1. Introduction

In the subtitle of a recent article, Mark SIDERITS (2001) asked: ‘Is the Eightfold Path a Program?’ What Siderits thus wants to know is whether persons, on the Buddhist analysis thereof, can be understood as analogous to computers. More precisely, Siderits wonders whether Indian Buddhist philosophy might finally be reconcilable with the sort of physicalism currently exemplified by the contemporary research programs of ‘cognitive science’. This is a large and flourishing field of inquiry comprising various approaches, and Siderits does not specify any particular instance of it; he simply wonders whether or not the strong dualist tendencies of Indian Buddhist philosophy are really integral to the Buddhist project—or whether, instead, the basic Buddhist commitment to selflessness might be compatible with physicalism, of which cognitive science is widely thought to advance a uniquely cogent version. Siderits argues that the basic Buddhist project is, in fact, thus compatible.

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Logic and Belief in Indian Philosophy
The constitutively Buddhist concern to advance a basically causal-reductionist account of the person surely makes it natural to ask whether Buddhist thought might be compatible with contemporary cognitive science. But despite this, it seems to me that SIDERITS is wrong to argue that the characteristically Buddhist form of dualism is not really integral to the Buddhist project. It seems, in particular, that the role and significance of rebirth in the Buddhist project commit Buddhists to refuting physicalism.\(^1\) Paul GRIFFITHS (1986: 112) is right, I think, to stress ‘just how radical a dualism’ was advanced particularly by the Abhidharma and Yogācāra trajectories of Buddhist thought. ‘Physicalism’, GRIFFITHS argues, ‘in any form (identity theory, epiphenomenalism and so forth) is not an option’ for this tradition of Buddhist thought.

But that is not the point I want to defend here. What I want to suggest here is, I hope, finally a more interesting point: that while Indian Buddhist thought is not (contra SIDERITS) reconcilable with physicalism, central strands of Buddhist philosophy nevertheless turn out to be vulnerable to precisely the same kinds of critiques that can be brought to bear against physicalism. Attention to this can help us appreciate the extent to which the category of *intentionality* is problematic for Buddhist philosophers.\(^2\)

Chief among the questions faced by contemporary philosophers of mind is whether it is possible to give an exhaustively causal account of *intentionally* describable states or events.\(^3\) It is, then, to the extent that theirs is an exhaustively causal account that many Buddhists share what is arguably the most im-

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\(^1\) A well-known elaboration of such an argument (developed precisely in the context of arguing for rebirth) comes in the *Pramāṇa-siddhi* chapter of Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇa-vārttika*; for useful analyses of that argument, see FRANCO (1997: 95–132), HAYES (1993), and TABER (2003).

\(^2\) It should be said at the outset that in using variations on the word ‘intentionality’ here, I have in mind a usage (common among Anglo-American philosophers) according to which intentionality is a constitutively semantic phenomenon. This usage follows Wilfrid Sellars in taking it that mental events should be understood on the model of a thought’s *meaning* something. In other words, the kind of *aboutness* that is typically taken to define *intentionality* is here taken to be inextricably related to the sense in which linguistic items are *about* what they mean. Sellars’s ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’ can, in this regard, be read as chiefly meant to advance the conclusion that ‘the categories of intentionality are, at bottom, semantic categories pertaining to overt verbal performances’ (1963: 180). Cf., as well, CHISHOLM–SELLARS (1957); and SEARLE (1982: 260), who similarly urges that ‘[i]ntentional states represent objects and states of affairs in exactly the same sense that speech acts represent objects and states of affairs.’ SEARLE (1982: 260) emphasises, however, that ‘Language is derived from Intentionality, and not conversely. The direction of pedagogy is to explain Intentionality in terms of language. The direction of analysis is to explain language in terms of Intentionality.’

\(^3\) Proponents of such causal accounts are often characterised as undertaking a project in ‘naturalising’ mental content, and the question is whether such a project can succeed; for a cogent argument to the effect that such a project cannot, in principle, succeed, see BAKER (1987).
portant presupposition of contemporary cognitive science—and that Buddhists are, like cognitive scientists, therefore at pains to account particularly for the ‘intentional’ phenomena that are propositional attitudes.

I want to suggest some ways in which this point plays out particularly in the trajectory of thought stemming from Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. In hopes of being brief, I would here like simply to suggest two issues—central to that philosophical trajectory—that are usefully characterised vis-à-vis the category of intentionality, and in ways that show this Buddhist program to be vulnerable to critiques that have identified intentional phenomena as what are most intractable for contemporary physicalists.

First, I want to suggest that the doctrine of *apoha* can be understood not only in terms of familiar debates regarding the status of universals, but more generally as an attempt at a non-intentional, non-semantic—a purely formal or syntactic—account of mental content. Here, however, I want to approach this point indirectly. In particular, I want to suggest what I mean simply by considering an interesting problem case that is briefly addressed by Dharmakīrti’s commentator Dharmottara: that of the perceptual experience of any (necessarily unique) utterance of a word. Consideration of an utterance under this description—that is (as Dharmottara says), as a perceptible *šabda-sva-lakṣaṇa*—then raises the question of how we get from this perceptual experience of a noise, to the discursive awareness of a sentence. The question then becomes: can the transition from one level of description to the other itself be described in non-intentional terms?

The problem that Dharmottara thus addresses represents a special case of what is a more general problem for Buddhist philosophers of this trajectory of thought: that of how to go from (causally describable) sense perceptions to (semantically evaluable) propositional awareness. I will suggest that in this form, we can appreciate this case as a point of access to what the contemporary cognitive scientist Jerry Fodor identifies as the ‘disjunction problem’—and despite Dharmottara’s relatively brief treat-

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4 In my use of the terms ‘semantic’ and ‘syntactic’, I particularly have in mind the usage exemplified by Jerry Fodor. In his early formulations of a computational theory of mind, Fodor proposes the computer model as most basically meant to advance our understanding of how a process can be (like the workings of a computer) exhaustively describable in physical (causal, ‘formal’) terms, and yet yield semantically ‘meaningful’ outputs: ‘Computers are a solution to the problem of mediating between the causal properties of symbols and their semantic properties’ (1985: 94). And ‘[w]hat makes syntactic operations a species of formal operations is that being syntactic is a way of not being semantic. Formal operations are the ones that are specified without reference to such semantic properties of representations as, for example, truth, reference, and meaning … formal operations apply in terms of the, as it were, shapes of the objects in their domains’ (1982: 279).

5 For a development of this point with reference to Dharmottara’s revisions Dharmakīrti’s epistemology, see Arnold (2005) 42–48. Something precisely like the problem characterised there is usefully stated in Brandom (1997: 126–28).
ment of the problem, I will suggest, as well, that this way of framing the issue can help us to appreciate what is, in point of fact, a very significant problem for Buddhist Apoha-vādins. This can be appreciated by briefly considering the extent to which a line of argument associated with the Mīmāṃsakas (but one not ordinarily brought to bear on discussions of apoha) turns out to have some purchase here.

Second, I want to suggest that another doctrine important to these thinkers—that of sva-saṁvitti, reflexive cognition or ‘apperception’—is important to understanding why these Buddhists may not, in principle, be able to address the issues raised by consideration of the first point. It is, I suggest, the characteristically Buddhist emphasis on sva-saṁvitti that makes this trajectory of Buddhist thought an instance of what Vincent DESCOMBES (2001) characterises as cognitivism—that is, of those philosophies of mind that take the locus of the ‘mental’ to be exhaustively internal to the subject, in the way, for example, that Jerry FODOR (1982) does in commending ‘methodological solipsism’ as a necessary ‘research strategy in cognitive psychology’. It is, according to a line of argument that I will sketch sympathetically, chiefly the ‘cognitivism’ or ‘methodological solipsism’ of contemporary projects in physicalism that makes it finally impossible for physicalists to account for the semantic content of intentional states—and I will suggest that arguments to this effect may have considerable purchase, as well, with regard to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti’s sva-saṁvitti.

Before turning to these Buddhist thinkers, then, let us consider briefly what motivates and characterises at least some of the influential examples of cognitive-scientific physicalism, and some of the lines of critique that have been developed against them.

2. The Problem of Semantics in Cognitive-scientific Physicalism

Cognitive science is heralded by its proponents as a revolutionary breakthrough, capable of solving the historically intractable ‘mind-body’ problem. It is particularly the characteristically cognitive-scientific appeal to the analogy of computers—to the idea, as proponents of this project often say, that thought is computational—that promises this.

The basic problem is familiar: human bodies are manifestly material objects, and so subject to whatever laws of physics we take to govern the behaviours of other such objects. But despite the possibility of seemingly exhaustive descriptions of bodily actions in physical terms, we experience at least a great many such actions as governed by our intentional states—by our beliefs, reasons, fears, intentions, and so forth. The question arises: How can we understand the content of such mental events to be causally efficacious with respect to the physically described actions
of our bodies, so that intentional states (like having a belief) can be thought to play some explanatory role in our behaviour?

The ‘cognitive-scientific’ approach to this problem involves an appeal to the model of computers to argue that thought is computational. There are reasons to think this characterisation can achieve what had eluded all previous versions of physicalism: namely, an intelligible characterisation of intentional states at the same time in syntactic and semantic terms. To accomplish this would be to answer the question, put by Vincent Descombes (2001: viii–ix): ‘How can a mechanical sequence of mental states also be a chain of reasoning?’

Consider, in this regard, the operation of a simple calculator. The calculator’s execution of an algorithm can be described entirely in causal terms: the completion of each instruction causes the machine to pass into a consequent electrical state, with the series determined entirely by the algorithm. What is remarkable is that the end result of this physically describable process—in the form of a numeric display on a screen—is at the same time also a meaningful sign. With the example of a calculator, then, we seem to find an instance of a ‘sign’ that can also be completely described as the effect of certain causal transactions. So what is really advanced by the computer analogy is a way to imagine describing a semantically meaningful occurrence (like having an idea) as simply the effect of a series of causally efficacious, physical events.

This basic picture is expressed by Jerry Fodor’s (1982: 279) representative claim that ‘computational processes are both symbolic and formal. They are symbolic because they are defined over representations, and they are formal because they apply to representations, in virtue of (roughly) the syntax of the representations.’ For Fodor, then, cognitive science is defined by its attempt to elaborate this idea that states of mind simultaneously have semantically meaningful content, and yet are formal in the sense that ‘they apply to representations by virtue of their non-semantic (e.g. syntactic, computational, functional, physical) properties.’

But it is, on this view, finally only under a causal-syntactic description that mental representations can really be thought to play any explanatory role. This is because Fodor thinks that a properly ‘scientific’ psychology can involve reference only to causally efficacious particulars with specifiable identity criteria—in this case, individual tokens of what Fodor figuratively calls a ‘language of thought’: representations or neurologically ‘inscribed’ correlates to the propositions that we experience as ‘contentful’. And it is only to these that we can refer if we are to explain

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6 Chief among the upshots of this is that this ‘language of thought’ would consist only in unique particulars; this is the point of Garfield’s (1988: 51) characterisation of Fodor as treating not propositional attitudes (which is Russell’s term for referring, basically, to intentional states), but sentential attitudes; that is, on Fodor’s account, the propositional attitudes, ‘like overt utterances, are biologically instantiated relations of individuals to concrete inscriptions of sentence
how intentional attitudes relate to our physically described actions; for a rigorously causal account requires reference only to processes that are (like the neuro-electrical and muscular transactions that figure in the description of bodily actions) internal to the body.

Thus, the passages here quoted from FODOR all come from his influential article ‘Methodological Solipsism Considered as a Research Strategy in Cognitive Psychology’ (1982). FODOR (1982: 283) argues that the cognitive-scientific hypothesis is ‘tantamount to a sort of methodological solipsism. If mental processes are formal, they have access only to the formal properties of such representations of the environment as the senses provide. Hence, they have no access to the semantic properties of such representations, including the property of being true, of having referents, or, indeed, the property of being representations of the environment.’

It is chiefly this commitment that is attacked by critics who argue that intentional phenomena cannot finally be explained in entirely non-semantic terms. Lynne Rudder BAKER (1987: 27), for example, has argued that ‘description of states in terms of content at all is incompatible with the presupposition that nothing exists other than the subject.’ There are several lines of argument behind this point, many of them finally supporting a basically Wittgensteinian point against the coherence of a ‘private language’—though it is something like Hilary Putnam’s ‘semantic externalism’ (advanced with reference to numerous thought experiments that basically resemble Putnam’s ‘Twin Earth’ case) that BAKER explicitly invokes. BAKER’s (1987: 41) argument, then, is one to the effect that, among other things, ‘[t]he identity of … beliefs depends in part upon the language-using community of the believer; so even considered apart from semantic properties of truth and reference, such beliefs are not wholly “in the head.” Therefore, if behavior is to be explained only by what is in the head, it is not to be explained by belief.’

The physicalist’s case only becomes more problematic if we then factor in the additional ‘semantic properties of truth and reference’—as we must if his own analysis is to be taken as possibly true.7 The argument here is that intentional descriptions tokens’ (my emphasis). The ‘objects’ of intentional states, then, are on this account nothing like, say, Fregean ‘thoughts’ or Husserlian ‘noemata’ (which are both fundamentally abstract ideas, akin to ‘propositions’); rather, the objects of intentional states are invariably particular. Dharmakîrti, as we will see, is after the same thing, and emphasises, in his account of the cognitive ‘representations’ (pratibhāsa) that are produced by perception, that they, like their putatively object referents, are sva-lakṣaṇas. More on this in due course.

7 The argument that the intentionality of mental content thus necessarily involves the idea of reference is one that is made by SELLARS in the section of his ‘Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind’ devoted to considering ‘The logic of “looks”.’ Against characteristically representationalist attempts to show that knowledge is built on the foundations of what incorrigibly seems to a subject to be the case, SELLARS (1963: 142) argues that ‘being red’ is logically prior, is a logically simpler
are presupposed even by those accounts that aim to explain away intentionality. Thus, it is not a trivial point to ask what analysis we are to give, on the cognitivist’s own account, of the phenomenon of giving reasons in support of a belief. Suppose, for example, that we want to give reasons to justify the belief that beliefs are reducible to brain states. If the claim itself is true, what difference can it be thought to make to adduce reasons for it? What could it mean, in other words, for someone to understand the meaning of a cognitive scientist’s argument, given that intentional states like ‘understanding’ are said by this program to consist in the kinds of physical events that, ex hypothesi, do not mean anything at all? To press this question is basically to make a transcendental argument—one to the effect that intentional descriptions are necessarily presupposed even by the very arguments that claim to explain them away.

While it may yet be—as SIDERITS (2001: 307) says—that contemporary cognitive-scientific iterations of physicalism are ‘more difficult to resist’ than earlier versions, these lines of critique make clear, at least, the kinds of problems that it is in principle difficult for physicalist accounts of mental content to accommodate. Thus, intentionally described situations—like being persuaded by an argument or believing in physicalism—may be intractable even for those physicalists who have suggestively exploited computer analogies. Physicalists can here be said to face a dilemma: it is arguably the case that the semantic content of mental events (the description of what it is that intentional states are about) necessarily involves factors external to the subject, such as truth conditions and the norms of a linguistic community; but to the extent that FODOR rightly takes a purely formal (causal, syntactic, computational) description of mental tokens to compel ‘methodological solipsism’, such physicalists cannot consider all of the factors that thus constitute mental content as being about what it’s about. The failure thus to vindicate intentionally described mental content cannot, however, coherently be taken to show that such semantic content is superfluous; for the very attempt to argue this necessarily turns out to presuppose intentional descriptions. And if that is right, then it is not intentional descriptions that are dispensable; rather, it is putatively exhaustive causal explanations thereof that we can coherently do without.

notion, than looking red—given which, ‘it just won’t do to say that x is red is analysable in terms of x looks red to y.’ FODOR (1982: 279) can be understood to refuse just this notion with his contention that what is required is an account of the mental that involves only terms ‘that are specified without reference to such semantic properties of representations as, for example, truth, reference, and meaning.’

8 This is the basic argument in Part II of BAKER (1987); see also GARFIELD (1988), whose sixth chapter comprises a similar approach.
Let us now consider whether these lines of arguments against the program of cognitive-scientific physicalism have any purchase against the Buddhist tradition of thought stemming from Dignāga and Dharmakīrti—and thus, whether this Buddhist program might, despite its clear rejection of physicalism, share something of the deep structure of physicalist arguments. Let me begin by briefly characterising the epistemological and ontological commitments that create the conceptual problems to be addressed by the Buddhist doctrine of *apoha*—which, I have said, I propose we understand not simply as an account of the referents of words, but more generally as a non-intentional, non-semantic account of mental content.

As is well known to students of Indian philosophy, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti admit only two reliable epistemic warrants, i.e. two *pramāṇas*: perception and inference. These have as their respective objects the only two kinds of things that are held by these Buddhists to exist: ‘unique particulars’ (*sva-lakṣaṇas*) and ‘abstractions’ (*sāmānyalakṣaṇas*). Only the former, though, are to be admitted into a final ontology—in characteristically Buddhist terms, only these are ‘ultimately existent’ (*paramārtha-sat*), whereas abstractions are merely ‘conventionally existent’ (*saṁvṛti-sat*). And what qualifies unique particulars as thus ‘real’, on Dharmakīrti’s view, is that they alone possess causal efficacy.

To the ontological claim that only causally efficacious particulars are ‘real’, there is the epistemological corollary that only cognitions that bear on (that are *caused by*) such particulars are finally warranted. More precisely, only cognitions that are themselves the *effects* of causally efficacious particulars can be said to be (in Dharmakīrti’s term) ‘inerrant’ (*abhrānta*). This is the point advanced by the claim—made alike by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti—that perception is constitutively ‘free

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9 For a fuller development of my understanding of the epistemology of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti (and of its problems), see ARNOLD (2005: Part I).

10 So, for example, PV₁ 3.3, p. 112:

> artha-kriyā-samarthaṁ yat tād atra paramārtha-sat /
> anyat saṁvṛti-sat proktāṁ te sva-sāmānya-lakṣaṇe //

11 See, for example, PV₁ 3.224ab, p 186:

> hetu-bhāvād rtte nānāyā grāhyatā nāma kācana /
> ‘Other than being a *cause*, there is nothing at all that can be called being *apprehendable*.’

As we will see, it is finally only subjectively occurring cognitions that are the relevant ‘effects’ thus produced—a point of great significance for understanding Dharmakīrti’s project.
of conceptual elaboration’ (kalpanāpodha). The ‘conceptual elaboration’ that perceptual cognitions thus lack consists, we might say, in propositional attitudes—in ‘association with name and genus and so forth’ (as Dignāga defined it), or (with Dharmakīrti) in thought whose phenomenological content is suitable for association with such linguistic items.12

Dignāga and Dharmakīrti thus maintain that discursive thought constitutively involves reference to things that are not actually present. A genuine ‘perception’ of, say, a book will consist only in a sensory impingement caused by some particular object, yielding a cognition whose appearance is itself caused by the object. But if one then entertains the propositional belief that ‘this is a book’, one’s thought now includes reference to something not actually present—for example, the generic image of a book, knowledge of the conventions for the use of the word ‘book’, and so forth. What distinguishes perceptual encounters as uniquely warranted, then, is that only these cognitions are causally constrained by actually present objects. Inferential cognitions are not so constrained, and therefore ‘add’ something to the uninterpreted data of perception. This amounts to a radical critique of naive realism; for insofar as perceptual cognitions are really thus constrained only by fleeting sense data, it turns out that whenever we think we experience a more or less enduring token of some type, we are deeply mistaken about what is really present.13

I do not think it too much of a stretch to understand this program as roughly analogous to cognitive science at least in the minimal sense that we have here a systematic redescriptions of our common-sense intuitions about our epistemic situation. Thus, while we typically experience ourselves as confronted with a world of intentionally described objects—which is to say, a world of things under familiar descriptions—the claim here being made is that objects as thus described do not really exist; rather, we are only really warranted in believing there to be uniquely particular and fleeting sensations, such as will, by definition, not admit of any predication.14

Moreover, this Buddhist approach thus admits of comparison with cognitive-scientific physicalism insofar as the privileged level of description involves only causal transactions; just as on Fodor’s account it is finally only under a formal or

12 So, for example, NB 1.5, p. 47: abhilāpa-saṅsarga-yogya-pratibhāsā ṭrātiṭhy kalpanā.—‘Conception is a thought whose phenomenological content is suitable for association with discourse.’

13 Here, it is helpful to recall the basically Buddhist point that is ultimately advanced by this epistemology: all that is finally warranted by the kind of cognition that is uniquely in contact with really existent phenomena is the conclusion that there are sensations—which does not also warrant the inferential belief that these must be the states of a ‘self.’

14 This is what Dignāga meant in saying of sva-lakṣaṇas only that they are ‘inexpressible’ (avyapadeśya); see Hattori (1968: 24, and p. 81, n. 1.19).
'syntactic' description that mental representations can be thought to have any explanatory role, so, too, it is affirmed by Dharmakīrti that only the world of causally efficacious sensibilia consists in ‘ultimately existent’ \((\text{paramārtha-sat})\) things. And the problem for Dharmakīrti, just as for FODOR, is whether and how the non-privileged level of description—the level consisting in those ‘conventionally’ described things \((\text{sāṁvṛti-sat})\) that involve the kinds of ‘abstractions’ \((\text{sāmānya-laksānas})\) that alone are \emph{semantically} evaluable—can be brought into contact with this.

But here is the problem: if perceptual cognition is defined by its independence from conceptual thought, and if the latter is held to be the point of ingress for cognitive error, then how could one ever be certain \emph{that} the (propositional) judgement that follows a perception is in fact properly related to the perception in question? More precisely, if perception’s privileged status is a function of its having been caused by its object, and if discursive cognitions are defined by their adding something, then how can one ever be sure that what one is thinking \emph{about}, when entertaining some proposition, is in any sense the same thing that was \emph{perceived}? How can perceptual data—which is exhaustively explicable in non-intentional (causal, formal, or syntactic) terms—be made available as the content of thought? In the terms suggested by FODOR, then, we have here a process that meets the \emph{formality} condition, but it is not clear how it can also meet the \emph{content} condition.

One way to address this problem is to redescribe thought and its contents in the same kind of non-intentional (causal, formal, or syntactic) terms here used to explain perception. And this is, I suggest, precisely the kind of answer that is elaborated by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and their followers in the form of the doctrine of \emph{apoha}. While space will not permit me here to give a full account of this as an attempt at an entirely non-intentional re-description of intentional phenomena, I want to suggest an oblique but revealing angle of approach to the issue. If the doctrine of \emph{apoha} is to succeed at what I thus take to be its aims, it must provide an account that explains the conceptual construction of (semantic) mental content without any reference to semantic descriptions (since these are what this account proposes to explain)—it must, instead, finally make reference only to \emph{subjectively appearing particulars}, in explaining how it is that the abstractions or universals that are the objects of thought are constructed.

One problem for such an account is that it turns out to be very difficult at once to provide a non-semantic description of the comprehension of a linguistic utterance, and to distinguish that from a perception. We can see this if we consider that any

\footnote{See ARNOLD (2006) for a fuller development of many of the relevant points.}
\footnote{The significance of its finally being \emph{subjectively appearing} particulars that are in play here will be considered in due course.}
particular utterance of a word or sentence is—considered as a unique, perceptible acoustic event—in a sense precisely the kind of thing of which we can (these Buddhists have urged) have a wholly non-conceptual perception. Given, then, that the utterance of a sentence can be appropriately described as a perceptible acoustic event that, as such, is no different from the sound of, say, thunder, the task is to explain how in one such case (but not the other) the sound also means something—which involves the further question of how (or whether) the transition from one level of description to the other can itself be described in non-intentional terms. That is, the case of a speaker’s uttering a sentence presents us with an event that is describable in two very different kinds of terms: what is ‘conventionally’ (saôvåtitas) taken as the expression of a meaningful proposition is, ‘ultimately’ (paramârtha-sat), nothing but the causation of particular noises that in turn have among their effects the production of certain cognitions. But insofar as it is only terms from the latter level of description that have a place in the final ontology (which is just what it means to characterise them as paramârtha-sat), the relation between these two descriptions must itself be explicable in terms that are paramârtha-sat—which is just to say that the process of understanding sâmânya-lakśaòa must, as Apoha-vâdins want to argue, finally be explicable with reference only to sva-lakśaào.

The problem I thus pose is closely related to what Jerry FODOR (1990: 89) has identified as the ‘disjunction problem’, which arises from the fact that ‘it’s just not true that Normally [sic] caused intentional states ipso facto mean whatever causes them.’ That this is a problem is clear from attempts to give thoroughly causal accounts even of perception; when, for example, one has a visual perception of a tree, all manner of brain events are surely among the causes of the resultant cognition—but these are not among the things that we say are thus seen. A tenable causal theory of perception requires, then, that there be some principled way to explain which of the relevant causes of any perception is at the same time what is perceived.

If (as I think is the case) it turns out to be a not entirely straightforward matter to provide such an account, the problem is even more difficult in the case of the specifically semantic version of the disjunction problem: ‘What the disjunction problem is really about deep down is the difference between meaning and information … Information is tied to aetiology in a way that meaning isn’t … By contrast, the meaning of a symbol is one of the things that all of its tokens have in common, however they may happen to be caused. All ‘cow’ tokens mean cow; if they didn’t, they wouldn’t be ‘cow’ tokens’ (FODOR (1990: 90); emphasis original). In this way, FODOR distinguishes between, as it were, artefacts that are efficiently precipitated by their causes (‘information’), and those that somehow manage to ‘refer’ to something other (or something more) than the particulars that cause them; the latter he
calls conveyors of ‘meaning’, and he characterises the relatively unconstrained nature of these in terms of the ‘robustness’ of signifying tokens.

The problem that Fodor thus identifies is the same as the problem of how innumerable uniquely particular acoustic events—such as those that occur when countless speakers of English make the sound conventionally represented by the letters c-o-w—can commonly be taken as utterances of the same word. Insofar as the uniqueness (the contingency, temporality) of any such event can (as with anything capable of being represented in space and time) be understood to consist in its being causally describable, the problem is invariably that of how to relate the causal level of description to the intentionally describable abstraction.17

Something like the same question is anticipated by Dharmakīrti’s commentator Dharmottara in his commentary to verse 5 of the first chapter of Dharmakīrti’s Nyāya-bindu. It is in this verse that Dharmakīrti stipulates that the ‘conceptual thought’ (kalpanā) of which perception is constitutively devoid consists in ‘a thought whose phenomenological content is suitable for association with discourse.’18 This definition significantly revises Dignāga’s earlier characterisation of conceptual thought as simply ‘association with name and genus and so forth’, making it possible to infer conceptual thought even in pre- or non-linguistic creatures—even, that is, in the absence of any actual use of language.

But it raises various questions to argue, in this way, that constitutively discursive thought can be inferred even in the absence of any overt use of discourse. Dharmottara elaborates on the situation:

17 The problem here characterised is one of the most prominently recurrent issues addressed in Husserl’s Logical Investigations. ‘What in general’, Husserl (1970: 567 [Investigation V, §13]) asks, ‘is the surplus element distinguishing the understanding of a symbolically functioning expression from the uncomprehended verbal sound?’ And his answer is: ‘…we do not, qua expressing it, live in the acts constituting the expression as a physical object—we are not interested in this object—but we live in the acts which give it sense: we are exclusively turned to the object that appears in such acts, we aim at it, we mean it in the special, pregnant sense’ (1970: 584 [Investigation V, §19]). Again, ‘The ideality of the relationship between expression and meaning is at once plain in regard to both its sides, inasmuch as, when we ask for the meaning of an expression, e.g. “quadratic remainder”, we are naturally not referring to the sound-pattern uttered here and now, the vanishing noise that can never recur identically: we mean the expression in specie. “Quadratic remainder” is the same expression by whomsoever uttered. The same holds of talk about the expression’s meaning, which naturally does not refer to some meaning-conferring experience.’ (1970: 284 [Investigation I, §11]). Husserl’s point here (which is an expression of his ongoing critique of psychologism in logic) could, I think, serve just as well as a critique of Dharmakīrti’s account of meaning, according to which utterances are, in the final analysis, to be understood as referring to ‘some meaning-conferring experience’; more on this shortly.

18 See n. 12.
There are some thoughts whose phenomenological appearance (äbhâsa) is [actually] associated with discourse, such as the conception of a jar on the part of someone by whom the [relevant linguistic] convention has been learned—[such a thought is one] whose phenomenological content [specifically] involves the word “jar”. But some [thoughts] have phenomenological content that is [simply] suitable for association with discourse, even though [they are in fact] un-associated with discourse—like the conception of a child by whom the [relevant linguistic conception] has not been learned.'\(^{19}\)

While this passage raises various questions, I am most interested in Dharmottara’s references to those who have learned the conventional usage of a word whose utterance is being heard (those who are, as Dharmottara says, vyutpanna-saõketa), and those who have not. Dharmottara recurs to this idea when he gets around to considering the following objection:

‘An auditory cognition [that is, a sensory perception of the auditory sort] apprehends a unique particular which is a sound. And since some audible particulars are referents and some are signifiers,\(^{20}\) [it therefore follows that cognition of an audible particular] would be one whose phenomenological content is suitable for association with discourse—and thus, it would be conceptual.’\(^{21}\)

The objection, then, is that insofar as it is a unique, perceptible acoustic event, any particular utterance of a word would seem to count as a sva-lakšaòa—that is, as the kind of unique particular that can be the object of a constitutively non-conceptual perception; and yet, insofar as the thing that is thus uttered is a word, it seems that we must allow that we here have a cognition that, though describable as a perception, is conceptual.\(^{22}\) In order to avoid this unwanted consequence, Dharmottara must find


\(^{20}\) I find Dharmottara’s use of the pair vācya and vācaka a bit counterintuitive here, since, in fact, both of these would seem to denote abstractions (precisely parallel to Saussure’s ‘signified’ and ‘signifier’, respectively). But it seems clear that what is wanted here is a dichotomy one of whose terms is a particular; hence, I render vācya here as ‘referent’, rather than as ‘signified’.\(^{21}\)

\(^{21}\) NBṬ, p. 52: śrotra-jānaṁ tarhi śabda-saõketa-grāhī; śabda-saõketaṁ ca kiñcid vācyaṁ kiñcid vācakam ity abhilāpa-saõsṛtya-yogā-pratīhāsāṁ syāt; tathā ca savikalpaṁ syāt.

\(^{22}\) Dharmottara’s commentator Durvekamiśra introduces this whole discussion by noting the following assertion ‘by previous commentators’ (pūrva-vyākhyaṁbhīḥ; I do not know whom he is quoting), which makes explicit the contradiction that Dharmottara is trying to avoid: DhPr, p. 52: tāṁ pūrva-vyākhyaṁbhīḥ ‘asāmarthya-vaiyārthābhāyāṁ sva-saõketa-saõketa-saõketa-tītum aśakyaṁvād.
some way to keep these two descriptions of the same event distinct from one another (so that the true ‘perception’ of the utterance can, as Dharmakīrti’s definition of perception requires, still count as non-conceptual); but he must do so in a way that allows us to understand how we can, as users of language, effortlessly go from the perceptual to the semantic (i.e. the conceptual) description.\(^\text{23}\) This is, then, another case of the same problem that recurrently bedevils the philosophical program of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti: how to bring these two sharply distinct levels of description together.

4. Recollection of Conventions

as Culminating in Sva-sāmvitti

In response to the foregoing problem, Dharmottara elaborates the following account:

‘This is not a problem. Even if a unique particular can be a referent or a signifier, the unique particular can be apprehended as referent or signifier [only insofar as it is] being apprehended as having been experienced at the time [when one learned the relevant linguistic] convention. And a thing’s being an object of experience does not now exist as occurring at the time [when one learned the relevant linguistic] convention. And just as the perception that existed at the time [one learned the relevant linguistic] convention has now ceased, in the same way a thing’s also being an object of that [experience] does not now exist. Thus, a [purely perceptual] auditory cognition, not registering the fact of having been previously seen, does not [itself] apprehend a signifier-signified relation.’\(^\text{24}\)
Let us first develop the idea that what Dharmottara is here addressing is something like Fodor’s ‘disjunction problem’—and in so doing, gain a more complete picture of the account that Dharmottara’s references to saṅketa-kāla here presuppose. Recall that the disjunction in question is between what Fodor referred to as ‘information’ and ‘meaning’. ‘Information’, on Fodor’s usage, is carried by the kinds of events that are only ‘about’ what causes them; and his account is one according to which all instances of meaning must in the final analysis be explicable with reference to some particular occasion on which the use of a signifying convention was in some sense caused by an interaction with some ostensible particular. Meaning, then, is for Fodor explicable in terms of information—in terms of particular cognitions that are ‘about’ their causes.25 And Fodor needs thus to bring the processes of signification to rest in some causally describable transaction with unique particulars since his account of semantics, like that of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, just is an account of how it is that semantically meaningful states are constructed out of the causally efficacious particulars that alone are really existent.26

Now, what thus causes foundational utterances on Dharmakīrti’s view is ultimately that kind of sva-lakṣaṇa (if it makes sense to talk of kinds of sva-lakṣaṇa!) that is some particular, subjectively occurring ‘intention’ (abhiprāya or vivakṣā).

Here it is important, then, to attend briefly to Dharmakīrti’s elaboration of another view commonly held by Buddhist philosophers in this trajectory of thought: specifically, the claim that cognitions engendered by testimony (œabda-jñāna) are not themselves pramāṇas just insofar as such cognitions are reducible to some other pramāṇa—namely, inference. On Dharmakīrti’s account, the inference involved here is specifically one to the fact that the speaker has some ‘intention’ (abhiprāya). As Dharmakīrti says at PV 1.213,

‘Since words have no inherent connection with things, there is no proof of objects based on them; for they [merely] express a speaker’s intention.’27

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26 It should be said, in this regard, that Fodor claims to be a realist about propositional attitudes, which suggests that he might not endorse this characterisation of his project; but I am persuaded by such critiques as that of Baker (1987) that, notwithstanding Fodor’s avowed realism, his reductionist position reduces, in the end, to an eliminativist one, insofar as the only real explanatory work is done at the ‘syntactic’ level of description. To that extent, the semantic level of description basically becomes epiphenomenal, which makes it hard to retain the claim that one is a ‘realist’ about things at this level.

27 PV2, p. 107:

nāntariyakatābhāvāc chadbānāṁ vastubhiḥ sāha /
nārtha-siddhis tatas te hi vaktā-abhiprāya-sūcakāḥ //
Note, however, that Dharmakīrti thus credits only the inference to the fact that a speaker has some intention, but cannot get at what that intention is; for the ‘intentions’ Dharmakīrti thus imagines must be understood not as anything like ‘propositions’ (not, that is, as concerning objective states of affairs), but only as subjectively occurrent representations. This is the salient point of Dharmakīrti’s saying (as he does at PV 2.2) that ‘language is a reliable warrant’ in regard to that object which appears in thought, which is the speaker’s object of engagement; it is not grounded in the reality of the object [itself]. And again, in the auto-commentary on PV 1.227, Dharmakīrti explains:

‘An utterance is impelled by an intention regarding a particular point; for one who knows that this utterance thus comes from that intention, the point expressed is the phenomenal appearance which is its proper cause. Hence, there is a cause-effect relation between [an intention] whose form is mental, and its expression in speech.’

The inference to a speaker’s intention, then, is an inference based on a kārya-hetu (that is, an inference from an effect to its cause). And the cause in question is a subjectively occurrent representation (ābhāsa) appearing to the speaker. For Dharmakīrti, to say that such a representation is thus the cause of the utterance is in effect to say that the ‘intention’ in question must be a unique particular, since only sva-lakṣaṇas, on his view, are causally efficacious. Indeed, Dharmakīrti has it that the ‘intention’ in question—a mental representation that is itself causally produced by what it is ‘about’—is, like any such representation, itself a sva-lakṣaṇa.

But that means that this ‘intention’ must in some sense be perceptible, since sva-lakṣaṇas are the objects only of perception—although as a subjectively occurrent representation, it would of course be ‘perceptible’ only to the subject to whom it was appearing. This is not, however, a problem for Dharmakīrti, and the attractive—

28 More literally, ‘language has reliability’ (sabdasya prāmāṇyaṁ).
29 PV 1 1.4:
vakṛtyāyāṃ viśayo yo ‘rtho buddhau prakāśate / prāmāṇyaṁ tatra sabdasya nārtha-tattva-nibandhanam //
31 As Kamalasīla says in expressing this point, ‘the intention is understood from the utterance because of [the utterance’s] being the effect of that [intention], but not as being [directly] expressible’ (TSaP, p. 376: sā ca vivakṣā tat-kāryatvād vacanāt pratīyate, na tu vācayatvā.).
32 Cf. n. 10.
33 On this point, DUNNE (2004: 116) says, ‘Since each image is an effect, it as much a particular’ as the sva-lakṣaṇas which they represent; cf. DUNNE (2004: 121).
ness of this picture becomes clear when we then factor in one of the other central commitments of Dharmakīrti and his philosophical fellow-travellers: the commitment to the view that sva-saṃvedana or sva-saṃvitti (reflexive cognition or ‘apperception’) is not only to be reckoned as a type of immediate, preconceptual awareness—which is to say, as a kind of pratyakṣa—but in the final analysis, as the only such cognition. That is, the only truly non-conceptual, non-discursive cognition—the only kind whose status as ‘inerrant’ (abhṛānta) is such as to make it indubitable—is the awareness we have of the contents of our own mental events. This, then, is the account that is in play when Tom Tillemans (2000: 163), explicating PV 4.109, thus summarises what he calls Dharmakīrti’s ‘fundamental position’ with regard to the role of a speaker’s intentions: ‘words are used according to the speaker’s wishes and designate anything whatsoever which he might intend. The speaker is thus an authority as to what he is referring to in that he can ascertain his own intention by means of a valid cognition (pramāṇa), viz., reflexive awareness (sva-saṃvedana).’

Now, however, we are in a position to see all the more clearly how problematic is this account of inferences to a speaker’s intention; for precisely insofar as our inference is thus to a particular, subjectively occurrent representation, there remains the question of how the speaker’s ‘intention’ itself relates to what that intention is about. That is, if the only inference involved here is one to the bare fact of ‘some speaker’s having an intention’, we are no closer to understanding what that intention is. Indeed, the account we have just surveyed would seem to undermine whatever claim Dharmakīrti has on giving an account of the reference of words; for insofar as the ‘reference’ thus becomes a subjectively occurrent representation, what we are ‘explaining’ seems no longer to be the constitutively intersubjective phenomenon of language, but rather, something eminently subjective and psychological. Against such a view, understanding what a speaker’s intention is about arguably requires reference to a universal such as a proposition—something with Husserlian ‘ideality’, or what the grammarian Bhartṛhari called upacāra-sattā (‘figurative reality’). Whatever it is we can thus be thought to require, the salient point is that it must, if it is to explain how it is that thoughts and utterances can be about objective states of affairs, be something other than the efficient causes of any particular mental event.

34 Dignāga first made this point in elaborating on Pramāṇa-samuccaya 1.8; see Arnold (2005: 34–36).
35 For a highly illuminating development of this and related points, see Nance (2004: 42–67).
36 Dunne (2004: 139 ff.) has made a similar point.
37 See n. 17, above.
39 In fact, Dharmottara is arguably striving for precisely such an account of intentionality when he revises Dharmakīrti’s account of perception. Thus, in commenting on the first chapter of the Nyāya-
Here, then, we can begin to see how the specifically semantic kind of ‘aboutness’ exemplified by linguistic items can be considered inextricably related to the ‘intentionality’ of mental events, for giving any account that takes thoughts or sentences to be about anything at all arguably requires reference to precisely the kinds of abstractions that pointedly do not figure in Dharmakīrti’s account of speakers’ intentions—requires reference, that is, to (what Fodor’s methodological solipsism is precisely meant to exclude) the ‘semantic properties of such representations, including the property of being true, of having referents, or, indeed, the property of being representations of the environment’ (Fodor (1982: 283)). This nicely discloses, I think, the main reason why Dharmakīrti’s epistemology can move so easily between realist and idealist commitments; for on one reading of the Dharmakīrtian account of sva-saṅvittti, the whole point just is to bracket from consideration the question of whether our mental events have the property of ‘being representations of the environment.’

5. Mīmāṃsakas on the Impossibility of a Non-intentional Account of Linguistic Conventions

To the extent that is right, the sva-saṅvittti of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti can be understood to play a role precisely analogous to the ‘methodological solipsism’ that underlies Fodor’s project—given which, we can say that the Buddhist commitment to sva-saṅvittti figures prominently in the difficulty of their giving a semantic account of mental content; for the view that all of our higher-order awareness has its foundations in indubitably occurrent, uniquely particular episodes of reflexive cognition just is the view that an account of the mental cannot finally make reference to the semantic properties of mental representations.

bindu, Dharmottara is concerned to reverse Dharmakīrti’s exhaustively causal account of perception, with an eye towards allowing that perception must, after all, yield something like propositional content; cf. Arnold (2005: 42–48). But of course, Dharmottara (as a commentator who claims exegetical adequacy to the texts of Dharmakīrti) tries to do so while yet maintaining that perception is kalpaṇāpoṭṭha.

40 Cf. n. 2.
41 Here, I mean ‘realist’ in the ordinary sense that pertains to a world of external objects.
42 Thus, these ideas put Dharmakīrti in a good position to take the further, idealist step of arguing that there is no ‘environment’ thus to be ‘represented’; but insofar as this ‘bracketing’ does not by itself commit Dharmakīrti to taking that step, he also remains in a good position to argue (as he usually does) as a ‘Sautrāntika’.
43 Which is just the view Sellars (1963) attacks when he considers ‘the logic of “looks”’; cf. n. 7.
Now, I have been trying to argue that these considerations (to recur, finally, to our passages from Dharmottara) represent the kind of thing that is presupposed by talk of saṅketa-kāla. Recall, then, that what makes a cognition ‘conceptual’, for Dharmakīrti and his ilk, is its not being causally constrained by an actually present object—by its involving, that is, reference to (or recollection of) something that is not presently there. When we hear (i.e. perceive) someone speaking, all that is presently occurring is the causally or ‘syntactically’ describable utterance of noises. The relevant non-present thing that is then recalled is the ‘linguistic convention’ (saṅketa) that governs the use of the word. Thus, on this way of describing the ‘computation’ (as it were) of a linguistic expression, the initial perception of the acoustic event that is someone’s utterance can be described as the effect of a causally efficacious, unique particular (namely, the sound emitted by the speaker). The sound’s being taken as meaningful (i.e. as ‘vācaka’) is then attributed to a stimulated recollection of an arbitrary convention—and if we are to avoid question-begging, the initial devising or acquisition of the relevant convention, as well as the recollection thereof, must itself be causally describable.

But can this picture work? What I want to suggest is that at least this part of the Buddhist proposal cannot, in the end, coherently be given a non-semantic, non-intentional description; for the picture that Dharmottara has sketched here presupposes precisely the intentional level of description that it is meant to explain. To see this, the question to ask is: how are we to explain—in non-semantic, non-intentional terms—the linkage between the sound that is immediately perceived, and the ‘convention’ (saṅketa) one is thereby prompted to recall? More compellingly, how are we to describe the making of this convention itself in non-intentional terms?

It is here that it becomes relevant to consider a Mīmāṃsaka argument that has not, so far as I am aware, been much considered with regard to the doctrine of apoha. Here, I have in mind not the characteristically Mīmāṃsaka arguments that were developed specifically against apoha, but rather, one of the arguments deployed to support the quintessentially Mīmāṃsaka claim that—as affirmed at Mīmāṃsā-sūtra 1.5—‘the relation between a word and its referent is primordial’ (MS, p. 28: autpattikas tu śabdasyārthena sambandhaḥ...). Among the arguments marshalled in support of this claim is the following, which Śabara—in his lengthy commentary on Mīmāṃsā-sūtra 1.5—quotes from the earlier commentary of the unnamed Vṛtti-kāra (‘author of the Vṛtti’):

44 Note that the expression saṅketa-kāla is ambiguous in this regard; it could mean ‘the time of [the devising of] the convention’—a translation that is recommended by the understanding of saṅketa as ‘agreement’ (for we can then simply translate ‘at the time of the agreement [i.e. between the creators of the convention]’)—or ‘the time of [the learning of] the convention.’ For further reflections on this ambiguity, see ARNOLD (2006).
There is no period whatsoever without a relation [between words and their referents, no period] in which not a single word was related to any referent. How so? Because the very act of making a relation does not [otherwise] stand to reason. Some language must be used by the one who is creating the relation; who created [the relations constitutive] of that [language] by which he would [thus] do so? If [that was done] by someone else, then who created [linguistic relations] for him, and who, [in turn,] for him? There is no end [to the series]. Therefore, someone who is [ostensibly] creating [any linguistic] relation must presuppose some words whose relations are unmade, established according to the usage of elders.45

The Vṛtti-kāra’s argument is straightforward but compelling: the fundamental connection (sambandha) of language with non-linguistic fact cannot coherently be imagined without presupposing precisely the intentional, semantic level of description that is supposed to be explained by positing the creation of precisely such a connection. This is, the Vṛtti-kāra argues, because we can only imagine an act of meaning-assignment—an act such as that consisting in the utterance “this [accompanied by an act of ostension] is to be called a cow”—as itself a linguistic act. Hence, the very act of creating such a ‘relation’ does not stand to reason unless we presuppose that both the agent and the audience of this act already have (what we are here trying to understand) the idea of meaning something—already find intelligible, that is, the very idea that the utterance that accompanies some act of ostension (‘this is called a cow’) means what is ostended.

This argument brings to mind one made by Wittgenstein, who nicely gets at what all is involved in knowing a language by criticising Augustine’s account of language-acquisition by children. Thus, against the view that children require only to learn the names of things by attending to the ‘bodily movements’ of adults—‘as it were the natural language of all peoples’46—Wittgenstein says:

‘Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the

45 ŠBh 1.5, p. 68: na hi sambandha-vyatiriktaḥ kaścit-kālo ‘sti, yasmin na kaścid api śabdāḥ kenacid arthena sambaddha āsīt. katham? sambandha-kriyāvā hi nōprapadyate. avasaṃyam anena sambhandhāṁ kurvātā kenacī chabdena kartavyaḥ, yena kriyeta, tasya kena kṛtaḥ? athānantena kena kṛtaḥ, tasya kenetī, tasya kena kṛtī, nāvāvagīthate. tasmād avasaṃyam anena sambhandhaṁ kurvātā akṛta-sambandhāḥ kecana śabdāḥ vrddhā-yaavahāra-siddhāḥ abhysagantavyāḥ. This line of argument is further elaborated by Kumārila in the Sānbandhākṣepa-parihāra chapter of the Śloka-vārttika; see Arnold (2006).

46 Augustine, Confessions, 1.8; quoted at Wittgenstein (1958: § 1).
country; that is, as if it already had a language, only not this one. Or again: as if the child could already think, only not yet speak. And “think” would here mean something like “talk to itself.”

Similarly, the Mīmāṃsakas have argued that to presuppose the intelligibility of a proposed convention’s meaning what is ostended is to presuppose that the audience for this act of creation ‘already had a language, only not this one.’ The challenge to the would-be nominalist here is a significant one: What must be imagined is how anybody could explain to someone—how they could, that is, tell them—what it means to mean something. This must be imagined, moreover, without presupposing that the parties to this eminently intentional act can already ‘think’, where that means (with Wittgenstein) something like talk to themselves.

6. Conclusion

It is this basically Wittgensteinian point that Vincent DESCOMBES (2001) develops in his critique of ‘cognitivism’, for ultimately the problem with all instances of cognitivism—with all philosophical programs, that is, that take the locus of the ‘mental’ as entirely internal to the subject—is that the normative, rule-governed, semantic character of thought requires reference to a constitutively social dimension. This fact, DESCOMBES (2001: 58–59) suggests, applies to the explanation and understanding of all constitutively social practices and institutions.

47 WITTGENSTEIN (1958: § 32). Interestingly, Jerry FODOR (1975: 63–64) quotes this passage from WITTGENSTEIN at the conclusion to an argument almost precisely like that of the Vṛtti-kāra: ‘Learning a language (including, of course, a first language) involves learning what the predicates of the language mean. Learning what the predicates of a language mean involves learning a determination of the extension of these predicates. Learning a determination of the extension of the predicates involves learning that they fall under certain rules (i.e. truth rules). But one cannot learn that P falls under R unless one has a language in which P and R can be represented. So one cannot learn a language unless one has a language. In particular, one cannot learn a first language unless one already has a system capable of representing the predicates in that language and their extensions. And, on pain of circularity, that system cannot be the language that is being learned. But first languages are learned. Hence, at least some cognitive operations are carried out in languages other than natural languages.’ FODOR thus agrees with the Mīmāṃsakas that trying to imagine a first creation (or acquisition) of linguistic conventions seems to confront us with an infinite regress; it’s just that FODOR, thinking the regress intolerable, takes the argument as a reductio, and argues that it is therefore necessary to posit what he figuratively calls a ‘language of thought.’ For a much lengthier development of the role of that argument in FODOR’s project, and of the Mīmāṃsaka argument briefly sketched here, see ARNOLD (2006).

48 Of which FODOR’s ‘methodological solipsism’ is a paradigm case—as would be Dhar-makīrti’s sva-saṅhīvīti, to the extent that (as I have suggested) this plays a role comparable to that of FODOR’s guiding principle.
‘… there can be no formal rules where there are no preexisting practices and customs… What we require, then, is an explanation that provides the institution’s intellectual principle, but without seeking it in an individual consciousness…’

But insofar as they take causally describable instances of sva-saîvitta to be foundational—to be, as Dharmakîrti argues, all that is finally expressed by (because they are the causes of) any linguistic utterance—Buddhist philosophers in the tradition of Dharmakîrti are unable to look to anything other than the mental representations occurring within an individual consciousness.

To be sure, there are characteristically Buddhist commitments that are well served by this account. Chief among these, of course, is (what all Buddhist philosophy is finally concerned to elaborate) the cardinal Buddhist doctrine of selflessness; Dharmakîrti’s account of a speaker’s ‘intention’ is, then, one among the many arguments meant to block any inference from the experience of sensations to the conclusion that these must be the properties or states of an enduring subject (a ‘self’). Dignâga and Dharmakîrti can be understood to have recognised that even to allow that thoughts or utterances could be about something other than their proximate causes—that they could be about such enduring realities as ‘objective states of affairs’—is already to clear the way for the view that our experiences could be related to something (a self) other than their manifestly episodic causes. Accordingly, these thinkers developed a radically thoroughgoing sort of empiricism, which is concomitant with a broadly nominalist account (such as they elaborated with the doctrine of apoha) in which the only existents to be admitted into a final ontology are causally efficacious particulars. The refusal that thoughts or utterances are really about anything so abstract as ‘objective states of affairs’ thus serves the goal of taking the only properly indubitable belief to be that there are sensations.

But the price to be paid for this is that the locus of truth becomes just subjectively appearing representations; and this is precisely the view that Husserl, in his ongoing struggle against psychologism, criticised by saying that an expression’s meaning ‘naturally does not refer to some meaning-conferring experience.’ For these Buddhists, in contrast, utterances are finally to be understood as referring simply to some ‘meaning-conferring experience’—specifically, to the reflexive cognitions (sva-saîvitta) of some particular speaker. Husserl’s argument against such a route, however, is compelling, and has ultimately to do with the very idea of truth; for it is only by taking expressions (and thoughts) to be, in general, about something other than their proximate causes that it is possible to make sense of the fact that (as Husserl says) ‘[q]uadratic remainder’ is the same expression by whomsoever uttered—which is a condition of the possibility of our holding (what must be held by
anyone who would make use of the idea of truth) that ‘[t]he state of affairs is what it is whether we assert that it obtains or not.’

The difficulties with holding a contrary view are clear in the Buddhist account that can be elaborated as relevant to understanding Dharmottara’s brief references to the recollection, by someone who perceives a speaker uttering sounds, of ‘saôketa-kâla’—of the ‘time of [one’s learning] a convention’. As we saw, Dharmottara needs to give such an account if he is to allow that we can appropriately describe the hearing of a ūabda-sva-lakšaòa (an audible particular) as the non-conceptual perception of a unique acoustic event, while yet explaining how an event so described can also be understood in terms of the auditor’s understanding what the speaker means. On the view Dharmottara sketches, such an occasion is indeed describable as a true perception, and the semantic level of description is brought in only by the recollection that is stimulated thereby—the recollection, that is, of some bygone ‘saôketa-kâla’.

But in order for such an account to succeed—in order, that is, for it to explain the emergence of a semantic level of description without at any point presupposing one—it must be possible to imagine both this recollection itself, and the ‘saôketa-kâla’ so recalled, in constitutively non-semantic terms. And I have suggested that a characteristically Mîmâôsaka argument for the eternality of linguistic relations can be understood as cogently calling into question precisely this possibility. Thus, Mîmâôsakas have argued, at least since the time of the Våtti-kâra, that we can only imagine an act of meaning-assignment as itself a linguistic act. I have suggested that among the things the Mîmâôsakas can be said thus to have recognised is (with Vincent Descombes) that we require ‘an explanation that provides the institution’s intellectual principle, but without seeking it in an individual consciousness.’ And among the things that make it impossible for Buddhists like Dharmakîrti to look anywhere other than to an individual consciousness is their deployment of the idea of sva-saôvitti—which, we saw, lies at the root of characteristically Buddhist claims that we are entitled to infer from anyone’s utterance of words only that some subjectively occurrent representation (some object, Dharmakîrti says, that ‘appears in thought’, buddhau prakâœate) has caused the noise we perceive.

It is, among other things, to the extent that these Buddhists in this way uphold something like FODOR’s ‘methodological solipsism’ that this Buddhist program is vulnerable particularly to those critiques of physicalism that argue for ‘semantic externalism’—that argue, in other words, that an intentional level of description cannot be reduced to an efficient-causal level of description just insofar as the for-

49 Cf. n. 17.
50 Cf. n. 29.
mer involves reference to something constitutively social. And the more compelling argument is then one to the effect that these Buddhist philosophers cannot forego such reference without also compromising their belief that their own account is intelligibly proposed as true.

Whether or not, then, arguments such as those developed by Lynne Baker and Vincent Descombes are finally convincing in showing the program of cognitive-scientific physicalism to be problematic, I hope to have suggested at least that they apply as well to the thought of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti and Dharmottara as they do to the accounts of mental content developed under the contemporary program of cognitive science. I have not, then, here tried to argue that physicalism is false (though I find the arguments sympathetically developed here to be cogent); only that many of the important critiques that have been brought to bear upon physicalism can also be brought to bear against certain Buddhist arguments—and this despite the fact that these Buddhists are emphatically not physicalists.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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