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ON SEMANTICS AND *SAMKETA*: THOUGHTS  
ON A NEGLECTED PROBLEM WITH BUDDHIST *APOHA*  
DOCTRINE

“... a theory of meaning for a particular language should be conceived by a philosopher as describing the practice of linguistic interchange by speakers of the language without taking it as already understood what it is to have a language at all: that is what, by imagining such a theory, we are trying to make explicit.” – Michael Dummer (2004: 31)

INTRODUCTION\*

If the Buddhist doctrine of *apoha* is to succeed in its aims, its proponents must be able to give a finally non-intentional account of every dimension of language-use. That is, the account can at no point presuppose a *semantic* level of description – a level at which notions like “meaning” and “truth” are in play – since that is just what the *apohavādin* purports to *explain*.<sup>1</sup> The doctrine of *apoha* is proposed as

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\* In thinking through the ideas developed here, I have benefited from the helpful comments of several readers and auditors of earlier drafts. In particular, I would like to thank Jason Bridges, John Dunne, Jonardon Ganeri, Jonathan Gold, Charles Goodman, and Rick Nance for their comments and suggestions. I especially benefited from the opportunity to present a version of this paper at the International Seminar on Logic and Belief in Indian Philosophy (Warsaw and Białowieża, Poland, May 2006); thanks to Piotr Balcerowicz for creating that possibility, and for the comments of participants there.

<sup>1</sup> 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, semantical categories pertaining to overt verbal performances.” (1963: 180) Cf., as well, Chisholm and Sellars (1957); and Searle (1982), 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” (260). Searle emphasizes, 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” (*Ibid.*).

an explanation of the very idea of *meaning* simply in the (as it were) “syntactic” terms of causally describable transactions between unique particulars.<sup>2</sup> Dharmakīrti, especially, can be thought to owe such an account, insofar as for him the only “really existent” (*paramārthasat*) things are those capable of involvement in such transactions.

The success of *apohavādins*<sup>3</sup> in defending such an account is surely debatable; theirs is a complex and in many ways promising doctrine, and cogent arguments were developed both for and against it. What I wish to suggest here is that their arguments depend at some points on a related pair of questions that the *apohavādins* do not, so far as I can see, satisfactorily address. These questions concern the initial *devising*, by hitherto non-linguistic beings, of a system of linguistic “conventions” (*saṃketa*); and any individual’s first *acquisition* of a language so devised. Both cases represent situations in which (to anticipate a passage from Wilfrid Sellars) “the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact is exhibited.”

I suggest, then, that despite the great differences between the versions of *apoha* elaborated by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti – and their doctrines are distinct enough to make the matter far more complex than is adequately expressed by the standard-issue example (that of the word *cow* as referring only to what is ‘*not a non-cow*’) – both accounts recurrently conflate the issues involved

<sup>2</sup> 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) While Buddhist *apoha* doctrine of course developed within a trajectory of thought that was emphatically not (like Fodor’s thought) physicalist, it too aims at a constitutively “non-semantic” account of mental content that, as basically empiricist and nominalist, has important affinities with Fodor – more on whom in due course.

<sup>3</sup> For present purposes, I mean by ‘*apohavādins*’ to refer to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, the first formulators of the doctrine. A fuller account would include, as well, discussion of the ways in which Śāntaraṅgita elaborated the idea, largely in response to the intervening criticisms of the Mīmāṃsaka Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa. The problems that I will work at identifying in Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are, I think, pertinent as well to Śāntaraṅgita’s version of the doctrine, but I will not be able to show that here.

in *using* a language, with those involved either in *devising* one or in first *acquiring* one. This is a point at which *apohavādins* are interestingly vulnerable to critique, since this conflation is exploited to obscure what is arguably among the most basic difficulties in giving a non-intentional account of language.

A similar observation was ventured, in passing, by Georges Dreyfus, whose discussion of Dharmakīrti's account of concept-formation (like Dharmakīrti's account itself) "does not intend to illustrate how we acquire language in general but how we learn a particular concept." (1997: 227) Dreyfus further notes that "[t]he question of how language is acquired is not addressed by Buddhist epistemologists." (*Ibid.*: 515n32) Dreyfus then refers us to some pertinent observations from Wilfrid Sellars, who should in this regard be read, according to Dreyfus, as encouraging wariness of "the fallacy of placing the learning person in [a] universe of already categorized objects." (*Ibid.*) The passage from Sellars to which Dreyfus thus refers – on which, more shortly – concludes by urging that the real test of a theory of language lies in its "account of those occasions on which the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact is exhibited." Sellars continues that many seemingly nominalist accounts "turn out to be quite 'Augustinian' when the scalpel is turned to their account of [this]." (Sellars, 1963: 162)

In a sense, the aim of the present essay is simply to explain what I take Sellars to mean, and to show that his point usefully illuminates some interesting problems for the Buddhist *apohavādin*. The argument will be that accounts of *apoha* presuppose that we know, in words that Lynne Rudder Baker has used in a different but related context, "how one thing (some mental item) *can mean or represent or be about* some other thing (for example, some state of affairs) – [that we already] understand how anything can have content."<sup>4</sup> What is already given, then (and what therefore cannot be *explained* by this account), is precisely a *semantic* level of description – a level of description at which the very idea of "meaning" something is already intelligible.

I will make this argument in part by showing that something like the same insight can be understood to have been developed in a characteristically Mīmāṃsaka train of argument. I do not, however,

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<sup>4</sup> This is Baker's statement (1987: 9 emphasis added) of the basic "question of intentionality."

have in mind the arguments that Mīmāṃsakas like Kumāriḷa developed specifically against the doctrine of *apoha*. While some of the arguments in the *apohavāda* chapter of the *Ślokavārttika* are interesting,<sup>5</sup> it is the Mīmāṃsaka arguments concerning the eternity of the relation between words and referents that I will bring into view. Modern scholars are, perhaps, generally unsympathetic to the latter arguments simply insofar as the conclusion they are meant by Mīmāṃsakas to support – that language in general, and the Vedic text in particular, are primordially existent – is not likely to be found attractive by many modern readers. It would be regrettable, though, if the Mīmāṃsaka arguments were for that reason dismissed out of hand; their cogency is usefully appreciated by generalizing the basic insight in light of comparable arguments developed with regard to various contemporary iterations of physicalism. This line of thought elaborates a basically transcendental argument against the coherence of any finally non-semantic account of language – which is to say, an argument showing that any such account turns out necessarily to presuppose precisely the level of description that it purports to explain.

This trajectory of argument can be understood, as well, as expressing a version of “semantic externalism”<sup>6</sup> – here, in the form of the idea that insofar as it always necessarily “exceeds” individual language-users (it is always already *prasiddha*, “familiar”), language cannot finally be explained (as the appeal to language *use* misleadingly suggests it can) with reference to individual language users. It is, on this view, especially as something constitutively *social* that language comprises abstractions (of precisely the sort that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are most concerned to avoid crediting) that must figure in an ontology of the mental. Developed sympathetically, this line of argument can be understood to elaborate some profound and compelling insights about what is involved in knowing a language.

Let us, then, see how crucial presuppositions regarding the initial devising and acquisition of linguistic conventions commonly underlie various influential Buddhist accounts of *apoha*, and how these accounts may to that extent be commonly vulnerable to the line of argument thus developed by the Mīmāṃsakas. Let us see, in

<sup>5</sup> These mainly develop the kinds of objections that intuitively arise when one first encounters the doctrine of *apoha*, and many of Kumāriḷa’s points here were more or less effectively addressed in Sāntarakṣita’s subsequent development of the doctrine.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., in regard to this issue, Patil (2003: 240–242); and n. 37, below.

particular, how the category of *saṃketa* figures in Buddhist arguments for *apoha*, and why there might be good reason to think that *apohavādins* cannot give a non-semantic account of it.

DIGNĀGA'S ACCOUNT OF *APOHA*: ON THE RELATIVE DETERMINACY OF  
CONCEPTUAL CONTENT

It is well known that Buddhist philosophers in the trajectory of thought initiated by Dignāga characteristically admit only two *pramāṇas* (perception and inference) – and (what is of particular interest to some of the Brahmanical schools) that linguistic items (paradigmatically, testimony or scriptural authority) are not themselves *pramāṇas* just insofar as language is in some sense reducible to inference. Indeed, Dignāga begins his discussion of *apoha* – in Chapter 5 of the *Pramāṇasamuccaya*, entitled *Anyāpohaparīkṣā* (“examination of exclusion of what is other”) – by saying as much:

Linguistic [cognition] is not a *pramāṇa* distinct from inference, since, just as in the case of [an inferential sign] like ‘being made,’<sup>7</sup> [it] designates its proper referent by excluding what is other.<sup>8</sup>

There is, however, significant divergence in the tradition about what it means thus to say that discursive thought is “not a *pramāṇa* distinct from inference” (*na pramāṇāntaram ... anumānāt*). To the extent that Dharmakīrti’s elaboration of the philosophical project of Dignāga has become normative, it is typical for these Buddhists to be characterized as thus holding that, say, a scriptural utterance is reducible to an inference just insofar as one who credits the utterance does so in virtue of having performed an inference – specifically, one to the effect that some speaker’s *intention* has been expressed. The inference, then, is from a particular linguistic item as *effect*, to a

<sup>7</sup> Dignāga here alludes to a stock example of a formally valid inference, in which “being made” (*kṛtakatva*) is the reason: “Sound is impermanent, because of its being made – just as a pot [is something that we know to be both an artifact, and impermanent].”

<sup>8</sup> The Sanskrit of this verse is available as quoted by Kamalaśīla in the *Tattvasaṃgrahapañjikā* (Hattori, 1982: 107n1; cf. Shastri, 1997: 376): *na pramāṇāntaram śābdam anumānāt tathā hi tat|kṛtakatvādivat svārtham anyāpohena bhāṣate ||*. Cf. Hayes (1988: 252), who translates: “Verbal communication is no different from inference as a means of acquiring knowledge. For it names its object in a way similar to the property of having been produced, by precluding what is incompatible.” Cf., also, Hattori (2000: 139).

speaker's intention as the *cause* thereof.<sup>9</sup> In this way, the characteristically Buddhist agenda is furthered insofar as the putative *referent* of any linguistic expression (which is to say, something that is a candidate for the status of *enduring universal*) ends up being relativized or subordinated to the (manifestly contingent and impermanent) goals of some particular utterer.<sup>10</sup>

This is not, however, what Dignāga seems to have had in mind in arguing that linguistic cognition does not represent a *pramāṇa* distinct from inference. Dignāga's point, rather, seems to be simply that language and inference both, as it were, *work the same way*. Indeed, Shoryu Katsura and Richard Hayes have shown that Dignāga's doctrine of *apoha* can be understood as an account of the relative determinacy of concepts that virtually restates his theory of inference.

<sup>9</sup> Consider, as representative of the characteristically Dharmakīrtian account of the sense in which linguistic cognition is reducible to inference, the passage from Kamalaśīla that preserves the Sanskrit of Dignāga's *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 5.1 (n. 8, above). In regard to Śāntarakṣita's *Tattvasaṃgraha* 1514 (which says that what is inferred from an utterance is a speaker's intention), Kamalaśīla explains: "And that intention is understood from the utterance because of [the utterance's] being the effect of that, but not as being [directly] expressible" (Shastri, 1997: 376: *sā ca vivakṣā tatkāryatvād vacanāt pratīyate, na tu vācyatayā*). See also *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.213: *nāntarīyakatābhāvāc chabdānāṃ vastubhiḥ saha|nārthasiddhis tatas te hi vaktrabhiprāyasūcakāḥ|* ("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"; text in Gnoli (1960: 107)). Perhaps even more interesting is a passage from Dharmakīrti's autocommentary on *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.227: *arth-aviśeṣasamīhāpreritā vāg ata idam iti viduṣaḥ svanidānābhāsinam arthaṃ sūcayātī buddhirūpavāgvijñaptyor janyajanakabhāvāḥ sambandhaḥ* ("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 [by the utterance] 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"; text in Gnoli [1960: 113–114]; cf. Dunne 2004: 146). This passage is interesting for the extent to which it thus explicitly takes utterances to be *about* subjectively occurrent representations (and not, e.g., objective states of affairs).

<sup>10</sup> Note, though, that this is a rather counter-intuitive account of the sense in which an inference is involved. It would be more intuitive to think that the inference in question concerns the *reliability* of the source of the utterance. (Consider, in this regard, Locke's account of *faith* as "the Assent to any Proposition, not thus made out by the Deductions of Reason; but upon the Credit of the Proposer..." [1689: 689] – given which, the only epistemic task at hand, when it comes to entertaining certain claims, is to determine that the "proposer" is credible.) One problem with the Dharmakīrtian account is surely that it simply defers the question of reference – for 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. For a highly illuminating development of this and related points, see Nance (2004: 42–67).

Dignāga's account of the latter was (as Richard Hayes suggests, following Erich Frauwallner) distinguished from its predecessors by the idea that "inference was based not upon an appeal to causal relations between the inferential sign (*liṅga*) and the thing inferred from it, but rather upon the relative scopes of concepts, whereby wider concepts could be inferred from narrower but not vice versa." (Hayes, 1988: 24)

On this interpretation, Dignāga's account of inference differs, as well, from Dharmakīrti's. In terms introduced by the latter, we might say that Dignāga's account of *apoha* involves chiefly the *tādātmya*, or 'categorical,' relation, while Dharmakīrti is finally interested only in the *tadutpatti*, or 'causal,' relation.<sup>11</sup> We might also invoke the sense/reference distinction to characterize the differences between Dignāga's account of *apoha* and Dharmakīrti's; in that case, it would surely be right to say that Dignāga's account chiefly concerns the *sense* of concepts, while Dharmakīrti's aims at an account of their *reference*. Thus, we will see that Dharmakīrti offers a finally causal account of how it is that unique particulars (which are all that really exist) can be understood to figure in the construction of universals. Dignāga's elaboration of *apoha* doctrine, in contrast, evinces little concern with how linguistic items "make contact" with the world of really existent particulars; instead, his arguments address only the *relative* determinacy of conceptual content – the conceptual scope or richness of a term, in other words, considered only relative to all the other terms in the system.

In this regard, Dignāga's development of the *apoha* idea particularly well exemplifies what Richard Hayes takes to be "the basic claim behind the *apoha* theory of meaning": that "every symbol divides the universe into two and only two mutually exclusive classes."<sup>12</sup> Specifically, every concept divides the universe into the class of all things that come under that concept, and the class of all things that do not – which just is to say, everything else in the universe. When the matter is thus understood, the question to be answered will always simply be: *at what level of generality* has this division been made? Dignāga's insight is that the answer to this question can invariably be expressed (and accordingly, that relative conceptual determinacy can be explained) entirely in negative terms – which is just to say, without

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hayes (1988: 254): "Describing inference in terms of causal relation is a feature of Dharmakīrti's but not Dignāga's theory of inference."

<sup>12</sup> Hayes (1988: 211). See also Dreyfus (1997: 210), who credits this point to B. K. Matilal.

having “positively” to specify a really existent universal such as the extension of the concept. The relative determinacy of the concepts ‘tree’ and ‘maple’ can, then, be precisely expressed in this way: the former excludes from its purview everything there is that does not properly come under the concept ‘tree,’ while the concept ‘maple’ excludes exactly that much *plus* all non-maples within the category ‘tree.’ The greater determinacy of the category ‘maple’ is thus a function of its excluding a larger domain – one whose scope is constrained by the immediately superordinate category in an ascending hierarchy of increasing generality.<sup>13</sup>

Dignāga succinctly expresses this idea of a hierarchy of concepts at *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 5.35:

[The properties] ‘being a tree,’ ‘being earthen,’ ‘being a substance,’ ‘being existent,’ and ‘being knowable’ are, [respectively,] the basis of four, three, two, and one certainties; taken in the opposite order, [they are the basis of just as many] doubts.<sup>14</sup>

That is, these properties constitute an ascending hierarchy of increasing generality, with the most general level (“being knowable”) representing the least conceptually determinate; it is the basis, Dignāga says, of only one “degree” of certainty.<sup>15</sup> The most determinate level of abstraction,<sup>16</sup> then, gains its content precisely as a function of its greater exclusion range. That this effectively tabulates something like

<sup>13</sup> In sketching this reading of Dignāga’s account of *apoha*, I follow Katsura (1979) and Hayes (1988: 185–216). A basically similar (and also illuminating) interpretation is given by Ganeri (2001: 106–111).

<sup>14</sup> My translation is adapted from Hayes (1988: 298–299), who gives: “The property of being a tree, the property of being earthen, the property of being a substance, the property of being real, and the property of being an object of awareness are respectively the causes of four, three, two and one certainties. Taken in the order opposite the one given above, they are the cause respectively of four, three, two and one uncertainties.” Dignāga’s Sanskrit is: *vṛkṣatvapārthivadṛavyasajjñeyāḥ prātilomyataḥ/catuśtridyekasamdehe nimittam niścaye nyathā*/(Hattori, 1982: 137n32). In Kanakavarman’s translation (Hattori, 1982: 137): *shing nyid sa las gyur rdzas yod/shes bya go rim log pa las/bzhi gsum gnyis dang gcig the ishom/gzhan du nges la rgyu mtshan yin* //. This verse represents one of the important bases for Katsura’s useful table (1979: 17). See also verses 5.25–28.

<sup>15</sup> Actually, it would seem the math is a little bit off here, as Dignāga has thus adduced five levels in a categorial hierarchy, and only four degrees of conceptual determinacy corresponding to them; perhaps the overarching category ‘*jñeya*’ is to be understood as having *no* conceptual determinacy.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, even the most determinate concepts, on this account, remain *abstractions* – a point that is aptly expressed by Ganeri (2001: 109), who says that the process of thus increasing conceptual determinacy remains “*asymptotic*, reaching ever nearer, but never actually touching the world of objects.”

Dharmakīrti's "*tādātmya*" relation between conceptual levels is clear from the inference-preserving character of moves between levels in the hierarchy: it is correct to say that "this is earthen, because it's a tree," "this is a substance, because it's earthen," etc. – but not, in any of these cases, the converse (since not everything that is "earthen" is a tree, not everything that is a substance is "earthen," etc.).<sup>17</sup> It is in this asymmetry in the relations between levels that Dignāga's account of *apoha* dovetails with his account of inference.

In the characteristically elliptical terms of Sanskrit verse texts, then, Dignāga has made a point that is almost precisely like one advanced in Robert Brandom's account of the relation *being inferentially weaker* than:

The sentence *q* is inferentially weaker than the sentence *p* just in case everything that is a consequence of *q* is a consequence of *p*, but not vice versa (consequences are not preserved but pruned) .... The negation of a claim is its inferentially minimal incompatible:  $\sim p$  is what is entailed by everything materially incompatible with *p*. These underlying incompatibilities induce a notion of inferential weakening: "Thera is a dog" incompatibility-entails, and so is inferentially stronger than, "Thera is a mammal," because everything incompatible with "Thera is a mammal" is incompatible with "Thera is a dog," but not vice versa (incompatibilities pruned, not preserved). It follows that incompatibility-inferentially weakening a negated claim incompatibility-inferentially strengthens the negation. "It is not the case that Thera is a mammal" is incompatibility-inferentially stronger than "It is not the case that Thera is a dog," just because "Thera is a mammal" is incompatibility-inferentially weaker than "Thera is a dog." (Brandom, 2000: 147)

Dignāga's point similarly represents a precise way to specify the different scope of any concepts, whose relative determinacy is expressible in terms of their "exclusion" (*apoha*) of all the other members of a branching categorial hierarchy – just as 'tree' excludes 'chariot' but not 'maple' or 'oak,' while 'maple' excludes not only chariots (and everything else in the world that is not a tree), but also all trees that are oaks, poplars, etc.

This reconstruction of Dignāga's account makes clear, I think, how misguided are the critiques of *apoha* that fault it for its inadequacy as a psychological or phenomenological description of what is subjectively appearing to the subject of an inferential cognition;<sup>18</sup> this is, rather, a strictly formal account of the logical or conceptual content – of the

<sup>17</sup> Just as, on the canonical example of Dharmakīrti's *tādātmya* relation, it is correct to say "this is a tree, because it's a *śiṃśapā*" (saying which would add another subordinate level to the table Dignāga has here presented) – but not the converse, since not all trees are *śiṃśapās*.

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., *Ślokovārttika, apohavāda* 41 (Shastri, 1978: 408).

conceptual “richness” or determinacy – of judgments.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, all of the foregoing raises an obvious question: even if it is allowed (as I think it must be) that this represents a cogent account of the relative determinacy of conceptual content, how do we know *which* things properly come under any of the concepts whose content can be thus delimited? To say that the concept ‘tree’ divides the universe into the class of all things that come under that concept and the class of everything that does not is, it seems, to presuppose that we already know what the concept ‘tree’ picks out – and one could reasonably suppose that this is precisely what the *apohavādin* needs to explain.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> More precisely, of the *terms* involved in judgments. Dignāga may, however, presuppose something like an idea of “propositions” (or Fregean “thoughts”) with the idea of *pratibhā*, or holistic *sentence*-meaning – with his doctrine of *apoha* offering an atomistic account only of *word*-meaning. Dignāga’s presupposition (rather than explanation) of this arguably makes Dignāga’s something less than an account of *mental content*, per se (i.e., insofar as mental content is propositional). In his lucid and illuminating discussion of the vicissitudes of *apoha* doctrine, Georges Dreyfus suggests that this tension is what “sets the stage for the efforts of Dharmakīrti and his later followers to clarify and defend the *apoha* theory” (1997: 205). See also the remarks of Hattori: “Regarding the meaning of a sentence, [Dignāga] simply accepted Bhartṛhari’s doctrine [of *pratibhā*], without discussing the problem how the meaning of a single word is related to the meaning of the sentence. In consonance with Bhartṛhari, he maintained the indivisibility of a sentence, and admitted that the utterance of a sentence immediately produced *pratibhā* in the mind of the listener. It might, therefore, be assumed that Dignāga attributed to the sentence the faculty of expressing its meaning directly, not indirectly through the exclusion of the other meanings.” Hattori adds, however, that “at the close of his discussion on *pratibhā*, Dignāga states that the *pratibhā* generated by a certain sentence pertains to the object which is differentiated from the objects meant by the other sentences. In this statement it is clearly noted that Dignāga applied the *apoha*-theory to the scrutiny of the meaning of a sentence.” (1979: 66–67). This is not a line of argument that I will here pursue, though an understanding of what it might mean for Dharmakīrti additionally to have attended to “sentence-meaning” is ventured below (see the first paragraph of the section treating Dharmakīrti’s account of *apoha*).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hayes: “One key problem that confronts his interpretation of universals is this: If one does not know what each *u* must have in order to be counted within the range of the expression ‘all *u*’s,’ then one cannot determine whether a particular is qualified by the absence of all *u*’s or whether by the deniability of the absence of all *u*’s. But if one does know what each *u* must have to be counted within the range of ‘all *u*’s,’ then one knows exactly that which is ordinarily called a universal.” (1988: 186) For this line of objection, see, e.g., *Ślokavārttika, apohavāda* vv. 63–64, 71–72, 83–85. Kumārila often puts the point straightforwardly in terms of double negation; if (to take the canonical example of the *apoha* doctrine) the referent of the word ‘cow’ is really ‘*not a non-cow*,’ rules governing negation would seem to dictate that this is no different from the referent’s being *cow*. This form of the objection is among the points addressed by Śantarākṣita, who appeals to the two different kinds of negation (*prasajya*- and *paryūḍāsa-pratiṣedha*) regularly invoked by Sanskrit grammarians (following the lead, in this regard, of the Mīmāṃsakas). For an illuminating reconstruction of Śantarākṣita’s arguments, see Siderits (1991, chapter 3, 2003: 214–215).

It is at this point that we can introduce one of the most interesting ways in which Dignāga's account of language dovetails with his account of inference: while his account of the latter centrally involves (as would all subsequent Indian discussions of the matter) the relations of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, it seems that it is particularly the Sanskrit grammarians' usage of these terms that informs Dignāga's presentation. And when the same terms, in the senses they have for the grammarians, come into play when Dignāga addresses the question I have just raised, their use can be seen as problematic in a way that precisely parallels what many take to be the basic problem in Dignāga's account of inference.

At this point, then, it is pertinent to say a bit about the latter. Among the virtues of Richard Hayes's illuminating explication of Dignāga's theory of inference is that it refuses the idea (common among interpreters who take Dharmakīrti as a guide to Dignāga) that the *anvaya* and *vyatireka* relations amount simply to "positive" and "negative concomitance" (that, in other words, *vyatireka* represents simply the logical contraposition of *anvaya*), and that the requirement that a formally stated inference must include both is therefore redundant.<sup>21</sup> To appreciate the logically distinctive character of these (and to get a sense both for the strength and the weakness of Dignāga's account of inference), we can follow Hayes's formalization of the three desiderata (the *trairūpya*) that, according to Dignāga, must be met in order for an inference to go through. Thus, the condition of *pakṣadharmatā* ("being a property of the locus in question") consists simply in the fact that the inferential reason (the *hetu*; on the canonical example of inferring the presence of fire on a mountain from the sight of smoke, the *smoke*) is indeed present in the locus in question (here, the mountain). On Hayes's formalization, this is expressed thus:  $PH > 0$  &  $P \sim H = 0$ ; that is, there is at least one thing (the *pakṣa*) possessing the *hetu*, and there is nothing which is both the *pakṣa* and not possessed of the *hetu*. The relation of *anvaya* then specifies simply that there is *at least* one other thing<sup>22</sup> in the induction domain ( $\sim P$ , i.e., *everything in the*

<sup>21</sup> For a statement of Dharmakīrti's view that an inference does not require reference to both of these terms, see Dharmottara's commentary on *Nyāyabindu* 2.5 (especially at Malvania, 1971: 95–96).

<sup>22</sup> Note that this locution requires reference only to a particular, and to that extent serves Dignāga's goal of explaining this process without presupposing the real existence of universals.

universe other than the locus in question) that exemplifies the co-occurrence of these properties: “ $\sim\text{PHS} > 0$ ”, in Hayes’s formalization. The relation of *vyatireka* then specifies, finally, that there is nothing at all in the induction domain that possesses the *hetu* (“smoke”) without also possessing the property here to be inferred (“fire”): “ $\sim\text{PH}\sim\text{S} = 0$ .”

Clearly, it is knowledge of the latter that is most problematic; while one can be in a position to know that *pakṣadharmatā* obtains (that there really is, e.g., smoke to be seen on the mountain), and that the relation of *anvaya* applies (that there is at least one other known case of smoke’s being accompanied by fire), it is clear that only an omniscient subject could have knowledge to the effect that *there is nothing in the universe that is smoky without also being fiery*. It is at this point, then, that modern expositors of Dignāga will point out that his remains a finally inductivist model of inference, and that Dignāga’s account of reasoning is therefore vitiated by the limitations inherent in such a model.<sup>23</sup> *Vyatireka*, on this account, clearly represents something other than the logical contra-position of *anvaya*; but it also seems clear that while the requirement of both is therefore not redundant, the same requirement effectively expresses the extent to which (in the words of Jonardon Ganeri) Dignāga “could not quite free himself from the old model of inference from sampling.” (2001: 21)<sup>24</sup>

Now, Hayes suggests that it is insofar as Dignāga presupposes the usage of the grammarians that it is thus important to avoid taking *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as redundant; for “in the usage of the grammarians, *anvaya* and *vyatireka* are logically independent rather than being contrapositive propositions.”<sup>25</sup> For the Sanskrit grammatical tradition, these terms identify a determination of “the

<sup>23</sup> It is common to suggest, in this regard, that among the differences between Dignāga and Dharmakīrti is the latter’s attempting instead to develop something like a *deductive* model of inference – one based on supposedly *necessary* relations (*svabhāvavpratibandha*). On this latter idea, see Ganeri (2001: 121–23) and Dunne (2004: 145–222).

<sup>24</sup> Note, though, that this critique has purchase particularly to the extent that the canonical example we have considered (the inference of fire from the sight of smoke) involves a *kāryahetu* – particularly to the extent, that is, that we are considering an inference from *effect* to *cause* (and hence, are on the ground of Dharmakīrti’s “*tadutpatti*” relation). If, instead, we considered the kind of case that seems especially to inform Dignāga’s elaboration of inference (such as an inference from *being an oak* to *being a tree*), the question becomes rather more complex.

<sup>25</sup> Hayes (1988: 119). Hayes here follows Cardona (1967–1968).

constant co-occurrence (*sāhacarya*) of a linguistic item (*śabda*) and a meaning (*artha*). A meaning is not understood unless the item expressing it occurs; if an item occurs a meaning is understood, and when that item is absent the meaning attributed to it is also absent.” (Cardona, 1967–1968: 345) Corresponding to the use of each of these terms in formalizing valid inferences, then, there is a precisely analogous rule (also expressed in terms of the words *anvaya* and *vyatireka*) for determining the proper use of a word. So, corresponding to the requirement of *pakṣadharmatā*, there is the rule simply that “the word must be applicable to the subject of discourse” (that is, an appropriately used word must apply *at least* to the particular presently referred to); the linguistic analogue of the requirement of *anvaya* then specifies that the word “must be applicable to objects other than the subject of discourse that have that which is to be learned through the word”;<sup>26</sup> and the requirement that there be knowledge of *vyatireka* here takes the form of knowledge to the effect that the word “must be restricted in application to that which is to be learned through it.”<sup>27</sup> And as in the account of inference, it is this latter requirement that is most deeply problematic – that, indeed, arguably begs precisely the question at issue.

Here is what these requirements look like in Dignāga’s hands – in particular, as stated at *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 5.34:

Since we don’t observe [the use of] a word in regard to a contrary sense, [and] since we do observe [the use of it] in regard to the portion which is its own sense, the word’s connection<sup>28</sup> is easy, and there is no errancy.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Again, the locution here suggests that we need make reference only to particulars: there is, e.g., *at least one other* instance where the word ‘fire’ is appropriately applied, some other particular within the induction domain that can, by virtue of its also being one with respect to which the word is appropriately applied, increase the determinacy of our concept.

<sup>27</sup> The foregoing quotes are from Hayes (1988: 189), where Hayes makes explicit the ways in which Dignāga’s account of language maps onto his theory of inference.

<sup>28</sup> *’brel pa*, surely translating Sanskrit *sambandha*.

<sup>29</sup> The Tibetan text (in the translation of Kanakavarman): *sgra gzhan don la ma mthong phyir/rang don cha shas la mthong phyir/sgra yi ’brel pa sla ba dang/’khrul pa nyid ni yod ma yin*/(Hattori, 1982: 135). Cf. Hayes: “Because a term is not observed to apply to objects in the extension of a contrary term, and because it is observed to apply to members of its own extension, it is easy to connect [the term to its meaning], and the term is not errant in its meaning.” (1988: 297–298)

Dignāga's auto-commentary elaborates:

A word expresses its referent by means of *anvaya* and *vyatireka*. These [consist, respectively, in] applying to what is similar, and not applying to what is not similar. In regard to these, it is certainly not said that [a word is known to] apply to *every* similar case, since the expression of what is in some cases an unlimited extension is impossible. But simply insofar as it is not observed in connection with what is dissimilar – even though that, too, is unlimited (*mtha' yas pa yod kyang*) – it is possible to say that it doesn't apply to the latter.<sup>30</sup>

The point of Dignāga's here saying that one needn't know how (or *that*) a word applies to *every* particular in its extension is exactly the same as the requirement of *anvaya* in the case of inference: the account requires (and explains conceptual determinacy by virtue of the fact) only that there be *at least* one other (particular) thing to which the word is appropriately taken to refer.

But in regard to the second claim – that it can be known that there are no relevantly *dissimilar* particulars to which a word is appropriately taken to refer – Dignāga's concession (“even though that, too, is unlimited”) is revealing; this shows the appeal to *vyatireka* here to be no more helpful than it was in requiring a non-omniscient person to know that nothing in the universe is smoky but not fiery. We seem, then, once again to face a circularity problem: to know there is nothing *dissimilar* that is rightly picked out by a term just is, it seems, to know what *is* rightly picked out.<sup>31</sup> Dignāga here responds with something of a retreat, effectively saying (according to Hayes) “that the universal property that is shared by a group of particulars and that serves as the basis for grouping those particulars is simply the fact that all those particulars are members of the set of things to which a specified

<sup>30</sup> *sgra'i don gzhan brjod pa la ni rjes su 'gro ba dang ldog pa yang thabs yin te/ de dag kyang 'dra ba dang mi 'dra dag la 'jug pa dang mi 'jug pa yin no||de la 'dra ba ni gdon mi za bar thams cad la 'jug par brjod pa ni ma yin gyi|'ga' zhig la yin te don mtha' yas pa'i brjod pa mi srid pa'i phyir ro||mi 'dra ba la ni mtha' yas pa yod kyang ma mthong ba tsam gyi phyir 'jug pa med par bstan pas nus pa yin no||* (Hattori, 1982: 135). Cf. Hayes (1988: 297–298): “Association and dissociation are the two ways that a verbal symbol expresses its object. They consist respectively in applying to what is similar and in not applying to what is dissimilar. It is not necessary to say that a verbal symbol applies to every instance of what is similar, because in some cases it is not possible to express an extension that is unlimited. But it is possible to say that it does not occur in the dissimilar – although it too is unlimited – simply on the basis of its not being observed to apply to any dissimilar instance.”

<sup>31</sup> Cf. n. 20, above.

word is applicable. That by which I know of a fire that it is a fire is simply the fact that I readily apply the word ‘fire’ to it.” (Hayes, 1988: 187) As Dignāga says, “In this regard, the word itself is the thing that objects have in common.”<sup>32</sup>

But in that case – and here is the main point I want to make about Dignāga’s account – Dignāga finally presupposes an intentional level of description; for here it is clear that his account cannot avoid reference to an already available system of linguistic conventions. Thus, in order to learn from the observation of linguistic practice how any *particular* words are appropriately used, one must already have what, I am going to argue, the *apohavādin* most needs to explain: *the very idea of meaning something – that* (and not simply the meanings of particular words) is what the initial acquisition of a language most basically represents. To invoke once again the words of Lynne Rudder Baker,<sup>33</sup> the account here on offer presupposes that we already understand “how one thing (some mental item) *can mean or represent or be about* some other thing (for example, some state of affairs) – [that we already] understand how anything can have content.”

In Sanskritic terms, Dignāga’s account presupposes the availability of a general framework of linguistic “conventions” (*saṅketa*). This idea is the linchpin in any account of the nature and efficacy of language. The grammarian Nāgeśa Bhaṭṭa defines the signifying “power” or “capacity” (*śakti*) of language as consisting in the relation (*sambandha*) between a word (*pada*) and its referent

<sup>32</sup> This is Hayes’s translation (1988: 272) of *Pramāṇasamuccaya* 5.10b: ‘*dir ni sgra mtshungs pa zhig go* (Hattori, 1982: 113). In discussing Dharmakīrti’s theorization of the *svabhāvahetu*, Dunne (2004: 221–222) summarizes a similar sort of retreat that might be thought to be available to Dharmakīrti – and explains, as well, why this move is unsatisfying: “One possible response to this problem is to fall back upon an appeal to worldly convention (*vyavahāra*, *lokaprasiddha*, etc.) as the basis for the identity relation. In effect, an inference by *svabhāva*-evidence becomes an exercise in learning the proper definition of the terms involved. While this probably is *part* of the identity relation, it does not entirely solve our problem. First, we must determine which properties of any given individual are germane to the predicate in question: is height, for example, relevant to being a tree, and if so, how short might a tree be? This amounts to the thorny problem of describing exactly what constitutes a worldly convention. Second, if we base identity *wholly* on convention, we lose the ontological appeal implicit in Dharmakīrti’s notion of *svabhāvavapratibandha*. In short, the exercise of reasoning from the fact of ‘existence’ to ‘momentariness’ would be reduced to a mere word-game of learning the accepted rules for applying these terms, and it would ignore the question of whether those conventions are based upon the characteristics of ultimately real particulars.”

<sup>33</sup> See n. 4, above.

(*padārtha*) – a relation that is also called the “signified-signifier relation” (*vācyavācakabhāvāparaparyāyā*).<sup>34</sup> He then explains that this “capacity” is known based on an identification between word and referent – an *imputed* identification that consists in the active superimposing of one upon the other: “An identity, based on the superimposition of one upon the other, is what brings this about. And this is a convention (*saṃketa*).”<sup>35</sup>

While Nāgeśa says as much in the 18th century, his formulation is not novel; he cites, e.g., Vyāsa’s commentary on *Yogasūtra* 3. 17.<sup>36</sup> “This view,” George Cardona concludes, “may be quite old.” (1967–1968: 346) And it is a view that picks out a constitutively *social* dimension to language; indeed, the word *saṃketa* most basically denotes an *agreement*, something involving more than one party. Moreover, the “agreement” that constitutes a convention is *normative*; this is the difference between causal *regularities* (such as those exhibited by stimulus-responders like thermostats) and *conventions* (which are rule-governed, semantic, etc.).

The usage of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* that commonly informs Dignāga’s accounts of inference and of linguistic reference, then, presupposes that we already understand what it *means* for there to be, in general, linguistic conventions (for the “superimposition” of an uttered sound upon a referred-to thing to be intelligible as an instance of someone’s *meaning* that thing) – and that there is, indeed, an already present community of language-users whose understanding of this is exemplified in the observable behavior from which anyone might learn the appropriate use of any particular such convention. But in that case, the question of what it is for there to *be* a way thus to represent things (i.e., a *language*) is begged. By way of an account, that is, of *how* language-users “come to know” which particulars are (and which are not) appropriately referred to by any term, Dignāga has offered what is in some ways not an account of their *coming* to know this at all; for this account works only if what Sellars referred to as “the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact”

<sup>34</sup> See Cardona (1967–1968: 345).

<sup>35</sup> *tadgrāhakaṃ cetaretarādhyāsamūlaṃ tādātmyam|tac ca saṃketaḥ*. Quoted in *Ibid.*: 346.

<sup>36</sup> This has it that “a *saṃketa* is a recollection which takes the form of identifying by superimposition the *śabda* and *artha*; *saṃketas tu padapadārthetararetarādhyāsarūpaḥ smṛtyātmakaḥ|yo 'yaṃ śabdaḥ so 'rtho yo 'rthaḥ sa śabda iti*.” (*Ibid.*)

is *already given*. What is already given, then (and what therefore cannot be *explained* by this), is precisely a *semantic* level of description – a level of description at which the very idea of “meaning” something is already intelligible.

The implications of this point, I think, touch both on the case where we are to imagine the initial *devising* of a system of conventions (i.e., the first creation of a language), and on the case of any individual’s initial acquisition of an (already created) language. In both cases, I suggest, it is the constitutively *social* character of language that makes it hard to avoid presupposing a semantic level of description. “There can,” as Vincent Descombes has said in expressing the more general point here at issue, “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....” (Descombes, 2001: 58–59) That is, whether we are imagining the first devising of a language or some individual’s first acquisition of one, chief among the things we are challenged to imagine is how the very idea of *meaning* something develops; but to the extent that *that* idea, it seems, itself already presupposes a community of language-users,<sup>37</sup> it cannot coherently be thought that it originates with any individual not yet constituted as a member of such a community. Hence, it can be argued that any attempt to offer an account of either the devising or the first acquisition of a language must presuppose what would seem to be precisely what calls for explanation: the meaning of *meaning*.

One might reasonably rejoin on Dignāga’s behalf that he was not trying (and that it cannot be thought incumbent upon him) to develop a total explanation of “the origins of language” – that, as Richard Hayes suggests, the whole point of Dignāga’s exercise just is to suggest that “there is not necessarily a basis in reality for our

<sup>37</sup> This is among the upshots of arguments to the effect that “semantics” constitutively involves something *external* to any particular subject – an idea particularly associated with Hilary Putnam’s “The Meaning of ‘Meaning’” (1975; see Pessin and Goldberg, 1996), and developed, as well, by Descombes (2001), among others. It is perhaps chiefly the idea of “semantic externalism” that is opposed by Fodor’s commendation of “methodological solipsism” (1982). I am currently working through the idea that the epistemological role of *svasaṃvitti*, for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, makes their project an instance in the application of something like Fodor’s “methodological solipsism” – and that it is in part this fact that makes it impossible for them to provide an account of the constitutively social (the “semantically external”) character of language. I will not, however, be able to take the argument in that direction here.

conventions being as they are.”<sup>38</sup> But this misses the point that I suggest is here at issue. To the extent that Dignāga has said that we finally learn the appropriate use of words simply by observing how people use an already given language, this invites the counter-argument that *that fact* is not something that can be explained in non-semantic terms. If that is right, then it will not do to simply presuppose this part of the linguistic situation – and particularly if good reasons can be given for thinking that it is, in principle, impossible to give a non-semantic account thereof. According to the Mīmāṃsaka (and comparable modern) arguments we will consider, this is precisely the case. First, though, let us see what Dharmakīrti adds to the emerging picture.

DHARMAKĪRTI’S ACCOUNT OF *APOHA*: ON THE CAUSAL LINK BETWEEN  
CONCEPTS AND PERCEPTIONS

On Georges Dreyfus’s reading, one of the principal differences between the accounts of *apoha* elaborated by Dignāga and Dharmakīrti stems from the latter’s attempt to develop (what is missing from Dignāga’s version) an “articulation between *apoha* and ideational meaning (*pratibhā*).” (1997: 217) That is, while Dignāga’s account explains only the relative determinacy of the particular concepts that are involved in judgments, Dharmakīrti can be read as instead offering an account of *mental content* in general – an account, that is, of the holistic level of meaning that can account for the

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<sup>38</sup> Hayes (1988: 208). Hayes also says: “The problem now becomes one of how we know of a given particular that a specified word is applicable to it, and Dinnāga’s answer to this seems to be that our knowledge of the applicability of words to things is not necessarily reducible to knowledge about any other sort of thing than our own linguistic habits.” (1988: 187) This is, in a sense, just as Buddhists are ultimately committed to arguing; for among the characteristically Buddhist commitments that first motivates the development of something like the doctrine of *apoha* is precisely a refusal of the idea that “the way things are” could, in and of itself, find expression in language (since an argument to the contrary could give comfort to proponents of the Vedic texts). But consider Dreyfus’s apt characterization of a central difference between the project of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, and that of the Mādhyamikas Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti: while the latter were characteristically content to stop at an assertion of the simply “conventional” nature of language, Dignāga and Dharmakīrti instead hold that saying that language is “based just on human practice will not do, for it does not explain anything at all. It merely describes what people do. To say that a sentence is meaningful because it is used in this way by people does not account for its meaningfulness.” (1997: 209) The purchase of the critique I am here developing depends to an extent on my reading Dignāga as holding the view here attributed to him by Dreyfus. (Cf., as well, Dunne’s point in n. 32, above.)

propositions or judgments that are what thought is really “about.”<sup>39</sup> While I am not altogether sure that I see this in Dharmakīrti, it is certainly appropriate to say (in terms suggested above) that if Dignāga’s account of *apoha* chiefly concerns the *sense* of terms, Dharmakīrti’s can be understood as chiefly concerning their *reference*; that is, what Dharmakīrti adds to the picture is mainly an account of how linguistic items can be understood actually to “make contact” with the kinds of concrete particulars that alone really exist.

It is in this regard that if Dignāga’s account can be understood (using a term from Dharmakīrti) as constitutively involving the *tādātmya* relation, Dharmakīrti’s could surely be said to involve only the *tadutpatti* (“causal”) relation; for the account of reference here on offer is an eminently *causal* one.<sup>40</sup> So, for example, Dreyfus characterizes Dharmakīrti’s version of *apoha* (as I would characterize it) as an attempt “to establish a bridge between the two realms [viz., perceptual and conceptual] by establishing an indirect causal link between reality and the domain of negative conceptual construction....” (1997: 218) Succinctly expressing the particular causal approach that Dharmakīrti thus offers, Dreyfus argues that for Dharmakīrti the propositional contents of thought, although constitutively erroneous, “are not groundless, for they arise as results of the indirect causal connection between real things, our perceptions of them, and our thoughts. There is no connection between perceptions and universals, the objects of concepts, for those are of two different orders, but experiences and concepts are connected and thus provide a bridge between the two realms (the conceptual and the real).”<sup>41</sup> We might, then, expect (with our passage from Sellars in mind) that “the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact” is here explained – but this expectation, I am of course going to argue, will be frustrated.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. n. 19, above.

<sup>40</sup> See n. 11, above. Indeed, Dharmakīrti can be said to give a finally causal account *even of the tādātmya relation*; see, e.g., Dunne (2004: 203–218).

<sup>41</sup> Dreyfus (1997: 226–227). Cf., as well, the apt comments of Katsura: “For Dharmakīrti, to be is to be causally efficient. The notion of causal efficiency is not found in Dignāga. Dharmakīrti’s strong inclination towards the causal interpretation finds its way into his *apoha* doctrine.... Dignāga’s *apoha* doctrine is based on his open-ended hierarchy of universals and particulars especially when it comes to determin[ing] what is *anya* (the contrary, which is to be excluded) in *anyāpoha*. It seems significant that Dharmakīrti never refers to such a hierarchy. He determines *anya* by causation. According to him two items are non-different when they share the same result (*ekakāryatā*) and they are different when they do not share the same result (*atatkāryatā*.” (Katsura, 1991: 143) See also Dunne (2004: 119, ff.).

Dharmakīrti succinctly states the basic problem to be addressed thus:

Existents that are intrinsically distinct appear as though non-distinct, with some form [not their own]. [This is because] their plurality is obscured by that veil which is thought – its phenomenological content that of a unitary object, with reference to [what are really] distinct existents – that obscures with its own form a form that is other [than it]. Based on the object of that [thought], an abstraction is said to exist; it is ultimately non-existent in the way it is imagined by that [thought].<sup>42</sup>

That is, all that really exists (and all that can therefore present itself to perception) is unique particulars (*this* colored shape and *that* one); but we typically experience these manifold particulars as examples of familiar *kinds* (“I see some books”). When we thus experience what are really irreducibly unique particulars as *tokens of familiar types*, our thought, Dharmakīrti is here saying, is really *about* something that does not ultimately exist – namely, the concepts that we take to be commonly exemplified by what are really particulars.

Among Dharmakīrti’s problems in thus assessing the situation is that only perception (*pratyakṣa*), for him, is constitutively “inerrant” (*abhrānta*) – and that is the case precisely insofar as perception is constitutively “free of conceptual elaboration” (*kalpanāpodha*).<sup>43</sup> “Inerrancy” thus results from an absence of the latter precisely insofar as it is owing to “conceptual elaboration” (*kalpanā*) that thought comes to involve reference to something not really existent – namely, to the kind of generic phenomenal “image” that is the kind of thing really referred to by words.<sup>44</sup> To the extent, however, that it is only in the form of (discursive) *judgments* that cognition can be said to have

<sup>42</sup> *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.68–70: *pararūpaṃ svarūpeṇa yayā saṃvriyate dhīyā/ ekārthapratibhāsinyā bhāvān āśritya bhedinah||tayā saṃvrtanānārtāḥ saṃvṛtyā bhedinaḥ svayam/abhedina ivābhānti bhāvā rūpeṇa kenacit||tasyā abhiprāyavaśāt sāmānyam sat prakīrtitam/tad asat paramārthena yathā saṃkalpitaṃ tayā||*(Gnoli, 1960: 38; cf. Dunne, 2004: 339)

<sup>43</sup> See, *inter alia*, *Nyāyabindu* 1.4 (Malvania, 1971: 40): *tatra pratyakṣam kalpanāpodham abhrāntam*.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Nyāyabindu* 1.5 (Malvania, 1971: 47): *abhilāpasamṣargayogyapatibhāsa pratīti kalpanā* (“[The] *kalpanā* [that perception is lacking] is a thought whose phenomenological content is suitable for association with discourse”). Note that (an eccentric reading of) this verse figures importantly in some Tibetan attempts to elaborate Dharmakīrti’s *apoha* doctrine; in particular, this is sometimes taken as Dharmakīrti’s statement of an “alternative” definition of *kalpanā*, one that is meant to clear the way for his positing of (what his epistemology desperately needs) an intermediate link between perceptions and concepts. The characteristically Tibetan reading of the verse is exploited by Dreyfus (1997: 220–222); on the nature of (and problems with) this reading, see Tillemans (1999: 238–239n22).

any epistemic value,<sup>45</sup> this combination of epistemological commitments is deeply problematic; for insofar as it is, on Dharmakīrti's account, precisely *judgments* that are the most basic source of cognitive error, it becomes difficult (if not impossible) to link these two – difficult, that is, to explain our confidence that what we are thinking *about*, when entertaining any proposition, is in any sense the same thing that was perceived.

To appreciate that this represents a well nigh intractable problem, consider that for Dharmakīrti, all cognitions are either (causally describable) *perceptions*, or they're *not* – just as all existents are either causally efficacious (hence, real), or not.<sup>46</sup> The problem, though, is that what Dharmakīrti seems to need in order to link perceptions with discursive mental content is something that is at once *causally describable*, and (in some sense) expressible *as a proposition*.<sup>47</sup> What Dharmakīrti suggests, in this regard, is that there is precisely such an intermediate link – specifically, (causally describable) perceptions give rise to representational “images” or “phenomena” (called, *inter alia*, *ākāra* or *pratibimba*). These, it is held, are causally related to the perceptions in which they are founded; as Dreyfus puts the point (in glossing some not particularly perspicuous verses from Dharmakīrti), “In perception a representation, that is, a reflection or an aspect, stands for a real individual object in a one-to-one, direct causal correspondence.” (1997: 227) And while these images are not themselves concepts, they are the bases of the “exclusions” (*apoha*) through which concepts are constructed, and hence serve a crucial role in bridging the gap.

Dharmakīrti succinctly expresses this process, for example, by way of answering the objection that insofar as only particulars are real,

<sup>45</sup> The commentator Dharmottara can be understood as having diagnosed (and as having worked to address) this problem in Dharmakīrti; on this point, cf. Arnold (2005: 42–48).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Pramāṇavārttika* [3].3 (Sāṃkrtyāyana, 1938–1940: 112): *arthakriyāsamarthaṃ yat tad atra paramārthasat|anyat saṃvṛtisat proktaṃ te svasāmānyalakṣaṇe |*. (References to Sāṃkrtyāyana's edition of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, which I have used for chapters other than the *svārthānumāna* chapter edited by Gnoli, will be given with chapter numbers in brackets; this reflects my deference to the scholarly consensus about the order of chapters in the *Pramāṇavārttika*, which is to the effect that Gnoli is right in judging the *svārthānumāna* chapter to be the first.)

<sup>47</sup> Something precisely like the problem characterized here is usefully elaborated in Brandom (1997: 126–128).

they cannot be held to be the objects of discursive thought. “This is not a problem,” he explains;

Ordinary discursive transactions (*vyavahārāḥ*) involving linguistic items<sup>48</sup> [are undertaken] with regard to the object that appears to cognition (*jñānapratibhāsiny arthe*).<sup>49</sup> This cognition – *stemming from latent dispositions (vāsanām āśritya), which are deposited by [the kind of perceptual] experience that apprehends the nature of things – is conceptual. Though it does not [really] have those [particulars] as its objects, it seems as though it has these as its objects. Its form is to [seem to] exist as those, as imagined, because its nature is to originate from the latent dispositions deposited by experience of them. As though it were apprehending non-distinct objects (abhinnārthagrāhīva), [this cognition thus] has a [phenomenological] aspect (ākāra) that is ultimately the same in regard to [objects] that have a difference from those [having a comparable effect], because of its production from things whose effects are indistinct.*<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> More precisely, the compound (*sāmānyasāmānādhikarānyadharmadharmivya-vahārāt*) refers to “ordinary usage involving universals, apposition, and subjects and predicates.”

<sup>49</sup> Note, here, the representationalist epistemology that recurs throughout Dharmakīrti; cf., in this regard, n. 59, below.

<sup>50</sup> *naiṣa doṣaḥ, jñānapratibhāsiny arthe sāmānyasāmānādhikarānyadharmadharmivya-vahārāḥ. yad etaj jñānam vastusvabhāvagrāhīṇānubhavenāhitam vāsanām āśritya vikalpakam utpadyate, atadviṣayam api tadviṣayam iva, tadanubhavāhitavāsanāprabhavaprakṛter adhyavasītatadbhāvasvarūpam, abhinnakāryapadārthaprasūter abhinnārthagrāhīva tadanyabhedaparamārthasamānākāram* (from Dharmakīrti’s auto-commentary on *PV1.75* [Gnoli, 1960: 42]; emphasis added. Cf. Dunne, 2004: 346–347)

See, as well, *Pramāṇavārttika* [3].163cd-165: *bāhyaśaktivyavacchedaniṣṭhābhāve ’pi tacchrutiḥ/vikalpapratibimbeṣu tanniṣṭheṣu nibadhyate/tato ’nyāpohaniṣṭhatvād uktānyāpohakṛc chrutiḥ/vyatirekīva yaj jñāne bhāty arthapratibimbakam/śabdāt tad api nārthāt mā bhrāntiḥ sā vāsanodbhavā*/(Sāṃkṛtyāyana, 1938–1940: 167–168) My translation: “Even given that [it has] no basis for distinguishing the capacity of an external [object], expression of that [i.e., of an external object] is connected to conceptual reflections [that are] based on that [external object]. Hence, because of [its being] based in exclusion of what is other, the expression is said to be constructed by exclusion from what is other. When there is cognition based on language, the reflection of an object which appears as though different [from the object] isn’t itself an object, either; it is a false impression produced by latent dispositions.” Cf. the translation of Dreyfus: “Although a word does not rest on an elimination [found in] external [things] that has the capacity [to perform a function], it is related to the [object’s] reflection [provoked] in conceptual thought [by words], which rests on this [elimination existing in external objects]. Therefore, since it rests on an elimination of others, a word signifies an elimination of others. That which pertains to the reflection of the object appears to the cognition [arising] from words similar to the elimination [of others], but it is not the real object, [for] it arises from mistaken latencies.” (1997: 226)

The subjectively occurrent representations that are produced by our perceptions can, Dharmakīrti thus argues, serve as a link to universals insofar as the cognitions produced by objects – reckoned by Dharmakīrti as among the *effects* “caused” by these objects – tend to be similar. This similarity is itself to be described, though, in causal terms: what is “excluded” from the range of things to which any word refers is whatever particulars do not produce the same effect. As Dharmakīrti puts the point, it is “by virtue of having the same effects and causes” (*ekasādhyasādhanatayā*) – and by virtue, as well, of the latent dispositions (*vāsanā*) we have to exploit useful regularities – that distinct existents can and do fruitfully appear to cognition as examples of the same kinds.<sup>51</sup>

It is important to note that the account on offer is significantly complicated by Dharmakīrti’s contention that the “same effect” thus produced by sensible objects consists finally in *the cognition that it causes*. So, for example, Dharmakīrti’s auto-commentary on *Pramāṇavārttika* 1. 109 tells us that “cognitions are without difference insofar as they are causes of a single judgment (*ekapratyavamarśa*); the individuals [in question], too, are without difference, insofar as they cause the same cognitions.”<sup>52</sup> This point in turn relates closely to the peculiar form of Dharmakīrti’s claim that a linguistic cognition (*śābdaṃ jñānam*) is reducible to an inference to speaker’s “intention.” More precisely, passages like this make clear why Dharmakīrti can only credit an inference to the effect *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

<sup>51</sup> Here, I am paraphrasing part of Dharmakīrti’s auto-commentary on *PV*1.68–70: *sā caikasādhyasādhanatayā anyavivekinām bhāvānām tadvikalpavāsanayāś ca prakṛtīr yad evaṃ eṣā pratibhāti tadudbhavā* (Gnoli, 1960: 38) Dunne (2004: 339) translates: “Those things conceptualized as non-different are excluded from others in that they have the same effects and causes; there is also a cognitive imprint (*vāsanā*) that induces one to conceptualize those things in that fashion. The nature (*prakṛti*) of those distinct things themselves and the nature of that imprint are such that the cognition that arises from those things and that imprint appears in this way.”

<sup>52</sup> *ekapratyavamarśasya hetuvād dhīr abhedinī ekadhīhetubhāvena vyaktīnām apy abhinatā* (Gnoli, 1960: 56–57; cf. Dunne, 2004: 121). Similarly, Dharmakīrti at one point explains that the singular “effect” that, say, various examples of the same “kind” of tree (*śiṃśapā*) relevantly produce is, in fact, “a unitary phenomenal appearance, which is a recognition” (*śiṃśapādayo ’pi bhedaḥ parasparānanvaye ’pi prakṛtyā-eva-ekam ekākāraṃ pratyabhijñānam janayanti* [Gnoli, 1960: 41]); cf. Dunne (2004: 344).

is, as concerning objective states of affairs), but only as *subjectively occurrent representations*.<sup>53</sup>

But this appeal to the capacity of various unique particulars to produce comparable effects (if only, finally, in the form of phenomenologically comparable cognitions) remains vulnerable to the charge of circularity often brought against *apohavādins* – a point surely invited by Dharmakīrti's recurrent reference to the causal “natures” (*prakṛti*) of particulars. That is, if some domain of particulars is usefully demarcated as sharing “the same causal capacity,” are we not having recourse to precisely the sort of abstraction that the *apoha* doctrine purports to explain? The ingenuity of Dharmakīrti's account is clear in an example that is recurrently adduced to address this sort of concern: that of various medicinal herbs (*auśadhi*) that are commonly prized for things like their fever-reducing effects (*jvarādiśamana*).<sup>54</sup> What is picked out when there is reference to such herbs just is whatever cannot be excluded as comparably producing those effects; and this explanation can be thought to avoid circularity since *what* it is to which one's activity is directed by such usage will invariably be *some particular* instance of the herb in question (and not to an abstraction such as ‘being an herbal remedy’).<sup>55</sup>

So, to the anticipated charge that a shared causal capacity just amounts to a universal,<sup>56</sup> Dharmakīrti responds thus:

<sup>53</sup> Cf. n. 10, above. The upshot of this is concisely expressed at *Pramāṇavārttika* [2.2]: “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].” (*vaktṛvyāpāraviśayo yo 'rtho buddhau prakāśate/pramāṇyam tatra śabdasya nârthatattvanibandhanam* //; text in *Sāṃkṛtyāyana* 1938–40: 4; emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup> So, *PV1.74*: *jvarādiśamane kāścit saha pratyekam eva vā/dr̥ṣṭā yathā vaūśadhayo nānāṭve 'pi na cāparāḥ* //: “Some medicinal herbs, even given their plurality, are observed in respect to soothing fevers, etc., whether singly or together – and others aren't” (Gnoli, 1960: 41).

<sup>55</sup> A fuller elaboration of Dharmakīrti's point here would require explaining, as well, the sense in which Dharmakīrti can provide a finally causal account of the *tādātmya* relation (cf. n. 40, above); for that account is crucial to understanding how Dharmakīrti can reasonably think that reference to the “natures” or “essences” of things (as in inferences based on the *svabhāvahetu*, which depend on the *tādātmya* relation) can be understood as picking out *particulars*. Consideration of this would add significant nuance to Dharmakīrti's overall position, but it would not, so far as I can see, finally address the issues that concern me here.

<sup>56</sup> So Dharmakīrti: *sāmānyam eva kiñcit tāsu tathābhūtāsu vidyate, tata eva tad ekaṃ kāryam*...: “There is just some universal among these kinds of things, and it is just because of that that there is a single effect” (Gnoli, 1960: 41). Cf. Dunne (2004: 345).

Since there is no distinction [between occurrences of a universal], there is no universal [present in these herbs to explain their common effect], because [otherwise there would be] the unwanted consequence of non-distinction, even given the differences in the fields [from which they were harvested], etc. – and because [a universal is] not the performer of any function (*anupakāra*), owing to its permanence (*dhrauvya*).<sup>57</sup>

The reason Dharmakīrti's account is served by his appeal to causal capacities, then, is that it is precisely the possession of such a capacity that defines something as *real*<sup>58</sup> – and any time discursive practice thus comes to rest in the discovery or realization of such a capacity, one has, *ipso facto*, encountered a unique particular. The causal efficacy of medicinal herbs with respect to fevers, then, is not something that belongs to an abstract property like 'being a medicinal herb,' but only to irreducibly particular plants (*this* plant and not *that* one).<sup>59</sup>

The construction of kind terms, then, simply by the mechanism of excluding what does not produce the same effect can at least arguably be explained (as Dharmakīrti thinks he has explained it) with reference only to particulars. While there is more to be said about this, let us suppose that Dharmakīrti has so far provided a successful causal account of reference; would we in that case have a wholly non-semantic account of what Sellars characterized as “the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact”?

Let us consider, in this regard, an exemplary statement:

The same expression (*samā śrutīḥ*) – [pertaining] to different [things] whose effect is the same, based on the exclusion of what does not have that effect – was *created by the elders in order to show the effects of these [different particulars]* (*tatkāryaparicodane ... kṛtā vṛddhair*); [and the elders did this] because of the impossibility (owing to the excessive

<sup>57</sup> PV1.75: *aviśeṣān na sāmānyam aviśeṣaprasaṅgataḥ/tāsāṃ kṣetrādibhede 'pi dhrauvyāc cānupakārataḥ*/(Gnoli, 1960: 41–42). Cf. Dunne (2004: 345–346).

<sup>58</sup> Cf. n. 46, above.

<sup>59</sup> Again, though, Dharmakīrti's appeal to “sameness of effect” is complicated by his contention that the relevant “effects” here consist finally in the subjectively occurrent representations produced by sensibilia. Among other things, this version of the “sameness of effect” move arguably undermines 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. (Dunne [2004: 139,ff.] makes a similar point.) In this regard, I suggest (but will not here argue) that it is because of their characteristically foundationalist commitment to *svasaṃvitti* (which is perhaps in play here) that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti finally cannot offer an account of the constitutively social character of linguistic conventions. Their commitments are, to this extent, suggestively analogous to what Jerry Fodor commends as “methodological solipsism” – which, too, is finally why Fodor is most significantly vulnerable to the kinds of critique to which we will turn shortly. Cf. n. 37, above.

difficulty) and the pointlessness of naming [each] different [thing]. [Hence, they did] not [apply these expressions] to anything real, since every existent is distinguished by a unique nature.<sup>60</sup>

This clearly states the characteristically causal version of the *apoha* doctrine that we have seen Dharmakīrti elaborate. But now I want to ask whether we have, in that doctrine, a way to explain the bygone “creation” of expressions by the “elders” here alluded to. I think we do not; for what has so far been left out of our representation of Dharmakīrti’s account is the very many places where he clearly presupposes (as Dignāga did) an already intelligible idea of *meaning* something, and a system of meaningful signs that is *already available* – already available, that is, to the individual whose task is (in a non-intentionally, non-semantically describable way) to master it. Only given such a system could any individual already find intelligible the possibility of *devising* any particular significations.

Here again, then, we encounter the idea that the conceptual problems involved in accounting for the first *acquisition* of a language parallel those involved in *creating* one; and one of the more striking aspects of Dharmakīrti’s discussion of *apoha* is the recurrent presupposition that neither of these cases is significantly different from that of *using* one. For example, Dharmakīrti explains (in what will again be a familiar expression of the doctrine) that “this apprehension of singularity with respect to [many particular] things is a false construction. The seed of this is the difference of one from another, *for the purpose of which there is signification (saṃjñā yadarthikā)*.”<sup>61</sup> That is, the experience of many particular things as being tokens of a single type (hence, of their “singularity”) involves reference to an unreal abstraction; and it is really so that we can attend to the relevant *differences* (viz. , in causal capacities) that discursive practices thus construct such abstractions.

But is this “signification” (*saṃjñā*) simply there for the taking? John Dunne – following the commentary of Śākyabuddhi, who glosses Dharmakīrti’s *saṃjñā* with *saṃketakriyā* (the “activity” or “making of conventions”)<sup>62</sup> – translates this last verse in a way that

<sup>60</sup> PV1.137–138: *ekakāryeṣu bhedeṣu tatkāryaparicodane|gauravāśaktivaiphalyād bhedākhyāyāḥ samā śrutih||kṛtā vṛddhair atakāryavyāvṛttivinibandhanā|na bhāve sarvabhāvānām svabhāvasya vyavasthiteḥ||*(Gnoli, 1960: 66).

<sup>61</sup> PV1.72: *tasmān mithyāvikalpo 'yam artheṣv ekātmātāgrahaḥ|itaretarabhedo 'sya bijam saṃjñā yadarthikā||*(Gnoli, 1960: 40).

<sup>62</sup> See Dunne (2004: 344n14). Cf. Karṇakagomin (in *Saṃkṛtyāyana*, 1943: 176): *saṃjñā saṃketakriyā yadarthikā*.

discloses the problematic presupposition here in play: “The seed of this conceptual cognition is each object’s difference from this and that other object; *one engages in the formation of linguistic conventions (saṃjñā) for the purpose of knowing that difference.*”<sup>63</sup> Dharmakīrti’s auto-commentary (also here in Dunne’s translation) elaborates:

*One forms linguistic conventions in order to have a cognition of a certain type of difference such that, having known that things which have nondifferent effects are different from those which do not have those effects, persons who understand those conventions act by avoiding those things that do not have the aforementioned effect.*<sup>64</sup>

These passages, it seems to me, cry out for an answer to the question: *who* thus “forms” these? Can it really be thought that individuals, in using any particular language, are thereby devising language as such? What is in question here is not, recall, the formation of *particular linguistic items* (such as, for example, newly coined technical terms or neologisms), but of *language as such* – of the very idea that the utterance of a sound could *mean* something. Particularly if we keep in mind that that is how to put the question (with Sellars) of “the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact,” the recurrent passages in Dharmakīrti’s account where this question is begged can begin to sound obviously problematic.

“For example,” Dharmakīrti says, “when there is the possibility of expressing, with respect to things like the eye (whose result is a single cognition of form),<sup>65</sup> [their] having that effect as [their] non-distinction, *someone can create a conventional expression (kaścit saṃketikīm śrutim kuryād)* for the sake of an understanding of all

<sup>63</sup> Dunne (2004: 343–344); emphasis added.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*: 344; emphasis added. The text here translated reads (per Gnoli, 1960: 40): *yasya pratyāyanārthaṃ saṃketaḥ kriyate, abhinnaśādhyaṅ bhāvān atatsādhyebhyo bhedena jñātvā tatparihāreṇa pravarteteti*. The point is, it seems to me, no less problematic if we render this (with the Sanskrit) in the passive voice: “*Linguistic conventions are formed (saṃketaḥ kriyate) in order....*” Dunne’s elaboration of the passage is warranted by commentaries such as Karṇakagoṃinī’s: *yasyetaretarabhedasya pratyāyanārthaṃ saṃketaḥ kriyate. atatsādhyebhyo ity atakāryebhyo bhinnāśādhyaṅ bhāvān bhedena jñātvā tatparihāreṇety etat kāryaparihāreṇa tatkāryeṣu pravarteteti kṛtvā saṃketaḥ kriyate* (Sāṃkṛtyāyana, 1943: 176).

<sup>65</sup> Note that Dharmakīrti here again expresses his view that the relevantly similar “effects” produced by distinct particulars consist in subjectively occurrent cognitions; cf. nn.52, 53, and 59, above.

[such cognitions] at once – even without a separate universal as the form of that.”<sup>66</sup> The commentator Manorathanandin says, with respect to this crucially indeterminate “someone” (*kaścīti*) who (it seems) thus decides that whatever “commonly produces the effect of cognition of form” (*rūpavijñānaikaphale*) will be called ‘*cakṣus*,’ that “someone who has a desire for discursive commerce to be created (*sandheyavyavahāraruciḥ*) could form a conventional expression for the sake of an understanding of every instance of sight, etc., all at once....”<sup>67</sup>

For Dharmakīrti and his commentators, the salient point of such passages is simply that this formation of conventions is accomplished without reference to real universals. But the more significant point is arguably that they are here exploiting unremarkable intuitions about the *use* of language, and pressing them into service of an account of the acquisition (and even the *creation*) thereof. But it is one thing to claim that language-users exercise some agency in their choice of terms; it does not follow from this that these capacities of an individual speaker determine what – much less *that* – the chosen words will *mean*. And yet, Dharmakīrti seems to suggest precisely as much; elaborating on the claim that speakers typically use words that effectively facilitate their specific purposes, he says:

These [usefully efficacious things to which one might refer] can be expressed by one word, or by many; the speaker has autonomy in this regard (*svātantryam atra vaktuḥ*). Insofar as it is *owing to the intention of a speaker* (*vaktrabhiprāyavaśāt*) that a single expression refers to many things, one cannot object [to someone’s so using words]. And it is not the case that this reference is impossible, because of [its] being

<sup>66</sup> PV1.141–42: *cakṣurādaḥ yathā rūpavijñānaikaphale kvacit/aviśeṣeṇa tatkāryacodanāsambhava sati/sakṛt sarvapatītyarthaṃ kaścīti sāmketikīṃ śrutim/kuryād ṛte ’pi tadrūpasāmānyād vyatirekīnaḥ ||* (Gnoli, 1960: 66). Dunne translates: “For example, when at a certain time it is possible to express that the things such as the eye and so on, whose effect is an awareness of form, have that effect as their non-difference, someone forms a signifying expression so as to know all of those things as causes of ocular awareness at once; that sign is formed without a separate universal which would be their essence.” (2004: 353)

<sup>67</sup> *kaścīti sandheyavyavahāraruciḥ sakṛt sarvasya cakṣurādeḥ pratītyarthaṃ sāmketikīṃ śrutim kuryāt* (Pandeya, 1989: 238). See, as well, Dharmakīrti’s auto-commentary: *vyavahāralāghavarthaṃ kaścīti sāmketikīṃ śrutim niveśayet yaro rūpavijñānahetuḥ śaso veti. api nāma sarveṣāṃ taddhetūnāṃ sakṛt pratītir yathā syād iti* (Gnoli, 1960: 68). Particularly in the translation of Dunne, the question-begging here is stark: “...in order to facilitate practical action..., someone applies a convention-establishing ... statement: ‘The causes are such-and-such and so-and-so.’ One uses these expressions such that the listener *somehow knows* all of the causes...” (2004: 356; emphasis added)

dependent upon [the speaker's] desires; for if the [language]-user does not have a desire, how could he refer even to one thing?<sup>68</sup>

What I am urging is that we are here encouraged to overlook the difference between a speaker's desire as causing *some particular utterance*, and such a desire as itself creating the *conditions of the possibility of any such utterance*.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>68</sup> *kevalam anena tatra yogyās te arthās codanīyāḥ. ta ekena vā śabdena codyeran, bahubhir veti svātantryam atra vaktuḥ. tad iyaṃ ekā śrutir bahuṣu vaktrabhiprāyavaśāt pravartamānā nopālambham arhati. na ceyam aśakyapravartanā, icchādhinatvāt. yadi hi na prayoktur icchā katham iyaṃ ekatrāpi pravarteta?* (from Dharmakīrti's auto-commentary on *PV1.142* [Gnoli, 1960: 67]). The translation of Dunne again clearly discloses the problematic move here: "The speaker has autonomy in this regard: he can choose to express those things that are capable of that effect with one expression or with many. Therefore, it is simply by virtue of the speaker's intention (*abhiprāya*) that one expression could refer to many things, and that being so, it is not correct to object to the use of a single expression for many things. Moreover, it is not impossible for that one expression to be used for all those things because the capacity to refer to things depends on the speaker's wish's (*icchā*) [or needs]. If meaning is not fixed by the wishes (*icchā*) of the person using the expressions, then how could an expression refer to even one thing?" (2004: 354–355; emphasis added) Cf. Kaṛṇakagomin (*Sāṃkṛtyāyana*, 1943: 168): *te tu kāraṇabhūtāḥ padārthā ekena vā śabdena codyeran bahubhir veti svātantryam atra codane vaktuḥ. yata evaṃ tad iti, tasmād iyaṃ ekā śrutir bahuṣu vācyeṣu vaktur abhiprāyavaśād hetoḥ pravartamānā nopālambham arhati.*

Cf., as well, Tillemans (2000: 163), who thus summarizes (in regard to *Pramāṇavārttika* 4.109) the "fundamental position" of Dharmakīrti: "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 (*svasaṃvedana*)." Here, then, Dharmakīrti's notion of the formation of conventions crucially comes together with his notion of an inference to speaker's intention; with the basic subjectivism of his notion of reference; and with the central (but here unexplored) category of *svasaṃvedana*. Cf. nn. 9, 10, 37, 49, 52, 59, above.

<sup>69</sup> The illuminating discussion of Nance (cf. n. 10, above) culminates with a strikingly similar observation: "... in coming to form an account of intelligible utterances, Kamalaśīla (and other Buddhist *pramāṇavādins*) appeal to two distinct ideas: the first is the idea that a desire to speak serves as an antecedent causal condition for any utterance whatsoever; the second is the idea that utterances are structured and rendered intelligible via shared linguistic conventions. By slipping between these ideas and failing to distinguish between them in a rigorous way, these thinkers come to hold that we (i.e., those of us who share linguistic conventions) infer particular desires from particular utterances. But this cannot be right. Linguistic conventions do not fix the conditions for inference in a way that renders parapraxis impossible: they do not assure that what we say will be invariably concomitant with what we desire to say." (Nance, 2004: 59) The force of Nance's concluding observation here lies precisely in the fact that *what is said* by any particular utterance – what our words are *about* – is not up to us. This is, indeed, the whole point in distinguishing (with Frege) between the *sense* and the *reference* of expressions.

Such assumptions about the explanatory value of individual language-use crystallize around an expression that recurs throughout the discourse of Dharmakīrti and his commentators: *saṃketakāle*, “at the time of the convention (or, of agreement).” It is partly with this expression in mind that I have recurrently noted the conceptual parallels between talk of the initial *acquisition* of a language and the *creation* of one; for this expression is ambiguous in this regard – it could, it seems, mean “at the time of one’s *learning* a convention,” or “at the time of the *creation* of a convention.” Either way, what is in question is the basic connection of language with non-linguistic fact – and whether that be for a particular language-learner, or for a language-using community, the question is still *whether that basic connection can itself be described in non-semantic terms*.

Here is an exemplary passage from Dharmakīrti in this regard: “Therefore, even at the time of [the formation of? the learning of?] the convention, exclusion of what is other, joined to an indicated object – which results in a thought of itself – is connected to the expression.”<sup>70</sup> Manorathanandin’s comment trades on the conflation we have noted, tellingly taking a fact about the acquisition or creation of a convention to follow from a fact about the *use* thereof: “Since, at the time of usage (*vyavahārakāle*), there is understanding, based on language, that discriminates what is other, therefore, at the time of the [formation of? learning of?] the convention, too, exclusion of what is other is bound to the expression as being expressible – nothing else.”<sup>71</sup>

<sup>70</sup> PV[3].171: *tasmāt saṃketakāle 'pi nirdiṣṭārthena saṃyutaḥ/svapratītiphalenānyāpohaḥ sambadhyate śrutau*/(Sāṃkrtyāyana, 1938–1940: 170). Cf., as well, the several places in Dharmottara’s *Nyāyabinduṭīkā* where comparable reference to “*saṃketakāla*” is made (Malvania, 1971: 52–53, 69). There, the context is invariably to distinguish a properly *perceptual* cognition from the conceptual thought that one might reasonably suppose to be immediately produced thereby – as, for example, in distinguishing one’s perceptual hearing of an utterance (describable as the “perception” of an “audible unique particular,” *śabdavalakṣaṇa*), from one’s *understanding* of it as a *sentence*. The explanation proposed there is that one is prompted to remember, in such cases, the prior occasion on which one had learned the use of this word.

<sup>71</sup> *yasmād vyavahārakāle 'nyavyavacchedapratītiḥ śabdāt, tasmāt saṃketakāle 'py anyāpohaḥ śrutau vācyatayā sambadhyate, na-anything* (Pandeya, 1989: 99). And how do we know this? Dharmakīrti, like Dignāga, refers to *anvaya* and *vyatireka*, saying, in the immediately following verse: “Exclusion is connected to an expression because of reference to observation of it in one place, [and] because of reference to non-observation of it in another.” (PV2.172: *anyatrādrṣṭyapekṣatvāt kvacit taddrṣṭyapekṣaṇāt/śrutau sambadhyate 'poho naitad vastuni yujyate*/(Sāṃkrtyāyana, 1938–1940: 170)). This presupposes, again, that an observable system of usage is already available.

Commenting on the same verse, Prajñākaragupta explicitly takes it to refer to the *creation* of a signifying convention: “Even in making a convention, the maker of a convention (*saṁketakāra*) does not make the convention by means of a rule (*vidhīmukhena*);<sup>72</sup> rather, it is just by means of exclusion, since even at the time of [the making of] the convention, only exclusion of what is other is connected to the expression, not a thing.”<sup>73</sup> Prajñākaragupta thus raises the question of whether the “maker of a convention” (*saṁketakāra*) might need anything in order for his act of formation to be possible. Prajñākaragupta says, of course, that whatever is needed here can be explained by the process of “exclusion” (*apoha*). Whether that can be right depends on our better appreciating the conditions of the possibility of any “making of a convention” – and the argument will now be that what is presupposed just is (what the *apohavādin* most needs to explain) an intentional level of description.

INTERLUDE: SOME MODERN VERSIONS OF THE ARGUMENT FROM  
LANGUAGE-ACQUISITION

Let us begin by scouting some modern iterations of an argument to that effect; for not only do these provide the context for my framing passage from Sellars, but they can suggest, as well, how the Mīmāṃsaka argument (still to be developed) can be generalized. We can begin by noting an often-quoted passage from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, which is surely what underlies Sellars’s reference to the “Augustinian” theories that can be seen to supersede avowedly nominalist theories when those are called on to give an account of “those occasions on which the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact is exhibited.”

Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* famously begins with a consideration of St. Augustine’s account, in the *Confessions*, of

<sup>72</sup> Or, “by means of a [positive] *affirmation*” (that is, of a really existent universal), which would in fact be the more common sense of *vidhi* in this context. (Cf. Dunne, 2004: 114–115, where there are a couple of occurrences of the word *vidhi* so translated.) In either case, though, the point is that the ‘*vidhi*’ here referred to as a possible alternative to *apoha* would be something that preexists the would-be creator of a convention – and would be, as well, the kind of thing that brings in (what Dharmakīrti and Prajñākaragupta need to avoid) what I take to be a constitutively *intentional* level of description.

<sup>73</sup> *saṁketayann api na vidhīmukhena saṁketakāraḥ saṁketam karoti; api tv anyāpohamukenaiva, yataḥ saṁketakāle ’py anyāpoha eva śrutau sambadhyate, na vastu.* (Shastri, 1992: 137)

how it is that he, like all children, first learned language. Augustine says,

When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face, the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs, I used them to express my own desires.<sup>74</sup>

Augustine's intuitively plausible description of the process is surely comparable, in a rough and ready way, to Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's appeal to (the grammarians' sense of) *anvaya* and *vyatireka* as guiding language acquisition. While Augustine's reference to the "natural language of all peoples" might be thought to represent an appeal of the sort that these Buddhists would regard with suspicion, this locution need not cause any problems for the committed nominalist; for we have here a generally *causal* account of learning by ostension – one that is intelligible, that is, with reference only to particular acts of ostension, ostensible particulars, etc.

Wittgenstein is so preoccupied with Augustine's passage that the lengthy consideration that follows represents Wittgenstein's most sustained engagement with any thinker addressed in the *Investigations*. For our purposes, the insight most compellingly pressed against Augustine's picture is this:

Augustine describes the learning of human language as if the child came into a strange country and did not understand the language of the 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."<sup>75</sup>

Among Wittgenstein's points, I take it, is that *knowing a language* involves something more (indeed, much more) than knowing (what can

<sup>74</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, I.8, as quoted (and translated) in Wittgenstein (1958: 2).

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*:15-16. Wittgenstein continues: "Suppose, however, someone were to object: 'It is not true that you must already be master of a language in order to understand an ostensive definition: all you need – of course! – is to know or guess what the person giving the explanation is pointing to. That is, whether for example to the shape of the object, or to its colour, or to its number, and so on.' – And what does 'pointing to the shape', 'pointing to the colour' consist in? Point to a piece of paper – And now point to its shape – now to its colour – now to its number (that sounds queer) – How did you do it? – You will say that you 'meant' a different thing each time you pointed. And if I ask how that is done, you will say you concentrated your attention on the colour, the shape, etc. But I ask again: how is *that* done?" (16).

at least arguably be taught by ostension) “the names of things”; it involves, much more basically, the very idea that there could *be* names of things – that by any act of speech or ostension, one could be taken to *mean* something. What we really want to understand, then, when we ask for an account of an infant’s language acquisition is how the child acquires the very idea of *meaning* something, and in what that consists. To that extent, an account such as Augustine’s begs the question that is most centrally at issue, insofar as it presupposes that the idea of *meaning* something is already intelligible to the language-learner, and that she requires only to learn *which* sounds “mean” which things.

What Sellars likely has in mind, then, when he says that avowedly nominalist theories may turn out, after all, to be rather “Augustinian,” is that they are not *completely* “nominalist” if they thus presuppose the meaning of *meaning* – if, as Sellars puts it, our account of first language acquisition makes sense only if it requires that the language learner occupies “a structured logical space in which *we* are at home.... But though it is *we* who are familiar with this logical space, we run the danger, if we are not careful, of picturing the language learner as having *ab initio* some degree of awareness – ‘pre-analytic’, limited and fragmentary though it may be – of this same logical space.”<sup>76</sup>

We can perhaps best appreciate the considerable purchase of this argument if we consider briefly the philosophical project of someone who is, in the end, not much impressed by it – or rather, who is impressed by it in such a way as to take it to warrant a conclusion other than the one Wittgenstein has in mind. Here, I have in mind Jerry Fodor’s arguments for the necessity of positing a “language of thought.” Fodor is an exceptionally prolific philosopher,

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<sup>76</sup> Sellars (1963: 161). This is the passage to which Dreyfus refers (see above, in the fourth paragraph of this essay). Note that this way of elaborating Wittgenstein’s point – as concerning, that is, an already “structured logical space” – is arguably somewhat different from how I have characterized it (*viz.*, as concerning the presupposition of the very idea of *meaning* something). On this way of characterizing the argument (which is surely warranted by the way in which Wittgenstein continues; see n. 75, above), Wittgenstein is mainly arguing that Augustine presupposes simply that the language-learner already has “a place for things” – that she has already categorized things, such that when she hears a parent referring to “trees,” she already has that *category* (already has, that is, the capacity to enter some space and notice the things we call ‘trees’ as constituting a single group). On this narrower construal, though, it remains the case that what the Augustinian account presupposes is an *intentional* level of description – one, that is, at which it is already possible to specify the kinds of things that any relevant utterance might be *about*. It seems to me, moreover, that it is not unwarrantedly stretching Wittgenstein’s point to say that the language-learner in this case also has the idea that her exemplar *means* to talk about these things when he utters certain sounds.

whose positions have developed over time; I think, however, that we can usefully glean from a few of his works a basic sense of the philosophical commitments that require that he arrive at such a notion – which, as I have already intimated, are commitments that have some suggestive similarities with the characteristic commitments of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti.<sup>77</sup> This is not surprising given that Fodor's is a broadly empiricist project in philosophy of mind – hence, one that requires that he provide an account of mental content that makes reference only to entities with scientifically accredited identity criteria (which is basically to say, in terms that Dharmakīrti would commend, to *causally efficacious particulars*).

Accordingly, Fodor, like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, is committed to giving an account of mental content (where that is understood as constitutively intentional or semantic) that does not involve reference to abstractions. Fodor, of course, has peculiarly cognitive-scientific reasons for this.<sup>78</sup> In particular, Fodor claims to be something of a realist about mental content (about, as the idiom of this literature often has it, *propositional attitudes*);<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> Cf. the passage from Tillemans quoted in n. 68, above (and the other notes cited there).

<sup>78</sup> For all that, Fodor's account remains in many ways quite comparable to that of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti; for the characteristically cognitive-scientific approach is, on Fodor's own reckoning, in every respect save for the novel appeal to computational theories just another version of long-standing representational theories of mind: "Technical details to one side, this is – in my view – the *only* respect in which contemporary Cognitive Science represents a major advance over the versions of [representational theories of mind] that were its 18th- and 19th-century predecessors." (Fodor, 1985: 93) Precisely to the extent, then, that a project like Dharmakīrti's is appropriately likened to, say, that of Locke, it is as we should expect that it would bear comparison with Fodor's, as well.

<sup>79</sup> See, *inter alia*, Fodor (1985: 78–84). Indeed, that is why Fodor would surely question my characterization, just above, of his project as not involving "reference to abstractions." Fodor's whole point about the cognitive-scientific appeal to the computer analogy (n. 2, above) is that the example of computers can help us understand how *both* "syntactic" and "semantic" levels of description – the levels, respectively, at which causally efficacious particulars and "propositional attitudes" are in play – can be thought to be involved. Something like the same qualification is arguably called for, moreover, in the case of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, as well; for on the *apoha* doctrine, it isn't the case that reference to universals is altogether jettisoned, so much as it is shown that (and how) they are *constructed*. Nevertheless, 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. Similarly, it is insofar as the level of description at which constructed universals are in play is contrasted with what is *paramārthasat* that, for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, too, there is finally a privileged level of description at which the real explanatory work is done; the *samvṛtisa*t level becomes, accordingly, epiphenomenal – which surely makes it hard to retain the claim that one is a "realist" about things at this level.

and on his understanding of the scientific task, thus retaining reference to mental content requires showing that (and how) this can be thought to figure in causal explanations of behavior. This is, of course, just the familiar mind–body problem: insofar as our bodies are manifestly material objects (hence, amenable to scientific description in terms of natural laws), there would seem to be a problem accounting for the causal efficacy of “mental content” (of, for example, our *reasons* for doing something) with respect to the actions of our bodies. The desideratum for a properly scientific account of this, then, is some way to explain at once how our intentional states can have the semantic properties they do (how they can at least seem to us to be *about* something), and how they can interact, in causally describable ways, with our bodies.

Fodor is eminent among the cognitive scientists who have extolled broadly *computational* theories of mind as accomplishing precisely this. What the functioning of computers enables us to imagine is how transactions that can be exhaustively described in causal terms (such as the conduction of electrical currents through the circuits of a computer) can at the same time be described as semantically meaningful – as, for example, are the outputs of a computer’s processing. Computers, as Fodor says, thus represent “a solution to the problem of mediating between the causal properties of symbols and their semantic properties.” (1985: 94) More precisely:

Computers show us how to connect semantical with causal properties *for symbols*. So, if the tokening of an attitude involves the tokening of a symbol, then we can get some leverage on connecting semantical with causal properties for thoughts.... You connect the causal properties of a symbol with its semantic properties via its syntax. The syntax of a symbol is one of its second-order physical properties. To a first approximation, we can think of its syntactic structure as an abstract feature of its (geometric or acoustic) *shape*. Because, to all intents and purposes, syntax reduces to shape, and because the shape of a symbol is a potential determinant of its causal role, it is fairly easy to see how there could be environments in which the causal role of a symbol correlates with its syntax. It’s easy, that is to say, to imagine symbol tokens interacting causally *in virtue of* their syntactic structures. (1985: 93)

If we grant that the example of computers can non-question-beggingly enable us to imagine how semantically contentful tokens can at the same time be described as having causally

efficacious “syntax,”<sup>80</sup> there remains the daunting task of explaining the specifically semantic dimension of these tokens. All that the appeal to the computer analogy helps us to understand, that is, is how something could be thought to be describable in both terms; but in the projects of cognitive science, it is finally only at the syntactic level of description that any explanatory work is done, and if semantic content can coherently be retained, it may be at the cost of its being only epiphenomenal. Fodor appreciates the complexity of the task:

... it's important to see that [a representational theory of mind] needs *some* semantic story to tell if, as we have supposed, [a representational theory of mind] is going to be Realist about the [propositional] attitudes and the attitudes have their propositional content essentially. Which semantic story to tell is, in my view, going to be *the* issue in mental representation theory for the foreseeable future. [And it's with regard to these semantic issues that] the ‘philosophy of psychology’ ... joins the philosophy of language.... (1985: 96)

And again, “the problem of the intentionality of the mental is largely – perhaps exhaustively – the problem of the semanticity of mental representations. But of the semanticity of mental representations we have, as things now stand, no adequate account.” (*Ibid.*:99)

There is, then, still the problem (analogous to the essential problem for Dignāga and Dharmakīrti) of how to *relate* these two levels of description – and if this is to be done without presupposing precisely the intentional level of description that the whole program is proposed as explaining, it must be in terms of a finally *syntactic* analysis that semanticity is explained. It is still incumbent on the proponent of this kind of program, that is, to give an account of *what* it is that thoughts are “about” – and to do so with reference only to causally efficacious, non-intentionally describable particulars. The cognitive scientist thus faces, to this extent, precisely the same problem that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti addressed with the doctrine

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<sup>80</sup> And it is not immediately clear that this can be done without begging the question; for such semantically meaningful outputs as computational processes generate are thus meaningful only *for* some user. If, that is, the outputs of a computer (in the form, say, of a numeric display on a screen) can be understood as “intentional” artifacts, it remains only *derivative* intentionality that is evinced – only, that is, the kind of intentionality that goes with their being the products *of* (first-order) intentional activity (in this case, on the part of the designers and users of computers). To the extent, however, that the computer analogy is meant to help *explain* intentionality, it will not do thus to presuppose the intentionality of a user in order for the example to have any purchase.

of *apoha*: that of giving a viable nominalist account of linguistic reference – of giving (what is the same thing) a strictly causal-syntactic account of mental content.

For of course, language figures prominently in accounts of *what* it is that thoughts are “about.” Indeed, this is chief among the reasons why it turns out to be so difficult to give an exhaustively causal explanation of mental content; for it is just insofar as thought is arguably about constitutively *linguistic* (hence, abstract) things – such as “the fact that it is unseasonably warm today” – that it becomes difficult to explain how such an abstract referent could be explained as *really* consisting in, say, the conduction of certain neurotransmitters across synapses. How can it be that we say “it is unseasonably warm today” because of certain particular neuro-electrical events, but that *what* we are talking about when we say this is something altogether other than these?

This question basically states what Fodor calls the “disjunction problem,” which consists in the fact that “it’s just not true that Normally [sic] caused intentional states ipso facto mean whatever causes them.” (Fodor, 1990: 89) That this is a problem is clear from attempts to give thoroughly causal accounts 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 etiology 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.*” (*Ibid.*:90; emphasis original) In this way, Fodor distinguishes between, as it were, artifacts 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

characterizes the relatively unconstrained nature of these in terms of the “robustness” of signifying tokens.

The difficulty of accounting for the latter is usefully brought out by considering a related version of the same “disjunction” problem – this one involving not the abstraction that Saussure called the *signified*, but the one he called the *signifier*. Thus, the problem that Fodor here 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*.<sup>81</sup> The problem of how irreducibly unique utterances can thus be understood to express the same word; the problem of how the words thus expressed can *mean* any of innumerable particular instances of some type; and the problem of how unique, temporally occurrent thoughts can commonly be taken to be *about* the same states of affairs – these are all basically the same problem: that of how the constitutively social abstractions that seem necessarily to figure in any account of the mental can be thought to relate to the inevitably *particular* (contingent, temporal) occasions that are mental events.<sup>82</sup> And insofar as the uniqueness (the contingency, temporality) of any such occasion 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.

To the extent, then, that one is (with Fodor) after “an attempt to solve Brentano’s problem by showing that there are naturalistically specifiable, and atomistic, sufficient conditions for a physical state to have an intentional content” (1990: 96), it becomes imperative to confront the disjunction problem. But the solution proposed, if it is to count as an *explanation* of intentionally described phenomena (and not simply an account that presupposes the intelligibility of this), must be a thoroughly causal one: “Solving the disjunction problem and making clear how a symbol’s meaning could be so insensitive to variability in the causes of its tokenings are really two ways of describing the same undertaking. If there’s going to be a causal

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<sup>81</sup> ‘*Signifier*,’ then, is, properly speaking, the posited abstraction in virtue of which each such utterance is to be understood as an utterance of *the same word*.

<sup>82</sup> The depth of the relations between these problems comes through with particular clarity, I think, in Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* (1900, 1913), throughout the enormous course of which variations on these themes are recurrently interwoven. More on this below.

theory of content, there has to be some way of picking out *semantically relevant* causal relations from all the other kinds of causal relations that the tokens of a symbol can enter into.” (*Ibid.*:91)

Among the solutions that Fodor thus proposes is one with suggestive similarities to the *apoha* doctrine (extending beyond the convenient fact that Fodor frequently takes as a stock example the word *cow*, which is familiar as well to students of *apoha*) – and similarities, moreover, that involve aspects of both of the very different accounts of *apoha* we have so far considered. Fodor’s proposal, succinctly (but fairly completely) stated, is that “‘cow’ means *cow* and not *cat* or *cow* or *cat* because *there being cat-caused ‘cow’ tokens depends on there being cow-caused ‘cow’ tokens, but not the other way around. ‘Cow’ means cow because but that ‘cow’ tokens carry information about cows, they wouldn’t carry information about anything.*” (*Ibid.*; emphasis original)

The account here on offer involves a strong appeal to what Fodor calls *asymmetric dependence*, which is key to unpacking the foregoing passage. Thus: “All that’s required for ‘cow’ to mean *cow*, according to the present account, is that some ‘cow’ tokens should be caused by (more precisely, that they should carry information<sup>83</sup> about) cows, and that noncow-caused ‘cow’ tokens should depend asymmetrically on these.” (*Ibid.*:91) The importance of this appeal is, as expected, that “you can say what asymmetric dependence is without resort to intentional or semantic idiom.” (*Ibid.*:92) With the claim that this account thus involves a basically *causal* story about the learning or use of at least some meaningful tokens, we have, I think, an approach that seems, *prima facie*, to share (or at least to be compatible with) the basic impulses of Dharmakīrti’s approach; might the idea of “asymmetric dependence” here in play then be understood as a point of contact with Dignāga’s elaboration of the *apoha* doctrine? After all, we have seen that central to Dignāga’s account of the relative determinacy of conceptual content is the asymmetry that constitutively obtains between levels of abstraction in a categorial hierarchy – with this being what makes his an account, in effect, of the *inferential* relations between concepts.

I put the question because I do think there are some suggestive similarities here – but while it is surely among his aims to provide an account of something like *inferential* relations (insofar, at least, as these can be taken as one way to characterize the “semanticity” of

<sup>83</sup> ‘Information,’ that is, in the specific sense introduced above.

concepts), Fodor's point is rather different. He clarifies the idea of asymmetric dependence with an example: "Notice that you have to invoke the practice of naming to specify the practice of paging. So the practice of paging is parasitic on the practice [of] naming; you couldn't have the former but that you could have the latter. But not, I suppose, vice versa? ... so I take it to be plausible that paging is *asymmetrically* dependent on naming." (*Ibid.*:96-97) So, too, with respect to the familiar example of bringing slabs in response to the command "bring me a slab": "So then it's plausible that the cluster of practices that center around bringing things when they're called for is asymmetrically dependent on the cluster of practices that fix the extensions of our predicates." (*Ibid.*:97)

The point, then, is that while not all tokens of any word will demonstrably be causally relatable to some particular – the fact that they will not (which Fodor characterizes in terms of the "robustness" that constitutes *meaning*) is precisely what is identified by the "disjunction problem," which is here what is purportedly being solved – it will always at least be the case that *some* such tokens are so relateable. And Fodor's claim is that while the intelligibility of the causally describable tokens does not depend on there being tokens that are not so describable, the intelligibility of the latter *does* depend on the former. This, then, is the "asymmetric dependence" that allows for an account of semantics that is grounded in (because irreducibly dependent upon) a causal story, while yet allowing for the extent to which innumerable individual tokenings may not be so explicable. If such an account succeeds, what will have been elaborated is (in the words of Lynne Rudder Baker) "a causal chain that links current uses of the expression to a first use that causally links the expression to the object or kind" (1987: 93).

What is properly *basic* on this account, then, is the initial *application* of terms,<sup>84</sup> where that process is understood to be causally describable – in terms, perhaps, not altogether unlike those imagined by Augustine (or by Dharmakīrti). As Fodor says:

These kinds of considerations show one of the ways that asymmetric dependence gets a foothold in semantic analysis: Some of our linguistic practices presuppose some of our others, and it's plausible that practices of *applying* terms (names to their bearers, predicates to things in their extensions) are at the bottom of the pile. But what, precisely, has all this got to do with robustness and with the relation between information and content? The idea is that, although tokens of 'slab' that request

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<sup>84</sup> Note that, as with Dharmakīrti, there is ambiguity here about whether what is thus meant is the *creation* of conventions, or someone's initial *acquisition* thereof.

slabs carry no information about slabs (if anything, they carry information about wants; viz., the information that a slab is wanted),<sup>85</sup> still, *some* tokens of ‘slab’ presumably carry information about slabs (in particular, the tokens that are used to predicate slabhood of slabs do); and, but for there being tokens of ‘slab’ that carry information about slabs, I couldn’t get a slab by using ‘slab’ to call for one. My ‘slab’ requests are thus, in a certain sense, *causally dependent on slabs even though there are no slabs in their causal histories*. (1990: 97–98)

This is (like the doctrine of *apoha*) surely a rich account as far as it goes. To the extent, however, that we are thus thrown back to something like the Augustinian account of language acquisition – or (again the ambiguity) of language *creation*, which could just as well be what is indicated by Fodor’s reference to “the tokens that are used to predicate slabhood of slabs” – it is important to ask whether the account so far on offer can count as an adequate response to Wittgenstein’s concern. Fodor appreciates that this is so, and precisely identifies the problem that remains: “But, of course, as it stands none of this is of any use to a reductionist. For, in these examples, we’ve been construing robustness by appeal to asymmetric dependences among *linguistic practices*. And *linguistic practices* depend on *linguistic policies*.... Since, however, being in pursuit of a policy is being in an intentional state, how could asymmetric dependence among linguistic practices help with the naturalization problem?” (*Ibid.*:98)

Fodor’s reference here to *linguistic policies* is reminiscent, perhaps, of Prajñākaragupta’s reference to an already established “rule” (*vidhi*) as possibly presupposed by the activity of any “maker of a convention” (*saṃketakāra*)<sup>86</sup> – and Fodor’s statement nicely shows why Prajñākaragupta would want to deny the necessity of this, and would want instead to argue that the doctrine of *apoha* is also sufficient to the task of explaining “the creation of conventions” (*saṃketakriyā*); for to presuppose possession of a “rule” is to presuppose precisely the sort of intentional state purportedly explained by the doctrine. What Fodor thus recognizes, then, is precisely the point I have recurrently pressed against Dignāga and Dharmakīrti: if a nonintentional account of the *use* of language (of the sense and reference of words) presupposes the intelligibility of the very idea of *meaning* something – and shows this presupposition, specifically, in its confidence that the creation or

<sup>85</sup> Cf. the Dharmakīrtian point that linguistic cognitions are reducible to inference insofar as all one can do is infer that the speaker has some intention (*inter alia*, nn. 9, 68, above).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. nn. 72, 73, above.

acquisition of language can be described in the same way as the use thereof – then we do not yet have a fully non-intentional account of language; for what is thus crucially presupposed just is an intentional level of description, *par excellence*.

Fodor's recognition of this problem figures prominently in his argument for one of the contributions most associated with him: the idea that there must be a "language of thought" (which Fodor sometimes calls "mentalese") that finally explains (in Sellars's phrase) "those occasions on which the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact is exhibited." Fodor's argument, most basically, is that the point we have developed threatens to open an infinite regress that cannot be allowed to stand, and that can only be terminated by something, in a sense, that both *is* and is *not* a "language."<sup>87</sup> Here is how he puts that argument:

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.<sup>88</sup>

There must, that is, be some "primitive basis" of language – and that basis must (if this project is to get off the ground) be describable in constitutively *non-intentional* terms. For Fodor, the non-linguistic basis of language is to be understood in terms of subjectively occurrent "representations," such as are presumably explicable with reference to brain states or the like – their salient characteristic, in any case, is that they must have the kind of "identity criteria" (they must, to use terms

<sup>87</sup> Recall, here, my point that the phenomenal "images" (*ākāra*, *pratibimba*) that Dharmakīrti posits as bridging his problematic gap (see the fifth paragraph of the preceding section on Dharmakīrti's account of *apoha*) must similarly be describable both *causally*, and *as propositions*.

<sup>88</sup> Fodor (1975: 63–64). Fodor proceeds to quote the passage we have considered from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (cf. n. 75, above), only to draw the contrary conclusion: "Wittgenstein apparently takes it that such a view is transparently absurd. But the argument that I just sketched suggests, on the contrary, that Augustine was precisely and demonstrably right and that seeing that he was is prerequisite to any serious attempts to understand how first languages are learned." (1975: 64) For more recent arguments concerning "mentalese," see Fodor (1994).

resonant with the program of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, be *causally efficacious particulars*) that makes it possible for them to do duty as an explanation of, say, the movements of the body.

But with this proposal, we are returned to the question of whether it really can be coherently argued, without begging the question, that the *semantic* content of these syntactically describable physical events is really playing any meaningful role.<sup>89</sup> That we are thus returned to an earlier question is clear from the fact that what Fodor's argument gets us is simply a return to the peculiarly "computational" version of the representationism that, as Fodor allows, gives this approach an 18th-century pedigree.<sup>90</sup> Consider, then, his summary characterization of the "language of thought":

To have a certain propositional attitude is to be in a certain relation to an internal representation. That is, for each of the (typically infinitely many) propositional attitudes that an organism can entertain, there exist an internal representation and a relation such that being in that relation to that representation is nomologically necessary and sufficient for (or nomologically identical to) having the propositional attitude. The least that an empirically adequate cognitive psychology is therefore required to do is to specify, for each propositional attitude, the internal representation and the relation which, in this sense, correspond [*sic*] to it. (1975: 198)

But this is just a version of the view that every intentionally describable state – such as *having a belief*, *knowing that it's a nice day*, or (perhaps most tellingly) *hoping to persuade your reader of the truth of physicalism* – is reducible to some internally occurrent event (such as a brain state) with determinate identity criteria; and, accordingly, that anyone having the propositional attitude in question must, *ipso facto*, be in an identical brain state (or, conversely, that those in identical brain states will, *ipso facto*, have the same propositional attitudes).

In thus characterizing the matter, I mean, of course, to suggest that it is far from clear whether the train of argument we have here followed gets us any closer to a viable nonintentional account of mental content – for there is much to be said against the possibility of a successful physicalist description of mental content, especially where (as here) "physicalist" implies reference only to conditions (such as brain events) internal to the subject.<sup>91</sup> Among the lines of critique that can be developed against this

<sup>89</sup> Cf., *inter alia*, nn.79, 80, above.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. n. 78, above.

<sup>91</sup> That Fodor thinks a successful account must refer only to conditions internal to the subject is precisely the point he makes in commending "methodological solipsism" as a "research strategy in cognitive psychology" (1982). Here, then, is among the most interesting points at which Fodor's project arguably aligns with Dharmakīrti's; cf., again, the passage cited from Tillemans (n. 68, above), along with the other notes cited there.

view is one to the effect that “having propositional content” is a constitutively *social* affair – insofar, that is, as mental content necessarily involves the idea of *reference*, one is not giving an account of such content if there is no role for such external factors as objective truth conditions, a community of language-users, etc.<sup>92</sup>

More compellingly, reference to such constitutively social conditions can be dismissed only at the cost of self-referential incoherence; for (hearkening back to one of my examples of a propositional attitude two paragraphs back) the presupposition of these is a condition of the possibility *even of their denial*. That is, to make an *argument* against the inter-subjective constituents of intentionality is itself to be in an intentionally describable state (that of *hoping to persuade your reader of the truth of physicalism*); and to try to explain such a state in something other than intentional terms is, *ipso facto*, “to relinquish the point of view from which the idea of making sense makes sense.”<sup>93</sup>

#### MĪMĀMSAKAS ON THE RELATIONS BETWEEN WORDS AND THEIR REFERENTS

It would, however, be a different task for us to undertake to develop, with the care that his sophisticated treatment warrants, a case against the coherence of Fodor’s project. For present purposes, it is enough

<sup>92</sup> This is the argument from “semantic externalism” (cf. n. 37, above). 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 there argues that “*being red* is logically prior, is a logically simpler notion, than *looking red*” – given which, “it just won’t do to say that *x is red* is analyzable in terms of *x looks red to y*.” (Sellars, 1963: 142) Fodor can be understood to refuse 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” (n. 2, above).

<sup>93</sup> This is the conclusion of Baker (1987: 173), whose critique of physicalism informs much of my thinking on the subject. The arguments of Garfield (1988; see especially Chapter 6) are strikingly similar. This is a broadly Kantian line of argument, stemming in particular from the Second *Critique*. For Kant, then, the most decisive objection against physicalism was that insofar as “pure reason” is “really practical, it proves its reality and that of its concepts by what it does, and all subtle reasoning against the possibility of its being practical is futile” (Kant, 1788 [1997]: 3); and what one *does* in making any argument (even one for physicalism) is exemplify one’s confidence that “reason is concerned with the determining grounds of the will....” (*Ibid.*: 12)

to have suggested that recourse to Fodor's arguments can serve to have given us a richer appreciation of just what a daunting task Buddhist *apohavādins* face in giving (what their account requires, but what they have not yet given) a non-intentional account of (again with Sellars) "the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact." We have, then, considered Fodor's argument for positing a "language of thought" as an instance of the kind of thing that *apohavādins* would have to provide; and we have at least noted that while the early steps in that argument (the ones that parallel the observations of Wittgenstein and Sellars) may carry conviction, there are at least some real questions whether the rest of the argument can go through. Moreover, even if that particular argument *can* be defended, it is not at all clear that Buddhists like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti would want to endorse anything like Fodor's conclusions; for these Buddhists are emphatically not physicalists, and the causally efficacious particulars whose real existence they will credit will therefore not be those with the kind of "identity criteria" that make for the kind of scientific respectability that Fodor is after.<sup>94</sup>

So, we perhaps have good reason to think that Fodor has quite rightly identified what it is most crucial for any thoroughgoing nominalist to address – but good reason to hesitate over whether his own attempt can finally succeed (and certainly good reason to think that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti could never embrace the particulars of his final answer). But here is the point: If we stop short of Fodor's conclusion that what we require is a "language of thought" that is describable in terms of brain events, what remains as the culmination of the thread of argument we traced through Fodor's work is his argument to the effect that "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 this, I now want to suggest, is precisely what the Mīmāṃsakas argued in developing their case for the eternity of the relation between words and their referents.

The argument in question is developed, then, in relation to *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 1.5, according to which "the relation between a word

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<sup>94</sup> Here, of course, we reach the point at which Dignāga and Dharmakīrti would have to declare (as I think they clearly mean to, in the final analysis) for the idealist commitments of Yogācāra – at which point, all bets are off, and the possible coherence of the project requires reference to another whole world of arguments.

and its referent is primordial” (*autpattikas tu śabdasyârthena sambandhaḥ...*)<sup>95</sup> – which in turn serves the characteristically Mīmāṃsaka contention that the Vedas are eternally existent. Of course, few modern readers will want to embrace either of these conclusions. But to the extent that some of the arguments deployed to support these claims may be generalized in ways suggested by our excursus on Wittgenstein and Fodor, we would do well to take the Mīmāṃsaka arguments seriously; while they support conclusions that we may be hesitant to endorse, these arguments nevertheless have considerable purchase at a point where, I have tried to show, the doctrine of *apoha* is perhaps most vulnerable.

Among the arguments, then, for this claim in *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 1.5 is one first ventured by the anonymous author of a commentary that predates Śabara’s, whom Śabara refers to simply as the *Vṛttikāra* (“author of the *Vṛtti*”). The lengthy extract that Śabara quotes from this earlier work includes, among many other arguments, the following in relation to 1.5:

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 (*kenacic chabdena*) 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.<sup>96</sup>

The *Vṛttikāra*’s argument is straightforward but compelling – and, it should be clear, significantly like Fodor’s argument (up to the point, anyway, where Fodor parts company with Wittgenstein). The point is that the creation of “the fundamental connection of language with non-linguistic fact” – the creation (in Mīmāṃsaka idiom) of a “relation” between words and their referents (*śabdasyârthena sambandha*) – cannot coherently be imagined without presupposing precisely the intentional, semantic level of description that is sup-

<sup>95</sup> Abhyankar (1976: 28).

<sup>96</sup> *na hi sambandhavyatiriktaḥ kaścit kâlo ’sti, yasmin na kaścicid api śabdaḥ kenacic arthena sambaddha āsīt. katham? sambandhakriyāiva hi na-upapadyate. avaśyam anena sambandham kurvatā kenacic chabdena kartavyaḥ. yena kriyeta, tasya kena kṛtaḥ? athānyena kenacit kṛtaḥ, tasya kenēti, tasya kenēti, naivāvatiṣṭhate. tasmād avaśyam anena sambandham kurvatā akṛtasambandhāḥ kecana śabdā vṛddhavya-vahārasiddhā abhyupagantavyāḥ.* (Abhyankar, 1976: 68; cf. Frauwallner, 1968: 46, Jha, 1973–1974: 24–25).

posed to be *explained* by the posited act of creation. This is, the Vṛttikāra 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” (*saṁbandhakriyāiva*)<sup>97</sup> 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.

But to presuppose the intelligibility of this is, as Wittgenstein appreciated, effectively to presuppose that the audience for this act of creation “already had a language, only not this one.” The Vṛttikāra makes, I think, precisely the same point when he urges against his opponent that “some language must be used by the one who is creating the relation” (*avaśyam anena saṁbandham kurvātā kenacīc chabdena kartavyaḥ*). “One cannot learn a language,” as Fodor put it, “unless one has a language.” 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,” insofar as that means (with Wittgenstein) something like *talk to themselves*.

The argument thus comprised in the *Śābarabhāṣya*, though, represents but one of several arguments on the topic, and the point is not much developed here beyond what we have seen. This is, however, a thread that is picked up by Kumārila, whose *Ślokavārttika* includes a diffuse but interesting chapter laying out a “refutation of the critiques of relation” (*saṁbandhākṣepaparihāra*).<sup>98</sup> This chapter follows various chapters concerning what, precisely, we are to understand as the *referents* of words,<sup>99</sup> and Kumārila thus states the

<sup>97</sup> Cf. Śākyabuddhi’s “*saṁketakriyā*” (n. 62, above).

<sup>98</sup> The beginning of this chapter corresponds, according to the commentator Pārthasārathimīśra, to the point in the *Śābarabhāṣya* (quoting the *Vṛtti*) where the Vṛttikāra entertains the question: “What is [meant in *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra* 1.5 by] relation?” (*atha saṁbandhaḥ kaḥ?*; Abhyankar, 1976: 62; Frauwallner, 1968: 42); cf. Pārthasārathi at Shastri (1978: 453, ff).

<sup>99</sup> The chapter is preceded by the chapters treating *sphoṭavāda*, *ākṛtīvāda*, *apohavāda*, and *vanavāda*.

task that remains: “Therefore, this very relation – [the discussion of which was] interrupted by consideration of the referents of words – is now again recalled in order to analyze whether it is eternal or non-eternal.”<sup>100</sup> The alternatives that are canvassed and rejected in the chapter specifically involve reference to a “contract” or “convention” account of linguistic meaning, and the general statement of that view could serve very well as an exemplary Buddhist claim: “Expressive capacity (*śaktatvam*) does not intrinsically (*svataḥ*) belong to the pair of signified and signifier; [rather,] comprehension could be based [only] on human convention (*pumsām samaya*), like the winking of an eye.”<sup>101</sup>

As the commentator Pārthasārathimīśra tells us, Kumāriḥla then proceeds to “raise doubts in order to refute this [idea of] convention.”<sup>102</sup> Thus, Kumāriḥla asks: “Is this convention (*samaya*) specific to each person (*pratimartyam*), or to each utterance? Or did someone make it all at once, at the beginning of the world?”<sup>103</sup> This lays out the basic options that are canvassed in the chapter. There are a couple of points at which it is clear that these comprise the line of argument suggested by the Vṛttikāra. The first broad division of the chapter, for example, considers the “*pratimartyapakṣa*” – that is, the position which has it (as, we have seen, Dharmakīrti frequently implies) that the relation between word and referent is a function of the individual language-user. But, Kumāriḥla argues, insofar as there is only one *speaker* (and hence, one *intention* being expressed), all of the auditors must understand one and the same relation; otherwise, it could not be said that what auditors understand is in any way the same as what the speaker intended, and ordinary discourse would be impossible.<sup>104</sup> This point has purchase against Dharmakīrti’s characteristic contention that all that can be reliably inferred from an utterance is the speaker’s having some *intention*, where that is understood as a subjectively occurrent representation.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>100</sup> *tasmāt sa eva śabdārthacintāvyavahito ’dhunā/nityānityavičārthaṃ sambandhaḥ smāryate punaḥ*/(*Sambandhākṣepaparihāra*, v.10; Shastri, 1978: 455).

<sup>101</sup> *svato naivāsti śaktatvaṃ vācyavācakayor mithaḥ/pratītiḥ samayāt pumsām bhaved akṣīnikocavat*/(v.12, Shastri, 1978: 455).

<sup>102</sup> *taṃ imaṃ samayaṃ nirākartuṃ vikalpayati* (*ibid.*).

<sup>103</sup> *samayaḥ pratimartyaṃ yā pratyuccāraṇam eva vā/kriyate jagadādau vā sakṛd ekena kenacit*/(v.13, *ibid.*).

<sup>104</sup> So verse 21, which concludes: “And because of the difference between the ideas of the speaker and the auditor, ordinary usage is destroyed” (*vaktṛśrotṛdhiyor bhedād vyavahāraś ca duṣyati*; Shastri, 1978: 457).

<sup>105</sup> Cf., *inter alia*, nn. 9, 10, above.

The complex situation of a speech act, with its reference to a speaker and an auditor, nicely serves Kumārila's point, showing why the relevant "relations" (*sambandha*) necessarily precede all of the individual agents of a speech situation (and hence, precede *any particular speech act*): "And to create a relation for the hearer, what [relation] would the speaker use? [If it is] by that which is already understood, [then] he doesn't make it for the hearer; [if] it is a new one that he makes, it [could] not be observed to conduce to understanding."<sup>106</sup> In other words, the constitutively social nature of the speech act requires that its terms already be available to all of the parties to that act – in which case, no *particular* speech act can itself be that which (by creating the idea of *meaning* something) creates the possibility of all speech acts.

Explaining why the speaker in this situation could not use hitherto "unavailable" (*asiddha*) terms,<sup>107</sup> the commentator Pārthasārathimīśra nicely relates the issue to intentionality more generally: "The creator of a relation, his activity preceded by a thought, does not make [something] completely new, its capacity uncognized."<sup>108</sup> That is, it is precisely insofar as any would-be creator of linguistic reference is himself engaged in an intentionally describable act – insofar as his activity, in other words, is "preceded by thought" (*buddhipūrvakārī*) – that we must suppose this effort to have as a condition of its possibility the constitutively social fact (*language*) whose creation is purportedly being explained; for how are we to imagine this creator's *thinking* about his goal if not (with Wittgenstein) in terms of that agent's "talking to himself"?

The bare utterance, for example, of the sound represented by the letters *c-o-w* (accompanied by the ostension of a particular brown and white ruminant) could not count as creating a *name* for the ostended item unless that act were accompanied by an understanding such as that "when this sound is uttered, it should be taken to refer to any of the things in the world relevantly similar to what is now being pointed at." But *that* understanding cannot be communicated by this same act, since that understanding is itself a condition of the possibility of

<sup>106</sup> *śrotuḥ kartuṃ ca sambandhaṃ vaktā kaṃ pratipadyatām||pūrvadr̥ṣṭo hi yas tena śrotur nāiva karoti tam|yaṃ karoti navaṃ so 'pi na dr̥ṣṭaḥ pratipādakaḥ||*(vv.22cd–23, in *ibid.*).

<sup>107</sup> V.24a–b: "If there is at all to be comprehension by the auditor, the interlocutor could not speak [words that are] uncomprehended" (in *ibid.*: *sarvathā śrotṛśiddhiś ced, asiddhaṃ nētarō vadet*).

<sup>108</sup> *buddhipūrvakārī hi sambandhakartī nājnātasāmāthyam abhinavaṃ karoti* (*ibid.*).

the utterance's counting as an institution of *meaning*. This is what it means for Fodor to say that "one cannot learn that *P* falls under *R* unless one has a language in which *P* and *R* can be represented." Kumārila concludes a precisely similar line of argument here with verses 30–31: "And at the time of making known the relation, when words such as 'cow' are uttered, some [could] understand [the utterance as meant] for the sake of understanding the relation, others not so. In this regard, given the non-existence of a relation, nothing at all could be determined."<sup>109</sup> Nothing at all, that is, could be framed as *something that could be meant* if the idea of *meaning* something were not already intelligible – and that idea is *presupposed* (but not itself communicated) by any would-be act of convention-creation, since no particular speech act can non-question-beggingly be described as creating the very idea of reference (*sambandhabuddhyārthaṃ*).

The same line of argument resumes (after some lengthy excursions that I will discuss presently) at the end of Kumārila's chapter, with the comments of Pārthasārathimīśra here particularly well fleshing out the picture on offer. Kumārila says, for example, that "An inference regarding the creation of [the linguistic] relation is contradicted by there being no way [to establish the relation without presupposing what is to be explained]; but an inference to [the effect that there is ultimately] no discourse is [contradicted] precisely by what is seen."<sup>110</sup> Pārthasārathi's comment on this succinctly and cogently states the case:

The creator of a relation [between words and referents] cannot form the utterance [needed] in order to bring about the creation of a relation with words whose meanings are not already established. But [the formation of such an utterance] is possible, for the expression of a relation, with [words whose meanings are] already established – there [can be] formation of an utterance owing to the expression's being already established. If it is said that, for understanders to whom the meanings of words are completely unfamiliar, no understanding of meaning at all is possible

<sup>109</sup> *sambandhākhyānakāle ca gośabdādāv udīrite/kecit sambandhabuddhyārthaṃ buddhyante nāpare tathā||tatra sambandhanāstīte sarvo 'rthaṃ nāvadhārayet|(vv.30–31ab; Shastri, 1978: 458).*

<sup>110</sup> 137cd–138ab: *upāyarahitātvena sambandhakaraṇānumā|| anākhyānānumānaṃ tu dr̥ṣṭenāiva viruddhyate | (Shastri, 1978: 481).*

based on utterance – well, this contradicts what is seen [i. e. , that successful communication takes place].<sup>111</sup>

Implicit here is the Mīmāṃsaka account of the acquisition of language – an account that, like Mīmāṃsaka epistemology, consists in the elaboration of common-sense understanding. Thus, while we cannot (for the kinds of reasons we have been scouting) coherently posit a first creator of linguistic reference, that fact cannot be taken to count against the reality and success of discourse, which cannot coherently be denied (since any expression of denial would of course be a discursive act); and we simply *see* that, generation after generation, children acquire a native language from seeing its use exemplified by their elders. As Kumāṛila says, “the repeated comprehension of elders being seen is the way [to explain all this]; there is abandonment of this [possible explanation] in the case of those whose comprehension is based on what is not understood.”<sup>112</sup> Pārthasārathi comments:

And [what is] not already established is not a means of understanding; hence, there is necessarily (*avaśyam*) reference to a relation simply by virtue of [there being] the expression of an explanation; the inference from ordinary usage, in turn, is only possible [insofar as the] understanding of meaning is repeatedly seen with respect to what immediately follows language; understanding of the relation between words and their referents is a means [for this].<sup>113</sup>

The Mīmāṃsaka account, then, like that of the Buddhists must make use of the grammarians’ idea of *anvaya* and *vyatireka* – of the observation by children, that is, of their elders using certain words only in the presence of some objects (and not when those are absent), and others in the presence of others, etc. What is different here is that the Mīmāṃsakas take this to be a necessarily beginningless process, and they do not purport to explain the first devising of this by pre-linguistic individuals – their point, then, is that this is something *irreducible*. Of course, Buddhists, too, uphold a view of the world and its processes as beginningless (*anādi*); but the unwillingness of Buddhists like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti to credit the reality of universals

<sup>111</sup> *nāprasiddhārthaiḥ sambandhakarāṇāya vākyaracanā sambandhakārasya sambhāvati, prasiddhaiḥ sambandhākhyānāya tu sambhavaty eva kathayituḥ prasiddhatvād vākyaracanā; yadi pratipattīṅnam aprasiddhasamastaśabdārthānām na kathaṅcana vākyād arthapratītiḥ sambhāvaty ucyate, tac ca dr̥ṣṭaviruddham iti (ibid.).*

<sup>112</sup> 138cd–139ab: *vṛddhānām dr̥śyamānā ca pratipattiḥ punaḥ punaḥ|upāya iti taddhānir asiddhāvagatiṃ prati|(Shastri, 1978: 482).*

<sup>113</sup> *aprasiddhaś cāvagater upāyābhāvaḥ, tarhy avaśyam kathanavākyaenāiva sambandhagrahaṇam vyavahārānumitāpi śabdānantarabhāviny arthapratipattiḥ punaḥ punar dr̥śyamānā sambhavaty eva śabdārthasambandhāvagater upāya ity āha.... (ibid.).*

has them profoundly disinclined to think of a semantic level of description – one involving abstractions like “states of affairs” as what thoughts are finally *about*<sup>114</sup> – as among the things that are therefore irreducible. The Buddhist *apohavādins* thus purport to offer, with the *apoha* doctrine, a finally non-semantic account of language – one that reduces the semantic level of description to a causal level of description. But even while arguing that all facts concerning language are thus reducible to causally describable relations, we have seen that these Buddhists crucially presuppose, throughout their statement of that account, that language is already available and intelligible. What is problematic, then, is not so much the appeal to *anvaya* and *vyatireka* in a description of language-acquisition, as the idea that these can be invoked to explain the acquisition or creation, *by non-linguistic persons*, of a not-yet-constituted language.

The closing passages of Kumāriḷa’s chapter are noteworthy for the extent to which they frame the matter not simply in terms of the utterance of words, but, more strongly, in terms of the impossibility even of (putatively sense-conferring) *ostension* that does not presuppose linguistic meaning – the impossibility, that is, of a wholly non-intentional account even of those bodily movements that are, for Augustine, “as it were the natural language of all peoples.” This is important because the ostension of particular objects represents one of the most intuitively plausible ways to terminate a discursive regress in a causally describable situation; while Fodor’s idea of a hard-wired “Language of Thought” presupposes a great many 20th-century developments in brain science, we can surely all understand what is meant when this “Augustinian” situation is proposed as the first moment in a causal chain that links current uses of an expression (say, ‘slab’) to some first use owing to which it can be right to say (with Fodor) that all ‘slab’ requests are “*causally dependent on slabs even though there are no slabs in their causal histories.*” This situation represents, that is, the most intuitively plausible of the causal stories Dharmakīrti could adduce as the basis (the *foundation*) of all subsequent acts of exclusion.

<sup>114</sup> And they are suspicious of these, of course, because of the extent to which they are conceptually similar to the idea of a *self*, which is the abstraction with which they are finally most concerned.

But as Fodor recognized, “none of this is of any use to a reductionist” – for this remains a basically *intentional* situation, hence one dependent on rules or “policies”; and “being in pursuit of a policy is being in an intentional state” (Fodor, 1990: 98). I suggest that precisely the same point is made by Kumāriḷa and Pārthasārathi, who conclude their consideration of the linguistic relation by entertaining this objection: “But utterance isn’t the only way of creating a relation; for there is the possibility of a way such as indication by gesture (*hastanirdeśa*), etc.”<sup>115</sup> Kumāriḷa rejoins that this, too, amounts in effect to an appeal to an intentional level of description: “A way such as hand gestures is not established for us at [the time of] the first creations; for [this way could] not be one whose signifying capacity was known without other language-users (*vinānyair vyavahartṛbhiḥ*).”<sup>116</sup> As Pārthasārathi explains, “only those hand gestures, etc., whose relation is already known could convey understanding.”<sup>117</sup> Insofar as we are in pursuit of the origin of linguistic rules, it will not do to stop at behaviors that themselves presuppose such rules.

#### CONCLUSION: THE INTRACTABILITY OF THE PROBLEM OF INFRALINGUALS

While the *sambandhākṣepaparihāra* chapter of the *Ślokavārttika* thus concludes by driving home the point we have traced to Śābara’s “*Vṛttikāra*,” this remains only one of several arguments comprised in the chapter. Interestingly, chief among the remainder are several arguments against theism. Understanding why arguments against theism would have a place here can help us further appreciate the considerable purchase of the line of argument developed following the *Vṛttikāra*. For Kumāriḷa, the lesson here is that there cannot coherently be thought to be a beginning to the series of speech acts – we must, that is, simply accept the infinite regress that Fodor agrees will follow if we do not posit (what Fodor’s “Language of Thought” really is) some kind of “language that is not a language.” As Kumāriḷa says, then, in stating the most basic point on which he differs with his various interlocutors, the reference whose relation we

<sup>115</sup> This is Pārthasārathi’s *avataṛaṇa* to v.139cd: *nanu sambandhakaraṇasyāpi na vākyam evōpāyaḥ, hastanirdeśāder apy upāyasya sambhavāt. ata āha.... (ibid.:482).*

<sup>116</sup> Vv.139cd–140ab: *hastasaṃjñādyupāyo hi siddho nādyakriyāsu nah|na hy asau jñātasāmarthyo vinānyair vyavahartṛbhiḥ|(ibid.).*

<sup>117</sup> *hastasaṃjñādayo 'pi hi prasiddhasambandhā evārthaṃ pratipādayeyur iti (ibid.).*

are investigating “does not have a beginning; whereas for you the relation has a beginning.”<sup>118</sup> That is, the opponent’s problem lies in the very attempt to formulate a first beginning of linguistic conventions. This is a problem because any beginning such as we might imagine will necessarily involve some individual *agent* (or some group of such individuals); but what is required here is (to recur to the words of Descombes) “an explanation that provides the institution’s intellectual principle, but without seeking it in an individual consciousness....”

Understood this way, the problem of the origin of linguistic conventions is compellingly intractable; as a constitutively social phenomenon, language-use is only intelligible with reference to persons who are already constituted as linguistic – but that means *no pre-linguistic individual* (and no group thereof) can coherently be thought to have created language. While this problem could be thought (as it is by Fodor) to represent a *reductio ad absurdum* with respect to any alternative to something like Fodor’s regress-stopping “language of thought,” the force of this insight is reflected in some contemporary characterizations of the “problem of infralinguals.” The problem, as Jay Garfield has put it, is this:

There appears to be strong *prima facie* evidence that there is significant neurobiological, ethological, and cognitive continuity between, on the one hand, infants, children, and adult humans, and, on the other, between the higher apes and humans. But on the account of the P[ropositional] A[ttitude]s we have adopted,<sup>119</sup> given the great gulf between our ideology and ‘ideologies’ (if that word can coherently be applied in this case) of infants and chimpanzees... there seems no possibility of attributing PAs to them. But this seems to introduce a fundamental ontological and methodological discontinuity where there ought to be continuity.<sup>120</sup>

A great many complex issues in philosophy of mind, it seems to me, come down to this. Thus, many of the most interesting arguments about the irreducibility of constitutively “mental” phenomena involve reference to something (language, social facts, Kant’s categories, and any number of other supposed conditions of the possibility of thought) properly *transcendental* – something,

<sup>118</sup> V.26cd: *tasyā na cādimmattāsti sambandhas tv ādimāms tava (ibid.)*.

<sup>119</sup> Garfield here makes reference to a broadly Sellarsian picture that is, I think, basically compatible with the one I have been using throughout this essay.

<sup>120</sup> Garfield (1988: 72); cf. Garfield’s sketch (at pp. 80–81) of Paul Churchland’s “argument from ontogenetic and phylogenetic continuity” – which is an argument meant to support a physicalist sort of reductionism that places Churchland in something like the same camp as Fodor.

that is, that cannot itself be thought to require explanation, insofar as any explanation we could give would itself, as an instance of thought, be in need of it. And yet, our best theories of the matter would have it that there is nevertheless a story of continuously developing evolution to be told about how we got that way. This raises a problem that Clifford Geertz has characterized thus: “We need to be able both to deny any significant relationship between (group) cultural achievement and innate mental capacity in the present, and to affirm such a relationship in the past.” (Geertz, 1973b: 65)

It is chiefly in order to gain some traction with respect to this problem that Geertz has developed<sup>121</sup> a sustained critique of what he calls the “stratigraphic” conception of evolution – of the view, that is, according to which cultural evolution begins only after the biological evolution of the species is complete. By arguing instead that cultural evolution was in fact ingredient in the processes of biological evolution, Geertz is able to represent cultural evolution as taking place on something like the same time-scale that we know to characterize biological evolution; and by making such a vast time-scale available as well for the understanding of cultural evolution, Geertz hopes to avoid what he calls any “critical point theory” – that is, any view according to which a sudden “quantum leap” takes place. Note, though, that a successful argument to this effect does not itself constitute an *explanation*; all that Geertz has done is made available the kind of time-scale that makes it easier to imagine that a “critical point” explanation need not be preferred.

Be that as it may, it is at least clear from these contemporary reflections that the problems that come into play when we sympathetically assess the Mīmāṃsakas’ insight – which, I have suggested, is most basically that we cannot, as the sapient beings we are, imagine ourselves creating the conditions that make us so – are profound. While Fodor of course refuses the conclusion that Mīmāṃsakas draw from their development of this insight, he can nevertheless be seen to credit precisely the argument that leads them there; it’s just that Fodor considers the infinite regress intolerable, and finds that fact to be chief among the points in favor of the non-intentional, hard-wired “language of thought” that he posits as a condition of the possibility of acquiring a first

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<sup>121</sup> In Geertz (1973a, b).

natural language. Similarly, theistic Indian philosophers are inclined to refuse the infinite regress – but, also crediting the force of this argument, they typically characterize the otherwise unavoidable regress as among the reasons for positing the existence of God. Thus, for example, Naiyāyikas like Udayana argue that insofar as we cannot coherently imagine linguistic conventions to have been created by pre-linguistic persons, we must suppose that *God* created the “relations” (*sambandha*) that obtain between words and their referents.<sup>122</sup>

This, then, is why it is relevant for Kumārila’s *Sambandhākṣepa-parihāra* chapter to comprise several critiques of theism: the characteristically Mīmāṃsaka commitment to the primordially “given” nature of language requires that the world itself cannot be thought to have come into being at any particular time, since that would preclude the possibility of *retaining* precisely the infinite regress that their opponents find intolerable. Interestingly, chief among those Indian philosophers who would have no problem with the “beginninglessness” (*anāditva*) of the world are, of course, the Buddhists, whose own critiques of theism bear a sometimes striking resemblance to some of the arguments here marshalled by Kumārila. But while the Buddhists have a strong stake in disallowing the possibility of the world’s having been created (for the reason that this act would presuppose a unitary *agent* of precisely the kind that Buddhist proponents of selflessness are committed to refuting), their comparably strong commitment to undermining the status of the Vedic texts<sup>123</sup> commits them, as well, to showing the contingent character of language.

The more general point I would have us appreciate, though, is that the considerable power of the argument we have now seen developed

<sup>122</sup> Cf., e.g., *Nyāyakusumāñjali* 5.5, and the attendant discussion (Goswami 1972: 598–599). Consider, in this regard, the comments of Ganeri, who has noted, in regard to the Naiyāyika account of the origins of language, precisely the point that I have here developed: the Naiyāyikas, he says, “seem to commit a quantifier-shift fallacy. For although it might be true of any given term that its use is prescribed by an authoritative mandate, it cannot be true that there are authoritative mandates for every term. The reason is that a mandate can only have a regulative function if it is learnable by the population, and the only way for such a mandate to be taught or learned is through language. Even if the divine will is ‘revealed’ to seers through intuition, *they* can only communicate it to the population at large in words. It is best, perhaps, to read the Nyāya as claiming that the terms function *as if* they had been introduced by acts of divine will.” (Ganeri, 1999: 38)

<sup>123</sup> As well as their recognition that even those really existent “wholes” that are universals do conceptually the same kind of work as the *ātman*.

(to altogether different ends) by Fodor and the Mīmāṃsakas is recognized even by thinkers with a strong stake in refusing the conclusion that Mīmāṃsakas take the argument to recommend. Brahmanical theists who posit God as the creator of linguistic reference; contemporary philosophers of cognitive science who find it necessary to posit the reality of a hard-wired basis for language; and Mīmāṃsakas who argue that language is eternal – all of these various thinkers can alike be seen to commend and deploy a line of reasoning that, I have been suggesting, may have considerable purchase against Buddhist *apohavādin*s.

Thus, the *apoha* doctrine – developed by Dignāga as an oblique account of the relative determinacy of conceptual content in an asymmetric hierarchy of inferential relations, and by Dharmakīrti as a causal account of reference – aims in various ways at a wholly non-intentional (read: non-semantic) account of mental content. *Apoha* is proposed, that is, to explain what it is that thoughts (judgments, beliefs, propositional attitudes) are *about* – and to do so in the context of a philosophical project that is radically committed to the view that only unique particulars (*svalakṣaṇas*) are really existent (*paramārthasat*). Some such account is required of this philosophical project insofar as there are cogent arguments to the effect that understanding *what* any propositional attitude is *about* (what any thought *means*) requires reference to precisely the kinds of abstractions that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti do not want to allow into their ontology.

The force of such arguments can be appreciated particularly with reference to what is arguably the seminal text for both of two broad traditions of modern thought about intentionality: Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900, 1913). As the precursor to Husserl's own influential work in phenomenology, this massive work stands at the beginning of the broadly "continental" tradition that comprises such thinkers as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty; but as a work that (as many contemporary scholars have noted)<sup>124</sup> can sound more like Frege than phenomenology, Husserl's *Logical Investigations* represent, as well, a point of contact with the contemporary Anglo-American literature in which philosophy of mind is sometimes indistinguishable from philosophy of language.

One of the most strikingly recurrent themes in the *Logical Investigations* can be characterized as concerning what Fodor calls the

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Mohanty (1974).

“disjunction problem” – the problem, that is, of how we are to explain what it is in virtue of which any number of uniquely particular, causally describable events (such as the utterance of noises by speaking persons) can be understood as *about* something altogether different from most of the causes of their production; for sentences are not typically *about* the unique acoustic events that express them (or even about the subjectively occurrent representations that may motivate these), but about objective states of affairs.<sup>125</sup> “What in general,” Husserl asks, “is the surplus element distinguishing the understanding of a symbolically functioning expression from the uncomprehended verbal sound?”<sup>126</sup> Answer: “...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.”<sup>127</sup>

Speech acts consist, then, partly in aspects with scientific identity criteria – the aspects, for example, in virtue of which such acts are describable as the unique productions of perceptible acoustic disturbances.<sup>128</sup> But these are not what such acts are usually *about*, and it is to that extent that we seem to require recourse to something abstract. As Husserl says,

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

<sup>125</sup> We have seen that Dharmakīrti’s peculiar account of the sense in which linguistic understanding is reducible to inference in effect denies this; cf. nn.68, etc., above.

<sup>126</sup> Husserl (1970: 567) (Investigation V, §13).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*: 584 (Investigation V, §19).

<sup>128</sup> Consider, in this regard, Dharmottara’s consideration (Malvania, 1971: 52–53) of utterances under the description of *śabdavalakṣaṇas* – that is, described as unique acoustic events which, as *perceptible*, would seem to be the objects of what Dharmakīrti and his followers take to be a constitutively non-discursive way of cognizing. This description of utterances therefore represents a special case of the problem of how we go from (constitutively non-conceptual, causally describable) perception to (conceptual and therefore errant) “inference.” This discussion is, as noted earlier (n. 70, above), one of the interesting places where the “*saṃketakāla*” idea is invoked.

uttered. The same holds of talk about the expression's meaning, which naturally does not refer to some meaning-conferring experience.<sup>129</sup>

Getting clear on this is crucial to so basic a matter as understanding the truth conditions of any particular judgment; for the point is to understand that “[t]hese ideal unities are not the experiences of judging in question” – what thoughts are about cannot, that is, be thought to consist in any particular, psychologically describable *act of judging* – “but their ideal ‘contents’, the propositions they involve. The premisses prove the conclusion no matter who may affirm the premisses and the conclusion, or the unity that both form. An ideal rule is here revealed which extends its sway beyond the judgements here and now united by ‘motivation’; in supra-empirical generality it comprehends as such all judgements having a like content, all judgements, even, having a like form.”<sup>130</sup> Husserl's points are developed, then, chiefly in the service of articulating what may be called a realist conception of truth – one according to which “[t]he state of affairs is what it is whether we assert that it obtains or not.”<sup>131</sup>

The kinds of abstractions that may (indeed, arguably *must*) thus be posited to make sense of linguistic activity are precisely the sort that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti – wary, above all, of the abstraction (imputed to what they take to be really just a series of causally continuous sensations) that is a *self* – are most committed to eschewing. But the need nevertheless to make reference to such abstractions in explaining language motivates their development of *apoha* doctrine, which is proposed as a way to explain, in the absence of really existent abstractions, what all manner of linguistic items (words, sentences, thoughts) are *about*. We have seen that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti develop, in this regard, highly sophisticated (but very different) approaches that can surely be said to advance that aim.

In Dignāga's hands, the doctrine of *apoha* is a way to explain the (Fregean) *senses* of terms without reference to really existent abstractions (such as the abstraction “being a cow,” or the abstraction that is “the extension of the set of all cows”). Dignāga's idea is that *relative* determinacy of conceptual content can be explained simply with reference to exclusion ranges (and hence, without positive

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*: 284 (Investigation I, §11).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*: 271 (Investigation I, §3).

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*: 285 (Investigation I, §11). Husserl (like Frege) characterized this goal in terms of the critique of *psychologism* that animates so much of his early work.

reference to any really existent abstractions) – with the relevant exclusion asymmetrically obtaining between levels in a categorial hierarchy. Thus, ‘maple’ is a more conceptually determinate category than ‘tree’ just insofar as the former *excludes* more than the latter; and to understand *what* the more determinate category thus additionally excludes is precisely to understand the inferential relationship between these terms – the relationship that makes it reasonable to infer that a maple is a tree, but not the converse.

But Dignāga’s account gives no explanation of how we are to know, as it were, in “absolute” terms what comes under any concept; that is, while his is a remarkably sophisticated account of the *relative* richness of conceptual content, Dignāga gives no way to know what we are to count as, say, “everything in the world that does not come under the concept ‘tree’.” No way, that is, save for the appeal to *anvaya* and *vyatireka*; but the appeal to these presumes an already available system of linguistic conventions – and presupposes, as well, that the language-learner’s observation of the workings of this already available discourse is the observation of someone who already finds the idea of *meaning* intelligible.

With his basically causal account of *reference*, Dharmakīrti might seem to get us closer to what is thus still needed. But in fact, Dharmakīrti’s account of *apoha* is arguably more problematic than Dignāga’s, much more sharply disclosing the problems with this approach. This is most apparent, I have argued, in the extent to which Dharmakīrti explicitly and recurrently discloses the “Augustinian” presuppositions that compromise his otherwise thoroughgoing version of nominalism. Thus, the discourse of Dharmakīrti’s elaboration of a causal version of *apoha* – of the view that *what* is “excluded” from coming under any term is simply whatever does not produce the same effects as the thing “referred to” – is replete with casual references to “the time of [acquiring? creating?] a convention” (*saṃketakāle*);<sup>132</sup> to “someone” who is “able to create a conventional expression” (*kaścit saṃketikīṃ śrutim kuryād*);<sup>133</sup> to the “making of a convention” and the “maker” thereof (*saṃketakriyā, saṃketakāra*);<sup>134</sup> to its “owing to the intention of a speaker that a single expression refers to many things” (*ekā śrutir bahūsu*

<sup>132</sup> Cf. n. 70, above.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. n. 66, above.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. nn. 62, 63, above.

*vaktrabhiprāyavaśāt pravarttamānā*).<sup>135</sup> In all of these cases, Dharmakīrti and his commentators can be understood to conflate the situation of *using* a language and that of *acquiring* or *devising* one, blithely appropriating intuitions about the former case – such as that speakers have a large degree of autonomy in choosing words – for application to the latter (as though it were up to individual speakers not only what words to use, but *what they mean*).

To the extent that this characteristic conflation allows Dharmakīrti and his commentators to overlook the difficulty of providing a non-semantic account of linguistic origins, it is clear that they are at these points begging the question; for what these thinkers presuppose, when they thus take the idea of *meaning* something to be unproblematically intelligible, is precisely an intentional level of description. Whatever may be said about the main edifice of the *apoha* doctrine, then, this represents a point at which the arguments in support of it are vulnerable to critique – a point at which it stands revealed, at least, that it is very hard to provide an altogether non-intentional, non-semantic account of discursive thought.

Such is, in the final analysis, the thrust of the arguments we have developed following thinkers as divergent as Fodor and the Mīmāṃsakas: There can be no coherent attempt to imagine the *creation* of language that does not itself presuppose the availability and intelligibility of language; “[s]o,” we saw Fodor conclude, “one cannot learn a language unless one has a language.” But of course, we *do* learn languages – so something has to give. For some Indian theists, this is among the points at which it is thought necessary to invoke God, who alone can be imagined as the first creator of language; for Fodor, we must, “on pain of circularity,” posit and explain the reality of an innate predisposition (itself explicable in the non-linguistic terms of the brain’s hard-wiring) to learn language – a “language of thought”; for the Mīmāṃsakas, we must, instead, simply accept the infinite regress and all that it entails – which means, among other things, that Mīmāṃsakas are generally committed to refuting the existence of God.

Of course, few modern readers would be inclined to defend the conclusion that Mīmāṃsakas draw from this line of argument, and I do not have it in mind for my generally sympathetic reconstruction of their position to support the view that the Vedas (or language, more generally) are primordially existent. That this is a formidable line of

<sup>135</sup> Cf. n. 68, above.

argument should, however, be clear from the many different kinds of thinkers who have been impressed by it – including one (Fodor) who is emphatically not up to arguing for anything like a primordially existent revelation in Sanskrit. I would, then, recommend vis-à-vis the Mīmāṃsakas that we appreciate the profound insight they have here grasped with regard to language: knowing a language (*being linguistic*) involves much more than simply “knowing the names for things”; it involves, much more basically, having a grasp of the meaning of *meaning* – of the idea that the unique acoustic events that are human utterances can, like thought itself, be *about* objective states of affairs.

And that idea, as the Mīmāṃsakas can be said to have understood, is a constitutively social one, necessarily preceding and exceeding any individual language learner – given which, a condition of the possibility of our having the idea of meaning is always that there already be an available language, which therefore cannot be explained in terms of any particular person or speech act. If (as I think we can safely conclude) that fact is in principle difficult for Buddhists like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti to explain, they are at least in good company; for as we saw Fodor concede (some 13 or 14 centuries after Dharmakīrti), “of the semanticity of mental representations we have, as things now stand, no adequate account.”

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