gustav / September 12, 2012 03:57PM

Chun-Ying WANG: Between the Given and the Thought: Introducing the Introduction of Dan Arnold's《Brains, Buddhas, and Believing》

Chun-Ying WANG: Between the Given and the Thought: Introducing the Introduction of Dan Arnold's《Brains, Buddhas, and Believing》

(In progress, please do not cite any part of the short essay)

Questions in focus:
◎ Can Buddhism be naturalized? Can the “experience” in the regard of some transcendent point of view be explained and examined by science? Mind is after all empirical-only or there is something rational (or logical, transcendental, conceptual, or linguistic) about it?
◎ Is the idea of selfless in Buddhism compatible with contemporary physicalists, that all metal events or states is only under (natural) causal laws and then reducible to activities in the physical world? With the theory of rebirth, Buddhism is than never totally agree with physcialism? However, can the claim that only those entering some causal relations can be counted as something real, which commonly admitted by Dharmakīrti and one physicalist represetative Fodor, survive the challenge raised by some like Sellars who urges for “logical space of reason,”or by Mimansakas and Madhyamakas who urge for the independence of the linguistic-related mental elements that cannot be reduced to causal laws? Dharmakīrti's own theory of “intentional level of description” and “the necessary first-person point of view” can help here?
◎ The referentiality of intention, as a mental activity, (the relation between the mental aboutness and the directed of the aboutness) is after all simply causal – as physicalists and Dharmakīrti wants it, or is constitutive?
◎I believe that... How to treat “belief”? The attitude of intentionality is different from its content, and this is about the question of ontology: is everything only normative, as Dharmakīrti wants it, that something is true because I or we believe it to be true? When I believe that it is raining, is it true that it is raining outside, given I believe it or not? When I believe that nothing has self-nature, is it true that nothing has self-nature, given I believe it or not? Perhaps language has its own external, even individual objectivity (Mimansakas)? Not only intention, but also intension.

I. Between the given and the thought – the birth place of all puzzles

Dignāga says at the very beginning of his 《Pramānasamuccaya》 that because there are the particular (svalakṣaṇa) and the universal (sāmānyalakṣaṇa), we establish two (and only two) pramānas, namely, perception (pratyakṣa) and inference (anumāna). The seeming simple lines stirs up exactly all the puzzles we will discuss in this field. Kant as well addresses at the beginning of his 《First Critique》 that: “In whatever manner and by whatever means a mode of knowledge may relate to objects, intuition is that through which it is in immediate relation to them, and to which all thought as a means is directed. But intuition takes place only in so far as the object is given to us. This again is only possible, to man at least, in so far as the mind is affected in a certain way. The capacity (receptivity) for receiving representations through the mode in which we are affected by objects , is entitled sensibility. Objects are given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone yields us intuitions; they are thought through the understanding, and from the understanding arise concepts. But all thought must, directly or indirectly, by way of certain characters (marks, Merkmale; transcendental categories I would say), relate ultimately to intuitions, and therefore, with us, to sensibility, because in not other way can an object be given to us”(A19/B33; Kemp Smith's English translation).

II. Kantian in the North America and analystic philosophy: Sellars's “logical space of reason1”and McDowell's following-up

Sellars, Wilfrid (1912-1989) believes that thought is “inner speech”and he tries to avoid his so-called “the mythical given”(the given knowledge does not demand for a correspondent, reasonable cognitive capacity). He claims that all of the intentional activities of human beings take place only in a “logical space of reason,” which is the source verifying and being able to verify one's discourse of inference, and any known “attributions” only has their states in the space, including those in cognitive activities, speech acts, and the truth in the sense of this circumstance (such as we can agree with the authority possessed by some experts with regard to their description about the

observation of the world). With this, Selalrs fights against any kind of “foundationalism” that bases cognition and theories of cognition in some mythical given (footnote 1). In other words, Sellars's opinion is similar with Kant's claim that human being's rational response to sensible experience is not a response of judgment; on the contrary, reason has to be operative directly in the experience and becomes part of the condition of experience.

McDowell once gives an example2：suppose A sees a cardinal, but A never learns about the cardinal, and A may be even in no possession of a concept of it, nor any related understandings. At the same occasion, B also sees the cardinal, and B recognizes that this is a cardinal. If we only think about the visual experience, the awareness of A and B in that occasion may not be different, but B's experience allows or inclines him to say “this is a cardinal”, while A's does not. The examples tries to indicate that: (1) the specification or attributions people address to a described object are somehow *really and *non-inferentially accepted as (part of) their knowledge, but (2) these specified attributions does not belong to the real, non-inferential experience, while (3) these specifiable and expressible contents indeed belongs to the capacity of cognition. The element of the capacity of cognition that does not yield direct experience but allows for specification and description dwells in “the logical space of reason” of Sellars in McDowell's understanding. These points means ot us here that: (1) the content that is to be described does not have its state in the direct experience, or otherwise it would not be impossible for A to address “this is a cardinal” in his experience; furthermore, (2) direct experience cannot be propositional, but the other kind; hence, (3) we have to accept two different kinds or sources of knowledge. And if we are with Sellars with regard to the persistence of correspondent, reasonable capacities, and both direct and indirect experience are possible only through cognitive capacity, then some kind of internalism that urges for the rejection of any form or states of “the thing in itself” no matter with direct experience or indirect experience. To reterm this in Buddhism, both the direct and the indirect experience do not have any kind of self-nature independent of the cognition, and no direct experience is not involved with prapanca (language). In this sense, Buddhism is not mythical.

III. The plan of the book
In Arnold's article “Is Svasamvitti Transcendental?” published in《Asian Philosophy》, 2005 , he puts two lines of history of philosophy together: (1) Kant – German idealism – north American Kant Studies and (2) Dignāga – Dharmakīrti – Madhaymika. He thinks, the post-Kantian development in German idealism is in favor of a more individualism that prefers simple idealism, while a more realistic feedback in the North America seems to summon up a “constitutive” understanding of Kant's transcendental theory that is believed by him to be more Kantian. On the other side, the post-Dignāga Dharmakīrti accepts Dignāga's theory of self-awareness as something like a perceptual subject or inner psychological focus, while Candarkīrti (Madhaymaka)'s critics (the endless regress of self-awareness) accelerates the later development in Santaraksita's correction of Dignāga theory of self-awareness with the idea of “condition” rather than “perception.”

In his article “Self-awareness and Subjectivity in Buddhist Philosophy”published in 《Indian Philosophy》, 2010, Arnold tries to decide Dignāga's theory of self-awareness between Paul Williams' perceptual model and constitutive model. By reviewing the development of the tradition, he suggest that there is a direction from the perceptual model reading going to the constitutive model reading. By ruling out perceptual model, Arnold places Dharmakīrti's “necessity of the first-person perspective”under the constitutive model and by introducing a Shaivis, Rāmakaṇṭa, as well as the intensity between phenomenology and Kant, he deepens the discussion about the constitutive reading of self-awareness.

In the present book, Arnold focuses on Dharmakīrti, and group him with contemporary physicalist such as Fodor when mentioning that they both claim “only things entering some causal relations can be counted as real” on the one hand, and group him with rational cognitivist like Sellars when mentioning that they both urge for the rational part of intentionality. His strategy shows the complexity in both Dharmakīrti and in the questions related. We do not have to take these classification of Dharmakīrti seriously, or how he positions some of the philosophical systems mentioned. By integrating the accounts and questions, he just put the traditions on similar issues at different time and space into a single forum. Besides, we should also notice that the main role of the book is Dharmakīrti, and we have to keep an awareness of the difference between Dharmakīrti and Dignāga.

Dharmakīrti is a epistemic idealist in Yogacara school. He thinks everything we get aware of has not ontological value. To him, they are all mental events, and they are mentally real, sothing causally effective at the level of

cognition (p.11, middle paragraph).

The problem is, how the universal gets its relation to the particular? Dharmakīrti develops his apoha (exclusion) theory that the meaning of cognition becomes clearer and more certain when the more specific concept is obtained by excluding the others from a broader concept. For this, Dharmakīrti claims that the meaning of the universals must sourced from the particular in sensibility; more importantly, only the clear and certain meaning of cognition is "real" (p.10).

Fodor's intentional realism: in《Propositional Attitudes》 (1978), Fodor urges that mental states are just mental, individual representations. In 《A Theory of Content and Other Essays》 (1990), he criticizes standard realism, such as Dianiel Dennett, who claims that we can admit the realty fo mental state without having to admit the reality of mental representations. Fordor urges that we must accept the reality of the perceptual, linguistic as well thinking operations codified in the brain, as we accept the reality of the mind and brain. Similar to Searle's idea: thinking as the real function of brain is as real as the digestion of the digestion organs. Arnold is aware that Dharmakīrti would not agree that cognition is just the function of brain, but he thinks both Dharmakīrti and Fordor are looking for the source of reality inside the mind, in the causal relations between the particular (perceptual mental pieces) and treating it as the basis explaining the abstract.

Arnold claims, the project in front of both Dharmakīrti and Fordor is a project to non-intentionalize the intentionality (p.11, last paragraph). When what is real is no longer the object of intention but is the intention itself, first, intention does not obtain meaning because of the object (it is then the case that intention itself is intelligible, i.e., meaning is in intention – self-awareness), and, second, intention is no longer about something else, but yielding intelligence, and cognition, by itself. Arnold also thinks the realization of intentionality conforms to some fundamental principles or objectives of the contemporary "naturalization of intentionality." Such attitude puts cognition to be a kind of subjective, psychological and empirical states, which by excluding some abstract elements and further specifying, to some degree, certain and causally effective mental states, from which real meaning is yielded.

But, if it is the case that the meaning origins from such "real" mental states or events, then where does the universal which by its nature does not belong to the particular mental states or events, come from? As questioned by his opponents, that which can be directly known via the apoha (exlusion) is only in reference to the universals, and no particular is involved (p.12, top paragraph), while the story that we are capable of ascertain some specific concept by exclusion with the help of the basis of some particular mental events, cannot explain all about the intention (last paragraph, p.12). It seems reasonable to claim, as Mimansakas wants to urge, that language cannot be reduced to empirical psychology, and a separate condition for this is necessary-- not touching yet whether that condition is the Vedas or something else. Neither the concept that "causes" a moral practice in Kant's practical reason, nor the logical space of reason raised by Sellars and McDowell seem to be able to be reduced to a particular basis.

Besides, the separation of ultimate truth and conventional truth made by Madhyamakas, and their believing the world to be, after all, an "irreducible conventional"are read by Arnold as an urge similar to Mimansakas that persists in the necessity of a individual condition of mind for linguistic mental elements. They both, to Arnold, reject naturalizing intentionality. Besides, Dharmakīrti spends pages on "the necessity of the first-person perspective" and the "intentional level of description," using a strategy like Kant's in 《Second Critique》 to deal with the issue from the perspective of morality (one universal as the cause and its result in real action). This is the topic of the sixth chapter of the book.

(In progress, please do not cite any part of the short essay)