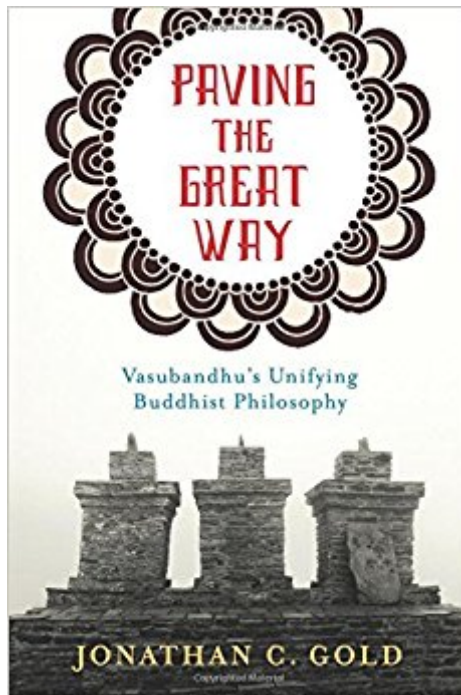




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# Paving The Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy



## Synopsis

The Indian Buddhist philosopher Vasubandhu (fourth–fifth century C.E.) is known for his critical contribution to Buddhist Abhidharma thought, his turn to the Mahayana tradition, and his concise, influential Yogacara “Vijñānavada” texts. *Paving the Great Way* reveals another dimension of his legacy: his integration of several seemingly incompatible intellectual and scriptural traditions, with far-ranging consequences for the development of Buddhist epistemology and the theorization of tantra. Most scholars read Vasubandhu’s texts in isolation and separate his intellectual development into distinct phases. Featuring close studies of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakosabhasya*, *Vyakhyayukti*, *Vimsatika*, and *Trisvabhavanirdeśa*, among other works, this book identifies recurrent treatments of causality and scriptural interpretation that unify distinct strands of thought under a single, coherent Buddhist philosophy. In Vasubandhu’s hands, the Buddha’s rejection of the self as a false construction provides a framework through which to clarify problematic philosophical issues, such as the nature of moral agency and subjectivity under a broadly causal worldview. Recognizing this continuity of purpose across Vasubandhu’s diverse corpus recasts the interests of the philosopher and his truly innovative vision, which influenced Buddhist thought for a millennium and continues to resonate with today’s philosophical issues. An appendix includes extensive English-language translations of the major texts discussed.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Vasubandhu, one of the greatest minds in the history of Buddhism, is brought to life in these pages. Jonathan Gold’s synthetic treatment of his most important ideas is a model for how to treat the work

of a classical Buddhist thinker. Written in clear and lively prose, *Paving the Great Way* will be the definitive work on this great Buddhist philosopher for many years to come. Essential reading for anyone interested in classical Buddhist thought. (José Ignacio Cabeza, University of California, Santa Barbara) Gold has done something extraordinary: he has pulled together the key philosophical strands running through Vasubandhu's works, thereby demonstrating far greater continuity than might have been suspected, and he has given us a much deeper and more compelling author as a result. This book will forever change the way we read Vasubandhu. (Mark Siderits, Seoul National University) A rare example of a sustained and subtle engagement with the whole career of one of history's greatest Buddhist philosophers, *Paving the Great Way* makes an important and eminently readable case for thinking that the works of the prolific Buddhist thinker Vasubandhu represent the development of a unified philosophical project. (Dan Arnold, University of Chicago) *Paving the Great Way* is a masterpiece of philosophical exposition, synthesis, and creative commentary. Gold addresses every facet of Vasubandhu's considerable and varied corpus and integrates them in his articulation of Vasubandhu's original synthesis of Buddhist ideas. Gold brings to this project great philological erudition, deep philosophical insight, scrupulous commentarial skills, and a marvelous lucidity in exposition. This book is a major contribution not only to Vasubandhu scholarship but also to Yogacara studies, the history of Indian philosophy, the history of world philosophy, and the engagement between Western and Buddhist philosophical scholarship. (Jay L. Garfield, Yale "NUS College") This book makes a major contribution not only to Vasubandhu scholarship but also to Yogacara scholarship as well as to the history of Indian Buddhist philosophy and contemporary engagement between Western and Asian Buddhist philosophical scholarship.... Highly recommended. (Choice) Beautifully written and cogently argued.... A superb assessment of one of Buddhism's greatest thinkers. (Buddhadharma) An erudite, informative, impressively organized and presented study, *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy* is a model of insightful scholarship. (Midwest Book Review) I am sure that students of Buddhism will use Gold's extraordinary book for a long time to come. (Journal of Religion)

The Indian monk Vasubandhu (fourth "fifth century C.E.) is one of Buddhism's most celebrated philosophers. *Paving the Great Way* draws together the key ideas from across his diverse writings. Vasubandhu unified seemingly incompatible intellectual and scriptural traditions and provided a crucial foundation for the development of Buddhist epistemology and the theorization of tantra. In *Vasubandhu*, the book reveals a surprisingly relevant philosophical position: a distinctive, Buddhist approach to knowledge, moral agency, and subjectivity, under a causal worldview in which the "self"

is understood to be an illusion.

This excellent volume by Jonathan Gold is a fantastic resource for students of Buddhism, particularly those interested in the thought of Vasubandhu. Gold begins by carefully addressing the contentions within scholarship about there being multiple Vasubandhus. This is a common contention between modern scholarship and traditional Buddhist interpretations--and pertains not only to Vasubandhu but to Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti and others. Gold does a very good job here articulating why he feels it is legitimate to speak of a single Vasubandhu as the author of a number of texts attributed to him and walks the reader through the various arguments pro and con so that readers can make up their mind on their own. This is just one example of how this book appeals to both scholarly/academic readers and Buddhist "practitioners" alike. I think both will find much of value in this book. The author then moves through the arguments of Vasubandhu's text with great skill and clarity. The arguments are too numerous to elaborate here, but all have to do with examining the substantiality of phenomena, and address the Vaibhasika and Sautrantika theories on various points. The author, however, keeps in mind that readers will likely be interested in the Madhyamaka considerations of such positions as well, and he gives important hints and notes with regard to this that I believe readers will find very valuable. I do not know the author personally, but it appears to me that he considers this text important not only historically and philosophically, but also as a resource for potential practice and implementation, which is something I greatly appreciate. I therefore highly recommend this. There are very few accessible, intelligent and well-researched books on Vasubandhu and Dr Gold has made a truly great contribution with this work.

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