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Review

Dan Arnold, *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing: The Problem of Intentionality in Classical Buddhist and Cognitive-Scientific Philosophy of Mind*. Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2012. 328 pp. $50.00/£34.50. ISBN: 978-0-231-14546-6 (hardback).

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The books is divided into six substantial chapters, with each of Chapters 1, 4, 5, and 6 examining a crucial concept in ancient Indian philosophy and its relation to the contemporary Western philosophical discussion in the philosophy of mind.

Chapter 1 deals with Dharmakīrti's celebrated proof of rebirth, based on the idea that since each moment of consciousness can only have another conscious moment at its cause, the succession of consciousness (and thereby the succession of lives) has to stretch back infinitely into the past. Arnold's discussion is less concerned with assessing the validity of the argument than with examining the claim that Dharmakīrti's decidedly anti-physicalists argument, based as they are on the idea of spelling out the mental in terms of causal relations, may share some of the limitations physicalist arguments inevitably face.

In the second chapter Arnold raises the notorious problem of how intentionality or 'about-ness', a property had by things like thoughts or pieces of language can be produced from something non-intentional, something that is not *about* anything, such as a sequence of neuronal discharges happening in our brain. Two well-known proposed solutions are considered, Fodor's 'Language of Thought' theory and Dennett's concept of the 'intentional stance'. Arnold finds that neither of them presents a satisfactory solution and points out that the limitations of the two proposals are shared, *mutatis mutandis*, by Dharmakīrti's conception of mind.

Chapter 3, which is in many respects the centre of the book, raises a Kantian challenge to the Buddhist and physicalist theories of mind. Arnold argues that the reduction of reasons to exclusively causal terms (whether it is the causal sequence of brain envents for the physicalist, or Dharmakīrti's non-physical sequence of moments of consciousness) cannot be fully successful. He points out that any such reduction has to be couched in terms of reasons, thereby showing that reasons can never be fully elimated from our picture of the mental, and that 'an exhaustively *impersonal* account of the

mental is finally unintelligible' (p. 113). For a philosopher like Dharmakīrti causal efficacy is the mark of the real, and if Arnold is successful in arguing that the reduction of the mental to the causal can never be complete it faces a challenge in integrating mental phenomena into its view of the world.

The focus of Chapter 4 is Dharmakīrti's exclusion semantics (*apoha*). This is commonly understood as a theory that explains how we can talk about general properties like 'being red' or 'being a pot' in a world which accords with Dharmakīrti's ontology in containing only particularized individuals, but no universals. But Arnold also considers it to be Dharmakīrti's way of giving a wholly causal explication of the contents of mental states. And while this, he claims, may be able to provide us with a causal story of how new concepts can be learned, it does not, however, manage to give us an idea how conceptual content could be acquired where there are no concepts yet. In Dharmakīrtian terms, it seems, we are unable to explain how children could learn a language.

Chapter 5 deals with the notion of reflexive self-awareness (*svasaṃvedana*), a notion indispensible in the Yogācāra framework to explain what perceptions are really perceptions of (if there are no external objects, when we think we perceive something external, mind is really just perceiving itself). Arnold, however, focuses on the role this notion plays Dharmakīrti's causal explication of intentional phenomena and is critical of its supposed ability to give an explication of the 'aboutness' in terms that themselves do not refer to anything conscious.

The final sixth chapter investigates the Mīmāṃsaka view of the eternality of language and the 'natural' relation between words and their referents. Once again, Arnold is primarily interested in the arguments for this view in relation to his thesis of the uneliminability of the intentional. For if the argument that language could never have begun, because the first speakers would have required access to a system of conventions in order to agree on the initial conventions goes through it appears to support the position that meaning is an irreducible feature of the world we live in. 'What must be imagined', Arnold points out, 'is how anybody could *explain* to someone, how they could *tell* them, what it means to mean something' (p. 204).

In relation to this last point it might be worthwhile to consider that David Lewis' *Convention* (a work Arnold does not cite) tried to solve exactly the problem how a system of conventions could be established without presupposing one already in existence. His solution builds on the notion of a successful interaction between two agents, and the extent to which this, as well as other concepts to which Lewis appeals can be spelt out exclusively in causal terms may well need further discussion. Nevertheless there might be more mileage in attempts of getting semantics out of syntax than Arnold admits. Modern science has shown us how properties characteristic of biological life could be wholly explained by recourse to the interaction of inanimate matter. The

jury is still out on whether we may similarly be able to reduce the sphere of reasons to the sphere of causes, and I have considerable doubts about the feasibility of settling this question by *a priori* arguments.

None of this, however, detracts from the considerably merits of this book. Arnold presents a series of highly interesting arguments based on a deep understanding of the Western and the ancient Indian philosophical tradition and, more importantly, takes ancient Indian philosophers seriously as opponents in a discussion concerning matters of systematic philosophical interest. The book admirably shows how the philosophical views of Dharmakīrti and others are not just exhibits in the Indian Wing of the Museum of the History of Ideas, but positions that are of considerable importance in our attempts of addressing contemporary philosophical problems. Arnold demonstrates this in a clear, detailed, and engaging manner, and it is much to be hoped that this way of discussing ancient Indian philosophy finds many equally sophisticated expositors.