāgasena found it necessary to rearticulate and defend the usage of *atthi* by invoking *vipāka*-based causal continuity.

In sum, for Naxian in the Chinese text, the main function of the present-tense copula is simply to link a subject and a predicate, and to express that the truth of the proposition is not time-bound. So, we might say: “The past *dharma* is infinitely past.” This is a present-tense statement only to emphasise that its “infinite” property is not contingent upon a particular temporal location but is grounded in a conceptual or analytic relationship. For the Pāli Nāgasena, by contrast, *atthi* straightforwardly denotes a causal continuity stretching “backwards” from the past into the future. Despite the difference in focus and method, both Naxian and Nāgasena manage to release *atthi* from the conventional assumption that it can only describe an actively occurring, “strictly present” phenomenon. This constitutes a key moment in Abhidharma/Abhidhamma philosophy—especially from the Sarvāstivāda perspective—indicating how *shi/atthi* came to serve broader metaphysical aims.

Yet most importantly, while the Pāli Nāgasena can be read as extracting from *atthi* the connotation of “persisting” or “continuing in existence”, in both Pāli and Chinese sources *atthi* and *shi* still remain fundamentally a copula, i.e. “it *is* something or *has* something”.

For instance, in Pāli we find the statement: *saṅkhārā atitā vigatā niruddhā vipariṇatā, so addhā natthi*—meaning that certain past conditioned phenomena are “finished”, hence *have* “no time span”. Analysed from our vantage, we might reformulate that as “these past conditioned phenomena do not *persist* into the present”, yet in the text itself, *atthi* remains a grammatical copula indicating “having something as its property”. It is never a simple existential “to exist”, but rather a nuance of “to persist in a causal sense”.

All of this shows how *atthi* can function both as a copula and, in a secondary sense, as an intransitive verb denoting causal persistence—and that these two aspects often overlap when the essential properties of a *dharma* are its causal properties but are not strictly identical. When *atthi* serves as a copula, it allows a *dharma* to “be” an instance of or “have” a certain property in an analytic or timeless sense. When it leans towards the meaning “persist”, it underscores a *dharma*’s “ongoing” status. Crucially, the King’s question—*kiṃ pana, bhante, sabbe addhā atthīti?*—is not a brute ontological query about whether “time” exists as an independent entity; rather, it asks whether *addhā* (time-span-ness/extensiveness) can be predicated *across the board* of conditioned *dhammas*, or only of a restricted subset.⁴⁷ That question is, in effect, a prototype of *sarvam asti*, except that here *sarvam* (or *sabbe*) does not refer to “past/present/future” themselves, but to “all conditioned *dhammas*”, while the three *adhvans* are understood as their predicates. The later Vaibhāṣikas universalise this insight into a fully *higher-order* thesis: *asti* now quantifies over the entire set of definitional predicates that each conditioned *dharma* contains, so “*sarvam asti*” states not merely that such *dhammas* exist, but that every one of their properties—including the three *adhvans*—is already entailed by the concept itself.

Returning to our two versions of Mil, although the Chinese one and the Pāli one are often classified as “parallel texts”, the Pāli discussion clearly shows more developed Abhidharma thought—richer in systematisation and analysis—than the Chinese version. Nonethe-

⁴⁷ The Pāli is syntactically compressed: *addhā atthi* is singular (as throughout the passage), whereas *sabbe* is plural. This is best read as a topicalised quantifier—*sabbe* (*sc. dhammā/saṅkhārā*)—followed by the predicative clause *addhā atthi*. Semantically one may expand it as *sabbesaṃ (dhammānaṃ) addhā atthīti?*, i.e. “for all (dhammas), is there *addhā*?” or “do all (dhammas) have *addhā*?”

less, Naxian’s idea that “the past event is extensive, the future event is extensive, the present is instantaneous” reverberates in certain Sarvāstivāda positions, such as in *Abhidharmasamuccaya* or JñPr, where the fleeting nature of the present is invoked to deny any possibility of simultaneously arising subject–object interactions.

Finally, in Kv, we find an even further development of the position “past conditioned phenomena still remain in some sense”, which builds on the Pāli Mil interpretation that *atthi* means “persists” or “has some kind of causal presence”. In short, throughout the sectarian period, *asti/atthi* simultaneously retained a copulative usage while taking on an intransitive sense. For an Ābhidharmika, to say a *dharma* is something means it *exists in a certain mode*, whether that is static or dynamic. Thus, whether one is stating a *dharma*’s core property or its particular “mode of being”, *asti* or *atthi* performs the same essential function. As will be discussed in the next chapter, this usage rests on a shared metaphysical and meta-linguistic assumption among all major Buddhist schools: that the bare existence or non-existence of a thing is never really the central philosophical issue—rather, what matters is how a *dharma* is what it is.

Such a reading clarifies why modern scholarship sometimes misinterprets “*asti* = ‘to exist’” in a purely existential sense. As repeatedly mentioned, that notion rarely arises in classical Abhidharma debates, for an Ābhidharmika’s questions revolve around which causal properties or definitional states a *dharma* instantiates, not whether it “exists” in a philosophical vacuum.

3.4 Philosophical Debates in the *Kathāvatthu*

3.4.1 Background on the *Kathāvatthu*

The movement from the Chinese *Naxian Biqiu Jing* to the Pāli *Milindapañha*, and from there into Kv, gives us an unusually clear view of how disputes about past *dharmanas* and temporal predication were being reformulated across genres. Before turning to the specific Kv passage, only a brief remark on the text’s use-value is needed.

3.4.1.1 Authorship and Historical Context

Kv is an unusual Abhidhamma text. Rather than classifying *dhammas* in a systematic way, it stages theses and counter-theses, often by means of extended *reductio*.⁴⁸ That polemical format makes it especially useful here. The text is not a neutral doctrinal digest, but a record of live sectarian argument in which positions are preserved under pressure, sometimes only in compressed or refracted form.⁴⁹ This is also why Buddhaghosa's commentary, Kv-a, remains important for the present study: it often helps reconstruct views that Kv itself mentions only through refutation.

Traditional sources connect Kv with Moggaliputta Tissa and the Third Council, although the details of that narrative cannot simply be taken at face value.⁵⁰ What matters more for the present chapter is that the text clearly preserves early debates in which “being” and “time” were already contentious. Among its many disputed theses, the *sabbamatthīkathā* explicitly targets the Sarvāstivāda claim; but related issues also appear elsewhere in the work, showing that the problem cannot be confined to a single doctrinal chapter or even to one school alone.

3.4.1.2 *sabbam atthi* and Other Topics

For that reason, Kv is valuable not only for what it says about Sarvāstivāda, but for the argumentative field it preserves around it. If the Vaibhāṣikas give us a later, self-interpreting orthodoxy, Kv lets us watch earlier Buddhist positions encounter one another before that later synthesis becomes fixed. It is precisely this earlier polemical field that the following pages try to recover.

⁴⁸ For the structure and historical development of Kv, see Jonardon Ganeri, “Argumentation, Dialogue and the Kathāvatthu”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 29, no. 4 (2001): 485–493; and David Bastow, “Debates on Time in the Kathāvatthu”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (1996): 109–132.

⁴⁹ For attempts to situate Kv historically through linguistic and epigraphic evidence, see Ludwig Alsdorf, “Aśoka's Schismen-Edikt und das dritte Konzil”, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 3 (1959): 161–74; Herman Tiekens, “Aśoka and the Buddhist Saṃgha: A Study of Aśoka's Schism Edict and Minor Rock Edict I”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 63, no. 1 (2000): 1–30; K. R. Norman, “Magadhisms in the Kathāvatthu”, in *Studies in Pali and Buddhism*, edited by A. K. Narain (Delhi: B. R. Publishing, 1979), 279–87; and Oskar von Hinüber, *A Handbook of Pāli Literature* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1996).

⁵⁰ For the *Dīpavaṃsa* passage and the traditional attribution, see the studies cited above; see also Hermann Oldenberg, ed. and trans., *Dīpavaṃsa: An Ancient Buddhist Historical Record* (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), 52.

3.4.2 Kāśyapīya–Sthaviravāda’s Debate: “A Past *dharma* Persists (*atthi*)”

3.4.2.1 Full Translation of the Debate

Let us now turn to a specific Kv discussion of whether a “past *dharma*” may be said to “persist” (*atthi*). This occurs in the first *Vaggo*, labelled “Debate on ‘Some [*Dharmas*] Persist’” (*Ekaccaṃ atthītikathā*). To illustrate the text’s dialectical style, we can look at its standard presentation: the “opponent” asserts a thesis, then the Theravādin presented by Kv attempts to expose contradictions by systematically drawing out various consequences. Below, we provide a full translation, numbering each step of the debate to show how it unfolds.

(1)

Sthaviravāda: “Do past (*dharmas*) persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Some persist, some do not.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then may we say: some have subsided, some have not; some have perished, some have not; some have ceased, some have not; some have utterly vanished, some have not?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated (repeats the previous lines).”

atītaṃ atthīti? ekaccaṃ atthi, ekaccaṃ natthīti. ekaccaṃ niruddhaṃ, ekaccaṃ na niruddhaṃ; ekaccaṃ vigataṃ, ekaccaṃ avigataṃ; ekaccaṃ atthaṅgataṃ, ekaccaṃ na atthaṅgataṃ; ekaccaṃ abbhattaṅgataṃ, ekaccaṃ na abbhattaṅgataṃ? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(2)

Sthaviravāda: “So, among the past (*dharmas*), some persist and some do not persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among past *dharmas*, those *vipāka dharmas* that have not yet matured—do some of them persist and others do not?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

Sthaviravāda: “Thus, among the past, some persist and some do not persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “What about those that have already matured? Do some of them persist and some not?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then, among the past, some persist and some do not persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, those that are not *vipāka*, do some persist and some not?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītaṃ ekaccaṃ atthi, ekaccaṃ natthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā ekacce atthi, ekacce natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... atītaṃ ekaccaṃ atthi, ekaccaṃ natthīti? āmantā. atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā ekacce atthi, ekacce natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... atītaṃ ekaccaṃ atthi, ekaccaṃ natthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkā dhammā ekacce atthi ekacce natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(3)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past (*dharmas*), some persist and some do not persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Which ones persist, and which do not?”

Kāśyapīya: “Within the past, those *vipāka dharmas* that have not yet matured persist; those that have already matured do not persist.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, do those yet-to-mature *vipāka dharmas* persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, do the already matured ones persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, do those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, do the ones that are non-*vipāka* also persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītaṃ ekaccaṃ atthi ekaccaṃ natthīti? āmantā. kiṃ atthi kiṃ natthīti? atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te atthi; atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā —te natthīti. atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te atthīti? āmantā. atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā —te atthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te atthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkā dhammā —te atthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(4)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, those *vipāka dharmas* that have already matured—do they cease to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Does that imply that among the past *dharmas*, those *vipāka dharmas* that have not matured also cease to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā —te natthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(5)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, those that are non-*vipāka*—do they cease to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then, among the past *dharmas*, do those *vipāka dharmas* that have not yet matured also cease to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītā avipākā dhammā —te natthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(6)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, do those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “However, among the past *dharmas*, have those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* subsided?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “If among the past *dharmas*, those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* have subsided, then it would not be correct to say: ‘those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* persist.’”

atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te atthīti? āmantā. nanu atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhāti? āmantā. hañci atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā, no ca vata re vattabbe—“atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā —te atthī”ti.

(7)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, have those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* subsided, yet still persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, have those already matured *vipāka dharmas* subsided, yet still persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, have the not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* subsided, yet still persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then, among the past *dharmas*, have the non-*vipāka dharmas* subsided, yet persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te atthīti? āmantā. atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te atthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te atthīti? āmantā. atītā avipākā dhammā niruddhā—te atthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(8)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, have those *vipāka dharmas* that have already matured and subsided ceased to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then, does that imply that among the past *dharmas*, those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* that have subsided also cease to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te natthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(9)

Sthaviravāda: “Among the past *dharmas*, have the non-*vipāka dharmas* that have subsided likewise ceased to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then do those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* that have subsided also cease to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītā avipākā dhammā niruddhā—te natthīti? āmantā. atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(10)

Sthaviravāda: “Among past *dharmas*, do those *vipāka*-producing *dharmas* that have not yet matured and have subsided still persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Among past *dharmas*, do the *vipāka*-producing *dharmas* that have already matured and subsided fail to persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “But if part of these past *vipāka dharmas* have matured and part are still not mature, both having subsided, can we say some persist and some do not?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te atthīti? āmantā. atītā vipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te natthīti? āmantā. atītā ekadesaṃ vipakkavipākā dhammā ekadesaṃ avipakkavipākā dhammā niruddhā—te ekacce atthi ekacce natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe

(11)

Sthaviravāda: “Shall we not say that ‘among past *dharmas*, those *vipāka dharmas* that have not yet matured do persist?’”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes, we shall say.”

Sthaviravāda: “However, among past *dharmas*, will those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharmas* eventually mature?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “If such past *vipāka dharmas* that have not yet matured will indeed mature, then it would not be right to say, ‘they persist.’”

na vattabbaṃ —“atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā—te atthī”ti? āmantā. nanu atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā vipaccissantīti? āmantā. hañci atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā vipaccissantī, tena vata re vattabbe —“atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā—te atthī”ti.

(12)

Sthaviravāda: “Among past *dharma*s, for those not-yet-matured *vipāka dharma*s, when they finish ‘will mature’, do they thus persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “When they finish ‘will mature’, do they thereby become present?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

Sthaviravāda: “When they finish ‘will mature’, do they become present?”

Kāśyapīya: “Yes.”

Sthaviravāda: “Then, for present *dharma*s, when they finish ‘will subside’, do they no longer persist?”

Kāśyapīya: “That should not be stated.”

*atītā avīpakkavīpākā dhammā vipaccissantīti katvā te atthīti? āmantā. vipaccissantīti katvā paccuppannāti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... vipaccissantīti katvā paccuppannāti? āmantā. paccuppannā dhammā nirujjhissantīti katvā te natthīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ...*⁵¹

In these passages, the Sthaviravādins use *reductio ad absurdum* to show that the Kāśyapīya standpoint will lead to self-contradiction. They target the proposition “among the past *dharma*s, some persist” (*atītaṃ ekaccaṃ atthī*), and by dissecting it from multiple angles, they aim to demonstrate its untenability.

It must be stressed that in these exchanges, the Kāśyapīyas interpret *atthī* as “to persist”, rather than “to exist” in an abstract sense. In other words, *atthī* denotes a mode of being—a reversed persistence starting from the past and heading into the future—clearly reminiscent of the Pāli Nāgasena’s theories (which in fact may stem from this very Kāśyapīya tradition). “Past *dharma*s that persist” here describes *dharma*s that originated in the past but, contrary to the usual forward flow of time, continue to persist backwards. If time be likened to a mighty, inexhaustible river running from the future through the present into the ever more distant past, then for the Kāśyapīyas, those “persisting” past *dharma*s resemble fish practising rheotaxis, swimming upstream so as to remain aligned with the “now”. By clarifying that the Kāśyapīya notion of *atthī* implies “to persist”, we can better appreciate why the Sthaviravādins see such a standpoint as fraught with logical challenges.

⁵¹ *Kathāvatthu*, 2 vols., ed. Arnold C. Taylor, B.A., Pali Text Society Text Series nos. 48–49 (vol. I first published 1894, vol. II first published 1897, combined reprint 1979; London: Pali Text Society, distributed by Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), 151–153.

3.4.2.2 Analysis of the Debates

After presenting the debate's text, let us examine its underlying logic. Specifically, how do the Sthaviravādins use *reductio* arguments, and which assumptions does the Kāśyapīya side appear to hold?

In **Passage (2)**, prompted by repeated Sthaviravāda inquiries, the Kāśyapīyas specify that among past *dharma*s, only those that are “not yet matured *vipāka*” still persist. Then, in **Passage (3)**, the Sthaviravādins divide “past *dharma*s” into three types: (a) matured *vipāka*, (b) not yet matured *vipāka*, and (c) non-*vipāka dharma*s. This move is clearly aimed at the Kāśyapīya position. By splitting “not yet matured *vipāka*” into the noun phrase “*vipāka*” plus the adjective “not yet matured”, the Sthaviravādins highlight that (a) and (b) share the object of *vipāka*, while (b) and (c) share the property “without being matured”. Although the Sthaviravādins themselves do not explicitly state their own view, they use a *reductio ad absurdum* to demonstrate what they consider the Kāśyapīya's self-contradiction. From this, we can infer the Sthaviravādins' standpoint indirectly.

Specifically, in **Passage (3)** the Sthaviravādins argue that if, in the Kāśyapīya claim “not yet matured *vipāka* persists”, the term “persist” (*atthi*) indicates the essential mode of *vipāka*, then the (a) “matured *vipāka*” category should likewise persist, since both (a) and (b) share the same referent, *vipāka*. But the Kāśyapīyas refuse that conclusion. The Sthaviravādins then press further: if “persist” applies not to the object *vipāka* but rather to the property “without being matured”, then it must also apply to (c) “non-*vipāka*”, since those too are “without being matured”. Again, the Kāśyapīyas deny this inference. In the Sthaviravādins' view, such refusals point to an internal contradiction in the Kāśyapīya position.

As noted above, Kv does not allow the Kāśyapīyas room to respond. Our aim here is not to determine whether the Sthaviravāda objections ultimately hold, but rather to highlight how the Sthaviravādins treat a *dharma*'s “object” and “property” as two distinct levels of conceptualisation. In their reasoning, distinct objects can share the same property, and the same object can adopt different properties. This stands in direct contrast to the Sarvā-

stivāda strategy, where a conditioned *dharma* is nothing over and above its own *complete* definitional predicate-bundle (no more and no less), and where *sarvam* functions to delimit the relevant predicational domain rather than to assert an unrestricted totality of properties. In the Prolegomenon’s terms, the opponent’s *reductios* repeatedly press for “unrestricted inclusion” by overstepping domains; this pressure is precisely what forces *sarvam* (domain) and *asti* (license of predication) to be sharpened in later Sarvāstivāda theorising. Moreover, from a Vaibhāṣika angle, the very fact that a “property of a dharma” can itself carry the predicates past/present/future shows that those time-labels are second-order properties of first-order predicates.

From these quotations, it is evident that the Sthaviravādins and the Kāśyapīyas interpret *atthi* in fundamentally different ways. The Sthaviravādins view *atthi* as a linking verb —“(not yet matured *vipāka*) is X”—meaning that, if *atthi* is allowed, the Kāśyapīya scholars must intend either “Not yet matured *vipāka* is *vipāka*”, or “Not yet matured *vipāka* is without being matured”. If the latter holds, it should apply to anything else likewise “without being matured”. The Kāśyapīyas reject that, whereupon the Sthaviravādins declare their whole argument undermined. This recalls our earlier discussion (in connection with Mil) of how central the question of *atthi* is in these controversies.

On the Kāśyapīya side, consistent with what we saw in the Mil analysis, *atthi* more closely resembles an intransitive verb connoting “to persist” than a copula or an abstract existential (“to exist”). Our decision to render it as “persist” inevitably obscures that Pāli *atthi* can also mean “is”. In **Passage (3)**, the Kāśyapīyas appear to describe how “not yet matured *vipāka*” stretches across time (from the past into the future), which resonates with Mil discussions and, as previously noted, strongly influenced the Sarvāstivādins’ concept of a timeless “*asti*”. Meanwhile, the Sthaviravādins insist on reading *atthi* as a copula in an analytic proposition, mirroring another Sarvāstivāda thread: the statement that “a *dharma* is complete—no more, no less—and therefore, in an analytic sense, timelessly what it is”. As we shall see below, Sarvāstivāda eventually fuses these two lines of thought—the Kāśyapīya’s

“persisting” interpretation and the Sthaviravādins’ “copulative” approach—into the seminal formula *sarvam asti*.

When the Sarvāstivādins proclaim *sarvam asti*, they simultaneously affirm that a conditioned *dharma* is nothing but the full set of its attributes and that these attributes must be realised through causal events. Put differently, the Sarvāstivādins integrate two distinct approaches to *atthi/asti*: one emphasising how a *dharma* persists through its causal maturation, and the other adopting an analytic, atemporal standpoint that says, “This *dharma* is all of its properties”.

In subsequent doctrinal evolution, they gradually absorbed the various interpretations of “is” and “persists” (*atthi/asti*)—most notably from the Kāśyapīya school—until, under the Vaibhāṣika system, *atthi/asti* was definitively taken to mean “a conditioned *dharma* is nothing over and above the totality of its definitional attributes”. Crucially, this totality is established by a *dharma*’s own nature rather than by a passage of time; yet it still unfolds over a causal sequence.

From selective persistence to universal completeness.

As discussed above, the Kāśyapīyas grant persistence only to not-yet-matured *vipāka*, whereas the Sthaviravādins accept *atthi* only as a copula in an analytic judgement. The Sarvāstivādins merge the two, but in a more articulated way: *sarvam* fixes the domain and standard of completeness of a *dharma*’s own definitional predicates, while *asti/atthi* functions as the license of predication that renders such propositions truth-apt and (in this analytic sense) timelessly valid; the causal sequence then explains how that complete predicate-bundle is sequentially actualised. The Vaibhāṣikas formalise this as a *higher-order* claim—“past, present, future” operate not on the *dharma* alone but on every one of its definitional predicates—thus yielding the mature doctrine summarised in the slogan *sarvam asti*.

Of course, the transition from Kāśyapīya philosophy to full-blown Sarvāstivāda teaching was not a simple matter of borrowing or assimilation. Since this study does not aim to

reconstruct every turn in that story, we need not pursue every step. In short, the Kāśyapīyas held that, if an unmaturing cause is awaiting its moment to produce a fruit, the time reference in *atthi/asti* implies sempiternity. By contrast, for the Sarvāstivādins, whenever a conditioned *dharma* is said, via *atthi/asti*, to “be” its complete attributes, this statement no longer falls within temporal constraints; it signifies an atemporality. One should recall that in traditional Sanskrit linguistics, a noun is treated as inherently outside time. An important metaphysical question thus arises: if a noun is atemporal, why do we need a time-inflected verb to describe its ongoing events? This question is seldom explicitly discussed in mainstream Western philosophy before relatively recent thinkers like Deleuze, yet the Sarvāstivāda tradition examined it systematically. In this context, one could argue that the distinction between nouns and verbs and their combination point to a deeper metaphysical question concerning how reality is represented in language.⁵² In many ways, Sarvāstivāda represents a pinnacle

⁵² Deleuze’s *Logic of Sense* puts a fresh spotlight on the verb as the true mover in language. Instead of treating the noun as a stable, self-contained thing, Deleuze sees the verb as what draws the noun into an ongoing process or event. See Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, edited by Constantin V. Boundas and translated by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990; originally published in French as *Logique du sens*, 1969). In *Dialogues II*, he underscores how events “unsettle” nouns; see Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987; revised edition, 2007). James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze’s Logic of Sense: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), further explains Deleuze’s shift from substance (noun) to becoming (verb). This viewpoint draws inspiration from Stoic philosophy of *lekta*, where nouns denote bodies and verbs incorporeal events, so a proposition (subject + predicate) weaves together something named with something happening. Analytic philosophers like Frege and Wittgenstein echo this from a logical angle: a lone noun cannot yield a statement; a predicate (verb) is “incomplete” until attached to a subject. See Gottlob Frege, “On Concept and Object” and “On Sense and Reference”, in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, 3rd ed., edited by Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), and *The Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884), translated by J. L. Austin (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1980); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Chomsky codifies this subject–predicate structure in generative grammar; see Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), and *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965). Lucien Tesnière, *Elements of Structural Syntax*, translated by Timothy Osborne, Sylvain Kahane, and Jean-Pierre Koenig (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015; original French edition 1959), sees the verb as the “director” governing its required nouns. Heidegger and Husserl note that our pre-predicative experience often feels inherently meaningful, even before we shape it into subject + predicate; see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962; originally published 1927), and *Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000; lectures delivered 1935); Edmund Husserl, *Experience and Judgement*, edited and revised by Ludwig Landgrebe, translated by James S. Churchill and Karl Ameriks (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973; originally published 1939). Nietzsche criticises our “grammatical superstition”, which insists on a subject for every action; see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966; originally published 1886). Yet, as Strawson concludes, most traditions still maintain that a fully meaningful sentence requires both a noun (subject) and a verb (predicate); see P. F. Strawson, *Subject and Predicate in Logic and Grammar* (London: Methuen, 1974).

of doctrinal development in sectarian Buddhist philosophies precisely because it confronted these subtle issues that, while fundamental, are easily overlooked.

In brief, the Sarvāstivādins say that nouns require verbs because *dharma*s subject to causal laws inevitably undergo changes, as was shown in the previous chapter's distinction between "external causation" (to appear) and "internal causation" (to become). Describing such transformations necessitates verbs. In this regard, even though *asti* is grammatically present tense, once it is used in a context of enumerating the complete set of a *dharma*'s attributes, its temporal form ceases to matter. The statement becomes an analytic truth, atemporally valid. Hence, as the Sarvāstivādins teach it, *asti* may be inflected for present tense but semantically expresses a timeless judgement. Precisely how to reconcile this atemporal proposition with the manifest changes a conditioned *dharma* undergoes is the key to Sarvāstivāda metaphysics—an issue we will explore in greater depth later on.

Finally, one may wonder whether Sarvāstivāda could also have influenced other schools (like the Kāśyapīya), making it look as if the directional borrowing went in reverse. Logically, such cross-influence remains possible, but from Kv evidence, two telling points emerge. First, the terms *vipāka* and *vipākadhamma* do not appear in the Sarvāstivāda sections of Kv (*Sabbamatthīkathā*); those concepts arise only in the Kāśyapīya context. Second, in *Sabbamatthīkathā*, Sarvāstivāda does not argue that *atthi* means "extend across past, present, and future". Rather, they engage the Sthaviravādins in a debate that treats *atthi* as a copula in an analytic proposition. This alignment suggests that Sarvāstivāda did not originally adopt the Kāśyapīya sense of "persist" (*atthi*)—otherwise, we would expect an explicit *Sabbamatthīkathā* refutation of such a stance. In the next section, therefore, we shall examine some representative arguments in *Sabbamatthīkathā*, reconstructing the early Sarvāstivāda approach to *asti* and distinguishing it from both Sthaviravāda and Kāśyapīya.

This debate in Kv shows how *atthi* carries two divergent senses: the Kāśyapīyas interpret it as "persist"—suggesting certain past *dharma*s retain causal potency—whereas the Sthaviravādins treat it more as a copula, logically linking subject to predicate. In essence,

the disagreement mirrors the earlier Mil discussions, where “past *dharma*s with *vipāka*” are deemed to “persist” for future fruition, while opponents insist on a stricter grammatical function for *atthi*. As we turn to the Sarvāstivādins’ eventual formulation of *sarvam asti*, we will see how these differing readings of *atthi*—copulative versus existential persistence—are ultimately philosophised into the doctrine that every *saṃskṛtadharmā* is complete in possessing all its static and eventive properties.

3.4.3 The Sarvāstivāda in the *Kathāvatthu*

In this section, we will analyse how Kv portrays the Sarvāstivāda position on *atthi*, contrasting it with the views of the Sthaviravādins and the Kāśyapīyas. This analysis will demonstrate that the Sarvāstivāda interpretation of *atthi* as a timeless copula, signifying an analytic relationship between a *dharma* and its properties, was not a fully formed doctrine from the outset, but rather emerged from a process of intense debate and refinement. It will also highlight the *limitations* of viewing *atthi* solely in terms of existential persistence, a view that, as we shall see, creates significant logical difficulties for some schools.

3.4.3.1 An Early Sarvāstivāda Exploration of *atthi*

Within the *Sabbamatthītikathā* chapter of Kv, the *Padasodhanakathā* (“Proposition on Purifying the Sentence”) subsection contains a significant debate centred on the proper interpretation of *atthi*. The discussion turns on a seemingly technical question: when *atthi* appears in a predicative statement, is it merely the verbal link that enables predication, or can it itself be treated as bearing (and so contributing) a further predicate-like determination? This grammatical issue matters because it bears directly on how one should understand the relation between a *dharma* and what is said of it.

Sthaviravāda: “Does the past exist (*atītaṃ atthi*)?”

Sarvāstivāda: Yes.

Sthaviravāda: “(Is it the case that) ‘exists’ is past (*atthi atītaṃ*)?”

Sarvāstivāda: ‘Exists’ might be past; it might be not past.

Sthaviravāda: Understand the refutation. If (you say) the past exists, and ‘exists’ might be past and might be not past, then (it follows that) the past is not past, and the not-past is past. What you say there—“It should be said indeed: ‘the past exists; ‘exists’ might be past, might be not past; therefore the past is not past, and the not-past is past’”—is wrong.

*atītaṃ atthīti? āmantā. atthi atītanti? atthi siyā atītaṃ, siyā nvātītanti
ājānāhi niggahaṃ. hañci atītaṃ atthi, atthi siyā atītaṃ, siyā nvātītaṃ, tenātītaṃ nvātītaṃ, nvātītaṃ
atītanti. yaṃ tattha vadesi—“vattabbe kho—‘atītaṃ atthi atthi siyā atītaṃ, siyā nvātītaṃ, tenātītaṃ
nvātītaṃ, nvātītaṃ atītan’ ” ti micchā.”⁵³*

Two features of this passage are immediately relevant to our larger argument. First, the exchange itself already stages the very shift in position that matters for *asti/atthi*: it begins with *atītaṃ atthi* (with *atthi* clause-final), but then deliberately turns to *atthi atītaṃ* (with *atthi* clause-initial). This is exactly the syntactic manoeuvre that, in Sanskrit materials, often correlates with a drift from a more copular use (linking subject and predicate) to a more existential use (introducing something as “there is/there exists”). We also recall that Vasubandhu, in challenging the Vaibhāṣika, plays a closely related game by rearranging *sarvam asti* into *asti sarvam*. Because Buddhist scholastic writers were certainly sensitive to such shifts, we should be cautious about treating Vasubandhu’s fronting as if it simply reported the Vaibhāṣika’s own intended formulation.

Second, the Sthaviravādins’ refutation makes its crucial move by treating *atthi* itself as something that can be qualified (“past” or “not past”). The question *atthi atītaṃ?* is not merely a repetition of *atītaṃ atthi*; it isolates the verb and asks, in effect, whether the “is/exists”-element can itself be placed under a temporal determination. The Sarvāstivādins’ reply—“it might be past, it might be not past”—gives the Sthaviravādins the leverage they need for a *reductio*: if the same “exists”-element can be both past and not past, then the past collapses into the not-past and vice versa (“the past is not past; the not-past is past”).

At this point, it would be a mistake to say that *atthi* is simply “copula-only” or “existence-only”. The Sthaviravāda critique is built precisely on the thought that *atthi* can be made to do more than merely connect a subject with a predicate: it can be pressed into service as if it were itself a predicate-bearing term. And in early Buddhist debates about the past, this is not merely a verbal curiosity. If one hears *atthi* as a robust existential marker, then to say “the past exists” readily suggests that what is past must in some way be “there” (and so, in a sense, persist). This is why, in some early traditions (and especially in polemical contexts), one

⁵³ Taylor, Kv, 139.

finds a tendency to treat existence-talk about past items as smuggling in a kind of temporal persistence. The Sthaviravādins' refutation exploits exactly this tendency: by forcing *atthi* to behave like something that can be “past” or “not past”, it pushes the Sarvāstivādin toward an unacceptable collapse of temporal distinctions.

The Sarvāstivādins (as reconstructed in this dissertation) do not accept that premise. They recognise that *asti/atthi* can play different syntactic roles depending on how it is deployed. Put differently: when *atthi* functions clause-final as a copular linking element, it does not itself contribute a further item of content about the subject; it serves to articulate the predication by which the subject is characterised. In that respect one may compare (with due caution) Kant's point that “being” is not a real predicate: the work is done by the predicate that follows, not by the mere “is”. But when *atthi* is fronted and made salient as in *atthi atītaṃ*, it is much easier—especially in a debate about past and future—for it to be heard as an existential assertion that carries an additional metaphysical load (precisely the load that the Sthaviravādins' *reductio* tries to expose). It is in this sense that the title *Padasodhanakathā* is apt: what is at stake is not a single doctrinal slogan in isolation, but the purification of a sentence by attending to how its words function.

As we noted before, Vasubandhu's shift of *asti* from clause-final (*sarvam asti*) to clause-initial (*asti sarvam*) is best read as a deliberate strategy to reframe the Vaibhāṣika thesis in a more straightforwardly existential register. The question then becomes: why do the Sarvāstivādins choose *sarvam asti* rather than *asti sarvam*? For them, the copular role is paramount. To say that a conditioned *dharma* “is” (or “has”) its definition-fixing characteristics is not to say that those characteristics must be manifested “here and now”, nor is it to say that the past persists as present. Rather, *sarvam asti* is meant to support a metaphysical scheme in which ultimate knowledge of every *dharma* is articulated through atemporal, analytic propositions—propositions whose validity does not depend on temporal persistence but on what the *dharma* is.

We are not here to decide whether the Sthaviravādins’ refutation is ultimately correct. Our aim is instead to reconstruct what the debate reveals about early Sarvāstivāda theorising. In short, the Sarvāstivāda position that emerges through these polemics (1) treats *atthi* primarily as a copula for stating what a *dharma* is, (2) is keenly aware that shifting *atthi* within a sentence can carry distinct linguistic and metaphysical implications, and (3) crucially, denies that *asti/atthi* itself constitutes a further predicate over and above the predicate that actually characterises the *dharma*. In other words, *asti/atthi* must work together with the genuine predicate to articulate what properties belong to a *dharma*; it is not itself an additional property-term. Nor, however, should we simply identify the Sarvāstivāda reading with Kant’s thesis that “*sein*” is not a real predicate. As argued previously, for the Sarvāstivādins the present-tense *asti* functions as a higher-order operator: it marks propositions as timelessly valid in the sense relevant to analytic truth, rather than reporting temporal endurance.

3.4.3.2 Buddhaghosa’s Explanation

Buddhaghosa’s commentary sheds further light on this issue:

The other side (i.e. the Sarvāstivādins) proposes that “what persists can be either past or non-past”. In this passage, given the context of the debate, it should be understood as follows: that which *is past* is past. That which is present or future does not persist and is not past. Therefore, what is past is not past and what is not past is past. Because of this, past is not past and not past is past. What is present or future follows the same reasoning.

*parato atthi siyā atītaṃ, siyā nvātītanti ettha evaṃ attho veditabbo. yaṃ atītaṃ eva atthi, taṃ atītaṃ. yaṃ paccuppannānāgataṃ atthi, taṃ no atthi, taṃ no atītaṃ. tenātītaṃ nvātītaṃ, nvātītaṃ atītanti tena kāraṇena atītaṃ no atītaṃ, no atītaṃ atītanti. anāgata paccuppannapucchāsūpi eseva nayo.*⁵⁴

Buddhaghosa’s phrasing still requires some unpacking. According to his commentary, the Sarvāstivādins say “some *dharms* which persist (*atthi*) are past, others are not”, precisely in order to refute the Sthaviravādins’ claim that “*atītaṃ atthi*” and “*atthi atītaṃ*” must be perfectly interchangeable propositions. The Sarvāstivādins argue that “*paccuppannaṃ atthi*” and “*atthi paccuppannaṃ*” similarly cannot both be equally valid, because a present *dharma*

⁵⁴ N. A. Jayawickrama, ed. *Kathāvattthupparakaraṇa-aṭṭhakathā Included in Pañcappakarāṇa-aṭṭhakathā Named Paramatthadīpanī* (London: Pali Text Society, 1979; reprint, 2011), 50.

is gone in a moment and cannot persist. So even if “*paccuppannaṃ atthi*” holds in every sense, “*atthi paccuppannaṃ*” does not follow automatically.

Likewise, if one were to assume (again, for the sake of argument) that “*anāgataṃ atthi*” and “*atthi anāgataṃ*” are identical truths, that would force the conclusion that *not only* do past *dharma*s persist, but future *dharma*s do so in the same way. However, the Sarvāstivādins themselves do not accept this. Rather, they highlight that the Sthaviravādins’ insistence on rewriting “*sarvam asti*” as “*asti sarvam*” yields this outcome—namely, if “*atītaṃ atthi*” can be symmetrically inverted, so must “*anāgataṃ atthi*”, which becomes a *reductio ad absurdum*. From the Sarvāstivāda standpoint, that is precisely why *atītaṃ atthi* and *atthi atītaṃ* cannot be full equivalents, and why “*sarvam asti = asti sarvam*” is a false equivalence.

In short, the Sarvāstivādins never claimed that if past *dharma*s persist, future *dharma*s must also persist. Instead, they are showing that the Sthaviravādins’ own logic leads to an untenable outcome, demonstrating that *sarvam asti* does not equate to *asti sarvam*.

Meanwhile, as Buddhaghosa further explains, the Sthaviravādins retort by alleging that the Sarvāstivāda approach lets *atthi* be both used and not used for the same subject—thus “if *atthi* can say ‘X is something’, it can also say ‘X is *not* that thing.’” A “past *dharma*” might thus be “not past”, or something “not past” might be deemed “past”.

Put more succinctly, Buddhaghosa’s commentary brings out how both sides employ *reductio* arguments against each other. On the one hand, the Sarvāstivādins do not in fact endorse “future *dharma*s persist”, but rather deploy that scenario to show why the Sthaviravādins’ assumption—namely, that *atthi*-based statements are all perfectly interchangeable—leads to self-contradiction. Meanwhile, from the Sthaviravāda perspective, the Sarvāstivādins’ treatment of *atthi* seemingly allows one to switch on or off the verb for any *dharma*, thus likewise breeding paradoxes.

Crucially, Buddhaghosa’s reconstruction confirms our interpretation: within his account, the Sarvāstivādins firmly defend *sarvam asti*, directly refuting *asti sarvam*. This makes clear that the Sarvāstivādins’ objection to *asti sarvam* stems from their core tenet

that each *dharma* is its total set of properties—not that “everything exists here and now”. In other words, *sarvam asti* is about completeness, not about omnipresent existence.

3.4.3.3 Additional Sarvāstivāda Arguments about *atthi*

Beyond the key disputes in the *Sabbamatthītikathā*, there is another crucial debate in the subsection titled *Vacanasodhanā* (“On the Purification of Statements”), which again hinges on *atthi* as a copula. The dialogue proceeds as follows:

(1)

Sthaviravāda: “A future *dharma*, having *been* a future *dharma*, becomes present?”

Sarvāstivāda: “Yes.”

(2)

Sthaviravāda: “So the future *dharma* is the present *dharma*?”

Sarvāstivāda: “That cannot be said.”

(3)

Sthaviravāda: “The future *dharma* is the present *dharma*?”

Sarvāstivāda: “Yes.”

(4)

Sthaviravāda: “‘Having once been, it is’ means ‘having once been, it is’?”

Sarvāstivāda: “That cannot be said.”

(5)

Sthaviravāda: “‘Having once been, it is’ means ‘having once been, it is’?”

Sarvāstivāda: “Yes.”

(6)

Sthaviravāda: “‘Not having once been, it is not’ implies ‘not having once been—it is not’?”

Sarvāstivāda: “That cannot be said.”

*anāgataṃ hutvā paccuppannaṃ hotīti? āmantā. taññeva anāgataṃ taṃ paccuppannanti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... taññeva anāgataṃ taṃ paccuppannanti? āmantā. hutvā hoti hutvāhotīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe ... hutvā hoti hutvāhotīti? āmantā. na hutvā na hoti nahutvānahotīti? na hevaṃ vattabbe ... pe*⁵⁵

At first glance, both the Pāli excerpt and the rendering above may be perplexing. The underlying difficulty arises from the Sthaviravādins’ strategic exploitation of the Sarvāstivādins’ premise that *atthi/hoti* is a copula. In other words, if “future” and “present” are merely adjectives describing the same *dharma*, and if the copula indicates identity, then one might be forced into concluding “the future *dharma* is the present *dharma*”.

We see Sarvāstivāda taking a careful approach to show that the changing factor is a *dharma*’s *state*, not the *dharma* itself. They do this, quite ingeniously, through *gerund* constructions in Sanskrit/Pāli—since a gerund denotes that the subject of the gerund and the

⁵⁵ Taylor, Kv, 125.

subject of the main verb must remain identical,⁵⁶ but the state changes across stages. The Sthaviravādins exploit that same grammatical point to argue that the Sarvāstivādins' position leads to contradiction.

3.4.3.3.1 Compounded Copula *hutvāhoti* and Its Ontological Implication From question (1), we can reconstruct the Sarvāstivāda viewpoint: (a) a *dharma* is predicated/designated as “future”, (b) it then completes the phase of “being future”, and (c) the same *dharma* is now predicated/designated as “present”. Yet, from (2) and our own background knowledge, the Sarvāstivādins deny that this implies “the future *dharma* is the present *dharma*”. They reject (2) because the fact that “a *dharma* undergoes future, then present” does not mean one can equate “future” and “present”.

So why would the Sarvāstivādins again affirm (3)? As the commentator Buddhaghosa explains, the Sthaviravādins artificially subdivide “future” into two phases—“before arising” and “the moment of arising”:

On the second question, because that future *dharma* (before it arose) did indeed become present at the moment it arose, the Sarvāstivādins acknowledge the statement that “the future is now present.”

*dutiyaṃ puṭṭho yaṃ uppādato pubbe anāgataṃ ahoṣi, tassa uppannakāle paccuppannattā paṭijānāti.*⁵⁷

Thus, *uppādato pubbe* (“before arising”) and *uppannakāle* (“at the moment of arising”) are two consecutive states of what is still referred to collectively as “the future *dharma*”. The Sarvāstivādins hence concede that in its second phase, that “future” has “present-ness (*paccuppannattā*)”.

Once the Sarvāstivādins have yielded (3), however, the Sthaviravādins escalate with (4): if we accept “the future *dharma* is the present *dharma*”, then the twin copulas “having once been, it is” must be conflated into a single compounded copula “*hutvāhoti* (*having-once-been-is*)”, effectively turning “the future → present” shift into a single identity statement.⁵⁸ For

⁵⁶ In *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.4.21, Pāṇini states “*samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*”, meaning that when two actions have the same doer and one action precedes the other, the suffix *-ktvā* is applied to the prior action.

⁵⁷ Jayawickrama, Kv-a, 46.

⁵⁸ A parallel instance of two verbals conjoined in a single expression is found in the Jain compound *syādasti* (“in some respect, it is”), combining *syāt* (optative form of *√as*, “to be”) with *asti* (present indicative). For *syādasti*

the Sthaviravādins, *huvāhoti* makes “having once been X, it is X” into a single existential/copulative fact—forcing a strict identity between the “future” and “present” states. The Sarvāstivādins, by contrast, see it as describing an irreversible transformation in the same underlying *dharma*. Thus, the Sarvāstivādins say (4) “cannot be said”. Buddhaghosa clarifies the Sarvāstivādins’ line of reasoning:

By saying “having once been, it is”, one is effectively saying “having-once-been-is”. That is to say, because the future *dharma*, having once been future, is the present *dharma*, the future *dharma* **is** the present *dharma*. Based on this identity theory, since the future *dharma*, having once been future, is the present *dharma*, one might likewise say: the present *dharma*, having once been present, **is** the future *dharma*. Then, what does this “having-once-been” refer to? Therefore, the Sarvāstivādins deny it, because “having once been” refers to what is already gone, leaving no possibility for another “having once been” thereafter.

huvā hoti huvāhotīti yadetam tayā “anāgataṃ huvā paccuppannaṃ hotī” ti vadatā “taññeva anāgataṃ taṃ paccuppannaṃ” ti laddhivasena “anāgataṃ vā paccuppannaṃ vā huvā hotī” ti vuttaṃ. kiṃ te tampi huvāhotīti? itaro huvābhūtassa “punahuvāabhāvato” na hevanti paṭikkhipati⁵⁹

By framing *bhavati/hoti* with the gerund “*huvā*”, the Sthaviravādins are clarifying *hoti/bhavati* as a genuine copula: to say “A *bhavati* B” is to describe an event that should be recast as “A, having once been A, now *bhavati* B”, and thus A and B are the same underlying entity. The Sthaviravādins’ argument aims to prove that if the Sarvāstivādins really treat *hoti/bhavati* as a copula, one ends up with an absurd conclusion: “The future *dharma* is the present *dharma*”.

Yet the Sarvāstivādins cleverly counter that *hoti/bhavati* is a special kind of copula. The phrase “*huvā...hoti*” indicates an irreversible transformation from the subject’s first state to its second state; the subject is the same underlying *dharma*, but its “phase” or “mode” changes. Because these modes are not interchangeable, saying “A *bhavati* B” does not let us swap $B \rightarrow A$. So, the Sthaviravādins’ attempt to force “the future *dharma* is the present *dharma*” is thwarted.

Still, at question (5), the Sarvāstivādins appear to accept the same “*huvāhoti*”. Buddhaghosa explains further:

in Jain logic (the first mode of the sevenfold *syādvāda*), see Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekānta-vāda)* (Ahmedabad: L.D. Institute of Indology, 1981), ch. 2.

⁵⁹ Jayawickrama, Kv-a, 46.

Confronted with the second challenge that ‘the future, having once been future, is now present’, the Sarvāstivādins effectively do define *hutvāhoti* as ‘the *dharma*, having once been future, being present.’ Hence, they accept *hutvāhoti*.

*dutiyaṃ puṭṭho yasmā taṃ anāgataṃ hutvā paccuppannaṃ hontaṃ hutvāhotīti saṅkhaṃ gataṃ, tasmā paṭijānāti.*⁶⁰

The Sarvāstivādins’ initial and seminal decision—to treat *atthi/hoti* as a copula while also affirming that past, future, and present are all states of the same conditioned *dharma*—inevitably compels them to address the critique that their doctrine would lead to absurd propositions such as “the future is the present”. The central philosophical challenge is to explain how these states differ without collapsing them into a single identity.

According to Buddhaghosa’s explanation, the Sarvāstivādins interpret “is” (*hoti*) as the present participle *hontaṃ* (“currently ...-ing”). This subtle shift shows that the Sarvāstivādins are deftly reminding the Sthaviravādins that “future” and “present” both modify the same *dharma*. Hence, the proposition “a future *dharma* *hutvāhoti* a present *dharma*” can hold precisely because what it really says is “the *dharma* formerly designated as future is now designated as present”, rather than “the future *is* the present”. In other words, on the one hand, the Sarvāstivādins demonstrate that *hoti/bhavati*, used as a copula, refers to a non-reversible relationship between a subject and its predicate—so “future *dharma*” and “present *dharma*” cannot be identical. On the other hand, they clarify that the event described by *hoti/bhavati* involves a single bundle of properties undergoing a change of state or an ongoing instantiation of different properties. Thus, even though we use a copula to describe the process, the bundle remains the same *dharma*—only its state changes. Hence, while the subject and predicate are joined by *hoti/bhavati*, they are not identical.

According to Buddhaghosa, the Sarvāstivādins also treat “future” (*anāgata*) and “present” (*paccuppanna*) in accordance with their grammatical function as adjectives modifying the same referent “*taṃ*”, rather than reifying one as the other. Consequently, the clause “(it) is a present *dharma*” becomes “(it is) that *dharma* now in a present phase”. Therefore, “the future *dharma* is (*hutvāhoti*) the present *dharma*” ultimately means “the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

dharma that was future has now arrived at a present phase”. As a result, the original judgement “the future *dharma* is the present *dharma*”, with *hoti* as its copula, effectively resolves into the short phrase “that *dharma* which is currently present”—indicating the *dharma* remains the same, but its position (*avasthā*) changes.

Here we glimpse the nascent concept that “the object does not mutate” (*na dravyān-tarataḥ*), a principle that the Sarvāstivādins would later elevate to a fundamental doctrine. Tellingly, the Sarvāstivādins’ argument in this dialogue depends crucially on the grammar of gerunds. As we have argued throughout, the Sarvāstivādins ground their metaphysics in a close reading of grammatical and syntactic structures. This is also why, in their tradition, the study of “*pada*” and “*vacana*” (i.e. the morphological and syntactic means of expression) is so deeply interwoven with philosophical reasoning.⁶¹

Nevertheless, the Sarvāstivādins eventually discard “*bhavati/hoti* + gerund” as a device to capture the essence of a *dharma*’s transformation, opting instead for “*asti/atthi*” plus “*kāri-tra*”, a new explanatory scheme about a *dharma*’s nature and change. Precisely because the early dialogues revealed that “*hutvā...hoti*” remains incomplete and prone to confusion, the later Sarvāstivādins developed more sophisticated analyses. As we suggested at the start of this section, one cannot fully grasp the Sarvāstivādins’ ultimate philosophical system without first encountering these intricate, formative debates.⁶²

Thus, already in these early Abhidharma debates we can see two distinct lines of inquiry crystallising around the verb *asti/atthi*. The Sarvāstivādins pursued its *copulative* function: How does “is/has” link a subject to the complete array of predicates that define it, and what follows if that link is taken to be analytically—hence atemporally—true? In parallel, the

⁶¹ Jaini’s foundational study explores the Vaibhāṣika theory of words and meanings, focusing on the reality of linguistic *dharmanas* (name-group, phrase-group) and Sautrāntika critiques of inherent meaning; see Padmanabh S. Jaini, “The Vaibhāṣika Theory of Words and Meanings”, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 22, no. 1 (1959): 95–107. Meanwhile, Choi’s more recent work traces how Sarvāstivādins variably define *nāman*, *pada*, and *vyañjana*, illuminating a sophisticated interplay between grammatical analysis and doctrinal interpretation in Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra literature; see Seongho Choi, “The Relationship between *nāman*, *pada*, and *vyañjana* in Sarvāstivāda and Yogācāra Literature”, in *Puṣpikā*, vol. 6: *Proceedings of the 12th International Indology Graduate Research Symposium (Vienna, 2021)*, 53–66 (Heidelberg: HASP, 2023).

⁶² The final negative compound (6) *nahutvānahoti* simply mirrors the same *reductio* pattern in (4)–(5); since it does not add a new semantic mechanism beyond the (gerund + copula) construction, I set it aside here.

Kāśyapīya school pressed the *intransitive* reading: How can “persists” describe a past karmic event that remains efficacious until its fruit ripens?

The mature Sarvāstivāda formula *sarvam asti* emerges when these two strands are brought together. From the Kāśyapīyas, the tradition inherits the idea that a conditioned *dharma* must in some sense “continue” so long as its causal work is unfinished; from the Sthaviravāda critique it learns to treat *asti* as a logical operator that attaches to, but is not itself, the predicate. Universalising both insights, the Vaibhāṣikas declare that every conditioned *dharma* already contains—by definition—all of its static and dynamic predicates, each of which will be instantiated in the appropriate causal phase. In this way the scattered debates of early sectarian Buddhism are fused into a single higher-order thesis: *sarvam asti*, “there is all that a *dharma* ought to have”.

3.4.4 Further Reflections on the Kāśyapīyas’ Understanding of *atthi*

Let us revisit the Kāśyapīya⁶³ view that “past *dharmanas* persist”, as articulated in the later sections of the Kv debates. In Passages (4) and (5), the Sthaviravādins continue their *reductio*-style arguments and classifications, only now the focus switches from “persist/*atthi*” to “not persist/*natthi*”. In Passage (6), the Sthaviravādins introduce the new concept *niruddha* (“no longer active” or “subsided”). They argue that, even if one tentatively grants the Kāśyapīya claim that “some not-yet-matured *vipāka* in the past persists”, logically there must be *two* incompatible predicates describing the same subject: namely, “persists” (*atthi*) and “is subsided” (*niruddha*). On the one hand, “it persists” indicates that it endures from the past towards the future—this we have already discussed at length. On the other hand, “it is subsided” is a standard Buddhist axiom held across different traditions to characterise a truly past *dharma*. Thus, in the Sthaviravādins’ view, recognising an unripe *vipāka* as “persisting” must simultaneously force one to call it “subsided”, a contradiction. The subsequent Passages (6) through (10) all unfold similarly, showing how the Sthaviravādins believe the

⁶³ For recent research on the Kāśyapīya, see Marcus Bingenheimer, “The Suttas on Sakka in Āgama and Nikāya Literature—With Some Remarks on the Attribution of the Shorter Chinese *Samyukta Āgama*”, *Buddhist Studies Review* 25 (2008): 149–173.

Kāśyapīyas’ assertion—“some portion of past *dharma*s does persist”—inexorably yields contradictions.

3.4.4.1 The Concept of *vipaccissanti*

A particularly noteworthy development appears in Passages (11) and (12). In Passage (11), the Kāśyapīyas introduce a new proposition: “Among past *dharma*s, those that have not yet matured *will* mature (*atītā avipakkavipākā dhammā vipaccissanti*)”. Although the immediate context is a Sthaviravāda question, the phrasing “*nanu*” shows that this statement is an actual Kāśyapīya view, not simply the Sthaviravādins’ inference of a possible Kāśyapīya stance.

From earlier sections, we know the Kāśyapīyas define *atthi* as “persisting from the past into the future, eventually manifesting in the present”. A natural question arises: for those “past *dharma*s” that persist in this sense, *how* exactly does that persistence operate, or what is the nature of this persistence? To address this, the Kāśyapīyas now invoke the concept of maturation (*vipāka*), and specifically its future-tense form *vipaccissanti*, capturing the process “from the past heading into the future for eventual manifestation”. In other words, for the Kāśyapīyas, when we say “Among past *dharma*s, those that have not yet matured *persist*”, we mean “Among past *dharma*s, those that are not yet matured *will* come to mature”. The Sthaviravādins, of course, reject the coherence of such an argument, pointing out that a future-tense transitive verb does not straightforwardly correspond to a present-tense intransitive verb *atthi*.

Clearly aware of this difficulty, the Kāśyapīyas propose yet another conceptual tool, “after completing the process” (*katvā*). This refinement appears in Passage (12): “Among past *dharma*s, those that have not yet matured *will* mature—after that is completed (*vipaccissantīti katvā*), they persist (*te atthi*)”. Immediately, the Sthaviravādins demand to know whether this new statement implies that what the Kāśyapīyas originally called “not-yet-matured *vipāka dharma*s among past *dharma*s” should now be labelled “present *dharma*s”. The Sthaviravādins’ rationale is as follows: if the Kāśyapīyas claim that “persist” refers to “a past and not-yet-matured *vipāka dharma*”, but now they add “after future maturation is

completed”, then that supposed not-yet-matured state must have become “matured” and accordingly must have become present. Thus, the Kāśyapīyas’ proposition that “some past *dharma*s persist” is untenable.

The Kāśyapīyas refuse to accept this Sthaviravāda inference. It would collapse the notion that “past *dharma*s persist” into “present *dharma*s persist”, undermining their carefully constructed definition of “persist” as bridging the past, future, and present. In Passage (11), the Kāśyapīyas had redefined “persist”, and now in Passage (12), they shift who or what is persisting. Buddhaghosa’s commentary helps us reconstruct this sequence of moves:

When the Sthaviravādins’ question is raised, “After having completed ‘it will mature’, do they persist?” [the Kāśyapīyas] answer in the affirmative. They rely on everyday language about “*atthi*”—for example, we say of someone with great virtues that even when he sleeps, he still *has* that many virtues. Then, in the second question, “After having completed ‘it will mature’, is it present?”, [the Kāśyapīyas] likewise answer affirmatively, holding the theory that karmic accumulation—understood as the principle “*kamma* is never destroyed”—is what truly persists. *vipaccissantīti katvā te atthīti pucchā sakavādissa. yathā dhammadharassa puggalassa niddāyantassāpi bahupavattino dhammā atthīti vuccanti, evaṃ lokavohāravasena atthitaṃ sandhāya paṭiññā paravādissa. vipaccissantīti katvā paccupannāti dutiyapañhe kammānaṃ avināsasaṅkhāto kammūpacayo nām’ eko atthīti laddhiyaṃ thatvā paṭiññā paravādissa.*⁶⁴

In Buddhaghosa’s reading, the Kāśyapīyas argue that once a not-yet-matured *dharma* eventually matures, *atthi* can still apply, because *atthi* designates *either* (1) the ongoing continuum of the property of being a *vipāka dharma* even if this property is fully instantiated and no longer active, or (2) the property it has even if it is in a potential state. An analogy: we say of a virtuous person that “he has virtues”, even when asleep and manifesting no active virtuous deeds. In short, *atthi* does not necessarily mean “existing or active right this moment”, but rather “having or containing certain qualities in some potential or abiding sense”. As pointed out earlier, this capacity of *asti/atthi* was recognised as far back as Pāṇini’s grammar (*tad asyāsty asminn iti matUP*). We have already touched upon this theme in previous chapters, since it significantly informs the Sarvāstivāda explanation of *sarvam asti*, switching between “what it is” and “what it has”.

Crucially, the Kāśyapīyas’ next move is to say, “Among past *dharma*s that have not yet matured, their process from unmatured to ‘will mature’ and eventually *fully matured* is a cu-

⁶⁴ Jayawickrama, Kv-a, 52.

mulative karmic build-up.” Hence, “persist” designates that ongoing karmic stream. When the Sthaviravādins ask, “After completing ‘it will mature’, is it present?”—the Kāśyapīyas answer “yes”, because from their viewpoint, the “present” now refers not to “the matured *dharma* that was in the past”, but rather “the entire karmic accumulation”. In effect, once “will mature” is completed, we can say “the karmic accumulation has reached the present”.

Thus, as Buddhaghosa clarifies, in the Kāśyapīya model, the “object” that maintains a reverse rheotaxis (as we previously discussed in § 3.4.2.1) is not the same “past *dharma*” reappearing in the future. Instead, it is the “karmic result” that the original past *dharma* set in motion. In Mil, the precursor of the Kāśyapīya notion still lacked a clear distinction about *what* precisely exhibits rheotaxis. Observing how the Kāśyapīyas sharpen this distinction offers us a concrete glimpse into the dynamic evolution of Buddhist philosophical thought.

3.4.5 Time’s Flow

3.4.5.1 The Notion of *addhā* as “Time Span”

Recall that in the preceding passages, we saw how Kv records a debate between the Kāśyapīyas and the Sthaviravādins in which each side aims to prove or disprove the persisting (*atthi/astī*) status of certain “past *dharmanas*”. In Passage (12), the discussion introduces a central question in the philosophy of time: namely, how to differentiate “time spans (*addhā/adhvan*)”. From everyday experience, it might seem that time itself moves forward on its own, that “the present” keeps arriving, with “past” and “future” naturally falling out on either side. Yet for the Ābhīdharmikas, the differentiation of these three time spans is not carried out by an independent temporal flow; rather, the labels are determined by when a causal event begins or ends. In other words, as previously noted, Abhidharma thinkers do not regard “time” as an object in its own right—time is not an external entity that makes things appear or vanish. Instead, “time” is a *predicate*, describing the causal stages through which a conditioned *dharma* passes.

We see in the Kāśyapīyas’ reasoning (and in their dispute with the Sthaviravādins) a prototype for the later Sarvāstivāda move to “de-temporalise” *adhvan* altogether. This cor-

roborates one of this chapter’s central observations: the history of Buddhist philosophy is layered and multi-voiced. Each school’s perspective only becomes clear when we place it within the crosscurrents of inter-sectarian debates. Otherwise, we risk missing the actual trajectories and dynamics that spurred such doctrinal developments.

When we speak of a “past *dharma*”, “present *dharma*”, or “future *dharma*”, the deciding factor is not an impersonal, forward-moving time, but rather the *dharma*’s particular phase in its causal activity. Indeed, *AMVŚ explicitly repudiates the view that time alone compels a *dharma* to migrate from “future” to “present”, then to “past”. Certain outsiders are quoted as claiming that “future time drives something into the present, and the present then drives it into the past”—an idea the Vaibhāṣikas reject as heterodox.

3.4.5.2 The Emergence of *kāritra*

What, then, actually determines which “time span” applies? In the Kāśyapīya–Sthaviravāda debate, both sides converge on a principle: it is the *dharma*’s action or function that dictates which time-span label is appropriate. Formally, whenever a future-tense verb (e.g. *vipaccisanti*, “will mature”) is accompanied by an absolutive form (*katvā*, “having done/fulfilled”), the subject is deemed “present” (*paccuppanna*). Concretely, the property—which already inheres in the object—enters manifestation. Once *katvā* signals that this property is now realised, the *dharma* “qualified” by that predicate likewise becomes present. In this way, the Sarvāstivādins underscore that it is the *dharma*’s actualisation of a property in a causal context—not a sheer flow of time—that dictates its being “past”, “present”, or “future”.

Earlier, when the Sarvāstivādins contended with the Sthaviravādins, they initially relied on *bhūtvā/hutvā* (“having once been A, it becomes B”) to describe change. But as noted, *bhūtvā/hutvā* proved somewhat problematic. A statement like *anāgataṃ hutvā paccuppannaṃ hoti* (“the future, having once been future, is now present”) could be misread as time itself driving that transition—an idea the Sarvāstivādins reject. By contrast, the Kāśyapīyas’ use of *katvā* offered a more precise device for explaining how a *dharma* transitions from one phase to another. Indeed, by the time the Sarvāstivāda system reached maturity, the key criterion

for classifying a *dharma*'s stage had become *kāritra* (trigger of causation), rather than *bhāvitra*.

The Sarvāstivādins innovate beyond the Kāśyapīyas by construing *kāritra* not as a transitive action denoted by *kāra-* but as a causative process derived from the stem *kāri-* (both from the root \sqrt{kr}). Moving away from *bhū*-based terminology to *kr*-based language expresses the Sarvāstivāda conviction that the causal aspects of each conditioned *dharma* are understood by its causal capacity, rather than by any abstract sense of “is” or “exists”. In simpler terms, neither bare existential “coming-to-be” (*bhū*) nor a passive chronological shift determines whether a *dharma* is past, present, or future. Instead, the *dharma*'s *kāritra*—its effect-bearing function—decides its stage.

Crucially, this dovetails with *sarvam asti*, the fundamental philosophical axiom that a *dharma* is the totality of its properties, an essential one of which is its property of triggering a causal event. If previous references to Passage (5) foreshadowed how “phase” (*avasthā*) theory originated, then Passage (12) truly sets the stage for its further development. In these debates, *kāritra* proves indispensable, enabling the Vaibhāṣika theorists to refine the question of which “phase” a *dharma* presently occupies, and by what process it shifts through phases in a causal sequence. Integrating insights from the Kāśyapīya classification and the Sthaviravāda critiques, the Sarvāstivādins forged a signature doctrine: *kāritra* and *avasthā*, properly elaborated, furnish a robust philosophical explanation of how a *dharma* acquires a given “time span” and how that same *dharma* actualises its complete property-set across causal events. This is precisely what *sarvam asti* conveys: that all those internal properties—past, present, or future—together define what any conditioned *dharma* truly **is**, even as each property is sequentially realised in a causal event.

3.5 Conclusion

This conclusion proceeds in two steps. It first distils the conceptual lesson of the chapter's reading of *sarvam asti*; it then situates that lesson within the earlier debates that made the mature Vaibhāṣika distinction philosophically necessary.

3.5.1 Persistence, Temporal Qualification, and *sarvam asti*

One reason the later formula proved so powerful is that Indo-European verbal systems readily invite us to hear past, present, and future as if they were the primary furniture of reality. Sanskrit, too, constantly tempts thought in that direction. Yet the Sarvāstivādins are driven toward a subtler position. What a noun picks out is not itself a temporal slice; the temporal burden falls on the activities, stages, and predicates through which the thing is articulated.⁶⁵ This is why *na dravyāntarataḥ* matters so much. What changes is not that one thing becomes numerically other than itself, but that different aspects of one and the same *dharma* come to be qualified differently within its causal career.

From this pressure there emerges the dual aspect that Chapter 4 will later discuss more systematically. A conditioned *dharma* must be understood both as *dravya*—that is, as the stable totality of the properties without which it would not be this *dharma* at all—and as *vastu*—that is, as the eventive unfolding of those properties under causal conditions. The force of *sarvam asti* lies precisely here. It does not say that all temporal slices sit side by side in an undifferentiated block. It says that a conditioned *dharma* is complete with respect to the full range of predicates that belong to it, including those whose instantiation is stage-bound.

The contrast with the unconditioned is clarifying. Unconditioned *dharmanas* do not need to be read through temporal stages in the same way, because what is said of them is not tied to a causal career. Conditioned *dharmanas* are different: what belongs to them definitionally is not therefore manifested all at once. Their properties are contained in the *dharma*'s complete identity, yet they are actualised stage by stage under the pressure of causes and conditions. This is why the language of completeness and the language of temporal qualification must be held together without being collapsed into one another.

This is why the familiar question “Is it past, present, or future?” can mislead if put to the *dharma en bloc*. The better question is: *which* aspect, *which* activity, *which* causal moment is

⁶⁵ For the noun–verb contrast in the Sanskrit grammatical tradition and its bearing on temporality, see B. A. van Nooten, “Pāṇini’s Theory of Verbal Meaning”, *Foundations of Language* 5 (1969): 242–55; George Cardona, *Pāṇini: His Work and Its Traditions* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997); and Hideyo Ogawa, *Process and Language: A Study of the Mahābhāṣya* (Tokyo: Sankibo Press, 2005).

being predicated? A football match may be over as an episode of play and yet still be present in its consequences; a past deed may be past as an act and yet present in the ripening it conditions. The Sarvāstivādins' point is not to license contradiction, but to force a finer parsing of predication. Past, present, and future do not land indiscriminately on the *dharma* as a solid block. They qualify the eventive predicates through which that *dharma*'s causal life is articulated.

Seen this way, the tri-temporal formulas preserved in later literature are already compressed outcomes. They register a real insight, but in a form that can obscure the more careful analysis from which they arose. What the earlier materials show is that the philosophical labour lay not simply in asserting that past things in some sense “are”, but in distinguishing object from activity, stable identity from eventive unfolding, and first-order predicates from the higher-order temporal predicates that qualify them.

3.5.2 From Early Debates to the Mature Distinction

The chapters above have repeatedly returned to a simple but demanding claim: to understand a *dharma* is to understand what it is, and to understand what it is is to articulate the predicates that belong to it. Chapter 3 adds a historical qualification to that claim. The later formula *sarvam asti* did not appear fully formed. It emerged from debates in which the status of past *dharma*s, the reach of *karma*, and the meaning of *addhā/adhvan* and *atthi/asti* were still under negotiation.

Mil shows one early way of allowing a past *dharma* to retain causal reach without yet turning that reach into a full doctrine of tri-temporal completeness. Kv preserves a sharper polemical field, where Kāśyapīyas, Sthaviravādins, Sarvāstivādins, and others struggle over whether what is past can still be said to be (*atthi*), and if so in what sense. AKBh, finally, gives us the later redactional moment at which many of these pressures are gathered into the concise but already selective formula that later readers came to know best.

What this chapter therefore contributes is not a second full exposition of mature Vaiśhāṅgika metaphysics, but the prehistory of the distinction that mature Vaiśhāṅgikas will later

stabilise. The debates traced here help explain why later Sarvāstivādins are driven to distinguish more carefully between *dravya* and *vastu*, between definitional belonging and eventive instantiation, and between the copular force of *asti* and its later existential flattening. If the mature system sometimes looks abrupt when viewed only in its final form, the earlier materials show the argumentative pressures that made it necessary.

They also show why the later system turns so insistently to a causative idiom. The chapter's case studies repeatedly return to verbs of bearing, ripening, moving, or making occur; and by the time of mature Sarvāstivāda, this pressure issues in a more explicit vocabulary of *kāritra*, *jāti*, and eventive transition. What Chapter 4 will systematise as a dual-aspect account of the conditioned *dharma* is already being prepared here, in scattered debates over how an act extends, how a past *dharma* can still matter, and how temporal markers attach to what is in fact a causal sequence rather than an independent time-object.

For that reason, the familiar tri-temporal gloss should neither be discarded nor allowed to dominate the whole picture. It is best read as a downstream formulation: one particularly tractable way of stating a more basic claim about the completeness of conditioned *dharmanas* and the predicative articulation of their causal stages. Chapter 4 will return to that mature solution itself—especially the dual aspect of conditioned *dharmanas* as *dravyataḥ* and *vastu-*naḥ**—but it can do so more securely now that the earlier debates which made the solution philosophically necessary have been brought back into view. Only against that longer history does the later Sarvāstivāda claim recover its full philosophical depth.

4 What It Means to Be a *dharma*: Dual Aspects as *dravyataḥ* and *vastunaḥ*

At that time, Śāriputra asked Subhūti: “What are called the characteristics of all *dharmas*?” Subhūti replied: “If, by means of such activities, marks, and aspects, one makes known the *dharmas* as: this is form, this is sound, this is smell, this is taste, this is touch, this is mental object; this is internal, this is external; this is tainted, this is untainted; this is conditioned, this is unconditioned—these are called the characteristics of all *dharmas*.” (MPP, *juan* 71)

《大般若波羅蜜多經》卷 71 (19 觀行品):「時, 舍利子問善現言:「何等名為一切法相?」善現答言:「若由如是諸行、相、狀, 表知諸法, 是色、是聲、是香、是味、是觸、是法、是內、是外、是有漏、是無漏、是有為、是無為, 此等名為一切法相。」」(CBETA 2024.R2, T05, no. 220, p. 404b21–25)

We now turn to the broader and also ultimate question of what it means to be a *saṃskṛtadharma*. The preceding chapter showed that fully appreciating *sarvam asti*—the idea that each *dharma* is complete with all its properties¹—requires recognising how those properties both define the *dharma* in a timeless sense (*dravyataḥ*) and unfold eventively (*vastunaḥ*). This dual perspective ensures that even an atemporal aspect remains consistent with *pratītyasamutpāda*.

4.1 To Be or to Exist

Buddhism has long recognised that people’s most fundamental ignorance stems from their attachment to existence (*bhavataṅhā*). Indeed, this insight has continued to illuminate human thinking for more than two millennia. Intriguingly, this same fixation on “existence” surfaces, unfiltered, in modern academic research—particularly in philosophy, including Buddhist philosophy.

A striking scene in contemporary scholarship on Buddhist—or, more broadly, ancient Indian—philosophy is that it is habitually framed around the question “What exists, and what does not?” In reality, however, classical thinkers were primarily concerned with **what**

¹ In the dissertation’s authorial prose, “property” functions as the umbrella term. “Characteristic” is retained chiefly where the sources themselves speak of *lakṣaṇa*, especially in *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* contexts. *svabhāva* names the ground that fixes which predicates belong to a *dharma*; *lakṣaṇa* names the articulated mark through which that ground becomes sayable.

a thing is rather than **whether it exists**.² As indicated in the famous dictum *tattvamasi* (“You are that”), the main question of classical Indian philosophy was never simply “Does ‘that’ or ‘you’ exist?” but rather “What is ‘that’? What is ‘you’?” Similarly, in the opening of AKBh, Vasubandhu explains that the aim of Abhidharma is to understand what a *dharma* is—not whether it does or does not exist.

As I shall emphasise below, the Vaiśeṣika tradition likewise states that human knowledge begins with “What is this?” and proceeds by identifying “what this is”.³ Clearly, the existence or non-existence of that very thing does not occupy the core of their interest. In the words of Halbfass, “the very idea of ‘nothing’ or ‘nothingness’ is, in fact, quite outside their horizon”.⁴ It is well-known that the Vaiśeṣika view holds everything to be knowable and storable—that is, everything can be expressed in subject–predicate propositions such as “X is what?” Hence, the Vaiśeṣikas’ central pursuit is to clarify what things are. This also

² In multiple philosophical contexts, numerous contemporary scholars have emphasised how “*ti esti*” prioritises understanding *what* a thing is rather than *whether* it exists, thus shaping the fundamental concerns of ontology across traditions. On Greek thought, see Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); Alexander Nehamas, “On Parmenides’ Three Ways of Inquiry”, *Deucalion* 33, no. 4 (1981): 97–111; and “Parmenidean Being/Heraclitean Fire”, in *Presocratic Philosophy: Essays in Honour of Alexander Mourelatos*, edited by V. Caston and D. W. Graham (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002); G. E. L. Owen, “Eleatic Questions”, *Classical Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1960): 84–102. For Plato and Aristotle, see the relevant entries in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: “Plato’s Metaphysics” and “Aristotle’s Metaphysics”. On Chinese philosophy, see Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), for analyses of the focus on the nature or function of things. In Islamic philosophy, see Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the Theology of Aristotle* (London: Duckworth, 2002) and Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna’s Philosophical Works* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1988), which trace how questions about *what* something is (and how that differs from *whether* it exists) developed from al-Kindi to Avicenna; see also Nader El-Bizri, “Avicenna and Essentialism”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 54, no. 4 (2001): 753–778, highlighting Avicenna’s approach to *māhiyya* (“whatness”). Regarding medieval Christian appropriations of these, see John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000) and Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Theism: Aquinas’s Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), both of whom demonstrate that Aquinas’s distinction between “what a thing is” and “that it is” became pivotal in Scholastic metaphysics.

³ 《勝宗十句義論》卷1:「猶豫智以何為因?非一同法現量為先,待各別異念、我、意和合為因。為何物智名猶豫智。審決智以何為因?猶豫智為先,待各別異印、我、意和合為因。定是此智名審決智。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T54, no. 2138, p. 1264c21–25)

*VDPS: Question: What is the cause of the knowledge of doubting (猶豫智)? (Answer:) It is preconditioned by the direct perception of generic property in multiple objects, and then it depends on the combination of various distinctive notions, along with “I” (我) and mind (意), as its cause. The knowledge of doubting is defined as the knowledge of “what is this” (為何物智). Question: What is the cause of the conclusive knowledge (審決智)? (Answer:) It is preconditioned by the knowledge of doubting, and then it depends on the combination of various distinctive impressions, together with “I” and mind, as its cause. The conclusive knowledge is defined as the knowledge of “what it is” (定是此智).

⁴ Wilhelm Halbfass, “Conceptualizations of ‘Being’ in Classical Vaiśeṣika”, *WZKSOA* 19 (1975): 183–198, at 196.

explains why they devoted so much intellectual energy to analysing the nature of the copula “*sattā*”, which resides at the heart of “X is Y”.⁵

Unsurprisingly, the Ābhīdharmikas share the same philosophical task: first, to analyse every *dharma* in terms of what it is, and then—one logical level higher—to ask what it means for it to be what it is. As Bronkhorst has surmised, these two traditions had more mutual influence than previously recognised.

4.1.1 *sarvam asti* as a Copular Proposition

I have repeatedly noted that every extant Sarvāstivāda text discussing *sarvam asti* does so within a larger inquiry into *saṃskṛtadharmas*.⁶ In fact, if we are focusing on the causal aspect of what a *saṃskṛtadharma* is, *sarvam* there stands for three past participles—*atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*—so that *sarvam asti* shall be understood in full as *saṃskṛtadharmāḥ sarvam asti*. Hence, *sarvam* is truly the predicate, *saṃskṛtadharma* the subject, with *asti* as the copula. Yet in modern translations and academic treatments, *sarvam* is often taken for the subject, while *asti* is interpreted as “exists”—a reading that not only inverts the syntax most naturally suggested by the Vaibhāṣika sources but also flattens the formula’s metaphysical scope and depth, reducing *sarvam asti* to a bare existential claim instead of a higher-order statement about how every *saṃskṛtadharma* instantiates its full causal profile.

Let me restate the Sarvāstivādins’ basic reasoning in the narrower, *saṃskṛta*-specific form relevant here:

sarvam asti means that a *saṃskṛtadharma* is ‘complete’. Concretely, when a *saṃskṛtadharma* instantiates its properties, it necessarily proceeds through three stages: *atīta* (“already past”), *anāgata* (“yet to come”), and *pratyutpanna* (“present”). Thus, *sarvam asti* declares that a

⁵ Contemporary studies on Heidegger’s *Sein* as intelligibility provide valuable insights into Vaiśeṣikas’ focus on *sattā*. Heidegger emphasises that Being is not simply about existence but about how entities become intelligible within meaningful contexts; see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 26–35. Hubert L. Dreyfus clarifies that Heidegger’s ontology concerns the disclosure of things as *something* rather than merely affirming their presence; see Hubert L. Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World: A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time, Division I* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 16–25. Thomas Sheehan shows that Heidegger reorients ontology towards meaning and understanding rather than existence *per se*; see Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

⁶ This revisits Commitments 1 and 2; see §1.1.2.

conditioned *dharma* timelessly incorporates these three stages in its abstract concept (*dravyataḥ*) and necessarily unfolds into these three stages eventually (*vastunaḥ*). By analogy, a human being has childhood, adulthood, and old age, so each of those phases is one of that person’s attributes. This triadic articulation does not exhaust the force of *sarvam*. Rather, it gives the conditioned-*dharma* specification of the broader thesis established in the Prolegomenon: *sarvam* first marks the completeness of a *dharma*’s admissible predicational domain, and only when that completeness is read under the causal aspect of *saṃskṛtadharmas* does it take the determinate form of *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*.

Importantly, “when we ask, ‘What is X?’ we are genuinely asking, ‘Which properties does X possess?’” This interpretation of “is/*asti*”, and the consequent logic of predication, is also deeply rooted in the Sanskrit grammatical tradition—indeed, as I will show, it can be traced to the Vaiśeṣikas’ discussions of *saṃyoga* or *samavāya*.

Modern Buddhology, while keen to recover certain “lost” or “deep” philosophical strands, sometimes overlooks what is plainly before us. For instance, the very name Sarvāstivāda incorporates *asti*—a conjugated verb—into a compound. Although permissible by Sanskrit rules, this is not a commonplace usage. It signals *asti*’s foundational role as a logical operator in Sarvāstivāda philosophy.⁷ Apart from the Ābhidharmikas, the figures who engaged in a most thorough examination of *astitva* or *sattā* were the ancient grammarians and the Vaiśeṣikas. Investigating how the Abhidharma tradition may have been influenced by these two groups thus becomes a central aim of this study.

4.1.2 *astitva/sattā* as Linking Rather than Abstract Existence

In modern scholarship—owing to a parallel “fixation on *bhāva*”—it is not unusual to see *astitva* or *sattā* translated or interpreted as “existence”, thereby marginalising or even block-

⁷ On rare occasions, Sanskrit compounds appear to incorporate *asti*. A commonly cited example is *astikṣīra*. Let us set aside the question of whether *asti* is a conjugated word or an indeclinable. Traditionally, as Kātyāyana says, it is understood as “a Brahmin woman whose milk is there” (*astikṣīrā brahmāṇī*). Placing *asti* at the start of the compound highlights its existential function—namely, “there is milk”. By contrast, if *asti* were placed at the end (for example, *kṣīrāsti*), as I have argued elsewhere, the focus would shift to a copulative sense (“something is milk”). Thus, the formation and interpretation of *astikṣīra* in the opposite manner further suggest that, rather than reading *sarvāsti* as “all (*sarvam*) exists (*asti*)”, it should be understood as “is (*asti*) complete (*sarvam*)”. This parallels the existential emphasis found in *astikṣīra*. For a fuller discussion of *astikṣīrā brahmāṇī*, see Cardona, *Pāṇini*, 133–34.

ing out the older meaning of “to be/linking”. And yet “linking” is intuitively present in ordinary language and thought: whenever we define or describe something as “X is Y”, we are linking X to Y. Once “being” is abstracted into a formal concept, it can be analysed into two crucial aspects: that a referent can be known or expressed, and that it is knowable because it exhibits certain properties. The verb “is” forges the link between a subject and its properties, and what we know about the object referred to by the subject noun resides in the predicate domain, that is to say, when we talk about an object, what we are actually talking about is what this object is. Put differently, *astitva/sattā* does not denote sheer, property-neutral “existence”. Rather, it signals that the referent instantiates the specific range of predicates introduced by the copula—i.e. that once the subject has been singled out, what is asserted is exactly the mode in which it is, as fixed by the properties attributed to it.

For the Vaiśeṣikas, the reason everything in the world can be discerned or expressed is precisely *astitva/sattā*. *dharmas* reveal their essential attributes through *astitva/sattā*—without which, they would remain inexpressible. But that would not mean they simply vanish, only that no properties could be predicated of them. What resides in the domain of properties/predicates is the basis of knowledge and expression.

For the grammarians—Bhartṛhari, for instance—when we perceive something and verbalise our perception, in reality we perceive and articulate how, through the copula, the subject is unfolded into its properties. In Bhartṛhari’s terminological system, what resides in the domain of property is called *upacārasattā*. One should note that “metaphor” is not an apt translation of *upacāra* here. If we describe a property A of some entity X, we do not generally say “X is like A”, but “X is A” or “X has A”. Here, A is best seen as a predicative property.⁸ A

⁸ A similar view—that the subject in itself is unknowable without predication—is echoed in both Indian and Western philosophies. Bhartṛhari, for instance, distinguishes between *mukhyasattā* (primary, ineffable being) and *upacārasattā* (the “secondary” or predicative being of linguistic cognition). Only once a property is predicated can anything be spoken of or known. See Johannes Bronkhorst, “The Peacock’s Egg: Bhartṛhari on Language and Reality”, and Terence Parsons, “Bhartṛhari on What Cannot Be Said”, both in *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 4 (October 2001): 474–491 and 525–534, respectively. Hans G. Herzberger and Radhika Herzberger, “Bhartṛhari’s Paradox”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 9, no. 1 (March 1981): 1–17, discuss in what sense the subject term is understood as something “insignifiable”. Finally, Jonardon Ganeri, *Artha: Meaning* (Delhi: Oxford University Press India, 2011), 10–50, emphasises that, in Bhartṛhari’s scheme, language creates the very framework for knowledge expressed by predication.

more detailed treatment of *sattā/upacārasattā* cannot be included in this thesis due to word-count constraints and its specific focus; however, it will be pursued as a separate project in the future.

One must emphasise that while scholars often acknowledge the broad importance of ancient India's linguistic investigations for the formation of her philosophies, it can become a platitude which prevents later researchers from exploring how linguistic observations really shaped Indian philosophical thinking and logic. For example, Vaiśeṣika is frequently depicted as a quest for metaphysical categories—yet, as I will argue, it begins (and ends) with linguistic analysis. They hold that language is validated by the same principle that validates the external world and that language articulates the world's essential properties. In this sense, I consider Bronkhorst's notion of a "correspondence principle" too narrow. For most classical Indian philosophers, the alignment is not between each morphological piece of a statement and some external object, but between the entire statement or proposition and the entire event it describes. Indeed, classical Sanskrit grammar teaches that a clause is centred on the verb, since the verb (plus the nouns or adjectives attached to it) constitutes the fundamental semantic unit.

Putting aside the modern assumptions foisted upon Vaiśeṣika—that it "must" be a typical metaphysics of "substance vs. existence"—we can more readily see *padārtha* for what it truly is: a linguistic category. And viewing Vaiśeṣika as effectively "meta-linguistic" receives confirmation from the ways in which Abhidharma interacts with Vaiśeṣika on linguistic grounds.

By contrast, imposing "existence vs. non-existence" as the lens by which to read Vaiśeṣika or Abhidharma has led us astray and also distances us from the grammarians' philosophical insight. As I have often stressed, classical Indian philosophers were first and foremost asking "What is something?" not "Does it exist or not?" Their fascination with *√as* was never primarily existential. Instead, they were concerned with "X is/has p_x (property-x)", not simply "X exists".

4.1.3 Reconsidering *sarvam asti* as “Has All Its Properties”

This “attachment to existence” has also shaped certain interpretations of Sanskrit grammar. For instance, the examples from Bhartṛhari are often read with *sattā* or *upacārasattā* as “existence” or “metaphoric existence”. In reality, *sattaupacārikī* here is the power enabling a predicative structure bridging *viśeṣaṇa* and *viśeṣya* and that serves as the basis for a meaningful verbalisation—i.e. “to be”.⁹ Setting aside the “existence” lens reveals that forging the link between subject and predicate is precisely what Bhartṛhari’s chapter on “*Sambandha/Relation*” in the *Vākyapadīya* is all about.

This dissertation therefore seeks to re-appraise *asti*—and, by extension, *sarvam asti*—from the vantage of “what a *dharma* is” and, one logical tier higher, “what it means to be a *dharma*”. By doing so, it re-situates Sarvāstivāda thought within a new, explicitly higher-order coordinate system that casts fresh light on early Indian philosophy as a whole. If we keep circling around the question “What exists?” we reduce every school to a mere position on existence. Once we pivot to the question “What is it?”—and ask how each tradition ac-

⁹ On *aupacārikā sattā* as the predicating-enabling factor for stating “what an entity is”, see Bhartṛhari, *Vākyapadīya* 3.3.39–41:

*vyapadeśe padārthānām anyā sattaupacārikī /
sarvāvasthāsu sarveṣām ātmarūpasya darśikā //*

In the linguistic designation of categorisable entities, something else emerges as predicative being (*sattaupacārikī*), which displays the own-form of these entities in their different stages (I retain “predicative being” for *sattaupacārikī* advisedly; the philological and conceptual grounds for this choice are argued elsewhere).

*sphaṭikādi yathā dravyaṃ bhinnarūpair upāśrayaiḥ /
svasaktiyogāt sambandhaṃ tādrūpyeṇeva gacchati //*

Just as an object such as a glass bead, through manifesting its innate potentiality, comes into a relation with various colours it can show, as if it already has those colours (before obtaining such a relation),

*tadvac chabdo 'pi sattāyām asyām pūrvam vyavasthitaḥ /
dharmair upaiti sambandham avirodhivirodhibhiḥ //*

So too does a word, once established through this predicative being, enter into relation with various *dharmas*, whether compatible or incompatible.

In a similar vein, Vasubandhu defines *upacāra* (predicative operation) in the opening verse of his *Triṃśikā: ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate vijñānapariṇāme* (“the predicating of a subject [*jñeya*] and its properties [*jñāna*], which is manifold, emerges in the transformation of consciousness”). See Westerhoff, *The Golden Age of Indian Buddhist Philosophy*, 212–216. The relationship between Vasubandhu’s theory and Bhartṛhari’s is highlighted by J. E. M. Houben, *The Sambandha-Samuddeśa (Chapter on Relation) and Bhartṛhari’s Philosophy of Language* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1995), 258–259.

counts for that very “is-ness”—their disagreements emerge instead as competing answers to a common problem, revealing a rich pattern of dialogue and cross-pollination among them.

Returning to *sarvam asti*: Even in Chinese Abhidharma translations, the Sarvāstivāda core axiom is rendered as “三世有” or “三世實有” (literally meaning “have three generations”). Xuanzang and Paramārtha both saw that *adhvan* did not equate to the usual concept of *kāla* (time/時), so they used “世” (phase/generation) to translate *adhvan*. Yet their painstaking phrasing gets lost once “世” is simply retranslated back as “time”, and “有” is read as “exist”. The underlying idea that “They have three *adhvans* as their attributes” is replaced by “The three time periods exist”. By conflating “What is it?” with “Does it exist?” we end up flattening Sarvāstivāda doctrine at its root.

An example often cited is the phrase “為境生覺”—“a cognition arises taking a past object as its referent”.¹⁰ Some modern scholars cite this as *Sarvāstivāda’s proof for the continued existence of past objects*. Their reasoning runs: because we can entertain a veridical cognition of a past object, that object must still *exist*. The inference, however, misconstrues Abhidharma vocabulary. When the Sarvāstivādins describe cognition **of** a past object, the content grasped is precisely that the object **is in its past causal stage**—that its *kāritra* (causal function) has already been exercised. In stricter terms, the intentional **object** of the cognition is not the *dharma* as a timeless noun; it is the *event–state* that the *dharma* has (or has not) already brought about. Put differently, the mind is directed towards a *propositionally articulated event* (“the causal efficacy has been spent”), not towards a free-standing entity. What is at stake, then, is **how** we determine a *dharma’s* locus in the causal sequence, not **whether** that *dharma* still “exists” in some ontologically robust way. The debate is therefore framed in *higher-order* terms—shifting the focus from *being* to the modal status a *dharma* analytically instantiates within its own causal narrative.

¹⁰ Dhammajoti, for instance, notes that in *NyAs (T29, 621c), Saṅghabhadra defines an existent as something that can serve as an object of cognition (see Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda*, 346). Cox discusses how this led to debates with Sautrāntikas, who argued that a present mental image (rather than the actual past object) can fulfil the role of “object” (Collett Cox, “On the Possibility of a Non-existent Object of Consciousness”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 11, no. 1 [1988]: 31–87). Bastow explores early Sarvāstivāda texts like the *Vijñānakāya* to show how they grounded tri-temporal existence in the very structure of cognition (Bastow, “The First Argument for Sarvāstivāda”).

Seen this way, “cognition of a past object” already has the form of a predication—“*x* is past”—rather than a bare pointing to *x*. The issue that then arises is not whether *x* endures now, but what licenses the assignment of the predicate past to *x*. This is precisely the role the Sarvāstivādins give to *asti* as a copula (cf. § 4.1.1–§ 4.1.2): it underwrites analytic predication about a *dharma*’s causal phase (*adhvan*) without committing us to its present subsistence. Once the intentional object is a predicated event–state, the discussion naturally shifts one level up: we are evaluating which predicate-ascriptions are warranted across a *dharma*’s causal sequence. I call this a “higher-order” perspective—not a piece of formal logic, but a metalinguistic vantage already implicit in Abhidharma debates.

On this higher-order reading, the inference from “cognition of a past object” to “the past object still exists” is a category mistake. What the cognition vindicates is only the correct assignment of an *adhvan* predicate: it ascertains of the relevant *dharma* that “past” is the mode in which its *kāritra* stands. The “is” in “it is past” is the Sarvāstivāda copula (*asti*) that licenses predication; it does not quantify existentially over a presently subsisting entity. To insist on existence here either begs the question (by reading the copula existentially) or trivialises the claim. Accordingly, for Abhidharma the operative question is not “does it exist?” but “which phase of causal efficacy does it instantiate within its own sequence?”—a higher-order determination about predicates of predicates rather than about bare being.

Hence, this chapter aims to reposition the cardinal Sarvāstivāda principle—*sarvam asti*—amidst the shared heritage of Sanskrit grammar, Vaiśeṣika theory, and the Abhidharma movement, focusing on *asti* in its role as a copula that unfolds an object into its essential properties. Due to the limits of length, I concentrate on the causal interpretation of *sarvam*, i.e. *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, *anāgata*, as is expounded by Vasubandhu. The central question, then, is how the Sarvāstivāda tradition philosophically explains the relationship between *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, *anāgata* and *asti*, or in short: “How does a conditioned *dharma* come to have *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, and *anāgata* as core properties or modes?” In other words, how do they conceptualise “to be” in relation to *adhvan*?

4.1.4 An Eventive Interpretation of *adhvan*

Why did questions of time—or, more precisely, of change and continuity—matter so urgently to the Ābhidharmikas of the early schools? Because their theory of liberation had to accommodate certain conceptual tensions that hinge on what we might call “time”.

All *dharma*s are neither more nor less than the bundles of their complete properties. Hence, an *asaṃskṛtadharmā* is nothing over and above *being asaṃskṛta*, and a *saṃskṛtadharmā* is nothing over and above *being saṃskṛta*. Almost everyone would grant these identity-claims; but they immediately propel us to the next, *higher-order* question: “what, in turn, does it *mean* to be *asaṃskṛta*, and what does it *mean* to be *saṃskṛta*?” It is on that second tier—where “being” itself becomes the topic—that doctrinal divergences emerge.

Unconditioned *dharma*s are said to be without cause (*ahetuka*, *avastu*) and outside time in the *dravyataḥ* sense. Some authors tried to save a vestige of temporal process by claiming that an unconditioned *dharma*, once produced, simultaneously generates a separate sustaining *dharma*; the Sarvāstivādins rejected this solution, keeping unconditioned *dharma*s wholly extratemporal and causally inert.

As we noted above, an entity—*dravya*—like a physical object (and the noun referring to it) does not itself undergo changes of tense. Accordingly, the Vaibhāṣikas discuss the characteristics of unconditioned *dharma*s from the perspective of *dravya*, i.e. emphasising timelessness. At this juncture, we need to clarify how “time/*adhvan*” is understood in Sarvāstivāda philosophy, where “time” is treated as a synonym for causal events.

It is important to note that in Sarvāstivāda—as well as in early Buddhist thought—“time” is not generally referred to by the traditional Sanskrit word *kāla*, but by the term *adhvan*. Consequently, reading the Sarvāstivādins’ “time-philosophy” as though it were about *kāla* is seriously misleading. In truth, the Sarvāstivādins’ thinking about “time” is ultimately about *adhvan*, and *adhvan* refers to the path or trajectory of a causal process.

That the Buddhist philosophers avoided *kāla* in favour of *adhvan* signals their conviction that conventional notions of time—whether from everyday experience or from other Indian

schools—are not required. First, “time” cannot accurately capture the causal processes that the Buddhists call “events”, and second, “temporality” is not the conceptual tool they use to analyse these processes. In that sense, Buddhist philosophy might be characterised as operating “out of time”.

For the Buddhists, describing an event demands concepts that identify the stage of its unfolding, not the location in a timeline. Accordingly, *adhvan* was further subdivided into *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*. Although translators and modern scholars often render these as “past”, “future”, and “present”, the original authors, by coining these three terms, deliberately replaced the conventional words *bhūta*, *bhaviṣyat*, *vartamāna*. Exactly as they replaced *kāla* with *adhvan*, so too they replaced the older expressions of “past-future-present” with *atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*.

This shift of vocabulary represents the Buddhist reinterpretation of “time”. In Sarvāstivāda, *adhvan* refers to the progression from *pratītyasamutpāda* to *pratītyasamutpanna*—that is, a causation-triggering event—while *atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna* designate three successive phases of that event. Observe that in the older triad—*bhūta*, *bhaviṣyat*, *vartamāna*—*bhūta*, “past”, is a past participle, *bhaviṣyat*, “future”, is a future participle, and *vartamāna*, “present”, is a present participle. This morphological nuance was carefully chosen in the older tradition, whereas in the Buddhist usage, *atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna* all happen to be past participles—a striking discrepancy. Their choice of three past participles for the phases of an event was deliberate and reflects their “de-temporalisation” of time, or, said differently, their reanalysis of time-flow as event-unfolding.

In other words, Buddhist philosophers do not rely on “time” in the sense of “moments” or of “past vs. future vs. present”. Rather, they emphasise a continuous process or event, and reflection on that event leads them to speak of “phases” rather than “temporal divisions”. Discussion of “temporality” thus unfolds as a discussion of “phases” and of predicative structure—in other words, how we account for changes of tense in verbs. This focus on phase-based description is deeply tied to the Abhidharma project, in which **predication**—determining

what a *dharma is*—takes precedence over asking “when in time does it occur?” We will explore this in detail further on.

Simply put, to treat Sarvāstivāda discussions of *adhvan*, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* as a “philosophy of time” is to miss the point. These Buddhist authors are deliberately abandoning ordinary temporal notions in order to analyse causal processes. The three familiar past participles are, in fact, analytical *splits* of the single participial compound *pratītyasamutpanna*:

$$\textit{pratītya-samutpanna} \rightarrow \left\{ \underbrace{\textit{anāgata}}_{\text{pre-dependence}}, \quad \underbrace{\textit{atīta}}_{\text{post-dependence}}, \quad \underbrace{\textit{pratyutpanna}}_{\text{post-arising}} \right\}.$$

- *anāgata* marks the phase in which the *dharma* has *not yet* relied on its causal pre-conditions (*pratītya*).
- *atīta* denotes that the “depending” stage (*pratītya*) has been fully traversed. It is labelled with the prefix *ati-* (“beyond”) rather than *prati-* because the *dharma* is now completely beyond dependence.
- *pratyutpanna* signals that the “arising” (*utpāda*) itself has run its course. The *sam-* of the original compound drops away, for the Sarvāstivāda analysis targets the arising of *this* particular *dharma*, not a synchronous arising of “everything”.

Thus, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* are not temporal labels applied *from outside*; they are *intra-causal* descriptors carved out of *pratītyasamutpanna* itself. Reading them as mere tenses obscures the deeper project: charting where a *dharma* sits in its own dependent-arising narrative rather than asking when it “exists” in clock time.

In short, the Sarvāstivādins replaced conventional time categories with entirely new terms to speak of causal analysis. A fuller exposition follows in § 4.3.2.

This break from conventional time notions also explains why “time” is not counted among the seventy-five *dharmas* in Sarvāstivāda standard list. The concept simply had no

function in their system or was reinterpreted as a causal process, wholly separate from its usual sense. Hence, reading *sarvam asti* as “the past exists, the future exists, the present exists” misreads the Sarvāstivāda position.

4.2 A *dharma* of Two Aspects

4.2.1 Timeless *dravya* vs. Eventive *vastu*

Let us return to the proposition: *saṃskṛtadharmāḥ sarvam asti*. Since *saṃskṛtadharmā* is the subject, it is necessarily nominal in form, i.e. a type of *dravya*. To clarify *saṃskṛtadharmā*, we must first understand how *dravya* functions in Abhidharma.

Crucially, *dravya* is treated as tenseless at the definitional level—it does not belong to a processual, causal event. But how can past participles (marking completed stages of an event) serve as the predicate for something timeless? This puzzle awaits us. Let us start by seeing how the Vaibhāṣikas articulate *dravya* from the viewpoint of *asaṃskṛta*:

All that is unconditioned is just qua *dravya*. The Vaibhāṣikas thus say. An unconditioned *dharma* has nothing to do with causation.

*asty evāsaṃskṛtaṃ dravyata iti vaibhāṣikāḥ | tasya tu hetuphale na vidyete iti*¹¹

At the same time, unconditioned *dharmanas*, though timeless and acausal, also have essential properties:

asaṃskṛtaṃ hi sārātvād dravyam ¹²

Because it has defining properties, the unconditioned is *dravya*.

As for the conditioned, *saṃskṛtadharmā* plainly entails an “unfolding in event” (*savastu*). In the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika usage, the term *vastu* is understood as a causal event of five types:

1. The arising of a *dharma*’s own nature.

¹¹ Pradhan, AKBh, 94.

《阿毘達磨俱舍釋論》卷 5〈2 分別根品〉：「一切無為實有別物。毘婆沙師說如此，無為法無因無果。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1559, p. 192c14–16)

《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷 6〈2 分別根品〉：「是故無為雖實有物，常無用故，無因無果。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 35a13–14)

¹² Ibid., 26.

2. The generation of understandability for all *dharmanas*.
3. The assimilation of external *dharmanas* as internalised properties.
4. Causation *per se*.
5. The acquisition of external *dharmanas* as objects.¹³

It should be noted that even before the Vaibhāṣika era, Sarvāstivādins commonly recognised that *vastu* and causation are definitionally related.¹⁴ As their philosophy evolved, however, the Vaibhāṣikas more precisely distinguished “*vastu*-aspect” from “*dravya*-aspect” properties within conditioned *dharmanas*, assigning only *dravya*-aspect properties to unconditioned *dharmanas*. Hence, a conditioned *dharma* has both *vastu*-aspect and *dravya*-aspect, whereas an unconditioned *dharma*—being non-eventive—possesses only *dravya*-aspect. Otherwise, if unconditioned *dharmanas* also had *vastu*-aspect attributes, they would be *savastuka*, thereby undermining the principle that unconditioned *dharmanas* are not subject to causality.

For all Buddhist schools, a conditioned *dharma* is by definition “event-possessing”. The distinctive Sarvāstivāda position, though, is that a conditioned *dharma* likewise has a *dravya*-side—a timeless and analytic aspect. In that sense, conditioned and unconditioned *dharmanas* do not differ: both conceptually possess defining properties or fundamental attributes completely. However, a conditioned *dharma*’s properties, in addition to an intrinsic, unchanging aspect (*dravyataḥ*), include an intrinsic, event-bound aspect (*vastunaḥ*) that does require stage-based causal manifestation. Furthermore, since a conditioned *dharma* is *vastu*, beyond its own intrinsic nature it can also link with external objects, for example, *kleśa*, via association (*saṃyoga*), which arises at specific phases in a causal event.

¹³ Ibid., 94: “*pañcavidhavadu / svabhāvavadu yathoktaṃ yad vastu pratilabdhaṃ samanvāgataḥ sa tena vastuneti / ālambanavadu / yathoktaṃ sarvadharmajñeyā jñānena yathāvastviti / saṃyogavadu / yathoktaṃ yasmin vastuni anunayaḥ saṃyojanena saṃprayuktaḥ pratighasaṃyojanena api tasminn iti / hetuvastu yathoktaṃ savastukā dharmāḥ katame / saṃskṛtā dharmā iti // parigrahavadu / yathoktaṃ kṣetravadu grhavadviti / tad atra hetur vastuśabdenoktas.*”

¹⁴ 《眾事分阿毘曇論》卷 4〈6 分別攝品〉:「云何有事有緣法? 謂有為法。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T26, no. 1541, p. 648b28).

*PrP, *juan* 4: What is a *dharma* that is eventive and is caused? It refers to conditioned *dharmanas*.

See also Pradhan, AKBh, 5: “*sahetukatvāt savastukāḥ /*”

4.2.2 Two Ways of Being: *samavāya* and *saṃyoga*

The distinction between *samavāyic* and *saṃyogic* modes of *asti* was introduced in §3.2.2.3, where the Vaibhāṣikas' own threefold classification of *astitva* was set out on the basis of *AMVŚ. The analysis below draws directly on that classification: *samavāya* for the inseparable, definitional belonging of a property to its *dharma*-bundle, *saṃyoga* for the contingent conjunction of one *dharma* with another.

The above outline of Sarvāstivāda thought is based on Vasubandhu's introduction prior to his formal discussion of *sarvam asti*, where he explains why the Sarvāstivādins arrived at that view:

ke punaḥ śeṣāḥ | dṛṣṭivicikitsā 'vidyās traiyadhvikāḥ | taiḥ sarvair api sarvasmin vastuni saṃyuktaḥ | sāmānyakleśatvāt | yāvad aprahīṇā ity adhikāro 'nuvarttata eva | kiṃ punar idam atītānāgatam ucyate 'sty atha na? yady asti sarvakālāstivāt saṃskārāṇāṃ śāśvatatvaṃ prāpnoti | atha nāsti, katham tatra tena vā saṃyukto bhavati visaṃyukto vā | na saṃskārāṇāṃ śāśvatatvaṃ pratijñāyate vaibhāṣikāiḥ saṃskṛtalakṣaṇayogāt, pratijñāyate tu viśadaṃ...¹⁵

What, then, are the others [i.e. the remaining afflictions]? They are view (*dṛṣṭi*), doubt (*vicikitsā*), and ignorance (*avidyā*), which operate across the three stages (*traiyadhvikāḥ*). All of these bind one in every causal event (*sarvasmin vastuni*), for they are universal afflictions (*sāmānyakleśatvāt*). So long as they are “non-abandoned (*aprahīṇa*)”, the principle applies here (in the present stage). Someone might ask: “How about past and future? Are they non-abandoned, or not?” If we say “they are”, then because they are (unabandoned) at all times it would imply that conditioned formations (*saṃskārāṇāṃ*) are eternal (*śāśvatatva*). But if we say, “they are not”, then how do we become bound by them or free of them? The Vaibhāṣikas do not accept that conditioned formations are eternal, because they possess the property (*lakṣaṇa*) of being conditioned (*saṃskṛta*). Nevertheless, they do affirm (this proposition) in a clear manner.

To understand Vasubandhu's discussion, we need more than a translation.¹⁶ We must reconstruct the Sarvāstivādins' broader line of reasoning on the basis of his paraphrase of the challenge he attributes to them and the thesis he says they advanced in response.

¹⁵ Pradhan, AKBh, 295. 《阿毘達磨俱舍釋論》卷 14〈5 分別惑品〉：「釋曰：何者為餘？謂見、疑、無明。此三若三世，於一切境及一切世中與彼相應，彼是通相惑故。乃至未滅，此言流。過去未來為實有物、為假名有？若實有，於一切時有故，一切有為法應成常住。若無，於無中由無物，云何相應及解脫？毘婆沙師成立一切有為法非常住，由與行相相應故。彼成立此義，分明謂」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1559, p. 257b26–c4) 《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷 20〈5 分別隨眠品〉：「所餘一切見疑無明，去來未斷遍縛三世。由此三種是共相惑，一切有情俱遍縛故。若現在世正緣境時，隨其所應能繫此事。應辯諸事過去未來，為實有無方可說繫。若實是有，則一切行恒時有故應說為常；若實是無，如何可說有能所繫及離繫耶？毘婆沙師定立實有，然彼諸行不名為常，由與有為諸相合故。為此所立決定增明，應略標宗顯其理趣。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 104a22–b2)

¹⁶ Cf. Commitment 6 (“Dual aspects without dual entities”) in §1.1.2.

In terms of the three afflictions that are universal—*dr̥ṣṭi*, *vicikitsā*, *avidyā*—if they remain not-abandoned (*aprahīṇa*), then from the standpoint of someone bound by them, we can say that at any stage (*sarvasmin vastunī*), that person (*pudgala*) is connected (*saṃyukta*) to the defilement (*kleśa*). Put differently, once someone is “bound” to a defilement, the defilement becomes internalised as one of their properties in that it will manifest throughout their endless rebirths. No other *dharma* gained by connection or association (*saṃyoga*) acquires that status—only a *kleśa* does. According to the Ābhidharmikas, *kleśa* is both pervasive and extremely tenacious.¹⁷

One way to clarify why, according to the Vaibhāṣikas, *kleśa* (defilement) can cling to a person yet still be removable is to distinguish *kleśa* as a *saṃyogic*—that is, conjunctive—object-*dharma* (煩惱相應) from the *samavāyic*, intrinsic properties that form a *dharma*’s definitional bundle. Unlike those *samavāyic* determinations, which are conceptually inalienable, a *saṃyogic* factor is an autonomous *dharma* merely joined to the person; the link is contingent and can be dissolved. So long as one does not engage in the requisite Buddhist practices, the *kleśa* remains in force. By following the path that cultivates analytic insight and liberation, however, the causal basis of this conjunction can be undermined, thereby eradicating the defilement.

In other words, while a penetrative defilement is inevitably manifest, it can also be abandoned. It cannot remain forever in mere latency, nor can it be absolutely unending. However, it will not conclude on its own—otherwise, liberation would be unnecessary, which would contradict both the Buddha’s teaching on pervasive suffering and daily experience.

¹⁷ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 38:「復次，覆義是蓋義。諸煩惱中，更無第二煩惱能覆有情慧眼如無明者，故說為蓋。繫義是結義。諸煩惱中，更無第二煩惱繫縛有情久處生死如貪愛者，故說為結。諸有情類為無明蓋所盲、愛結所縛故，不能棄捨生死，趣向涅槃。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 195a22–27)

*AMVŚ: Furthermore, the function of “covering” (覆) is indicated by the term “veil” (蓋). Among all defilements, there is no other affliction that can shroud sentient beings’ eye of wisdom in the same way ignorance does; hence, it is called a “veil”. Likewise, the function of “binding” (繫) is indicated by the term “fetter” (結). Among all defilements, there is no other affliction that can bind sentient beings, so they remain long in *saṃsāra* in the same way craving does; hence, it is called a “fetter”. Because sentient beings are blinded by the veil of ignorance and bound by the fetter of craving, they are unable to abandon *saṃsāra* and turn towards Nirvāṇa.

We must recall that the entire Abhidharma project serves the soteriological aim of liberation. Imagine a scenario in which a *kleśa* disappears on its own. Then no one would remain “bound”, and no one would need liberation—contradicting Buddhism’s emphasis on the pervasiveness of suffering. Conversely, if “*kleśa* arises, but through practice one can break its bond”, the Buddhist must demonstrate a philosophical basis for this claim.

In Sarvāstivāda, a conditioned *dharma*’s *dravya*-aspect is indeed fundamental and eternal—“eternal” meaning “timeless” rather than “enduring through time”. So even if *kleśa* becomes one’s *dravya*-based, internalised property, that does not make it eternally persistent in time. Thus, if Vasubandhu claims that the Sarvāstivādins regard *kleśa* as one’s *dravya*-based property, leading to the inference that it is “eternally present” (*asti sarvakālāstitvāt*), that is a misreading. Besides, the Sarvāstivādins deny *kāla* (time) as an independent object in the ordinary sense.

The Vaibhāṣikas further explain that although *kleśa* becomes *internalised*—it is counted among the properties presently characterising a person—it is still a *saṃyogic* factor: an independent, conditioned *dharma* merely conjoined with the person.¹⁸ Precisely because the linkage is conjunctive rather than *samavāyic*, sustained practice can dismantle the causal support for that bond; once the conjunction ceases, liberation follows. In short, *kleśa* is internalised but not *inherent*: it belongs to the person only as a contingent, conditioned attachment, not as an intrinsic constituent of the person’s definitional property-bundle.

Drawing on these clarifications we can see why the Vaibhāṣikas do not endorse an “infinite-persistence” reading of *sarvam asti*. If all three causal phases (*atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*) were ever-lasting in the same respect, they would collapse into one another and destroy sequential difference. Their conclusion is subtler: *kleśa* is *timelessly* linkable to a person, *yet* contingently severable—hence liberation is possible.

¹⁸ In Bhartṛhari’s *Sambandhasamuddēśa* (especially VP 3.3.6=3.3.13), *saṃyoga* (conjunction) is explained as a combination that occurs *between two objects*—one of which may be internalised as a new property residing in the other, yet it remains fundamentally *object-to-object* contact. *Samavāya* (inherence), by contrast, operates *between an object and its properties* (such as substance and attribute, or parts and whole), binding them inseparably (cf. Helārāja’s *Prakīrṇaparakāśa* in Houben, *The Sambandha-Samuddēśa*, 341–348).

***kleśa* as saṃyogic, not samavāyic.**

kleśa is a conditioned *dharma*, endowed with its own tri-temporal attributes. But when it functions as a *property* of the person, it does so only *saṃyogically* (conjunctively), not *samavāyically* (intrinsically). So long as practice is absent, the causal conditions that sustain that conjunction obtain, and the defilement stays in the *pratyutpanna*-phase *for that person*, no matter where the person herself sits in her own causal sequence. When the practice of the path undermines those conditions, the conjunction dissolves: *kleśa* shifts to its *atīta* phase with respect to the person (even though, as a separate *dharma*, it does not simply vanish from the universe). The transformation thus concerns the *to-be-in-relation* of two dharmas, not the brute existential removal of one.

Why a higher-order description is indispensable.

To state all this, the Vaibhāṣikas must speak on *two levels at once*: (1) the person’s own causal itinerary, and (2) the further itinerary of each saṃyogic factor that may or may not be instantiated within the person. That is a genuinely *higher-order* task: it attributes properties (*kleśa* or *no kleśa*) to the subject, and then attributes *temporal properties* (*atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*) to that very property. Without such a two-tier framework the system could not distinguish “the person is now free from defilement” from “defilement no longer exists at all”, nor explain how liberation is metaphysically coherent.

Failing to keep these two strata apart would lead to an impossible result: the moment *kleśa* shifts into its *atīta* phase, the person—whose only “property” we have acknowledged—would ipso facto also become *atīta*, as though the practitioner herself had been concluded and consigned to the past. Distinguishing (i) the person, (ii) the person’s saṃyogic properties, and (iii) the temporal phases of those properties is therefore not a mere logical nicety; it is what prevents Sarvāstivāda soteriology from collapsing into the absurdity that liberation entails the practitioner’s own causal extinction.

In that light, *asti* is read, not as “the defilement exists”, but as a copula that links the subject to a predicative complex:

pudgalaḥ kleśena saṃyukto 'sti (“the person *has* a defilement”).

What finally changes at liberation is the truth-value of that higher-order proposition: the *asti* that formerly made “X is afflicted” true becomes false once the *saṃyoga* has been causally undone.

In short, liberation is intelligible only when we work on *two logical tiers at once*: the person as subject, and the shifting *saṃyogic* factors that may or may not be instantiated *within* that subject. Having clarified why such a higher-order perspective is indispensable, we are now ready to descend to the *intrinsic* level and ask a more basic question: What *samavāyic* properties must every conditioned *dharma* possess by definition, and how do those properties unfold in its causal life? The classical Sarvāstivāda answer is the well-known ninefold scheme.

4.2.3 The Nine Properties of Conditioned *dharmanas*

4.2.3.1 Property and Causality

Having established why an explicitly higher-order tier is required for *saṃyogic* factors, we now return to the *object-level catalogue* of properties that every *saṃskṛtadharma* possesses by definition. The Sarvāstivāda tradition lists nine such *samavāyic* determinations (*ātmanā navamo hi dharmo utpadyate | sārđhaṃ lakṣaṇānūlakṣaṇair aṣṭābhiḥ*):

1. The *dharma* itself (as the bundle of all properties)
2. *jāti*
3. *jātijāti*
4. *sthiṭi*
5. *sthiṭisthiṭi*
6. *jarā*
7. *jarājarā*
8. *anityatā*

9. *anityatānityatā*

The first is the *dravya*—the timeless bundle. Items 2, 4, 6, 8 are the four primary phases through which a conditioned *dharma* must pass. Items 3, 5, 7, 9 are their so-called *anulakṣaṇa*: each asserts that its corresponding primary phase “occurs”. Functionally they act as *quasi-higher-order* meta-predications—properties of properties—yet ontologically they remain first-order *dharmanas* within the same intrinsic bundle. In this way the Sarvāstivādins secure both completeness (*sarvam*) and guaranteed instantiation: every primary phase is reflexively marked as having been realised inside the causal sequence.¹⁹

In other words, the first of these nine is the *dharma* as *dravya* that inherently and analytically bundles all possible properties, while the subsequent four primary properties (*jāti*, *sthiti*, *jarā*, *anityatā*) correspond to the successive phases a conditioned *dharma* necessarily undergoes, and four auxiliary ones (*jātijāti*, *sthitisthiti*, *jarājarā*, *anityatānityatā*) each instantiates its corresponding primary property. Notably, the reduplicated (cognate) form of these auxiliary properties highlights again the completeness or full realisation of each primary property.²⁰ Clearly, these eight properties are causal and stage-based; they unfold sequentially.

From this perspective, a *saṃskṛtadharma* is both qua object (*dravyataḥ*)—insofar as it timelessly and analytically possesses its intrinsic properties (the *dharma* itself, the four primary properties, and the four auxiliary ones)—and qua event (*vastunaḥ*), insofar as those properties become instantiated through causal stages. In other words, *dharma* itself as a bundle of a complete set of properties appears as *dravya* outside of causation (but still subject to causality), yet, through the four auxiliary properties, that *dharma* becomes instantiated and thus enters the causal stages collectively known as *adhvan*. If the four primary properties had not received instantiation via their respective auxiliaries, those primary properties would remain unmanifested; likewise, the conditioned *dharma* itself would remain outside

¹⁹ “Completeness” and “guaranteed instantiation” correspond to Commitments 1, 5, and 7 in §1.1.2.

²⁰ Cognate constructions, like “the rain rains”, commonly reinforce thoroughness or completeness, intensifying the action through morphological repetition and semantic bounding. Linguists across traditions—morphological, syntactic, and cognitive—have highlighted this function; see Diane Massam, “Cognate Objects as Thematic Objects”, *Canadian Journal of Linguistics* 35, no. 2 (1990): 161–190; Yuko Horita, “English Cognate Object Constructions and Their Transitivity”, *English Linguistics* 13 (1996): 221–247; and Heizo Nakajima, “Adverbial Cognate Objects”, *Linguistic Inquiry* 37, no. 4 (2006): 674–684.

causal events and unmanifested. Yet in the Sarvāstivāda view, the instantiation of the four main properties—and thus the *dharma*'s complete instantiation—necessarily occurs from within. Put differently, a conditioned *dharma* is “timelessly endowed” with temporality—that is, with stage-based causal realisation. This demonstrates precisely how *sarvam asti* applies: the *dharma* is analytically complete yet necessarily undergoes causal instantiation in a stage-based sequence.

Vasubandhu articulates this profound principle with clarity:

諸相者何。頌曰相謂諸有爲生住異滅性... 若法令行三世遷流。此經說爲有爲之相... 頌曰：此有生生等，於八一有能。論曰。此謂前說四種本相。生生等者。謂四隨相。生生住住異異滅滅。諸行有爲由四本相。本相有爲由四隨相。²¹

What are these “characteristics”? The verse states: “The characteristics refer to birth (*jāti*), abiding (*sthitī*), alteration (*jarā*), and extinguishing (*anityatā*)—these define all the *saṃskṛtadharmas*. If a *dharma* causes conditioned things to flow through the three times, the scripture speaks of these as ‘the characteristics of the conditioned.’” The verse continues, “They have characteristics such as ‘birth-of-birth’ and govern eight and one respectively”.

The commentary explains: “‘They’ refers back to the four primary characteristics mentioned earlier. ‘birth-of-birth, etc.’ stands for the four auxiliary characteristics. Specifically, they are birth-of-birth (生生), abiding-of-abiding (住住), alteration-of-alteration (異異), and extinguishing-of-extinguishing (滅滅). All conditioned *dharmas* are conditioned by virtue of the four primary characteristics; those four primary characteristics are conditioned by virtue of the four auxiliary characteristics.”

In our discussion here, we rely particularly on Xuanzang’s Chinese translation, which contains a final explanatory line missing from extant Sanskrit versions. This additional line happens to clarify our topic vividly. It shows how, for a *dharma* to count as “conditioned”, it must be governed by causal law, and moreover, how that governance itself—i.e. how causal processes shape the *dharma*'s unfolding—works in tandem with the actualisation of the *dharma*'s inherent attributes. Both converge within the same underlying causal unfolding.

4.2.3.2 Instantiation as Causal Mechanism

Earlier sections have looked at how a conditioned *dharma* undergoes certain internal/definitional causal sequences; but only at this stage do we see their precise mechanism. In Sarvāstivāda thought, a *dharma*'s internal development of its properties (the definitional causal

²¹ Pradhan, AKBh, 75: “lakṣaṇāni punar jātir jarā sthitir anityatā || 2.45 || ... ye hi dharmāḥ saṃskārāṇām adhvasaṃcārāya pravṛttās ta eva sūtre lakṣaṇāny uktāny udvejanārtham... jātijātyādayas teṣāṃ... teṣāṃ api catvāry anulakṣaṇāni bhavanti | jātijātiḥ sthitisthitīḥ jarājarā anityatā 'nityatā iti...”

process) never occurs in isolation. Rather, it synchronises with the cosmic-scale external causal processes.²² Put differently, a conditioned *dharma* manifests itself both as the outcome of earlier causes and as the cause of subsequent outcomes. The key to this twofold arrangement—an internal development that also resonates outwardly—lies in the instantiation of four primary properties, each then further made to be instantiated by four auxiliary properties.

Hence, from a Sarvāstivāda standpoint, *adhvan* does not denote clock-time. It designates the causal stages through which these properties unfold. Thus, the four primaries and their four *anulakṣaṇas* operate on two explanatory tiers: the primaries tell us *what* the *dharma* is, while each auxiliary states *that* this very description now obtains—an explicitly second-order predication folded back into the first-order bundle. Reframing *adhvan* in causal terms frees us from mistaking the stages for mere temporal intervals and shows that each phase corresponds to the *dharma*'s ongoing causal actualisation.

Although the last line—“由諸法有本相故成有爲。本相亦爾。由隨相故成有爲。故立本相更有四隨相”—does not appear in the currently available Sanskrit recension of AKBh, it also occurs in Paramārtha's translation and is also cited by Saṃghabhadra in his *NyAŚ. We may therefore conclude that it existed in the broad Sarvāstivāda textual tradition. The lines Vasubandhu then attributes to the Vaibhāṣikas read:

te 'ṣṭadharmāikavṛttayah |

*teṣāṃ jātyādīnāṃ aṣṭāsu dharmeṣu vṛttiḥ | kim idaṃ vṛttir iti | kāritraṃ puruṣakārah | jātijātyādīnāṃ caikatra dharme kathāṃ kṛtvā ātmanā navamo hi dharma utpadyate | sārthaṃ lakṣaṇānulanakṣaṇair aṣṭābhiḥ | tatra jātir ātmānaṃ virahayānyān aṣṭau dharmān janayati | jātijātiḥ punas tām eva jātim ...*²³

於八一有能。

四種本相一一皆於八法有用。四種隨相一一皆於一法有用。其義云何。謂法生時并其自體九法俱起。自體爲一相隨相八。本相中生除其自性生餘八法。隨相生於九法內唯生本生。謂如雌雞有生多子有唯生一。生與生生八生一其力亦爾。本相中住亦除自性住餘八法。隨相住於九法中唯住本住。異及滅相隨應亦爾。是故生等相復有相。²⁴

“and have efficacy with respect to eight and one, respectively”

Each of the four primary characteristics has efficacy with respect to eight *dharma*s; each of the four auxiliary characteristics has efficacy with respect to one *dharma*. What does this mean?

²² By “cosmic-scale external causal processes”, I refer to the interconnected networks of conditions, where each *dharma*'s arising is woven into vast webs of mutual causation.

²³ Pradhan, AKBh, 76.

²⁴ CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 27b8–23.

When a *dharma* arises, nine *dharms* arise together, its own entity included: its own entity is one, and the primary and auxiliary characteristics are eight. Among the four primary characteristics, “birth” (生), apart from itself, gives rise to the other eight *dharms*. Among the nine *dharms*, its auxiliary characteristic, ‘birth-of-birth’ (生生), gives rise only to the primary birth. It is like hens: some give rise to many chicks, some give rise only to one; the efficacy of birth and birth-of-birth is likewise—the former gives rise to eight, the latter to one. Among the primary characteristics, “abiding” too, apart from itself, causes the other eight *dharms* to abide. Among the nine *dharms*, the auxiliary characteristic ‘abiding-of-abiding’ causes only the primary abiding to abide. Alteration and cessation, together with their auxiliary characteristics, should be understood in the same way. Therefore characteristics such as birth themselves again have characteristics.

To illustrate: a certain hen might produce a large brood of chicks, and another hen might only produce a single chick (there is no difference in terms of giving birth in these two cases). Yet either way, the causal efficacy “birth” exerts to make eight *dharms* arise and the causal efficacy “birth-of-birth” exerts to make “birth” arise are identical.

The same logic holds for “abiding” (住) among the primary characteristics: apart from itself, it acts upon the other eight to make them abide; and its auxiliary “abiding-of-abiding” (住住) acts only upon the primary abiding among the nine *dharms*. The auxiliary characteristics of “alteration” (異) and “extinguishing” (滅) function in the same way. Hence the four primary characteristics—birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing—each has its own further auxiliary characteristic.

The Vaibhāṣika account here is both **expansive** and **innovative**. It is expansive in that this ninefold system of “conditioned properties” provides an all-encompassing account of how each and every *saṃskṛtadharma* in the cosmos becomes *what it is* via a chain of causal realisations.²⁵ It is *innovative* because, for the first time in Buddhist philosophical history, it systematically affirms that a conditioned *dharma* cannot be treated as anything over and above the complete bundle of properties through which it is articulated and made causally operative; beyond those properties, no further substrate needs to be posited.

As the passage shows, when a conditioned *dharma* arises, the text does not merely say that it is accompanied by eight characteristics. It says that nine *dharms* arise together: the

²⁵ This broad, “surface” orientation closely follows Deleuze’s shift in *The Logic of Sense* from depth-based searches for hidden essences to a more expansive mapping of events. By tracing how phenomena unfold across a wide “surface”, Deleuze shows that breadth can yield a richer understanding than any singular focus on underlying cores.

dharma's own entity counts as one, while the four primary and four auxiliary characteristics count as eight. The point is therefore not merely classificatory. The passage preserves a doctrinal tension between the conditioned *dharma* as one and the same arising-complex as nine *dharms*. This tension should, in my view, be retained in translation rather than silently flattened, since it is itself part of the theory being articulated. The further claim advanced in this dissertation can then be made after, not inside, the translation: this ninefold arising-complex is one reason why a conditioned *dharma* cannot be treated as a bare substrate separable from the characteristics through which it becomes operative.

Moreover, as is implied in this Vaibhāṣika thought, to say that “a *dharma* is X” also implicitly conveys “it becomes X”: for them, *being* and *becoming* are never fully disentangled. By introducing a ninefold arrangement, Vaibhāṣikas demonstrate how *saṃskṛtadharms* display both timelessness and change. Two fundamental levels can accordingly be distinguished:

1. **Nine Properties, Timelessly Embedded**

All nine properties, along with the way a *dharma* is actualised by those nine, are *timelessly* and *analytically* interwoven within the *dharma*'s concept itself. In this sense, A conditioned *dharma* is understood as an object (*dravyataḥ*).

2. **Instantiation in Sequential Causal Events**

Simultaneously, these properties must also be *instantiated* in event-based causal sequences, revealing the *dharma*'s being in the sense of an event (*vastunaḥ*). For instance, “birth” and “change” exist as timeless inherent properties, yet still require activation or instantiation in actual occurrence.

Within the emergent sequence of *jāti*, *sthiti*, *jarā*, and *anityatā*, we discover the variety of transformations that characterise the appearance of all conditioned objects in the phenomenal world. Correspondingly, the Vaibhāṣika system integrates these transformations into *sarvam asti*, the principle that every *dharma* contains its complete set of properties. As previously noted, Sarvāstivādins interpret *sarvam* in diverse ways, but for our purposes here, the bipartite concepts—unfolding of a *dharma*'s intrinsic properties (*samavāya*) and its procedu-

ral stages in an event (*adhvan*)—best clarify how these nine properties operate. Altogether, they may be subsumed under the headings *dravyataḥ* and *vastunaḥ*, and woven into *astitva*, the twofold sense in which any conditioned *dharma* is/*asti*. Hence, these nine properties demonstrate precisely how a *saṃskṛtadharma* is analytically complete (*sarvam*) while also subject to causal unfolding into its properties (*asti*).

4.2.3.3 The Vaibhāṣika–Sautrāntika Debate

As might be expected, the Sautrāntikas challenged the Vaibhāṣikas’ ninefold model of a conditioned *dharma*. Their worry is straightforward: the Vaibhāṣikas claim that a conditioned *dharma* has nine properties in a way that is not exhausted by any single moment of manifestation. But if these properties are said to belong to a *dharma* in a stable and systematic way, then (so the Sautrāntikas press) the account begins to resemble the profile of an *unconditioned dharma*. How, then, could the *dharma* still count as **conditioned**?

Their objection is framed in epistemic terms: even if one can speak of “birth” and the rest, there is, they claim, no *pramāṇa* for taking such items to be real in the *dravyataḥ* sense:

na hy ete jātyādayo dharmā dravyataḥ saṃvidyante yathā ’bhivyajyante | kiṃ kāraṇam | pramāṇābhāvāt | na hy eṣāṃ dravyato ’stitve kiñcid api pramāṇam asti pratyakṣam anumānam āptāgamo vā yathā rūpādīnāṃ dharmāṇām iti |²⁶

《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷 5:「非生等相有實法體如所分別。所以者何? 無定量故。謂此諸相非如色等有定現、比或至教量證體實有。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 27b24–26)

For *dharms* such as “birth” and so on are not cognised *as substances* (*dravyataḥ*) in the way they are made-manifest/expressed. Why is that? Because of the absence of a *pramāṇa*. For with respect to their existence *as substances* (*dravyato ’stitva*) there is no *pramāṇa* at all—whether direct perception, inference, or trustworthy testimony—as there is for *dharms* such as form (*rūpa*) and the rest.

Taken literally, the Sautrāntika complaint is not that “birth” (*jāti*), “abiding” (*sthitī*), “change/ ageing” (*jarā*), and “perishing/ impermanence” (*anityatā*) are never mentioned or never conceptually distinguished. Rather, they deny that such items are *established as dravyataḥ*—that is, as having the same kind of objective standing as paradigm *dharms* like *rūpa*. If these “marks” were genuinely *dravyataḥ* in that strong sense, then (they argue) at least one standard *pramāṇa* (*pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, or *āptāgama*) should be available for

²⁶ Pradhan, AKBh, 76.

them, as it is for colour, shape, and the like.²⁷ Since no such *pramāṇa* is forthcoming, the Vaibhāṣika ninefold analysis appears, to the Sautrāntikas, ontologically overcommitted.

This objection puts the Vaibhāṣikas under pressure: how can one defend the *dravyataḥ* status of properties that are not straightforwardly delivered by ordinary *pramāṇa*? The Vaibhāṣika strategy, as reconstructed in this dissertation, is not to postulate a new sensory faculty for perceiving “birth” as one perceives colour. Instead, they reframe the justificatory burden. What matters is not whether *jāti* and its companions are isolated objects of perception, but whether the very idea of a *conditioned dharma* is intelligible without them. In other words, their defence shifts from *empirical detectability* to *structural indispensability*: these are real because they are required for a conditioned *dharma* to be what it is.

A closely parallel move is made in *AMVŚ, in the debate with the Vibhajyavādins over the ontological status of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This passage is especially useful here, because it shows how the Vaibhāṣikas can insist on a form of fixity or constancy—a determination that is grounded in a *dharma*’s own nature (*dharmatā*)—without concluding that the relevant item is *unconditioned*:

Some hold that dependent origination is unconditioned, like the Vibhajyavādins. Question: for what reason do they hold thus? Answer: because of a *sūtra*. The *sūtra* says: “Whether the Tathāgata arises in the world or does not arise, a *dharma* abides in its own *dharmatā* (法住法性). The Buddha himself fully awakens (to it) and, for others, discriminates and explains it in detail, and so forth.” Therefore they know that dependent origination is an unconditioned *dharma*. In order to stop that position and to show that dependent origination is a conditioned *dharma*, (the Vaibhāṣikas say that) it falls into the three times, and there is no unconditioned *dharma* that falls into the three times.

If one objects, “If dependent origination is not unconditioned, how do we explain the *sūtra* they cited?” the answer is: the *sūtra* speaks of the meaning of definiteness/determination (決定) in cause and fruit. That is to say: whether the Buddha arises or not, ignorance is definitely the cause of formations, formations are definitely the fruit of ignorance; thus up to: birth is definitely the cause of ageing-and-death, and ageing-and-death are definitely the fruit of birth. “A *dharma* abides in its own *dharmatā*” is the meaning of determination; it is not the meaning of being unconditioned. The *sūtra*’s intention is like this.

If it were not so, then other *sūtra* passages would likewise become untenable. The *sūtra* also says: “Whether the Tathāgata arises or does not arise, a *dharma* abides in its own *dharmatā*: form is

²⁷ It is worth noting that even within this paradigm category, the Sautrāntikas themselves contested the *dravyataḥ* status of shape (*saṃsthāna*), arguing that it is merely a designation (*prajñapti*) for specific arrangements of colour (*varṇa*). For a detailed analysis of the Abhidharmic debates over the nature and reality of shape in Vasubandhu’s works and commentaries, see Szilvia Szanyi, “Is Shape Real? Controversies Over the Nature and Reality of Shape in the Works of Vasubandhu and His Commentators,” *Philosophy East and West* 74, no. 4 (2024): 767–789.

always form's characteristic, up to consciousness always consciousness' characteristic; earth is always hardness' characteristic, up to wind always motion's characteristic; *Kalikāra* is always a bitter taste; *Kaṭukoloṣaṇī* is always a pungent taste." Would the five aggregates and so forth also have to be unconditioned? Yet they are conditioned; dependent origination is the same. The five aggregates and so forth are spoken of in this way because their own characteristics are definite; dependent origination too is (so spoken) on the basis of the definiteness of cause and fruit. (*AMVŚ, *juan* 23)

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「或復有執。緣起是無為, 如分別論者。問: 彼因何故作如是執? 答: 彼因經故。謂契經說: 如來出世若不出世, 法住法性。佛自等覺為他開示乃至廣說。故知緣起是無為法。為止彼宗顯示緣起是有為法, 墮三世故, 無無為法墮在三世。問: 若緣起法非無為者, 如何會釋彼所引經? 答: 經說因果決定義故。謂佛出世若不出世, 無明決定是諸行因, 諸行決定是無明果。如是乃至生決定是老死因, 老死決定是生果。法住法性是決定義, 非無為義。經意如是。若不爾者, 契經亦說: 如來出世若不出世, 法住法性: 色常色相, 乃至識常識相; 地常堅相, 乃至風常動相; 喝梨德鷄常是苦味, 羯竹迦盧呬尼常是辛味。豈五蘊等亦是無為? 彼既有為, 緣起亦爾。謂五蘊等自相決定說如是言。緣起亦依因果決定。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 116c4–22)

With the key formula rendered as “a *dharma* abides in its own *dharma*tā”, the Vaibhāṣika reply becomes easier to articulate in a way that matches the global architecture of this dissertation.

The Vibhajyavādins treat this “abiding” as pointing beyond the conditioned causal stream: if a *dharma* abides in *dharma*tā whether or not a Buddha appears, then (so they infer) it must be something not produced by causes and conditions, i.e. unconditioned. The Vaibhāṣikas reject that inference. They insist that the *sūtra* is not using 法住法性 to mark *asaṃskṛtatva*; it is using it to mark **determination** (決定). And this determination is not an extra metaphysical ingredient added from outside. It is grounded in the *dharma*'s own *dharma*tā—that is, in what makes the *dharma* the *dharma* it is.

This is why the Vaibhāṣikas can immediately cash out 法住法性 in two converging registers, both of which matter for our present problem. On the one hand, it is *causal determination* (因果決定): ignorance is definitely the cause of formations, and so forth. On the other, it is *self-characteristic determination* (自相決定): form is always form-characteristic, earth always hardness-characteristic, wind always motion-characteristic, and so on. In both cases, the point is not that these items are unconditioned, but that what belongs where is not optional or indeterminate: it is fixed by the relevant *dharma*'s own nature. This is precisely

the sense in which analytic necessity and sufficiency can be affirmed without collapsing the conditioned/unconditioned distinction.

Returning to the Sautrāntika objection, we can now see the shape of the Vaibhāṣika reply. The properties of “birth”, “abiding”, “change”, and “perishing” are defended as *dravyataḥ* not because they are perceived like *rūpa*, but because they are structurally required by what it is to be a *conditioned dharma*—and thus are grounded in the *dharma*’s own *dharimatā*. Their “reality” is therefore secured at the level that this dissertation calls *analytic*: they belong to the conceptually fixed profile of the conditioned, while still being instantiated only through causal unfolding (and hence still “falling into the three times”).

The present debate therefore functions as a bridge to the next step of the argument, where I make explicit the proposed structural isomorphism between causation and predication.

4.2.4 Causation-Predication Isomorphism

To better grasp this crucial metaphysical framework, we must further distinguish **external/generative causation** from **internal/definitional causation**. Let us begin by highlighting a key commonality: from either an external or an internal perspective, the **predicate** invariably serves as an explanation of the **subject**. For instance, in saying “the pot is hot”, the property “hot” explains what kind of pot we are dealing with.²⁸

In other words, throughout this dissertation we are examining language in a specific context—namely, the construction of propositions (*kathā*) that articulate our understanding

²⁸ The grammatical tradition is suggestive here: *bhāva* ($\sqrt{bhū} + gha\tilde{N}$) is classically analysable as *bhavaty anena iti bhāvaḥ* (*karāṇa-sādhana*), i.e. “that by which something becomes”, and can therefore slide naturally toward an explanatory/causal sense (*hetu*). Cf. Pāṇini, *Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.3.24 *śṛṅībhuvo ’nupasarge*; and Kaiyaṭa’s *Pradīpa* on Patañjali’s *Vyākaraṇa-mahābhāṣya* ad A 5.1.119 (Vedavrata, ed. *Śrībhagavatpatañjaliviracitaṃ Vyākaraṇa-Mahābhāṣyam* [*Śrīkaiyaṭakṛtapradīpena nagojibhaṭṭakṛtena bhāṣyapradīpodyotena ca vibhūṣitam*], 5 vols. (Gurukul Jhajar [Rohatak]: Hairyaṇā-Sāhitya-Saṃsthānam, 1962–63), vol. IV, 92), where *bhāva* is derived as a *karāṇa-sādhana* and explicitly connected with determinations such as *jāti*. Compare also Jayāditya and Vāmana’s *Kāśikāvṛtti* ad A 5.1.119 (Śrīnārāyaṇa Miśra, ed. *Kāśikāvṛtti of Jayāditya-Vāmana, along with Commentaries Vivaraṇapañcikā–Nyāsa of Jinendrabuddhi and Padamañjarī of Haradatta Miśra*, 6 vols. (Varanasi: Ratna Publications, 1985)), which glosses *bhāva* as *śabdasya pravṛttinimittam*. This does not claim historical dependence, but it shows that “being”-vocabulary can be grammatically grounded as “what makes/lets X be thus”.

of the myriad *dharma*s. In such a context, the predicate unquestionably conveys our grasp of what a *dharma* is, precisely because its knowability derives from its place in a causal chain.²⁹

According to our earlier analyses, in Buddhist metaphysics, knowledge of what a *dharma* is ultimately finds expression in knowing *the causation it goes through*.³⁰ Therefore, when we aim to understand what a *dharma* is, any term occupying the predicate position shall eventually point to either the *dharma*'s cause or its effects—since identifying what causes its arising and which properties are brought into being (as conceptually contained in this *dharma*) provides the real (*yathābhūta*) explanation of what the *dharma* is. Hence, in Buddhist metaphysics, there are two primary ways of knowing a *dharma*:

1. A **generative/external mode**—knowing *why* it arises (corresponding to *sarvajñāna*),
2. A **definitional/internal mode**—knowing *what* it is (corresponding to *sarvathājñāna*).

Under the first mode, because the cause is external, the resulting property will inevitably belong to the “shared” or “generic” domain. For instance, in the example of *kleśa* (affliction): when we say, “This person is afflicted”, we effectively mean that affliction caused him to be reborn as the person he is now. Thus, in such a proposition, the predicate (“afflicted”) indicates **why** the subject (the person) is as he is.

The Vaibhāṣikas make this causation-predication isomorphism very clear:³¹

²⁹ 《尊婆須蜜菩薩所集論》卷 2:「或作是說: 諸觀十二緣起, 彼一切觀法也; 設觀諸法, 彼一切觀十二緣起。觀十二緣起時, 彼亦觀法; 觀法時, 彼亦觀十二緣起。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T28, no. 1549, p. 735b4–7)

*ĀVBSS: Someone might say: “Suppose one observes the twelvefold dependent origination, what she observes is what *dharma*s completely are. Accordingly, suppose one observes *dharma*s, what she observes is what the twelvefold dependent origination completely is. (This is why) when one is observing the twelvefold dependent origination, she is also observing *dharma*s; and when she is observing *dharma*s, she is also observing the twelvefold dependent origination.”

³⁰ Gombrich notes that when the Buddha explains what consciousness is, he categorised it “according to the cause that produced it” (Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* [London: Athlone Press, 1996], 47–48).

³¹ Baruch Spinoza and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz both advanced metaphysical systems that closely link causation and predication. In *Ethics* Part I, Propositions 16–29, Spinoza treats finite modes as following from the divine substance just as conclusions follow from premises—thus uniting causal and logical orders (see *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Vol. I, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985]). Michael Della Rocca (*Spinoza* [London: Routledge, 2008], 17–25) underscores that, for Spinoza, an effect is effectively “predicated” by its cause within the one infinite substance. Leibniz’s “complete concept” doctrine similarly posits that all properties of a substance are logically (and thus causally) contained within its notion, as elaborated in his “Discourse on Metaphysics”, §§8–14 (in *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber [Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989], 35–56) and “Primary Truths” (same volume, 31–35). Both philosophers’ rationalist metaphysics collapse the distinction between explaining what a thing is and explaining why it is so, though subsequent scholarship debates the extent to which either

Furthermore, if the *conditionality* (*yuánxìng*, 緣性)—i.e. the fact that *dharma*s are to be understood *in dependence on causes and conditions*—does not *really obtain* (*shíyǒu*, 實有), then one would not even be able to *posit* (施設) *dharma*s as *profound*. That is to say, if one observes *dharma*s without relying on causes and conditions, the nature of *dharma*s is coarse and easy to grasp; but if one observes them through causes and conditions, their meaning is profoundly deep—deeper than the four great oceans—knowable only to the Buddha and immeasurable for anyone else. 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 131:「又若緣性非實有者, 應不施設諸法甚深。謂法不依因緣觀察, 則諸法性龜淺易知; 若以因緣而觀察者, 則甚深義過四大海, 唯佛能知, 非餘所測。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 680c7–10)

This passage is especially revealing for the present argument because it frames the issue in explicitly *predicative* terms. The question is not whether *conditionality* (緣性) is an additional entity to be counted among “what exists”, but whether it can be *truthfully ascribed* to *dharma*s in virtue of what they are. In other words, *shíyǒu* (實有) here is best read as the claim that *dharma*s, *as they really are* (*yathābhūta*), *have conditionality* (法如實而有緣性)—not as the ontological reification of a new thing called “conditionality”. Accordingly, “to observe *dharma*s through causes and conditions” is precisely to expand a *dharma* into its admissible predicate-domain—its causal roles, dependencies, and efficacies—and it is this expansion that grounds the ascription “profound”. Once conditionality is denied at this level, what collapses is not merely a thesis about what exists, but the very possibility of making deep, truth-apt judgements about what a *dharma* *is*.³²

4.2.4.1 Ontological–Epistemological Mismatch

By contrast, the internal perspective aims at understanding a *dharma*’s **own properties**, and here too a causal relationship is at work. To know what a *dharma* is, we need to ascertain which properties it possesses. Practically, this means we may place those properties in the subject position and then formulate a proposition describing them. According to the Buddhist “bundle theory”, any property devoid of its corresponding *dharma* as the bundling to-

allows for external, contingent causation (see Nicholas Jolley, *Leibniz* [London: Routledge, 2005], 45–49; Robert M. Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994]; and Steven Nadler, “Baruch Spinoza”, *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* [Fall 2022 ed.]).

³² This is close in spirit to Buddhapālita’s way of putting the point: *hetupratyayaśāśād bhāvaprajñaptir bhavati and na bhāvāḥ svabhāvena vidyante* (“it is through the force of causes and conditions that a positing of *bhāva* occurs; things do not obtain by *svabhāva*”); Buddhapālita, cited in Ye (2021), 《中论佛护释》译注 [An annotated Chinese translation of the *Buddhapālita-mūlamadhyamakavṛtti*] (Shanghai: Zhongxi Shuju 中西书局, 2021), 185. In that idiom, *pratītyasamutpāda* is precisely what underwrites *prajñapti*—the very possibility of meaningful designation/predication—rather than a further item to be added to an ontological inventory.

tality is meaningless. Our ultimate knowledge of a property therefore arises from identifying the bundling (the particular *dharma*) to which it belongs. Put differently, we must answer: “Which *dharma* does this property belong to?”—for example, “Property X belongs to *dharma* A”. Here, *dharma* A (as the bundle/*saṃskāraskandha*) naturally appears in the predicate slot, furnishing the final explanation for that property.

Yet at this juncture, we face a significant divergence. As we have analysed before, the relationship between a *dharma* and its properties is one of containment and being contained—specifically, a complete, “no-more-and-no-less” containment. In other words, aside from all its contained properties, a *dharma* has nothing else that it “is”, just as those properties themselves have no sense unless they belong to that *dharma*’s bundle. This mutually necessary and sufficient relationship inherently instantiates an analytic connection between subject and predicate. Consequently, from the internal/definitional causality viewpoint, not only can “the *dharma*” serve as the predicate explaining which property belongs to it, but also each “property” can appear as the predicate explaining the *dharma*. Put differently, when we investigate which property belongs to a *dharma*, we are simultaneously inquiring what that *dharma* itself is.

In contrast, under *external/generative causality*, the outcome (i.e. the newly arising *dharma*) as the effect and its myriad prior *dharms* as causes are fixed; they do not explain each other. We inevitably place the newly arisen *dharma* as the subject and the causal antecedents as the predicate. Hence, when we attempt to explain *what* a *dharma* is in the external sense, we end up describing its reason for arising—the already-existing interconnected web of *dharms*. Note, however, that although this generative network—comprising all the *dharms* that existed beforehand—relates to the new *dharma* via an analytic inevitability (“Given all these conditions, no other outcome is possible”), the analyticity in this relation is not the same as in internal causality. In external causality, the effect is *not* a symmetrical “cause” of its prior conditions. In other words, the analyticity here is guaranteed by the necessity of the *dharma*’s arising through that causal web (as its sufficient reason), not by any *mutually* necessary-and-sufficient relationship between them, as found in internal causality.

From a **generative** (i.e. **ontological**) standpoint, the coming-together of causes is the “sufficient condition” for the emergence of a *dharma*. Still, there is also an **epistemic** or conceptual dimension: in the Buddhist view of causality, from the fact that “the causes converge”, we can logically infer “the *dharma* arises”, and *vice versa*. What we **cannot** infer is **why** those causes converge in the first place.³³ In other words, from the *dharma*’s arising, we cannot ontologically explain the deeper reason why those conditions assembled. Epistemically, however, we deduce that they *indeed* did so. Thus, the link between cause and the *dharma*’s appearance, while still “analytic”, exhibits an asymmetry on the ontological level but a symmetry on the epistemological level. Put differently, on the ontological side (the factual level), the convergence of causes and the *dharma*’s arising is a one-way sufficiency, whereas on the epistemic side (the conceptual level), the relationship becomes two-way (mutually necessary and sufficient). Knowing that the *dharma* emerges implies that those causes must have converged, even though we have no insight into *why* they converged.³⁴

This **ontological–epistemological mismatch** clarifies why the Buddhist view of causation does not amount to a simple, rigid determinism. Even though a web of analytic propositions pervades every phenomenon in the cosmos, there remains a broader realm of “synthetic propositions”—i.e. *why* certain causes gather in the first place—lying beyond our knowledge.

4.2.4.1.1 Returning to Internal/Definitional Causality At this point, the familiar formula *asmin sati idaṃ bhavati* returns with a sharper force. Read at the level of internal causality, it does not merely register the external succession of one *dharma* upon another; it

³³ This epistemic two-wayness (from cause-complex to effect and back) is later rendered explicitly in Buddhist theories of inference: the “warrant” depends on *svabhāva-pratibandha*, often glossed as *āyatta* (dependence). Dharmakīrti: *svabhāva-pratibandhād eva hetuḥ sādhyam gamayati*; Raniero Gnoli, ed. *The Pramāṇavārttikam of Dharmakīrti: The First Chapter with the Autocommentary (Text and Critical Notes)* (Rome: Istituto Italiano per Il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1960), 17 (PVSV ad PV 1.25). And without *pratibandha* there is no determination of concomitance: *na hy asati pratibandhe ’nvayavyatirekaniścayaḥ*; Gnoli, 10 (PVSV ad PV 1.15). Again, the point here is structural affinity, not a claim of direct transmission.

³⁴ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 1:「以一切種所知法性甚深微妙，非佛世尊一切智者，誰能究竟等覺」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 1a8–10)

*AMVŚ: Since the properties of *dharma*s, known through *sarvathājñāna*, are exceedingly profound and subtle, who but the Buddha, the World-Honoured One, having all kinds of knowledge, can completely realise them in truth?

also states that, given such-and-such a *dharma*, determinate features follow from what that *dharma* is. In this sense, the formula names not only generative dependence but a kind of definitional unfolding: because it is this *dharma*, it becomes or instantiates such properties. The question is therefore no longer why a *dharma* arises, but what belongs to it by virtue of its own *dharmatā*. That is why, in internal causality, cause and effect can reverse positions; they stand in a **mutually necessary and sufficient** relationship. Yet this scenario raises another puzzle: *If cause and effect can swap places, what is the point of distinguishing them at all? Do “cause” and “effect” still differ?* The answer is yes, and the crux lies in *how* we form our judgements. Are we adopting an analytic stance to comprehend “what the *dharma* is”, or do we rely on a synthetic stance?

- In **analysis mode**, the *dharma* itself (as the subject) logically “causes” or guarantees the property in question. By virtue of *sarvam asti*, the *dharma* already includes all attributes. We thus say: “Because it is this *dharma*, it must have property X.” Here, the subject is cause, and the predicate is the logical effect.
- If we use an **observer-based** or **synthetic** approach—detecting from experience which properties an entity actually instantiates—then the *property* can appear to be the cause, and the *dharma* is the effect discovered.

Recalling the Buddha’s omniscient (*sarvathājñāna*) awareness of *all* possible properties—knowing the *dharma*’s concept in full—the *dharma* reclaims the status of cause, while its properties become effects of that analysis. Consequently, in a world governed by *sarvam asti*, where “a *dharma* precisely equals the bundle of its attributes”, subject and predicate invariably become co-referential: each can serve as the other’s cause or effect, depending on vantage and approach.

At first glance, this might seem self-evident, as it reflects the Sarvāstivāda idea that genuine judgements about *what* a *dharma* is are **analytic** propositions. For example, “A triangle’s interior angles sum to 180°”: the subject and predicate entail each other—“triangle”

implies “180° angles”, and vice versa. One could say “Because it is a triangle, it must have 180° angles”, or “Because it has 180° angles, it must be a triangle”. Both remain valid, merely emphasising different explanatory directions.

4.2.4.1.2 Two Directions of Judgement (Analysis vs. Synthesis) Put differently, if we employ **analytic judgement** to know a *dharma*—i.e. to identify the attributes it possesses—we deduce or infer those attributes from the *dharma*’s conceptual totality. In that scenario, the *dharma*, as a bundle of all attributes, might occupy the predicate position, affirming that these attributes “belong to this bundle” and thus clarifying why such attributes indeed constitute part of it. (In such a case, our recognition of what a *dharma* is proceeds from the concept of the *dharma* itself.)

Conversely, if we start from a **synthetic** vantage, we might begin with the attributes and then move backwards to the *dharma*. (In other words, when we want to ascertain which attributes belong to a *dharma*, we can only rely on *a posteriori* observation rather than *a priori* analysis; after extensive observation, we confirm how the attributes and the *dharma* correspond to each other.)

Hence, in that context, these attributes appear in the **predicate** slot, elucidating our understanding of *what* the *dharma* is.

However, this approach may lead to an infinite-regress concern: If we only know a *dharma* via its properties, do we also need to know each property via its sub-properties, and so forth? Sarvāstivāda forestalls such a spiral by declaring that a “property” is valid only insofar as it belongs to a particular *dharma*’s complete bundle. (Notice that this move is higher-order: it is a claim *about the set of first-order predicates itself*, blocking any further descent to “sub-properties of sub-properties”.) Once we identify the *dharma* that includes it, the property reattaches to the *dharma*’s **analytic completeness**, pre-empting any endless chain of sub-attributes.³⁵

³⁵ A later Yogācāra idiom makes a structurally similar move in reflexive form: “圓成實故名圓成實” (She Dasheng Lun Shi, *juan* 5), i.e. *pariṇiṣpanna* is called *pariṇiṣpanna* because it is *pariṇiṣpanna*. The point is

4.2.4.2 Ontological Asymmetry and Metaphysical Symmetry

This ability for “cause” and “effect” to alternate harkens back to the claim that, *at the conceptual level (cittacaitasika)*, only **analytic judgement** can comprehensively address propositions concerning every *dharma* in the cosmos. Since each *dharma* is nothing other than its **complete set of attributes**, all *dharmanas* interlink and can be expressed through complementary statements (subject–predicate or predicate–subject). As we shall see, the Vaibhāṣikas illustrate this principle by showing how any “conditioned property” may serve as either **explanans (sādhaka)** or **explanandum (sādhya)**, depending on the context.

Furthermore, although at the **generative** plane of actual emergence (external causality) cause and effect need not be mutually necessary and sufficient, the Sarvāstivādins maintain that **epistemically**, external causality and internal causality both operate under an essentially **analytic** framework for “stating what a *dharma* is”. By allowing cause and effect to appear in the **predicate/explanans** role that explains the *dharma* as subject, they establish a structural parallel between *pratītyasamutpāda* and the sphere of **predication**—yet they also retain a higher-level “**synthetic dimension**”. In so doing, they avoid reducing the world to monolithic determinism: everyone’s moral activities, shaped by personal judgement and corresponding deeds, continuously synthesise new outcomes and guide the cosmos in new directions.³⁶

not to posit an extra entity, but to mark a closure at the level of determinate, non-distorted characterization once the relevant conditions are in place.

³⁶ Abhidharma sources often depict the birth of a new cosmos with the image of a rising wind.

When the karmic forces of sentient beings from the previous aeon recombine in unknowable ways, this cosmic wind emerges, dispersing the remnants of the old world and reorganising them into a new cosmological order.

Thus, *AMVŚ explains: “Some masters say that a fierce wind arises from the lower wind disc and scatters the world. According to this teaching, it is the powerful force of the aggregated, predominant *karma* of sentient beings that causes the world to form; and by the end of the *kalpa*, once the karmic force has been exhausted, [the world is destroyed].”

「有餘師說：從下風輪有猛風起，吹散世界。如是說者，說諸有情類業增上力令世界成，至劫末時，業力盡故。」(CBETA 2025.R1, T27, no. 1545, p. 690b5–8)

Likewise, AKBh describes a complete cosmic cycle that begins with such a wind, see Pradhan, AKBh, 179: “*vivartakalpaḥ prāgvāyor yāvan...*” (For Xuanzang’s translation, see CBETA 2025.R1, T29, no. 1558, p. 63a8–14)

As the Sarvāstivādins observe, if *ontologically* (or “externally”) each *dharma* acts as the **cause** of all *dharms* that follow it and as the **effect** of all *dharms* that precede it, then by analysing any single *dharma* we can discern how earlier *dharms* converge to produce its arising, and also see how it in turn conditions later *dharms*. In this *generative* view, the universe as a whole manifests a vast **asymmetrical** causal network in which each *dharma* is both cause and effect. (The asymmetry arises because a *dharma*, in its role as an effect, cannot retroactively generate the causal web that led to its own emergence.)³⁷

Meanwhile, from the vantage of *understanding* or *predicating* (i.e. casting a *dharma* in a subject–predicate structure), the totality of *dharms* likewise forms a second asymmetrical network of explanation. The reason is that when we set out to analyse any single *dharma*, we can **analytically** grasp *how* the relevant causes have converged, yet not *why* they converge. At the same time, we can analytically deduce why that *dharma* will lead onward to future *dharms*.

This *ontological* asymmetry means that on a higher level, we can never fully fathom *why* certain *dharms* converge—though we can know *how* they do so. It is like being able to infer, from an observed outcome, that some sufficient configuration of conditions must have obtained, while being unable—from the outcome alone—to determine why that configuration obtained (or why it obtained rather than some alternative sufficient configuration). This is precisely what we have stressed earlier: at the broader cosmic plane, the universe shows up as a more expansive **synthetic proposition**, thereby preserving our moral freedom and guaranteeing the conditioned nature of *pratītyasamutpāda*.

In contrast, on the *metaphysical* (or “internal”) level, a *dharma* taken as a **complete bundle** stands in a relationship of mutual necessity and sufficiency with its concrete properties. Consequently, whether we consider the *dharma* as a whole or one of its attributes, each can serve as either explanans or explanandum, both converging on the same result—explaining

³⁷ A similar view of cosmically mutual causality is found in Śiṃhasūri’s elaboration of the *Sarvasarvātmakatvavāda*: *sarvaṃ sarvātmakam, tata eva sarvaṃ sarvasya kāraṇaṃ kāryaṃ ceti kṛtvā*. Possible philosophical interaction awaits further exploration. Cf. Albrecht Wezler, “Remarks on the Sarvasarvātmakatvavāda”, in *Philosophical Essays: Professor Anantalal Thakur Felicitation Volume*, edited by Rama Ranjan Mukhopadhyaya et al. (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1987), 166–81.

how this *dharma* qualifies as a *saṃskṛtadharmā* (有為法), i.e. subject to causal law. This expresses the deepest sense of *sarvam asti*: namely, when we call a *dharma* “complete”, we refer primarily to its *metaphysical* or *conceptual* completeness, rather than to its fact-based ontological emergence.³⁸

From a strictly *analytic* viewpoint (*pratītyasamutpāda* in the realm of axioms), **to know a *dharma*** is to proceed from the subject to the effect (the *dharma*-as-bundle being cause; its attributes being effect). Conversely, in an “already-generated world” (*pratītyasamutpanna*), i.e. from our everyday vantage—one proceeds from effect (those attributes) back to cause (the *dharma*-as-bundle). Under *sarvam asti*, the analytic truth established at the metaphysical level guarantees that both directions of understanding remain valid, ensuring the unfailing truth-value of our two-way comprehension.

Finally, from the Sarvāstivāda perspective, in addition to the more expansive “synthetic proposition” posited in the realm of possible worlds and thus beyond this already-actualised world, in our actual world all *dharmanas* adhere to an analytic order. If the world’s being were not constituted as a vast analytic proposition, then our confidence in any synthetic judgement about the myriad *dharmanas* would inevitably falter. Put differently, unless the entirety of existence coheres with an overarching analytic structure—one in which every *dharma*’s arising, properties, and interconnections are logically entailed—our everyday causal inferences, and even our fundamental determinations of what a *dharma* is, could not securely attain genuine certainty. In this sense, *pratītyasamutpāda* itself functions as the analytic scaffolding that keeps the universal net of cause and effect conceptually coherent, thus grounding our knowledge claims on both the everyday (synthetic) and the metaphysical (analytic) levels.

³⁸ Bertrand Russell contended that the fundamental laws of physics are typically expressed through time-symmetric equations—relations that do not privilege any direction of cause and effect. See Bertrand Russell, “On the Notion of Cause”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 13 (1913): 1–26. In *The Analysis of Matter* (London: Kegan Paul, 1927), he similarly emphasised that physics relies on equivalences, rather than one-way causal operations, to capture its governing structures. This emphasis on symmetry resonates with the notion of “metaphysical symmetry” under discussion, in which a *dharma* and its attributes stand in a mutually entailing relationship: the *dharma* necessarily includes its full set of properties, and those properties, in turn, only cohere as aspects of that specific *dharma*.

4.2.4.3 *sahabhūhetu*

It is worth noting that in Sarvāstivāda literature, the discussion of predication and propositions is classified under “*sahabhūhetu*” (俱有因), or “co-present causes”. First, the Vaibhāṣikas clearly regard *lakṣaṇa* (能相, lit. “that which characterises”) and *lakṣya* (所相, lit. “that which is characterised”) as co-present causes.³⁹ In the analysis of a proposition, this pair corresponds to what we would call the predicative term and the subject term. In addition to their mutual causality, these pairing concepts are categorised as such because they bring about the same result. And since *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* are conceptual tools for breaking down and elucidating the deeper structure of a proposition, the result here is best understood as the successful ascertainment of what is being predicated:

The characteristic (相) and what is characterised (所相) are one and the same fruit; they certainly proceed together.

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 38:「相與所相是同一果, 決定俱行。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 198b11–12)

4.2.4.3.1 Mutual Causality at the Conceptual Level We should also note that, according to the Vaibhāṣikas, mental activity (*citta*) and mental concomitant activities (*caitasikas*)—that is, one’s consciousness of a *dharma*’s properties, along with the distinct modes or degrees of conceptualisation (from perception to sensation) corresponding to this *dharma*’s presence—are likewise classed as *sahabhūhetu*.⁴⁰ Not only do they jointly contribute to the same outcome, namely, understanding what a *dharma* is; they also qualify as mutual causes that explain each other:

What is *sahabhūhetu*? Mental activity is the *sahabhūhetu* for mental concomitant activities. Mental concomitant activities are the *sahabhūhetu* for mental activity. (*AMVŚ)

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 16:「云何俱有因? 答: 心與心所法為俱有因; 心所法與心為俱有因。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 81b17–19)

³⁹ Pradhan, AKBh, 83: “*sahabhūr ye mithaḥphalāḥ | bhūtavac cittacittānuvartilakṣaṇalakṣyavat ||*”

⁴⁰ Major modern scholarship on *sahabhūhetu*—for instance, Kenneth K. Tanaka, “Simultaneous Relation (Sahabhū-hetu): A Study in Buddhist Theory of Causation”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 8, no. 1 (1985): 91–111; Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*; and Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*—variously interprets it as an ontological principle (a real simultaneous causal link among *dharmas*), an epistemic requirement (ensuring object and cognition coincide), or a logical/definitional relation (like a thing and its inherent properties).

The Vaibhāṣikas fully recognise that in an **ontological** scheme where causes and effects are woven together in all directions, one’s knowledge of a *dharma* (that is, how one comes to understand “what a *dharma* is”) also becomes interlaced with cause-and-effect—yet at a **metaphysical** rather than **physical** level. Put differently, the explanation (*explanans*) and the object to be explained (*explanandum*) stand in an interchangeable relationship that mirrors causal interdependence, but operates within the conceptual plane of definitions and propositions (i.e. **internal/definitional causation**).

Crucially, this reciprocal explanation does not mean that, on the ontological (external/generative) side, a *dharma* that arises as an effect could suddenly regenerate its own prior cause. The Vaibhāṣikas limit the interchange of cause and effect to the **conceptual** realm, where the “*dharma*-as-bundle” interacts with the “bundled properties”, all within the sphere of **internal** causation.⁴¹ Likewise, the mere fact that subject and predicate can swap roles (so that each becomes *explanans* or *explanandum*) does not lead to circular reasoning. Instead, each pair of propositions forms a mutually necessary and sufficient condition, rather than a mere tautology. Taken as a whole, they point towards an analytic proposition that holds universally true, rather than lapsing into an infinite self-reference.

Vasubandhu, in AKBh, mentions a theoretical worry that the introduction of *sahabhūhetu* might confuse the arising order of cause and effect. However, that potential problem never actually occurs, precisely because *sahabhūhetu* refers only to the **conceptual** level—where definitions, properties, and explanations about what a *dharma* is are worked out—and not to the generation of the *dharma* itself. Hence, no *dharma* re-creates its own cause “backwards” in a causal sequence, nor do we end up with a circular loop in the actual unfolding of events.

⁴¹ 《俱舍論記》卷 6:「說一切有部答: 即由前說一有一切有、一無一切無, 互為因果理亦無違。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T41, no. 1821, p. 117c3–5)

Notes on AKBh: The Sarvāstivādins reply: “Based on the concept of mutual causality, the previous statement will be free from contradiction—if (you find that a *dharma*) has one property (that belongs to it, you will find that this *dharma*) has all properties (that belong to it); if (you find that a *dharma*) does not have one property (that is not supposed to belong to it, you will find that this *dharma*) does not have all properties (that are not supposed to belong to it).”

4.2.4.3.2 Saṃghabhadra’s Twofold Model of Causality Notably, although *AMVŚ does not explicitly cite the Buddha’s statements on the two modes of dependent origination in its discussion of *sahabhūhetu*, from the analysis above we can already see the profound homology between “predication/explanation” and “causation”. This connection would later be spelled out explicitly by Master Saṃghabhadra in *NyAŚ. For instance:

Now we shall briefly explain the properties of cause and effect, so as to show that they include *sahabhūhetu*. Specifically, in summarising various properties of causes, we have quoted the Bhagavān’s teaching that is frequently found throughout the *sūtras*: “When this is, that is; when this arises, that arises”, and conversely, “If this is not, or does not arise, then that is not, or does not arise.” Such is termed the “all-embracing property” of cause and effect. Here, the first proposition reveals the meaning of *sahabhūhetu*, while the second proposition explains “antecedent cause”. (*juan 15*)

《阿毘達磨順正理論》卷 15:「今當且為辯因果相, 即令知有俱生因果。謂前略舉諸因相中, 引薄伽梵處處經說: 依此有彼有, 此生故彼生; 與此相反, 非有非生, 如是名為因果總相。此中初顯俱生因義, 後文復顯前生因義。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1562, pp. 418c28–419a3)

Evidently, from Saṃghabhadra’s viewpoint, the Vaibhāṣika teaching aligns with the Buddha’s own words, even if *AMVŚ does not quote those lines verbatim.

4.2.4.3.3 Conceptual Concurrency Returning to the Vaibhāṣikas’ discussion of *sahabhūhetu*: they explicitly propose that, in apprehending a *saṃskṛtadharmā*, one must consciously recognise that a *saṃskṛtadharmā*, taken as a bundle, and its defining *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* (the property of being conditioned) form a paradigmatic pair of co-present causes:

Every conditioned *dharma* has birth, among its other (conditioned) properties, as its *sahabhūhetu*. (*AMVŚ, *juan 16*)

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 16:「一切有為法皆有生等相為俱有因故。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 82b1)

Here, in fact, the Vaibhāṣikas return to the challenge posed by various other schools, namely that the conditioned properties of a conditioned *dharma* cannot be decisively known (in the same way one knows a *dharma*’s objective colour or shape, *dravyataḥ*). The Vaibhāṣika response is to maintain that a *dharma*’s conditioned properties remain within the domain of mental activity and mental concomitant activities; and that one can attain the true knowledge of a conditioned *dharma* in an analytic sense through the crossroads of the path

of understanding the properties of being conditioned and the path of perceiving this very *dharma*.

In the Vaibhāṣika account of a *dharma*'s “conditioned properties”, one finds the statement that when a conditioned *dharma* arises, simultaneously nine *dharmanas* arise. Crucially, the expression “simultaneously... arise” refers not to generation in the sense of physical production, but to *conceptual* concurrency. They mutually ground and interpret one another. Likewise, the relationships among a *dharma* and its Four Primary Properties (四本法), and between those Four Primary Properties and their Four Auxiliary Properties (四隨法), rest on mutual causation and predication—indeed, forming two sets of necessary and sufficient conditions between the *dharma* and its Four Primary Properties and between those Four Primary Properties and their Four Auxiliary Properties.

We can also elaborate one point mentioned above: from the Vaibhāṣika perspective, *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* not only lay the foundation for each other; they jointly produce the same fruit, namely the truth-value of one's judgement about what that *dharma* is. Put differently, whether one proceeds *analytically*, from the *dharma*'s concept to its attributes, or *synthetically* (from a causal-theory angle) from the *dharma*'s attributes back to the *dharma*'s concept, if the resulting propositions are correct, both approaches describe the same metaphysical event.

4.2.4.3.4 Later Developments and a Mahāyāna Parallel This line of analysis is carried further in Saṃghabhadra's *Nyāś and, later still, finds a striking parallel in the *Mahāyāna Abhidharmasaṃgrahaśāstra* (大乘阿毘達磨雜集論), *juan* 11 (“Section on *dharma*”, 法品):

The term “investigation” (推求) means observation (觀察). The “investigation that provisionally establishes an own-entity” (自體假立尋思) means: within the correspondence between what expresses (能詮) and what is expressed (所詮) among the various *dharmanas*, one investigates an “own-entity” (自體), which is nothing but a provisional establishment of its nature as a cause of verbal expression (言說因性). The “correspondence between what expresses (能詮) and what is expressed (所詮)” means that these two mutually serve as causes for comprehension (互為領解因性).⁴² Why? One skilled in name-and-word usage (善名言者), merely hearing what expresses (能

⁴² Logically, this is a higher-order claim: it no longer characterises a first-order object but rather states something about the *relation* between what expresses and what is expressed—namely, that each is intelligible only through the other.

詮), through the gate of recollection (憶念門) thereby gives rise to comprehension regarding what is expressed (所詮); or, merely apprehending what is expressed, through the gate of recollection thereby gives rise to comprehension regarding what expresses. Within such correspondences jointly established among these kinds (如是種類共立相應中), the own-characteristic of “eye” and so on (眼等自相) is only provisionally established (唯是假立), since this name-and-word arises from the basis of verbal designation for “lumps of flesh” and the like (但於肉團等名言因中起此名言故). When one observes in this manner, it is called “the investigation that provisionally establishes an own-entity”.

《大乘阿毘達磨雜集論》卷11〈2法品〉：「推求者，是觀察義。自體假立尋思者，謂於諸法能詮、所詮相應中推求自體，唯是假立言說因性。能詮、所詮相應者，謂此二種互為領解因性。所以者何？善名言者但聞能詮，由憶念門便於所詮得生領解。或但得所詮，由憶念門便於能詮得生領解。於如是種類共立相應中，眼等自相唯是假立，但於肉團等名言因中起此名言故。若如是觀察，是名自體假立尋思。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T31, no. 1606, p. 745c5–13)

In the above citation, we see a clear exposition of how what expresses (能詮) and what is expressed (所詮) stand in a mutually clarifying relationship, with each side capable of illuminating the other.⁴³ This framework echoes the Sarvāstivāda–Vaibhāṣika conception of *sa-habhūhetu*, in which *dharma*s and their properties, viewed at the level of conceptual analysis, form mutual conditions for understanding what a *dharma* is. The text further highlights that the very act of “provisionally establishing an own-entity” (自體假立尋思) consists in tracing how, within such a nexus of what expresses and what is expressed, an “own-characteristic” (e.g. “eye”) becomes available as an object of discourse and predication—ultimately as no more than a name grounded in a naming-basis (e.g. a “lump of flesh”).

From the standpoint developed in § 4.2.4.3, we can see how this Mahāyāna Abhidharma text reinforces two core points of the Vaibhāṣika position:

1. A *dharma* and its properties (or, in the text’s terms, what is expressed and what expresses it) cooperate to yield authentic knowledge, and
2. The relationship between them, as worked out within such “investigation” (推求), is analytic rather than merely conventional.

⁴³ Hegel’s “speculative proposition” treats subject and predicate as interpenetrating: each appears as *explanans* and *explanandum* by turns, culminating in a seamless “reciprocity” (*Wechselwirkung*) that halts any infinite regress of cause and effect (G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 1812–1816). In contemporary analytic philosophy, ontic structural realists (OSR) argue that relational structure—not self-subsisting “substances”—forms the world’s bedrock, and that any apparent “object” is merely a node within a global web of relations (James Ladyman and Don Ross, *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007]). Both frameworks highlight a holistic net in which distinct roles of property-bearer and property (or subject and predicate) effectively collapse into an interdependent whole, paralleling the Sarvāstivāda notion of a fully integrated causal–predicative matrix.

Much as the passage describes, it is only by linking what expresses and what is expressed—that is, by recognising both their interdependence and the sufficiency of each to clarify the other—that one attains a valid grasp of the *dharma*'s “object-ness”. This precisely aligns with the Vaibhāṣikas' argument that *lakṣya* (所相) and *lakṣaṇa* (能相), and likewise a *dharma* and its *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa*, come together as a paradigmatic pair of coexistent causes. Both the *Mahāyāna Abhidharmasaṃgrahaśāstra* and the earlier Vaibhāṣika treatises thus affirm that our understanding of “what a *dharma* is” unfolds in a conceptual domain where subject and predicate, or explanandum and explanans, reciprocally define each other to yield a timelessly valid proposition.

4.2.4.4 Ninefold Properties: A Causal–Predicative Network

Building on our earlier examination of how a *saṃskṛtadharma* and its *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas* are understood as co-present and co-referential causes, we now turn to a more detailed analysis of how this concept of *sahabhūhetu* operates in its **property-structure**.

For a conditioned *dharma*, the crucial difference from an unconditioned *dharma* is that its **property-structure** must necessarily be instantiated in causal events (*vastu*). Thus, whenever a conditioned *dharma* arises, eight additional properties arise concurrently: the four primary properties (四本法) plus the four auxiliary properties (四隨法). On the one hand, **what** is a conditioned *dharma*? It consists of the properties of birth (生), abiding (住), alteration (異), and extinguishing (滅). On the other hand, **what** are primary properties? They too each entail birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing.

Concretely:

1. “This *dharma*” is a conditioned *dharma* because it possesses birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing.
2. Birth is of this *dharma* and is itself conditioned, because birth-of-birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing also make birth have these four aspects.
3. Abiding is of this *dharma* and is conditioned, because birth, abiding-of-abiding, alteration, and extinguishing cause abiding to have those four aspects.

4. Alteration is of this *dharma* and is conditioned, because birth, abiding, alteration-of-alteration, and extinguishing cause alteration to have those four aspects.
5. Extinguishing is of this *dharma* and is conditioned, because birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing-of-extinguishing likewise ensure extinguishing manifests those four aspects.
6. Birth-of-birth is of this birth and is itself conditioned because birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing ensure that “birth-of-birth” also includes those four features.
7. Abiding-of-abiding is of this abiding and is conditioned for the same reason: each of birth, alteration, and extinguishing instantiates it.
8. Alteration-of-alteration is of this alteration and is conditioned in the same pattern.
9. Extinguishing-of-extinguishing is of this extinguishing and is conditioned, again by birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing, thus completing the cycle.

We see that the Sarvāstivādins’ “four primary + four auxiliaries + the root property itself” scheme not only clarifies **why** a *dharma* is conditioned—i.e. it is subject to these nine interlocking functions—but also clarifies **what** that *dharma* is: a structure of nine properties, each referencing the same network of causes. With fewer than nine, the explanation would not fully close; with more than nine, it would become redundant.

Crucially, in enumerating these nine aspects, any concept acting as the **subject** in one proposition reappears as the **predicate** in another. Once the four auxiliary properties are introduced, every item in the system can serve as both explanans and explanandum without falling into infinite regress. If an explanation had to keep introducing new concepts to justify each property’s cause, the system would not clarify anything. Hence, the Sarvāstivāda insight that the “subject” (所相) and “predicate” (能相) are inseparable—and can interchange roles—reveals a universal interlinkage of *dharmanas*.

From a more classical perspective, one might wonder, “Does this risk undermining a notion of an irreducible substance?” Indeed, for the Sarvāstivādins, no *dharma* serves as a pure substrate that only **receives** properties but never itself **becomes** a property. In their view,

everything is so deeply intertwined in the total matrix of causal–predicative relationships that every *dharma* can be the property or predicate of other *dharmanas*.

4.2.4.5 Analytic Relation of Subject and Predicate

A further question arises: in an actual statement “What is a *dharma*?” how precisely do the subject and its properties relate? As established, the Sarvāstivādins’ ontological stance holds that a *dharma* and its attributes coincide **analytically**—all possible properties of that *dharma* are already contained in the *dharma*’s concept, forming a *necessary-and-sufficient* relationship. By introducing *lakṣya* (所相, the characterised locus/subject) and *lakṣaṇa* (能相, the characteristic/predicate), the Sarvāstivādins provide a more concrete tool to navigate this metaphysical knot. Consider the following Vaibhāṣika articulation:

“Some other masters say: ‘*Lakṣaṇa* (能相) and *lakṣya* (所相) are different.’ One asks: ‘If so, how is it that one does not take some other *lakṣaṇa* as the *lakṣaṇa*?’ The reply: ‘There is no such fault. *Lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*, from beginningless time, mutually belong to one another. Further, *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*, from beginningless time, are always conjoined, not separated, constantly following one another, dwelling intermingled.’ The Venerable Vasumitra spoke thus: ‘*Lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* are different; yet the various *lakṣaṇas* arise in dependence on the *lakṣya*, like smoke depends on fire. Therefore one does not take some other *lakṣaṇa* as the *lakṣaṇa*. Further, since *lakṣaṇa* is the *lakṣya*’s fault (過患), although they are not separated, they are distinct; just as illness is a person’s fault: although not separated, each is distinct. If illness and person were not different, then when the illness is cured, the person too should be absent.’”

(*AMVŚ, *juan* 39)

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 39:「有餘師說: 相、所相異。問: 若爾云何不以餘相為相? 答: 無如是失。能相、所相從無始來互相屬故。復次, 能相、所相從無始來恒和合故、不相離故、常相隨故、相雜住故。尊者世友作如是說: 相、所相異, 然諸能相依所相起, 如煙依火。是故不以餘相為相。復次, 能相既是所相過患, 雖不相離而相不同, 如病既是人之過患, 雖不相離而相各別。若病與人相不異者, 其病若愈人亦應無。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 202a17–26)

Two claims are held together here. First, *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* are said to be “different” (異), so the characteristic/predicate-aspect is not simply identical with the characterised/subject-aspect. Second, this difference is explicitly denied to be a separation: they “mutually belong” from beginningless time, are “always conjoined” and “not separated”, “constantly follow” one another, and “dwell intermingled”. The smoke–fire simile then makes the anti-arbitrariness point in the most literal way: the *lakṣaṇa* is something that *arises in dependence on* the *lakṣya*, and so cannot be swapped out at will. Yet the illness simile blocks a collapse into strict identity: illness is inseparable from the person who is ill, but it is not the person.

In the present reconstruction, this is precisely the structure of a genuine proposition “A is B”: B is not an external add-on, but something grounded in A and co-belonging with it, even though A cannot be reduced to B.⁴⁴

Because the Sarvāstivādins treat **causation and predication** as a single conceptual network, no *dharma* can remain a “pure subject” that never becomes another’s predicate. Every *dharma* is woven into the total “why/what” continuum. Far from implying a rigid determinism, this notion reflects a universal **interdependence**: each *dharma* can arise as the property of another, so every proposition “A is B” emerges as an **analytic** judgement. In other words, the “necessity” or “inevitability” stems from the fact that, once we fully grasp the entire field of a *dharma*’s relations—once we see how its attributes necessarily entail and are entailed by it—every claim about that *dharma* follows with logical inevitability. “**Why** it is” and “**what** it is” meet in a single analytic proposition.

In Sarvāstivāda usage, the timeless bond between subject and predicate is literally described as “no beginning” (從無始來). This is not a report about a first moment in time, but a way of marking that the *lakṣya*–*lakṣaṇa* tie is not established by an ad hoc stipulation. In this spirit one may compare the grammatical maxim attributed to Kātyāyana, *lakṣyalakṣaṇe vyākaraṇam*, i.e. that grammar is concerned with *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*. From the standpoint of “*astitva*” (the doctrine of “X is Y”), if a given *dharma* stands in the role of *lakṣya* (subject), then its *lakṣaṇa* (predicate) must be linked to it in precisely this non-arbitrary way. This co-belonging follows from the same **necessity** that secures the *dharma*’s inherent completeness and the non-random matching of subject and predicate within the Sarvāstivādins’ thorough cause–effect network.

⁴⁴ A parallel emphasis on necessary subject–predicate ties—where the predicate reveals the subject’s very essence—appears in a range of Western and Indian philosophies. In the West, Aristotle distinguishes essential from accidental predication; Leibniz contends that any true predicate is “contained” in the subject; Kant and Frege focus on analytically necessary judgements; while Hegel and Bradley stress the internal, non-external nature of genuine predication. In Indian thought, Bhartṛhari’s *sphoṭa* theory and Nyāya’s doctrine of inherence (*samavāya*) both underscore the non-arbitrary unity of subject and attribute, mirroring the Sarvāstivāda claim that a *dharma*’s defining property remains inseparable from that *dharma*’s very being.

4.2.4.5.1 Valid Cognition of Causal Properties It is commonly agreed among Buddhist sects that *rūpa* (form or visible property) is an objective property that is always connected to its subject. That is to say, whenever we perceive that there is an object, we at the same time conceive its form. They are always bound together and never separable. And the visible property is, qua object, constant and static and therefore acts like an object. These kinds of properties constitute precisely the domain of “valid cognition” or *pramāṇa*, because the knowledge gained about them and their subject–object pair is always true. In the later Vaibhāṣika tradition, a *dharma*’s immutable, timelessly correlated properties are defined as its *yathābhūta* (實有) attributes, distinct from any conventional characteristics that might arise through further mental constructions—such as being named as something else in a different region.

However, the properties such as “birth”, “abiding”, “alteration”, or “extinguishing”, which must unfold over time within causal events, clearly cannot be grasped by that type of “valid cognition”. Hence, from the Sautrāntika standpoint, if such cognitive certainty cannot apprehend these four properties, then these properties cannot exist qua object (*dravyataḥ*). We already know that the Vaibhāṣikas maintain that the properties of a *saṃskṛtadharmā* that hold *qua* event (*vastunaḥ*)—that is, as unfolding in causal sequences—are necessarily instantiated and are likewise timelessly connected with their subject–predicate pair. From that angle, a Vaibhāṣika rebuttal is to be expected, and indeed it appears—though it is woven so tightly into the Sautrāntikas’ own counter-arguments that one must disentangle the two. We therefore present the full passage first; the next subsection will unpack this compressed piece of intellectual history step by step.

Vaibhāṣika: The *sūtra* states: “It is indeed discernible that (in) the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*), there is arising, passing away, and abiding—transformation (*sthiti–anyathātvam*).”

Sautrāntika: Love-of-gods knows the text but does not know its intention. Bhagavān also declared that the intention is what we shall **rely** on. What, then, is the intention here? Ignorant beings, blinded by nescience, cling to the flow of conditioning (*saṃskārapravāha*) as if it were a self or belonged to a self. In order to dispel that false assumption, Bhagavān, wishing to illustrate that the very flow of conditioning is conditioned, namely, dependently arisen (*pratītyasamutpanna*), as its nature, spoke these words: “There are three conditioned properties of the conditioned.” (By saying so), Bhagavān did not intend to propose that “for every conditioned *dharma*, it instantiates three properties in a single instant”. For arising and so forth in a single instant cannot be

discernible, and if they cannot be discernible, they cannot be properties. Because of this intention, the *sūtra* says: “It is indeed discernible that (in) the conditioned (*saṃskṛta*), there is arising, passing away, and abiding–transformation (*sthiti–anyathātvam*).” The text uses the term “conditioned” twice, so one will understand that “to be conditioned means exactly to have these three properties”. One must not construe it as “the property of being conditioned, qua event, has three properties” in the same manner as the water’s existence is indicated by herons. Moreover, one must not do so as if the property of a girl’s face has further properties of being good-looking or bad-looking.

yat tarhi sūtra uktam “saṃskṛtasyotpādo ’pi prajñāyate vyayo ’pi sthityanyathātvam apīti” | granthajñō devānām priyo na tv arthajñāḥ | arthas ca pratiśaraṇam uktam bhagavatā | kaḥ punar asyārthah | avidyāndhā hi bālāḥ saṃskārapravāham ātmāna ātmīyatas cādhimuktā abhiṣvajante | tasya mithyād-himokṣasya vyāvarttanārtham bhagavāms tasya saṃskārapravāhasya saṃskṛtatvam pratīyasamut-pannatām dyotayitukāma idam āha “triṇīmāni saṃskṛtasya saṃskṛtalakṣaṇāni” | na tu kṣaṇasya | na hi kṣaṇasyotpādādāyāḥ prajñāyante | na cāprajñāyamānā ete lakṣaṇam bhavitum arhanti | atha evātra sūtre “saṃskṛtasyotpādo ’pi prajñāyate” ity uktam | punaḥ saṃskṛtagrahaṇam saṃskṛtatve lakṣaṇānīti yathā vijñāyeta | maivam vijñāyi saṃskṛtasya vastuno ’stīve lakṣaṇāni jalavalākāvat sādḥvasādutve vā kanyālakṣaṇavad iti⁴⁵

Thus, while the Sautrāntikas stress direct perceptibility, the Vaibhāṣikas posit an analytic inevitability that includes these eventive properties—though not necessarily discernible in a single flash of perception.

It is worth noting that while we have grown accustomed to four defining properties of a conditioned *dharma* in our prior discussions of Sarvāstivāda philosophy, the canonical text that the Sautrāntikas and Vaibhāṣikas cite here identifies only three—arising (*utpāda*), passing away (*vyaya*), and abiding–transformation (*sthityanyathā*)—as collectively “the properties of the conditioned”. However, this discrepancy does not affect my main point: whether the text references three or four properties, it refers fundamentally to the same underlying set of conditioned attributes.

The next subsection therefore takes up the epistemic question that remains unresolved: *in what sense* can these event-properties be known if they elude direct perception?

⁴⁵ Pradhan, AKBh, 76–77. 《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷 5〈2 分別根品〉：「若爾，何故契經中言：有為之起亦可了知，盡及住異亦可了知。天愛！汝等執文迷義，薄伽梵說義是所依。何謂此經所說實義？謂愚夫類無明所盲，於行相續執我我所，長夜於中而生耽著。世尊為斷彼執著故，顯行相續體是有為及緣生性，故作是說有三有為之有為相，非顯諸行一刹那中具有三相，由一刹那起等三相不可知故。非不可知應立為相，故彼契經復作是說：有為之起亦可了知，盡及住異亦可了知。然經重說有為言者，令知此相表是有為，勿謂此相表有為有，如居白鷺表水非無。亦勿謂表有為善惡，如童女相表善非善。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 27b26–c10)

4.2.4.5.2 Further Thoughts on the Analytic Relationship between a Subject and Its Properties Building on that epistemic challenge, we now examine how Vaibhāṣikas extend the analytic framework to the whole range of a *dharma*'s dynamic properties.

To begin with, we may recall that for the Vaibhāṣikas, any static (object-mode) property of a *dharma* (viewed qua object) is analytic—since conceptual necessity and sufficiency bind it. Yet in their account, the *dharma*'s dynamic, event-like properties (viewed qua event) also possess this same analytic structure on the epistemic level. In other words, for the Vaibhāṣikas, the entire scope of a *dharma*'s properties—static or dynamic—comprises necessary and sufficient conditions that define what the *dharma* is, whether qua *dravya* or qua *vastu*.

Because this Vaibhāṣika perspective appears embedded within Vasubandhu's presentation of the Sautrāntika critique, we must carefully examine the debate to reconstruct the Vaibhāṣikas' own reasoning.

Their point of contention hinges on how to interpret the *sūtra*'s line “*triṇīmāni saṃskṛtasya saṃskṛtalakṣaṇāni*”. Based on context, the Vaibhāṣikas quote it to refute the Sautrāntikas' assertion that birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing (生住異滅) cannot be known. Since the Buddha explicitly refers to these “conditioned” properties, the Vaibhāṣikas contend that we can indeed know them—though perhaps not in the particular sense the Sautrāntikas have proposed. Moreover, these properties are not analogous to a merely static property (“chili peppers must necessarily be spicy”); rather, they are “*saṃskṛtasya vastuno 'stitve lakṣaṇāni*”, i.e. **properties instantiated when a *dharma* is considered in the sense of an event**. This dovetails with the earlier phrase “*eṣāṃ dravyato 'stitve*”, confirming that the Vaibhāṣikas distinguish a *dharma* qua *dravya* from the same *dharma* qua *vastu*—a key point in our reconstruction of the Vaibhāṣika view.

Because both Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas rest their entire conceptual framework on what a conditioned *dharma* is taken to mean, this disagreement carries great importance. To make sense of how each side argues, let us revisit the main lines of exchange. The Sautrāntikas previously stated that birth, abiding, alteration, and extinguishing should

not be treated (as they claim the Vaibhāṣikas do) as four properties that differ from the *dharma*'s self-property (自法) and arise simultaneously with it. Instead, Sautrāntikas see those conditioned properties as what constitute the *dharma* itself. For them, if these aspects were truly distinct from the *dharma*'s own nature, they should be independently perceptible. Yet, they add, no direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), or scriptural statement (*āgama*) establishes them. By analogy, the Vaibhāṣikas' "root plus eight other properties" looks like a hidden pond plus eight visible herons: the pond (the *dharma*'s self) remains unseen, so the eight herons alone would be known, rendering the entire theory pointless.

To defend their position, the Vaibhāṣikas quote the *sūtra* ("three conditioned properties of the conditioned") to claim that birth, abiding, and so on are indeed knowable. The Sautrāntikas respond by saying, "You merely know the words without grasping their intention." They argue that the text's primary aim is to cure people's mistaken grasping—those unaware that the flow of conditionings (*saṃskārapravāha*) is dependently arisen, non-self. Consequently, describing the "conditioned" was intended to demonstrate *pratītyasamutpāda*, not that one can co-perceive all four aspects in a single moment. For the Sautrāntikas, references to "birth", "passing away", and "abiding-alteration" each apply to distinct processes, so they cannot be conceived in a single instant.

The Vaibhāṣikas then ask, "If the *sūtra* does not establish two discrete strata within the conditioned, why does it say 'saṃskṛta' (conditioned) twice?" The Sautrāntikas reply that this repetition serves only to underscore how the same *dharma* intrinsically is these three properties, rather than to posit a root property plus additional layers. Meanwhile, the Vaibhāṣikas had read "being an event" (*vastu*) and "being an entity" (*dravya*) as dual facets of a single *dharma*. The Sautrāntikas reject such layering, insisting that it is pointless to further explain properties using further properties. The Sautrāntikas continue with an example: just like the property of a girl's face is exactly how she looks, there will be no use in proposing two external properties as good-looking and bad-looking in order to know how she looks.

Still, both Sautrāntikas and Vaibhāṣikas uphold *sarvam asti* in the sense that “a *dharma* is indeed the totality of its definitional properties”. Where they diverge is that the Vaibhāṣikas assert the “root *dharma*” (本法) is itself one more property, over and above being a mere name for the sum of attributes. In Vaibhāṣika logic, the “root *dharma*” does not simply label a set; it acts as a predicate that confers unity upon the eight other properties, unifying and bundling them all as “belonging to this one and the same *dharma*”. This move is philosophically profound and represents a distinctly higher-order manoeuvre. The “root *dharma*” is no longer a mere substance or a name for a collection (a first-order concept), but has been elevated to a second-order property whose very function is to operate upon other, first-order properties. It predicates “unity” or “belonging-to-this-bundle” of the other eight attributes, thereby ensuring the bundle’s coherence. This higher-order function is what the Sautrāntikas, with their flatter, more empirical ontology, fail to grasp.

The Sautrāntikas, by contrast, see the root *dharma* only as a convenient term for that entire collection. Hence, the Vaibhāṣikas see special significance in the *sūtra*’s repeated usage of “conditioned”—to stress that the *dharma* itself can serve as an additional property, rather than merely signifying a cluster of eight.

Although Vasubandhu generally sides with the Sautrāntikas, he does not record a Vaibhāṣika counterargument in detail. Yet we can still reconstruct one from other Vaibhāṣika material and from Vasubandhu’s quotations and refutations. If we take the Vaibhāṣika side for now, we will notice that the Sautrāntikas build extra premises onto the text (that “arising” must be literally perceptible, that “*saṃskārapravāha*” is known in a single homogeneous *pramāṇa*, etc.). The Vaibhāṣikas object that the *sūtra* literally means birth, abiding, and so forth are also objective properties—not perceivable in the exact “one-moment” sense the Sautrāntikas imagine.

Furthermore, the Vaibhāṣikas do not claim that a *dharma*’s self property plus four primary and four auxiliary properties must be perceived in a single moment. Rather, as previously discussed, all nine are inseparably linked in a timeless sense—once the root appears,

these eight analytically appear, yet each gets instantiated in turn. Think of the “triangle having 180° interior angles” example: conceptually inseparable, but not necessarily proven in one glance of the senses. The proposition that “all nine arise at once” indicates inseparability, not that they must be observed at once. However rapid the process, the properties still arise one after another, in strict sequence.

On a “timeless” level, all these are necessarily bound. On a “phenomenological” level, the entire chain from birth to extinguishing transpires so quickly as to be called a *kṣaṇa*. The Vaibhāṣikas thus find their model “not incorrect”, even if it might not be their ultimate explanation. After all, we have seen how the notion of “stages” (*avasthā*, 𑖅𑖛) could supplant older *kṣaṇa*-based accounts. Nonetheless, *AMVŚ shows some Vaibhāṣikas continuing to speak of “three aspects in one *kṣaṇa*”, provided that “one *kṣaṇa*” is understood as an extremely rapid sequence rather than a single atomic instant.

Hence, the Sautrāntika critique hardly undermines the Vaibhāṣikas’ position; it only highlights different ways of conceptualising properties. The Vaibhāṣikas maintain that a *dharma* encompasses both a *dravya*-aspect (static, definitional) and a *vastu*-aspect (causally dynamic), whereas the Sautrāntikas condense these into one empirical stratum. The Vaibhāṣikas prefer a two-tier logic: for any conditioned *dharma*, (1) all its properties are conceptually and timelessly contained in it, and (2) these properties will be caused to instantiate through causal events. The Buddha’s double mention of “*saṃskṛta*” corresponds respectively to (1) and (2), with the second (*vastu*) aspect further explicated by “birth, passing away, and abiding-transformation”. Based on this metaphysical scheme, the Vaibhāṣikas propose that a *dharma*’s properties in both senses can be equally known analytically and thus refute the Sautrāntikas’ charge that there is no valid knowledge of conditioned properties viewed qua event.

4.2.5 Synthesis and Conclusion

In the Vaibhāṣika tradition, the last pivotal step in arguing for *sarvam asti* is to validate that the recognition of a conditioned *dharma*’s event-aspect instantiation of its properties is like-

wise an analytic judgement. As we have continually stressed, a conditioned *dharma* considered qua object (*dravyataḥ*) conceptually and timelessly contains all its properties, and a *dharma* considered qua event (*vastunaḥ*) likewise conceptually and timelessly contains all its dynamic attributes. A conditioned *dharma*, therefore, does not merely have static properties that are necessarily attributable at the definitional level; it also includes dynamic properties in its complete profile, properties whose actual instantiation is phased through causal events.

At first glance, the Vaibhāṣika stance might appear somewhat “extreme”, yet it is simply a natural extension of the fundamental Buddhist doctrine that all *dharmanas* are causes of all other *dharmanas*, apart from themselves, within a vast interlinking causal network. The predominance of this network—already in force prior to any given *dharma*’s definitional instantiation—dictates that every prospective property is contained conceptually and analytically within that *dharma* from the outset. That, in turn, yields another corollary: to know what a *dharma* is means to know its cause. Conversely, we are able to know what a *dharma* is precisely because a *dharma* is “nothing more and nothing less” than the totality of its definitional properties. Grasping that totality is tantamount to grasping *pratītyasamutpāda*, and realising *pratītyasamutpāda* is liberation. Thus, the Vaibhāṣikas’ tightly interlocking set of premises unites the three key frameworks of Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology—culminating in *sarvam asti* as the fundamental axiom that secures all three.

The temporal reading just defended should therefore be understood as a specification of the broader predicational thesis, not as its replacement. We have previously emphasised that *sarvam* in the Sarvāstivāda viewpoint can be parsed in multiple ways. Among the narrower articulations of this broader *sarvam*, the reading in terms of *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* is especially important, because it shows how completeness is expressed within the eventive life of conditioned *dharmanas*. As we have shown, the Vaibhāṣikas hold that “to be a conditioned *dharma*” implies entry into causal relationships, so all its properties (both *dravya*-aspect static ones and *vastu*-aspect dynamic ones) must be exhaustively and analytically contained in that *dharma*’s very concept. Since a conditioned *dharma* is necessarily

subject to causality, it thereby manifests two aspects—an object dimension and an event dimension. To focus on the event dimension is simply to underscore that it must also have *adhvan* as its property, for the *adhvan* of past, future, and present is how a *dharma*'s participation in causal events is articulated.

In turn, we come to see that knowledge of a *dharma*'s event status remains analytic as well: we interpret a *dharma*'s “what it is” in causal-phase terms—whether it be *atīta*, *anāgata*, or *pratyutpanna*. Recognising such phases amounts to affirming that this eventive attribute is no less inherently belonging to the *dharma* than its object-level property. Furthermore, by establishing an “order of predication”, the Vaibhāṣikas extend an originally implicit schema—found in earlier Buddhist thought—where causation and predication interweave. In so doing, they elaborate a hierarchical interpretative structure among a *dharma*'s conditioned attributes without devolving into fatalistic determinism. Rather, they posit that all *dharmanas* universally submit to causality, yet simultaneously are open to expansive explanation by virtue of “what they are” qua object and qua event. The result is a philosophical scheme in which everything (and every property) is thoroughly interdependent and mutually explainable, and yet not forced into a rigid determinism—because nothing absolutely and eternally functions as the dominating subject.

Still, the Vaibhāṣikas insist that *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* must be recognised not as simplistic “past, present, and future”, but as phases within causal events themselves. Indeed, they tie these three phases to the logic of *pratītyasamutpāda*, so that each conditioned *dharma*'s “what it is” also elucidates “why it has arisen”.

The preceding sections established a formal architecture: the ninefold matrix, the causation–predication isomorphism, and the modal proof that every conditioned predicate occupies a unique node in the causal lattice. That architecture was reconstructed from mature Vaibhāṣika sources. The question now is whether the earliest textual strata already point toward the same structure, or whether the temporal vocabulary developed independently. The following sections return to early Buddhist texts to show that the formal

results just derived illuminate—and are corroborated by—pre-Vaibhāṣika reflections on how temporal markers attach to a *dharma*'s causal career.

4.3 The Three *adhvans* and *pratītyasamutpāda*

4.3.1 Early Buddhist Texts on *asti*, *adhvan*, and *pratītyasamutpāda*

Here we must give special consideration to the relationship between the twelve links of dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and the Buddhist philosophy of time. In fact, the earliest systematic reflections on “time” in Buddhism emerged through inquiries into *pratītyasamutpāda*. In other words, from the outset, Buddhism treated “time” as the unfolding of causal events, so that what we call “time segments” are in fact the distinct stages—“phases” or “positions” (*avasthā*)—of a causal sequence.⁴⁶ It is also noteworthy that early discussions of the twelve links (*dvādaśāṅga*) extended well beyond the *adhvan*-based concepts.⁴⁷ By attending to these earlier explorations, we can more precisely understand how the theory of the twelve links left such a profound mark on the Sarvāstivāda defence and exposition of *sarvam asti*.

⁴⁶ Cf. K. N. Jayatilleke, “The Theory of Causation”, in *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1963), 760–782; and Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda*, chap. 5, 144–148.

⁴⁷ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 24:「謂或有處說一緣起: 謂一切有為法總名緣起。如說: 云何緣起? 謂一切有為法。或復有處說二緣起: 謂因與果。或復有處說三緣起: 謂三世別, 或煩惱、業及事為三。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 122a10–13)

*AMVŚ: In some contexts, it is said that *pratītyasamutpāda* is understood as one: this refers to all conditioned *dharmas*, collectively called “*pratītyasamutpāda*”. As the text says: “What is *pratītyasamutpāda*? It is all conditioned *dharmas*.” In other contexts, it is said that *pratītyasamutpāda* is understood as two, namely cause and result. And in yet other contexts, it is said that *pratītyasamutpāda* is understood as three, which may be explained by distinguishing the three *adhvans*, or by grouping them as *kleśa*, *karma*, and *vastu*.

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 24:「復次, 此十二支緣起法, 有二續三分。二續者, 謂識與生能續生故。三分者, 謂煩惱、業、事。無明愛取是煩惱, 行有是業, 餘支是事。有餘師說: 二續者, 謂行有續後有故。三分者, 謂三世。又十二支攝為三聚, 謂煩惱、業、苦如名三聚。亦名三集、三有、三道, 隨相應知。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 122b11–17)

*AMVŚ: Furthermore, these twelve links of *pratītyasamutpāda* can be approached in terms of ‘two continuities’ (二續) and ‘three divisions’ (三分). The two continuities are *viññāna* (識) and *jāti* (生), because they function to perpetuate further rebirth. The three divisions are *kleśa*, *karma*, and *vastu*. Among them, *avidyā* (無明), *taṇhā* (愛), and *upādāna* (取) count as *kleśa*; *saṃskāra* (行) and *bhava* (有) count as *karma*; while the remaining links are classed as *vastu*. Some other masters explain that the ‘two continuities’ are *saṃskāra* (行) and *bhava* (有), because they continue into future rebirth, and that the ‘three divisions’ refer to the three *adhvans*. Moreover, these twelve links can be grouped into three categories (三聚), namely *kleśa*, *karma*, and *duḥkha*. They are also called the ‘three accumulations,’ the ‘three beings,’ or the ‘three ways,’ to be understood according to which properties are being discussed.

As previously stated, the principle “*asmin satīdaṃ bhavati, asyotpādād idam utpadyate*” is essentially twofold. First, there is definitional or predicative causation, such as “Because it is an apple, therefore it is a fruit”, or “Because it is a poem, therefore its arrangement of sounds follows a certain pattern”. Second, there is generative causation, which is the more familiar sense of one thing arising from another: “Given the arising of X, Y arises”. In the source text, “*asmin satīdaṃ bhavati*” employs the copular verb (*asti*, “is”), while “*asyotpādād idam utpadyate*” uses more eventive verbs denoting physical occurrence or birth. For various reasons, modern understanding of Buddhist causality often emphasises only the second half—generative causation—and reinterprets the first half’s *asti* as an intransitive “exists”.⁴⁸ The first half of this chapter sought to show that *asti* should remain a copula, preserving the tradition of *astitva* explored in Buddhist philosophy, especially by the Sarvāstivādins. Now, we will turn to generative causation explicitly, demonstrating that it, too, becomes subsumed within the philosophical axiom of *sarvam asti*.

The volume of material on the twelvefold dependent origination is vast. Below, we will selectively highlight dimensions that illuminate the Sarvāstivāda conception of *adhvan*. The first aspect to note is the establishment of the “three *adhvans*” as essential to clarifying the twelve links:

The dependent origination has twelve links and three sections...

These three sections are “before”, “after”, and “in the middle”, divided into past lives, next lives, and present lives.

sa pratītyasamutpādo dvādaśāṅgaḥ trikāṇḍakaḥ ...

trīṇi kāṇḍāni pūrvāparāntamadhyāny atītānāgatapratyutpannāni janmāni | kathameṣu trikāṇḍeṣu dvādaśāṅgāni vyavasthāpyante |⁴⁹

From our everyday folk conception, we ordinarily think of past, present, and future as vantage points relative to our observations: we judge whether an event is “past”, “present”,

⁴⁸ As Gombrich has translated *paṭiccasamuppāda* as “conditioned genesis”, see Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began—The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teachings* (London & New York: Routledge, 1996). For an insightful survey of modern Buddhological interpretations of causality, see Dhivan Thomas Jones, “This Being, That Becomes: Reconsidering the *imasmiṃ sati* Formula in Early Buddhism”, *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 45 (2022): 119–55, particularly 139–44. Jones also proposes that this formula served to explain inner experience, thus regarding the “principle of conditionality” as a profound framework for discovery and explanation.

⁴⁹ Pradhan, AKBh, 131.

or “future” based on our own location in time. But in AKBh’s explanation, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* are determined not by an observer’s vantage but by the causal stage the event has reached, quite apart from whether anyone is actually witnessing it. As we have stressed, if we label an event “present” in common parlance, it means it occurs concurrently with the act of our describing it, but that has nothing to do with whether the event itself is in the “early”, “middle”, or “late” portion of its causal unfolding. The *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* in this context refer to three successive segments or phases of the entire process of the twelve links.

Far from being a mere invention of the sectarian period, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* in this sense already appear in embryonic form in early *sūtras*—occasionally even bringing together the two sorts of causation. One example is SN 12.20: *Paccayasutta*:

yato kho, bhikkhave, ariyasāvakaṃ ayaṅca paṭiccasamuppādo, ime ca paṭiccasamuppannā dhammā ya-thābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya sudiṭṭhā honti, so vata pubbantam vā paṭidhāvissati ahosiṃ nu kho ahaṃ atītam addhānaṃ, nanu kho ahosiṃ atītam addhānaṃ, kiṃ nu kho ahosiṃ atītam addhānaṃ, kathaṃ nu kho ahosiṃ atītam addhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ ahosiṃ nu kho ahaṃ atītam addhānanti; aparantaṃ vā upadhāvissati bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ anāgatam addhānaṃ, nanu kho bhavissāmi anāgatam addhānaṃ, kiṃ nu kho bhavissāmi anāgatam addhānaṃ, kathaṃ nu kho bhavissāmi anāgatam addhānaṃ, kiṃ hutvā kiṃ bhavissāmi nu kho ahaṃ anāgatam addhānanti; etarahi vā paccuppannaṃ addhānaṃ ajjhataṃ kathaṅkathī bhavissati ahaṃ nu khosmi, no nu khosmi, kiṃ nu khosmi, kathaṃ nu khosmi, ayaṃ nu kho satto kuto āgato, so kuhiṃ gamissatī⁵⁰

“When, bhikkhus, a noble disciple has clearly seen with correct wisdom as it really is this dependent origination and these dependently arisen phenomena, it is impossible that he will run back into the past, thinking: ‘Did I exist in the past? Did I not exist in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past?’ Or that he will run forward into the future, thinking: ‘Will I exist in the future? Will I not exist in the future? What will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? Having been what, what will I become in the future?’ Or that he will now be inwardly confused about the present thus: ‘Do I exist? Do I not exist? What am I? How am I? This being—where has it come from, and where will it go?’
...⁵¹

Beneath its seemingly straightforward surface, this passage poses a crucial grammatical question: *atītam addhānaṃ* and *anāgatam addhānaṃ* appear in the accusative, though translator Bhikkhu Bodhi treats them as locative. In the Pāli tradition, an accusative used outside its standard function often denotes a duration (*kāladdhāna*) rather than a single time

⁵⁰ M. Léon Feer, ed. *Samyutta-Nikāya*, Part II, *Nidāna-Vagga* (London: Published for the Pali Text Society by Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press Warehouse, 1888): 26–27.

⁵¹ Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Samyutta Nikaya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003), 552.

point. Thus, *atītam addhānaṃ* and *anāgatam addhānaṃ* might be better rendered as “for the duration of the past” or “for the duration of the future”, rather than “in the past/future”. As we have argued, *adhvan* in the Sarvāstivāda sense indeed refers to a “stretch” or “span” of causal events. Interestingly, these lines also hint at a distinction between *asti* as existential (when placed at the beginning of a sentence) and *asti* as a true copula (when placed at the end), forming a progressive predicative structure. Ultimately, the passage returns us to the question “In what way does a person exist (or not exist)?”—pointing back to the Sarvāstivāda principle *sarvam asti*, since the properties a person possesses define how that person exists. Indeed, the Sarvāstivāda philosophical inquiry into a *dharma*’s complete set of properties consistently sought to clarify two of the Buddha’s key questions: “What am I?” and “How am I?”—that is, the *yathābhūta* of a person.

Hence, for the Buddha, confusion over past, future, and present arises because one lacks a coherent explanatory framework. Once the theory of dependent origination is introduced, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *paccuppanna* are reinterpreted as phases of a causal event, and that triple confusion vanishes. The more systematic philosophical elaborations of these time/causality elements in the twelve links came later, especially under the Sarvāstivādins. As the excerpt from AKBh cited above shows, the Sarvāstivāda tradition extended the *adhvan* model from the context of the twelve links, where it was originally developed.

4.3.2 *pratīyasamutpanna*’s Being Analysed into *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*

If we suspend applying conventional translations to *atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*, the close correlation between these three and *pratīyasamutpāda/pratīyasamutpanna* becomes more apparent. Note that *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* are all past participles, which in Sarvāstivāda texts specifically denote the completion of some property’s instantiation. This stands out more vividly when the same text also uses cognate present participles or action nouns—one sees the Sarvāstivādins’ meticulous distinction between a property’s ongoing generation and its fully instantiated status. For example, in *AMVŚ, *juan* 23, we find re-

marks such as: “If a *dharma* is in the mode of arising, it is *pratītyasamutpāda*; if it has arisen, it is *pratītyasamutpanna*.”⁵²

From the Buddha’s initial exposition of *pratītyasamutpāda* through the Vaibhāṣikas, *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna* retained their special causality-laden logic, distinct from ordinary chronological labels. In earlier Indian grammar, “past, future, present” were *bhūta*, *bhaviṣyat*, and *vartamāna*, not the three past participles that the Ābhidharmikas employ. By adopting *atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna* instead of *bhūta*, *bhaviṣyat*, *vartamāna*, Buddhist philosophers signalled that they were not discussing mere chronological “when”, but rather “which phase” in a causal sequence. Meanwhile, in the older Indian tradition, *dravya* was defined as *svabhāvasiddha*—something that has its nature completely instantiated.⁵³ Since *siddha* itself is a past participle, once the Sarvāstivādins speak of a *dharma* qua *dravya*, they are already moving beyond the usual notion of temporal flow, because *dravya* is treated as “outside time”; accordingly, talk of a *dharma* in terms of *dravyataḥ* is not intended as a tense-marked report of temporal occurrence, but as a timeless predicative claim about what that *dharma* is.

Put simply, by coining new terms to articulate a “de-temporalised” viewpoint, early Buddhism made it plain that the timing of an event’s occurrence is not the central concern of Buddhist causal theory. Rather, it focuses on which “phase” of a causal process a *dharma* is in. Hence, we can see that the three terms *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, and *anāgata* all closely relate to *pratītyasamutpanna*. The word *atīta* points to a *pratītya*—that is, a “depending-upon (previous causes and conditions)” —which is fully (*ati*) ended (*ita*). Meanwhile, *pratyutpanna* is derived in part from *pratītyasamutpanna*, retaining the initial *prati* (“upon”) plus *utpanna* (“arisen”), stressing the “dependently arisen” segment of *pratītyasamutpanna*. The prefix *sam-* is omitted because the model of three *adhvans* only aims to explain how each individual *dha-*

⁵² 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「尊者世友作如是說……復次，若法是起，名緣起法；若法有起，名緣已生法。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 118b25–c1)

⁵³ For a recent examination of *svabhāvasiddham*, see M. P. Candotti & T. Pontillo, “Svabhava in Grammar: Notes on the Early History of a Philosophical Term”, *Rivista Studi Orientali*, Supplemento 2 (2015), 85–110. There (esp. pp. 95–96) they discuss Patañjali’s phrase *svabhāvasiddham tu dravyam* (at *Mahābhāṣya* 1.257, ad A 1.3.1) as emphasising the irreducible autonomy of *dravya*. In contrast to *kriyā*, which are “brought into being”, *dravya* is said to be “established through its own intrinsic condition”, with no need of external factors.

rma comes into being, rather than a universal arising of all *dharma*s. Finally, \sqrt{gam} (to “go”) is synonymous with \sqrt{i} , so *anāgata* signifies a *pratītya* that has not yet been fulfilled.

Thus, when *sarvam asti* refers to a *dharma*’s causally having *atīta*, *anāgata*, or *pratyutpanna*, we can regard it as a **disjunctive proposition**: it does not claim that a single *dharma* exists simultaneously in all three stages, but rather that all three **stage-based properties** are **analytically contained** in every conditioned *dharma*.⁵⁴ Otherwise, it would be pointless—or even impossible—to practise a wholesome *dharma* aimed at yielding a future result, if *being future* were not already encompassed in its concept and necessarily bound to manifest.⁵⁵

4.3.3 Pre-Vaibhāṣika Reflections on *adhvan* and *pratītyasamutpāda*

Our philosophical reconstruction of the conceptual relationship between *adhvan* and *pratītyasamutpāda* is not conjectural. In Abhidharma developments, one finds parallel examples, including Vasubandhu’s remarks on dividing *pratītyasamutpāda* into two sequences:⁵⁶

When *pratītyasamutpāda* is said to be twofold—the earlier phase and the later phase—then the first seven links belong to the earlier phase, and so on, the last five are the later phase...

⁵⁴ Three strands in modern metaphysics illuminate the Sarvāstivāda notion of event- or causally extended properties. First is temporal parts theory, as discussed by Theodore Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), and David Lewis, “Survival and Identity,” in *The Identities of Persons*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 17–40. This view treats an entity as spread out over time, each “part” constituting a distinct temporal or eventive stage, so that the entity’s future aspect is already “contained” within the whole. Second is dispositional essentialism, represented by Alexander Bird, *Nature’s Metaphysics: Laws and Properties* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), and Stephen Mumford, *Dispositions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Here, an entity’s present intrinsic property includes causal powers aimed at future manifestations, making its eventual outcome implicitly present from the start. Third is causal structuralism, articulated by James Ladyman and Don Ross (*Every Thing Must Go*) and John Hawthorne, “Causal Structuralism,” in *Metaphysics*, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 361–78. This position posits that an entity’s identity is fully defined by its role in a causal network, so that future relations are an integral aspect of what it is.

⁵⁵ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 106:「謂過去、未來俱無實體故，為遮彼執顯定實有過去未來。現在能修未來善法，謂現在世勝善為因，引起未來諸善法得，由得彼法，故說彼為所修。若無能修未來善者，則應無有得果等義。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, p. 551c6–11)

*AMVŚ: Some propose that the property of being past and the property of being future are not substantial (in the sense that they are analytically contained in a subject as *dravya*). In order to refute them, we make it clear that the property of being past and the property of being future are substantial: it is accepted that one can cultivate future wholesome *dharma*s in the present. In other words, a superior wholesome cause in the present brings about the attainment of future wholesome *dharma*s. Because one thereby obtains those future *dharma*s, it is future *dharma*s that are being cultivated. If it is impossible to cultivate future wholesome *dharma*s, then it would be meaningless to attain fruits, and so forth.

⁵⁶ Cf. Cox, *Disputed Dharmas*: 51 note114.

*yadā tu dvividhaḥ pratītyasamutpāda ucyate paurvāntikāś cāparāntikāś ceti tadā saptāṅgāni paurvāntiko yāvad vedanāntaḥ pañcāparāntikaḥ...*⁵⁷

Such a dichotomy effectively splits a single causal event into “cause-formation” and “result-formation”. *AMVŚ also preserves a record of certain masters arguing that “*pratītyasamutpāda* (the action noun) denotes cause, whereas *pratītyasamutpanna* (the past participle) denotes effect.”⁵⁸

Thus, before the triadic scheme of *adhvan* had fully emerged from the theory of the twelve links, one could still conceptualise “two phases” (or two segments within the same causal event) by distinguishing *pratītyasamutpāda* from *pratītyasamutpanna*. However, that twofold arrangement ultimately proved insufficient to capture the complexity of the conditioned realm the Sarvāstivādins sought to illuminate.

In short, this bipartite approach leaves the transition from cause to effect—be it conceptual, definitional, or generative—unaccounted for. Yet even after the three-phase model (*adhvan*) gained sway, the two-phased idea persisted in certain debates. For instance, Venerable Ghoṣa (妙音) devised a hybrid perspective:

Venerable Ghoṣa taught thus: “The first two links that belong to the past life are only called *pratītyasamutpāda*; the last two links that belong to the next life are only called *pratītyasamutpanna*. The eight links in this life can each be called both *pratītyasamutpāda* and *pratītyasamutpanna*.” (*AMVŚ, *juan* 23)

尊者妙音作如是說：過去二支唯名緣起法。未來二支唯名緣已生法。現在八支亦名緣起法，亦名緣已生法。《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23, CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 118b12–15)

Ghoṣa thus attempts to reconcile the twofold and threefold schemes, and his proposal helps clarify the Sarvāstivāda understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda*. He holds that when we say a *dharma* is *atīta*, one might expect it to be denoted by the past participle *pratītyasamutpanna*, since it has completed its “depending-upon” process. However, in Ghoṣa’s view, the fact that a *dharma* is *atīta* implies that it continues to act as a cause for what follows—i.e. it remains in a causal or generative role—and thus it is indicated by *pratītyasamutpāda* (the

⁵⁷ Pradhan, AKBh, 131.

⁵⁸ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23: 「復次因名緣起法；果名緣已生法。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 118b1–2)

causative action noun). That compound literally means “collectively bringing into being” (*samutpāda*) what is to be “dependent” (*pratītya*) upon it. Hence, if a *dharma* is *atīta* but still functions as the causal trigger for a subsequent *dharma*, we describe it as *pratītyasamutpāda*.

Conversely, when we label a *dharma* as *anāgata* (“not-yet-arisen”), Ghoṣa teaches that it should be viewed as *pratītyasamutpanna*. In his view, to say a *dharma* is *anāgata* does not merely mean “it has yet to appear”, but rather that “the conditions determining all its properties are already fully established in its concept”, which confers an inevitable, analytically individualised or bundled complete set of properties. Thus, this *anāgatadharmā* can be termed *pratītyasamutpanna*, referring to “the *samutpanna* of *pratītya*”, i.e. the ‘collectively-bringing-into-being’ process that has reached completion in the conceptual domain—even though the *dharma* has not yet manifested in the phenomenal realm. From the Sarvāstivāda perspective, a *dharma* counted as *anāgata* is already an “effect”, in the sense that all its properties are analytically contained in its concept, even if not yet fully instantiated.

4.4 Stage Logic (*avasthā*) and the Philosophy of Participles

4.4.1 Early Sarvāstivādins’ Four Perspectives on *pratītyasamutpāda* and Their Evolution towards *avasthā* (位)

In subsequent passages, Vasubandhu remarks that within the history of Abhidharma, four modes of analysing *pratītyasamutpāda* emerged.⁵⁹

The *pratītyasamutpāda* is understood in four modes: momentary, successive, binding, and segmentary.

*sa caiṣa pratītyasamutpādaś caturvidha ucyate / kṣaṇikāḥ prakarṣikāḥ sāmbandhikāḥ āvasthikāś ca*⁶⁰
《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷9(3 分別世品):「又諸緣起差別說四: 一者剎那、二者連縛、三者分位、四者遠續。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 48c8–10)

From at least PrP onward, *pratītyasamutpāda* was extended to encompass all conditioned *dharmas*. Accordingly, for the Sarvāstivādins, interpreting *pratītyasamutpāda* is tantamount to interpreting what conditioned *dharmas* are. Hence, these four interpretive frameworks

⁵⁹ Cf. Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, 552–3.

⁶⁰ Pradhan, *AKBh*, 132–3.

likewise serve as four models for understanding conditioned *dharma*s. Parallel references can be found in other texts:

《阿毘曇毘婆沙論》卷 13〈3 人品〉：「緣起法有四種：一者剎那；二者相續；三者時；四者次第。此說剎那，彼說相續。此說時，彼說次第。」

(CBETA 2023.Q1, T28, no. 1546, p. 93a25–27)

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23：「復次緣起有四種。一剎那。二連縛。三分位。四遠續。此說分位遠續。彼說剎那連縛。」

(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 117c3–5)

《雜阿毘曇心論》卷 8〈8 修多羅品〉：「問：有四種緣起，何等為四？答：謂彼相續轉，剎那與連縛，及前謂分段，此則說緣起。」

(CBETA 2023.Q1, T28, no. 1552, p. 935c25–27)

In the *Dharmatrāṭadhyāna Sūtra* (達摩多羅禪經), an alternate term *abhiṣyanda* (流注) is used to express the sense of *flow*, which in later Abhidharma sources often appears as *prakarṣika*. The difference is likely due to some traditions emphasising “flow” or “fluidity”, whereas others stressed “succession” (相續). Originally, both were grouped together under “flowing succession” (流注相續). The *Dharmatrāṭadhyāna Sūtra* itself clarifies this “flow” (*abhiṣyanda*) perspective:

Flow (*abhiṣyanda*) describes how a practitioner contemplates *pratīyasamutpāda* through a temporal continuum: from the single instant (*kṣaṇa*) to *tatkṣaṇa*, then *lava*, and so on up to *muhūrta*. 《達摩多羅禪經》卷 2：「流注者，謂修行者觀剎那流至恒剎那 (*tatkṣaṇa*)，乃至羅婆 (*lava*) 摩睺路妬 (*muhūrta*)，是名流注。」

(CBETA 2023.Q1, T15, no. 618, p. 323a26–27)

Hence, “flow mode” addresses time as an advancing continuum—from a single *kṣaṇa*, via 120 *kṣaṇas* (*lava*), to larger units (*muhūrta*). In contrast, “連縛” (*binding*) connotes a discrete yet unbroken chain of causal junctures. The *Dharmatrāṭadhyāna Sūtra* enumerates six types of binding. As Sarvāstivāda thought developed, the “flowing succession” (流注相續) framework transitioned from emphasising *flow* to emphasising *succession* (相續/遠續). Master Fabao (法寶), a disciple of Xuanzang, preserves his teacher’s commentary distinguishing *prakarṣika*/遠續 from *sāṃbandhika*/連縛. According to Xuanzang, the core difference is whether *vipākahetu* (異熟因, resultant cause) is entailed. *prakarṣika* is *vipākahetu*, thus excludes simultaneously coexistent or instantaneous cause–effect, preferring “stage-

based” sequential causation.⁶¹ Indeed, in one of the earlier *Abhidharmavibhāṣā* translations, *prakarṣika* is rendered as “次第” (orderly segment), highlighting the idea of “interval”.

4.4.2 *avasthā* (位) and Detemporalisation

From the sources above, we see that *kṣaṇika* (刹那) and *sāmbandhika* (連縛) are often paired together, whereas *prakarṣika* (遠續) is combined with *āvasthika* (分位). If *kṣaṇika-sāmbandhika* envisions a discrete, moment-to-moment continuum of “flow”, then *prakarṣika-āvasthika* reflects a more de-temporalised way of interpreting causality.⁶² As we have analysed, the *prakarṣika* perspective acknowledges a gap between cause and effect, but does not quantify “how long” that gap lasts. Instead of marking durations, the Sarvāstivādins reframe the question: “What exactly lies between cause and effect?”—the answer being *avasthā*, i.e. “phase” or “stage”, thereby dispensing with an external timeline.

Hence, in Vaibhāṣika philosophy, *avasthā* (位) emerges as the primary concept for describing how causal processes unfold, without relying on an objective notion of time. As shown earlier, the Sarvāstivāda project reconfigures *adhvan* into three stages of causal progression. By making *avasthā* purely event-based, they eliminate any need for further “temporal measurement”. Thus, *avasthā* supersedes (or redefines) older references to “past–present–future”.

The advantage of adopting this *avasthā*-based reading over conventional time theory is illustrated in one telling example:

Question: Since *sparsā* (contact) and *vedanā* (feeling) arise together, why does this *sūtra* only state that contact conditions feeling, rather than feeling conditions contact? ...

⁶¹ 《俱舍論疏》卷9:「今詳遠續、連縛二種緣起別者。遠續唯隔越; 連縛唯無間。遠續是異熟因, 若兼無情亦通同類因, 若有情亦遍行因。連縛定非異熟因, 通同類、遍行及能作, 除相應、俱有、異熟因, 異熟因非連縛故。相應、俱有非前後故, 不名相縛。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T41, no. 1822, pp. 599c29–600a6)

Commentary on AKBh: Here, we offer a detailed explanation distinguishing two types of *pratityasamutpāda*—succession (遠續) and binding (連縛). Succession works only in intervals, whereas binding works only without any interval. Succession is a *vipākahetu*. If it is applied to insentient beings, it also functions as a *sabhāgahetu*. If it is applied to sentient beings, it additionally serves as a *sarvatragahetu*.

Binding, however, is definitely not a *vipākahetu*. Yet it can function as a *sabhāgahetu*, a *sarvatragahetu*, and a *kāraṇahetu*, while excluding *saṃprayuktahetu* and *sahabhūhetu*, and *vipākahetu*. It cannot be a *vipākahetu* because a *vipākahetu* does not operate through binding; *saṃprayuktahetu* and *sahabhūhetu* lack a temporal dimension, so they are not termed “binding”.

⁶² Willemen, Dessein & Cox, *Sarvāstivāda Buddhist Scholasticism*, 27–8.

Answer: Consider a lamp and its light. Even if they arise simultaneously, the light is caused by the lamp, while the lamp is not caused by the light. The same logic applies here.

Furthermore, this *sūtra* explains “stage-based dependent arising” (分位緣起). The prior stage is called *sparsā*, whereas the subsequent stage is called *vedanā*. Hence, there should be no difficulty. One might ask: Why are the aggregates in the earlier stage named “contact”, and those in the later stage named “feeling”? The answer: In the earlier stage, one cannot yet discriminate whether an object is pleasant or unpleasant, so one simply engages with multiple objects as “pleasant contact”. Therefore, it is termed *sparsā*. In the later stage, one can distinguish unpleasant or pleasant objects, thereby avoiding danger and seeking security, which is why it is called *vedanā*...

Thus, *sparsā* is the cause of *vedanā*, not the converse. It is a necessary principle that cause precedes effect; no contradiction arises. ...

This discourse follows the logical intent (理趣) of *pratītyasamutpāda*, not the “mutual or coexistent cause” approach. (*AMVŚ, *juan* 23)

《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 23:「問: 觸受俱起, 何故此經但說觸緣受, 不說受緣觸耶?如燈與明, 雖復俱起, 而明因燈, 非燈因明。此亦如是。復次, 此經中說分位緣起, 前位名觸, 後位名受, 故不應責。問: 何故前位諸蘊名觸, 後位諸蘊名受耶? 答: 前位未能分別苦樂境界差別, 但樂觸對種種境界, 故說為觸。後位能了苦樂境界, 避危就安, 故說為受.....觸為受因, 非受為觸因, 因前果後其理必然, 不應為責.....此依緣起理趣而說, 不依相應俱有因說。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 120b22–c8)

In short, if *sparsā* (contact) and *vedanā* (feeling) appear simultaneously, it can puzzle a “mutual causality” model. By invoking *āvasthika* (“stage-based”) reasoning, the *sūtra* depicts *sparsā* as the prior stage (前位) and *vedanā* as the subsequent stage (後位) in a causal sequence. Whether they genuinely coincide in time is no longer relevant once interpreted through stage-based logic; *sparsā* is cause, *vedanā* is effect.

At the end, the text clarifies that this exposition is aligned with the “logical intent” of *pratītyasamutpāda*. This shows how firmly *avasthā* (位) had become the normative Sarvāstivāda standpoint. Indeed, after enumerating the four ways of explaining *pratītyasamutpāda*, Vasubandhu comments that “among these, the *āvasthika* approach is regarded as superior.”

In Xuanzang’s Chinese version (though absent from the extant Sanskrit), we read:

“According to tradition (傳許), the Buddha spoke of the twelve links only in terms of *āvasthika* (stage-based) analysis.”⁶³

Samghabhadra quotes a similar statement:

“According to the masters of the Abhidharma, they all assert that the Buddha explained dependent origination by stages (分位). The commentator does not concur with that statement, calling it mere tradition.”⁶⁴

⁶³ 《阿毘達磨俱舍論》卷 9〈3 分別世品〉:「傳許。世尊唯約分位說諸緣起, 有十二支。」(CBETA 2024.R3, T29, no. 1558, p. 48c21–22)

⁶⁴ 《阿毘達磨順正理論》卷 27:「論曰: 對法諸師咸作是說, 佛依分位說諸緣起。經主不信說傳許言」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T29, no. 1562, p. 494b14–15)

Thus, *avasthā* (位) stands out in the Vaibhāṣika perspective as the culmination—or the most refined method—for understanding how a *dharma* undergoes causal processes without presupposing a purely temporal measure.

4.4.3 A Participle-Based Philosophy: Nouns, Verbs, and the Timelessness of Properties

4.4.3.1 Participle between Nouns and Verbs

Yet the Sarvāstivādins’ reliance on *āvasthika* (位論) also highlights a deeper underlying paradigm—one that transcends conventional “noun-based” or “verb-based” ontologies.⁶⁵ In early Indian traditions, philosophers often debated the primacy of things (nouns) vs. events (sentences). The Sarvāstivāda concept of “*dharma*” was often explained partly as a stable entity (*dravyataḥ*) and partly as an unfolding event (*vastunaḥ*). But in their fully developed system, they emphasised that neither “substantial thing” nor “bare process” alone captures a conditioned *dharma*.⁶⁶

Instead, a *dharma* is best characterised by *past participles*, i.e. forms that encode both noun-like and verb-like aspects: it can be approached as a “substantive” that timelessly contains all its properties, and as an “action” or “event” that fully instantiates those properties in causal episodes.⁶⁷ In fact, as we have previously discussed, certain Buddhist schools (like the Vibhajyavāda) concluded that the “timeless” aspect of *pratītyasamutpāda* must be an uncon-

⁶⁵ Cf. Commitments 6 and 7 in §1.1.2.

⁶⁶ Gethin argues against a purely static understanding of what a *dhamma* is, stating that its essential nature is dynamic rather than static; see Rupert Gethin, *The Buddhist Path to Awakening: A Study of the Bodhi-Pakkhiyā Dhammā* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 149–51. However, as we will see, the Northern Sarvāstivādins hold that neither a purely static nor a purely dynamic conception of what a *dharma* is can be sufficient.

⁶⁷ Three contrasting yet complementary examples illustrate a “participial” ontology that bridges substance-like and event-like aspects: (1) Spinoza’s *natura naturans/natura naturata*; see Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics* (1677), esp. Part I, Prop. 29 Schol., where *natura naturans* (present participle: “naturing nature”) designates reality’s active, generative side, and *natura naturata* (past participle: “natured nature”) refers to its manifested state—both aspects belonging to the one Substance. (2) Davidsonian Event Semantics posits that verbs implicitly refer to concrete events, thus allowing us to treat, for instance, “cooking the rice” as a discrete entity with its own properties (agent, place, manner); see Davidson, Donald, “The Logical Form of Action Sentences”, in *The Logic of Decision and Action*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), 81–95. (3) Langacker’s notion of sequential vs. summary scanning shows how the same conceptual content may be viewed dynamically (verb-like) or statically (noun- or adjective-like); see Ronald W. Langacker, *Foundations of Cognitive Grammar*, vol. 1 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987). Through participle and gerund forms, a single phenomenon (e.g. cooking) can be construed either as an event or an entity, underscoring the fluid boundary between eventive and substantive dimensions.

ditioned *dharma* (*asaṃskṛta*), precisely because they saw the unstoppable necessity behind every instance of dependent arising.⁶⁸ *AMVŚ (*juan* 195) records how yet other schools tried to classify “all conditioned properties” themselves as unconditioned, or proposed that “impermanence” too belongs among the unconditioned, citing its universal, timeless presence in all conditioned things.⁶⁹

Yet the Sarvāstivādins do not go that route. They maintain that, yes, a *dharma* has properties in a timeless (analytic) sense, but it also concretely “instantiates” them through a fully completed (past-participle) event. Hence, *pratītyasamutpāda* (the nominal or action-noun aspect) is viewed as an abstract, general “dependently co-arising”, while *pratītyasamutpanna* (the past participle) indicates the completed event—this double perspective (nominal and participial) reveals the “noun-verb” duality coalesced in a single *dharma*.

Thus, the Sarvāstivāda solution is to construe “*dharma*” from a *participle-based* vantage, bridging static attributes and dynamic manifestation. On the one hand, from the *dravya*-aspect (qua object), the *dharma*’s essential properties appear stable and timelessly contained. On the other hand, from the *vastu*-aspect (qua event), the *dharma* triggers or completes causal episodes—an aspect that each property must fulfil.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 116c4–8

⁶⁹ CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 977b11–19

⁷⁰ In his *Compendium Grammatices Linguae Hebraeae*, Spinoza famously treats Hebrew parts of speech—nouns, adjectives, and participles—as mirroring the ontological categories of substance, attribute, and mode. Just as an adjective is predicated of a noun (e.g. “the noun is big”), or a participle describes the noun’s unfolding state (“the noun is walking”), so in Spinoza’s metaphysics an attribute is predicated of substance, and a mode is predicated of an attribute (and ultimately of substance). This sequence has been developed extensively by Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of Spinoza: Unfolding the Latent Processes of His Reasoning*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934), esp. vol. I on attributes; Alexandre Guérout, *Spinoza, tome I: Dieu (Éthique I)* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1968); Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza et le problème de l’expression* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1968), trans. Martin Joughin as *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza* (New York: Zone Books, 1990), on univocity; Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1984), on attributes and modes; Edwin Curley, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: An Essay in Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Edwin Curley, *Behind the Geometrical Method: A Reading of Spinoza’s Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988); Michael Della Rocca, *Representation and the Mind-Body Problem in Spinoza* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michael Della Rocca, *Spinoza* (New York: Routledge, 2008); and Yitzhak Y. Melamed, *Spinoza’s Metaphysics: Substance and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). A classic Spinozistic example might say, “Substance is extensive”, and then, “Extension (as attribute) is one metre long in a stick”, thereby illustrating how each level is “in” or “predicated of” the one beneath it. Sarvāstivāda Buddhism exhibits a comparable predicative sequence: intrinsic properties (akin to “adjectives”) are predicated of a fundamental *dharma* (conceived as a bundle of properties), and the causally unfolding stages of that *dharma* (akin to participles) are predicated both of those properties and, ultimately, of the *dharma* itself. Notably, the first predication explains what a *dharma* is, qua object (*dravyataḥ*), whereas the second predication clarifies it, qua event (*vastunaḥ*).

4.4.3.1.1 *avasthā*: Shifting from “When” to “Which Stage?” Exactly this logic underlies *avasthā*: once a property is read in a “participle” sense—*something that was/has been done or is in progress*—the “timing” question dissolves in favour of “which stage of its completion we are addressing”. Past, present, and future no longer point to an external observer’s vantage or clock-time. Instead, each pertains to whether a property’s “depending-upon” is fully ended (*atīta*), currently culminating (*pratyutpanna*), or not yet reached (*anāgata*). In short, the Sarvāstivādins break from purely nominal or purely verbal frameworks and adopt a “participle-based” approach, capturing *dharma*s’ timeless containment of all properties *and* their event-like actualisation of them—hence forging their final explanation of causal phases as *avasthā*.

In this way, the Sarvāstivādins’ “phase-based” (*āvasthika*) reading of *pratītyasamutpāda* arises from, and also reaffirms, an underlying shift away from a strictly noun-based or verb-based philosophy. Instead, they see *dharma*s as cognitively or logically akin to participles, uniting an entity’s “timeless necessity” with an event’s “actual completed status”. And with that, they succeed in articulating a thoroughly de-temporalised model of dependent origination—one in which a *dharma*’s entire array of properties stands “always already” analytically determined, yet becomes (or is, in a past-participle sense) fully instantiated in *avasthā*, independent of any universal time-flow.

4.4.3.2 Timelessly Propertied and *bhāvāntara* as the Propositional Structure

We should also note that “stage” (*avasthā*, 𑀅𑀲), although a de-temporalised concept, remains fundamentally *aspectual* rather than a mere static slice of time. It does not, as certain translations might suggest, denote an inert “state” or “phase”. Rather, it specifies the completion of a causal event. This relates to our earlier observations: when the Sarvāstivādins replace the old triad *bhūta–bhaviṣyat–vartamāna* with *atīta–anāgata–pratyutpanna*, they essentially identify three properties corresponding to three completed phases in a sequential causal process. Hence, *sarvam asti* can be formulated with these three past participles plus *asti*: if we analyse a *dharma* from its causal properties, *sarvam asti* states that any conditioned *dha-*

rma is “complete”, i.e. it necessarily includes these three properties—*anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*, *atīta*—within its causal unfolding.

Previously, we saw that in Sarvāstivāda thought, no *dharma* exists independently of its properties: each *dharma* is its set of properties. In other words, when taken *as object*, a *dharma* concretely “embodies” a bundling (*samudaya*) of all its properties; when taken *as subject*, it simply picks out a topic to be discussed. Hence, there is no such thing as a “bare entity”. Consequently, whenever we say “a *dharma asti*”, we must indicate *how* or *in what sense* it is—never simply “it is”. Indeed, when a *dharma* is said to be *dravyataḥ*, we accentuate its stable dimension. As Vasubandhu says, “*rūpādivat bhāvāntaram cet dravyataḥ*”: if a *dharma* is approached as *dravya*, it must possess “something other”, for instance “form”, among other properties.

4.4.3.2.1 *bhāvāntara*: “To Be Is to Be Something (Else)” Within Abhidharma practice, to ascertain what something is, our inquiry surpasses “X is” or “X exists”, moving on to identifying which essential property this “thing” claims or in *what sense* it exists. Put differently: “**to be is to be something (else)**.”⁷¹ In Sarvāstivāda idiom, *bhāvāntara* (*literally* “*another state of being*” or “*being otherwise*”) precisely signifies a *dharma*’s being discerned in and through its properties.⁷² In that same context where “*rūpādivat bhāvāntaram cet dravy-*

⁷¹ Some worry this could trigger an infinite regress (if existence requires a property, and that property itself must exist, etc.), but many argue this need not be vicious, so long as the regress explains a distinct fact at each stage and does not merely reintroduce the same problem. For discussion, see Graham Priest, *One: Being an Investigation into the Unity of Reality and of Its Parts, Including the Singular Object Which Is Nothingness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). 182–193; Anna-Sofia Maurin, “Infinite Regress—Virtue or Vice?”, in *Hommage à Wlodek: Philosophical Papers Dedicated to Wlodek Rabinowicz*, ed. T. Rønnow-Rasmussen, B. Petersson, J. Josefsson, and D. Egonsson (<https://www.fil.lu.se/hommageawlodek>, 2007), 1–25; Ross P. Cameron, “Turtles All the Way Down: Regress, Priority and Fundamentality”, *The Philosophical Quarterly* 58, no. 230 (2008): 1–14; and Ricki Bliss, “Viciousness and the Structure of Reality”, *Philosophical Studies* 166, no. 2 (2013): 399–418.

⁷² Contemporary analytic metaphysics embraces the view that “to be” is always “to be something”, insisting that any existent entity must be characterised by determinate identity conditions or essential properties. W. V. Quine’s well-known slogan “no entity without identity” underscores that nothing exists in a featureless way; see Quine, “Ontological Relativity”, in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969). Likewise, sortal-dependence theorists—such as David Wiggins (*Sameness and Substance Renewed* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001]) and E. J. Lowe (*The Possibility of Metaphysics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998])—contend that an entity’s existence necessarily presupposes a kind or category: to say “X exists” tacitly means “X, an F, exists”. Kit Fine’s work on essence and grounding further argues that existence is never “bare” but always grounded in specific essential features; see Fine, “Essence and Modality”, *Philosophical Perspectives* 8 (1994): 1–16.

ataḥ” appears, the Pudgalavādins and the Sarvāstivādins debate the status of the “*pudgala*”. Examined more closely, however, the question is not truly “*pudgalaṃ santam?*” but rather “in which sense—*dravyataḥ* or *prajñaptiyaḥ*—should the *pudgala* be posited?”⁷³ This again shows that whenever *vas* becomes the focus of philosophical debate, the issue is not a bare question of existence, but rather what the *dharma* is and what that entails.

Hence, *sarvam asti* emerges as a potent philosophical principle that enshrines the metaphysical rule whereby any given *dharma* may be articulated in an analytic proposition: “X is Y”. From a Sarvāstivāda perspective, stating that “a conditioned *dharma* is conditioned” is merely a trivial tautology. Instead, they propose that every conditioned *dharma* necessarily enters causal events encompassing the trio *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*, *atīta*.⁷⁴ Consequently, when we regard a *dharma* in its causal aspect and claim “this *dharma* is complete (*sarvam*)”, we assert that it incorporates all three causal phases. Since a *dharma*’s presence in these phases is analytically inscribed in its own concept—i.e. by definition, anything genuinely “conditioned” possesses the causal stages of *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*, and *atīta* conceptually and analytically—using the timeless *asti* remains entirely appropriate.

4.4.3.2.2 Metaphysics, Causality, and a Participle-Based Logic Earlier Abhidharma debates show that the timeless side of *pratītyasamutpāda* exerted real pressure toward positing an *asaṃskṛta* factor. As *AMVŚ (*juan* 195) reports, some positions held that the marks of conditioned *dharmanas*—or even impermanence itself—must be unconditioned. Their concern is intelligible: if such properties govern conditioned *dharmanas* necessarily and can bring them to cessation, then they may seem too lawlike and too powerful to be merely conditioned occurrences.⁷⁵

⁷³ Pradhan, AKBh, 461: “*yat tarhi vātsīputriyāḥ pudgalaṃ santam icchanti / vicāryaṃ tāvad etat / kiṃ te dravyata icchanty āhosvit prajñaptitaḥ / kiṃ cedaṃ dravyata iti kiṃ vā prajñaptitaḥ / rūpādivat bhāvāntaram cet dravyataḥ / kṣīrādivat samudāyaścet prajñaptitaḥ /*”

⁷⁴ CBETA 2024.R3, T27, no. 1545, pp. 393c01–394b18

⁷⁵ 《阿毘達磨大毘婆沙論》卷 195:「或復有說: 諸有為相是無為法, 如分別論者所說。所以者何? 彼作是說: 若有為相是有為者, 其力羸劣, 何能生他, 乃至令滅? 以是無為故, 便能生法乃至滅法。或復有說: 有為相中生、老、住是有為, 滅是無為。所以者何? 彼說諸法令生、老、住則易, 令滅則難。若無常相是有為者, 其性羸劣, 何能滅他? 以是無為故, 其性強盛, 能滅諸法。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T27, no. 1545, p. 977b11–19)

*AMVŚ: Moreover, some propose that the properties of conditioned *dharmanas* are unconditioned, following what is stated by the Vibhajyavādins. Why is this? They argue that if the properties of conditioned *dharmanas*

The Sarvāstivāda response is decisive. Instead of relocating necessity outside the conditioned domain, it internalises that necessity within the *dharma*'s own articulated profile. What other schools sought in an *asaṃskṛta* factor, the Sarvāstivādins redescribe under the rubric of *bhāvāntara*: the same *dharma* can be read *dravyataḥ*, under its more stable and intelligible aspect, and *vastunaḥ*, under its eventive and causally efficacious aspect. These are not two entities or two ontic strata. They are two ways of grouping and disclosing one and the same set of intrinsically grounded predicates.

This strategy culminates in the following Vaibhāṣika statement:

Therefore the Vaibhāṣikas say: *svabhāva*, self (*ātman*), thing (*vastu*), characteristic (*lakṣaṇa*), nature (*prakṛti*), and so forth differ in designation but not in meaning. One cannot say that *dharmanas* have characteristics apart from their own nature. Just as, when one says that quiescence is the characteristic of *nirvāṇa*, there is no *nirvāṇa* apart from quiescence.

《五事毘婆沙論》卷 1(1 分別色品):「故毘婆沙作如是說: 自性、我、物、相、本性等, 名言雖殊而義無別, 不可說諸法離自性有相。如說涅槃寂靜為相, 非離寂靜別有涅槃。」(CBETA 2023.Q1, T28, no. 1555, p. 990b13–16)

Read together with the passages discussed above, this statement first secures a crucial point: a *dharma*'s characteristics are not detachable features standing apart from its own nature. Terms such as *dravya*, *ātman*, *vastu*, *lakṣaṇa*, *prakṛti*, and *bhāva* differ in designation, but the text refuses to split them into distinct layers of referent. Once that point is secured, the stronger reconstruction advanced in this dissertation follows as its natural extension: a *dharma* is not a bare support to which characteristics are subsequently added, but the articulated unity of the predicates through which it is what it is and through which it becomes causally intelligible.

On this basis, the Sarvāstivāda programme of *sarvam asti* can be restated more exactly. In its narrower and programmatic sense, *sarvam asti* is a predication with an omitted subject:

“[Every conditioned *dharma*] is complete.” The thesis therefore concerns *saṃskṛtadharmanas* in

were themselves conditioned, they would be too impotent to bring other *dharmanas* into being or to lead them to cease. Since they are unconditioned, they can bring about the genesis of *dharmanas* up to even make them cease. Furthermore, others propose that among the properties of conditioned *dharmanas*, arising, ageing, and abiding are conditioned, whereas cessation is unconditioned. Why is this? They maintain that with regard to *dharmanas*, it is easy to cause them to arise, to grow old, or to abide, but difficult to make them cease. If the property of impermanence were conditioned, being feeble in nature, how could it extinguish other *dharmanas*? Since it is unconditioned, it is strong in nature and thus capable of extinguishing *dharmanas*.

the first instance. And since, as Vasubandhu explains, *sarvam* is analysed into *atīta*, *pratyutpanna*, and *anāgata*, the temporal triad names the phase-articulation required once a *dharma* is understood as conditioned. It does not exhaust the wider logical force of *sarvam*; it specifies how completeness is articulated in the conditioned case.

The broader metaphysical lesson, however, reaches farther. The force of *asti* here is not that a *dharma* first enjoys a bare, unqualified existence and is only then described from without. Rather, a *dharma* is only as determinately such-and-such. No *dharma*—whether conditioned or unconditioned—is a naked entity standing behind its predicates. To say that a *dharma* is is already to say that it is under a determinate profile: as this rather than that, in this mode rather than that, and, in the conditioned case, across the relevant phases of causal articulation. The Sarvāstivāda point is therefore not a bare existential “it is”, but a copular “it is thus”.

To emphasise *dravyataḥ* is to foreground the more stable side of this copular structure—hence expressions such as “*rūpādivat bhāvāntaram cet dravyataḥ*”: qua *dravya*, it is another determinate something, akin to form. To emphasise *vastunaḥ* is to foreground the very same *dharma* insofar as those same predicates are eventive, instantiated, and causally efficacious. *Bhāvāntara* thus names not a hidden ontic residue, but the integral structure by which being is always being-something: what is analytically inscribed in the *dharma* can also unfold as a real causal event.

Concretely, then, *sarvam asti* means that the complete predicate-set relevant to a conditioned *dharma*—including its past, present, and future phase-determinations—is analytically contained in what that conditioned *dharma* is. “Timelessly” does not here cancel actual causal unfolding. It means, rather, that once one has truly identified a *saṃskṛtadharmā* as such, the admissible field of its eventive determinations is not externally appended or accidentally discovered; it belongs to the *dharma*’s own intelligible constitution, even though its actual instantiation occurs only when the relevant causal nexus obtains.

Accordingly, the Sarvāstivāda claim that “every conditioned *dharma* is complete” unifies three things at once:

1. **Metaphysics:** no predicate genuinely belonging to the *dharma* stands outside what that *dharma* is; there is no leftover bearer beyond its articulated bundle.
2. **Causal explanation:** to state how the *dharma* functions in events is to articulate the same intrinsic predicates under their eventive aspect; causation and explanation are internally linked.
3. **Logical form:** a participle-based grammar in which the same *dharma* is read under a stable/*dravyataḥ* and an eventive/*vastunaḥ* aspect, without splitting it into two entities.

4.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that Sarvāstivāda philosophy locates a *dharma*'s identity at the intersection of two complementary perspectives: *dravyataḥ* and *vastunaḥ*. On the one hand, a *dharma*, qua *dravya*, appears as a “timelessly complete bundle of properties”, ensuring that all its attributes—such as birth, abiding, and cessation—are analytically embedded in its very concept. On the other hand, the same *dharma*, qua *vastu*, discloses those attributes through an event-like, causal unfolding—its properties actually manifest across stages (*avasthā*), rather than merely existing in some static form.

Crucially, Sarvāstivāda does not fragment a conditioned *dharma* into two separable layers—one “eternal essence” plus one “temporal shell”. Instead, it unifies these aspects by treating the *dharma* as a participle-like entity: fully *what it is* in an analytic sense yet *how it is* in an event sense. Put differently, the *dharma*'s object-aspect (*dravyataḥ*) underwrites the necessity that all its properties be intrinsically available, whereas the *dharma*'s event-aspect (*vastunaḥ*) secures that these same properties belong to it as eventive predicates and are instantiated when the relevant causal nexus obtains. The higher-order analytic commitment therefore concerns the licitness and truth-conditions of such predications, not the reduction of actual causal occurrence to definition alone. Analytic completeness thus entails

conditional necessity, not unconditional fatalism: what is fixed is the form of the lawlike connections, not a single inevitable itinerary through them.

By recasting “What a *dharma* is” in this dual manner, the Sarvāstivāda school forges a robust account of both continuity and transformation. A *dharma* can be analysed and known (*via dravyataḥ*) precisely because its defining properties never drift outside what it is. Yet we also see *why* it changes (*via vastunaḥ*): the same attributes that characterise a *dharma* conceptually become activated through a chain of cause and effect, and even that “must-unfold” aspect belongs to the *dharma*’s analytic structure. This view proves pivotal for the Sarvāstivāda hallmark proposition, *sarvam asti*, which proclaims the thorough completeness of every conditioned *dharma* without denying its actual arising and vanishing. Hence, in depicting a *dharma* as both timelessly “complete” and dynamically “unfolding”, the school not only addresses the perennial puzzle of static identity versus transformative process but also grounds its core soteriological claim: that seeing a *dharma* in its full set of properties (including birth, change, and cessation) leads to genuine insight into causality and ultimately to liberation.

5 Final Remarks: Complete Predication and the Architecture of Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma

From the outset—and, as the Prolegomenon’s BL 28 scene makes especially vivid—this dissertation aimed to move beyond the stock claim that Buddhism merely “treats *dharma*s as properties”. I have argued that the Sarvāstivāda axiom *sarvam asti*, when taken only in its familiar first-order gloss (“everything exists across three times”), captures one important downstream articulation of the tradition, but not the full philosophical work performed by the slogan. If, instead, we hear *sarvam asti* in the idiom of higher-order predication—where *sarvam* marks the completeness of a *dharma*’s admissible predicate-set and *asti* functions as the copula that licenses such predications as truth-apt claims—an integrated metaphysical system comes into view: each conditioned *dharma*, precisely by being conditioned, analytically contains the full set of definitional and causal attributes that make it what it is and can never fall short of that inner completeness.

This higher-order reading immediately throws new light on *pratītyasamutpāda*. For the Sarvāstivādins, *pratītyasamutpāda* is more than a cosmological string of twelve factors; it is an internally self-grounding law. In higher-order terms, it belongs to the level that governs the whole admissible predicate-set of what it is to be conditioned, rather than to the level of any single first-order predicate. Because the completeness of a conditioned *dharma* fixes, in principle, which causes, effects, and phase-predicates belong to its admissible profile, the maxim *asmin sati idaṃ bhavati* may be read as a Sarvāstivāda expression of the principle of sufficient reason: nothing arises without a sufficient ground. That ground is analytically anchored, though not analytically exhausted, in the concept of what arises, since the complete causal profile of a conditioned *dharma* fixes what would count as the sufficient reason for its arising. Yet the actual convergence of causes remains ontologically asymmetric and eventive, and is therefore not reducible to internal definition alone. Completeness determines what the sufficient ground of arising must be; causal occurrence determines when that ground is actually realized. What *sarvam asti* secures, then, is not merely truth-conditional determi-

nacy and explanatory constraint, but the principled sufficiency and non-bruteness of arising itself.

To establish this claim, the dissertation widened the textual lens far beyond Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. The debates preserved in BL 28, **Mahāvibhāṣā*, *Kathāvatthu*, and *Milindapañha* allowed Vaibhāṣika reasoning to speak in its own voice, revealing that *sarvam asti* was not exhausted by the thesis that “past, present, and future objects all subsist.” Rather, the slogan unites two complementary registers: the object-like aspect of a *dharma* (*dravyataḥ*), in which its properties are timelessly embedded, and the event-like aspect (*vas-tunaḥ*), in which those same properties must successively manifest.

Early controversies about “past” and “future” *dharmanas*—as we traced in Chapter 3—were thus preliminary skirmishes around a deeper question: how to reconcile a *dharma's* analytic completeness with its empirical becoming. The Sarvāstivāda answer redescribes temporal markers as causal “phases” (*avasthā*). The terms *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna*, and *atīta* are not slices of a universal timeline but participial designators for properties that are not-yet-triggered, currently-instantiating, or already-consummated. Because those labels are themselves part of a *dharma's* analytic content, one need not choose between eternalism and flux: the same causal law that secures necessity at the conceptual level simultaneously licenses genuine change at the causal level.

Along the way, Chapters 2–4 brought into focus two complementary viewpoints on causation that Sarvāstivāda quietly integrates. Viewed forward, one starts from a complete definition and deduces what must follow—an analytic judgement. Viewed backwards, one observes a *dharma's* instantiated properties and, by reading their causal indices, recovers the very concept of that *dharma*—a synthetic *a priori* judgement. The very possibility of either operation presupposes that, on the one hand, *dharmanas* inter-explain one another through a universal and generative causal lattice; on the other hand, each *dharma's* concept is the bundling of its complete set of properties, and these bundled properties inter-explain themselves, forming another definitional causal lattice. But because these lattices are read

through the lens of property-completeness, they never collapse into fatalism. Instead, they license the multi-directional predication that the Buddhist non-substantial analysis of *dharmanas* requires.

Seen in this light, the Vaibhāṣika distinction between *dravyataḥ* and *vastunaḥ* is not dualistic. A *dharma* is not an immutable core wrapped in a perishable shell; it is a single logical unit that can be read in a noun-like or verb-like register. The most economical grammatical form for that dual reading is the past participle, which both names a thing and hints at an accomplished action. By redescribing temporal flow as successive participial phases (*avasthā*), Sarvāstivādinis free themselves from the need for an independent time-substance, anchoring impermanence inside each concept rather than outside it.

As suggested already above, Saul Kripke’s gloss on Frege and Russell proves salutary: “One cannot, according to Frege and Russell, say of an object that it exists or not, because—so they argued—everything exists.”¹

For Frege–Russell, existence is a second-level predicate applying to properties, not to objects. The analogy is not exact, but it is heuristically useful: *sarvam asti* can be read as operating at a second-order level. The crucial question is not whether some past *dharma* still persists, but whether the properties called “past”, “present”, and “future” are necessarily and sufficiently instantiated by the very concept of a conditioned *dharma*. A first-level reading asks whether *dharmanas* endure across three times. The second-level reading advanced here asks how the relevant predicate-set is delimited and guaranteed. The point is not to discard the former question, but to show that it becomes philosophically clearer when situated within the latter, where issues of definitional necessity and empirical becoming can be seen together.

That shift of level also elucidates why the system resists triviality. Note that these properties are logically second-order—predicates of predicates—yet, within the Abhidharma ontology, they are still classified as first-order *dharmanas*. If read only at first order, the claim

¹ Saul A. Kripke, *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 6.

risks being heard as little more than an enumeration of temporal phases. Read also at second order, however, it becomes a substantive explanatory thesis: because each conditioned *dharma* is analytically complete with respect to its admissible predicates, its eventive phases can be predicated and explained without positing any hidden substance or external clock. What completeness guarantees is not a purely deductive production of occurrence, but the intelligibility of occurrence once the relevant causal nexus is in view. The resulting architecture unites metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology: to know a *dharma* in full is to see the sufficiency of its inner network of properties; to see that sufficiency is to grasp *pratītyasamutpāda*; and to grasp *pratītyasamutpāda* without remainder is, on the Buddhist path, to eradicate ignorance.

Although this study has only sketched parallels with Vaiśeṣika, the grammarians, or Sāṃkhya, a systematic, second-level comparison promises to deepen our view of how Indian thinkers converged on property-based ontologies. Such work would, I believe, reinforce the central thesis advanced here. Freed from the narrow existential reading, Sarvāstivāda emerges as a remarkably coherent account of how a world can be both analytically determined and dynamically open—an account that still speaks, across two millennia, to perennial questions about being, causal explanation, propositional truth, and the possibility of liberation, while potentially offering a transferable higher-order method for reading other classical ontologies.

Appendix A. Logical Framework for *sarvam asti*

2

A.0 Domains and Variables

Domain	Symbol type	Intuitive content	Appears first in
\mathbb{D}_0 –Dharmas	x, y, z, \dots (variables)	any individual <i>dharma</i>	II §2
	a, b, c, \dots, p (constants)	specific <i>dharma</i> / object-mode presentation where marked	II §2
\mathbb{D}_1 –Properties	F, G, H, \dots	first-level predicates	II §3
\mathbb{D}_2 –Laws	L, M, \dots	second-level operators	II §1.2

Constant $PA := pratyasamutpāda$ belongs to \mathbb{D}_2 qua law. When dependent origination is treated in object-mode, its dharmic presentation is represented by some $p \in \mathbb{D}_0$ such that $\text{Reifies}(PA, p)$ (see A.6).

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A.0.1 Note on *dharmas*, predicates, and controlled type-shifts

In the main argument (esp. IV §4.2.4.4–5), I treat the Vaibhāṣika *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇa* / “ninefold” analysis as a causal–predicative network: once the four primary and four auxiliary *lakṣaṇas* are in play, a term can reappear as subject in one analytic proposition and as predicate in another, so that no *dharma* functions as a pure substrate that only receives predicates yet never itself becomes predicative. At the same time, this does *not* mean arbitrary predication: *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* remain distinct yet inseparable and “belong to each other timelessly” (smoke/fire; illness/person), which constrains what may count as an admissible predicate for a given subject.

Convention (for this appendix). We keep a two-sorted presentation (\mathbb{D}_0 for *dharmas*, \mathbb{D}_1 for predicates), but allow a *controlled* type-shift to mirror the Vaibhāṣika practice whereby certain *lakṣaṇas* are both (i) *dharmas* in their own right and (ii) predicative resources:

- $\text{Reif}(F) \in \mathbb{D}_0$: the *dharma*-term corresponding to a predicate/property F (e.g. a *lakṣaṇa* treated as a *dharma* in the ninefold matrix).

² The appendices model the inferential architecture reconstructed in the body of the thesis; they do not claim that historical Vaibhāṣikas themselves stated the doctrine in axiomatic form.

- $\text{Pred}(x) \in \mathbb{D}_1$: the predicative reading of a *dharmā*-term x when it plays the role of a predicate in an analytic proposition.

To stay close to Abhidharma idiom, I will sometimes suppress $\text{Reif}(\cdot)$ and $\text{Pred}(\cdot)$ when the intended reading is clear from syntactic position. A parallel controlled shift is used when a law is itself made the object of predication. Thus, if dependent origination is discussed not as governing operator but as a predicative object, the formalism introduces a dharmic presentation p such that $\text{Reifies}(PA, p)$. Predicates such as $\text{Complete}(p)$ apply to this object-mode presentation, not to PA qua law.

A.1 Higher-Order Definition of Completeness

$$\text{Complete}(x) := \forall F (Fx \iff \Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F))$$

Here $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$ marks that F is an analytic / definitional necessary property of x in the Sarvāstivāda sense. Because the definition quantifies over predicates F , *Complete* is a second-order predicate.

A.2 Formal Reading of *sarvam asti*

In the present reconstruction, *sarvam asti*(x) is not a second predicate over and above $\text{Complete}(x)$; it is the doctrinal label for that same higher-order condition. Hence:

$$\text{sarvam asti}(x) := \text{Complete}(x) := \forall F (Fx \iff \Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F))$$

Right \rightarrow Left: if a property F necessarily belongs to x (i.e. $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$), then F belongs to x 's real definition (i.e. Fx).

Left \rightarrow Right: every real property of x (i.e. Fx) belongs to it by necessity (i.e. $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$).

Thus, a *dharmā* is “no more and no less” than its full set of definitional attributes.

A.3 Primitive Predicates and Their Logical Level

Predicate	Type signature	Reading	Logical level
$F(a)$	$\langle \text{dharma const.} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ a has property F ”	1
Fx	$\langle \text{dharma var.} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ x has property F ”	1
$\text{Inst}(F) = \exists x Fx$	$\langle \text{property} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ F is instantiated”	2
$\text{Originates}^{\text{ext/int}}(L, F)$	$\langle \text{law, property} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ L (externally / internally) guarantees F ”	2
$\text{Arises}(L, x)$	$\langle \text{law, dharma var.} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ x arises under the governance of L ”	2
$\text{SelfGrounding}(L)$	$\langle \text{law} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ L grounds itself”	3
$\text{Reifies}(L, p)$	$\langle \text{law, dharma const.} \rangle \rightarrow \text{Bool}$	“ p is the object-mode / dharmic presentation of L ”	2

Bool = {True, False}.

A.4 Role of *pratīyasamutpāda* (PA)

(External / generative guarantee) $\text{Originates}^{\text{ext}}(PA, F) \Rightarrow \exists x(Fx \wedge \text{Arises}(PA, x))$

(Internal / definitional guarantee) $\text{Originates}^{\text{int}}(PA, \text{CompleteProp}) \Rightarrow \forall x(\text{Arises}(PA, x) \Rightarrow \text{Complete}(x))$

(Self-grounding of PA) $\text{SelfGrounding}(PA)$

Here CompleteProp is the second-order property “being complete” ($\lambda y \text{Complete}(y)$), and $\text{Arises}(PA, x)$ designates the arising of x under the governance of PA .

A.5 Five Main Theses in Formal Dress

Informal claim	Formal statement
Every <i>dharma</i> is exactly its set of definitional properties.	$\forall x \text{ Complete}(x)$
The completeness-condition is instantiated.	$\exists x \text{ Complete}(x)$
The completeness-condition is internally guaranteed by <i>PA</i> .	$\text{Originates}^{\text{int}}(PA, \text{CompleteProp})$
<i>PA</i> is self-grounding and guarantees the instantiation of any property it internally originates.	$\text{SelfGrounding}(PA) \wedge \forall F[\text{Originates}^{\text{int}}(PA, F) \rightarrow \text{Inst}(F)]$
Every true predication is explained by either external or internal causality.	$\forall x \forall F(Fx \rightarrow \text{Expl}^{\text{ext}}(x, F) \vee \text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(x, F))$

A.6 Optional Object-Mode Bridge

When the law *PA* is itself treated as the subject of predication, the present formalism introduces a dharmic counterpart *p* such that

$$\text{Reifies}(PA, p).$$

This bridge does not identify the law with a first-order *dharma*; it marks the controlled passage from law-mode to object-mode. Hence the relevant completeness claim is:

$$\text{Reifies}(PA, p) \Rightarrow \text{Complete}(p).$$

Accordingly, predicates such as *Complete* apply to *p*, not to *PA* qua law. The self-grounding or self-explanatory status of *PA* is then argued downstream from this object-mode completeness rather than presupposed by it.

A.7 Causation–Predication Isomorphism

A.7.1 New second-level predicates

$\text{Expl}^{\text{ext}}(x, F)$: “*F* externally explains *x*”,

$\text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(x, F)$: “*F* internally (definitionally) explains *x*”,

$\text{Expl}(x, F)$: “*F* explains *x* either externally or internally”.

A.7.2 Definitions

$$\text{Expl}^{\text{ext}}(x, F) := Fx \wedge \text{Originates}^{\text{ext}}(PA, F),$$

$$\text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(x, F) := Fx \wedge \Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F),$$

$$\text{Expl}(x, F) := \text{Expl}^{\text{ext}}(x, F) \vee \text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(x, F).$$

A.7.3 Axiom-schema

$$\forall x \forall F (Fx \Rightarrow [\text{Expl}^{\text{ext}}(x, F) \vee \text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(x, F)]) \quad (\text{Ax-Iso})$$

A.7.4 Derived theorems

Statement	Explanation / consequence
Thm 1 Isomorphism	If $\text{Expl}(x, F)$ holds, the predicate F functions as an explanation of the subject x (tautological from the definitions).
Thm 2 Role-exchange (schematic)	$\text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(x, F) \Rightarrow \text{Expl}^{\text{int}}(\text{Reif}(F), \text{Pred}(x))$. (Controlled type-shift.)
Thm 3 Lakṣya–lakṣaṇa constraint	Role-exchange does not license arbitrary predication: internal explanation presupposes a non-random, timeless correlation between subject (<i>lakṣya</i>) and predicate (<i>lakṣaṇa</i>).
Thm 4 Epistemic two-way	From $\text{Expl}^{\text{ext}}(x, F)$ we may infer $\text{Inst}(F)$ and hence know its causes, even though ontologically the entailment is one-way.

A.8 Logic-Level Map to Chapter Structure

Chapter §	Dominant formulas	Highest level used
II 1 (causality)	Originates ^{ext/int} , Expl ^{ext/int} , SelfGrounding(<i>PA</i>)	2–3
II 2 (<i>dharma-vicaya</i>)	Complete(<i>x</i>)	2
II 3 (twelve <i>āyatanas</i>)	$Fx \Leftrightarrow \Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$	2
II 4 (analyticity & PSR)	Inst(<i>F</i>), $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$	2
III–IV (textual debates)	same formulas contextualised	1–3

A.9 Reader's Note

Because Complete(*x*) and *sarvam asti(x)* quantify over properties *F*, all statements containing them are second-order.

Only SelfGrounding(*PA*) involves a third-level predicate (it takes a law as argument). No fourth-level constructs are employed.

Appendix B. Geometric Demonstration of Completeness

This appendix presents, in a *Spinozistic* geometric style, the Sarvāstivāda logic of *sarvam asti* and uses the formal vocabulary introduced in Appendix A.

Preface

My purpose is to demonstrate, in schematic form, that every conditioned *dharma* is complete and intelligible, and that major Buddhist lines of reasoning about arising, knowing, and liberation can be reconstructed from this insight. I write *more geometrico* only as a formal aid: it renders inferential order explicit, but it does not claim that analytic completeness yields unconditional fatalism or that every concrete occurrence is reducible without remainder to definition alone.

Part I. Of Definitions, Axioms, and Postulates

Definitions

Definition (D1). [*dharma*] A causally conditioned phenomenon (*saṃskṛta*) that may enter predicative analysis as subject and, under controlled type-shift, may also function predicatively. (Let x, y, z, \dots be variables for any *dharma*, and a, b, c, \dots be constants for specific *dharms*).

Definition (D2). [*Property*] Whatever can truly be predicated of a *dharma*—*lakṣaṇa*, *svabhāva*, etc. (Let F, G, H, \dots be variables for properties).

Definition (D3). [*Completeness (sarvam) / Principle of sarvam asti*] For any *dharma* x and any property F , x is complete (or *sarvam asti*(x) holds) if and only if F is a property of x precisely when F is an intrinsic (analytically necessary) property of x . Formally:

$$\text{Complete}(x) := \forall F (Fx \iff \Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F))$$

(This definition aligns with Appendix A.1–A.2.)

Definition (D4). [*Copula \Box_{asti}*] The logical operator $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$ establishes that property F belongs to *dharma* x with analytic necessity, signifying an intrinsic link.

Definition (D5). [*External / Generative Causality*]

Causal influence exercised by other *dharms* upon a *dharma*'s arising.

Definition (D6). [*Internal / Definitional Causality*] The *dharma*'s own conceptual essence unfolding as its intrinsic properties, as captured by $\Box_{\text{asti}}(x, F)$. Together with D5, this corresponds to *Originates^{int}* and *Originates^{ext}* as detailed in Appendix A.

Definition (D7). [*Dependent Origination (PA)*] *PA* (*pratītyasamutpāda*) is, formally speaking, a law-like principle coordinating both external and internal causality. When dependent origination is itself made the subject of predicative analysis, it is treated in object-mode as a *dharmic* presentation p —that is, as a member of the *dharm-domain* for purposes of predication—such that *Reifies*(*PA*, p) (cf. Appendix A, especially A.0.1 and A.6). Propositions 2–3 below concern this object-mode presentation, not *PA qua* governing law.

Definition (D8). [*āyatana*s]

The twelve sense bases, which exhaustively catalogue the universe of properties.

Definition (D9). [*Ninefold Matrix*]

The root *dharma* plus birth, abiding, alteration, cessation, and their four auxiliaries.

Definition (D10). [*dravyataḥ / vastunaḥ*]

Respectively, the timeless bundle of a dharma and its stage-wise instantiation.

Axioms

Axiom (A1). *Within the present reconstruction, whatever enters the relevant field of analysis is either a conditioned dharma or a property predicable of one.*

Axiom (A2). *No admissible predicate in the present reconstruction falls outside the domain marked by the twelve āyatanas.*

Axiom (A3). *Knowledge that liberates is analytical: it proceeds by apprehending properties F as necessarily linked to their dharmic subject x (i.e., via $\Box_{asti}(x, F)$).*

Axiom (A4 (Principle of Completeness / *sarvam asti*)). *Every dharma x , in the restricted sense fixed by D1, is complete. (This axiom asserts the universal applicability of the Definition of Completeness stated above for all dharmas). Formally: $\forall x \text{ Complete}(x)$.*

Axiom (A5). *Every causal chain is intelligible under PA; if it were not, infinite regress would follow.*

Postulates

Postulate (Pst 1). *The intellect can enumerate the full predicate set of at least one dharma (the Buddha's omniscience).*

Postulate (Pst 2). *What applies analytically to one dharma applies, mutatis mutandis, to all, because all are subject to the same PA.*

Part II. Of Completeness

Proposition (Prop 1). *Every dharma is predicatively exhausted by its bundle of intrinsic properties.*

Proof. By Axiom A4 (Principle of Completeness), for any dharma x , it holds that $\text{Complete}(x)$. By the Definition of Completeness, this means $\forall F (Fx \iff \Box_{asti}(x, F))$. This biconditionality implies that the properties F for which Fx is true are precisely the set of intrinsic properties defined by $\Box_{asti}(x, F)$. Thus, x possesses all and only its intrinsic properties: nothing belongs to x 's defining bundle contingently, and no intrinsic property is excluded. Hence, for purposes of predicative analysis, x is exhausted by its bundle of intrinsic properties. Q.E.D.

Corollary (Cor 1). *There is no "bare substratum" beneath properties.*

Corollary (Cor 2). *Single properties, taken in isolation, are unintelligible; they signify only within a complete bundle.*

Proposition (Prop 2). *If Reifies(PA, p), then p is complete.*

Proof. By Definition D7, when dependent origination is treated in object-mode, its dharmic presentation is denoted by p . Axiom A4 applies to every dharma so treated; hence $\text{Complete}(p)$. In other words, the object-mode presentation of dependent origination possesses all and only its intrinsic properties. Q.E.D.

Proposition (Prop 3). *Because the object-mode presentation of dependent origination is complete, PA is self-explanatory.*

Proof. Definition D6 states that internal causality is the unfolding of a *dharma*'s own intrinsic content. By Prop 2, the object-mode presentation *p* of dependent origination is complete. Hence, when dependent origination is analysed predicatively, the explanation of its operation is found within its own complete definitional profile rather than in some further external principle. Axiom A5 blocks explanatory regress by stipulating that every causal chain is already intelligible under *PA*. Therefore *PA* is self-explanatory: not because the law and its object-mode presentation collapse into one item, but because the latter makes explicit, in predicative form, the explanatory closure internal to the former. Q.E.D.

Scholium. *The reflexivity at issue is not vicious circularity. PA qua governing law and p qua object-mode presentation occupy distinct formal roles: the former governs, while the latter is what becomes available for predicative analysis. The bridge Reifies(PA, p) connects these levels without identifying them. To deny such explanatory closure would reintroduce the regress excluded by Axiom A5.*

Part III. Of the Mutual Sufficiency of Seeing *PA* and Seeing *dharma*

Proposition (Prop 4). *To know a dharma fully is to know PA; to know PA is to know any dharma fully.*

Proof. If one grasps a *dharma*'s complete property bundle, one perceives both the external conditions that brought it forth and the internal stages that define it; these exhaust *PA*'s function. Conversely, if one understands *PA* in its self-unfolding (Prop 3), one already cognises the generative and definitional pattern immanent in every *dharma*. Hence, mutual sufficiency. Q.E.D.

Corollary. *The Buddha's twin dictum ("who sees dependent origination sees dharma, and vice versa") is logically rigorous, not rhetorical.*

Part IV. Of the Causation–Predication Isomorphism

Proposition (Prop 5). *In any true statement "dharma S is P", the predicate P also functions as an explanation of S.*

Proof. **External.** *P* names the causal state produced by prior *dharms*; thus it explains why *S* arose.

Internal. *P* names an intrinsic property; thus it explains what *S* is by necessity.

Either way predication coincides with causal explanation.

Q.E.D.

Scholium. *The Vaibhāṣika maxim "knowing a property is knowing a cause" encapsulates this overlap.*

Proposition (Prop 6). *Subject and predicate may, under differing epistemic stances, trade explanatory roles without circularity.*

Proof. By internal causality, *S* guarantees *P* (analysis). By empirical synthesis, perception of *P* entitles inference to *S*. Because A4 renders both links necessary, the reciprocity is stable. Q.E.D.

Part V. Of Ontological Asymmetry and Metaphysical Symmetry

Proposition (Prop 7). *The chain of external causation is ontologically one-way but epistemically two-way.*

Proof. Ontology: past causes generate present effects, never vice versa. Epistemology: once an effect is known, the intellect may infer its requisite causes (A3). Thus directions diverge. Q.E.D.

Proposition (Prop 8). *The chain of internal causation is both ontologically and epistemically symmetric.*

Proof. Because the *dharma* and its properties are mutually necessary and sufficient (Prop 1), either may serve as *explanans* or *explanandum* without asymmetry. Q.E.D.

Definition. *Call the two preceding results the ontological asymmetry / metaphysical symmetry pattern.*

Corollary. *Freedom from deterministic fatalism is preserved: since we cannot ontologically predict why causal vectors converge, moral choice remains meaningful, yet analytic certainty is retained once convergence occurs.*

Part VI. Of Practical Consequences

Proposition (Prop 9). *Liberating knowledge must be analytic, not merely synthetic.*

Proof. Synthetic observation gives contingent truths; but liberation requires certainty immune to temporal flux. Only analytic propositions, founded on A4, possess such necessity. Q.E.D.

Proposition (Prop 10). *Analytic knowledge is attainable because the āyatanas bound the property space.*

Proof. A2 restricts possible predicates; therefore the intellect's task, though vast, is finite in principle. Q.E.D.

Proposition (Prop 11). *The Buddha's sarvathājñāna (omniscience of all properties) is conceptually the complete survey of all pairs (x, F) for which $\square_{asti}(x, F)$ holds (i.e., all intrinsic properties of all dharmas).*

Proof. Direct corollary of Prop 1, Prop 3, Prop 9 and Postulate 1, given the definition of completeness. Q.E.D.

Part VII. Of the Dual-Aspect Ontology

Proposition (Prop 12). *Every conditioned dharma possesses two inseparable aspects: dravyataḥ and vastunaḥ.*

Proof. The ninefold matrix is analytically embedded (*dravyataḥ*) yet must be realised stage-wise (*vastunaḥ*); both follow from A4 plus Definitions 9 & 10. Q.E.D.

Proposition (Prop 13). *Change (impermanence) is itself an intrinsic property and thus foreseen by completeness.*

Proof. The property *anityatā* is contained in the ninefold matrix; hence no contradiction arises between fixed analytic truth and phenomenal flux. Q.E.D.

Proposition (Prop 14). *Predicate deficits (e.g. absence of kleśa after liberation) are explained by saṃyoga rather than samavāya.*

Proof. Afflictions are externally conjoined predicates; their removal alters the web of external relations without subtracting from the intrinsic ninefold structure. Q.E.D.

Part VIII. Of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (Buddhist Form)

Proposition (Prop 15). *For any true predication concerning a dharma, there exists a sufficient reason analytically anchored in that dharma’s completeness and articulated under PA.*

Proof. By Props 1, 5 and A3, every predicate either originates internally or externally, both intelligible under PA. Therefore, within the present reconstruction, no predicative brute facts remain: the sufficient ground of a true predication is internally analytic and externally causally intelligible under PA. Q.E.D.

Scholium. *Where Leibniz speaks of “complete concept”, the Sarvāstivādin speaks of “complete dharma.” The rationalist and Buddhist principles converge, though the latter is explicitly soteriological.*

Part IX. Of the Final Unity of Doctrine

Theorem. *The central propositions of Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology can be modelled as inferentially downstream from sarvam asti together with the definitions and axioms above.*

Demonstration. Metaphysics. *Props 1–8 explain being, becoming, and causal order through completeness as coordinated by PA.*

Epistemology. *Props 9–11 ground truth conditions, omniscience, and the analytic method.*

Soteriology. *Liberation follows from analytic eradication of ignorance (Props 9, 14).*

Since each domain becomes systematically coordinated once A4 is read together with the foregoing definitions, axioms, and postulates, the theorem stands.

Schematic Table of Logical Flow

Stage	Core claim	Logical vehicle	Key reference
⟨1⟩	Completeness: every dharma is predicatively exhausted by its properties	A4	1.1.2; 2.2
⟨2⟩	Object-mode presentation of PA is complete; hence PA is self-explanatory	Props 2–3	2.1.3.1
⟨3⟩	Mutual sufficiency (knowing PA ↔ knowing dharma)	Prop 4	2.1.3.3; 2.4.7
⟨4⟩	Isomorphism: predicate = cause / explanation	Prop 5	2.4.2; 4.2.4
⟨5⟩	External asymmetry vs. internal symmetry	Props 7–8	2.1.3.2; 4.2.4.2
⟨6⟩	Analytic liberation	Prop 9	2.4.5; 4.2.4.5

Epilogue

Thus the Sarvāstivāda axiom *sarvam asti* is the organising principle of the reconstruction advanced here. Far from being a scholastic quirk about “three times existence”, it coordinates predication with causation and renders the path of analysis systematically intelligible. What it yields is conditional necessity, not fatalistic inevitability: what is fixed is the form of the lawlike connections, not a single inevitable itinerary through them.

Appendix C. Pressure Tests on the Reconstruction: Three Engagements with Recent Secondary Literature

C.1 Jonathan C. Gold: Against the Times and the Three-Time Thesis

Gold’s chapter “Against the Times” in *Paving the Great Way* (2014) is directly relevant to my dissertation, not because it accurately captures what *sarvam asti* means in Vaibhāṣika sources, but because it offers a clean reconstruction of how AKBh can be made to look like a metaphysical dispute about tri-temporal existence (Gold, 26–29). That reconstruction is precisely the pressure point my project must address: I argue that the AKBh debate becomes metaphysically misleading the moment *sarvam asti* is read as a first-order inventory claim (“everything exists”), rather than as a higher-order predicational thesis that licenses complete truth-apt specification.

Gold’s chapter is therefore a useful adversary text. It helps isolate (i) the interpretive pivot by which *asti* becomes existential rather than copular, (ii) the way “three times” becomes the whole story rather than one coordinate within a larger completeness grammar, and (iii) the way causality is recruited as a criterion of existence in a manner that risks collapsing into either circularity or an unacknowledged realism about lawlike structure. My response proceeds by accepting Gold’s exposition of Vasubandhu as a strong reading of AKBh, while resisting his opening gloss and re-situating the debate in the Vaibhāṣika predicate-architecture reconstructed across §3.4.2, §4.1.1–§4.1.2, and the BL 28 evidence stream.

1. The Opening Gloss Already Tilts the Field: *sarvam asti* Is Not “Exist in All Three Times”

Gold opens by glossing the school name as “the view that things ‘exist’ (*asti*) in ‘all’ (*sarva*) of the three times” (Gold, 26).

This is not merely a harmless paraphrase. It is, in my terms, an unargued substitution of *sarvam asti* with something like *sarveṣu (trikāleṣu) asti*. The gloss smuggles in a locative structure (“in all...”) that is not present in the slogan. If the intended claim were literally “in all three times,” the locative plural would be the natural vehicle; *sarvam*—especially in the

Vaibhāṣika environment where it is repeatedly thematised as completeness—does different work.

The difference matters because BL 28 shows that Sarvāstivāda itself treats *sarvam* as expandable along multiple dimensions, of which “three times” (*sarvakāle*) is only one. In that debate scene, the axiom is immediately unfolded into a sevenfold series: *sarvakāle*, *sarvatra*, *sarvākāreṇa/sarvagareṇa*, *sarvakaraṇena*, *sarvabhāvaiḥ*, *sarvahetubhiḥ*, *sarvapratyayaiḥ*.

Once this is seen, Gold’s opening gloss can be located precisely: it selects one coordinate (*sarvakāle*) and then treats it as the meaning of the slogan itself. But BL 28’s logic is the opposite: “three times” is a dimension in which completeness may be tested, not the semantic essence of *sarvam*. To read *sarvam asti* as “exist in all three times” is therefore to collapse a multi-dimensional predicational programme into a single temporal-existential thesis.

2. What I Take *sarvam* to Do: Domain/Completeness, Not Mere Quantification

My dissertation repeatedly insists that *sarvam* in *sarvam asti* should be heard as a qualitative requirement of completeness/determinacy rather than as a mere quantitative “all.” In the Vaibhāṣika grammar, *sarvam* functions as a domain-marker that can be articulated through interchangeable inventories (twelve *āyatana*s / eighteen *dhātu*s / five *skandha*s, with special handling for the unconditioned when needed).

The philosophical point is not that Sarvāstivādins are eager to multiply entities; it is that they build ontology around what counts as admissible, truth-making predication of a *dharma*. “All” signals that the predicational domain must be exhaustive and non-overlapping: whatever counts as a *dharma* must be placeable within a complete grid in which its definitional profile can be fully specified. This is why I treat *sarvam asti* as a higher-order thesis that underwrites truth-aptness (*astitā*) by requiring completeness in the space of predicates.

This is also why I read the axiom as structurally allied with the Sarvāstivāda elevation of *pratītyasamutpāda* into a self-explanatory principle (§2.1.3.1). If dependent origination is itself a *dharma*, then, under *sarvam asti*, it must be complete: it must govern both (i) external/generative arising and (ii) internal/definitional unfolding that fixes a *dharma* as what it is and thereby renders predication truth-apt.

From this angle, Gold’s narrative—“Sarvāstivāda says everything exists in three times; Vasubandhu attacks that”—begins downstream of the axiom’s logical form. The upstream question is: what makes *abhidharma* discourse capable of complete predication in the first place? My answer is: the completeness constraint articulated by *sarvam* and the copular licensing function of *asti* (developed in §4.1.1–§4.1.2).

3. *asti* in My Reconstruction: Copula/Truth-Operator, Not Existence-Verb

The decisive pivot—already embedded in the AKBh debate and therefore easily missed—is the syntactic and semantic reversal from *sarvam asti* to something like *asti sarvam* (“there exists everything”). Once *asti* is treated as an existence-verb, the whole question becomes: which entities exist, and in which times? But in Vaibhāṣika usage, especially as reconstructed in §3.4.2 and §4.1.1–§4.1.2, *asti* increasingly functions copularly: it links a *dharma* (as subject) to its predicate-bundle (including temporal/phase predicates).

This is also why my project takes seriously a basic linguistic fact that is too easy to miss in “metaphysics-first” summaries: *atīta*, *anāgata*, *pratyutpanna* are not “times” in the first instance but participial/adjectival forms. They naturally live in the predicate-space: they are what is said of a *dharma*. When the Vaibhāṣikas say “the past exists,” what is primarily at stake is the predicability of pastness, not an entity called “the past.”

This is why the school can, without incoherence, hold a de-temporalised view: time is not itself a *dharma*, and “three times” is not an ontological container. The dispute is about how phase-qualification is grounded within the causal architecture of a *dharma*, not about placing substances into temporal locations.

4. Reframing Gold’s “Central Conundrum”

Gold reconstructs the central Sarvāstivāda problem as: if past and future *dharma*s exist, what differentiates them from present *dharma*s? (Gold, 27–29). His presentation of the four internal Sarvāstivāda variants is lucid and valuable as an exposition of the AKBh doxography (Gold, 29–38).

But the “conundrum” is sharpened by the same initial paraphrase. If existence is tacitly equated with being present, then the Sarvāstivādin must explain how something can “exist”

without being present. This is exactly the conceptual trap my reconstruction avoids: the Vaiśhāṣika does not begin with a presentist construal of *asti*. The baseline is instead a predicational grammar in which phase-qualification (past/present/future) is one layer of truth-apt description over a *dharma*'s definitional predicates.

The result is that what needs differentiating is not “existence-status across time,” but **how phase-differences are grounded within a *dharma*–property architecture**. In §4.3–§4.4 I emphasise the distinction between reference-time and causal-time: one can predicate “past” or “future” relative to a *dharma*'s event-phase without positing a time-substance. The criterion of *kāritra* is precisely a stage-marker: whether the causal efficacy has been exercised, is being exercised, or is yet to be exercised.

5. The Four “Differentialists”: What Gold’s Taxonomy Captures, and What It Obscures

Gold’s treatment of the four Sarvāstivāda variants (being-, quality-, position/activity-, and difference-differentialists) is lucid and genuinely helpful (Gold, 29–38). It also registers something my reconstruction stresses: Sarvāstivāda internalises temporal differentiation as something to be explained through a *dharma*'s own structure, not by appeal to an external time-substance.

Where I diverge is in what exactly is being differentiated. Under my framework, the four views are better read as competing attempts to locate phase-differences **within the predicate-bundle** rather than within an entity’s “existence-status.” In other words, what changes across the three *adhvas* is not a self-identical *dharma* moving through an external time-container; it is the way its intrinsic properties are *said*—and, on the eventive side (*vaśtunaḥ*), the way those properties are unfolded within a causal episode. Once the variables are pulled into the world of predicates, the four positions (*bhāva*, *lakṣaṇa*, *avasthā/kāritra*, *anyathā*) look less like awkward metaphysical patches and more like deliberate attempts to specify which predicate-layer carries temporal qualification.

5.1 The Missed Continuity: the Four Masters as Developments of BL 28's Sevenfold Expansion

A further continuity emerges once BL 28 is treated as a snapshot of an earlier Sarvāstivāda predicational programme. BL 28 unpacks *sarvam asti* along seven dimensions—*sarvakāle*, *sarvatra*, *sarvākāreṇa*, *sarvakaraṇena*, *sarvabhāvaiḥ*, *sarvahetubhiḥ*, *sarvapratyayaiḥ*—so that “the three times” (*sarvakāle*) is only one coordinate in a larger completeness space. The Kośa's four differentialists can be read as selective crystallisations of this sevenfold space, each fixing temporal difference by privileging one predicational dimension (or a synthesis of several).

On this hypothesis: Dharmatrāta's *bhāva*-differentialism is essentially the *sarvabhāva*-dimension (*sarvabhāveḥ*) carried into a theory of temporal phases; Ghoṣaka's *lakṣaṇa*-variant plausibly develops out of the “aspect/mode” dimension (*sarvākāreṇa* / *sarvagareṇa*), relocating difference into describable marks; Vasumitra's *avasthā-kāritra* account looks like a synthesis of *sarvakāla* with the causal coordinates (*sarvakaraṇena*, *sarvahetubhiḥ*, *sarvapratyayaiḥ*), explaining temporal qualification through the staged activation of causal function within an event; and Buddhadeva's *anyathā*-variant pushes the predicational turn furthest by treating difference as relational comparison across descriptions—i.e., as a feature of judgement that presupposes the whole matrix of predicational dimensions.

This mapping is still programmatic, and the precise genealogies remain to be excavated. But even at the level of terminological reuse and structural role, the overlap is hard to miss. It also helps explain why these four “masters” matter so much in later memory: they are not ad hoc rescue moves for “three-times existence,” but developments internal to a predicational framework already explicit in BL 28.

5.2 *astitva* as Threefold: the Conceptual Space that Makes the Debate Possible

This is also where §3.2.2.3 becomes crucial. The Vaibhāṣikas classify *astitva* in three truth-relevant modes: (i) “is” as inherence (*samavāya* / 相待有), (ii) “is” as conjunction (*saṃyoga* / 和合有), and (iii) “is” as temporal segmentation (*adhvabheda* / 時分有). The third mode supplies conceptual space for the differentialist debate: it lets temporal qualification operate at a higher order, as a “property of properties.” Once a definitional predicate belongs to a

dharma by *samavāya*, that predicate can be further qualified as past/present/future; temporal segmentation layers a second-level predication over the bundle rather than placing the *dharma* into an external time-container.

In this light, I can partially agree with Gold’s implicit judgement that the “activity/position” view is philosophically privileged (Gold, 33–38)—because it aligns naturally with the eventive aspect (*vastunaḥ*) and stage-logic (*avasthā*). But I do not take this to support the equation “to exist = to be causally active” as a definition of *asti* in Sarvāstivāda; it shows rather that causal activation is one crucial dimension of how intrinsic properties become manifest, without exhausting what “to be” means in the copular-completeness sense.

6. The Four Arguments for *sarvam asti*: How They Look under a Predicational Reconstruction

Gold’s chapter does an excellent job of laying out the four reasons given in AKBh for why past and future must be acknowledged: (1) because scripture says so, (2) because cognition arises dependent on faculty and object, (3) because of the existent sense-object (*ālambana*), and (4) because of result (*phala*) (Gold, 39–55).

My response is not to deny that these arguments function as “reasons” within the *Kośa* dialectic. It is to insist that their force changes once the logical form of *sarvam asti* is restored: the arguments are not best heard as proofs that temporally scattered entities exist, but as pressures toward a stable predicational grammar in which *dharmanas* can be determinately characterised across causal phases.

6.1 “Because It Is Said” (Scripture)

Gold is right to highlight how Vasubandhu resists scriptural literalism and appeals to a special use of *asti* to deflate the existential force of “past exists” talk (Gold, 39–44). This is genuinely important for my project—but not in the way it functions within Gold’s framing.

On my reconstruction, the deepest issue is not whether scriptures “say” that past and future exist; it is what kind of predicational licence those utterances grant. If the axiom is about what may be truly said of *dharmanas*, then it is unsurprising that debates over scripture become debates over the semantics of “is,” and over which predicational matrices (*āya-*

tana/dhātu/skandha, *adhvan*, *anūsaya*, and other complete grids) anchor the truth conditions of *abhidharma* discourse.

6.2 “Because of the Two Things” (Sense Faculty and Object)

Gold reads this as support for the idea that past and future objects must exist, otherwise cognition could not arise dependent on object and faculty (Gold, 45–48).

My reconstruction shifts the burden, but not—on this point—towards the twelve *āyatana*s. The Vaibhāṣika claim is not that a past object must subsist as a presently existing external producer, but that cognition always takes as its object a *dharma*-as-qualified: “x is past,” “x is future,” “x is present.” When the tradition speaks of a cognition arising “taking a past object as its referent” (為境生覺), the content grasped is precisely that the object stands at a determinate causal phase—that its *kāritra* has already been exercised (or is yet to be exercised). I develop this point in §3.3.4.1.

Once this is kept in view, Gold’s intentionality-style inference (“consciousness must have an existent object; therefore past/future objects exist”) can be granted at the level of *abhidharma* grammar without granting the metaphysical conclusion. What must be “existent” for cognition to arise is not a presently operative producer, but a determinately sayable target of predication—something that can bear the relevant phase-predicate under the governance of the school’s stage logic. This is why the BL 28 maxim “Only the past may be said to be past; only the future may be said to be future; only the present may be said to be present” is so revealing: present-tense *asti* is deployed to attach phase predicates, not to stock the world with temporally scattered entities.

This also clarifies why I do not treat the twelve *āyatana*s as a single master-key here. As I argue in §3.2.3.2, Sarvāstivāda completeness is multi-dimensional: *āyatana/dhātu/skandha* delimit one exhaustive coordinate system, but *adhvan*-predicates form another complete set within *sarvam*, and BL 28’s sevenfold expansions make explicit that temporal, spatial, modal, and causal coordinates can each function as dimensions along which completeness is tested.

6.3 “Because of the Existent Sense Object” (*ālambana*) and the Unicorn Analogy

Gold emphasises Vasubandhu’s distinction between productive causes and “mere experiential objects,” and treats the phenomenological point—remembered past objects appear present—as support for the claim that temporal identity is conceptually imposed (Gold, 49–51).

I do not deny the phenomenological force. The misstep is to treat it as automatically metaphysical: from “pastness is not given in direct appearance” to “pastness is unreal.” Under the Vaibhāṣika architecture, it is consistent to say (i) temporal identity is not directly given in ordinary experience, and yet (ii) temporal predicates can still be truth-apt as higher-order qualifications of definitional predicates—exactly why *adhvabheda* must be treated as “a property of properties” in §3.2.2.3.

Moreover, the unicorn analogy raises the crucial question that it cannot, by itself, settle: what grounds the difference between veridical and non-veridical conceptual content? The Vaibhāṣika answer appeals to bundle-grounding and domain regulation; the Sautrāntika answer appeals to causal efficacy. That dispute is therefore not resolved merely by noting that “mere objects” exist in experience.

6.4 “Because of Result” (*phala*)

Gold’s presentation of the karmic/result-based rationale is persuasive as a reconstruction of why the *Kośa* tradition finds tri-temporal talk explanatorily natural: without futurity, the very intelligibility of karmic fruition appears threatened (Gold, 52–56).

But again, under my framework the crucial issue is what kind of futurity is required. The Vaibhāṣika need not posit an already-existing future entity; what is required is that the future be a stable predicate-layer within a causal episode, so that present causes can be truthfully characterised as bearing (or not bearing) certain future-oriented predicates. In that sense, “result” is not a proof that future entities exist somewhere; it is pressure toward a predicational-causal grammar in which the causal powers of present *dharma*s are completely specifiable—including their oriented relations to future stages.

7. Gold on *asti* as *nipāta*: an Insight that, Taken Seriously, Pressures His Opening Gloss

A particularly valuable part of Gold’s chapter is the discussion of Vasubandhu’s appeal to an “irregular” use of *asti* as *nipāta*, illustrated by the extinguished light (Gold, 42–43). Gold uses this to support Vasubandhu’s anti-realism about certain conceptual constructions and to argue that past/future talk is causal-language rather than literal ontology.

I agree that the manoeuvre is philosophically important; but I understand the example differently. In the extinguished-light case, *asti* is entirely reasonable precisely because it functions as a **copulative verb**: “the light is extinguished” (*dīpaḥ... nirvṛtaḥ* in effect), not “the extinguished light exists” as a reified entity. The example therefore supports, rather than undermines, my reading of *asti* in Vaibhāṣika usage as a truth-linking copula: it attaches a predicate to a subject and thereby licenses the evaluation of a claim, without automatically functioning as an existential quantifier.

This is exactly why I treat Gold’s reliance on the *nipāta* manoeuvre as diagnostic. It resolves a problem that becomes urgent only once *asti* has already been heard as an existence-verb that threatens to reify “past things” and “future things.” Under the Vaibhāṣika copular framework, the fundamental role of *asti* is instead to mark truth-apt predication: it registers that a predicate belongs (or fails to belong) to a *dharma*’s definitional or stage-qualified bundle.

8. Existence, Causal Activity, and the Stability of a Criterion

Gold’s summary of Vasubandhu’s project—existence is equated with causal activity, and alternatives are eliminated—is clear and, within the AKBh line of argument, well motivated (Gold, 57–58). The question is whether the criterion is stable.

Gold also acknowledges that, for Vasubandhu, causality itself is not a *dharma* and is not substantially real in the same sense as basic *dharmanas* (Gold, 58); what makes something count as a cause is a conceptual construction imposed on a temporal sequence. This is illuminating, but it is easy to hear too strongly. In the Kośa’s own discussion of *pratītyasamutpāda*, the more careful point is to deny a reified extra entity called “causality” while still affirming a determinate *niyama*—the *dharma*tā/*dharma*sthititā by virtue of which, for example, “given ig-

norance, formations arise, not otherwise.” Read this way, “conceptual construction” names an anti-reification strategy about how causal talk is licensed, not a denial that causal roles are fixed.

Once this distinction is in view, the pressure point shifts. The worry is not simply that Vasubandhu grounds existence on something “unreal,” but that he must rely on a non-reified yet objective notion of causal determination to police the real/unreal boundary while simultaneously insisting that only the present exists. How is that *niyama* grounded? If it is grounded in the definitional-causal structure of *dharma*s themselves, then the distance between Vasubandhu and the Vaibhāṣika narrows: what is at stake becomes the scope of causal determination (external production alone versus the internal/definitional unfolding that fixes what a *dharma* is). If it is not so grounded, the criterion risks oscillating between a merely conventional account and an unacknowledged realism about lawlike structures.

From my standpoint, this is precisely where the Vaibhāṣika alternative becomes philosophically attractive: it gives an account of constraint in terms of *sarvam*/completeness and *asti* as the copular licensing of truth-apt predication, while also treating causality as foundational rather than derivative. In §2.1.3.1 I treat *pratītyasamutpāda* as the most foundational *dharma* and argue that *sarvam asti* is the proposition that renders it self-explanatory: dependent origination is complete not only in governing the external generation of conditioned *dharma*s, but also in governing the internal/definitional unfolding through which a *dharma* becomes determinately what it is and therefore becomes truth-aptly predicable.

This is why my own criterion is not “causal activity alone,” nor “completeness alone,” but the interlocking of the two: causal explanation and predicational specification are isomorphic. That is exactly what I formalise in §4.2.4.1.1 and Appendix A: when a *dharma* is correctly said to be such-and-such, what is being stated is (ultimately) its causal explanation—because the event by which a *dharma* is brought about is also the event by which it becomes itself (definitional causality).

9. What I Take Gold to Miss Structurally: the Scope of *sarvam* and the Direction of Explanation

Gold's chapter is shaped by the *Kośa's* argumentative agenda, and within that frame it succeeds. But my dissertation's central claim is that the *Kośa* is not neutral reportage: it is a selective restatement that narrows the Vaibhāṣika axiom into a form most vulnerable to Sautrāntika critique. This is why I treat §3.4.2 as a key diagnostic: once *sarvam asti* is recast as “everything exists [in three times],” the debate has already shifted from a higher-order claim about truth-apt predication to a first-order inventory claim about entities distributed across time.

In other words, what Gold reconstructs so well is precisely the dialectical surface my project must step underneath. The deeper Vaibhāṣika project is not to populate a timeline, but to secure a metaphysical grammar in which *dharma*s are determinately characterisable—externally, by generative dependence, and internally, by definitional unfolding—under a completeness constraint that makes *abhidharma* discourse possible as a truth-apt enterprise.

10. Concluding Assessment

Gold's chapter is therefore something I must respond to in depth. It is not merely “secondary literature on Sarvāstivāda”; it is an exemplary modern reconstruction of the *Kośa's* own polemical reframing of *sarvam asti*. My response is to accept Gold's clarity about the AKBh dialectic while resisting the initial gloss that drives the whole chapter: *sarvam asti* is not best heard as “exist in all three times,” because that reading collapses a multi-dimensional completeness programme (explicit already in BL 28) into a single existential-temporal thesis.

Once the predicational reconstruction is restored, the chapter's centre of gravity shifts. The four differentialists become intelligible as predicate-theoretic developments (and, plausibly, as later crystallisations of BL 28's seven dimensions); the four “arguments” become pressures toward stable truth conditions rather than proofs of temporally scattered entities; and the causality criterion can be re-read not as a merely conceptual construction but as an anti-reification strategy that still requires objective *niyama*. The Vaibhāṣika alternative

I reconstruct is not a retreat from causality into “analyticity,” but a claim that analyticity is itself grounded in causality—because the event by which a *dharma* arises is also the event by which it becomes itself and becomes knowable.

C.2 Mark Siderits: Presentist Challenges to Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda (*How Things Are*, 2022, ch. 7 “Time”)

1. Aim and Scope

Mark Siderits’ *How Things Are* (2022) offers an argument-centered reconstruction of Indian Buddhist metaphysics geared toward contemporary analytic metaphysics. Chapter 7 (“Time”) is especially salient for the present thesis because it (i) frames the intra-Buddhist dispute between “presentists” and “eternalists” (in the contemporary metaphysical sense), (ii) treats Vaibhāṣika Sarvāstivāda as the Buddhist form of eternalism, motivating the view on semantic, epistemological, and ethical grounds (truthmakers/TSB, inference, and karma), and (iii) takes Vasumitra’s *kāritra* doctrine as the crucial strategy for reconciling three-time talk with impermanence (Siderits 2022, 111–118).

This appendix is a stress test of the reconstruction defended in the body of the thesis. I take as my test case Siderits’ presentation of the presentist challenges to the Vaibhāṣika formulation he attributes to Vasumitra.

Two methodological constraints govern what follows:

I accept Siderits’ choice of target—the Vaibhāṣika formulation “most widely accepted ... (and critiqued by their opponents),” attributed to Vasumitra—as the relevant foil.

But I re-specify the level at which Vaibhāṣika claims operate. My central claim is that many presentist objections gain their traction by forcing Sarvāstivāda into a one-level, objectual, tensed ontology (“past things exist,” “future things exist”), whereas the Vaibhāṣika core is better understood as a meta-level semantic–modal architecture: (i) a de-temporalised copular *asti* functioning as a truth-linker, and (ii) temporal markers as higher-order phase indices on *kāritra* (efficacy), not as tenses built into existence.

The guiding hypothesis, then, is not that Siderits misreports the debate, but that the strongest presentist objections presuppose a parsing of Sarvāstivāda that my reconstruction precisely rejects. The aim is to show, in a controlled way, which objections dissolve once the parsing is changed, and which pressures remain.

2. The Interpretive Pivot: De-temporalised *asti* and Phase-Indexed Efficacy

Siderits summarises Vasumitra’s move as follows: “Tense is just our way of specifying the location of the occurrence of efficacy for events that themselves exist timelessly.” (Siderits 2022, 118).

I treat this sentence not as a commitment to a “block-universe” metaphysics, but as a compressed statement of two distinct theses that my reconstruction separates:

A de-temporalised truth-linker (*asti*). The relevant “timelessness” is not a thesis about a thing’s persistence across time, but about the logical form of Vaibhāṣika predication: *asti* functions primarily as a copula that links a *dharma* to the complete set of predicates that fix what it is, and so fixes the truth-conditions of those predications without importing tense.

A higher-order temporal marking system. “Past/present/future” are best read as phase predicates (*avasthā/adhvan* markers) that specify where, in a causal itinerary, some efficacy-index is realised, not as three regions of a timeline through which a thing literally moves.

This is precisely why Siderits can report Vasumitra as combining (i) momentariness with (ii) “three-time existence”: momentariness concerns efficacy (what gets realised in a single moment), while “three-time existence” concerns a *dharma*’s admissibility to be truthfully predicated under phase-indices.

What follows uses this pivot to re-assess the presentist challenges that Siderits catalogues.

3. Objection 1: Vision in the Dark, Dispositions, and the Alleged “Blindness” Consequence

Siderits reconstructs a presentist worry: if the vision faculty’s efficacy is to yield visual cognition, then in darkness (with no visual cognition) the eternalist seems driven to say that ordinary people are, at that moment, blind. He notes that the presentist blocks an easy re-

ply in terms of dispositions, since (as they argue) dispositions require a persisting bearer, and the momentarist denies persistence. He then reports an eternalist reply in terms of a moment-to-moment series where what the efficacy yields depends on conditions. (Siderits 2022, 118–120).

My reply is that the presentist dilemma only looks inescapable if one assumes that “vision *dharma*” has a single, fixed efficacy-specification (“produce visual cognition”) and that the only way to handle conditionality is to posit a persistent disposition. Under the phase-indexed reading, neither assumption is needed.

Efficacy is not a single univocal output-term. In my reconstruction, what is fixed “in the *dharma*” is not one outcome-token, but a structured package of conditional efficacy-indices: what is realised at a given phase is determined by a network of causal relations. “Produces visual cognition” is one such realisation; “produces a successor phase of the same faculty-stream” is another. The dispute is thus not about whether an unexercised disposition can exist, but about how to model conditional causal unfolding without reifying a persisting substrate.

The “disposition” is replaced by a phase-logical rule, not by a persisting bearer. The presentist claim is: without persistence you cannot speak coherently of powers that may or may not manifest. The Vaibhāṣika reply, on my reading, is: you can speak coherently of conditional efficacy if the conditionals are internal to the *dharma*’s predicate-structure and realised phase-by-phase. The explanatory work is done by the phase-indexed realisation of efficacy, not by a persisting carrier.

So, the “blind in the dark” pressure does not force Vaibhāṣika into persistence or into blindness; it forces a clarification of what kind of thing an efficacy-index is. Under my reconstruction, it is a phase-indexed causal rule, not a disposition borne by a persisting entity.

4. Objection 2: Why Does Efficacy Occur at One Moment Rather than Another? The Regress Worry

Siderits reports a classic presentist pressure: if a *dharma* is said to exist “in all three times” but its efficacy is confined to one moment, what explains why the efficacy occurs then rather

than earlier or later? He reconstructs the concern as a looming regress: efficacy begins to look like something that “comes into existence” at a certain time and therefore demands an explanation. (Siderits 2022, 120).

My reply is that the regress is generated by a tacit shift in levels: it treats “efficacy occurs” as the introduction of a new time-indexed entity or event over and above the phase-indexed predication itself.

Efficacy-occurrence is not an extra event to be time-located; it is the phase-index itself. On my account, “its efficacy occurs at (t_n)” is not the assertion that a thing acquires a new property at (t_n) in addition to its standing existence. It is the assertion that the relevant efficacy-predicate is instantiated at that phase, where phase is already the temporal marker (*avasthā/adhvan*). Hence the explanation of “why there?” is just the explanation of the phase transition in the causal itinerary. There is no need for a second-order “time of the efficacy of the efficacy.”

Condition-talk must be phase-sensitive, not merely entity-sensitive. The presentist assumes: if a condition (say, light) exists in all three times, why does it “do its conditioning” only at one time? But on the phase-indexed reading, it is a category mistake to treat “exists” as “is equally conditionally efficacious at all phases.” The condition’s contribution is itself phase-indexed: the relevant relational configuration may obtain at one phase and not at another without positing any additional “activation event.”

This does not eliminate the need for explanation; it relocates it. What needs explaining is not why a timeless entity “selects” a time to act, but why a causal itinerary enters one phase rather than another. That is exactly the kind of explanation *abhidharma* analysis is built to deliver.

5. Objection 3: “Demi-Production” and the Claim that Causal Production Cannot Be Momentary

Siderits reports a presentist argument (attributed to Vasubandhu) that production seems to involve two sides (a giving and a receiving), and thus cannot be completed within a single moment; if efficacy is production, efficacy cannot be confined to the “present” moment of

the *dharma*. He also notes that the eternalist can answer by allowing real relations across times and treating “projection” as something that occurs at the cause’s moment. (Siderits 2022, 120–121).

My reply is that the presentist objection depends on forcing “production” into a one-moment, one-place predicate. The phase semantics I defend gives a cleaner decomposition:

The cause-side and effect-side are different phase predicates. “Projecting” belongs to the cause’s present phase; “manifesting” belongs to the effect’s present phase. Production, then, is not a single monolithic event that must “fit” into one phase; it is a structured relation across successive phases.

This does not trivialise causation; it makes the causal relation the basic unit. The presentist wants to show that nothing like production can be real if momentariness is true. The Vaibhāṣika answer (on my reconstruction) is that what is real is precisely the phase-structured causal relation; the “two-sidedness” is not an embarrassment but the shape of the phenomenon.

Thus, “demi-production” is not a reductio; it is evidence that the objectual, one-place model of “production” is the wrong model for the *abhidharma*’s causal grammar.

6. Objection 4: The Identity/Difference Dilemma—if *dharma* and Efficacy Are Identical, Doesn’t It Yield Infinite Effects?

Siderits calls this “perhaps the most powerful critique,” framing it as a dilemma: if *dharma* and efficacy are identical, efficacy exists in all three times and the *dharma* would produce its effect repeatedly; if distinct, the account threatens to reify *dharmanas* as persisting bearers of powers. (Siderits 2022, 121–122).

My reply is that the dilemma presupposes a metaphysical picture I reject: a *dharma* as a bare substrate that either (i) just is its efficacy, or (ii) is something over and above it that carries efficacy as a further item. The dual-aspect account (*dravya/vastu*) blocks this substrate/cargo framing.

At the *dravya* level, “efficacy” is part of the *dharma*’s definitional profile. In the tenseless predicational register, a *dharma* is fixed by the complete set of predicates that define it.

Among those predicates are its causal indices—what it can do under which conditions. This is not a second entity; it is definitional content.

At the *vastu* level, only one phase-realisation is instantiated at a time. What is momentary is not the truth of the definitional profile, but the occurrence of a particular phase-realisation. That is why the “infinite sprouts” consequence does not follow: it confuses (a) tenseless truth about causal indices with (b) repeated instantiation of a particular causal outcome.

Put bluntly: the presentist dilemma tries to force Vaibhāṣika into choosing between (i) “everything the *dharma* is, it does at all times” and (ii) “the *dharma* persists as an inert carrier.” The *dravya/vastu* distinction provides a third option: the *dharma* is tenselessly definable by its causal indices, while the indices are instantiated phase-by-phase.

7. Objection 5: the “Neither Identical Nor Distinct” Move and Logical Conservatism

Siderits argues that a “neither identical nor distinct” strategy is unacceptable if interpreted as a violation of bivalence, and suggests that the more charitable reading is that the question is ill-formed. (Siderits 2022, 122–123).

I accept the constraint of logical conservatism and propose that, under my reconstruction, “neither identical nor distinct” is best treated as a diagnosis of mis-parsing, not as a third truth value.

If “*dharma*” is being spoken of in the tenseless, definitional register (*dravya*) and “efficacy” in the eventive, phase register (*vastu*), then asking whether they are “identical or distinct” treats two different kinds of item as if they were two objects in one ontological domain.

The correct repair is not to proclaim a mysterious third relation, but to restate the claim in level-sensitive form: efficacy is not an entity distinct from the *dharma*, yet neither is it identical with the *dharma* as an event token.

In this way, Vaibhāṣika can preserve what is valuable in the “neither-nor” intuition without abandoning classical logic.

8. Objection 6: Fatalism—Does Three-Time Existence Make Striving Futile?

Siderits reports a presentist worry that if future events exist (while their efficacy lies in the future), this may suggest that the future is fixed and present striving cannot prevent what will occur. He also notes that it is not clear presentism has an advantage here, since Buddhist causal laws are typically treated as deterministic and the present still contains sufficient conditions for what follows. (Siderits 2022, 123–124).

My reply is to insist on a crucial disambiguation:

“Future exists” is not “future is already realised.” Under the *asti* = truth-linker reading, “future” is a phase-index on a causal itinerary, not a completed block of reality. The semantic point is that we can truthfully predicate “future-phase” of a *dharma* under appropriate causal indexing; it is not that the future token is already actualised.

Analytic completeness entails conditional necessity, not unconditional fatalism. On my reconstruction, the Vaibhāṣika package commits us to a strong modal claim: given a fully specified *dharma* and its causal lattice, some transitions are necessitated. But it does not follow that all future outcomes are fixed independently of present interventions, because interventions are precisely modifications of the relevant conditions in the causal lattice. In short: what is “fixed” is the form of the lawlike connections, not a single inevitable itinerary through them.

Here it is helpful that Siderits himself observes that the presentist cannot simply escape the “up to us” pressure by denying future existence, since present conditions may already necessitate the outcome. That observation supports the claim that fatalism is not a decisive objection to Vaibhāṣika three-time talk once that talk is understood as a phase-indexed semantics rather than a static completed future.

9. Objection 7: Intentional Inexistence, Absences, and “Turtle-Hair Robes”

Siderits contrasts an eternalist restriction (only existents can be objects of thought or speech) with the presentist’s willingness to talk about mere possibilia and even impossibilia, then develops Ratnakīrti’s objection concerning “turtle-hair robes” and similar impossibilia. He

also notes a Vaibhāṣika resource: Saṃghabhadra’s reduction of some absences to mutual incompatibility relations. (Siderits 2022, 124–126).

My reply is that the pressure here is real, but it is best addressed by separating two claims that are often conflated in polemics:

A claim about truthmakers (what makes a statement true), and

A claim about intentional objects (what can be thought or spoken about).

On the *asti* = truth-linker reading, Vaibhāṣika can accept a robust truthmaker discipline without denying that language and thought can range over “name-only” items. A negative existential such as “there is no turtle-hair robe in the closet” can be handled at least in two ways compatible with the spirit of Vaibhāṣika semantics:

As a truth about incompatibility structures among real *dharmas* (the Saṃghabhadra-style reduction strategy, useful for many ordinary absences), and/or

As a semantic truth about failure of instantiation of a coherent predicate-bundle (where the “turtle-hair robe” fails to correspond to any satisfiable bundle of *dharma*-predicates).

The presentist objection bites only if the eternalist insists that intentionality requires the same ontological standing as truthmaking. My reconstruction rejects that assimilation: the Vaibhāṣika can allow reference and thought at the conventional level while requiring that truth, in the strict sense relevant to the Sarvāstivāda slogan, be grounded in the lawful predicational structure of *dharmas*.

10. What Remains After the Stress Test

If the foregoing replies are correct, then many of the presentist challenges Siderits lists are best understood as diagnosing mis-parsing: they tacitly treat “exists in all three times” as a single-level, tensed, objectual claim, rather than as the output of a two-level framework in which *asti* is de-temporalised and temporal markers function as higher-order phase indices on efficacy.

That said, the stress test still reveals two genuine points of ongoing pressure:

The cost of predicate-bundle talk. Any reconstruction that treats *dharmas* as definitional bundles must make fully explicit why this does not amount to illicit “complexity” in

the sense targeted by *abhidharma* anti-composite arguments. This is not a presentist objection as such, but it is a vulnerability that presentist polemics can exploit.

The semantics of impossibilia. Even if the Vaibhāṣika can handle many absences via incompatibility reductions, the class of “utterly non-existent” items (Ratnakīrti’s focal point) still pushes the system to articulate a two-tier semantics—one for intentionality and one for truthmaking.

11. Concluding Statement

Siderits notes that some formulations of Sarvāstivāda risk collapsing into a purely relational story and thus (in his phrase) “fails to take tense seriously.” (Siderits 2022, 117). My central claim in this appendix has been that the reconstruction I defend avoids that collapse by locating tense neither in a time-substance nor in mere relations among events, but in a higher-order phase logic of *kāritra*—while simultaneously de-temporalising *asti* into a truthlinker. Read this way, the most forceful presentist objections lose their intended target: they press hardest against a tensed-existence reading that Vaibhāṣika need not, and should not, accept.

C.3 Alexander von Rospatt: Momentariness and the Sarvāstivāda Architecture

Rospatt’s chapter “The Origin of the Doctrine of Momentariness” in *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness* (1995) is valuable to me for two reasons. First, it is methodologically careful: it refuses to treat “momentariness” as a single monolithic doctrine and instead traces multiple argumentative routes—canonical, scholastic, and yogic—through which the idea could be articulated and extended (Rospatt, 113–121; 122–152; 153–191; 199–205). Second, it foregrounds a tension that any Sarvāstivāda reconstruction must face: how do we square (i) the experience and doctrine of radical impermanence with (ii) the *abhidharma* demand for stable explanatory structure, especially in the analysis of causality, simultaneity, and temporal talk?

My dissertation, however, forces me to reframe what is really at stake in these debates. I argue that Sarvāstivāda’s signature axiom *sarvam asti* should be read primarily

not as a time-centred existential thesis (“everything exists across the three times”), but as a higher-order thesis about predication, completeness, and truth conditions: to be (*asti*) is, in this context, to have—to have the complete bundle of definitional predicates that can be truly said of a conditioned *dharma*. On my reconstruction, Sarvāstivāda’s “time-language” (*atīta/anāgata/pratyutpanna*) is best treated as phase-predication internal to causal unfolding, not as a metaphysics of an external timeline.

From that standpoint, I want to respond to Rospatt by accepting much of his evidence, but re-situating momentariness within a Sarvāstivāda architecture that is plural (not single-track), and ultimately stage-logical (*avasthā*-based) rather than purely *kṣaṇa*-based.

1. Momentariness Is Not “the” Model: Sarvāstivāda Has Four Causal Frameworks

The most important point I want to place on the table—one that directly bears on how to read Rospatt’s chapter—is that, in Sarvāstivāda *abhidharma* self-understanding, momentariness is explicitly only one way of analysing dependent origination.

Vasubandhu reports that *abhidharma* developed four modes of interpreting *pratītyasamutpāda*: momentary (*kṣaṇika*), successive/remote (*prakarṣika*), binding (*sāṃbandhika*), and stage-based/segmentary (*āvasthika*). This is not a marginal scholastic taxonomy. In my reading, once *pratītyasamutpāda* is extended (from at least the Prakaraṇapāda onward) to cover all conditioned *dharms*, these four interpretive modes become, in effect, four models of what conditioned *dharms* are.

And crucially, the tradition’s trajectory is not: “momentariness wins.” Rather, the sources repeatedly show that *kṣaṇika* is often paired with *sāṃbandhika* as a “moment-to-moment flow” picture, whereas *prakarṣika* is paired with *āvasthika* as a more de-temporalised causal analysis. In fact, Vasubandhu is reported to regard the *āvasthika* approach as superior, and Xuanzang’s Chinese version even preserves the claim (as a tradition report) that the Buddha taught the twelve links only in terms of stage-analysis.

This matters for my response to Rospatt because his chapter (understandably, given his topic) is structured around ways in which momentariness becomes compelling—as experience, as inference from change, and as inference from destruction. But from within Sarvāsti-

vāda's own reflective categories, those routes are best treated as articulations of the *kṣaṇika* framework (and allied views), not as the whole story of *abhidharma* causal explanation.

So my first “reply” is simply: even if Rospatt's historical reconstruction of how momentariness arises and expands is persuasive, Sarvāstivāda materials themselves press us to ask a second-order question: why was momentariness not allowed to monopolise the interpretation of dependent origination? The answer, on my reading, lies in *avasthā*.

2. Rospatt on Mind-to-Matter: a Real Problem, but Sarvāstivāda Has a Different Solution

One of Rospatt's most interesting discussions (for my purposes) concerns the move from the momentariness of mental events to the momentariness of corporeal or material bases (Rospatt, 122–152). He notes the pressure created by certain construals of simultaneity between cognition and its basis, and he also records counter-illustrations that try to preserve the endurance of the basis (wick) while allowing the supported flame to “move as a series [of moments].” Importantly, he is cautious: he explicitly doubts whether one can presume that a “pregnant understanding of simultaneity” was so firmly established among Sarvāstivādins (or others) that the momentariness of corporeal matter could simply be derived from it, and he admits he has not pursued the question systematically (Rospatt, 125–129; 149–152).

From my Sarvāstivāda angle, I think this is exactly where *avasthā*-logic changes the terrain.

In my dissertation, I emphasise that Vaibhāṣika thinkers increasingly detemporalise causal talk: instead of asking how long the gap between cause and effect is, they ask: what lies between cause and effect? Their answer is *avasthā*—a causal “phase” or “stage” that does not require measurement against an external time axis.

That conceptual move solves a class of problems that otherwise motivate “momentarisation.” Consider the classic worry: if two factors arise together, how can one be the cause and the other the effect? The Mahāvibhāṣā example I discuss is the simultaneous arising of *sparsā* (contact) and *vedanā* (feeling). The text answers with the lamp/light analogy: even if they arise together, light depends on lamp, not vice versa; and this is explained as stage-

based dependent arising—*sparsā* as the prior stage, *vedanā* as the later stage. The point is explicit: the exposition follows the “logical intent” (理趣) of dependent origination, not a model of mutual or coexistent causation.

If I bring that logic back to Rospatt’s “basis and supported” discussion, I get a distinctive reply:

- The pressure to declare the basis momentary, merely because the supported cognition is momentary, is weakened once causal asymmetry can be grounded in phase-order rather than strictly temporal precedence.
- In other words, simultaneity does not automatically force me into a doctrine of complete congruency that destroys the endurance of the basis; it can instead be parsed as two items occupying different *avasthās* within one causal narrative.

So where Rospatt sees a problem that can push a tradition toward momentarising the basis, I see a Sarvāstivāda-developed tool that can dissolve the problem without that cost: *avasthā* redefines causal priority.

3. Rospatt on Change as Substitution: Compatible with Buddhism, but Not the Sarvāstivāda Core

Rospatt’s chapter offers a powerful account of one major proof-strategy: the deduction of momentariness from change, grounded in an “anti-substantialist tendency.” He describes the denial of a persisting substrate (a *dharmin*) underlying changing properties (*dharmas*), and he notes how, in an Abhidharmic strand, real existence is attributed to *dharmas* alone; therefore, a change of property implies the destruction of the old entity and the origination of a new one. He also observes that analysing transformation as substitution is not necessarily contingent upon a fully developed doctrine of momentariness; it can be arrived at independently (Rospatt, 153–154; 168–176).

I largely agree with the direction of this analysis, but I would shift its centre of gravity in two ways.

3.1 My Key Shift: From “What Exists” to “What Can Be Truly Predicated”

My reconstruction of *sarvam asti* treats Sarvāstivāda philosophy as primarily concerned with predicability and completeness: each conditioned *dharma* is nothing over and above the complete bundle of definitional properties that can be truly predicated of it, with *asti* functioning as a tenseless copula and truth-conditional operator (“to be is to have”).

This means that when I talk about *dharmanas* being “properties,” I am not merely gesturing to a vague trope that “Buddhists treat *dharmanas* as properties.” I am claiming something more structured: Sarvāstivāda builds a system in which metaphysical explanation is systematically correlated with analytic predication—to specify a cause is (in a precise sense) to add a property to the bundle.

So, for me, the decisive point is not simply “change implies substitution because there is no underlying substance.” It is: the identity-conditions of a *dharma* are fixed by a complete predicate-bundle, and causal analysis is a disciplined way of unpacking which predicates are activated, necessitated, or completed.

3.2 My Second Shift: “Change” as Stage-Unfolding, Not Necessarily as Instant Replacement

Sarvāstivāda’s own mature resources also complicate any direct equation of “change” with “momentary substitution.” The classical ninefold scheme of intrinsic determinations is explicit: every conditioned *dharma* includes the *dharma* itself (as a timeless bundle) plus four primary phases—*jāti*, *sthiti*, *jarā*, *anityatā*—together with their corresponding auxiliary “*anulakṣaṇa*” properties that ensure each phase occurs.

The logic here is subtle but crucial: the system makes room for both an object-aspect (*dravyataḥ*, the “timeless bundle”) and an event-aspect (*vastunaḥ*, the sequential instantiation of phases). This is not an attempt to smuggle in an eternal substrate. It is an attempt to articulate how a *dharma* can be analytically complete while still undergoing real causal unfolding.

From this standpoint, Rospatt’s substitution model becomes one possible abstraction—useful for certain arguments—but it is not the Sarvāstivāda core explanation of change.

The Vaibhāṣika core explanation is: change is the causal manifestation of phase-predicates already embedded in the bundle.

This is precisely why my dissertation insists that Sarvāstivāda temporal vocabulary is not best read as ordinary past–present–future. The very choice of *atīta*, *anāgata*, and *pratyutpanna*, three past participles, signals a de-temporalisation in which the focus shifts from external time to event-phases and completion of instantiation.

So my response to Rospatt is: the move “change \Rightarrow substitution \Rightarrow momentariness” is historically important and philosophically coherent, but if we want to understand Sarvāstivāda on its own terms, we should not treat that chain as the only, or even the dominant, explanatory grammar available to them—especially not once *avasthā*-logic becomes explicit.

4. Rospatt on Destruction and Spontaneity: I Agree on the Dialectic, but I Interpret the Vaibhāṣika Move Differently

Rospatt’s discussion of the proof from destruction is one of the chapter’s strongest (Rospatt, 178–191). He isolates three premises behind such proofs: (1) conditioned things are impermanent, (2) they cannot change their nature without losing identity, and (3) their destruction cannot be effected by an external agent; then he asks whether the third premise was independently adopted or whether it was itself shaped by a prior commitment to momentariness. He also argues that spontaneity of destruction is best understood as applying to discrete momentary entities (not macroscopic objects), and that the move to spontaneity likely came after momentariness, rather than serving as its original ground (Rospatt, 189–191).

He further notes a crucial doctrinal fault-line: within Buddhism, the argument that destruction is not caused is repudiated by Sarvāstivādins, who maintain that destruction—though not dependent on an external cause—is effected by the mark of destruction (*anityatā-lakṣaṇa*) (Rospatt, 186–187).

I agree with this portrayal of the debate. Where I differ is how I want to read the Sarvāstivāda invocation of a “mark of destruction.”

4.1 “Mark of Destruction” as Internal/Definitional Causality

My reconstruction of Sarvāstivāda turns on a principled distinction between:

- external/generative causality: what brings a *dharma* into occurrence, and
- internal/definitional causality: how, once arisen, the *dharma* must unfold the predicates that constitute its nature.

When Sarvāstivādins say that destruction is effected by the mark of destruction, I do not hear them as crudely positing “non-being” as an effect produced by some efficient agent. Rather, I understand the claim as follows:

- *anityatā* is an intrinsic phase-property of conditioned *dharmanas* (one of the primary phases in the ninefold scheme), analytically included in the *dharma*’s complete bundle.
- “Destruction” is the completion of that phase in the *dharma*’s causal life; it is not an external event imposed from outside, but the internal unfolding of a built-in predicate.

This is why my framework can simultaneously accommodate two points that otherwise seem to conflict:

1. “Impermanence is always true of the conditioned” (as an analytic predication grounded in completeness), and
2. “Causal unfolding is real” (phases are instantiated sequentially in events).

4.2 Responding to Rospatt’s Worry about Hypostatized *anityatā*

Rospatt notes a line of reasoning (e.g., in discussions around MSABh and related sources) where *anityatā* is treated as a mark that necessarily qualifies the conditioned; then it is argued that if something persisted after origination, it would for some time not be endowed with impermanence, which would contradict the necessity of the mark. He frames this as one way the “logical impossibility of persistence beyond origination” can gain strength when *anityatā* is hypostatized as an intrinsic quality (Rospatt, 192–193).

My reply is that Sarvāstivāda’s stage-based grammar allows a different disambiguation:

- “Being characterized by *anityatā*” can mean: *anityatā* belongs to the *dharma*’s definitional bundle (analytic endowment).

- “Currently undergoing destruction” can mean: the *anityatā*-phase is being instantiated in the causal sequence (eventive activation).

Once those are separated, the inference “impermanence is a necessary mark \Rightarrow the *dharma* must perish immediately upon arising” is no longer forced. The Sarvāstivāda strategy is precisely to secure necessary inclusion at the analytic level while still allowing causal sequencing at the event level.

So I take Rospatt’s reconstruction to have correctly identified a real pressure-point, but I think Sarvāstivāda’s own resources (especially the ninefold scheme and *avasthā* logic) show that “impermanence is intrinsic” need not collapse into a universal metaphysics of instantaneous annihilation.

5. Rospatt on the Experience of Momentariness: I Accept the Yogic Genealogy, but I Locate It within “Flow Mode”

Rospatt’s account of the experience of momentariness is especially important because it prevents us from treating momentariness as merely a scholastic invention. He describes meditative insight stages in which the illusion of endurance is intercepted by discernment of rise-and-fall, followed by a further narrowing of attention toward destruction, yielding a striking experience of universal evanescence (bhanga-type insight). He also notes (via sources like the Hsien-yang) that dependent origination is involved in this process, and that the presence of “four argumentations” specifying *pratītyasamutpāda* suggests an application at the level of discursive thinking, so theoretical considerations may supplement direct perception (Rospatt, 199–205).

On this, I am broadly sympathetic. My own reconstruction of Sarvāstivāda is explicitly designed to show why *abhidharma* causality can be both soteriologically oriented and logically articulated: predication and causal explanation are not opposed; they are structurally intertwined.

But I want to integrate Rospatt’s yogic narrative with a Sarvāstivāda internal distinction: the experience of momentariness belongs most naturally to what I call the “flow” perspective on dependent origination—*abhiśyanda/prakarṣika* as a contemplative analysis of tempo-

ral continuum. The Dharmatrāṭadhyāna Sūtra explicitly defines “flow” as contemplation of *pratītyasamutpāda* through temporal units from a single *kṣaṇa* to *tatkṣaṇa*, then *lava*, up to *muhūrta*.

This dovetails strikingly with Rospatt’s emphasis on meditation narrowing down to moment-to-moment rise and fall. But Sarvāstivāda’s own doctrinal history then does something else: it does not stop at flow-based time analysis; it transitions toward a stage-based (*āvasthika*) causal model that detemporalises the explanation.

So my response is:

- I accept that momentariness can be grounded in yogic experience and then supported by theory (Rospatt’s survey makes that plausible).
- But I think Sarvāstivāda’s more distinctive move is what happens next: the system elevates *avasthā* to a normative explanatory tool—so much so that it can claim (traditionally) that the Buddha explained dependent arising by stages.

That is why, within my thesis, “momentariness” cannot be treated as the single key that unlocks Sarvāstivāda. It is one model inside a broader causal pluralism.

6. What I Think My Framework Adds to Rospatt’s Story

Rospatt’s chapter gives a historically sensitive map of early and classical argumentative routes to momentariness, including the crucial debates around destruction, external causation, and yogic perception (Rospatt, 153–191; 199–205). My dissertation, by contrast, is a systematic attempt to reconstruct Sarvāstivāda’s organising proposition and show how its metaphysics, epistemology, and soteriology hang together when *sarvam asti* is read as a thesis about completeness and sayability rather than mere existence across times.

From that reconstruction, I draw three implications for how I read Rospatt:

1. Momentariness is best situated inside a higher-order predicational programme. If “to be is to have,” then many disputes about impermanence, destruction, and time are fundamentally disputes about what predicates are built into the definition of the conditioned, and how they are legitimately applied.

2. Sarvāstivāda's most characteristic move is not "everything is momentary," but "causality is phase-structured." This is visible both in the reanalysis of temporal terms as participial phase-predicates and in the explicit privileging of *avasthā* as the refined method of interpreting dependent origination.
3. Rospatt's puzzles about simultaneity and causal priority can be re-solved without forcing universal momentariness. The lamp/light logic applied to *sparsā* and *vedanā* is not an isolated trick; it illustrates the deeper Sarvāstivāda idea that causal order is not always temporal order, but can be stage order.

7. Closing

So my "comprehensive reply" to Rospatt is not a rejection, but a relocation. I accept his historical demonstration that the doctrine of momentariness can be supported by meditative experience and by scholastic inferences from change and destruction. But from my Sarvāstivāda perspective, it is methodologically crucial not to let that story flatten *abhidharma* causal theory into a single axis.

Sarvāstivāda explicitly preserves multiple explanatory grammars of dependent origination, and its mature Vaibhāṣika stance increasingly privileges *avasthā*—a stage logic that detemporalises causal analysis and redefines what "time" is doing in the system.

In that light, momentariness remains real and philosophically meaningful—but it becomes, for me, one mode among four, not the final metaphysical key.

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