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9 – Thus, the Yogācāra tradition may be compared, in this way, with Dennett 1991. I mention the subject because of the Buddha’s emphasis on the no-self doctrine, but of course the Yogācāra tradition was equally concerned to point out the fictional character of our experiential *objects*, the other side of the “dual” relation of intentionality.

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## Response to Jonathan Gold’s Review of *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*

### **Dan Arnold**

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I have enjoyed spirited philosophical conversations with Jonathan Gold for well over a decade now, and I always learn from them; I am grateful, then, to the editors of *Philosophy East and West* for the opportunity to share something of our long-standing conversation in this forum, just as I am grateful to Professor Gold for his characteristically generous and insightful engagement with my book. While the philosophical and interpretive alternatives he develops in response to my book’s critique of

Dharmakīrti are undoubtedly defensible, it will come as no surprise to Professor Gold that I am generally not persuaded that they succeed in getting Dharmakīrti (or cognitive-scientifically inclined philosophers of the present) off the hook. I have little expectation that what I have to say in turn will persuade unregenerate empiricists such as Professor Gold; in the hope, though, that our exchange might nevertheless bring the basic issues more clearly into focus, I would like to sketch some of the reasons for thinking that Gold's more sympathetic reading of Dharmakīrti does not escape the line of critique I have pressed.

The basic problems in philosophy of mind that my book explores can be brought into view by attending to the two fundamentally different senses of the word *thought*. 'Thought' can refer to something one *does*, to particular *acts of thinking* such as occur on specific occasions with particular psychological and other conditions in their past; 'thought' also refers, however, to the semantic *content* of such acts, to what particular occasions of thinking are *about*.<sup>1</sup> (The same observation applies to a whole range of verbal nouns including *judgment*, *belief*, etc.) The first sense of the word represents the purview of *psychology*, which concerns such questions as how, as a matter of empirical fact, human mental processes tend to operate, what their causes and conditions are, etc. Insofar, however, as one is concerned with the second sense of the word—with what is *meant* when someone says "my thought is *x*"—one has brought essentially *logical* considerations into play, raising such questions as whether one thought is justified by another, what its entailments are, and so forth.

Among the enduring questions in philosophy of mind is whether it is possible to explain the second, logical sense of 'thought' with reference only to the first, psychological sense. Insofar as they are apt to suppose that the only finally real things are those that figure in causally describable perceptual encounters with the world, those of a generally empiricist persuasion—chiefly exemplified, in my book, by Dharmakīrti (for whom perception is privileged just insofar as it is nonconceptual) and Jerry Fodor (for whom the semantic content of thought is finally a function of the "syntax" of particular brain events)—are by and large committed to explaining mental content as an exhaustively psychological phenomenon; after all, if one is committed to the view that only perceptible particulars count as "real," it stands to reason that everything about our mental lives must admit of explanation in terms thereof.

The view that such an explanation can be carried out is *psychologism*—a view paradigmatically exemplified by Locke, whose basic notion of "Ideas"<sup>2</sup> problematically conflates the two senses of *thought*, referring at once to particular mental representations, and to the semantic content of such representations. This view was famously targeted early in the twentieth century by Husserl and Frege, with the latter's notion of "Thought" (*Gedanke*), for example, meant precisely to counter Locke's problematic conflation: "What is a content of my consciousness, my idea, should be sharply distinguished from what is an object of my thought."<sup>3</sup> Frege's "thought" thus denotes the intersubjectively available *content* of acts of judging, in contrast to Locke's "Ideas," which chiefly denote the particular mental events (immediately accessible only to the subjects thereof) that *bear* that content. This way of framing the

issue should be recalled with regard to Gold's characterization of my book as arguing that "[t]here is no possibility of describing ideas causally . . . because what operates causally is by its nature nonconceptual, whereas only what is conceptual is available to thought." Significantly, it is only with respect to one sense of 'ideas' that this accurately captures my argument, for I would not deny that 'ideas' in the sense of specific mental goings-on will admit of characterization in causal terms. My point, however, is that a full characterization of things like *having an idea* requires reference also to their *content*, and that this will not admit of such characterization.

The guiding thought of my book is that even though Dharmakīrti was emphatically not a physicalist, he and contemporary physicalists are alike committed to basically psychologistic accounts of thought—and this because they share the presupposition that only causally efficacious particulars count as finally real. For Dharmakīrti, of course, such particulars turn out to be in some sense mental, whereas for philosophers like Fodor they are the kinds of things that figure in physical-scientific explanations; it is, though, philosophically revealing that the central presupposition they share may finally be more significant than their divergent intuitions about what kind of "stuff" these real particulars consist of. That this is so is suggested, I argue in the book, by the extent to which the same line of critique cuts against both positions.

The line of critique in question comes in two stages. First, it is argued that the logical sense of 'thought' cannot, in fact, be gotten out of the psychological sense thereof; the kind of semantic content that represents the purview of logic cannot be explained by or reduced to any particular goings-on in the heads (or in the *citta-saṃtānas*) of any number of particular subjects. In the book, this stage of the argument is particularly advanced against Dharmakīrti by his Mīmāṃsaka critics; their arguments for the eternity of language, I suggested, represent a case for the ineliminably basic character of linguistic meaning, which (Mīmāṃsakas claimed) is objective at least in the sense that its reality cannot coherently be thought to depend on any particular language-user's mental states.

The second stage of the argument is then to show that the first claim—that the semantic content of thought will not admit of exhaustive explanation in terms of any thinker's psychology—cannot coherently be taken to count against the reality of meaning, since the reality thereof is in fact a condition of the possibility of the reductionist's own argument for her case. One might, in other words, conclude from the fact that thought's semantic content is not psychologically explicable that it cannot be finally real; if it is impossible to explain things like *beliefs* and *reasons* in terms of psychological events, well, that must be so much the worse for mental content, which must therefore have a place simply in "folk psychology"—in an optional theory that we needn't finally advert to in giving a complete account of the mental.<sup>4</sup> But (the second stage of my argument goes) this is not, in fact, a coherent move, since it is only *as the semantic content of the reductionist's own claim* that this proposal is available to us in the first place. This stage of the argument is developed against Dharmakīrti with reference to Madhyamaka; for those among Dharmakīrti's co-religionists who took their bearings from the thought of Nāgārjuna

argued (I take it) that *no* account of what there is and what we're like can coherently be privileged as disclosing the ultimate truth, insofar as the terms of any account will themselves turn out to depend for their intelligibility on the very things supposedly explained thereby.<sup>5</sup>

Now, the first part of this two-stage argument—the part advanced by the Mīmāṃsakas, who aim to show that semantic content is *sui generis*, and that accounts (such as Dharmakīrti's *apoha* doctrine) that would reduce it to causally describable psychological events end up presupposing precisely what they set out to explain—is not, as Gold's review at one point suggests, an argument to the effect that "the intentional, subject-object structure inherent in all thought and language may be taken to show that no merely causal explanation could be a sufficient explanation." It is not in virtue of its "subject-object structure" that thought is resistant to causal explanation; rather, it is in virtue of the essentially *normative* character of thought's semantic content, reference to which is absent from Gold's review. Insofar as I *mean* anything in expressing a thought, my expression entails potentially innumerable truths—"truths," as Paul Boghossian says, "about how I *ought* to apply the expression, if I am to apply it in accord with its meaning, not truths about how I *will* apply it." This fact cannot be accounted for by any empirical survey of the dispositions of any number of particular language users, since (Boghossian explains) "to be disposed to use a word in a certain way implies at most that one *will*, not that one *should* (one can have dispositions to use words *incorrectly*)."<sup>6</sup> It is the essentially normative dimension of thought that represents the distinctive purview of logic (as contra psychology); and insofar as thought constitutively involves this dimension, we must, as John McDowell says, "see intuitions as standing in rational relations to what we should think, not just in causal relations to what we do think. Otherwise the very idea of what we think goes missing."<sup>7</sup> So the real challenge, for physicalists and for Dharmakīrti alike, is to explain how an exhaustively causal explanation of particular acts of *thinking* could ever yield the normativity that essentially characterizes *thought* (in the semantic content sense).

Gold aptly characterizes one of Dharmakīrti's moves in this regard as mere "hand waving," in the same way as in the many contemporary appeals (noted by Gold) to the "triggering" of what Ilkka Pyysiäinen (for one) refers to as our "inferential system." Insofar as 'trigger' here really means *cause*, such appeals amount simply to the assertion that our conceptual capacities are *caused* to engage by perceptual inputs; to call this causation "triggering," however, is simply to issue a promissory note on the possibility of providing an explanation of how this is possible.<sup>8</sup> The problem is that Gold's own proposal does not, so far as I can see, amount to anything more than similar hand waving. Thus, of Dharmakīrti's account as more sympathetically reconstructed in light of Sakya Paṇḍita, Gold says: "This kind of behind-the-scenes *causal story of perception giving shape to conceptualization* allows one to grant a certain kind of epistemic authority to knowledge gained through perception due to perception's specifically causal nature, without falsely imagining that objects are 'given' to perception as they exist. This might not entirely circumvent the critique of the Myth of the Given, but it certainly moves the target" (emphasis added). I do not see, how-

ever, that Gold's account can do anything of the sort.<sup>9</sup> First of all, insofar as it is only *as known* that causation itself can show up for us, our access to the causally describable character of perception cannot be thought essentially more secure than everything else we know; to that extent, we lose any grip on the idea that we can identify the causation of perception as a discrete, privileged part of the process—in which case the sharp distinction Dharmakīrti draws between perception and rationality is largely evacuated of significance. Allowing as much, Gold notes that “[i]t makes a significant difference to note that what is ‘given’ is given in error; such a view makes it difficult to label Dharmakīrti as an empirical foundationalist.” The whole point, though, is that Dharmakīrti *distinguishes* the perceptual events from the “error,” and reckons the latter as belonging entirely to the conceptual side of the process; but as long as perception is privileged (as, e.g., uniquely inerrant) owing to its being causally describable, all of the problems that Sellars showed for the “myth of the given” remain in play. And if Gold's point here is that perception is *not*, after all, privileged in this way, then it is hard to see how the distinction between perception and rationality can do any work for Dharmakīrti.

The second problem is evident in Gold's sketch of what happens “behind-the-scenes”; for in fact, the account on offer tells us nothing determinate about what perception's “giving shape to conceptualization” consists of. Is perception's thus “giving shape” to semantically contentful knowledge to be understood in terms of its *causing* judgment, or in some way essentially *other* than causally? If the former, then Dharmakīrti again forfeits his claim that perception is uniquely causally describable—in addition to which we are still owed an account of how the normative character of thought can be explained in causal terms. (Of course, the *apoha* doctrine represents Dharmakīrti's attempt to provide precisely such an account; to the extent, however, that this doctrine cannot—as I take the Mīmāṃsakas to have shown—finally explain *meaning* without somewhere along the way presupposing that we already have the idea of meaning, we must still await a satisfactory account.) If, instead, perception constrains judgment in some way other than causally, then Dharmakīrti forfeits the claim that only causal relations are finally real. Either perception “gives shape to conceptualization” causally, or not; neither horn of this dilemma is tenable, and it does not solve anything merely to assert (with Gold) that although “causally structured perception is sequestered from cognition” it is somehow the case that perception is nevertheless “causally *related* to conceptual cognition.” How or whether that could be so is just what we are trying to understand.

Nor does it help, so far as I can see, to allow (by appealing to the classically Buddhist idea of “two truths”) that the proposed causal explanation is itself just *conventionally* true, as when Gold opines that “[o]ne who adopts a Yogācāra view—that language is a flawed instrument and the final reality is inconceivable—should never claim to be affirming *what there really is*.” This cannot work, at least, if one wants to preserve the contrast between “conventional” and “ultimate” truth as Dharmakīrti and other proponents of Yogācāra (on my reading) understand that contrast. Here, it becomes necessary for me to say something about my interpretation of Madhyamaka—and in particular about the sense Madhyamaka makes, on that interpretation, *as a*

*Buddhist position.* In characterizing my reading of Madhyamaka, Gold wonders: “if it is self-contradictory to deny that we are ‘reasoning persons,’ does this mean that the Buddha mistakenly contradicted himself when he affirmed ‘no-self’ (*anātman*) . . . ?” In the same vein, he says that “it does seem rather contrary to a Buddhist view of unenlightened beings to say that there’s no better description of what’s happening than the ordinary way ‘we take ourselves to be.’”

Among Gold’s worries, clearly, is that the line of critique I have pressed against Dharmakīrti is tantamount to a critique, as well, of *anātmavāda*—given which it would indeed be hard to see how the supposedly Mādhyamika arguments I have marshaled as part of that critique could count as Buddhist. One thing to be said in this regard is that Gold is evidently in thrall to the idea that the kind of transcendental argument I have made is, *ipso facto*, an argument for *selves*—hence, his characterization of me as arguing (*inter alia*) that “*being manifest* requires a viewer—the Kantian synthetic subject—who is *aware of* the manifestation”; hence, too, his thought that “whereas the construction of concepts seems to require an ‘intentional’ agent (as Arnold proposes in his argument against *apoha*), that implicit *subject* need not be any more real than the *concept*.” In fact, though, to read my arguments as introducing a “viewer who is aware”—an “intentional agent” who does the work of “construction of concepts”—is, among other things, precisely to compromise the properly transcendental character of the arguments. Kant himself emphasized, against such a reading, that it is mistaken to suppose that the kind of argument he makes entitles us to conclude anything about the “agent” of any particular acts; that kind of conclusion is exemplified, rather, by the famous Cartesian argument, which Kant diagnoses as a “paralogism.”<sup>10</sup> What the arguments are meant to show, rather, is that the space of reasons is incontrovertibly real, always already available to us just insofar as each of us already finds him- or herself reasoning; indeed, it is precisely the *objectivity* of the space of reasons—its independence of any particular agent—that the argument shows.<sup>11</sup> This line of argument, then, does not by itself necessarily recommend *ātmavāda*.

Be that as it may, might not Gold nevertheless be right to worry that it is hardly Buddhist to affirm that there is nothing more real than conventionally described experience? In fact, I think I have suggested an account of Madhyamaka (on my understanding thereof) as the *most* authentically Buddhist position in this regard—as representing, indeed, the most thoroughlygoingly *Buddhist* development of the two truths idea. Consider, then, the basic question that is occasioned by the cardinal Buddhist doctrine of *anātmavāda*, “the claim that we are not selves”: if we are not *selves*, then what are we? The basically Ābhidharmika answer to this question is that “we” are, as a matter of ultimate fact, nothing more than causally continuous series of momentary events. An *ultimately true* description of us, then, will make reference only to the *ultimately real* particulars that Ābhidharmikas referred to as *dharmas*; the causal regularities obtaining among these ontological primitives finally explain how we can mistakenly come to think of ourselves as *selves*. According to this kind of view—which represents the philosophical mainstream in the Indian Buddhist tradition—“ultimate truth” represents a privileged level of description, one that ex-

*plains* everything that is the case under a “conventionally true” description. There is, in short, something that it makes sense to say we really are—it’s just that it’s not at all what we typically think.

This is, on my reading, the understanding of the two truths to which the Yogācāra tradition in general (and Dharmakīrti in particular) is heir. On these later developments of this understanding, it is no longer thought necessary to refer to the full menagerie of *dharmas*, only to momentary mental events; everything there is can be explained as a function of what Vasubandhu referred to even in the *Abhidharmakośa* as *saṃtānapariṇāma*, “transformation of a continuum.” What there really is, then, is nothing more than causally continuous series of “manifestations” (*vijñapti*), which will ultimately admit of characterization in entirely impersonal terms—as, e.g., *paratantra-svabhāva* or *ālayavijñāna*, both of which amount to something that is not phenomenologically accessible, something that essentially differs from the “imagined” (*parikalpita*) way in which the same events show up for a first-person perspective. While I am more inclined than Gold to see discontinuities between Vasubandhu and Dharmakīrti,<sup>12</sup> I would nevertheless affirm that in this respect Dharmakīrti clearly advances the same basic understanding of the two truths; what is really real, for him, is just self-manifesting mental particulars, which we are immediately acquainted with in the only genuinely *perceptual* (because the only genuinely *nonconceptual*) awareness, which is *svasaṃvitti*. There remains, in any case, something we can refer to as what there *really* is.

In sharp contrast, the Mādhyamika answer to the basic question occasioned by *anātmavāda*—if we are not selves, then what are we?—is thoroughly radical: there *is* no such thing as what we really are; rather, the question is misguided from the start, and cannot be answered by any philosophical analysis that introduces some new kind of object (whether an *ātma*, *dharmas*, self-manifesting mental particulars, or whatever). This, on my understanding, is what it means to say that, for Mādhyamikas, the ultimate truth is that *there is no ultimate truth*. And it seems to me that Nāgārjuna is right to think that this represents the most thoroughly Buddhist answer insofar as *anything* proposed as “ultimately true”—anything proposed as the point at which explanation comes to rest—could have that status only if it is finally an exception to the Buddhist insight that everything is dependently originated. In the context of this reading, then, the point in saying (as I have) that for Mādhyamikas there is nothing more real than “the reasoning persons we take ourselves to be” is *not* to affirm that we are, after all, “selves”; rather, the point is that while we are not ourselves ultimately real (every moment in our lives is, instead, dependently originated), there is nothing it makes sense to say is essentially *more* “real” than this, nothing that we “really” are. This is not, then, simply a ratification of the naive perspective of ordinary beings (who are, for Mādhyamikas as for Buddhists more generally, deeply attached to the idea that there *is* some way that we really are); the strong claim, rather, is that *nothing* is “real” in the way we typically think things must be. (This is not nihilism insofar as the claim is not that *nothing exists*; rather, it is just the intuitive criterion of *being real* that Mādhyamikas mean to refute—which is in fact to show the only way that anything *can* exist, which is dependently.)

What, though, of Gold's protestations that proponents of Yogācāra, too, "never claim to be affirming *what there really is*"? Surely it is right that "the self-undermining nature of Buddhist doctrine" is a "central theme of Mahāyāna texts,"<sup>13</sup> and that "Yogācāra scriptures and treatises acknowledge that their own doctrines are not, finally, meaningful in the way they appear to be." There remains, however, the question of which Buddhist philosophical approach makes most consistent sense of that fact—and I think, with Nāgārjuna, that proponents of Yogācāra and all the other schools of thought that retain the basically Ābhidharmika understanding of the two truths are not, in fact, as adequate to such tropes as Madhyamaka is. This is because these other approaches depend on the contrast between conventional and ultimate truth in a way that Nāgārjuna does not. Dharmakīrti cannot coherently allow that his is just a conventionally true account, and at the same time maintain that causal efficacy is the unique criterion of the real (and that the logical space of reasons must therefore be finally explicable in causal terms); for this is to claim to offer a conventionally valid account while at the same time eschewing what are precisely the conditions for the intelligibility of such an account. Nor can Gold's Yogācārin coherently claim to be saying something just conventionally true in urging that "every conceptual cognition based on perception is not only subject to doubt, it is *mistaken*, because *every conceptual cognition is mistaken*"—which is precisely to affirm a contrast with a supposedly privileged, *non*-mistaken perceptual awareness. The contrast between these (particularly as emphatically affirmed by Dharmakīrti) cannot do any philosophical work for Dharmakīrti and other Yogācārin unless it is allowed that one side of the process is privileged as disclosing what is really the case.

So, too, for Gold's characteristically Yogācāra claim that "[d]uality *can be eliminated*," which is possibly true just insofar as "dually" is "only *how things appear*, not how things really are." This means nothing unless it means that mental events are real *only as impersonally described* (only, in a contemporary idiom, as scientifically described from a third-person perspective); what shows up from a first-person perspective, in contrast, is essentially less real, is (again in a contemporary idiom) epiphenomenal. In that case, then, notwithstanding the claim that (as Gold says in a footnote) "there are terms such as *dharmadhātu* and *tathatā*, which *name* what is beyond our conceptual structures, but [which] are described *via negativa*," the proponent of Yogācāra is giving a strong answer to the question *if we are not selves, then what are we?* But it makes no sense to claim that experience is real only under an impersonal description—that only "nondual awareness" is finally real, and that experience as it shows up for a subject is essentially unreal—and at the same time to claim not to be making a really true claim.

In fact, I submit, we can make no sense of any claim to the effect that conventionally described experience is *essentially unreal*, since it is only *as* conventionally experiencing subjects that we can understand any claims at all; altogether to abandon the commonsense view of the mental, as Lynne Rudder Baker puts the point, "would be to relinquish the point of view from which the idea of making sense makes sense."<sup>14</sup> Is this conclusion necessarily tantamount to giving up on the idea that Bud-

dhahood is possible? If so, then I must confess that I do not see what sense the idea of Buddhahood makes; indeed, it seems to me that nobody *could* make sense of this apart from assent to the Buddhist tradition's testimony to its possibility. Might it not be the case, though, that what a Buddha knows is simply that ordinary experience does not require—indeed, that it is inconsistent with—the idea that there is something that we “really” are? That it is only *because* there is nothing we “really” are that anything at all (including the Buddhist path) is possible? It seems to me that there is a good Buddhist case to be made for thinking so—and that this case is expressed in the Mādhyamika's claim that the question “*what are we really?*” is fundamentally misguided and will therefore not admit of any answer at all.

The foregoing response will, of course, admit of some answer from Gold; the articulation of any philosophical position always does! If, though, something of the foregoing is helpful in clarifying some of the possible next steps in the conversation, I will happily count that as success enough.

## Notes

- 1 – Gilbert Ryle is among those who have exploited the significance of this distinction, having noted that terms like ‘thought’ and ‘judgment’ are equivocal, “since they may equally well denote ‘thinkings’ as ‘what-is-thought’ (*cogitationes* as *cogitata*, *judicationes* as *judicata*). . . .” This comment comes (at p. 94) near the beginning of Ryle's “Are There Propositions?” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, n.s., 30 (1930): pp. 92–126, which can profitably be read as background to my framing of the issues here and in my book.
- 2 – “Since *the Mind*, in all its Thoughts and Reasonings, hath no other immediate Object but its own *Ideas*, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident, that our Knowledge is only conversant about them. *Knowledge* then seems to me to be nothing but *the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas*” (*Essay concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 4, chap. 1, § 1–2).
- 3 – Frege, “The Thought: A Logical Inquiry,” *Mind* 65, no. 259 (1956): 306.
- 4 – This sort of claim is widely taken to be exemplified by Stephen Stich, in *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science: The Case against Belief* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983).
- 5 – This characterization of the basic line of critique as consisting of these two stages follows Lynne Rudder Baker, whose *Saving Belief: A Critique of Physicalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987) similarly consists of two parts, the first (“Will Cognitive Science Save Belief?”) arguing that the semantic content of *belief* cannot be reduced to physical goings-on in the head, and the second (“Is Belief Obsolete?”) arguing that that fact cannot be taken to count against the reality of belief. See, too, Jay Garfield, *Belief in Psychology: A Study in the Ontology of Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), chapter 5 of which

advances the first stage of the argument as here characterized, and chapter 6 the second.

- 6 – Paul Boghossian, “The Rule-Following Considerations,” *Mind*, n.s., 98, no. 392 (1989): 507–549; the foregoing quotations are from pp. 509 and 513, respectively. Normativity will be left out of any dispositional account *regardless* of the number of instances adduced insofar as the same problem obtains at the level of the social: “The community . . . however exactly specified, is bound to exhibit precisely the same duality of dispositions that I do: it too will be disposed to call both horses and deceptively horsey looking cows on dark nights ‘horse’. . . . The communitarian, however, cannot call [these] *mistakes*, for they are the community’s dispositions” (p. 536).
- 7 – John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 68.
- 8 – On Pyysiäinen on “triggering,” see *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*, pp. 240–241.
- 9 – To be fair, Gold allows (in his note 7) that much more would need to be said to warrant the view he sketches; my contention, however, is that however the proposal is nuanced, it will come down to the question of whether a causal account of normativity can be given—and that such an account *cannot*, in principle, succeed.
- 10 – He argued, in particular, that the *cogito* argument involves an equivocation between “I” as grammatical subject (“I think”), and “I” as naming a substance (“therefore I am”); see the *Critique of Pure Reason*, A348 ff. Husserl similarly urged that Descartes’s argument is problematic insofar as it compromises its valid transcendental insight by introducing “the apparently insignificant but actually fateful change whereby the ego becomes a *substantia cogitans* . . . and [the] point of departure for inferences according to the principle of causality” (*Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns [Kluwer, 1995], p. 24).
- 11 – One further comment on the general promise of transcendental arguments: With regard to the kind of performative self-contradiction exploited by such arguments, Gold invokes Graham Priest as arguing that “talk about the limits of language and thought *always* ushers in a contradiction of this kind.” It is crucial to note, however, that Priest takes his project in paraconsistent logic to be called for precisely insofar as the contradictions that obtain in such cases are *true* contradictions. It is not part of Priest’s project, as I understand it, to argue that such true contradictions are (as seems to me) metaphysically significant—only to elaborate a system of logic that is tolerant of them. I take it, though, that Priest’s project doesn’t necessarily count against transcendental arguments, and may even count *for* them.
- 12 – See, on this, my “Buddhist Idealism, Epistemic and Otherwise,” *Sophia* 47, no. 1 (2008): 3–28.

13 – On this kind of point, see esp. Jonardon Ganeri, *The Concealed Art of the Soul: Theories of Self and Practices of Truth in Indian Ethics and Epistemology* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

14 – Baker, *Saving Belief*, p. 173.

Reply to Dan Arnold

**Jonathan C. Gold**

I am honored by Professor Arnold's enlightening engagement with my review of his book. I, too, always learn from our conversations, and I am grateful to him for this careful treatment. I also thank the editors of *Philosophy East and West* for offering me the opportunity of a brief reply. The limits of space require me to pick a few points and postpone the majority until a later occasion.

Arnold says that "it is only as conventionally experiencing subjects that we can understand any claims at all." That may be, under a certain definition of what it means to understand something. Yet Nāgārjuna and Yogācāra writers considered it their responsibility to make sense of Mahāyāna scriptures such as the *Heart Sūtra*, in which language is manipulated to express the possibility of a perspective that is quite different from our ordinary view. The great bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara speaks after coming out of his meditative attainment, and says that form is no different from emptiness, and that there is no eye, no ear, no nose, and no tongue. He does not say that all things are empty of essential nature *except for normativity*. There are no exceptions. From the ultimate perspective, there is "no wisdom, no attainment, and no non-attainment." We could hardly expect a clearer *refusal* of Buddhist normative terminology. Notice that Arnold's argument as to the irreducibility of linguistic intentionality would apply here as well as it does anywhere else: Even *using* these linguistic conventions in the negative, he might say, is "normative" in that it assumes a *proper use* of these terms that are being denied. But if these terms are to be "understood" in their ordinary sense, then Avalokiteśvara is foolishly contradicting himself. I would submit instead that the position that is affirmed in this scripture is one in which the key terms of Buddhist doctrine are denied *precisely in order to challenge our ordinary understanding of language and conceptualization*. Mahāyāna Buddhists do, I think, propose that there is a perspective—the ultimate perspective—from which our ordinary way of making sense *doesn't make sense*.

I leave it to the reader to decide if the paragraph above has failed to make sense. (Note, before judging, that it is printed in an august philosophical journal.) Arnold thinks it does not make sense; I think it does, and that it is a narrow, unconventional, philosopher's definition of meaningfulness that makes him think otherwise. Granted, any tradition that claims that all of our conceptualizations are, in an important