

**VOLUME 3 No 1 (2012)**



**COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY**

*An International Journal of Constructive Engagement  
of Distinct Approaches toward World Philosophy*

**OPEN ACCESS**

**[www.comparativephilosophy.org](http://www.comparativephilosophy.org)**

**ISSN 2151-6014**



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OPEN ACCESS / ISSN 2151-6014 / <http://www.comparativephilosophy.org>

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Volume 3 No. 1 (January 2012)

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## EDITOR'S WORDS

The current issue consists of three types of articles. They respectively address and illustrate three major concerns of comparative philosophy, as understood in a philosophically interesting and engaging way, and thus present three major types of coverage of the journal *Comparative Philosophy*.

The first type, as attended to in the first article "How is this Paper Philosophy?" by Kristie Dotson, addresses the fundamental meta-methodological/meta-philosophical issue of how cross-tradition constructive engagement between distinct approaches from different traditions is possible (in other words, it tackles a general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy). Though such a concern is also involved (more or less) in various areas of philosophy, comparative philosophy is especially and intrinsically concerned with the issue, as discussions on the topic explore the foundation and rationale that undergird and guide the second and third types of explorations in comparative philosophy to be indicated below. Dotson's article addresses a series of principal issues concerning the identity and nature of philosophy and its methodology; the author challenges what she calls 'a culture of justification' in professional philosophy while arguing for the case of "culture of praxis". Though the members of our review team disagree to some of the claims presented in the article, we render the paper philosophically interesting and engaging, and we recommend that the voice of this paper be heard. Indeed, it is part of the constructive-engagement emphasis and expectation of the journal that a highly provocative but philosophically engaging paper like this is to arouse healthy discussion in the field.

The second type addresses the issue of how distinct approaches from different (culture/region-associated or style/orientation-associated) philosophical traditions can learn from and constructively engage with each other to make joint contribution to a series of issues and topics in philosophy, and all for the sake of the development of contemporary philosophy. This is the central point of the special topic section in this issue, "Dharmakīrti's Buddhist Philosophy and Contemporary Philosophy", which includes two articles, "Dharmakīrti, Davidson, and Knowing Reality" by Lajos Brons and "How to Avoid Solipsism While Remaining Idealist: Lessons from Berkeley and Dharmakīrti" by Jeremy Henkel. Both articles are neither out of purely historical interest nor merely engage in intellectual games for their own sake; rather, they are intended to explore how a significant thinker in Buddhist philosophical tradition, Dharmakīrti, and two important thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, respectively Donald Davidson in contemporary philosophy and George Berkeley of modern philosophy, can make their joint contributions to the development of

contemporary philosophy in such important areas as metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, etc. The contents of the articles are thus intrinsically relevant to the philosophical interest of whoever explores the related issues in these areas, no matter which philosophical tradition he/she focuses on.

The third type addresses the concern of how, in the setting of one cultural and philosophical tradition, relevant resources from some other tradition(s), through their philosophical interpretation via relevant (philosophical or other intellectual) resources of the home tradition, can contribute to the development of contemporary society, which includes other intellectual, professional or social areas/parts than philosophy (as one academic discipline). Surely the philosophical enterprise as a whole is not limited to pure theoretic explorations only but also consists of their interaction with contemporary society (including their impact on, and their enrichment from, social development). This is one connection in which comparative philosophy is also especially valuable as it can play its distinct role in constructively bringing in relevant resources and distinct visions from other traditions through philosophical interpretation. The last article, “Benevolent Government Now” by Howard Curser, attends to this concern through the author’s creative interpretation and application of relevant resources from Mencius’ Confucian account in classical Chinese philosophy to explore how his resources of benevolent government can contribute to the current debate between American liberals and conservatives on governmental responsibilities and duties.

Indeed, the foregoing three types of coverage of this issue, specifically speaking, and of this journal and the constructive-engagement emphasis in comparative philosophy, generally speaking, have been highlighted concisely in the opening statement found on the journal’s website: this journal goes “with emphasis on the constructive engagement of distinct approaches to philosophical issues, problems, themes from different philosophical traditions (generally covering both culture/region-associated and style/orientation-associated philosophical traditions), for the sake of their joint contribution to the common philosophical enterprise and the development of contemporary society, and on general theory and methodology of comparative philosophy.”

Bo Mou  
January 2012

## HOW IS THIS PAPER PHILOSOPHY?

KRISTIE DOTSON

**ABSTRACT:** *This paper answers a call made by Anita Allen to genuinely assess whether the field of philosophy has the capacity to sustain the work of diverse peoples. By identifying a pervasive culture of justification within professional philosophy, I gesture to the ways professional philosophy is not an attractive working environment for many diverse practitioners. As a result of the downsides of the culture of justification that pervades professional philosophy, I advocate that the discipline of professional philosophy be cast according to a culture of praxis. Finally, I provide a comparative exercise using Graham Priest's definition of philosophy and Audre Lorde's observations of the limitations of philosophical theorizing to show how these two disparate accounts can be understood as philosophical engagement with a shift to a culture of praxis perspective.*

**Keywords:** *professional philosophy, diversity, culture of justification, culture of praxis, exceptionalism, sense of incongruence, Audre Lorde, Graham Priest, Anita Allen, Gayle Salamon*

*Philosophy is not for black women. That is a white man's game.*  
– College Guidance Counselor at a Historically Black College (2009)

### 1. INTRODUCTION

My younger sister, Alexis Ford, once had the following conversation with her Guidance Counselor, while she was a college student at a Historically Black College.

Counselor: Why don't you major in Social Work?  
Alexis: Social Work sounds good, but I am interested in philosophy.  
Counselor: (Snorts) Philosophy is not for black women. That's a white man's game.  
Alexis: My older sister is a philosophy professor.  
Counselor: Well, she's probably the only one and that should tell you something. (2009)

I remember clearly when this conversation was relayed to me. At the time, I was at once vastly appalled and silently relieved. Appalled at the intentionally discouraging

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remarks towards my sister's initial interests on the sole basis that she is a black woman. And relieved because, to be honest, this initial resistance led her to seriously reconsider a career in philosophy. At the time, I was not certain that I would recommend a career in professional philosophy for her. In my ensuing conversations with Alexis, it became clear to me that no matter how offensive and inappropriate the Counselor's words were, and they were that, I recognized an uncomfortable sense of *déjà vu*. Philosophy *is seen* as a "white man's game" and I am often made to feel a sense of incongruence as a result of that impression. And though I am certainly not the only black woman philosophy professor, as the Counselor assumed in a tongue and cheek fashion, our numbers are still very small. According to Kathryn Gines, fewer than 30 black women hold Ph.D.s in philosophy and also work within philosophy departments in North America (2011, 435). If we were to count the number of black women with research arms in black feminism, one of my primary areas of research, with Ph.D.s in philosophy working within philosophy departments, that number would grow starkly smaller to something like roughly 8 people. As the Counselor suggests, these numbers do tell a story, but what?

Anita L. Allen has issued a challenge to honestly interrogate the origin of the abysmal numbers of black women in the U.S. working in professional philosophy. Specifically, she calls for a genuine assessment of the merits of pursuing a career in philosophy for black women. Allen asks:

With all due respect, what does philosophy have to offer to Black women? It's not obvious to me that philosophy has *anything* special to offer Black women today. I make this provocative claim to shift the burden to the discipline to explain why it is good enough for us; we should be tired of always having to explain how and prove that we are good enough for the discipline. (Yancy 1998, 172, italics in original)

Allen's skepticism here is similar to the skepticism held in the "advice" from the Guidance Counselor and is most likely intimately tied to my feelings of abject relief when my sister decided to embark on a different career path. In fact, we, i.e. Allen, the Counselor and myself, may all hold a great deal of skepticism towards the ability of professional philosophy to offer an environment where black women can thrive, though for very different reasons. This skepticism is not, as Allen and I are aware, though the Counselor is most likely unaware, a doubt centered on whether black women are good enough to do philosophy. Of course, we are. But we doubt whether the environment provided by professional philosophy is good enough for us. As such, Allen's call that we scrutinize the environment of professional philosophy for its ability to foster the success of Black women marks an important shift away from justifications of Black philosophy, Africana philosophy, and/or black philosophers (See Jones 1977-1978, West 1995, Outlaw and Roth 1997, Outlaw 1997) to an interrogation into the conditions that facilitate or hinder the success of diverse practitioners within professional philosophy as such.

Allen's shift in focus is in line with Robert Solomon's claim that "our critical scrutiny today should be turned on the word 'philosophy' itself...to realize that what

was once a liberating concept has today become constricted, oppressive, and ethnocentric” (Solomon 2001, 101). Solomon, here, calls for an interrogation into prevailing definitions of philosophy, which may work to exclude and/or suppress diverse perspectives. Both Allen and Solomon draw attention to the possibility that professional philosophy may provide poor conditions for diverse peoples and perspectives. It is in honoring the call to assess the environment of professional philosophy and the possibility of constrictive understandings of philosophy that I turn to genuinely assess the potential of being sustained within professional philosophy as a diverse practitioner. I understand the phrase ‘diverse practitioner of philosophy’ to refer to notoriously under-represented populations within western, academic philosophy. As a result, my use of ‘diversity’ here is meant to include not only racial, ethnic, gendered, sexual, and ability diversity, but to also include diverse approaches to philosophy, Eastern, applied, engaged, fieldwork, field, public, experimental, literary approaches, etc. Though the specific challenges within professional philosophy may differ among these diverse populations, the general challenges presented by the environment of professional philosophy and constrictive definitions of philosophy are similar.<sup>1</sup>

My cluster of concerns about the environment of professional philosophy and constrictive definitions of philosophy can be viewed by interrogating the question, “How is this paper philosophy?” To be clear, I am not concerned with appropriate answers to the question, “how is this paper philosophy?” Rather, I am concerned with the kind of disciplinary culture that renders such a question of paramount importance. Specifically, I take the question of *how* this or that paper is philosophy to betray at least one circumstance that pervades professional philosophy. It points to the prevalence of a culture of justification. Typified in the question, “how is this paper philosophy,” is a presumption of a set of commonly held, univocally relevant, historical precedents that one could and should use to evaluate answers to the question. By relying upon, a presumably, commonly held set of normative, historical precedents, the question of how a given paper is philosophy betrays a value placed on performances and/or narratives of legitimation. Legitimation, here, refers to practices and processes aimed at judging whether some belief, practice, and/or process conforms to accepted standards and patterns, i.e. justifying norms. A culture of justification, then, on my account, takes legitimation to be the penultimate vetting process, where legitimation is but one kind of vetting process among many.

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<sup>1</sup> It bears noting that I am not, here, focusing on the reasons why traditionally conceived diverse peoples, e.g. racial, ethnic, gender, sexuality, and ability diversity, for example, are not attracted to philosophy as a career path. There are social, political, and class boundaries to deciding upon a career in professional philosophy that should not be overlooked (See, for example, Allen et al. 2008, Sanchez 2011, Gracia 2000). Rather, I am specifically concerned with the environment of professional philosophy for diverse practitioners who have made the choice to pursue philosophy as a career path. Even still, not all people who fall under my definition of diverse practitioner will identify with the problems I highlight. In fact, a great deal of the currently employed under-represented, traditionally conceived diverse philosophers may be perfectly satisfied with the status quo. Unfortunately, their numbers are small. My focus here is on interrogating the conditions that keep this number small.



In what follows, I gesture to a dynamic that is, in part, responsible for the relatively few numbers of diverse peoples in professional philosophy. I highlight that the environment of professional philosophy manifests symptoms of a culture of justification, i.e. a culture that privileges legitimation according to presumed commonly-held, univocally relevant justifying norms, which serves to amplify already existing practices of exceptionalism and senses of incongruence within the profession. *Ultimately, I claim that the environment of professional philosophy, particularly in the U.S., bears symptoms of a culture of justification, which creates a difficult working environment for many diverse practitioners.* I agree with Allen's assessment that professional philosophy is simply not an attractive setting for many diverse practitioners.<sup>2</sup> As a means of addressing the downsides of the current culture of justification within professional philosophy, I advocate for a shift in disciplinary culture from a culture of justification to a culture of praxis.

This paper will proceed in five parts. First, I will briefly define the term, 'culture of justification'. Second, I identify symptoms of a culture of justification present in the environment of professional philosophy. Third, I will outline the kind of exceptionalism and incongruence that such a culture amplifies, which serves to create a difficult professional culture for diverse practitioners. Fourth, I offer a beginning step towards an understanding of philosophical engagement that can avoid the pitfalls of a culture of justification. Specifically, I advocate for a shift from a culture of justification to a culture of praxis. Fifth, and finally, I offer a comparative exercise where I show how two disparate positions on philosophical engagement, i.e. Graham Priest's definition of philosophy as critique and Audre Lorde's observations of the limitations of philosophical theorizing, are both manifestations of philosophical engagement according to an understanding of philosophy as a culture of praxis.

## 2. WHAT IS A CULTURE OF JUSTIFICATION?

Gayle Salamon, in her essay, "Justification and Queer Method, or Leaving Philosophy", identifies within professional philosophy the privileging of justification. In fact, she cites the privilege given to justification within professional philosophy as the catalyst for her leaving the field for English. Salamon understands the notion of justification as "making congruent" one's position with acceptable norms (Salamon 2009, 226). To say that philosophy has a culture of justification, then, is to say that the profession of philosophy requires the practice of making congruent one's own ideas, projects and, in her case, pedagogical choices with some "traditional" conception of philosophical engagement. For Salamon, the activity of making congruent itself is problematic given her conception of queer method and its inherent resistance to harmonizing with status quo conceptions. She writes:

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<sup>2</sup> Allen, of course, is not alone in holding this position. Sally Haslanger offers a similar statement in her article, "Changing the Ideology and Culture of Philosophy: Not by Reason (Alone)." She writes, "Women, I believe, want a good working environment with mutual respect. And philosophy, mostly, doesn't offer that" (Haslanger 2008, 212).

If justification is concerned with the ordering of beliefs, the reconciliation of one thing with another, the making congruent of different objects or worlds, then queerness as a method would proceed in the opposite way, by supposing a diversion or estrangement from the norm and using that divergence as a source of proliferation and multiplication with the aim of increasing the livability of those lives outside the norm. (Salamon 2009, 229)

Justification as a method requires we attend to prevailing norms and is antithetical, according to Salamon, to queer methods that take estrangement from norms as a point of departure.

A privileging of “justification as a method” refers to a heightened value placed upon processes of legitimation, or identifying congruence between accepted patterns and standards with one’s own belief, project, and/or processes, for the sake of positive status. For example, taking justification as an evaluative concept, a standard, internalist theory of justification within epistemology is analogous to Salamon’s understanding of “justification as a method” in that it is, itself, a process of legitimation. An internalist theory of epistemic justification, as it is generally conceived, confers positive, epistemic status on a given belief due to whether the given belief is reasonably held (e.g. that the belief accords with one’s evidence). In such theories of justification, there is an element of demonstrating the congruence between one’s belief and acceptable patterns and standards, or justifying norms, for the sake of positive, epistemic status. Salamon aims to draw attention to a value placed on similar forms of legitimation within the disciplinary culture of professional philosophy as such, where one is asked to demonstrate that one’s positions, beliefs, comportment, and/or existence is congruent with some prevailing set of norms for philosophical engagement in order to gain positive status.<sup>3</sup>

Broadly privileging legitimation as an assessment tool for appropriate disciplinary conduct creates a culture of justification within a given discipline. That is to say, within a culture of justification a high value is placed on whether a given paper, for example, includes *prima facie* congruence with norms of disciplinary engagement, or justifying norms, and/or can inspire a narrative that indicates its congruence with those norms for the sake of positive status. As such, a culture of justification will include at least three components. It will 1) manifest a value for exercises of legitimation, 2) assume the existence of *commonly-held*, justifying norms that are 3) *univocally relevant*. That is to say, a disciplinary culture of justification is driven by

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<sup>3</sup> It bears noting that I see a difference between processes of legitimation and processes of validation. Legitimation takes as a sign of positive status congruence with dominant patterns and standards, where validation refers to evaluative processes more broadly. Validation, here, refers broadly to all processes aimed at establishing the soundness of some belief, process, and/or practice as such. Like legitimation, validation is an evaluative concept, but it is not confined to evaluation according to accepted patterns and standards. In accordance with this distinction, legitimation is a kind of validation insofar as it attempts to establish the soundness or corroborate a practice. Yet, legitimation is not the sole form of validation available. In this paper, I see validation as referring to vetting processes in general and legitimation as referring to a specific vetting process, i.e. justification. I will return to this distinction later.

the creation and/or discovery of papers and/or projects that fall within the purview of a certain set of commonly held, univocally relevant justifying norms. Compliance with these justifying norms, in turn, confers positive status on those papers/projects. It is hard to deny that the environment of professional philosophy currently manifests these three components of a culture of justification. However, if one were tempted to deny this observation, then an interrogation of the question, “How is this paper philosophy?” is warranted. It is through offering a descriptive analysis of this question that the symptoms of a culture of justification can be uncovered within professional philosophy.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. SYMPTOMS OF A CULTURE OF JUSTIFICATION IN PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY

Identifying symptoms of a culture of justification accords with identifying a 1) manifest value placed on legitimation narratives along with a presumption of 2) commonly-held, 3) univocally relevant justifying norms. The question of how a given paper is philosophy is a question that calls for a justificatory account. It is, as Carlos Sanchez might characterize, a question asking for one’s philosophical “passport” (Sanchez 2011, 39). As such, the question aims at assessing whether one is doing philosophy according to, presumably, commonly held, univocally relevant norms of conduct. The pervasiveness of the question, i.e. how is this paper philosophy, betrays a value placed on legitimation narratives.

#### 3.1 PRIVILEGING LEGITIMATION NARRATIVES

To clarify how the question, “how is this paper philosophy,” is a symptom of a culture of justification, I will paint a common scene in professional philosophy contexts. Imagine or recall this scene. After I present this paper at a philosophy conference, the question arises, as it will inevitably arise, “How is this paper philosophy?” The question is undoubtedly a slight, whether the question-asker sees it that way or not. It is both a charge and a challenge. The charge concerns suspicions that the remarks offered are not, in some way, in conformity with relevant justifying norms of philosophical engagement. This charge may find many forms depending on the question-asker. It could manifest as a concern over whether this paper is relevant to historical and current philosophical enterprises; or it could take the form of failing to meet some presumed requisite abstract engagement. No matter the actual charge,

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<sup>4</sup> The symptoms of a culture of justification I will highlight do not, obviously, establish with absolute certainty that a culture of justification exists in professional philosophy, anymore than symptoms of anemia establish the existence of anemia. However, they do issue a call for further investigation. It is beyond the scope of this paper, to offer a full sociological analysis of professional philosophy. Rather, the aim of this paper is to theorize a possible catalyst for the low numbers of diverse practitioners in philosophy and to encourage future study in this direction. To do this, I need only direct attention to the symptoms of a culture of justification along with the possible problems such symptoms illuminate within professional philosophy.

the challenge remains. The challenge, then, is to “make congruent” or clarify the connection between the remarks offered and some justifying norm of philosophical engagement (however, it is conceived by the question-asker). What is distinctive about the question, how is this paper philosophy, is not that my paper is not *prima facie* philosophical, but rather the call for legitimation that underwrites the question. That is to say, the answer to the question, “how is this paper philosophy,” is assessed according to justifying norms that can confer positive status on my project and, by doing so, show my paper to be “properly” philosophical. This call for legitimation or justification goes beyond whether or not one can produce an adequate account of how one’s work is philosophical, which will be contingent upon the justifying norms deemed relevant by the question-asker. It also serves as a symptom that a culture of justification is pervasive within professional philosophy. That is, the frequency of the question, “how is this paper philosophy,” betrays a value placed on legitimation narratives. This value is further evidenced by the reality that many professional philosophers find the question, at best, unproblematic and, at worse, routinely appropriate (For accounts that gesture to the pervasiveness of the question, “how is this paper philosophy,” see Tiwald 2008, Outlaw and Roth 1997, Nye 1998, Sanchez 2011, Solomon 2001, Walker 2005, Prabhu 2001, Marcano 2010).

A concrete example of the value placed on legitimation narratives in professional philosophy, a symptom of a culture of justification, can be found in Williams Jones’ article, “The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy”. Jones identifies two kinds of legitimation narratives. He claims that one can be asked to justify the “adequacy and significance” of a given philosophical orientation or one can be asked to justify a given philosophical orientation’s “right to exist as an appropriate philosophical position” (1977-1978, 149). Diverse practitioners of philosophy are often asked to offer both kinds of justification. There is a rich tradition of such justifications in Africana philosophy, for example. Within an U.S. context, essays by Williams Jones (1977-1978) to Cornell West (1977-1978) to Lucius Outlaw (1997, 1997) exemplify the fact that there are a number of existing attempts to offer narratives of legitimation for philosophy based in the experiences and lives of African-descended peoples. And though the necessity of engaging in narratives of legitimation for Africana philosophy is now being challenged, the external call to justify the existence of Africana philosophy is still strongly felt.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.2 COMMONLY HELD, UNIVOCALLY RELEVANT JUSTIFYING NORMS

Along with a value for narratives of legitimation, held in the question “how is this paper philosophy” is a demand that one make clear how one’s paper is congruent with common, univocally relevant justifying norms in order to establish the positive, philosophical status of one’s paper. These justifying norms, which often go

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<sup>5</sup> Africana philosophy is by no means the only kind of philosophy that has been called to legitimate itself. Jorge Gracia, for example, has leveled sustained investigative challenges to the exclusion of Latino/Hispanic philosophers and philosophy within professional philosophy (See, for example, Gracia 2000, Gracia 2008).

unarticulated, are thought to be accepted by all interlocutors and are presumed to be clearly relevant to all philosophical enterprises. The environment afforded by professional philosophy includes an ever-present demand to justify one's philosophical projects and engagements via presumed common, relevant justifying norms. Recall, the presumption of 1) commonly-held, 2) univocally relevant justifying norms are both symptoms of a culture of justification. A brief analysis of a recent narrative of legitimation can aid in identifying this particular symptom in the environment of professional philosophy.

Karsten Struhl's 2010 article in *Philosophical Compass*, entitled "No (More) Philosophy without Cross-Cultural Philosophy," is a recent example of an attempt to offer a legitimation narrative aimed at establishing the positive status of a different kind of philosophical engagement than is typically accepted within western professional philosophy. Struhl explains, "While this is beginning to change, it is still generally the case that comparative philosophers find themselves on the defensive, as they attempt to insert elements of non-western thinking into an essentially western philosophical curriculum" (2010, 287). Finding himself on the defensive, as a comparative philosopher, Struhl makes an attempt to put practitioners with narrow conceptions of western professional philosophical engagement on the defensive and, as a result, takes up the offensive position as a practitioner of comparative philosophy. He explains, "What I am claiming [in the title] is that the philosophical enterprise cannot adequately fulfill its purpose so long as philosophy remains restrictive to only one tradition" (2010, 287).<sup>6</sup> Taking philosophical engagement to be defined by "critical and systematic investigations" of fundamental assumptions, Struhl defends that claim that "doing" philosophy requires engagement with cross-cultural philosophy for the sake of interrogating fundamental assumptions (2010, 288). Accordingly, Struhl's article ultimately provides an account of the disciplinary significance of comparative philosophy in terms of a, presumably, *commonly held* norm for philosophical enterprises. In other words, to fulfill the promise of philosophical enterprises, i.e. critical interrogation of our fundamental assumptions, comparative philosophy is necessary. No matter how much this places narrow conceptions of professional philosophy on the defensive, it is a legitimation narrative complete with an appeal to a seemingly common justifying norm.

Though Struhl's offensive position may shift the burden of justification away from comparative philosophers to narrow, professional philosophers, it does so only to the degree that the commonly held justifying norm is taken to be univocally relevant to all philosophical enterprises. That is to say, the shift in the burden of justification can only follow from a mutual and immediate recognition that Struhl has indeed identified a commonly held and univocally binding justifying norm. In making the claim that comparative philosophers are particularly well suited to philosophize in accordance with the norm of interrogating fundamental assumptions, he issues a call

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<sup>6</sup> It bears noting that this claim mirrors William Jones' claim in his article, "The Necessity and Legitimacy of Black Philosophy" and the understanding of philosophical practice held in Struhl's article is remarkably similar to Alain Locke's understanding of philosophy as philosophies of life (See 1977-1978, Locke 1991).

for legitimation aimed at philosophers who would challenge the philosophical merit of comparative philosophy given its optimal compliance with the justifying norm in question. If the performance of Struhl's article is to succeed at all, it does so to the degree that the norm he identifies is actually *prima facie* relevant to all philosophical enterprises. If the norm of interrogating our fundamental assumptions does not have this kind of all-encompassing relevance, then Struhl's attempt to put a certain class of philosopher on the defensive is futile. One need only respond to Struhl by rejecting the justifying norm identified. This does not figure into Struhl's analysis because it is often presumed by many professional philosophers that one of philosophy's primary roles *is* to systematically interrogate fundamental assumptions.

Regardless of whether Struhl has identified a genuine, commonly held, univocally relevant justifying norm, he is certainly relying upon the existence of such norms for the success of his account. Struhl's account, though a very good defense of comparative philosophy, does not challenge the call for legitimation narratives as such. It is, rather, a good example of two symptoms of a culture of justification present in the environment of professional philosophy, i.e. the presumption of 1) commonly held, 2) univocally relevant justifying norms.

#### 4. ON GRISLY GROUND: DIVERSE PRACTITIONERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY

The environment of professional philosophy, which contains symptoms of a culture of justification, is often rendered inhospitable for diverse practitioners due to "silent exclusions" (Marcano 2010, 54). In a culture of justification, historical, unwarranted exclusions come to inform the very justifying norms relied upon for legitimation. That is, the presumption of commonly held, univocally relevant justifying norms, when informed by unwarranted exclusions, creates means of validation incapable of tracking those exclusions. In fact, those exclusions can easily become seen as "reasonable" via disciplinary practice itself. In this section, I will highlight two kinds of exclusions that are hard to track in a culture manifesting the three symptoms of a culture of justification. They are *exclusion via exceptionalism* and *exclusion via a sense of incongruence*. Where exclusion via a sense of incongruence is a direct result of the fact that there are few, if any, commonly held, univocally relevant justifying norms, exclusion via exceptionalism gestures to the point where disciplinary cultures simply fail to accurately assess legitimation.

##### 4.1 EXCLUSION VIA EXCEPTIONALISM

Sandra Harding offers a definition of exceptionalism in her introduction to *The Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies Reader*. She writes:

Exceptionalism assumes that the West alone is capable of accurate understandings of the regularities of nature and social relations and their underlying causal tendencies. There is one world, and it has a single internal order. One and only one science is capable of

understanding that order. And one and only one society is capable of producing that science: our Western society!” (Harding 2011, 6).

Though Harding is speaking specifically of scientific explorations, the definition is relevant here. Exceptionalism involves the unfounded, exclusion of large bodies of investigation based upon the privileging of one group (or set of groups) and their investigations over others. Excluded groups might actually meet many of the demands imposed by operative, justifying norms. However, they are still excluded due to historical privileging of investigative enterprises produced by privileged populations.<sup>7</sup> The exclusions of non-western philosophy in American professional philosophy, for example, can be seen according to a kind of exceptionalism.

Non-western philosophy, as has been pointed out repeatedly, can be legitimated according to several prevailing, justifying norms for philosophical engagement. In his article, “Philosophy in an Age of Global Encounter,” Joseph Prabhu writes:

If philosophy consists in systematic attempts to address fundamental questions about the nature of reality, the nature of methods of knowledge, the basis of moral aesthetic values and judgments, the self, and the meaning and goal of religion, then there is abundant philosophy in Indian, Chinese, and Islamic thought. (I cannot speak of African philosophy because of my own ignorance, but I would presume that it too embodies systematic reflection about the nature of things). (2001, 30)

After citing several productive exchanges between western philosophers and non-western philosophers, like the exchanges between Michael Dummett and Bimal Matilal along with J.N. Mahanty’s fruitful engagement with the work of Gottlieb Frege and Edmund Husserl, Prabhu concludes, “thus it cannot be on philosophical grounds that non-western philosophy is so neglected in American universities at present” (2001, 30). As a result, Prabhu concludes that something else is clearly afoot. Here we see recognition of a kind of exceptionalism.

What Prabhu draws attention to is the fact that not everyone has equal access to justifying norms in an American professional philosophy context. Exceptionalism within professional philosophy works to not only refuse some access to justifying norms, but to also exempt others from being subject to certain prevailing justifying norms. For example, there are black philosophers with positions that hold marginal anti-white sentiments that some disregard as racist (e.g. Alexander Crummell), while white American or European philosophers with similar anti-black sentiments

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Privilege’ is a relative term. According to Peggy McIntosh, systemic privileging refers to “unearned power conferred systematically” (McIntosh 2008, 66). Though many African Americans voices, for example, may be privileged over many Haitian voices in terms of their ability to impact U.S. social spheres, they are both underprivileged with respect to many White voices. In turn, wealthy White voices are often privileged over poor White voices. The term ‘privilege’, in this analysis, refers to broader structure of evaluation, where entire legitimation structures are tainted with the oppressive privileging of certain social identities and social, investigative practices in the form of “unearned power conferred systematically”. For more thorough accounts of privilege see McIntosh 2008, Bailey 1998.

that are forgiven as products of their time (e.g. G.W.F. Hegel). Clearly there are overarching social and political considerations that inform the decisions on who counts as an exception to justifying norms that are not actually reflected in the justifying norms themselves. Because exceptionalism is largely determined by social and political structures of empowerment and disempowerment, it cannot be addressed with adding more justifying norms. In the case of exclusion via exceptionalism, justifying norms, themselves, are not the problems. The people applying them are the problem. A culture of justification, or a culture that manifests the three main symptoms of a culture of justification, has few resources for addressing the misapplication of justifying norms. Privileging legitimation narratives and presuming the existence of commonly-held, univocally relevant justifying norms does not assure there is also a value placed on the appropriate use of those norms. Rather, privileging legitimation narratives assures that most disciplinary practitioners feel as if they are judge and jury over “appropriate” professional conduct and production, while never recognizing the demand to acknowledge the ways prevalent social and political structures of empowerment and disempowerment influence their judgment.<sup>8</sup>

#### 4.2 EXCLUSION VIA A SENSE OF INCONGRUENCE

The second form of exclusion is exclusion via a sense of incongruence. Whereas exceptionalism pertains largely to the *uneven persuasive power* of justifying norms, incongruence refers to *unequal acceptance* of justifying norms. That is, many diverse practitioners do not accept as valid current, dominant justifying norms within professional philosophy. In this case, a sense of incongruence with current justifying norms hinders one’s ability to argue for the positive philosophical status of one’s projects. This can be seen in Gayle Salamon’s reaction to the call to legitimate her pedagogical choice of relying upon queer theory and methods in her philosophy classes. This call put her in the position of accepting, against her will, the norm of justifying as such, which runs counter to her own personal, political, and theoretical leanings (Salamon 2009). She is not alone in experiencing the sense of incongruence she describes. Jacqueline Scott, when asked to discuss her experience as a black woman, professional philosopher, describes the sense of not fully accepting or fulfilling philosophical expectations. She labels this sense of incongruence, “dissonance” (Allen et al. 2008, 185).

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<sup>8</sup> Some may say that if justifying norms are not the problem of exceptionalism per se, then what is needed are better applications of prevailing justifying norms not, as I will argue later, an alteration of roles assigned justifying norms altogether. It is important to understand the degree to which exceptionalism is largely unconscious. In their respective articles, Virginia Valian and Sally Haslanger, identify the impact of gender schemas on evaluations of philosophical performances where women are routinely judged more harshly than their male counterparts and made subject to exceptionalism due to being women philosophers (Valian 2005, Haslanger 2008). When one’s very judgment manifests tendencies towards exceptionalism, this is not an easy pattern to break. It is more reasonable to foster a climate that neutralizes such biases than to harbor hope for the elimination of those biases.



Indeed, Salamon and Scott are not the only diverse practitioners of philosophy who have confessed to a sense of incongruence with respect to justifying norms for “proper” philosophical conduct and investigation. A great deal of feminist philosophy began as a rejection of some set of justifying norms within professional philosophy.<sup>9</sup> Still others feel a sense of incongruence with professional philosophy’s expectation of a panoramic view and the, often misunderstood, particularity attached to “minority” social identities. Donna-Dale Marcano, in her article, “The Difference that Difference Makes: Black Feminism and Philosophy,” gives an account of the reality that a black woman philosopher who takes as her point of theoretical departure the lives and experiences of black women is often conceived as doing work so particular “that philosophy resists its presence” (2010, 53). Marcano, of course, does not accept the expectation that philosophical theorizing begins from the broadest possible vantage point.<sup>10</sup> The rejection of this justifying norm ushers in a sense of incongruence between her philosophical projects and professional philosophical expectations, in her estimation.

In a similar fashion, Carlos Sanchez, in his article, “Philosophy and Post-Immigrant Fear,” highlights the fact that the demand for disembodied philosophizing as a marker for what counts as philosophy is *one of the ways* professional philosophy is inhospitable to “Hispanic philosophers” and “Hispanic philosophy”. He writes, many professional philosophers believe “if a thinking situates itself, embodies itself, or historicizes itself, then it is not profound, and worse, not philosophy” (Sanchez 2011, 40). The value of disembodied, a-historical philosophical engagement is clearly not a value shared by either Sanchez or Marcano for converging and diverging reasons. These are but a few examples of the myriad ways a sense of incongruence plagues many diverse practitioners within professional philosophy. No matter its origin, I suggest that part of what forms these senses of incongruence is a failure to accept a justifying norm or a given set of justifying norms prevalent within professional philosophy context.

#### 4.3 EXCLUSION AND LEGITIMATION NARRATIVES

The presence of exceptionalism and incongruence among professional philosophers points to the difficulty of sustaining diverse practitioners. If positive, philosophical status follows from *prima facie* legitimation and adequate narratives of legitimacy, and these, in turn, rest on dominant, justifying norms, then being barred access to relevant justifying norms (via exceptionalism) or failing to accept justifying norm according to which one is assessed (via incongruence) demonstrates the ways legitimation represents an impossible goal. Without access to typical justifying norms, the goal of justification is futile. Similarly, if one’s work reflects a rejection of

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<sup>9</sup> Take, for example, some feminist ethics rejections of “theoretical-juridical models” for moral theory (See Jaggar 2000, Walker 1992) or some feminist epistemology rejections of neutral-subject assumptions within theories of knowledge (See Code 1993, Code 1981).

<sup>10</sup> She shares this orientation with other Black philosophers. See, for example, Outlaw Jr. 1996, Locke 1991, Jones 1977-1978, Outlaw Jr. and Roth 1997, Harris 1997.

the justifying norms being used as criteria for assessment, then it seems similarly futile to pursue legitimation. If positive, professional philosophical status rests on the fair application of justifying norms and the uniform acceptance of those norms, then many diverse practitioners can expect to fail adequacy tests by rote.

Some may object that the picture I have painted here is too grim. They may point out that I have made an error in casting the justifying norms within professional philosophy as a set of static, easily identifiable criteria. They may agree with Andrea Nye, in her review article, “‘It’s Not Philosophy,’” that

Even when ratified by a version of intellectual history that covers up personal or political sources of philosophical wisdom or that privileges science as the only source of knowledge, philosophy’s parameters remain unstable. That the very insistence on what is ‘real’ or ‘hardcore’ philosophy against what is ‘only’ poetry, sociology, personal memoir, or politics itself renews the possibility of yet another philosophical reconstitution” (1998, 108).

The hope here is that in a culture that manifests the three symptoms of a culture of justification, justifying norms are continuously destabilized and revised via the very demand for narratives of legitimation. There can be little doubt that justifying norms for philosophical engagement change over time. In fact, it may be true, as Stan Godlovitch argues, in his article, “What Philosophy Might be About: Some Socio-philosophical Speculations,” that philosophy is simply a discipline that is constantly reconceptualizing its own past given shifts in socio-political climates (2000, 17). However, one has to examine closely who has the burden of destabilizing norms at any given time and whether this is a worthy activity for the targeted populations. Diverse practitioners may disproportionately shoulder it. I believe the burden of shifting the application and content of justifying norms influenced Anita Allen to pose the question whether professional philosophy provides a good working environment for black women. It is, I presume, part of the burden that Gayle Salamon refused to shoulder, which made English a more desirable career choice. And it is absolutely the burden I would never wish upon my younger sister.

The burden of shifting justifying norms within a professional environment that manifests symptoms of a culture of justification involves sacrificing one’s labor and energies towards providing a catalyst for change via numerous legitimating narratives aimed at gaining positive status for oneself as a philosopher and one’s projects as philosophical. Let me make the strong statement that shouldering this burden and the set of experiences one exposes oneself to is *not a livable option* for many would-be diverse practitioners of philosophy and the small numbers of under-represented populations within professional philosophy attest to this observation. There are, to speak euphemistically, better working environments for diverse practitioners, which may not be perfect, but may certainly count as providing more opportunities for the success of *one’s own life and projects* than professional philosophy. Perhaps Sally Haslanger says it best:

I don't think we need to scratch our heads and wonder what on earth is going on that keeps women [for example] out of philosophy. In my experience, it is very hard to find a place in philosophy that isn't actively hostile toward women and minorities, or at least assumes that a successful philosopher should look and act like a (traditional, white) man. And most women and minorities who are sufficiently qualified to get into graduate school in philosophy *have choices*. They don't have to put up with this mistreatment. (Haslanger 2008, 212, italics in the original)<sup>11</sup>

It is the realization that black women who are qualified to pursue philosophy have other options that leads Allen to pose her challenge to assess the environment of philosophy for the possibilities it holds for one's own projects and quality of life.<sup>12</sup> It is also quite possibly why Allen states of her shift in careers from philosophy to law, "I did not like law as much as philosophy, but I was much, much happier as a law professor than as a philosophy professor. I hit the ground running" (2008, 172). Hitting the ground running is unlikely for many diverse practitioners within a professional philosophy environment where a disproportionate burden of shifting justifying norms is placed on those very practitioners.

## 5. A PROPOSAL: TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PRAXIS

Problems of exceptionalism and incongruence become significant in a professional environment that manifests the three main symptoms of a culture of justification. That is to say, no one can absolutely control unwarranted exceptionalism, nor can (nor should) one control the myriad senses of incongruence among diverse practitioners. So part of making professional philosophy a more inclusive discipline will include reducing the effect of exceptionalism and recognizing the creative capacity of senses of incongruence. Hence, we need to work towards a disciplinary culture that not only lessens the effect of exceptionalism, but can also create an environment where incongruence becomes a site of creativity for ever-expanding ways of doing professional philosophy. I propose that a step towards a more inclusive environment within professional philosophy can start with a shift away from values held in a culture of justification to values held in a culture of praxis. A culture of praxis might

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<sup>11</sup> Haslanger's quote speaks not only to professional expectations (i.e. justifying norms), but also to interpersonal dynamics (e.g. blatant sexism and/or racism). I do not specifically address interpersonal dynamics here. In a professional environment, I understand interpersonal dynamics to be curtailed, to the degree they can be curtailed, by the prevalent, professional culture. The existence of racism and sexism in professional philosophy does not, by itself, explain the dismal numbers of women, racial and ethnic minorities within professional philosophy. It is unusual, within a U.S. context, to have a working environment free of racism and sexism. And, yet, there are still working environments more friendly to women and people of color in the U.S., even where racism and sexism remain pervasive. In short, poor social and interpersonal dynamics alone cannot account for the low numbers of black women in professional philosophy. Hence, here I focus on one of the ways poor, interpersonal dynamics are exacerbated, i.e. professional culture.

<sup>12</sup> Certainly, this is part of the challenge Allen issued to the black women present at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Collegium of Black Women Philosophers in 2009.

provide a disciplinary culture that can increase livable options within professional philosophy. A *culture of praxis*, I propose, has at least the following two components:

- (1) Value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living, where one maintains a healthy appreciation for the differing issues that will emerge as pertinent among different populations and
- (2) Recognition and encouragement of multiple canons and multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation.

In what follows I will develop briefly each of these components.

The idea that professional philosophy should come to place value on inquiries into issues and circumstances present in our historical time is not a new idea. Philip Kitcher has recently called for such a shift in his 2011 article, “Philosophy inside Out.” In his “plea for philosophical redirection,” Kitcher aligns himself with John Dewey in his call for the realization that contemporary philosophical investigations, at any given time, begin with “philosophical problems [that] emerge from situations in which people – many people, not just an elite class – find themselves” (Kitcher 2011, 250). A culture of praxis, on my account, would value investigations that contribute to old, new, and emerging discussions, problems, and/or investigations. As Kitcher explains, value would be placed on everything from “the state of inquiry, to the state of a variety of social practices, and to the felt needs of individual people to make sense of the world and their place in it” (Kitcher 2011, 254). One will no longer be asked to justify one’s projects according to some set of justifying norms, but rather one does need to identify a point of contribution within contemporary philosophy, outside of contemporary philosophy, and/or in our surrounding worlds.

One can quickly object to the proposal to value contributory projects, however they are formed, with offering the observation that this value operates as simply another method of justification. Recall the distinction I drew between legitimation and validation. Legitimation requires some set of justifying norms that are commonly held and univocally relevant. Validation, on the other hand, refers more broadly to evaluations of soundness as such. It may be difficult and unwise, to say the least, to eliminate all forms of validation. However, legitimation is but one form of validation. If, in a culture of praxis, validation is determined according to contribution, then it need not be understood according to a legitimation narrative. In fact, it is entirely possible that the call to identify one’s contribution not only contextualizes validation in a way commonly-held, univocally relevant justifying norms does not, but also distributes the burden of validation more evenly. Everyone’s projects must contribute. And all projects will be seen as situated in historical questions, contemporary needs, and/or new or emerging investigations. Wherever one turns their energies, one must contribute.<sup>13</sup> In a culture of praxis, justifying norms that aim to shape topics and or

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that “contribute” is used very broadly. It is reasonable that some professional philosophers who might want to decipher elusive knowledge problems as contributing to a discourse on such matters. However, it is likewise true, that philosophers concerned with race, class, gender, and immigration issues, for example, can contribute to these discourses.

character of *all philosophical investigation* no longer operate to delimit how one contributes. This shift alone can aid in producing an environment where senses of incongruence become the sites of new investigations, methods, and livable options, as Salamon suggests (2009).

It is true that valuing the contribution of one's works as part of a culture of praxis does not move us entirely away from methods of justification. In fact, it is very likely that a proliferation of investigations, inquiries, and questions will create a proliferation of canonical works and criteria that will be used as justifying norms. These norms, however, will not be generalizable in the way justifying norms appear to be today. Also, philosophical engagement will not be determined solely by these justifying norms. Justifying norms will become an important part of philosophical criticism, where judgments of good and bad philosophy are made, and not judgments concerning the philosophical nature of those endeavors. One does not call a bad short story a collection of words, except in a tongue and cheek fashion, because it is a bad short story. Accordingly, philosophy can be deemed poor philosophy without it ceasing to be philosophy.

What the initial valuing of "live" issues and actual contribution ensures, however, is an encouragement of multiple philosophical canons and a fragmentation of justifying norms (including new and developing justifying norms). The philosophical work produced and the questions asked in a culture of praxis will not always be compatible or capable of consolidation due to the divergent inquiries and experiences that inform them. This would force recognition of the fragmentary nature of professional philosophy, where canons and justifying norms appear more relevant in some inquiries than others, which is very similar to how philosophical engagement actually operates today.<sup>14</sup> What is being proposed is, as Kitcher coins, a "philosophical redirection" (2011), where the current activities in philosophy are evaluated differently (See also Outlaw 1996). Again, legitimating narratives may be introduced, but would function differently. Justification according to a supposedly monolithic set of justifying norms would no longer be relevant. Rather, smaller, reflexive validation mechanisms can emerge in accordance with the inquiries and questions under investigation. An appreciation of the smaller canons that emerge lessens the need to lay claim to some overarching set of canonical texts and or questions in order to claim positive, professional philosophical status.

Accordingly, a culture of praxis, where projects are not predetermined and canons are multiple, lessens the effect of exceptionalism. Let me be clear, it may not lessen the existence of exceptionalism, but it allows for the growth of communities of scholars to exist relatively free of the demands made by those who would practice such exceptionalism. That is to say, relatively little time need be spent defending

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<sup>14</sup> Some may say that the inability for philosophical insights to be consolidated, speaks to how this proposal is unrealistic. One might even attempt to make an analogy between a natural science, like microbiology, and philosophy, stating that because a culture of praxis appears untenable for microbiology, it should also be untenable for philosophy. This is a false analogy due to the presumed existence of natural laws, where there is no unproblematic presumption of equivalent philosophical laws.

one's project to a practitioner of philosophy who will never be convinced of the value of one's work. Rather, energies can be diverted toward making contributions within one's communities. Some may observe that this kind of focus already happens among diverse practitioners. This is true, but it happens as part of the "periphery" of philosophy due to a failure to gain easily recognizable, positive, philosophical status. In a culture of praxis, the concept of periphery and mainstream would make little sense and value will be placed on identified points of contribution. This is mainly due to the fact that, in a culture of praxis, what creates philosophical communities is a concern for contributions made according to one's interests and community involvement, rather than a shared set of justifying norms.

There are at least two objections to my proposal to move to a culture of praxis. The first concerns a presumed inability to preserve the idea that professional philosophy has its own distinct disciplinary specialization. The idea is just this: if justifying norms that govern what counts as philosophy drop away, then what makes philosophy distinctive also drops away. This objection seems to follow from the idea that philosophy and philosophizing are not a widespread, human activity. It contains the assumption that there is something special about philosophizing that is in the purview of professional philosophy alone. This is a form of exceptionalism insofar as it unacceptably rarifies professional philosophical engagement, i.e. it privileges the output of one population over another. Let me offer an analogy to clarify this point. There are creative writers all over the world. Most creative writers will never be able to sustain themselves purely on creative writing, but they write nonetheless. Some of the factors that thwart some creative writers' hopes of fame and financial support concern social, political and geographical privileges, differences in talent, and trends in criticism. These factors, however, do not determine the existence or non-existence of creative writers and creative writing. The inevitable widening of philosophical engagement that would follow understanding such engagement according to contribution does not lessen the activity and production of philosophy, any more than an extraordinarily wide conception of creative writing eliminates the activity and production of creative writing. Creative writing is still a widespread human activity; in like fashion, philosophy is a widespread human activity.<sup>15</sup>

The second objection, gestured to earlier, concerns whether a shift to a culture of praxis is too extreme. If the problem is, for example, poor application of justifying norms and poor justifying norms, why not require better application of justifying norms and better justifying norms? Within a disciplinary culture that manifests symptoms of a culture of justification, the revision of justifying norms tends to fall disproportionately upon diverse practitioners. This is, to be plain, unacceptable. I take a culture of praxis to be calling for better applications of justifying norms and better justifying norms in a way that also distributes the burden of making these changes. If justifying norms and legitimation are difficult to eliminate as a form of validation,

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<sup>15</sup> Some identify the demise of philosophy in higher education as primarily resulting from attempting to rarify philosophy. See, for example, Lee McIntyre's recent opinion essay in *The Chronicle Review*, entitled "Making Philosophy Matter – or Else" (2011).

then they need to be placed in perspective. They are not always commonly held, nor are they ever univocally relevant. A professional disciplinary culture needs to make room for this reality. And a culture of praxis, on my account, can account for fragmentary, diverse justifying norms by displacing all-encompassing justifying norms for contextual assessments of contribution. In what follows, I will give an example of how a culture of praxis can work to neutralize, to a degree, exceptionalism and aid in creating a space where senses of incongruence can become sites of creative philosophical engagement.

## 6. A COMPARATIVE EXERCISE: TESTING THE TWO COMPONENTS IN A CULTURE OF PRAXIS

In order to gain a fuller understanding of the culture of praxis in professional philosophy, I will briefly describe two understandings of philosophy, i.e. Graham Priest's definition of philosophy as critique and Audre Lorde's observations of the limitations of philosophical theorizing. I do this to show how both accounts can be seen as philosophical engagement in accordance with the two components of a culture of praxis.

### 6.1 GRAHAM PRIEST AND PHILOSOPHY AS CRITIQUE

After disagreeing with Wittgensteinian and Rortian understandings of philosophy, Graham Priest, in his 2006 article, "What is Philosophy?" offers a conception of philosophy that he labels, "philosophy as critique" (200). On Priest's view, philosophy entails a negative and positive project. It has both critical and constructive arms. Priest writes, "Learning philosophy is not simply learning a bunch of facts; it is learning how critically to evaluate people's ideas" (2006, 201). Though criticism may be said to flourish in any field, it holds a distinct place in philosophy. "What distinguishes the role of criticism in philosophy is," Priest writes, "precisely that there is nothing that may not be challenged" (Priest 2006, 202). So not only is philosophy defined by criticism, that orientation is itself "unbridled" (Priest 2006, 201). Hence, for Priest, "philosophy is precisely that intellectual inquiry in which anything is open to critical challenge and scrutiny" (2006, 202).

The critique-centered nature of philosophy serves to produce three features, on Priest's account. Philosophy is 1) subversive, 2) unsettling, and 3) of universal import (Priest 2006, 202-203). Presumably, because philosophers are prepared to challenge everyday common beliefs, philosophy is subversive. And this subversiveness is unsettling to the new student of philosophy, according to Priest. The claim concerning the "universal import" of philosophy, however, follows from nature and value of criticism. Priest writes:

Philosophy is of universal import. Concerning any field of inquiry, one may ask pertinent philosophical questions. One does this when one challenges things that the inquiry itself takes for granted. This is exactly what the philosopher has a license to do. (2006, 203)

Here, asking questions is synonymous with making challenges. It is the making of challenges that shows philosophy's universal import. There is no assumption a philosopher cannot question and no position a philosopher cannot challenge. Priest will go on to suggest that if the common practice of attacking positions put forward by philosophers at professional conferences is any indication, then his interpretation of philosophy is correct. "Criticism," Priest adds "is the life-blood of the discipline" (2006, 203). Philosophy, then, holds a critique-centered spirit that takes as its object anything and everything, and, as such, is a discipline with universal import.

The critique aspect of philosophy is the negative element of philosophizing. Priest also adds a positive element of philosophizing realizing that conceiving of philosophy as merely combative criticism is probably not a "terribly attractive picture" (2006, 203). So he adds the observation that "philosophy is a highly constructive enterprise. Philosophers are responsible for creating many new ideas, systems of thought, pictures of the world and its features" (2006, 203). It becomes very apparent that Priest holds the constructive side of philosophy, i.e. the creation of new ideas, to be the harder and the more rewarding side of philosophy. Yet, upon a careful reading, even the constructivist side is done for the sake of criticism. Priest explains that it is easy to be a "knocker" or a person who only knows how to critique the positions of others. It is an altogether more difficult endeavor to offer criticism that is supported with a "rival theory" (Priest 2006, 204). "Criticism," Priest explains, "is...most powerful only when it has the backing of some rival theory" (2006, 204). The new ideas in philosophy arise out of responses to and criticisms of old ideas. What underwrites this understanding of philosophy and its alleged universal import is the so-called intrinsic value of finding problems (via criticism), then finding solutions to problems (via rival theories).

This understanding of philosophy is not unusual. It is actually rather common. It is a definition of intellectual activity that many black feminists find less than fruitful, however. In what follows, I will articulate Audre Lorde's observations concerning the limitations of this kind of theorizing, where Lorde's tacit understanding of theorizing is very similar to Priest's definition of philosophy. Hence, if philosophy is understood according to Priest's conception of philosophy as critique, Lorde offers an account of serious limitations for philosophical theorizing. Again, the challenge here is to show how a culture of praxis can accommodate both Priest's conception of philosophy and Lorde's observations of its limitations.

## 6.2. AUDRE LORDE – SURVIVAL IS NOT AN ACADEMIC SKILL

Lorde juxtaposes poetry, which is driven by experience and feelings, on her account, with theoretical enterprises, which are driven by conceptual thinking and criticism. She establishes that one of the values of poetry is the ability to render *merely* theoretical observations relevant to actual living. Though Lorde offers an interesting defense of the necessity of poetry in her work, what is of interest here are the limitations she sees in philosophical theorizing that makes it a "handmaiden" to



poetry (1984, 56). For Lorde, the limitations of philosophical theorizing concern a commitment to the rationality-from-nowhere ideal and a commitment to the view that the meaning of living is solving problems.

### 6.2.1 RATIONALITY-FROM-NOWHERE

In a 1979 interview with Adrienne Rich, Rich questions Lorde about a set of positions she puts forth in her 1977 article, “Poetry is not a Luxury”. Lorde’s position reads, “The white fathers told us: I think, therefore I am. The Black mother within each of us – the poet – whispers in our dreams: I feel, therefore I can be free” (Lorde 1984, 38). Rich asks Lorde to respond to the criticism that she is, here, simply restating an old set of stereotypes of “the rational white male and the emotional dark female” (Lorde 1984, 100). Lorde’s response is fascinating. One would expect her to defend herself against the charge that she is espousing the belief that only white males are properly rational and only “dark females” are properly emotional. Instead she responds by dissolving the critique:

I have heard that accusation, that I’m contributing to the stereotype, that I’m saying the province of intelligence and rationality belongs to the white male. But if you’re traveling a road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere, the ownership of the road is meaningless. If you have no land out of which the road comes, no place that road goes to, geographically, no goal, then the existence of that road is totally meaningless. Leaving rationality to white men is like leaving him a piece of that road that begins nowhere and ends nowhere. (1984, 100)

According to Lorde, there is something meaningless about the concept of *Rationality*. The understanding of the human practice of exercising reason held in *Rationality*, for Lorde, has no origin, no destination, and no goal. It does not have a specifiable locale and as such it has no use. Now, is she saying that all rationality is meaningless, in general? No, because Lorde will go onto explain:

*Rationality* is not unnecessary...it serves feeling. It serves to get from this place to that place. But if you don’t honor those places, then the road is meaningless. Too often, that’s what happens with the worship of rationality and that circular, academic, analytic thinking. (1984, 100)

Lorde appears to challenge whether the concept of *Rationality* is useful given that it is a concept of a human practice, not the practice of being rational or exercising reason. The practice of rationality always has a location. There is a where-from and a where-to for every attempt to be rational. Honoring the place and space of given instances of reason is what affords rationality meaning. Hence, attempts to render reason abstract, without appeal to space and place are, on Lorde’s account, meaningless. So an assumption of ownership over such a concept amounts to an inconsequential claim.

### 6.2.2 LIVING AS A PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED

A way to defend the value of concepts of human practice, like Rationality, could follow from understanding conceptual thinking as a way to address contemporary problems. By addressing problems in the world, philosophy can help to guide human behavior. For Lorde, this response is contingent on a certain approach to the world and living. It conceives of living as if it presented itself as a set of problems to be solved. Lorde, on my reading, observes limitations to this particular worldview. She writes:

When we view our living in the european mode, only as problems to be solved, we rely solely upon our ideas to make us free, for these were what the white fathers told us were precious. But as we come more into touch with our own ancient and original non-european view of living as a situation to be experienced and interacted with, we learned more and more to cherish our feelings, and to respect those hidden and deep sources of our power from whence true knowledge and, therefore, lasting action comes. (Lorde 1984, 37)

Lorde, here, sees a clear connection between a particular worldview and the reliance upon ideas. Regardless of whether her designation of “european” and “non-european” is correct, taking living “as a problem to be solved” leads one to both believe in and rely upon ideas in a certain way. It would behoove us to try to articulate what a problem/solution conception of living might entail. There are at least three commitments. The first would concern valuing the activity of discovering problems. The second would concern placing a value on analyzing these problems in order to determine possible solutions. And the third commitment would concern articulating solutions to the problems. It is not clear where, according to a problem/solution approach to living and its three commitments, one need ever *act* upon a solution. Uncovering ideas alone is presumed to have revolutionary force. All that is needed to change the world is to *think* of a solution. It is not clear, for Lorde, how this orientation for living, the creation of ideas in the form of problems and/or solutions, can ever make demands upon our actions *by itself*. The question here is the following: how precisely will discovering, determining, and articulating problems and/or solutions make demands upon our actions?

Lorde, here, seems to be suspicious of how ideas and conceptual thinking can make demands on our actions. More precisely, because conceptual thinking can and does make errors, the process of finding problems and solutions is infinitely regressive. For example, the above question of ‘How will discovering, determining, and articulating problems/solutions make demands on our actions,’ if taken as a problem that needs to be solved, will produce answers which themselves are problems to be solved. One can lose herself/himself in the process of finding problems and offering solutions. Reframed in the terms of Graham Priest’s conception of philosophy as critique outlined earlier, one can lose herself/himself in the infinite regress of criticism and rival theories without ever acting in accordance with a single idea. In fact, the problem/solution model, or the criticism/rival theory model, by itself, may be a means of suspending action indefinitely. As a result, Lorde

demonstrates that relying solely on ideas and concepts does not make demands on our actions, but rather must be combined with some other form of human activity, i.e. poetry, that translates theory into action (Lorde 1984, Lorde 2009). As a result, she is not outright rejecting philosophical thinking, as she understands it, but rather observing its limitations.

Philosophy, when taken as criticism and rival theories, is implicated by Lorde's observations concerning problem/solutions models. A problem/solution orientation underwrites a criticism and rival theory conception of philosophy. In what follows, I will not attempt to defend Graham Priest's idea of philosophy as critique or Audre Lorde's proposed limitations to such an activity, though both positions, I believe, can be defended for different reasons in very different contexts. Instead, I aim to show how both Priest's definition of philosophy and Lorde's observed limitations for philosophical theorizing can be accommodated with the two components contained in a culture of praxis.

### 6.3. HOW DO THEY PRACTICE PHILOSOPHY?

Neither Priest's, nor Lorde's remarks offered here are original. However, I chose Priest's conception of philosophy as critique and Lorde's observed limitations of philosophical theorizing very deliberately. Neither conception is particularly easy to reconcile with the components I identify as present within a culture of praxis. Recall, the first component is value placed on identifying and pursuing "live" concerns and/or questions and the second component concerns recognition of the proliferation of canons and justifying norms. On my reading of Lorde, the emphasis on concerns and/or questions in the first value may appear to render Lorde non-philosophical. And, on the surface, Priest's conception of philosophy looks largely irrelevant in this discussion as a relic of a culture of justification.<sup>16</sup> However, there are several features of Priest's and Lorde's respective observations that make them well suited to exemplify how a culture of praxis might work.

#### 6.3.1 COMPONENT 1: VALUE PLACED ON CONTRIBUTING TO "LIVE" CONCERNS

Again, the first component of a culture of praxis is a value placed on seeking issues and circumstances pertinent to our living. Lorde, as was briefly mentioned, rejects the orientation that living presents itself as a set of problem to be solved. As such, the idea that philosophy is primarily composed of the identification of concerns and/or questions to be investigated and engaged is not an orientation to which Lorde might readily subscribe. However, it is not clear that Lorde's desire to move away from a problem/solution worldview renders seeking pertinent issues and circumstances irrelevant. In fact, she explains that both philosophical theorizing and something like

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<sup>16</sup> See Dotson 2011, Moulton 1996, for accounts that observe the ways criticism within philosophy shores up a culture of justification.

poetry are necessary for survival (Lorde 1984, 37). However, privileging philosophical theorizing without a medium that situates that theorizing so as to produce viable action is futile. As such, Lorde, in observing limitations to the brute search for problems and solutions, is offering an alternative methodology for pursuing applicable insights. What counts as theorizing that contributes to “live” problems, according to Lorde’s understanding of the limitations of problem/solution philosophizing, would shift significantly. Accordingly, her conception of philosophical writing would shift significantly. Literature, poetry, autobiography would count as viable sources for philosophical engagement.

It is clear that what philosophy would look like, for Lorde, would be very different than what philosophy would look like for Priest. This is primarily because what counts as a contribution would look very differently depending upon the methodological commitments one holds, i.e. either Lorde’s conception or Priest’s conception. This observation alone would not render Lorde’s approach lacking in positive, philosophical status. Such an assessment would be irrelevant.<sup>17</sup> In this case, we can see how a culture of praxis can aid in proliferating the kinds of methodologies one relies upon and the texts included in one’s canon. In other words, Lorde’s work can increase the livable options for philosophical practitioners within professional philosophy, if it is not made to answer to, let us say, the justifying norms that follow from Priest’s account of philosophy as critique.

Priest’s account is far easier to reconcile with the value of seeking “live” questions. Priest, at no point in his article, specifies a single body of relevant questions. In fact, for Priest there is nothing that cannot be questioned. Hence, the creation of a singular body of appropriate problems and/or questions seems to be antithetical to his approach. And even if some should feel the need to construct a set of “appropriately” philosophical questions, that list could be questioned. Along with the emphasis on questioning, in Priest’s account, one need only emphasize the fact that Priest’s conception of philosophy holds a negative *and a* positive component, where the positive component may be extended to whether one contributes to some discourse and/or ongoing circumstance.

### 6.3.2 COMPONENT 2: MULTIPLE CANONS, MULTIPLE METHODOLOGIES OF DISCIPLINARY VALIDATION

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<sup>17</sup> In this vein, however, other factors will still hold sway over which philosophical praxes will thrive within a given philosophy department. Yet, given the reality that at this moment in history, professional philosophy is being called to highlight its usefulness, it might behoove otherwise recalcitrant professional philosophers and philosophy departments to reevaluate the scope and role of philosophy (McIntyre 2011). For example, in a culture of praxis, graduate education in philosophy can be broadened to allow more room for the creation of philosophers with expertise in other fields of study relatively easily. Not all professional philosophers would be employed in philosophy departments, which is an already present reality for many professional philosophers. But the stigma that can follow not being employed in a philosophy department for professional philosophers might be significantly lessened.

The second aspect of a culture of praxis involves the proliferation of canons and methods of disciplinary validation. On this front, Priest's definition of philosophy as criticism also does not require a single set of canonical writings. In fact, a multitude of questions will probably produce a multitude of canons. Now, where his position might appear irreconcilable to the second component of a culture of praxis is whether Priest is committed to a single method of disciplinary validation, i.e. discernable critique. This is where the culture of praxis idea might appear to be incompatible with Priest's conception of philosophy. Answers to the question, "what is philosophy," like Priest's definition, imply a delimiting perspective on disciplinary engagement. However, this is only an implication. It actually becomes a delimiting perspective if we take Priest to be offering a universalizable definition of philosophy, i.e. critique as a univocally relevant justifying norm. That is to say, within a culture of justification that admits of one set of justifying norms, Priest's account of philosophy as critique could easily become a constrictive definition of philosophy. However, in like fashion, the understanding of philosophical theorizing that follows from Lorde's observations, if taken to contain the only set of justifying norms available, would be equally constrictive. A culture of justification and its assumption of commonly held, univocally relevant justifying norms makes any understanding of philosophical engagement constrictive. Within a culture of praxis, however, Priest's definition is not universalizable. As a result, in a culture of praxis, Priest's account can be probed for the ways it is at once useful for some projects and irrelevant to others.

This second component of a culture of praxis is not a feature of philosophical theories themselves, unlike the first component. It is a component that should manifest in disciplinary environments for professional philosophy themselves. For example, Priest's understanding of philosophy as critique and the methodological validations that follow from it may prove irrelevant to positions following from a philosophical praxis based on Lorde's positions. But this does not spell disaster for Priest's understanding of philosophy; it simply gives us a sense where it, quite possibly, does not apply. That is to say, valuing multiple forms of disciplinary validation acts like a check against the universalizability of definitions of philosophy and their resulting justifying norms, which too often translates into constrictive and, at times, ethnocentric definitions of philosophy along with justifying norms that are falsely taken to be commonly held and univocally relevant. A proliferation of disciplinary validations, that map onto how one's work contributes (including methodologies that shape one's contribution and one's definition of contribution), would go far to create an environment where senses of incongruence become sites of exploration. A culture of praxis, with its value on contribution, multiple canons, and multiple forms of disciplinary validation, would be flexible enough to identify philosophical engagement according to a range of factors. As a result, a culture of praxis within professional philosophy would present a great deal more livable options than it does currently.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Anita Allen for issuing the challenge to turn a critical eye toward the profession of philosophy for what it offers or fails to offer black women. Thanks also to Kyle Whyte, Jim Nelson, Sandra Harding, Marilyn Frye, the philosophy graduate students in the 2009 & 2010 proseminars at Michigan State University (especially Samantha Noll, John Dombrowski, and Ian Werkheiser), the audience at the 2009 Ida B. Wells Philosophy Conference at the University of Memphis, and the three anonymous reviewers of *Comparative Philosophy* for their thought-provoking comments on various drafts of this paper.

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## DHARMAKĪRTI, DAVIDSON, AND KNOWING REALITY

LAJOS L. BRONS

**ABSTRACT:** *If we distinguish phenomenal effects from their noumenal causes, the former being our conceptual(ized) experiences, the latter their grounds or causes in reality 'as it is' independent of our experience, then two contradictory positions with regards to the relationship between these two can be distinguished: either phenomena are identical with their noumenal causes, or they are not. Davidson is among the most influential modern defenders of the former position, metaphysical non-dualism. Dharmakīrti's strict distinction between ultimate and conventional reality, on the other hand, may be one of the most rigorously elaborated theories of the opposite position, metaphysical dualism. Despite this fundamental difference, their theories about the connection between phenomena and their noumenal causes are surprisingly similar in important respects. Both Dharmakīrti in his theory of 'apoha' and Davidson in his theory of 'triangulation' argued that the content of words or concepts depends on a process involving at least two communicating beings and shared noumenal stimuli. The main point of divergence is the nature of classification, but ultimately Dharmakīrti's and Davidson's conclusions on the noumenal-phenomenal relationship turn out to be complementary more than contradictory, and an integrative reconstruction suggests a 'middle path' between dualism and non-dualism.*

**Keywords:** *Dharmakīrti, Donald Davidson, apoha, triangulation, reality, meta-ontology, subjectivity, metaphysical dualism*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

What can we know about reality? If two communicating beings are both aware of a certain black queen chess piece as evidenced by their reference(s) to that black queen chess piece in their communication, does that imply that there 'really' is (something that is) that black queen chess piece? At least there must be something causing the shared awareness. If we call that 'something' a *noumenal cause* and the shared conceptualized awareness of the black chess queen a *phenomenal appearance*, then the question could be rephrased as being about the (possibility, necessity, and/or extent of) identity or non-identity between such phenomenal appearances and their

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noumenal causes, or between our phenomenal beliefs and noumenal reality. The extremes on the gamut of answers to this (kind of) question would be (a variety of) *metaphysical dualism* arguing for non-identity of causes and phenomena, and thus for the illusoriness of our phenomenal beliefs; and (a variety of) *non-dualism* identifying phenomena with their causes and rejecting (the possibility of) massive error of our beliefs.

The rejection of metaphysical dualism and the subjectivity it implies is a central theme in the philosophy of Donald Davidson, but his *anti-dualism* is rarely phrased in terms like those employed above. According to Davidson:

What stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief. And what we, as interpreters, must take them to be is what they in fact are. Communication begins where causes converge: your utterance means what mine does if belief in its truth is systematically caused by the same events and objects. (1983, 151)

On the other end of the gamut, Dharmakīrti and many other Indian (and Tibetan) Buddhist philosophers argued for the non-identity of conventional (phenomenal) reality (*saṃvṛtisat*) and ultimate (noumenal) reality (*paramārthasat*), and considered the former to be (in some sense) illusory.

Nevertheless, despite that seemingly fundamental difference, there are remarkable similarities between Dharmakīrti's and Davidson's ideas about the connection(s) between words and phenomena on the one hand, and the (noumenal) world on the other. Both defended a form of externalism about the content of words or concepts that is *both* social and physical. That is, the content of words or concepts is determined in a process involving at least two communicating beings (the social aspect), and a shared noumenal stimulus (the physical aspect). In Dharmakīrti's thought, this idea is part of the theory of *apoha*; in Davidson's later thought (especially that of the 1990s), it is called 'triangulation'.

*Apoha* and triangulation are (a.o.) theories about what makes it possible that words can (come to) be used to refer to 'things'. If those theories are valid, actually having concepts, actually communicating, implies that those necessary conditions (that 'what makes it possible that ...') must be actually satisfied as well. In Davidson's words: "successful communication proves the existence of a shared, and largely true, view of the world" (1977, 201). Reading *apoha* and triangulation in this way, the focus shifts from the prerequisites of language and communication to *meta-ontology*, from phenomenal effects to their noumenal causes, from the observation of the existence of language and communication to Dharmakīrti's dualism and Davidson's non-dualism.

Metaphysical dualism, in its strongest form, denies any access to the noumenal world, and thus robs metaphysics of its subject matter – such dualism leads to a kind of ontological deflationism. A radical non-dualism, on the other hand, gives direct access to noumena through language, reducing metaphysics to little more than an

analysis of ordinary language and the findings of physics (e.g. Manley 2009). The debate between ontological deflationism and inflationary (mainstream analytical) metaphysics is the main battlefield of meta-ontology (sometimes called ‘meta-metaphysics’; see Chalmers *et al.* (2009) for a recent overview). If Dharmakīrti and Davidson have similar theories leading to apparently contradictory meta-ontological conclusions (dualism vs. non-dualism), then an analysis and comparison of those theories, and – if possible – an attempt to integrate them, may be a valuable contribution to this debate.

Not surprisingly, given the distance in time, space, and tradition between Dharmakīrti (7th century, India, Buddhist philosophy) and Davidson (20th century, USA, analytic philosophy), the similarities between their arguments are hidden behind vastly different terminologies, aims, and background assumptions. The combination of similar arguments and (seemingly) contradictory conclusions, however, justifies an attempt to decontextualize, translate, and integrate these theories for the twin purpose of (1) determining the essential *difference* between *apoha* and triangulation that causes these two seemingly similar theories about word - world connections to be associated with contradictory meta-ontological perspectives (dualist vs. non-dualist); and (2) analyzing and – if possible – transcending that difference in order to assess the meta-ontological implications of communication. The aim of this paper, therefore, is not just to compare Dharmakīrti and Davidson, but to bring them – or at least (an interpretation of) *some* of their ideas – together, to integrate and extend. In other words, it aims at ‘constructive engagement’ (Mou 2010) more than at the juxtaposition (or even opposition) inherent in ‘comparison’. And to some extent, given the vast differences in theoretical and traditional backgrounds, such integration or constructive engagement requires deviation from both – the ‘middle path’ between Dharmakīrti and Davidson leads to an answer that is neither dualist, nor non-dualist (and neither strictly Dharmakīrtian nor Davidsonian).

Whatever the intended conclusion of an argument on the identity or non-identity of phenomenal appearances and noumenal causes, these two ‘levels of reality’ must be distinguished (if even as a purely semantic distinction for the sake of rejection). Therefore, before turning to *apoha* and triangulation, section 2 explores these ‘levels’ – and what is in between – in Dharmakīrti’s and Davidson’s thought. Section 3 briefly introduces Dharmakīrti’s theory of *apoha* as concept formation and more extensively explains the notion(s) of ‘triangulation’ and the role(s) it play(s) in Davidson’s philosophy, and section 4 argues that *apoha* in the more restricted sense of ‘negative classification’ is the aforementioned ‘essential difference’ causing the different meta-ontological position, and outlines a variant of triangulation that incorporates such (*apoha*-ic) negative classification: an *apoha*-triangulation integration. The role of negative classification is further analyzed in section 5 in terms of the boundaries of types and tokens, which is illustrated by Dharmakīrtian and Davidsonian answers to the question about the black queen chess piece – “no” and “yes” respectively. Section 6 finally, argues that these different answers are really answers to different questions and are, therefore, complementary more than

contradictory; and discusses the consequences of the *apoha*-triangulation integration presented in section 4.

## 2. THE NOUMENAL, THE PHENOMENAL, AND THE IN-BETWEEN

*Metaphysical dualism* is the distinction and opposition of a noumenal and phenomenal (level of) reality, the idea that the world as it appears to us may be (or even is) nothing like the world as it ‘really’ is independent of our experience. In Western philosophy, Kant’s distinction between appearances and things-in-themselves, or between *phenomena* and *noumena*, is the paradigm of metaphysical dualism, but Kant scholars disagree about the metaphysical status of the opposites – whether Kant’s noumenal - phenomenal dialectic is an opposition of ‘worlds’ or ‘aspects’. Similarly, the distinction in general can be framed alternatively in terms of ‘two realities’, ‘two worlds’, ‘two levels of reality’, ‘two aspects of reality’, and so forth. However, unless (or until) these terms are clearly defined, any one of them could be a metaphor for any of the others; and any one of them is equally metaphorical (and ambiguous) in itself.

Setting aside metaphors and Kantian connotations, ‘phenomena’ or ‘phenomenal appearances’ will be interpreted here as referring to the things, stuffs, events, and so forth *as* we consciously and conceptually experience them, and the ‘phenomenal world’, ‘phenomenal reality’, or the ‘phenomenal level of reality’ as the world of phenomena, the world or reality *as* it appears to us (as conscious observers of and participants in that world/reality). Hence, phenomenal experience is conscious, conceptualized experience, experience of cows *as* cows, water *as* water, and weddings *as* weddings. These two predicates, ‘conscious’ and ‘conceptualized’ are not independent – neither Dharmakīrti, nor Davidson allows for conscious, non-conceptual experience for reasons to be explained below.<sup>1</sup> However, there may be room for the converse, for some kind of un- or semi-conscious conceptual experience, although this would be mostly a derivate of conscious experience with little relevance for the subject matter of this paper.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘noumenal world’, ‘noumenal reality’ or the ‘noumenal level of reality’ is the world or reality independent of our experience (or of how we experience it). There are not necessarily ‘noumena’ as counterparts of phenomena, however. It can be argued that phenomena have ‘noumenal causes’ (and perhaps coincide with (or are) those if non-dualism is correct), but it is not necessarily the case that there are

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<sup>1</sup> By way of advance summary: Dharmakīrti distinguishes conceptualized (‘determinate’) phenomenal experience (*pratibhāsa-pratīti*) from non-conceptual and non-conscious raw sensory data (*pratibhāsa*), with external (‘ultimate’/noumenal) reality as the only other category. Hence, ‘conceptual’ and ‘conscious’ come together. Davidson famously rejected ‘non-conceptual content’, *i.e.* something non-conceptual in the conscious mind (see below in this section), and argued that thought requires concepts (see next section).

<sup>2</sup> The existence of such (derivative) unconscious but conceptual experience and thought is supported by research in cognitive neuroscience on non- (or un-) conscious processes. (*e.g.* Hassin *et al.* 2005; Tamietto & de Gelder 2010)

discrete, individuated noumena as the count noun character of that term suggests. A further asymmetry between the noumenal and the phenomenal is that while the phenomenal world (or phenomenal reality) *is* the sum total of phenomena, the noumenal world (or noumenal reality) *includes* the sum total of ‘noumenal causes’, but there may also be a part of noumenal reality without phenomenal effect(s) or counterpart(s).

*Metaphysical non-dualism* then, can be roughly defined as the idea that *in normal circumstances*<sup>3</sup> phenomena necessarily *are* (identical with) their noumenal causes – ‘things’ as they appear to us are the (noumenally) real things(-in-themselves), and therefore, (phenomenal) appearances are non-deceptive. *Metaphysical dualism*, on the other hand, rejects the necessary identity of phenomena and noumena and argues either for possible or actual difference. Consequently, according to dualism, ‘things’ as they appear to us are or may be nothing like things-in-themselves, and therefore, (phenomenal) appearances are (actually or potentially) deceptive (or illusory).

The distinction between metaphysical dualism and non-dualism hinges on ‘identity’ (and its opposite, ‘difference’), which is a rather ambiguous notion here. A theory claiming complete qualitative identity could be easily qualified as non-dualist, and another theory claiming significant qualitative and numerical difference (in which ‘significant difference’ means something like ‘below any reasonable threshold of fuzzy identity’) would be dualist, but a theory claiming numerical identity and qualitative non-identity would be harder to classify, and it is not difficult to imagine further cases that seem to fall somewhere in between dualism and non-dualism. Rather than as a dichotomy, the distinction between metaphysical dualism and non-dualism could be perceived as a scale of some kind with intermediate positions between extremes. Resolving the issue of (non-) dualism – if possible – then, would not be a choice between these extremes, but an assessment of the extent to which phenomena and their noumenal causes can be meaningfully said to be (non-) identical.

Questions like this, and theories and debates about noumena and phenomena and (the) relationship(s) between them in general, are more commonly framed in terms of ‘realism’ and ‘anti-realism’. Depending on which interpretation or definition of these terms one adheres to, the crux of the realism - anti-realism polarity is either the existence of, or the possibility of making truth-apt statements about noumenal reality. The focal point here, however, is neither existence, nor describability, but identity or non-identity of noumena and phenomena, which is much more accurately captured in the terms ‘dualism’ and ‘non-dualism’ than in variants or extensions of ‘realism’ and ‘anti-realism’. Moreover, neither Davidson nor Dharmakīrti (at least in the context of

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<sup>3</sup> The clause ‘in normal circumstances’ is needed to exclude hallucinations and other extraordinary situations in which some experiencer (temporarily or not) experiences things that are not ‘real’. However, defining such ‘normal circumstances’ (and/or the contrary) without reducing the definition of non-dualism to ‘phenomena are noumena except when they are not’ may not be easy, and consequently, this clause is a serious weakness, but because presenting and defending a theory of non-dualism is not the purpose of this paper, as a characterization of the general idea this rough definition should suffice.

his epistemological writings) can be classified unambiguously and uncontroversially as either a realist or a non-realist (except perhaps, after another redefinition of those terms). (Davidson rejects both realism and anti-realism in (1998b), for example.) There have been attempts to recruit them for either camp, but both have also been interpreted (more appropriately) as somehow transcending the realism - anti-realism opposition. Dharmakīrti's and Davison's approximate positions on a dualism - non-dualism scale, on the other hand, are reasonably easy to determine – the former explicitly adheres to dualism, while the latter equally explicitly rejects it. Nevertheless, although there should be little doubt that Dharmakīrti is closer to the dualist end of the scale and Davidson closer to the non-dualist end, because of the aforementioned ambiguity of 'identity' and its opposite in this context, and because of interpretive ambiguities, it is difficult, perhaps even impossible, to pinpoint the *exact* position of either Dharmakīrti or Davidson.

One of the defining characteristics of Buddhist philosophy is a form of *epistemological dualism*, a distinction between conventional (or phenomenal) truth (*saṃvṛti*) and ultimate truth (*paramārtha*). Knowledge beyond the mere conventional or phenomenal (hence, beyond *saṃvṛti*), knowledge of ultimate truth, is (a requirement for) liberation (from suffering), and consequently, in Buddhist philosophy, epistemology is soteriology. Ultimate truth was often conceived as truth about (a.o.) the nature of the relationship between noumena and phenomena, but theories about that relationship differed between schools – some considered ultimate truth to be that phenomena and noumena are identical, while others argued for metaphysical dualism. The most rigorously developed version of such dualism can be found in the epistemological writings of the Yogācāra 'logicians' Dignāga (5-6th ct.) and (especially) his indirect student Dharmakīrti (7th ct.).

Like many other Buddhist philosophers, Dharmakīrti distinguished two 'realities' (or two levels of reality), ultimate reality (*paramārthasat*) and conventional reality (*saṃvṛtisat*) (e.g. Dunne 2004). Ultimate reality is the noumenal world, or the noumenal level of reality, and is composed of *svalakṣaṇa*, unique spatio-temporally non-extended part-less noumenal 'atoms'; conventional reality is the phenomenal world, or the phenomenal level of reality, the world as it appears to us. These two realities (or levels of reality) are connected through perception (*pratyakṣa*) and conceptual construction (*kalpana*). The connection is indirect, however. Central idea in Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's epistemology is the distinction of and relationship between two kinds (or levels) of 'appearance' – indeterminate and determinate appearance (*pratibhāsa* and *pratibhāsa-pratīti*)<sup>4</sup>. "In the former we directly grasp

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<sup>4</sup> Dharmakīrti, *Nyāyabinduṣaṅgah*. – There are a number of different terms used for the distinction between determinate and indeterminate appearance, and as is the case with many Sanskrit philosophical terms, these are translated differently by different interpreters. 'Pratibhāsa' is an abstraction of 'pratibhā', which most literally means 'reflection', but which in a philosophical context more commonly meant 'thought', 'appearance', 'mental image' or something similar. A *pratibhā* is an 'appearance' in the sense of something appearing in, to, or before the mind. Furthermore, in the conceptual opposition with 'pratibhāsa-pratīti', *pratibhāsa* is not-*pratīti*. 'Pratīti' means 'approach', 'apprehension', 'distinction', 'conviction', or 'belief' (or something similar) and has a Vedic

particulars, while in the latter we directly grasp mentally constructed universals, but thereby indirectly grasp particulars” (Siderits 2004, 371). The notion of ‘determination’ (*pratīti*) separating these two kinds (or levels) of appearance refers to verbal determination or conceptual construction (*kalpana*). Indeterminate appearance is the result of direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), which was defined by Dignāga as “free from conceptual construction / nonconceptual” (*kalpanāpoḍha*) (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* 1.3c); and determinate appearance is (conscious) phenomenal perception – perception of something as something. In other words, determinate appearance is phenomenal appearance (or phenomenal experience), and indeterminate appearance is a *pre*-phenomenal intermediary between the noumenal world and our phenomenal experience.

Davidson famously argued against (certain kinds of) such intermediaries in “On the very idea of a conceptual scheme” (1974) and “The myth of the subjective” (1988a). He opposed what he called the ‘third dogma of empiricism’, the idea that there is “an element in the mind untouched by conceptual interpretation” (1988a, 40), “an ultimate source of evidence the character of which can be wholly specified without reference to what it is evidence for” (p. 42), and the related idea that our ‘conceptual schemes’ somehow ‘organize’ this ‘element’ or ‘fit’ this ‘source of evidence’ (1974). His primary target was the empiricist notion of ‘sense data’ (and the subjectivity it implies), and these short quotes summarize his main objections against that notion. The first objection is closely related to Sellars’s (1956) argument against ‘the myth of the given’, the idea that there are givens in the mind independent of, and prior to, conceptualization. The second objection takes issue with the disconnection of phenomenal experience from its noumenal causes.

This latter objection is related to a more general rejection of metaphysical dualism, a recurrent theme throughout many of Davidson’s philosophical writings. According to Davidson, “words and thoughts (...) are necessarily about the sorts of objects and events that commonly cause them” (1988a, 45). It is the *distal stimulus*, the (noumenally) real world object or event, that determines the content of words and thoughts, not the *proximal stimulus* of sense data (see also section 3). More than in the arguments against sense data and subjectivity, this anti-dualism finds clear and explicit expression in Davidson’s rejection of the possibility of ‘massive error’. In a number of papers (*e.g.* 1977; 1982a; 1983), he argued that communication (or interpretation) is only possible if communicators have (shared) largely true beliefs about the world; and since we are able to communicate (often quite successfully), our phenomenal experience cannot be completely false (in ‘massive error’; *i.e.* different from noumenal reality) (see also the two quotes in the introduction of this paper). In the course of the 1990s, many of these arguments would be integrated within the ‘triangulation’ framework that will be the topic of most of the next section (see also Malpas 2009; 2011b).

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connotation of self-evident clearness. In this context, ‘*pratīti*’ refers to the determinateness of some *pratibhā*, to their appearance *as* something. ‘*Pratibhāsa-pratīti*’ then, is determinate appearance, and in contrast, ‘*pratibhāsa*’ is indeterminate (or perhaps pre-determinate) appearance.

The same non/anti-dualism lays at the foundation of Davidson's argument(s) against sense data, subjectivity, and conceptual schemes. In the aforementioned two papers, Davidson concluded that "the idea that there is a basic division between uninterpreted experience and an organizing conceptual scheme is a deep mistake, born of the essentially incoherent picture of the mind as a passive but critical spectator of an inner show" (1988a, 52); and "in giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false" (1974, 198). Nevertheless, Davidson's rejection of metaphysical dualism does not imply a rejection of the conceptual distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal (as defined in this paper) itself, although he did not use those (or related) terms. This is evident, for example, in his philosophy of mind, 'anomalous monism', which depends on a distinction between noumenal events and their phenomenal descriptions (e.g. 1970; 1993).

At first glance, there seems to be a fundamental disagreement here between Davidson (and Sellars) on the one hand, and Dharmakīrti (and Dignāga) on the other. However, whether the refutation of (given) sense data is also a refutation of *pratibhāsa* (indeterminate, pre-phenomenal appearance) depends on whether the latter is (a kind or variety of) the former. And whether Davidson's criticism of conceptual schemes also applies to *kalpana* (conceptual construction) depends primarily on whether the source material of *kalpana* is the same as (or essentially similar to) that what is 'organized' or 'fitted' in Davidson's interpretation of conceptual schemes, hence again, to whether *pratibhāsa* is (given) sense data.

Davidson and Sellars object to (given) sense data as some kind of non-conceptual mental content. In its epistemic role (as 'evidence') that mental content must have propositional form. It must consist of identifiable, more or less discrete, and determinably (inter-) related chunks of sensory information that map (almost) directly to concepts. For words (or 'concepts') to 'fit the evidence' of sense data, that evidence must consist of such (interrelated) sense data chunks. As the source material of the 'organizing' role of conceptual schemes (in Davidson's reconstruction thereof), sense data is similarly structured. Davidson's interpretation of the metaphor of 'organization' is really *re-organization* – conceptual schemes re-organize what is already in some sense organized (i.e. structured in discrete chunks of sensory information) (1974, 192ff). Hence, 'non-conceptual' is a bit of a misnomer here because, although such sense data is non-verbal (or better: not-yet-verbal), it is not entirely non-categorized (but note that the categorization is (supposed to be) provided by noumenal reality, not by a categorizing agent). Davidson and Sellars's interpretation of sense data is better described as propositional, non-verbal mental content, as something *in* the mind that has propositional form, but (still) lacks verbalization. Such sense data should be distinguished from 'sensory experience' (1988a, 45), the pre-mental, uninterpreted signal of the sense organs, which is *non-propositional* (in addition to being non-verbal), which is more *before* than *in* the mind, and which is causally, but not epistemically, related to conceptual(ized) beliefs (in the mind). Davidson rejects sense data, but not such 'sensory experience' (his



term)<sup>5</sup> (but he does consider the latter without philosophical significance). “Of cause there are causal intermediaries. What we must guard against are epistemic intermediaries” (Davidson 1983, 144).

In Nyāya epistemology, the main philosophical opponent of Buddhism in Dharmakīrti’s time, perception is a two stage process involving bare, undifferentiated (*nirvikalpaka*) perception, followed by perceptual judgment resulting in differentiated (*savikalpaka*), but still non-verbal perception; and conceptualization is nothing but the attachment of linguistic labels to the propositional content resulting from that second stage of perception. In other words, the Nyāya theory of perception involved a notion of propositional, non-verbal mental content, hence (given) sense data. It was exactly *that* notion that Dharmakīrti rejected (in Nyāya epistemology). According to Dharmakīrti, “perception is necessarily non-propositional” and “limited to a bare sensing which does not directly produce any useable information” (Dreyfus 1996, 213).

*Pratibhāsa* (indeterminate, pre-phenomenal appearance) is *not* (given) sense data. Like Davidson’s ‘sensory experience’, it is pre-mental and uninterpreted, and causally rather than epistemically related to phenomenal experience.<sup>6</sup> There is a further similarity between the two concepts in their ‘innocence’: Davidson argued that the form and nature of ‘sensory experience’ (as it is produced by particular sense organs) is mere empirical accident without philosophical significance (1988a, 45); and Dharmakīrti added the predicate ‘free of error’ (*abhrānta*) to Dignāga’s definition of *pratibhāsa* as non-conceptual.

In other words, despite the fundamental difference with regards to the (non-) identity of noumena and phenomena, there appears to be a lot of agreement between Davidson and Dharmakīrti – both argue for a causal (rather than epistemological) connection between the noumenal and phenomenal levels of reality through an innocent intermediary (*pratibhāsa* or ‘sensory experience’). Moreover there are striking similarities in their respective theories on the noumenal - phenomenal connection, which is the subject matter of the next section.

### 3. APOHA AND TRIANGULATION

In Dignāga’s and Dharmakīrti’s philosophical system(s), phenomenal experience and conceptual knowledge are connected (through perception) to ultimate (noumenal) reality by means of *apoha*. This concept of ‘*apoha*’ plays a role in two different but related theoretical contexts – conceptual construction (*kalpana*) and concept formation. In the former we construct particular determinate phenomena in opposition

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<sup>5</sup> Davidson’s term for this innocent intermediary, ‘sensory experience’ is not a particularly good term because the word ‘experience’ suggests something *in* the mind, perhaps even something conscious, and something pre-conceptual *in* the (conscious) mind is exactly what Davidson objected to, and which is exactly what ‘sensory experience’ is *not*.

<sup>6</sup> Because of the epistemological purpose of Dharmakīrti’s theory, his rejection of an epistemic intermediary lead to theoretical difficulties that kept many generations of (especially Tibetan) Scholastics occupied (see Dreyfus 1996), but that is of no concern to us here.

to what they are not; we perceive a particular cow as not non-cow; in the latter we create (pseudo-) universals rather than particular determinations (phenomena). Dignāga introduced the concept in the former context. Conceptual construction (*kalpana*) is a form of inference (*Pramāṇasamuccaya* 5.1) which works by means of exclusion: *apoha* (*id.* 5.17). The closest Western equivalent to this idea is Derrida's concept of 'différance', which similarly expresses a deferring of meaning (or determination) by reference to or embedding in a network of different, but related, concepts. Dharmakīrti further elaborated Dignāga's idea (and philosophy in general) and applied it to concept formation (mostly in the auto-commentary to his *Pramāṇavārttika*; Dreyfus 1997; 2011; Tillemans 2011). Making Dharmakīrti's ideas "clearer than they are" (p. 278), Dreyfus summarizes *apoha* as concept formation as follows:

[O]ur starting point is our experience of things and their mutual resemblances. These experiences give rise to a diffuse concept of similarity. To account for this sense of similarity, we construct a more precise concept by correlating conceptual representations with a single term or sign previously encountered. This creates a more precise concept in which the representations are made to stand for a commonality that the objects are assumed to possess. (...) In this way experiences give rise to mental representations, which are transformed into concepts by association with a linguistic sign. The formation of a concept consists of the assumption that mental representations stand for an agreed-on imagined commonality. Two points must be emphasized here regarding concept formation. First a concept, which is nothing but an assumption of the existence of a fictional commonality projected onto things, comes to be through the conjunction of two factors: the experience of real objects and the social process of language acquisition. (...) Second, a concept is mistaken. (Dreyfus 1997, 227)

Further summarizing Dreyfus's summary: concepts are formed in communication about shared experiences of real things. Hence, *apoha* is (or involves) a kind of social and physical externalism about language. In (recent) Western philosophy, externalism about language and/or mental content is usually *either* social, as in Kripkenstein's or Burge's externalism, *or* physical, as in Putnam's, but rarely both. The most important exception is Davidson, particularly his theory of triangulation, which has much in common with *apoha*. Dreyfus (2011) writes that according to *apoha* "thought and language are causally related to our experiences of things and hence are grounded in reality" (p. 209), but the exact same could be written about triangulation. Compare also the first half of the above quote with Davidson's assertion that "all creatures classify objects and aspects of the world in the sense that they treat some stimuli as more alike than others. The criterion of such classifying activity is similarity of response" (1991, 212). And compare the above quote's conclusion with the central idea of triangulation: concepts (and therefore the possibility of communication and thought) depend "on the fact that two or more creatures are responding, more or less simultaneously, to input from a shared world, and from each other" (1997a, 83).

Davidson first introduced the notion of *triangulation* in the second last paragraph of "Rational animals" (1982b) in the context of an argument for the necessity of

objectivity for thought. “Our sense of objectivity is the consequence” of a kind of triangulation involving two creatures, each of which “interacts with an object, but what gives each the concept of the way things are objectively is the base line formed between the creatures by language” (p. 105). During the 1990s, Davidson employed the notion in a variety of related contexts, and consequently, triangulation became gradually associated with more and more parts of his philosophical system (see also Amoretti & Preyer 2011a; Malpas 2009; 2011b).<sup>7</sup> Partially because of that, “Davidson’s triangulation figure is notoriously difficult to explicate” (Fergestad & Ramberg 2011, p.221), and different interpreters understand the notion (sometimes subtly) differently and position it differently in the wider context of Davidson’s philosophy (or even ignore that wider context, as Malpas (2011a) points out). For example, Føllesdal (1999) suggests that the term was introduced “for the process of language learning” (p. 724), specifically for the role of perception in word learning; Sosa (2003) associates it with the *principle of charity* and *radical interpretation* in the context of the refutation of skepticism about external reality (hence, in the context of metaphysical anti-dualism); Carpenter (2003) interpretes triangulation as a model of language learning and as such as the ‘transcendental argument’ for externalism about mental content at the very core of Davidson’s philosophical system; Lepore and Ludwig (2005) locate it in the context of the ‘third person perspective’ and Davidson’s arguments for the necessity of language for thought; and Glüer (2006) disentangles the two aspects of triangulation suggested in Davidson (1997b): “without the triangle, there are two aspects of thought for which we cannot account. These two aspects are the objectivity of thought and the empirical contents of thoughts about the external world” (p. 129). All of these interpretations (and probably a few more that are not mentioned here) are correct; the apparent differences are merely the result of differences in focus on particular aspects of the notion’s application.

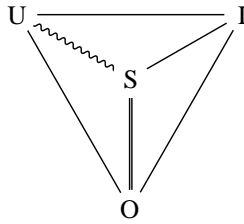
“In its simplest form” or “its pure state” (e.g. Davidson 1999, 731), triangulation is a singular occasion of pointing out some object by one communicant to another by means of some *ad hoc* sign. These two communicating creatures and the shared stimulus are the three corners in the triangle. Many of Davidson’s papers make use of a notion of triangulation in a less ‘simple’ or ‘pure’ form, however: as (a model of) a process of word learning by means of repeated similar signs in the (repeated) presence of similar stimuli (e.g. 1990a; 1992; 1994; 1997c; 1998). In the second half of the 1990s, the notion of *ostensive learning* appeared as a variant denotation of such *triangulatory word learning* (my term) (e.g. 1997c; 1998), and in that form, the idea made its final appearance in the last pages of the posthumously published *Truth and Predication* (2005a).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In (1990a), discussing externalism, Davidson wrote that “for some thirty years [he had] been insisting that the contents of our earliest learned and most basic sentences (...) must be determined by what it is in the world that causes us to hold them true” (p. 200); in other words, that the basic idea of triangulation had already been a central part of his philosophy for some thirty years at that point.

<sup>8</sup> In (2001a), Davidson wrote that (the importance of) ostensive learning was his original inspiration for the idea of triangulation. Consequently, the later references to ‘ostensive learning’ are a return to the source of triangulation more than a substantial change or innovation.

figure 1: Davidson's triangle



Either in its ‘simple’ or in its less simple form, triangulation involves the same triangle graphically represented in figure 1. It should be immediately obvious that the term ‘triangle’ is a misnomer if triangles are considered to consist of nothing but three corners and three sides – triangulation involves a fourth element: language ( $S$  in figure 1), which Davidson called the ‘base line’ on a number of occasions, but which is more properly characterized as the triangle’s *pivot*. These four elements are connected by six lines as shown in the figure and explained in the following. A communicating creature  $U$  utters (*wavy line*) some sound  $S$  (which could in principle also be another kind of sign) in reference<sup>9</sup> (*double line*) to some object, occurrence, or state of affairs  $O$  perceived (*single line*) by  $U$ . Triangulation further involves a second creature  $I$  that also perceives (*single lines*) the object (etc.)  $O$ , the sound  $S$ , and its utterer  $U$ , and the relationships between these three (uttering:  $U$ - $S$ , reference<sup>9</sup>:  $S$ - $O$ , perception:  $U$ - $O$ ; but note that the *awareness of* these relationships is not graphically represented in the figure). By ‘correlating’ these incoming lines,  $I$  finds or creates the meaning (or ‘content’) of  $S$ . Words (as a kind of sign  $S$ ; but not necessarily *all* words) are learned by repetition of this process (often with different people in the roles of  $U$  and  $I$  at different occasions, and/or the same people switching roles): by repeated correlation of sufficiently similar verbal signs  $S$ , sufficiently similar objects  $O$ , and sufficiently similar utterers  $U$  (that belong to the same species and seem to speak a similar language, for example).<sup>10</sup>

Triangulation explains how (it is possible that) words get (empirical) content or meaning. Triangulation “is necessary if there is to be any answer at all to the question what [a creature’s] concepts are concepts of” (1992, 119); without triangulation, words could not have content, and (therefore) (propositional) thought would be

<sup>9</sup> ‘Reference’ here, is nothing but the *act* (by the utterer) of referring to something; it should not be confused with the technical term.

<sup>10</sup> The repetition of such correlations is essential. Malpas (2011b) correctly points out that there is a “need for triangulation to operate through repetition” (p. 259). This, however, seems to be ignored by some (perhaps even many) critics of triangulation (see Amoretti & Preyer 2011a for an overview). The common criticism that triangulation does not fix a connection between a word and a noumenal kind seems to be based on (a) the assumption that according to Davidson, such a connection can be made in a single triangulatory event (rather than in repeated triangulations), and (b) the neglect of Davidson’s holism and coherentism. The latter fits in with a general tendency observed by Malpas (2011a) to ignore these and other less orthodox aspects of Davidson’s (especially later) philosophy. See further section 4.

impossible (1982b; 1991; 1997b). The question how (it is possible that) words get meaning (or content) should be distinguished, however, from the questions what ‘meaning’ is and how to determine (a) meaning, although neither these questions, nor their answers are always easily kept apart. For example, Davidson’s answer to the last of these questions is his theory of interpretation (*radical interpretation* (1973) in cases with the least information to start with) but interpretation (of meaning) is based on the same triangle: interpreter *I* determines the meaning of *S* by correlating the ‘incoming lines’.<sup>11</sup> As his closing statement in a paper rejecting Quine’s dependency on proximal stimuli (see also section 2), Davidson writes: “the active role of the interpreter (...) requires that the interpreter correlate his own responses and those of the speaker by reference to the mutually salient causes in the world of which they speak” (1990b, 62). The terminology here seems to be that of interpretation, but the idea expressed is that of triangulation: speaker, interpreter, mutually salient cause (the distal stimulus): these are the three corners (*U*, *I*, *O*) of the triangle. The apparent incongruity is partially explained by the strong similarities between the two ideas (interpretation and triangulation), which differ more in background and purpose than in process or effect; and partially by the fact that, aside from the singular mention of ‘triangulation’ in (1982b), it was only around this time that Davidson started to apply the term in a wider range of contexts.

Davidson answered the third question, what meaning is, by analyzing meaning in terms of truth (e.g. 1967; 2005a) – ‘*s* means in *L* that *p*’ is equivalent to ‘*s* is true-in-*L* iff *p*’ where *s* is some statement, *L* is a language, and *p* is a description of the truth condition of *s* in the meta-language. If *S* in figure 1 would be a simple constative rather than a word – ‘*ame ga futte iru*’ (‘it is raining’ in Japanese), for example – then the meaning of *S* in the language spoken by *U* is that, if *S* is true, then *O*, which is described in the meta-language (English in this case) as ‘it is raining’. By defining ‘meaning’ in this way, Davidson avoided an ontological commitment to facts as truth-makers and meanings as abstract entities. ‘Meaning’ in itself is of little relevance in the context of this paper, however; what concerns us here is the implication of the possibility of meaning something – not so much that *S* is true iff *O*, but that without *O* (along with some other conditions), there could not be an *S*.

Perhaps confusingly, Davidson sometimes seems to coalesce the questions what meaning is and what makes meaning possible; that is, ‘meaning’ is sometimes understood in terms of *triangulatory word learning history*, rather than in terms of truth, particularly in the context of metaphysical anti-dualism. Two speakers “may mean different things by the same words because of differences in the external situations in which the words were learned”, and therefore, “the correct interpretation of what a speaker means is not determined solely by what is in the head; it depends also on the natural history of what is in the head” (1988a, 44). Which leads to the conclusion that “in the simplest and most basic cases, words and sentences derive their meaning from the objects and circumstances in whose presence they were

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<sup>11</sup> On the relation between triangulation and (radical) interpretation, see also Carpenter (2003), Goldberg (2011), and Malpas (2011b).

learned” (p. 44), in other words, that meaning depends on triangulatory word learning history; and consequently, “words and thoughts (...) are necessarily about the sorts of objects and events that commonly cause them” (p. 45), and thus not subjective (or illusory).

Although this argument predates Davidson’s explicit usage of the term ‘triangulation’ in the context of word learning (1990a; 1992; 1994; see also above and footnote 7), and the term, therefore, does not occur in the paper, the idea that “words and sentences derive their meaning from the objects and circumstances in whose presence they were learned” is the same idea elaborated in the word learning version of triangulation, thus connecting Davidson’s arguments against subjectivity or metaphysical dualism with triangulation. His (1988a) argument also connects triangulation and anti-dualism with the ‘primacy of the idiolect’, the idea that ‘a language’ is a collection of idiolects (1986; 1994), which also applies to truth-conditional meaning (see above) – the *L* in ‘true-in-*L*’ is an idiolect, and ‘true-in-*L*’ is ‘true-in-the-idiolect-of-*U*’ (*U* is the utterer in figure 1), where ‘idiolect’ is, moreover, continuously changing under the influence of new triangulatory experiences (thus: ‘true-in-the-idiolect-of-*U*-at-*t*’).

Aside from the somewhat indirect connection between triangulation and metaphysical anti-dualism through (meaning as) triangulatory word learning history, there are two more direct connections.<sup>12</sup> The first of these can be found in (1983) and (1990a): Davidson’s argument against ‘skepticism of the senses’ (*i.e.* metaphysical dualism) in (1983) quoted in the introduction of this paper (“What stands in the way of global skepticism of the senses is, in my view, the fact that we must, in the plainest and methodologically most basic cases, take the objects of a belief to be the causes of that belief.”; p. 151), is quoted by Davidson himself in (1990a) in the context of externalism about mental content, *i.e.* the origination of the content of words and thought – through triangulation – in external reality. The second of these more direct connections was already hinted at above: the stimulus in triangulation (*O* in figure 1) is *shared* (*e.g.* 1991; 1997a), and a shared stimulus can only be a *distal* stimulus. Using the term ‘interpretation’ rather than ‘triangulation’, Davidson pointed this out in (1990b), as mentioned above, but the argument of that paper partially overlaps with that of (1997a), which explicitly mentions “the triangular nexus of causal relations” (p. 83). There cannot be language, communication, and thought without triangulation, and there can be no triangulation without (shared) distal stimuli (along with the other necessary conditions) – we speak and think, therefore our words are grounded in distal stimuli (*i.e.* in the noumenal world).

#### 4. TRIANGULATING DIFFERENCE

Triangulation as word learning and *apoha* as concept formation, while similar in their world - word connection through social learning processes, differ in two respects.

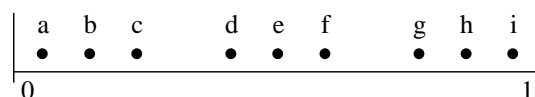
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<sup>12</sup> On the connections between triangulation, (radical) interpretation, anti-dualism, and externalism about mental content, see also Carpenter (2003), Sosa (2003), and Malpas (2011b).

First, and least importantly, the idea and implications of triangulation are much more extensively, and more rigorously explored than *apoha*, which is partly due to the theories' embeddedness in different philosophical traditions, and partly to the obscurity of many of the key philosophical texts on *apoha*. The second, more important difference is expressed in the characterizations as *word learning* and *concept formation* respectively – triangulation merely names (or assigns words to) the objects and occurrences given by the noumenal world (in a sense, Davidson relocates the 'given' from sense data to noumenal reality), while *apoha* simultaneously *constructs and* names phenomena. Assuming that conceptual construction is always and necessarily construction out of sense data, Davidson rejected construction with the rejection of sense data (see section 2). That rejection may have been premature, however. Conceptual construction (*kalpana*) by means of *apoha* in its more narrow sense as *anya-apoha*, (classification by) exclusion of what is different, does not depend on sense data or similar epistemic intermediaries, and is therefore, at least in that respect, not inconsistent with triangulation. And incorporating *apoha* in triangulation – that is, adapting triangulation to allow for construction by exclusion, or extending a more rigorous reconstruction of *apoha* with an exploration of consequences as in triangulation – does neither lead to metaphysical dualism, nor to anti-dualism, as the final sections of this paper will show. Furthermore, similarity-based (positive) classification of experiences is considered a weakness of Davidson's theory of triangulation by some critics (*e.g.* Fennel 2000; Ludwig 2011), and therefore, the substitution of (negative) classification by exclusion may lead to a stronger version of triangulation; a version that would, moreover, be tied in more closely with Davidson's holism.

Consider the following very abstract example: a perceiver has become aware of 9 particulars, which all have one and only one characteristic such that these characteristics are values on a single dimension, and each particular has a unique value on that dimension. figure 2 shows the positions of the 9 particulars on that single dimension (the *x*-axis, ranging from 0 to 1). (An example of such a dimension could be (the noumenal ground or cause of) the range from dark (0) to light (1).) The perceiver perceives the difference between the 9 particulars, but at the same time notices that some are less different (or more similar) than others. The pair {d,e} is considerably less different than {c,h}, for example.

figure 2



Next, assume a second perceiver who, in the presence of e (and nothing but e) utters 'def', and does so again in the presence of d (and nothing but d), but utters 'bac' in the presence of b (and nothing but b). With this information alone (the utterings and the perceived relative differences), the first perceiver is able to construct two working concepts, 'bac' and 'def', such that the first refers to {a,b,c}, and the

second to  $\{d, \dots, i\}$ . Further communication may refine these concepts – despite the gap between  $c$  and  $d$ , it is in principle possible that  $c$  is classified as ‘def’ rather than ‘bac’, for example; and there may be a third concept ‘hig’ that refers to  $\{g, h, i\}$  and that restricts ‘def’ to  $\{d, e, f\}$ . (Note that there are many more possible classifications of the particulars in figure 2, including various discontinuous ones.)

Let us assume that further triangulations result in the latter restriction of ‘def’ indeed. The formation of this concept makes those particulars seem even more similar, even identical in their ‘def’-instantiating capacity, but that is mere phenomenal illusion. Having a concept ‘def’ does not mean that the apparently similar elements of  $\{d, e, f\}$  are ‘def’, that they share a property ‘def’-ness, that such a universal ‘def’-ness exists, or that *defs* (ultimately/noumenally) exist (as *defs*). All that the ‘things’ we call ‘def’, the phenomenal *defs*, share is that they are ‘not non-def’.

This ‘not non-...’ is *the* key notion in *anya-apoha* (exclusion of difference). It should not be interpreted as a double classical negation ‘not not’, but available sources do not make clear how ‘not non’ should be understood exactly either. Siderits (e.g. 1991) proposed an interpretation based on Matilal’s (1971) distinction between ‘nominally’ and ‘verbally bound negation’ found in Hindu philosophy, but as Siderits admits himself (2011), there is no clear evidence for that distinction in Buddhist philosophy (and it is, moreover, not immediately clear how Siderits’s two kinds of negation relate to ‘exclusion’ and ‘difference’). Nevertheless, the idea that ‘not non’ should be interpreted as two different negation-like operations is not implausible, provided that it can be made to work such that it coheres with the basic idea of excluding what is different (*anya-apoha*), while not collapsing into identity (as is the case with a double classical negation).

The point of the formula ‘ $x$  is not non- $X$ ’ is avoiding the ontological commitment to an universal involved in ‘ $x$  is (an)  $X$ ’.  $X$  marks a class, membership of which is determined by an universal, meaning or intension, or something similar; and ‘ $x$  is  $X$ ’ denotes membership of that class ( $x \in X$ ), which implies that there is an  $X$  (that the universal  $X$  (or  $X$ -ness) exists). Any acceptable interpretation of ‘not non-...’, therefore should (a) not collapse into  $x \in X$ , and (b) not commit to the existence of  $X$  (or other universals or classes determined thereby) by existentially quantifying over  $X$  (etc.). Three interpretations will be briefly outlined here, but the first two violate either (a) or (b) and are, therefore, rejected. In all three, it is assumed that ‘not’ stands for classical negation, and that it is, therefore, the ‘non’ operation that needs elucidation.

(1) ‘Non- $X$ ’ is the absolute complement of  $X$  ( $X^C =_{\text{def}} U \setminus X$ ) and ‘ $x$  is non- $X$ ’ means  $x \in X^C$  ( $x$  is an element of the absolute complement of  $X$ ; that is, it belongs to the class of ‘things’ that are not  $X$ ). ‘Not’ as classical negation merely negates  $\in$ , and therefore, ‘ $x$  is not non- $X$ ’ means  $x \notin X^C$  ( $x$  is not in (or is excluded from) the class of things that are different from  $X$ ). However, this interpretation (obviously) fails because  $x \notin X^C \leftrightarrow x \in X$ , collapsing the two negations in ‘ $x$  is not non- $X$ ’ into ‘ $x$  is  $X$ ’, thus violating (a). Nevertheless, the implicit identification of ‘not’ with ‘exclusion’



and ‘non’ with ‘difference’ in *anya-apoha* (exclusion of what is different) seems correct.

(2) Rather than to an absolute complement, the prefix ‘non-’ is a negative reference to an open class of mutually exclusive contextually appropriate alternative classifications (where ‘open class’ is a class with undetermined and unfixed membership). If  $\mathbf{D}=\{X,Y,Z,\dots\}$  is that open class of such contextually appropriate classifications  $X, Y, Z$ , and so forth, then ‘non- $X$ ’, here symbolized as  $\mathbf{D}^{-X}$ , is  $\mathbf{D}$  minus  $X$ :  $\mathbf{D}^{-X}=\mathbf{D}\setminus\{X\}$ . However, because the elements of  $\mathbf{D}$  are classes themselves, the relationship between  $\mathbf{D}^{-X}$  and any particular is indirect: ‘ $x$  is non- $X$ ’ means that  $x$  is an element of a class  $D$  that is an element of  $\mathbf{D}^{-X}$ , formally:  $\exists D\in\mathbf{D}^{-X}[x\in D]$ . And since ‘not’ is just classical negation, ‘ $x$  is not non- $X$ ’ is nothing but the negation thereof:  $\neg\exists D\in\mathbf{D}^{-X}[x\in D]$ . In words: there is no contextually appropriate class other than  $X$ , such that  $x$  is a member of that class; or shorter:  $x$  is not in a different class (than  $X$ ).

Although interpretation (2) avoids (direct) commitment to (the existence of)  $X$ , it does so by positing a series of alternative classifications  $Y, Z, \dots$ , and in (indirect) violation of (b), is ontologically committed to those:  $\exists D\in\mathbf{D}^{-X}[x\in D]$  ( $x$  is non- $X$ ) quantifies over elements of  $\mathbf{D}^{-X}$ , which are classes determined by universals (above described as ‘contextually appropriate alternative classifications’). Moreover, *anya-apoha* similarly applies to  $Y, Z, \dots$ , and thus, if negative classification assures that  $X$  has no members, then these have no members either. By implication, it is true that  $\neg\exists D\in\mathbf{D}^{-X}[x\in D]$  for *any*  $x$  and  $X$ : if ‘ $x$  is not non- $X$ ’ it is also ‘not non- $Y$ ’, ‘not-non  $Z$ ’, and so forth. Therefore, (2) fails, but the reasons for its failure point at the third interpretation.

(3) The source of (2)’s failure is  $\mathbf{D}$ , which is effectively a set of universals. This third interpretation keeps the basic framework of (2), but substitutes  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  for  $\mathbf{D}$ . The members of  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  are not universals, but non-overlapping loose collections of ‘things’ or experiences deemed not-non-something in previous triangulation events, such that both the members of  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  and their members are salient to the interpreter in the occasion of the new triangulation event.<sup>13</sup> Thus  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  is the collection of ‘things’ considered ‘not non- $Y$ ’ before, and remembered, reconstructed, or otherwise (sub-)consciously activated in the context of the (new) triangulation of  $x$ . There may or may not be an element  $\dot{X}$  in  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}$ , depending on whether something was triangulated as ‘not non- $X$ ’ before. In either case  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}^{-X}$  excludes that (if  $\dot{X}\notin\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  then  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}^{-X}=\dot{\mathbf{D}}\setminus\{\dot{X}\}=\dot{\mathbf{D}}$ ; if  $\dot{X}\in\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  then  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}^{-X}=\dot{\mathbf{D}}\setminus\{\dot{X}\}$ ). The members of  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}^{-X}$  are collections of remembered or reconstructed *past* triangulations (or strictly speaking, the particular objects or features involved therein), and consequently, the object or feature  $x$  in the *new* triangulation can (barring exceptions such as (partial) loss of memory) not be a member of any of these. This means that the membership relation in the right-hand part of

<sup>13</sup> In actual learning situations, relevant members of  $\dot{\mathbf{D}}$  are often *made* salient. For example, when offering a new word to a child, parents often follow up the usage of the new word “with additional information in the form of a selection of adjacent terms – neighbors from the relevant semantic domain that help delimit the probable meaning of the new term” (Clark 2010, p. 257).

$\exists D \in \mathbf{D}^{-X} [x \in D]$  in (2) needs to be replaced (in addition to dotting the  $D$ s). In the process of triangulation,  $x$  is compared to contextually salient previous triangulations, the elements of elements of  $\mathbf{D}$ , and found to be similar and/or dissimilar to some. The relationship between  $x$  and some  $\dot{D}$  ( $\dot{D} \in \mathbf{D}^{-X}$ ) is that of (subjective and contextually salient) similarity:  $sim(x, \dot{D})$ . With those changes to (2), ‘ $x$  is non- $X$ ’ becomes  $\exists \dot{D} \in \mathbf{D}^{-X} [sim(x, \dot{D})]$ , and ‘ $x$  is not non- $X$ ’ the classical negation thereof:  $\neg \exists \dot{D} \in \mathbf{D}^{-X} [sim(x, \dot{D})]$  (which can be read something like: ‘there is no  $\diamond$  collection of previously triangulated not-non-somethings other than not-non- $X$ , such that  $x$  is  $\diamond$  similar to the  $\diamond$  members of that collection’; in which each  $\diamond$  can be replaced with ‘subjectively, contextually salient(ly)’).

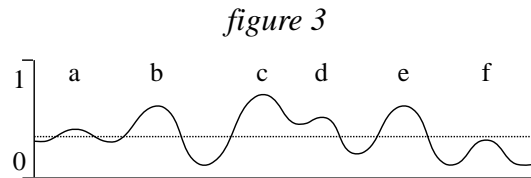
Contrary to (2), (3) is not ontologically committed to universals (or universal-like classes), but merely to collections of (remembered or reconstructed) particulars loosely bound together by that interpreter’s history of triangulations. An obvious objection to (3) would be that ‘similarity’ ( $sim(x, \dot{D})$ ) is too vague and subjective to guarantee success (see also footnote 10), but there are two counterarguments against that objection. Firstly, repeated triangulations (of similar particulars) progressively disambiguate (dis-)similarity and reduce subjectivity. Secondly, the whole process embeds any singular triangulation in the whole triangulation history of that interpreter, locking all words and concepts together in a single, (more or less) coherent whole. Coherence and incoherence with that history and its result (the web of concepts) also disambiguates (dis-)similarity and reduces subjectivity. The essence of *anya-apoha*, or at least this triangulation-infused interpretation thereof, is that the meaning of a word or concept is not some kind of universal, but its embedded triangulation history, a history that, moreover, never stops. Rather, speakers/interpreters (one has to be both to be either) continuously further ‘atune’<sup>14</sup> their words and concepts in further communication. In ‘atunement’, at least some vagueness clears up.

There is a second, perhaps more fundamental type of vagueness involved in concept formation: the vagueness of what counts as one particular. In addition to the negative classification (*anya-apoha*) of ‘things’ (as not-non-something), *apoha* similarly constructs (at least some of) the boundaries of (at least some of) the ‘things’ classified. In the above example, illustrated in figure 2, there were nine clearly distinguishable and discrete particulars, and the process of concept formation merely added a convenient (negative) classification. However, as Dharmakīrti pointed out, singular concepts are either grounded in (noumenally caused) singular effects, *or are purely conventional (saṃketa)*.<sup>15</sup> There are many cases in which particular-hood itself

<sup>14</sup> In their *Thinking through Confucius*, Hall and Ames’s (1987) use the term ‘atunement’ for a similar process. Their Derrida-inspired interpretation of Confucius has interesting similarities with the *apoha*-triangulation integration suggested here. “Classical Chinese is a system of differences, (...) The meaning of a given sign is (...) determined by its active and passive difference, and that meaning is never altogether present but deferred” (p. 293).

<sup>15</sup> “Eka-vacanam api tad-eka-śakti-sūcana-arthaṃ saṃketa-paratantram vā” (autocommentary (PVSV) at *Pramāṇavārttika* 1.141-142). Note that the expression ‘(noumenally caused) singular effects’ is not an accurate translation of “eka-śakti-sūcana-artha” but a summary of what this fragment refers to: the

is determined by (negative) classification, where the objects we (phenomenally) perceive are constructed (*kalpana*) out of non-discrete indeterminate appearance or sensory experience, and are therefore conventional (*saṃketa*). To illustrate this, consider again a rather abstract example. figure 3 shows a continuum on one spatial dimension (the *x*-axis), and with one type of characteristic with infinite values between two extremes (0 and 1; the *y*-axis) – a bit like one-dimensional pumpkin soup with solidity on the *y*-axis.



Given the right circumstances, an agent could form a concept ‘gu’<sup>16</sup> (as ‘not non-gu’), but in the same way that particulars could be grouped together differently in case of the previous example, in this case particular-hood itself can be constructed differently. For example, there may be an absolute threshold, the dotted line in the figure, making the concept of ‘gu’ applicable to a, b, {c,d}, and e; or a relative threshold, which might exclude a, but include f; and depending on the convention constructed, different bumps in the line are called ‘gu’, and c and d may be considered one *gu* or two. This is, of course, a very abstract example, but it can be easily made less abstract – distinguishing ‘gu’ from ‘non-gu’ could be distinguishing chunks (from non-chunk) in pumpkin soup; or mountains (from non-mountain) in a landscape (on a somewhat larger spatial scale). Or perhaps, if the *x*-axis would represent time rather than space, distinguishing ‘gu’ could be distinguishing specific types of events. Whatever the rule for distinguishing ‘gu’ from ‘non-gu’, it is nothing more than a (constitutive) rule, a convention (*saṃketa*). There are no real (discrete) noumenal *gus* (as a plural of *gu*); it is that convention that creates phenomenal instances of ‘gu’.

In other words, the thing-ness (or particular-hood) of (at least) some perceived ‘things’ is itself phenomenal. Indeed, the 9 particulars in figure 2 – *as* individual, discrete particulars – may be phenomenal. Furthermore, not just their particular-hood, but also the ‘one characteristic’ that differentiates them (the *x*-axis in figure 2) and that is the basis for classification and concept formation, and similarly, the characteristic expressed on the *y*-axis in figure 3, may be phenomenal (as they *are* in the explanatory examples). The *direct* source material for concept formation (and/or conceptual construction) does not (always) need to be the indeterminate sensory experience or *pratibhāsa* that is directly caused by noumenal reality, but may be –

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capacity of a collection of *svalakṣaṇa* (unique spatio-temporally non-extended part-less noumena) to have a singular effect.

<sup>16</sup> Not coincidentally, ‘gu’ (具) is the Japanese word for (among others) (more or less) solid things in soup.

and most likely often is – already *otherwise* determined, hence phenomenal. In such cases, concept formation *adds* a conceptual layer, a further classification. Nevertheless, below (or behind) such ‘layers’ of phenomenal description, there must be a level of basic concepts (Davidson’s ‘plainest and methodologically most basic cases’ in the quote in the introduction above, see also 1988a, 44) that is created or learned in triangulation of shared indeterminate appearance.

## 5. BOUNDARIES OF TYPES AND TOKENS

*Apoha* in the narrow sense is classification by exclusion of what is different, *negative* classification, to be contrasted with *positive* classification, which groups things together on the basis of (perceived) class-internal similarity rather than class-external difference. Nevertheless, all classification, either negative or positive, either conceptual or otherwise, is drawing (class) boundaries; drawing boundaries between ‘gu’ and ‘non-gu’ and between ‘defs’ and ‘non-defs’, for example.

The two examples in the previous section illustrate the two kinds of (class) boundaries involved in conceptual construction and classification: *extensional boundaries* and *object boundaries*, or boundaries of *types* and *tokens*. Extensional boundaries are the outer limits of the extension of a conceptual class or type, such as the boundaries between ‘defs’ and ‘non-defs’. Object boundaries are the outer limits of that what is constructed and classified as one instantiation, case, or token of a certain conceptual type, such as the boundary between one specific instantiation (etc.) of ‘gu’ and the surrounding ‘non-gu’. In other words, extensional boundaries delimit types, and object boundaries delimit tokens.

Both kinds of boundaries can be *conventional* or *intrinsic*. Conventional boundaries are more or less arbitrary boundaries that are ‘drawn’ in areas of gradual rather than discrete difference (between noumenal causes) in the social process of concept formation. Non-conventional or intrinsic boundaries, on the other hand, match ‘real’, intrinsic ‘joints’ in noumenal reality and are therefore not created, but discovered or confirmed. In meta-ontology a similar distinction is often phrased in terms of the ‘cookie-cutter’ metaphor (concepts cut up noumenal reality into objects and categories in the way cookie-cutters cut up amorphous dough) versus ‘cutting nature at its joints’. Metaphysical dualism assumes that (at least a significantly large share of) boundaries are conventional; non-dualism assumes that they are intrinsic.

Boundaries of types and tokens do not play a role in Davidson’s philosophy because he implicitly assumed intrinsic boundaries, which – together with the equally implicit assumption of positive classification – became self-confirming in his philosophical system. Conventional boundaries are the result of conceptual construction, and because Davidson assumed that conceptual construction can only take sense data as its source material, with the rejection of sense data Davidson rejected conceptual construction (see also sections 2 and 3). Among the many different names and metaphors used for the notion of ‘conceptual construction’, Davidson (1974) focused on the rather ambiguous ‘organization’ (aside from ‘fitting’, which is mostly irrelevant in the present context), but interpreted it as *re-organization*

– concepts re-organize what is already (otherwise) (conceptually) organized. Consequently, he failed to make sense of the notion: “how could something count as a language that only organizes experiences (...). Surely knives and forks, railroads and mountains, cabbages and kingdoms also need organizing” (p. 193). Underlying Davidson’s misunderstanding is the aforementioned implicit (prior) assumption of intrinsic extensional and object boundaries – ‘things’ are already ‘organized’ (that is: intrinsically bounded and classified), and therefore, further ‘organization’ can only be re-organization (or re-classification). However, if ‘things are already organized’, and thus non-constructed, then all that is left for triangulation is the assignment of names to things, and triangulation as the necessary link between words and things circularly confirms their ‘thingness’ (i.e. their intrinsic boundaries). In other words, if ‘defs’ are grouped together in a triangulatory process based on the unconstructed similarity between the elements of {d,e,f} (hence, by positive classification), then there really are (intrinsically bounded, noumenal) ‘defs’. *Apoha* as negative classification avoids this conclusion without ending up at the other extreme – according to Dharmakīrti, at least some, but not necessarily all extensional and object boundaries are purely conventional (*saṃketa*).

There seems, moreover, no *prima facie* reason for Davidson to object to the *apoha*-ic extension (or insertion) suggested in the previous section – *apoha*-ic construction does not assume sense data (Dharmakīrti rejected that notion; see section 2), which is Davidson’s ground for objection to conceptual construction. Rather in the contrary, the above interpretation of the *apoha*-ic notion ‘not non-...’ not only coheres with Davidson’s holism and rejection of meanings (universals; see sections 3 and 4), but implies those, and in that way strengthens the ties between triangulation and other core elements of Davidson’s philosophical system (holism/coherentism particularly).

Let us return to the question that opened this paper: *If two communicating beings are both aware of a certain black queen chess piece as evidenced by their reference(s) to that black queen chess piece (in their communication), does that imply that there ‘really’ is (something that is) that black queen chess piece?* The two communicating beings each ‘have’ a type (concept) ‘black queen chess piece’, such that these types overlap and the shared token is a token of that type-overlap. The shared-ness of that token implies that the indeterminate appearance (‘sensory experience’ or *pratibhāsa*) classified as a ‘black queen chess piece’ is (ultimately) noumenally caused. Whether that implies that there ‘really’ is (something that is) that black queen chess piece depends on the nature of the boundaries of type(s) and token(s), however. The questioned implication can be split up in accordance with the distinction between those two kinds of boundaries: (1) *is there ‘really’ (something that is) that*, or: is there ‘really’ some singular and discrete noumenal ‘thing’ that corresponds or coincides with that (singular and discrete) black queen chess piece; and (2) *is that something a black queen chess piece* (or at least, can that something be meaningfully be considered to be a black queen chess piece)? The first sub-question concerns the nature of object (token) boundaries; the second of extensional (type) boundaries.

An intrinsic object boundary implies that there is a singular and discrete noumenal ‘thing’, ‘object’ or ‘entity’ (if such terms apply to the noumenal) causing and coinciding with the appearance that is classified as a black queen chess piece. A conventional object boundary, on the other hand, does not have such an implication – there may be a singular and discrete noumenal cause, but it may also be the case that more or less arbitrary boundaries are drawn in a ‘landscape’ of non-discrete and heterogeneous noumenal cause(s) (as in the case of the ‘gu’ example in section 4). Consequently, the answers to the first sub-question (is there ‘really’ some singular and discrete noumenal ‘thing’ that corresponds or coincides with that (singular and discrete) black queen chess piece?) are “yes” if one – like Davidson – assumes the intrinsic object boundaries that come with ‘non-constructivism’, and “no, *not necessarily*” if one – like Dharmakīrti – assumes that at least some object boundaries are conventional (and that this may be a case of such conventional boundaries).

The second sub-question concerns extensional boundaries. An intrinsic extensional boundary means that for each of the tokens  $x_1, x_2, \dots, x_i$  of a certain type X there is a noumenal cause  $nc_{x_i}$ , such that these noumenal causes  $nc_{x_1}, nc_{x_2}, \dots, nc_{x_i}$  are identical, or at least very similar, to each other in the relevant (x-token-causing) respect, and (significantly) different (in the same respect) from noumenal causes of phenomena that are not tokens of X. In other words, the clear and unambiguous phenomenal boundary between X and non-X coincides with the equally clear and unambiguous noumenal boundary that causes it. And if that is the case, and there are only innocent intermediaries in between the phenomena and their noumenal causes (see section 2), then there seems little reason to not identify the noumenal causes of black queen chess pieces *as* black queen chess pieces – the object of a belief is the cause of that belief (Davidson 1983, see the quote in the introduction).

A conventional extensional boundary, on the other hand, denies the necessary existence of a noumenal class boundary coinciding with the phenomenal boundary and only grants that the noumenal causes of the appearances that in their (linguistic, situational, etc.) contexts are phenomenalized as tokens x of a certain type X are insufficiently different to be classified differently (are not non-X; see section 4). There is a noumenal basis for the classification, but boundaries are drawn by convention, are context dependent, and (potentially) conceal real differences. Hence, if there is a class of noumenal causes of tokens x of type X, than that class ‘exists’ only by virtue of the phenomenal distinction between X and non-X, and because the noumenal was defined above (see section 2) as non-phenomenal, as independent from our (phenomenal) experience, there is no purely noumenal (-ly determined) class corresponding with (phenomenal) X.

Consequently, the answers to the second question (can the cause of the phenomenal black queen chess piece be meaningfully considered to be a black queen chess piece) are “yes” if one – like Davidson – assumes the intrinsic extensional boundaries associated with positive classification, and “no” if one – like Dharmakīrti – assumes that extensional boundaries are conventional. Combining the answers to the two sub-questions results in two answers to the original question: *Yes, the shared experience of a black queen chess piece implies there really is a black queen chess*

*piece. Or: No, that shared experience merely implies that it is noumenally caused, but its specific phenomenal (or conceptual) effect is or may be largely due to (shared) convention.*

## 6. “A SHARED, AND LARGELY TRUE, VIEW OF THE WORLD”

Either by means of *apoha* or triangulation, words and phenomena are grounded in the noumenal world through a conjunction of a number of conditions – there must be at least two agents that have the ability to communicate, and that are perceiving the same ‘things’ and the same similarities and differences between those ‘things’, and at least one of those agents uses similar signs in the presence of (or to refer to) perceived to be similar objects. Where *apoha* and triangulation fundamentally differ is in the nature of classification of (relevant) experiences (of ‘things’) – while *apoha* as exclusion is negative and thus constructive, Davidson implicitly assumes a positive, non-constructive form of classification. Consequently, ‘def’ is not defined by difference from ‘non-def’, but by similarity between the things labeled as ‘def’, which suggests perceiving them as instantiations of ‘def’, *as defs*. In other words, contrary to *apoha*, (positive) classification based on similarity invites (but not justifies) the idea that having a concept ‘def’ implies that there are *defs*, and therefore, that language gives us more or less direct access to the (real) world. And it is exactly this illegitimate conclusion that Dignāga and Dharmakīrti wanted to avoid (*e.g.* Matilal 1971).

On the other hand, having a concept of ‘def’ does imply that there are shared indeterminate appearances (‘sensory experience’ or *pratibhāsa*) in which that concept is grounded, and the ultimate cause of such *shared* indeterminate appearances can only be noumenal (the distal stimulus). Furthermore, the rejection of a noumenal category corresponding with (phenomenal) ‘def’ because of the non-identity of its supposed members implies that we are or can become aware of that non-identity. And if that is the case, we can triangulate and conceptualize the difference(s). Perhaps every ‘thing’ that is classified as (not-non-) ‘def’ is uniquely different, and every ‘thing’ constructed as ‘gu’ is merely a conventional construction, and therefore, there *really* are no *defs* and *gus*, but we can be (or become) aware of those differences, conventions and constructions and describe those. Hence, conceptual categories are deceptive or illusory only to the extent of our (contingent) inability or unwillingness to ‘see’ beyond (ordinary) words. Aside from that contingency (or unwillingness), phenomenal perception can only be subjective, deceptive, or illusory in the minimal sense regarded ‘mere empirical accident without philosophical significance’ by Davidson (see section 2).

In the previous section it was shown that his rejection of conceptual construction and implicit assumption of positive classification would lead Davidson to answer “yes” to the black chess queen question. That answer, however, does not depend thereon – an *apoha*-enriched Davidson would still answer “yes”. Davidson’s key point is that “successful communication proves the existence of a shared, and largely true, view of the world” (1977, 201), that shared phenomena are necessarily

noumenally caused (or that a shared stimulus is a distal stimulus, in more Davidsonian terminology), and that, given the innocence of causal (rather than epistemic) intermediaries, phenomena are non-deceptive (or only ‘deceptive’ in a very limited sense) and that we can in principle become aware of the ‘real nature’ of things. The abandonment of positive classification results in the recognition of the difference of (identically named) ‘things’, but the noumenal causation of those differences implies that those can be triangulated and conceptualized. The black chess queen piece may be a phenomenal construction, and there may thus not strictly speaking be a *noumenal* black chess queen, but the shared phenomenon’s cause does (noumenally) really have certain (triangulable) properties that make us perceive it as such (in the given context). That is enough to answer “yes”.

Davidson and Dharmakīrti largely shared the idea that words or concepts are (ultimately) noumenally grounded conventions, but differed in focus and attributed implication. While for Davidson the noumenal grounding of words (and thought) implied that they somehow stand for noumenally real things (ignoring the intricacies of Davidson’s thought about that relationship), thus downplaying their conventionality,<sup>17</sup> it is that conventionality which Dharmakīrti stressed, and which for him implied that conceptual categories are (noumenally) unreal. The difference seems largely ideological – Davidson wanted to prove ‘unmediated touch’ with noumenal objects as much as it was an indubitable premise for Dharmakīrti that the phenomenal or conventional world is an illusion. This ‘ideological difference’ reveals a difference in purpose (of the argument), and a difference between the questions Dharmakīrti and Davidson intended to answer. Because of that difference, for Davidson the question about the black queen chess piece would be a question about necessary noumenal causes, about subjectivity and about the possibility of deception by the senses; for Dharmakīrti it would be a question about the nature of things independent from our experience. Hence, the different answers: “*no*, the black queen chess piece is not (really) a black queen chess piece independent of our experience, but *yes*, there is a noumenally real cause of our shared experience of that black queen chess piece, and that experience is no deception”. These answers, however, are complementary rather than contradictory.

These answers are also somewhat unsatisfactory because they remain two separate answers. By integrating *apoha* and triangulation, section 4 transcended the apparent contradiction between Davidson’s argument that our (phenomenal) beliefs about the (noumenal) world cannot be massively wrong, and Dharmakīrti’s belief in

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<sup>17</sup> That concepts are conventional, as argued here, does not imply that such – or other – conventions are necessary for communication, which Davidson rejected in (1982c) and (1986) (and which also more or less follows from the theory of triangulation itself). Concepts are conventions in the sense that they are created in a social process involving shared objects of beliefs (the real ‘things’ referred to); they are conventions between the participants *in triangulation* (hence, involving those shared objects). Davidson’s critique of conventions in (1982c) and (1986) rejects the idea that language and communication necessarily involve more or less fixed conventions between all speakers of a language, that social conventions are constitutive of meaning. It is a rejection of *social* externalism about mental content (see also 1990a) in favor of an externalism that is both social and physical, *i.e.* triangulation.



the (ultimate) illusoriness of the phenomenal world. The key point of that integration is that our grounding of words and phenomena in the (noumenal) world may be imperfect in the sense that words (may) conceal real differences, but that a shared noumenal world implies that those differences can be triangulated and conceptualized, and therefore, that conceptual categories are deceptive or illusory only to the extent of our (contingent) inability or unwillingness to ‘see’ beyond (ordinary) words.

This metaphor of ‘seeing beyond words’ is a central theme in many currents of Chinese (and Japanese) Buddhist philosophy (most famously, Chán/Zen), which mostly rejected metaphysical dualism (but not the epistemological dualism at the core of Buddhist thought). Such ‘seeing beyond words’ is often interpreted as conscious, non-conceptual perception (or experience), which was rejected in section 2, but whether this interpretation is correct is not the issue here. Above, the bracketed word ‘ordinary’ was added: ‘seeing beyond (ordinary) words’. The point here (and possibly in (some) Chinese/Japanese Buddhist philosophy as well) is not the impossible goal of conscious, non-conceptual experience, but a critical examination of the categories given in our (ordinary) language. ‘Ordinary’ is again bracketed here, because the construction of arbitrary conventional boundaries (as in both examples in section 4) is not necessarily limited to ordinary concepts. However, such ‘critical examination’ necessarily takes place *in* language – determination of non-identity of the members of a conceptual class requires triangulation and conceptualization or description. Hence, ‘seeing beyond (ordinary) words’ *extends* rather than rejects language, and it is still ‘seeing through words’, but ‘seeing through’ in *both* senses of ‘through’.

‘Seeing beyond (ordinary) words’ denotes a ‘middle path’ between two conflicting dogmas: the illusoriness of conventional (phenomenal) reality (and the associated rejection of the categories of (ordinary) language as noumenally true) in Buddhist philosophy, and the authority of ordinary language in analytic philosophy; between the Buddhist wholesale rejection of language as a guide to the (noumenally) real world, and the common ‘analytic’ belief in ordinary language as truly and objectively representing reality.<sup>18</sup> (Ordinary) language is to some extent deceptive, but only to *some* extent, and the necessary (social) grounding of words in the real world through *apoha* or triangulation also implies the possibility of uncovering ‘deception’: of uncovering the conventional nature of (at least some) conceptual (class) boundaries and their real grounds.<sup>19</sup>

The *apoha*-triangulation integration suggested in this paper (see sections 4 and 5) neither guarantees the identity of phenomena and noumena as assumed in metaphysical non-dualism, nor implies the dualist conception of the phenomenal -

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<sup>18</sup> *Most* of Buddhist philosophy involved the claim that phenomenal (conventional) reality is illusory, but not all. And *most* of analytic philosophy beliefs in the authority of ordinary language, not all. Hence, these two ‘dogma’s’ are not universal.

<sup>19</sup> This leaves metaphysics with the question of how to determine what is conventional/constructed, and what is (noumenally) real. If at least some, but not (necessarily) all, boundaries are conventional, then how can one know which boundaries are intrinsic and which are conventional, or which phenomena are constructed and which coincide with discrete (intrinsically bounded) noumena, hence ‘are real’?

noumenal divide as an unbridgeable chasm, but rather suggests another ‘middle path’ – a middle path between dualism and non-dualism. There is a gap between the noumenal and the phenomenal, but it is not an unbridgeable gap. Communication (triangulation) continuously creates bridges, but also enables us to *build* further bridges, and that possibility of building bridges means that the gap, rather than irrelevant because it is (believed to be) either non-existent or too wide, is an invitation for further inquiry.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This paper resulted from a research project supported by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS). I would like to thank the three anonymous referees of *Comparative Philosophy* for their insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

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## HOW TO AVOID SOLIPSISM WHILE REMAINING AN IDEALIST: LESSONS FROM BERKELEY AND DHARMAKĪRTI

JEREMY E. HENKEL

**ABSTRACT:** *This essay examines the strategies that Berkeley and Dharmakīrti utilize to deny that idealism entails solipsism. Beginning from similar arguments for the non-existence of matter, the two philosophers employ markedly different strategies for establishing the existence of other minds. This difference stems from their responses to the problem of intersubjective agreement. While Berkeley's reliance on his Cartesian inheritance does allow him to account for intersubjective agreement without descending into solipsism, it nevertheless prevents him from establishing the existence of other finite minds. I argue that Dharmakīrti, in accounting for intersubjective agreement causally, is able to avoid Berkeley's shortcoming. I conclude by considering a challenge to Dharmakīrti's use of inference that Ratnakīrti, a Buddhist successor of Dharmakīrti, advances in his "Disproof of the Existence of Other Minds" and briefly exploring a possible response that someone who wants to advocate an idealist position could give.*

**Keywords:** *Berkeley, Dharmakīrti, Ratnakīrti, idealism, solipsism, philosophy of mind*

### 1. INTRODUCTION: IDEALISM AND SOLIPSISM

Ever since Descartes (at least) in the West, and for far longer in India, philosophers have entertained the possibility that the whole world is illusory, our experience of an external world merely the result of delusion. As fun as it can be to entertain this notion in films and introductory philosophy classes, however, and despite a plethora of sophisticated defenses of it in Western and Eastern philosophical traditions alike, idealism is a difficult position to genuinely and consistently subscribe to. Aside from simply being counterintuitive, one of the primary challenges to idealism is the apparent implication from idealism to solipsism. Descartes, of course, saw this. The whole point of continuing beyond the Second Meditation is to avoid solipsism:

If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot

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be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. *But if no such idea is to be found in me, I shall have no argument to convince me of the existence of anything apart from myself.* (Descartes (1641/1984), p. 29; emphasis added)

I take it for granted, as did Descartes, that solipsism is an unacceptable philosophical position. In fact, if Wittgenstein's argument against private languages is correct, then solipsism is not just objectionable but actually incoherent. The Private Language Argument indicates that, if I were alone in the universe, language would be impossible and I would thus be unable to even formulate the question of whether I were alone in the universe.

If solipsism is untenable, then if it can be established that idealism leads to solipsism, it follows that idealism, too, is untenable. There are at least two reasons to believe that idealism entails solipsism. First is the problem of intersubjective agreement. If everything is mind, and all anyone can perceive is his or her own ideas, then how do you and I come to agree not only that, say, there is a tree in front of us, but even in our descriptions of that tree? A realist will press this issue because solipsism seems to be the only recourse for the idealist to respond to the problem of intersubjective agreement: "we" agree because what I take to be "you" is just another idea in my mind.

The second reason to believe that idealism entails solipsism involves the principle of parsimony. Arguments in favor of idealism typically rely on the premise that all of our experience can be explained—and indeed explained better—without reference to or reliance on an external world, and on the principle that whatever is found unnecessary in accounting for our experience ought not be posited to exist. But the principle of parsimony, in doing away with material substance, seems to be no less ruthless with other minds. My experience of the so-called external world seems to be the only basis for my belief in the existence of anything beyond myself and my perceptions. So if I can be made to doubt the existence of the physical body I see directly in front of me, then how much more dubious must be the notion of an unperceived mind that motivates that non-existent body? If I have no reason to believe in the independent existence of those objects that I perceive to lie outside my body—indeed, no reason to believe even in the existence of my body—then I have no grounds on which to justify a belief in the existence of minds, of which I have even less alleged experience. If all I can know are the modifications of my own mind, then just as the principle of parsimony demands that we eliminate material substance from our ontology once we have shown it to be unnecessary, so too does it demand that I eliminate any notion of other mind from my own ontology: one stream of subjective consciousness is enough to explain all experienced phenomena—including those that themselves are allegedly *experiencing* phenomena.

Neither of these concerns relies on a particular (Western or non-Western) way of framing the issue. Given the abundance of philosophers who have advocated idealism, we should expect to find that such philosophers have challenged either the view that solipsism is problematic or the view that idealism entails solipsism. The

majority, perhaps not surprisingly, have opted for the latter. In the remainder of this essay, I will examine how Berkeley, the most prominent of early-modern idealists, and Dharmakīrti, who among Yogācārins put forward the most detailed argument for the existence of other minds, attempt to establish the co-possibility of idealism and knowledge of other minds. Beginning from quite similar arguments for the non-existence of matter, the two philosophers employ rather different strategies for establishing the existence of other minds. This difference stems, among other things, from their responses to the problem of intersubjective agreement. Berkeley's reliance on his Cartesian inheritance allows him to account for intersubjective agreement without descending into solipsism, but it prevents him from establishing the existence of other finite minds. Dharmakīrti, in accounting for intersubjective agreement causally, is able to avoid Berkeley's limitation. But, as we will see in the conclusion of this essay, a new objection awaits Dharmakīrti. And this objection, coming as it does from a fellow idealist, proves to be much less easily dispatched. This final objection, I contend, can be useful in pointing out to idealists—Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike—an important direction to take the discussion in order to finally put down for good the solipsism objection.

## 2. BERKELEY AND OTHER MINDS

In *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* Berkeley argues from the empiricist premise that ideas are the only possible objects of knowledge to the conclusion that there exists no material world. His argument for idealism involves three steps. The first step is to establish that a material world, if any such world were to exist, is not a possible object of knowledge. It is the nature of ideas, according to Berkeley, to be perceived. As such, they are inert, wholly passive. But the idea of a material world is the idea of a world of objects that are capable of acting as causes—as causes of our ideas of those objects, at the very least. This common-sense conception of the world is one in which our ideas resemble the objects that cause them. But common sense, according to Berkeley, is greatly mistaken, for “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (1710/1998a, p. 105). It is as incoherent to claim that an idea can resemble a material object as it is to claim that a smell can resemble a shape—they are wholly incommensurate sorts of things. If all we can know are ideas, and if ideas cannot be of a material world, then there can be no knowledge of a material world.

The second step in Berkeley's argument for idealism involves establishing that a material world is not necessary in order to explain our seeming experience of one. He uses the classic example of “dreams, frenzies, and the like” as evidence that, while our ideas can only be caused by some sort of substance, it need not be material substance: “[I]t is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them” (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, p. 109).

The Crux of Berkeley's argument for idealism, though, is the third step, wherein he seeks to establish that a material world is not only unnecessary but indeed incoherent. He challenges the reader:

if you can but conceive it possible for one extended movable substance, or in general, for any one idea or anything like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause...I shall grant you its existence, though you cannot either give me any reason why you believe it exists, or assign any use to it when it is supposed to exist. (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, p. 110)

He explains in the next paragraph why such a challenge cannot possibly be met: meeting it would entail thinking of an object unthought-of, or conceiving of an object unconceived-of—“which is a manifest repugnancy. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas” (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, p. 111). The incoherence of the concept of material substance being thus established, Berkeley concludes that the only rational option is to adopt idealism as our standpoint: “it remains therefore that the cause of ideas is an incorporeal active substance or spirit” (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, p. 112).

This is the point in Berkeley’s argument at which the spectre of solipsism appears. The very arguments that he used to demonstrate that one can have no grounds for belief in a physical world seem also to imply that one can have no grounds for belief in any spirit—or mind—other than one’s own. Berkeley argues that the notion of spirit comes from direct intuition of one’s own status as experiencer. In his *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* Berkeley explains how it is that we can be aware of the existence of spirit despite the impossibility of a corresponding idea. Speaking in the voice of Philonous, in the Third Dialogue he makes the point that perception—which gives rise to ideas—is just one of the three permissible grounds for belief (Berkeley, 1713/1998a, pp. 115-117). We can defensibly believe in something of which we have no idea if we have a direct intuition of that thing or if the existence of that thing is a necessary presupposition for or consequence of something that we do know (that is, if it can be directly experienced or logically inferred from direct experience). Spirit is thus rendered unproblematic, as every idea we experience carries with it a direct intuition of the spirit that is the experiencer of that idea. Awareness of one’s own mind, coming as it does through direct intuition, cannot be called knowledge because it does not lead to an idea of mind; it does, however, lead to what Berkeley calls a *notion* of mind.<sup>1</sup> But, since we do not have direct intuition of other spirits, belief in the existence of other minds seems to be no more justified than belief in the physical world. Berkeley’s solution to this problem is that belief in other minds can be justified through inference.

In the beginning of the *Treatise* Berkeley states that ideas can arise through sense-experience, the passions, or imagination (including memory) (1710/1998a, p. 103). His inference to the existence of other minds begins from the recognition that our experiences of the different sorts of ideas are themselves qualitatively different.

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<sup>1</sup> Berkeley’s insistence that awareness of one’s own mind is not knowledge is interestingly similar to Wittgenstein’s dictum in the *Philosophical Investigations* (§246) that knowledge of one’s own pain makes no sense—that such a claim betrays a failure to understand what we normally mean in our use of the word ‘knowledge’. ‘Knowledge’ makes sense only within the context of the possibility for error.



Whereas the ideas of memory and imagination that I experience are wholly subject to my will, my sense-experiences are not similarly compliant:

But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or not, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them. (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, 113)

My experience of ideas that do not find their cause in my mind is not, for Berkeley, a refutation of the thesis that all ideas have their origin in mind (and so a rejection of idealism); rather, it is a confirmation that mine is not the only mind. While I have no direct intuition of others' minds, I do have sense-experience of actions that reveal the workings of a mind, which themselves form the basis of a valid inference to the existence of a mind as the volition behind the action. My further recognition that these volitional actions are not subject to my own will reveals to me the existence of a will other than my own. I thus come by my notion of other mind in addition to my notion of my own mind.<sup>2</sup> As Anita Avramides points out, despite many commentators' arguments to the contrary, this is *not* an argument by analogy *a la* Mill. Rather, this is a causal argument, taking the following form:

- P1: All ideas are caused by some mind.
- P2: I experience ideas that are independent of my will.
- P3: Ideas that are independent of my will must be caused by a mind other than my own.
- C1: Therefore, a mind other than my own exists.

Having thus explained the difference between our different sorts of ideas, Berkeley is in a position to address the realist's concern regarding intersubjective agreement. Given the passivity of perception—as opposed to the activity of imagination—it makes sense that other people too will find their ideas of sense to be independent of their will. Ideas of sense thus being imposed on our experience, it is not surprising that different people's reports of sense-experience agree with one another in a way that their reports of those mental states that are subject to an individual's will do not. But given the conclusion, already established by this point, that all ideas are caused by mind, Berkeley must give an account of the sort of mind

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Also what he says in paragraph 145 (1710/1998a, p. 157). Berkeley is subject to a biting criticism here: what if, in considering my ideas to be unchosen by my will, I have deceived myself? The paradigm case of this is, of course, dreams, but one could argue that addicts deceive themselves when they claim that their cravings come unbidden. It is interesting to note that, though he twice mentions dreams (paragraphs 18 and 42) in support of his idealist thesis, Berkeley does not seem to have considered the possibility that dreams could pose a counterexample, calling into question the validity of this inference. I will more fully examine the dream objection below, in the context of Dharmakīrti's response to it.

that would be necessary to explain the seemingly independent existence of sense-ideas. Clearly, the mind that is the source of such ideas must be qualitatively different from a human mind. The ideas of imagination that people experience

are faint, weak, and unsteady in respect of others they perceive by sense, which being impressed upon them according to certain rules or laws of nature, speak themselves the effects of a mind more powerful and wise than human spirits. (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, p. 115)

For Berkeley, then, intersubjective agreement and the stability of an individual's sense-ideas are intertwined—and neither presents a difficulty that the idealist cannot respond to. Our sense-ideas are stable and a matter of intersubjective agreement because our ideas of sense are caused by God: an infinite mind that keeps everything in existence by being a perpetual perceiver.

To summarize: for Berkeley, intersubjective agreement blocks the inference from idealism to solipsism, rather than demanding it. Intersubjective agreement is a result of our sense ideas being more stable than our imagination-based ideas, and this itself is a result of the existence of a qualitatively different mind. The principle of parsimony thus does not demand an inference from idealism to solipsism. Once it has done away with the material world, it in fact demands the existence of another mind to explain our experiences: the mind of God.

At this point Berkeley is subject to a critical objection: insofar as he succeeds at proving the existence of God, he seems to eliminate any reason for believing in other finite minds. With God as a sufficient cause of all my ideas, I no longer find myself in a position to infer distinct individual minds motivating the representations I have of my spouse and my child—both are merely aspects of God's universal mind.<sup>3</sup> If this objection succeeds, then Berkeley may have avoided solipsism, but with the result of existing alone in the universe with God. Such a prospect is little, if at all, more appealing than solipsism.

Berkeley's reply to this objection calls to mind Descartes. It is the uniformity of experience, he points out, that makes the benefit—and even the maintenance—of life possible: “And without this we should be eternally at a loss: we could not know how to act anything that might procure us the least pleasure, or remove the least pain of sense” (Berkeley, 1710/1998a, p. 113). The intra- and interpersonal regularity of sense-ideas, which are not subject to one's own will, Berkeley takes to be a mark of the benevolence of the will that is their author. And once we can be confident in the existence of a benevolent God, we have no reason to assume that our belief in other minds is a result of deception.

But it is not at all clear that this response does succeed. Berkeley is correct that the regularity of experience is a necessary condition for the maintenance of life, but from this we cannot infer a benevolent God at all: all Berkeley is justified in inferring from the stability of our sense-ideas is a mind that wants us to have experience that is

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<sup>3</sup> This objection is posed by Jonathan Bennett. Avramides (2001, p. 125-130) makes considerable use of it in her explication of Berkeley, and I am following her analysis.

coherently enough ordered to be called *experience* at all. But since the author of our sense-ideas could well have the maximization of pain and misery as a goal, this could be a mark of malevolence just as easily as it could be of benevolence. All we need to do to see the truth of this is to consider the case of torture. On the assumption that one's purpose is to maximize the pain and suffering of another, the primary objective must be to keep that person alive and lucid enough to experience suffering. And cultivating in that person a belief in the existence of loved ones, who themselves can seem to suffer or cause suffering in the subject through various other means, is certainly a powerful tool for increasing the experience of suffering.

Berkeley's argument for the existence of other finite minds hinges on the ability to infer God's benevolence from the orderliness of one's experience. This inference fails. Thus Berkeley seems to be unwittingly committed, if not to solipsism, then to the belief that in addition to oneself only God exists. His contention (1710/1998a, p. 158) that we have even greater ground for belief in God than in the existence of other finite minds is thus true, but in a way that he never intended.

The medieval Buddhist philosopher Dharmakīrti is as concerned as Berkeley is to show that idealism does not entail solipsism. Dharmakīrti's response to the problem of intersubjective agreement differs markedly from Berkeley's, however; this difference saves him from the concerns that plague Berkeley's account. Let us turn now to Dharmakīrti's arguments.

### 3. DHARMAKIRTI AND OTHER STREAMS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

As a member of the Yogācāra school of Buddhism, Dharmakīrti inherits arguments for idealism that are similar to the arguments we have already seen from Berkeley. Vasubandhu's *Twenty Verses (Vimśatikā)*, for instance, makes use of dreams and cases of perceptual error (eye-diseases, illusions) to show that all our experiences can be explained without reference to physical causes. Among Dharmakīrti's unique contributions is the argument from constant co-cognition (*sahopalambhaniyama*), which anticipates by more than a millenium Berkeley's argument for idealism. In the *Pramānavārttika* Dharmakīrti points out that, for any two objects, if they are distinct then they will be available in isolation from one another. But blue, for instance, is never found in isolation from awareness of blue. It follows, then, that blue and awareness of blue are non-distinct. Since the same deduction can be made with regard to any object or property—a pot is never found distinct from awareness of the pot, heat is never found distinct from awareness of heat, etc.—we are left to conclude that the world consists in nothing more than various states of awareness. Anything that I take to be an external object is nothing more than my mental state.

Dharmakīrti's argument for idealism, then, is quite similar to Berkeley's argument for the incoherence of extended matter. But despite the similarity in starting points, Dharmakīrti's idealism takes on a significantly different feel from Berkeley's. In his *Proof of the Existence of Other Streams of Consciousness (Santānāntarasiddhi; hereafter Proof)*, Dharmakīrti provides what is perhaps still the most extensive argument that idealism does not imply solipsism that has yet been advanced. He

argues for an inference to the existence of other streams of consciousness<sup>4</sup> that is similar to what Berkeley advocates, but he stops short of concluding the existence of God. Instead he provides a causal account of intersubjective agreement that is unlike anything we find in Berkeley. In this section I will argue that this move saves Dharmakīrti from Berkeley's fate and thus, if his inference to other streams of consciousness works, then Dharmakīrti shows idealism not to lead to solipsism in a more tenable way than does Berkeley.

Much of Dharmakīrti's argument amounts to demonstrating that knowledge of other streams of consciousness is no more problematic for the idealist than for the realist because they use the same method. The realist will agree with the idealist that we have no direct perception (*pratyakṣa*) of others' mental states, and thus that any knowledge we can have must come by means of inference (*anumāna*). The realist, believing that extended objects exist in an external world, infers the existence of the mental from physical evidence. The only difference from this account for the idealist is that idealists understand the evidence to be a mental representation of a physical act, rather than the physical act itself. But, Dharmakīrti points out, this does not indicate a difference at all, because the realist makes *precisely* the same inference: idealists and realists alike infer the existence of other minds from mental representations of actions, not from actions themselves. To prove this, he asks whether we come to cognize another's consciousness from the mere existence of action, or only from the actual perception of that action. Clearly the mere existence is not sufficient, otherwise everyone would have knowledge of all other consciousnesses. Thus the inference is not from the action, but from one's perception—that is, mental representation—of actions and speech. We only know that our mental representations are caused by another consciousness; we can say nothing about acts in themselves (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verses 40-47).

For Dharmakīrti, then, idealism does not entail solipsism any more than realism entails solipsism: both the idealist and the realist infer the existence of other streams of consciousness from the experience of volitional actions that do not originate within one's own stream of consciousness. It remains to establish exactly how, according to Dharmakīrti, that inference proceeds. He says that all volitional actions—such as speech and other movements that reveal intentionality—have their origin in consciousness. Those volitional actions that I experience subjectively as originating from within provide a confirmation of this: my actions reveal my intentions, and my lack of action reveals a corresponding lack of intention. The subjectively-experienced actions also provide an example of how volitional actions manifest, which helps me to recognize those volitional actions that I experience objectively (that is, as

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<sup>4</sup> Being a Buddhist, Dharmakīrti of course does not believe in the existence of "minds" *per se*. In denying the existence of the *ātman*, the Buddhist denies that there is an irreducible subject of experience that has privileged epistemic status—something that Berkeley, due to his Cartesian inheritance, takes for granted. Nevertheless, what Berkeley wants to call "*mind, spirit, soul, or my self*" the Buddhist will call a "*santāna*" or "stream of consciousness", thereby acknowledging the perceived unity of an individual life while denying any unchanging substance that underlies this perceived unity.

originating from without) as volitional, despite the phenomenological difference in how they are experienced.

The difference between subjectively and objectively experienced volitional actions amounts to a difference between experience and non-experience of the causally efficacious mental states that lead to the action. Objectively experienced volitional actions are those that I cannot find the cause of within my own stream of consciousness. Knowing that if they had their cause within me I would be aware of it, I conclude that such actions have their cause outside my own consciousness. Having established that all volitional actions are similar in having their origin in consciousness, and that objectively-experienced volitional actions differ from subjectively-experienced ones by virtue of not having their origin in *my* consciousness, the conclusion follows that objectively-experienced volitional actions have their origin in *another* consciousness—which means, of course, that another consciousness exists. Thus, Dharmakīrti concludes, the idealist is able to infer the existence of other streams of consciousness: “Between the concept of mind in general and that of its external manifestations in movements and speech, there is a causal relation, and on the basis of the effect, we shall cognize the cause” (1969, Verse 48).

Dharmakīrti’s argument for the existence of other streams of consciousness, then, takes the following form:

- P4: I experience actions of a certain type.<sup>5</sup>
- P5: Actions of this certain type have their cause in consciousness.
- P6: These actions do not have their cause in my consciousness.
- C2: Therefore, these actions have their cause in another consciousness.
- C3: Therefore, consciousnesses other than mine exist.

Like Berkeley, Dharmakīrti argues that awareness of other minds can be justified through logical implication. However, Dharmakīrti would not agree with Berkeley that the differences between our sense-ideas and our other ideas—which differences explain the phenomenon of intersubjective agreement—give proof of a qualitatively different sort of consciousness as their cause. Instead, Dharmakīrti shows that intersubjective agreement can be explained causally even among a community of finite minds. People’s reports of the “external world” agree because they have similar causal histories and similar perceptual mechanisms. In any circumstance, given (nearly) identical causes, one would expect (nearly) identical effects. So if the causal explanation for my perception of the tree is the same as that for your perception of the tree, then it should come as no surprise that our experiences of that tree are themselves similar. And this is true for the realist just as much as for the idealist. Someone in Istanbul and someone in Tokyo cannot directly experience the same

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<sup>5</sup> I use the word ‘type’ here advisedly, as Dharmakīrti’s denial that *sāmānyalakṣaṇas* are ultimately real (because not causally efficacious) precludes him ascribing any substantial reality to types. But his *apoha* theory does, I take it, provide him with the tools necessary to make sense of a differentiation between actions that reveal volition and those that do not. (I thank the anonymous reviewer of this journal for encouraging me to be clearer on this point.)

tree—at least, not at the same time—and this because of their distinct causal histories, which have led them to be in vastly different locations. However, a person and a bat, if they were somehow able to communicate with one another, would be highly unlikely to agree in their descriptions of a tree they were both in proximity of because of the differences between each's perceptual apparatus. Indeed, it does not seem absurd here to suggest that they may not be experiencing the *same* tree at all.

Dharmakīrti insists that we need not posit the existence of the object experienced in order to account for intersubjective agreement. To make his point, he uses the example of two people with the same eye condition, both of whom think they see two moons. Their agreement in experience is not caused by an object that corresponds to and causes their experience, but by the agreement of the causal factors in their perception. This illustrates that there need be no external object causing the experiences in order for the experiencers to agree in their reports of their individual experiences (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verse 65). By explaining intersubjective agreement without appeal to a consciousness that is qualitatively different from human consciousness, Dharmakīrti avoids the conclusion that Berkeley could not: that one is alone in the universe with God.

An important objection can be raised against Dharmakīrti here, however. The example he uses, it seems, does not succeed, because even here the erroneous perception is caused not just by the faulty eyes, but also by the materially existent moon. The only proper analogy we have to what experience would be like without external objects to regulate it, the objection continues, is our experience of dreams. But in dreams there is no agreement between experiencers. One's dream experiences are one's own; within the dream there is no other experiencer, and once outside the dream one finds that nobody else's experience agrees with the experience one had within that dream. This objection seems to strike right to the heart of Dharmakīrti's argument, not just regarding intersubjective agreement but regarding the inference to other streams of consciousness at all: for if all our waking experience is akin to our dream experiences, then inferring the existence of other consciousness from the appearance of volitional action seems highly dubious. In dreams I frequently experience the representations of volitional actions that seem to have their source outside me. But subsequent waking experience informs me that my original assessment was incorrect, that those experiences were the result of no consciousness other than my own. And if it is possible to experience representations of a volitional action as caused by a consciousness other than my own when they are in fact caused by my own, then in no instance am I justified in inferring the existence of another consciousness merely from such a representation. But since the idealist cannot provide another account, we must conclude that idealism does in fact commit one to solipsism.

Dharmakīrti is well aware of the dream objection. In fact, the bulk of the *Proof* is dedicated to refuting it. His response begins by pointing out that the realist's account of dreams is no less problematic than is the idealist's. If, as according to the realist, objectively experienced volitional actions within a dream do not provide a valid ground for inferring other consciousnesses, then neither do they in waking life. Such

an inference can be legitimate only if it is valid universally; if dream-experiences block the inference, then we can no longer say that objectively experienced volitional actions are a consistent mark of the existence of other minds—in the parlance of Indian logic, pervasion (*vyapti*) is lost. We are thus, according to this argument, never justified in inferring the existence of another mind from objectively experienced volitional actions, even when we are awake (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verses 53-58). Dharmakīrti provides a ready response to this concern—one that is available to the realist and the idealist alike. He points out that the inference to another consciousness that occurs within a dream is valid *within the dream* (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verses 83-87). The error arises if, after we wake up, we try to carry the inference over into the waking world. For Dharmakīrti, the best criterion we can have for the truth of a cognition (*jñāna*) is successful action. The actual existence of the object inferred is thus not a necessary (or, given his idealist leanings, even a possible) condition for the validity of an inference. The question is, rather, whether actions that are based on that inference meet with success or with frustration. Given that the inferences to the existence of other streams of consciousness that we make within our dreams do lead to successful action within said dreams, the dream-inference must be taken as valid:

Those inferences of other mind which are made in sleep are possible only in such a state; exactly thus, the attainment of aim—the conversations, etc—which take place in sleep, are [also] possible only at this time. But since at this time is possible such an activity as is not contradictory, has mutual bond and is logical, there is no inconsistency in our theory. (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verse 87 Commentary)

Since the inference leads to successful activity, it would be absurd to insist that we have no dream-experience of other consciousness simply because the marks by which we infer such consciousness are not present in waking experience. Given our successful ability to navigate the social world when awake, it is similarly absurd to say that we have no waking experience of other consciousness simply because the marks of other consciousness do not exist in the manner the realist thinks they do.

Dharmakīrti provides another, more obscure response to the dream objection as well. In Verse 51 he says,

In [cases of] illusions, the course of our representations is under the influence of special causes, the nature of which determines the content of the representations. The representations may also be caused by other mind and [various] other factors, in which case there is sometimes an interruption in time between these factors and the representations; but these representations cannot appear quite independently of them.

This passage is difficult to interpret, and Vinītadeva's gloss does little to clarify, but one possibility is that Dharmakīrti is making the point that the mere existence of dreams presupposes objective experience, on which dreams are based. On this reading the dream-representations I experience of volitional action, while directly dependent on only my mental states, are indirectly dependent on the mental states of others—because the possibility of my presently having mental states that represent

another's volitional action is dependent on my having antecedently had actual experience of such cases. This seems to be a plausible point for Dharmakīrti to make. Some support for the position can be found in studies that have indicated that congenitally blind people have sightless dreams, though they experience other dream-sensations just as much as sighted people do (Kerr and Domhoff, 2004).

These two responses, taken together, I think are sufficient to undermine the dream objection. But other objections remain—objections to which Dharmakīrti provides less thorough responses. One that strikes me as particularly powerful is this: if the goal of an inference is to prove that a particular event has its origin in consciousness, then by asserting that the event in question is a volitional act is Dharmakīrti begging the question? After all, if he has defined volitional actions as those having their origin in consciousness, then for any event under consideration it should begin as an open question whether that event is a volitional action. Throughout the *Proof*, speech is taken to be an inferential mark of consciousness. But a bird that can imitate human speech is not taken to be expressing the mental state that we would take such speech to indicate if uttered by a human. Why, then, assume that people's speech indicates volition?

There is an easy response to this objection, which likely explains why Dharmakīrti did not bother considering the objection at all. Given the idealist thesis, everything that we experience either has its cause in consciousness or is uncaused. But on the Buddhist metaphysical framework, nothing is uncaused. It follows that everything has its cause in consciousness. The only question, then, is whether the consciousness that is originary to this particular event is one's own. But that is what this whole inquiry aims to answer, and thus there is no logical flaw in beginning from this starting point.

This response, however, seems insufficient because it overlooks some of the underlying concerns behind the objection. Particularly, it does not answer the question of why we do not take the bird that mimics human speech to be expressing a volition, but we do take people to. (Note that we take the bird to be *mimicking* human speech, not *speaking*.) Relatedly, we sometimes do not hold people to be responsible for their speech and actions: how do we justify such an inconsistency in our attributions? How do I really *know* whether a person's volitional actions have their origin in her consciousness? Fortunately, even though Dharmakīrti does not respond to my concern about question-begging directly, he does address the concerns that motivate it.

To begin with, his Verse 51 response to the dream objection and his later response to the challenge that inference to other consciousness is not *pramāṇa* (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verses 66-72) remind us of the Buddhist success-criterion for truth. Starting from the assumption that what I experience as speech emanating from another reveals a consciousness within that other as cause of that speech, my ensuing activity will meet with either success or frustration, depending on the circumstance. Attempting to engage a bird in discussion meets with much more frustration than success, and ultimately leads me to recognize the falsity of the initial assumption. But the attempt to engage people in discussion, in response to what I experience as their speech,



generally meets with success (and, where frustration, frustration of a different sort). The bird's speech we can still recognize as a mark of consciousness, however. Only, it is not the bird's consciousness but rather the consciousness of the individual who originally spoke the words that the bird is now parroting. This example demonstrates Dharmakīrti's point that a volition and the actions that result from that volition need not be co-locational. If I throw a stone, for instance, the flight of the stone is an intentional act, but one that has its origin in my consciousness. Similarly if someone pushes me down a flight of stairs, then my movement is the result of an intentional state—but not my own (Dharmakīrti, 1969, Verse 18). Thus we can see that a person is taken to be responsible for her actions if the conscious will that gave rise to the action is her own as well—that is, if she experiences the act subjectively.

The objection is not so easily put to rest, however. R. K. Sharma has argued that, rather than reinforcing the inference to other minds as Dharmakīrti thinks it does, this admission actually renders impossible any such inference: "The invariable relation between consciousness and bodily behaviour now stands eviscerated of all such subjective conviction on which rested analogical reasoning, with the result that even the certainty of this relation now comes under question" (Sharma 1985, 59). In order to infer, by means of an analogy, your intentional state from your actions, I must already have established that my actions are always accompanied by my mental states. But if my actions can be the result of another's will, then the universal association of my action with my willing does not obtain—and thus there is no ground for the analogy. Sharma's challenge, then, is similar to Dharmakīrti's challenge regarding the realist's account of dreams: with pervasion lost, the inference is undermined.

I noted above that Berkeley has been incorrectly interpreted as providing an argument by analogy to support the inference to other minds. I suspect Sharma is similarly misreading Dharmakīrti. To illustrate this, consider the structure of an argument for the existence of other minds by means of an analogy:

Argument by Analogy:

- P7: My actions of a certain type have their cause in my consciousness
- P8: These actions are of that certain type
- P9: These actions do not have their cause in my consciousness
- C4: Therefore, these actions have their cause in another consciousness
- C5: Therefore, consciousnesses other than my own exist

And compare this with Dharmakīrti's Argument for the existence of other streams of consciousness, as articulated above:

- P4: I experience actions of a certain type.
- P5: Actions of this certain type have their cause in consciousness.
- P6: These actions do not have their cause in my consciousness.
- C2: Therefore, these actions have their cause in another consciousness.
- C3: Therefore, consciousnesses other than mine exist.

Given the similarity of the final conclusions, as well as the third premise, in the two arguments, it is understandable how Dharmakīrti could be read as providing an analogical argument. But from the differences between the first two premises of each argument, it should be clear that Dharmakīrti is not advocating an analogy. Dharmakīrti's causal argument can best be understood, rather, as an argument by remainder.

What Sharma has provided, I think, is an insightful critique of the possibility of establishing the existence of other minds by means of an analogy. But as a critique of Dharmakīrti it misses its mark. Rather than providing a *reductio* of Dharmakīrti's argument, Sharma provides a *reductio* of his own claim that Dharmakīrti makes use of an argument by analogy. The argument by analogy relies on an action's being similar to mine in order for me to infer a similar cause. But if it can be shown that there is a difference between my own actions and the actions that form the basis of the inference, then the analogy will be undermined. The argument by remainder, on the other hand, relies on a property of actions generally, and applies that property to the two cases separately. In this way, differences between the two cases under consideration do not undermine the inference as long as the cases still fall under the type. Whereas the argument by analogy takes one's own actions to be the paradigm, the argument by remainder takes actions generally to be the paradigm, and recognizes that one's own actions are merely a type that fall under that general category.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Dharmakīrti's argument for knowledge of other streams of consciousness succeeds in showing the realist's objections to be incapable of refuting the idealist's thesis. For each objection the realist brings to bear, the idealist is able to show that his theory accounts for experience as well as or better than the realist's theory. There remains an objection from another camp, however, that is more difficult to respond to: the fellow idealist. Ratnakīrti, a successor of Dharmakīrti, argues that the idealist ought to embrace solipsism. Ratnakīrti accepts Dharmakīrti's argument from constant co-location in a way the realist cannot bring himself to. But he then proceeds to use this argument against Dharmakīrti's inference to other streams of consciousness. Just as blue and my awareness of blue are non-distinct, so too are your consciousness and my awareness of your consciousness. The idea of your mental states existing independent of my awareness of those mental states is unthinkable by me, in precisely the way that Berkeley points out that it is impossible to think of an object unthought-of. Within my experience there is no difference between your feeling, say, angry, and my representing to myself that you are angry. This being the case, what possible meaning can asserting knowledge of other streams of consciousness have for me, beyond being an assertion about my own consciousness—and thus not about other streams of consciousness after all?

This seems to me an exceedingly difficult challenge for Dharmakīrti to respond to. One possibility is that he could abandon his own argument for idealism, and make use instead of Vasubandhu's and Dignāga's arguments (though these are not without

their own detractors). As Arindam Chakrabarti (1990) points out, there exist a number of sophisticated responses to the argument from constant co-location.

A less unpalatable response for Dharmakīrti may be to claim that the inference to other streams of consciousness provides content for the assertion that not all of my states of awareness are up to me. This may reduce ultimately to an assertion about my own mental states, but it is a different sort of assertion about my mental states—that they have their cause in something outside me, something that is beyond the grasp of perceptual awareness, and only indirectly within the grasp of inferential awareness. I take this approach to be the most promising way not just for Dharmakīrti, but for idealists more generally to respond to Ratnakīrti's objection. This is important because, while the objection itself may originate in medieval India, it is relevant to anyone who wants to advocate idealism, regardless of temporal or geographic circumstance.

There is a caveat attached to this move, however: it brings one dangerously close to Berkeley's position of inferring a qualitatively different sort of mind, the position that led him to the consequence that Dharmakīrti's idealism has heretofore been able to avoid. But if the idealist remains faithful to Dharmakīrti's causal account of experience and of intersubjective agreement, and does not concern herself overmuch with the *nature* of the mental cause that is just beyond one's grasp, she may be able to avoid the untoward consequence.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I presented a version of this paper at a meeting of the International Society for Chinese Philosophy in conjunction with the 2007 APA Pacific Division meeting. Thank you to the audience members and other panelists for your comments. Thank you also to Arindam Chakrabarti for providing extensive feedback on an earlier version of this paper, and to the three anonymous referees for this journal whose helpful comments enabled me to become clearer in my argument and improve the article overall.

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## BENEVOLENT GOVERNMENT NOW

HOWARD J. CURZER

**ABSTRACT:** *Mencian benevolent government intervenes dramatically in many ways in the marketplace in order to secure the material well-being of the population, especially the poor and disadvantaged. Mencius considers this sort of intervention to be appropriate not just occasionally when dealing with natural disasters, but regularly. Furthermore, Mencius recommends shifting from regressive to progressive taxes. He favors reduction of inequality so as to reduce corruption of government by the wealthy, and opposes punishment for people driven to crime by destitution. Mencius thinks government should try to improve the character of the population by preventing or relieving poverty, by setting a good example, and by teaching people to respect and care for each other. He considers a government to be legitimate only if it has the support of the people. His recommended foreign policy is approximately the same as his recommended domestic policy: set a good example and enhance the material wellbeing and moral values of one's own people so that they will enthusiastically support their country, while foreigners will long to immigrate. These are policies of today's left. Mencius was a radical reformer in his own day. His description of benevolent government shows that he is an extreme liberal by contemporary standards, too.*

**Keywords:** *Mencius, benevolent government, liberal, conservative, regulation, taxation, punishment, legitimacy, civil liberties, foreign policy*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Its emphasis on ritual, filial piety, tradition, hierarchy, etc. raises the specter that the Confucian tradition is inherently politically conservative.<sup>1</sup> I shall try to assuage this worry, but rather than struggling to encompass the entire Confucian tradition within the bounds of a single paper, I shall focus on Mencius' description of benevolent government for the Warring States period. In this paper, I shall describe the policies and underlying principles of benevolent government in order to compare them with some of the policies and principles currently debated by American liberals and

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<sup>1</sup> Long (2003, 35-62) argues that the Confucian tradition is predominately libertarian.

conservatives. Some ideas which are progressive when first proposed are left behind by the march of history and sound quite reactionary, today. Not Mencius' ideas! Mencius was a radical political reformer in his own day, and perhaps surprisingly, he also turns out to be a liberal – even a radical – by the standards of the contemporary political scene.

Three procedural points: First, contemporary comparisons between Mencian and modern political thought are not lacking, but with few exceptions they have been limited to the ongoing debate about whether human rights are compatible with the Confucian tradition.<sup>2</sup> Without denying the importance of that debate, I shall frame my discussion in terms of governmental duties. This will have the advantage of being less anachronistic since Mencius, himself, talks of what a ruler should do rather than what people deserve. Discussing duties may better enable us to listen for insight from Mencius rather than arguing about whether Mencian benevolent government meets our standards. Second, I shall extrapolate from the concrete practices Mencius prescribes to the general responsibilities of government which I take to underlie these practices. Although anachronism and misinterpretation are serious risks, such extrapolation is necessary in order to bring Mencius into the contemporary dialog since many of the particular practices he describes are inapplicable to the modern world. Third, in order to keep the focus on Mencius rather than on the details of contemporary politics (and in order to keep this paper to a reasonable length), I shall have to compare Mencian benevolent government to rough caricatures rather than nuanced characterizations of contemporary liberals and conservatives. I ask the reader's indulgence for this oversimplification.

## 2. REGULATION AND INTERVENTION

The *Mencius* begins with an account of a crucial component of benevolent government. When King Hui takes famine to be a natural disaster to which he responds well, Mencius retorts that famine is a *result* of a natural disaster (e.g. drought) *plus* inadequate preparations. He faults the king for merely responding to, rather than forestalling famine (1A3.1-2). The general principle here is that governments should strive to anticipate natural disasters and take steps to avert them. This principle is currently uncontroversial with respect to disasters such as fires and floods, but contested with respect to disasters such as stock market crashes and oil spills. Contemporary conservatives tend to blame crashes and spills on market forces and rock strata. They take crashes and spills to be natural disasters. By contrast, contemporary liberals along with Mencius maintain that crashes and spills are the results of market forces, rock strata, *plus* inadequate governmental preparation and regulation.<sup>3</sup> Liberals might take a cue from Mencius. They might supplement their

<sup>2</sup> Exceptions include Bai (2008, 19-34), Bell (2006, 231-254), and Chan (2003, 236-253). For a sample of the human rights debate see De Bary and Weiming (1998), Bauer and Bell (1999), and Angle and Svensson (2001).

<sup>3</sup> This dispute is perhaps even more pronounced with respect to problems which are not extreme or sudden enough to qualify as disasters. Conservatives tend to blame nature completely for these

case for more preparation and regulation by citing Mencius' warning that people tend to blame nature for their problems rather than accept the social responsibility to take preventative measures. That is, liberals might use this Mencian nugget of insight about a common blame-shifting mechanism in their debate with conservatives over this issue.

A second issue at the heart of disputes between liberals and conservatives has to do with ways in which other people or institutions might interfere with people's livelihoods. Mencius also has considered view on this issue. For example, a bit later in Mencius' retort to King Hui, Mencius cautions against governmental policies that disrupt people's lives and livelihoods (1A3.3).<sup>4</sup> Both liberals and conservatives are excruciatingly aware of governments' potential to impose excessive burdens. All acknowledge, in principle, that governments should avoid such intrusions, even if governments are not always successful at avoiding them in practice. Unlike conservatives, however, liberals think that governments are not the only serious threat to people's lives and livelihoods. Liberals also worry about concentrations of private power which enable individuals, corporations, and organizations to restrict and/or exploit others. Liberals believe that an important role of government is to act as a bulwark against such restriction and/or exploitation, even though this protection typically requires governmental restrictions on the freedom of powerful people and groups. As I shall show below, Mencius shares with liberals this worry about threatening concentrations of private power, and his solution also requires governmental curbs on the liberties of the powerful.

Like Confucius, Mencius often moves from one injunction to another which pulls in almost the opposite direction like a sailboat tacking against the wind. In 1A3 he follows his injunction to *avoid* certain government interventions by tacking in the opposite direction with an injunction to *perform* governmental interventions of a different sort – in this case by enjoining the king to prohibit extra-fine fishing nets and off-season logging (1A3.3). Mencius' rationale for this prohibition is that if only a few people fish or log excessively, they will gain extra food and fuel, and the overall harm to society will be minimal. Problems arise only when such practices become widespread. Thus, the general principle here is that governments should restrict people's choices in order to prevent a tragedy of the commons. The ongoing struggle over pollution prohibitions shows how controversial this principle is today. Partially because of their faith in the invisible hand, contemporary conservatives balk at the idea that governments should restrict individual freedoms by prohibiting individually profitable acts. As a rhetorical tool, the invisible hand exercises a powerful fascination. Liberals could use some help in breaking its hypnotic hold on people, so they should welcome Mencius' observation that the invisible hand is not

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problematic non-disasters, while liberals maintain that it is government's responsibility to prepare for, and respond to these problems. For example, conservatives take terrible traffic problems to be a fact of life while liberals take them to result from a governmental choice to subsidize oil drilling rather than mass transit.

<sup>4</sup> Citations are to Mencius (2008) unless otherwise specified.

ubiquitous. Although many self-interested choices sometimes produce efficiency, at other times they produce disaster.

Governments must do more than merely refrain from burdensome demands, prepare for disasters, and prevent tragedies of the commons.<sup>5</sup> According to Mencius, governments must also ensure that crucial tasks get done right. Mencius endorses customs inspections of roads and markets (1B5.3) and the repair of bridges (4B2). More strikingly, Mencius says that governments should regulate and supervise plowing, planting, weeding, reaping, and animal husbandry – every important aspect of farming (1A3.4, 1A5.3, 1A7.21, 1B4.5, 6B7.2). Governments should do this not just occasionally to recoup from disasters, but regularly to increase efficiency. Now farming in the Warring States period was the occupation of the overwhelming majority of the population. Thus, Mencius is not just saying that government must regulate a few aspects of a small, but important sector of the economy; he is saying that government should regulate, in great detail, all aspects of the work of almost everyone. Mencian benevolent government, therefore, is very far from laissez faire government. Presumably, Mencius advocates this drastic policy because he believes that people will not follow expert advice unless required to do so. Current examples of comprehensive regulation and production incentives are numerous, of course, but nowhere near as invasive as Mencius' proposal. Imagine what today's farmers would say if required by the government to plant on certain days, plough in certain ways, etc. On this issue, Mencius seems even further left than contemporary liberals.

### 3. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

An ideally just policy would convict all and only the guilty. In the real world, liberals opt to err on the side of acquitting some of the guilty in order to minimize convictions of the innocent while conservatives conversely tend to minimize acquittals of the guilty at the cost of convicting some of the innocent. That is, liberals tend to favor various due-process policies while conservatives conversely tend to favor law-and-order policies. Again Mencius takes a liberal view, although this can be obscured by anachronistic expectations (2A2.24). Mencius says that an accused person should be executed only if he or she is judged guilty both by the ruler and by all of the (sophisticated) people (1B7.5). Extrapolating, I suggest that Mencian benevolent government would inflict any severe punishment only if the ruler's representatives (the prosecutors) and the people's representatives (the jury) unanimously agree. This procedure is uncontroversial in the contemporary world, of course. But Mencius is advocating a dramatic modification to the autocratic, harsh procedures of his day.

Studies show that the crime rate generally rises when jobs are scarce and wages are low,<sup>6</sup> suggesting that some people turn to crime when they cannot find adequate

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<sup>5</sup> Passage 1A3.3 suggests that governments need do no more than this, but it will become clear that Mencius thinks that considerably more governmental action will be necessary.

<sup>6</sup> Unsurprisingly, this pattern is especially pronounced with respect to property crimes. The statistics are tricky, for this pattern is sometimes masked by other factors.



honest work.<sup>7</sup> Conservatives claim that people are not *forced* to become criminals by poverty in capitalist countries, for the free market ensures that opportunities to find honest work are available. Governments need only refrain from interference with the free market. By contrast, liberals believe that governments have obligations to provide a sufficient safety net for the truly needy by providing welfare, food stamps, unemployment compensation, etc. Insofar as governments allow people to become impoverished, liberals are sympathetic to criminals. They tend to blame and punish criminals less than conservatives because they see governments as partially to blame. Again, Mencius is considerably further left than contemporary liberals. Mencius believes not only that destitute people tend to turn to crime, but also and quite remarkably, that when they perform criminal acts, they should *not* be punished (1A7.20, 3A3.3, 6A7.1). Presumably, the reason is that governments, and *not* the people, themselves, are responsible for preventing destitution (6B7.2).

#### 4. NECESSITIES AND LUXURIES

Mencius claims that the government must provide aid to people directly whenever the people become impoverished. He requires rulers and lesser lords to “distribute grain to those who do not have enough” (1B4.5-10, 6B7.2, 3B9.9). Of course, the government must obtain the grain from those who have more than enough in the first place. One might at first take Mencius to be insisting merely that governments take precautions to ameliorate a disaster’s impact by spreading the burden widely rather than allowing it to be wholly born by only a few. He is at least advocating a requirement that everyone participate in a public plan for insurance against starvation. The current dispute over a public plan for healthcare shows how controversial such a requirement is in contemporary America. Liberals generally favor such approaches, conservatives generally oppose them, thinking that insurance should be optional and provided by private companies, instead.

But Mencius is actually making an even more controversial claim. He does not say merely that governments should collect grain in years of plenty, and distribute it in lean years. He is not talking only about spreading the burden of disaster relief; he is also endorsing an ongoing redistributive scheme, a welfare system. He thinks that it would be best if people care for each other voluntarily, but if needy people are not cared for by their relatives and/or friends, then government should be the caregiver of last resort. It should ensure that everyone is cared for (Chan 2003, 236-242).

It might seem controversial to suggest that Mencius think that *everyone* should be cared for, so let me elaborate. Mencius mentions no benefit-qualification requirement other than need. In particular, he does not exclude those who “do not have enough” because they are inept or lazy farmers, as contemporary conservatives would prefer. Parallel to their view on punishment, contemporary liberals opt to err on the side of supporting some free-riders in order to minimize unsupported truly needy people, while conservatives conversely choose to minimize support for free-riders at the cost

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<sup>7</sup> For example see Chiricos (1987, 187-212) and Weinberg and Mustard (2002, 45-61).

of also depriving some of the truly needy. Mencius takes this to the extreme; he makes no noticeable effort to preclude free-riders at all. Thus, Mencius takes a very liberal stance with respect to distributive, as well as retributive justice. Perhaps Mencius is unaware of the free rider problem, but it seems more likely that he just considers precluding free-riders to be a lower priority than ensuring that help reaches the truly needy.

So far, benevolent government consists in ensuring that the economy runs well and that no one is pushed to the wall or punished when they are so pushed. But Mencius also advocates public musical performances, parks, etc. in order to give the people access to these luxuries (1B1, 1B2, 1B4).<sup>8</sup> Of course it is liberals rather than conservatives who tend to favor public support for the arts, parks, and other luxuries. Mencius goes further. He tells King Hui to take steps to enable fifty-year-olds to wear silk and seventy-year-olds to eat meat (1A3.4, 7A22). In the Warring States period, these were luxuries. So in this passage, Mencius is deploying the liberal principle that government should not only to ensure that people's basic needs are satisfied, and that they have access to certain publicly supported luxuries, but also that each person has his or her own luxuries.<sup>9</sup> Of course, both liberals and conservatives are committed to the idea that people should have the right to "the pursuit of happiness." But conservatives interpret this right narrowly to mean that people's attempts to increase their happiness should not be interfered with, except insofar as is necessary to protect the rights of others, while liberals interpret the right broadly to mean that people's attempts to increase their happiness should be supplemented by governmental provision of sufficient opportunities. Yet again, Mencius is further to the left than contemporary liberals. He asserts that governments should ensure not just the opportunity to acquire luxuries, but even the luxuries, themselves.

The Mencian safety net is not the same for all. Mencius demands special provisions for those with special needs. To begin with, Mencius says that if the government does its job, "those whose hair has turned gray will not carry loads on the roadways" (1A3.4). That is, Mencius maintains that government is responsible for ensuring that the elderly are able to retire, or at least to avoid heavy labor. This is a sort of social security, a favorite program of contemporary liberals, but not of conservatives.

Moreover, Mencian benevolent government ensures that people have the means to support their living family members and bury their dead ones according to ritual propriety (1A3.3). At first it might seem that Mencius and contemporary conservatives are on the same wavelength here, for both want support and burials to be performed by kinfolk rather than by the government. But the crucial difference comes when people lack kin to support or bury them, or when their kin lack sufficient

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<sup>8</sup> This is a controversial interpretation of these passages. Mencius may merely be saying that rulers may enjoy these luxuries so long as they ensure that their people have access to other luxuries.

<sup>9</sup> Mencius may be making a similar point when he tells King Xuan to treat the commoners as if they had a "weakness for wealth" (1B5.4). Alternatively, rather than saying that the people should be given luxuries, Mencius may be reiterating his thesis that government should provide a safety net for the impoverished.

resources. In such cases, conservatives are content to leave the matter in private hands; they are willing to wait for some charitable person, church, or NGO to step up to fill the need. By contrast, Mencius considers it to be the responsibility of government to ensure that people are supported and buried. One of Mencius' heroes, King Wen, gave special consideration to four sorts of people: widowers, widows, childless folks, and orphans (1B5.3). Presumably, Mencius thinks that other rulers should do the same, and presumably, the reason is that these are folks with no kin to support or bury them. Thus, if there are no kin, then government should step in. Moreover, if there are kin, but they cannot fulfill their ritual obligations to their family members, it is government that has failed them. Mencius sides with liberals and against conservatives by endorsing the principle that government should enable people to fulfill their obligations to their relatives. A contemporary application of this principle is that needy parents should receive enough welfare and food stamp payments to enable them to support their children.

## 5. TAXATION

How, according to Mencius, is this significant expansion of government to be paid for? Clearly not by increasing the taxes of the common folks. Indeed, Mencian benevolent government involves lowering their taxes (1A5.3). Mencius discusses specific taxes on two groups: merchants and farmers. He proposes the elimination of taxes on merchants' goods, shops, travel, and persons (2A5.2-3, 2A5.5).<sup>10</sup> Functionally, a tax on goods is a sales tax, for it is passed on directly to the consumer. The other three are equal for poor and rich merchants. Thus, all of these are regressive taxes. Mencius replaces them with a straightforward 10% income tax (3A3.15).<sup>11</sup> Again, Mencius sides with contemporary liberals. Liberals are generally in favor of progressive or at least proportional taxes rather than regressive taxes, while conservatives generally wish to lower income taxes and raise alternative taxes such as sales taxes which are regressive.

For the farmers, Mencius recommends the "well-field system." Under that system each household owns a field of a certain size, and in addition contributes 1/8 of the labor necessary to farm a common field of the same size whose proceeds go to the government (1B5.3, 3A3.15). Thus, each farming household gets to keep the proceeds of 8/9 of its labor, and the proceeds of the remaining 1/9 go to the government. If everyone were to pull exactly his or her own weight, each household would be taxed

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<sup>10</sup> Mencius does believe in taxing merchants when they are not selling goods at a fair price (2B10.7).

<sup>11</sup> In this passage, Mencius distinguishes between those living in the countryside and those in the middle of the state. The former are clearly farmers, and Mencius suggests that they be taxed by "the one-ninth assistance method" which is the well-field system. I think that by contrast the latter must be merchants, and Mencius suggests that they be taxed by "the one-tenth method, making them pay taxes individually."

at the rate of about 11%.<sup>12</sup> Functionally however, the well-field system would work a bit differently. I suggest that Mencius favors it because it provides an opportunity for extending benevolence from the family to the neighbors. Generally, the able will feel pressure to contribute more to farming the common field; the less able will be allowed to contribute less. Thus, the well-field system incentivizes benevolence, not by offering tax relief for charitable donations, as contemporary conservatives prefer, but rather by peer pressure on the well-off to contribute more than their 11% to the government so that the disadvantaged may contribute less than their 11%.

Mencius says that, “benevolent government must begin with setting the field boundaries.” Mencius explains that corrupt officials are lax about this because, “If the field boundaries are not straightly set, the well-fields will not be equal, and the grain income will not be even” (3A3.13). Why are corrupt officials indifferent or partial to uneven grain income? Presumably, because those farmers with greater incomes bribe officials to close their eyes to the inequality. Here Mencius is delicately hinting at two morals: inequality is to be avoided, and inequality tends to perpetuate itself or increase because the advantaged are in a position to preserve or increase their advantages. Mencius urges officials to straighten the field boundaries. In other words, he advocates redistribution by taking land from those who have more and giving to those who have less until the land holdings are equalized. Contemporary liberals would not go so far, but they would like to limit inequality, so as to keep the gap between rich and poor from becoming a chasm. Furthermore, it is liberals who fear that concentrations of private power will perpetuate or enhance themselves by corrupting government.

## 6. LEGITIMACY

Mencian benevolent government seems undemocratic. After all, Mencius only discusses monarchies, and he observes that a king may be overthrown only when he has lost the mandate of heaven (1B8, 5A5.1-2), and only by relatives (5B9).<sup>13</sup> So far this sounds like the divine right of kings, but Mencius also says that rulers who govern improperly should be sacked (1B6). Moreover, it turns out that the mandate of heaven is manifested partially by the people’s acceptance of the king (5A5.5-6). Now Mencius is not talking about a majority vote on the king’s tenure. Rather his view is that as long as most of the people are not upset enough to revolt, a properly installed king retains heaven’s mandate. Even if the overwhelming majority would prefer another ruler, the king retains the mandate so long as the people’s preference for an alternative is mild or moderate. This is admittedly far from democratic, although it does show that the people’s preferences are relevant.

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<sup>12</sup> I doubt that Mencius is intentionally advocating a higher tax rate for farmers than for merchants. Rather Mencius seems to be thinking in approximate terms. He takes the well-field system to generate about a 10% tax rate (3B8).

<sup>13</sup> Rather than a theoretical limitation, I take Mencius’ claim that only relatives may depose a king to be a practical concession; non-relatives shouldn’t try because only relatives can get away with it.

The king is one man; almost all governing is done by others. The legitimacy conditions for the king are not the legitimacy conditions for the government as a whole. Retaining the mandate of heaven is not the standard of job security for anyone in government except the ultimate ruler. Everyone in government other than the king must meet a different and higher standard. Mencius says that subordinates should be hired for their worthiness and removed by their superiors for absenteeism, negligence, selfishness, or incompetence (1B6.2, 1B8, 6B7.2). Defending against Mencius' accusation that he hires and fires public officials at whim, King Xuan asks how the competence of a person may be determined. Mencius replies that office holders must meet two conditions; they must be recommended by all of the people and pass a royal examination in order to gain, and to retain office (1B7). Neither the ruler nor the people has complete authority to hire or fire.

Mencius' view of the royal role in hiring might be that the king (or his agents) should interview candidates and/or perform background checks. Presumably, the king should make retention decisions on the basis of "inspection tours" and the "reports on responsibilities" made by subordinates to superiors (1B4.5, 6B7.2). Mencius does not specify a method by which the people might endorse a candidate for office; in particular, he does not specify elections. But he clearly thinks that office holders must have and hold the favor of a large majority of the people.<sup>14</sup> Thus, Mencian benevolent government is not so different than our own when it comes to determining who should govern. In both cases, a small group of high officials (king, Supreme Court) are insulated from politics by the fact that they are removable only when extremely unpopular, but everyone else in government must gain and retain the endorsement of both the higher-ups in their party and the favor of the majority of the people. Of course, Mencius does not think that everyone is qualified to make policy decisions (3A4.6), but neither do we in the modern world. Rather both we and Mencius think that those who lack the ability to govern should nevertheless have some significant say in choosing officeholders.

## 7. CIVIL LIBERTIES

Mencian benevolent government seems to be at its most conservative when it comes to non-economic liberties and social policy. After all, Mencius rejects liberal neutrality; he hopes to use the power of government to convert the populace to a certain way of life. In particular, he advocates a family-centered, traditional, hierarchical set of values. In both means and ends, Mencian benevolent government seems closer to contemporary conservatives than to liberals.

Yet this turns out to be an illusion. First, liberals are not committed to the idea that the state should be completely neutral. Rather they believe that the state should favor at least the values which are necessary conditions for the possibility of liberal

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<sup>14</sup> Tiwald distinguishes between two general sorts of popular endorsement: (a) the people's judgments about an official's virtue and qualifications, and (b) their love, loyalty, and political participation under an official. Functionally, these may not be distinct (Tiwald 2008, 277-280).

neutrality. Now the values Mencius hopes to promulgate are pretty general and minimal: “the righteousness of filiality and brotherliness” (1A3.4, 1A7.24). Arguably, these are not values peculiar to just a few particular conceptions of the good, but rather they are necessary bits of a framework which makes it possible for numerous different conceptions of the good to be pursued. That is, they are values that even liberals would consider necessary to inculcate because they make liberal neutrality possible. Rawls, for example, maintains that some of the character traits necessary for the development of the sense of justice are rooted in early filiality (Rawls 1971, 462-467; see also Galston 1991, 283-287).

Second, the means Mencius endorses are more liberal than conservative. Mencius’ approach is not to legislate morality, as conservatives favor. He takes regulation of behavior to be less effective than teaching which is less effective than modeling good behavior (7A14). Mencius believes that people are inherently good in the sense that their sprouts will develop into virtues so long as basic resources are present and repeated interference is absent (6A8). Thus, rather than urging rulers to ban various practices, Mencius urges rulers to *remove* restrictions on behavior that might interfere with moral development (1A3.3, 1B2).

Admittedly, Mencius takes education to be important, and he does endorse trying to change people’s behavior through teaching in the schools (1A3.4, 1A7.24, 3A4.8). He does not specify a pedagogical strategy, but if he follows Confucius’ lead, Mencian teaching would consist of explanation and discussion rather than indoctrination (*Analects* 2.15).

To summarize, Mencius thinks that government should let people develop naturally with only minimal guidance and limitations. Rather than prohibiting some behaviors, requiring others, and inculcating values by manipulation and/or appeals to authority, benevolent government’s main strategies for improving people’s values and behavior are to protect people from hardships and interference which would hinder moral development, and to win the people over to virtue by example and reasoned persuasion (4B5, 7A14). Rather than forcing and indoctrinating people, rulers should focus on protecting people from destitution and modeling the right behavior. Overall, benevolent government is not completely neutral, but the values it endorses are arguably socially necessary, and it does not try to impose its values by illiberal means.

## 8. FOREIGN POLICY

Liberals tend to seek lower defense budgets and higher social spending than conservatives. They do not hold the Pollyannaish view that if government can get its domestic policy right, then foreign policy will take care of itself. They allow for wars in cases of defense, narrowly defined, and for wars of liberation to free people from oppressive regimes, although not for wars of conquest or to gain resources. But they do think that economic policy is an important component of national defense. What keeps a state strong is not just its military-industrial complex, but also its social capital, even if the education and well-being of its people cannot be seen to help in

any direct way. Conservatives tend toward the opposite priorities and policies. They think that reducing the defense budget weakens the country, and increasing social spending does not strengthen it. Mencius too allows for wars of defense and liberation (1B10), but not wars of conquest (2B8.2). But once more Mencius is further to the left than contemporary liberals. His main strategy for protecting a state is to avoid cruelty and enhance the well-being, and thus the loyalty of that state's citizenry through the penal and economic policies describe above. This will win the hearts and minds of the state's own people, making them a formidable force for defense and offense (1A5.3-6, 2B1, 4A9). Moreover, this policy will also win the hearts and minds of the people of neighboring states, making them a resource rather than a threat. If one practices benevolent government, "the people of neighboring states will welcome you like a father or mother....One will have no enemies in the world" (2A5.6, 3B5.4). Conversely, illiberal penal and economic policy will lose hearts and minds both at home and abroad (1B11, 6B6.4).

Liberals maintain that setting a morally good example is an important aspect of foreign policy. One reason to adopt principled domestic and foreign policies is to deprive other governments of justifications for injustice and oppression. A more positive reason is to give other peoples and governments an actual, rather than ideal model at which to aim. Like liberals, Mencius endorses transforming other governments by example (2A3). Along with advocating a benevolent domestic policy, he opposes compromising with oppressive regimes in order to secure advantages to one's own state (4A7, 4A14.3).

## 9. CONCLUSION

I have not tried to address the actual or potential role of human rights within the whole Confucian tradition. Instead, I have focused on the particular doctrines that constitute Mencian benevolent government. This investigation has shown that Mencius consistently advocates liberal, sometime radical policies and principles. The fact that Mencius is a leftist is one resource that Confucians can use to combat the worry that the Confucian tradition is inherently conservative. And while appealing to the authority of Mencius will not help today's embattled liberals in the West (as appealing to the authority of Jesus seems to help conservatives), liberals can use some Mencian insights and arguments in their struggle for popular opinion.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to two anonymous referees of *Comparative Philosophy* for their helpful evaluations and comments on this article.

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