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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

way, false, is asking that we change the rules of the language game in which we ordinarily understand how meaning and reference operate. We are asked to read such expressions as merely pragmatic, as not affirming any essential nature, as figurative, *sous rature*. This is not how words seem to work, including the words that express these ideas. But we are being asked to look at things in a new way. And it is not an appropriate response to a proposed rule change to say that to accept it would be against the rules.

Arnold may be right that if perception and causality are affirmed to be conventional and not ultimate truths, then the distinction between perception and inference as epistemic means may not do the work that Dharmakīrti wants it to do. But that depends on what we take Dharmakīrti to want the distinction to do. If we read Dharmakīrti's positions as situated on a "sliding scale of analysis"—whereby he sometimes adopts a position for practical purposes that in other contexts he disavows—it is possible that he is affirming here a distinction that has value in its context, but no ultimate reality.¹ For a Mahāyānist, as for a pragmatist, this may be the best available kind of distinction.

Arnold extends just this leniency to Madhyamaka, while denying it to Yogācāra. He says that the Mādhyamika is able to maintain Buddhist teachings (of emptiness, at least) as superior to other views *in a conventional sense*, even though ultimately all teachings are empty of essential nature. But what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Yogācāra and Dharmakīrti, too, may then maintain distinctions among conventional truths without surrendering the claim that ultimate reality is beyond description. I do not see why Yogācāra must admit that it affirms what is *really the case*, if this requirement does not devolve upon Madhyamaka as well.

Finally, let us note the oddity that Arnold chooses to propound a Mīmāṃsā view in the barbarian (*mleccha*) language of English. Of course, Arnold is not accepting the mantle of the Mīmāṃsā position that Sanskrit is the one eternal language (though I doubt their critique of Dharmakīrti is defensible unless *there is* an eternal language). But if Arnold picks and chooses from the Mīmāṃsā, his strict construction of Dharmakīrti is unfair. A more charitable reading of Dharmakīrti would resist Arnold's critique.

Note

1 – See Georges Dreyfus, *Recognizing Reality: Dharmakīrti's Philosophy and its Tibetan Interpretations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); John D. Dunne, *Foundations of Dharmakīrti's Philosophy*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2004); and Sara McClintock, *Omniscience and the Rhetoric of Reason: Śāntarākṣita and Kamalaśīla on Rationality, Argumentation, and Religious Authority*, Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2010) for this reading of Dharmakīrti, which Dreyfus calls "ascending scales of analysis."