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“The Whole Secret Lies in Arbitrariness”:
A Reply to Eli Franco

I am pleased that Eli Franco has taken the time and effort to review my book, *Is Enlightenment Possible? Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje on Knowledge, Rebirth, No-Self and Liberation* (Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1993; hereafter referred to as IEP).¹ Needless to say, I'm sorry that he doesn't like it better. I am not, however, entirely surprised: I knew from the outset that of the several constituencies to which the book might be of interest, it was the community of Dharmakīrti scholars who were most likely to find fault with it, on the grounds that it does not deal as directly as they might like with Dharmakīrti and his texts. What does surprise me is that Franco's critique is based on an analysis of so small and unrepresentative a sample of the book's actual contents. I am reminded of an observation by Kierkegaard:

The whole secret lies in arbitrariness. . . . You see the middle of a play, read the third part of a book. In this way one derives a quite different enjoyment from the one the author has been so kind as to intend for you. One enjoys something entirely accidental²

Substitute “misery” for “enjoyment” and “suffers” for “enjoys,” and my overall sense of Franco's treatment of *Is Enlightenment Possible?* will be clear. This is not, of course, to say that the book is above criticism, or that Franco has not occasionally found his mark; and I do believe that he has raised some methodological questions that are worthy of serious discussion. Nevertheless, I am quite troubled by how much that is basic to the book he omits even to discuss, by the Indological and philological funda-

1. Eli Franco, “Distortion as a Price for Comprehensibility? The rGyal tshab-Jackson Interpretation of Dharmakīrti,” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 20.1 (1997) 109-132, hereafter referred to as DPC.

2. Søren Kierkegaard, *Either / Or: A Fragment of Life*, trans. Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin, 1992) 239.

mentalism³ that shapes his analysis of the parts that he does discuss, and by his obvious ambivalence about rGyal tshab rje, the Tibetan commentarial tradition, and the methods by which they ought to be studied. In the space the editor has so kindly offered me, I will first address the scope of Franco's treatment of *Is Enlightenment Possible?*, then respond to some of his specific criticisms of those portions that he has selected for discussion, and finally consider some of his arguments about the proper method for studying Tibetan commentaries on Indian Buddhist texts.

I am hardly the first author to feel that a reviewer has ignored what is most important about his or her book, while focusing on passages and issues that are of secondary consequence. Lest I utter too extended a Prufrockish whine—"That is not it at all,/ That is not what I meant, at all"⁴—I will point out as briefly as possible that Franco's lengthy discussion of *Is Enlightenment Possible?* addresses in detail only the following elements of a 571-page book: one four-page chapter on "Scholarship on Dharmakīrti"; selected items in the appendix, glossary and bibliography; and two samplings from my translation, which cover rGyal tshab rje's commentary on roughly five of the 285 verses of the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*.

Of course, no reviewer can discuss every element of a work he or she is considering. Given the necessity for selectivity, however, it behooves the reviewer to give at least a general indication of the actual range of the book's contents, and to choose for analysis "core samples" that are representative of the work as a whole. Franco has done neither. He never even mentions that roughly the first third of *Is Enlightenment Possible?* consists of an extended discussion of "Truth and Argument in Buddhism," which attempts to situate both Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje within the history of Buddhist thought, and to reflect, both intra-traditionally and comparatively, on the philosophical issues with which they grappled; and he barely acknowledges that the translation is provided with an extensive apparatus of explanatory footnotes, whose major purpose is to try, for the modern reader, to make some philosophical sense of rGyal tshab rje's commentary.

3. The phrase is a variation on "philological positivism," a category suggested recently by José Cabezón ("Buddhist Studies as a Discipline and the Role of Theory," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*, 18:2 [1995] 245).

4. T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," *Selected Poems* (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964) 15.

These sorts of discussions may not interest Franco much, but he might at least have mentioned how much, for better or for worse, they obviously interested *me*. Furthermore, of the translation passages Franco selects for discussion, all but one are from the opening verses of the chapter, which he himself admits are “notorious for their difficulty” (DPC 113), and which, moreover—interesting and important as they are—are neither typical of the chapter in their content, nor central to Dharmakīrti’s major line of argument (though they do, of course, help to set it up). Finally, in analyzing my translation, Franco consistently launches his critique from an Indological rather than a Tibetological perspective, lamenting my “lack of interest in Dharmakīrti” (DPC 109), and insisting that I should be reading rGyal tshab rje *via* Dharmakīrti, when my explicit purpose is precisely the opposite, namely, to cast some light backward on Dharmakīrti from a great and still influential representative of the *Tibetan* commentarial tradition. *Is Enlightenment Possible?* is Tibetological and philosophical in its orientation; it is obviously not the Indological and narrowly philological book that Franco wishes I had written, but I’m not certain that it’s entirely fair—common as it may be—to be criticized for the book that one *did not* write.⁵

Although I wrote *Is Enlightenment Possible?* with issues of philosophical import foremost in my mind (and am quite explicit about this in a number of places), it would be quite disingenuous, in a work devoted in considerable part to the translation and elucidation of a Tibetan text, to claim that philological issues—let alone correct translation—do not matter at all. They do, so let me turn now to some of Franco’s major criticisms in this area. Roughly, he identifies two types of failing: technical errors and misconstructions of Dharmakīrti and / or rGyal tshab rje. I will comment on each of these in turn.

Franco devotes two long paragraphs (DPC 111-113) to cataloguing a variety of “shocking” technical errors he has located in my chapter on Dharmakīrti scholarship, as well as the appendix, glossary and bibliography. He himself admits that some of the statements he considers mistaken (e. g., on the value of contributions to Pramāṇa studies by Jha and Warder) are matters of opinion. Nevertheless, I cannot deny that Franco has located some mistakes and inconsistencies in the sections he has scrutinized. I am

5. For another recent example of this review style—which, in fact, raises many of the same issues and entails many of the same problems as does DPC—see J. W. de Jong’s review of José Cabezón’s *A Dose of Emptiness*, *Indo-Iranian Journal* 38 (1995) 285-288.

embarrassed by these, and only can note that the chapter on Dharmakīrti scholarship was a quite belated addition to the book, and was not checked for accuracy with sufficient rigor; as for the appendix, glossary and bibliography, I did my best to weed out errors, but, obviously, a few remain.

Later (DPC 118-120), Franco devotes two further paragraphs to “the rather eccentric way in which Jackson translates Sanskrit and Tibetan technical terms” (DPC 118). Eccentricity apparently is measured against something Franco describes as “the mainstream of Buddhist *pramāṇa* studies” (DPC 118), into which he feels I have not entered with sufficient enthusiasm. I do not wish to descend with Franco into terminological trench warfare. Let me simply note that most of his criticisms of my terms are based on their appearance in the glossary, rather than their instantiations in the text, where, in their proper context, they often may seem considerably less egregious. Furthermore, his criticisms are launched primarily from the perspective of the *Sanskrit* side of the terminological puzzle, whereas I have concentrated on the Tibetan terms, which, given Tibetan’s grammatical and terminological differences from Sanskrit may *not*—the best efforts of translators and commentators notwithstanding—always match up exactly with their Sanskrit prototypes. Even if we were to concede (and this is dubious) that where the Sanskrit is unambiguous there can be little doubt about a Tibetan term, I find—as in most philological discussions—that sometimes the corrections offered are helpful (e. g., “reason based on an essential property” rather than “reason based on synonymy” for *rang bzhin gyi rtags / svabhāvaheṭu* ⁶), and sometimes trivial (e. g., “doubt” rather than “concern” for *dogs pa / śankā*, “completely beyond the realm of the senses” rather than “very hidden phenomenon” for *shin tu lkog gyur / parokṣa*).

Now, Franco clearly does not believe that the technical points he raises in such detail are “trivial.” Indeed, he sees them as calling into question the very value of the book—for, he reasons, if the philology is weak, then the real foundation of the work is flawed. Now I am far from a translational (or any other kind of) relativist. I certainly believe that there are better and worse translation choices to be made in any given circumstance. Nor do I

6. My choice here was based on a concern to avoid “essence-talk” in translating Buddhist terms, but I probably should have simply stuck to the more literal rendition, which Franco’s clearly represents. It might be noted that, the first time the term comes up (IEP 104), I do provide “own-nature” as a parenthetical alternative to “synonymy” (not, as Franco has it, “synonymity”) though I might have explained my choice of a translation-equivalent that, in this case, I would agree is “eccentric.”

object to the correction of technical errors where they exist, or to the proffering of alternative translation-terms; such criticism is an important way in which, individually and as a field, we progress. What I do find disturbing is the spirit of philological fundamentalism that Franco brings to his critique, the apparent certainty that there is usually *a single* right translation for any given term in any given context and that a translator's failure to provide that single right term is evidence of his or her incompetence, hence of the worthlessness of his or her entire project. As I have tried to argue generally above, and will attempt to demonstrate more specifically below, it is *not* so evident that the rights and wrongs of translation-choices are utterly clear-cut, for the choices that are made do depend in large part (but not completely) on the translator's own background and sense of the context of the text under consideration—and Franco and I obviously have very different understandings of the context of rGyal tshab rje's *Pramāṇavārttika* commentary. Nor is it so evident that the presence of a few errors in a huge, translated work—and I would challenge Franco to name a translation that cannot be corrected—vitiates the worth of the work as a whole. This is especially so when the translator has—as I believe I have—got it right the vast majority of the time and, besides, is interested in, and deals extensively with, issues that lie beyond, and are only partially dependent upon, the narrowly philological. I do not claim that a philosophical account of rGyal tshab rje's or Dharmakīrti's arguments can be given in disregard of an accurate reading of their texts; I do want to maintain that some at least partially arbitrary notion of correctness cannot be invoked as the sole standard by which to measure a scholar's efforts.

With these points in mind, let me turn briefly to a consideration of those passages in my translation that Franco has selected to demonstrate my supposed misconstrual of rGyal tshab rje or Dharmakīrti. I should remark generally that I find much of what Franco had to say here quite interesting and valuable. I cannot gainsay his understanding of Dharmakīrti's verses, both in the Sanskrit original and in Sa skya Paṇḍita's Tibetan translation; his command of Indian commentarial material relating to the *Pramāṇavārttika*; or his broader Indological competence. I'm not, on the other hand, convinced that his critiques of my reading of rGyal tshab rje's interpretation of Dharmakīrti—which was, let us recall, my basic angle of approach in *Is Enlightenment Possible?*—are at all compelling.

The passages he analyzes fall into two major groups: (1) those relating to the first six verses of the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*.

[PV],⁷ in particular verses 1-2 (commented upon on pp. 229-230 of rGyal tshab rje's commentary [GT],⁸ translated on pp. 176-178 of IEP and discussed on pp. 113-118 of DPC); 4d-5a (= GT 231-233, IEP 180-184, DPC 115-116); and (quite briefly) 5d-6 (= GT 233-236, IEP 184-188, DPC 117-118); and (2) those relating to verses 34a-c (= GT 252-253, IEP 221-223, DPC 121-128).

(1) The first six verses of the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter are notoriously difficult, and though I think that most of the time I have made sense of rGyal tshab rje's interpretation of them, I am aware that my translation through this section is often quite convoluted, and occasionally flawed. I do believe that, in relation to PV 1ab, Franco is right to question my footnoted comments (IEP 177, n. 2) on the relation between apperception (*rang rig / svasamvedanā*) and subsequent confirmatory action. He is correct in maintaining that Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje are *not* distinguishing between direct cognitions and cognitions that must receive subsequent confirmation, but, rather, between apperceptions, *none* of which require subsequent confirmation, and cognitions of knowledge-objects, *all* of which require subsequent confirmation. By the same token, his related criticism of my footnoted remarks on Devendrabuddhi's alternative reading of PV 4d-5a (DPC 115-116, on IEP 182, n. 15), where similar issues are at stake, seems also to be on target. I do not believe that my actual translation of the rGyal tshab rje passages in question is as far off the mark as Franco claims, but I would certainly now alter them somewhat, given the chance to do so.

Two brief examples will have to suffice. (1) I would alter my translation of *btso bsreg la sogs pa'i don byed nus par rang gis ji ltar gzhal ba ltar gnas pa ni / las la mi slu ba yin* (GT 229, IEP 182-183) to something along the lines of: "[a knowledge object's] ABIDING as comprehended as it is [ji ltar] by oneself AS [CAUSALLY] EFFICIENT, such as for cooking, burning, etc., is non-deceptive in [its susceptibility to subsequent confirmatory] action." The problem here is with the *ji ltar*, which I no longer would read as interrogative; on the other hand, Franco, is wrong in claiming (DPC 114) that "*nus pa(r)* is not translated"—it is incorporated into "EFFICIENT." (2) I would alter my translation of *tshad ma yin pa'i cha de dus physis*

7. Y. Miyasaka, ed., *Pramāṇavārttika-kārikā. Sanskrit and Tibetan. Acta Indologica* 2-4: 1977.

8. rGyal tshab rje, *rNam 'grel thar lam gsal byed*. 2 vols. Sarnath: Tibetan Monastery, 1974. rGyal tshab rje's commentary on the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter is found in the first volume, and all references are to that volume.

byung gi don byed can gyi tha snyad pa'i tshad ma nyid las rtogs dgos par mthong ba'i phyir (GT 232, IEP 182) to something like: “because we see that the AUTHORITATIVENESS part must be cognized THROUGH authoritativeness that is a CONVENTION which has an apparent efficiency that arises at a later time.” I agree with Franco that “convention” is preferable to “designation” for *tha snyad*, and that *don byed* refers to “efficiency” rather than an “object”; on the other hand, my choice of “apparent” for *sngang can* need have nothing pejorative about it—the “apparent” is simply that which appears.

In most of Franco’s other comments on my translation of material relating to the first six verses, I must confess that I see few significant *semantic* distinctions between my own reading and his, whether of Dharmakīrti’s verses or rGyal tshab rje’s commentary. Indeed, many of the differences between our renditions are a matter of terminological preference, while still others—especially where a rendition of the root-verse is in question—reflect the fact that Franco is invariably reading a given verse of Dharmakīrti “straightforwardly,” while I am reconstructing it from rGyal tshab rje, distilling it from the commentarial text in which it is imbedded. In fact, Franco seems not to have fully appreciated this aspect of rGyal tshab rje’s commentarial method. While he is correct in observing that the *rNam ’grel thar lam gsal byed* “does not explain [the *Pramāṇavārttika*] word for word” (DPC 125), it is misleading to claim that rGyal tshab rje’s commentary “is more general and discursive. . . . He writes about and around the *mūla*-text” (DPC 125), for rGyal tshab rje does indeed *incorporate* the entire root-text of the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter into his commentary, usually in the syntactical order of the Tibetan translation, and usually verbatim. It is that incorporation of the root-text that is reflected in my capitalizations within my translation of rGyal tshab rje, and it is that, in turn that generates my version of root-verses presented at the head of each section, and gives the translation its occasionally “eccentric” character.

Thus, in the case of PV 2 (*smra ba po yi byed pa'i yul / don gang blo la rab gsal ba / de las gra ni tshad ma yin / don gyi de nyid rgyu can min*, GT 230, IEP 178, DPC 117) it is perfectly understandable how Franco might arrive at the version he does (“The validity of a word relates to the thing that forms the object of the speaker’s activity [and] appears in the cognition [of the hearer] (i. e., the meaning of the word); it does not depend on the reality of [that] object”) through a straightforward reading of the PV verse. Mine, on the other hand (“WORDS IN THE [ŚĀSTRAS] ARE NOT CAUSE-POSSESSING REAL / OBJECTS, AUTHORITIES; THEY BRING ABOUT / IN THE MIND A CLEAR [APPEARANCE OF] SOME OBJECT / THAT IS THE OBJECT

THE SPEAKER [DESIRES TO EXPRESS]”) is dependent upon rGyal tshab rje’s presentation of the verse within his commentary. Here, as in a number of instances, he has altered the sequence of the verse to make his point, so it might appear as if a wildly off-base translation of the root-verse has been offered. On the other hand, if one reads rGyal tshab rje with the root-verses close at hand, and/or notices in my translation of rGyal tshab rje the capitalized words that indicate his direct quotations from the root-verse, it becomes evident that the translation of the root verse makes perfect sense in the context of rGyal tshab rje’s discussion. Our differences in approach and translation notwithstanding, I think that here, as so often, Franco and I actually have arrived at the same point, in this case, that words are authoritative to the extent that they demonstrate that a speaker intends a particular object, and that their authoritativeness *as words* is unconnected to the reality or unreality of the objects they designate.

In any case, whether or not Franco and I have differences that are “significant” (this obviously being a relative term), let alone whether or not one of us is “right” or “wrong” in a given instance, let us recall that verses 1-6 of the *Pramānasiddhi* chapter are unusually dense and difficult, as well as atypical of the chapter as a whole in their purely epistemological subject-matter. They have bedeviled every translator that has attempted them, and if I also have failed them on occasion, I am in good company. Let me reiterate, though, that my “failure” in regard to them would be egregious only if I were attempting a direct translation from the Sanskrit original, or perhaps from the Tibetan translation. Neither of these, however, is the source for my version, which is, rather, drawn from the context of rGyal tshab rje’s incorporation of them into his commentary.

(2) Franco then turns (DPC 121ff.) to PV 34⁹ to demonstrate that I stumble even when confronted by “relatively simple” verses. In the process of attempting to do so, he supplies a fascinating excursus on the commentarial tradition surrounding this verse, noting the variety of readings supplied by the likes of Devendrabuddhi, Ravigupta, Manorathanandin and Prajñākaragupta. His strongest criticism is reserved for my reading of the first line of the verse, *sgrub byed thugs rjes goms las de*, which I translate “ACCUSTOMATION WITH COMPASSION IS THE ESTABLISHER” (IEP 221), and which he would render “Compassion is the proof [of the Buddha’s being a means of knowledge]. That [compassion arises] from repeated practice” (DPC 121-122). Translation choices aside, the difference

9. *sgrub byed thugs rjes goms las de/ blo ni lus la brten pa’i phyir/ goms pas grub pa med ce na/ ma yin brten ni bkag phyir ro* (GT 175ff., IEP 221ff.).

between Franco's reading and mine is over whether the "establisher" (or "proof") of the Buddha's authoritativeness is "accustomation" (with compassion) or "compassion" itself. Now, Franco himself admits that each of these is acknowledged by Prajñākaragupta as a possible way of reading the verse, and he concedes that the Sanskrit *karuṇā* (*thugs rjes*) is ambiguous enough that it might be read either as (a) a nominative in agreement with *sādhana* or (b) as part of a compound, *karuṇābhyāsāt*, in which it functions as an object for *abhyāsāt*. He argues that Sanskrit grammatical rules make the first reading preferable, and that Sa skya Paṇḍita's Tibetan translation removes the ambiguity entirely.

Matters are not, however, so unambiguous when we look at the way in which rGyal tshab rje incorporates the verse into his commentary. The relevant Tibetan here is:

*thugs rje chen po de tshad ma'i skyes bu de sgrub par byed pa la / dang
por sngon du song dgos te / dang por mtha' dag sdug bsngal grol bar
'dod pa'i snying rje bskyed nas / de'i rjes su sdug bsngal zhi ba'i thabs la
goms par byas pa las ston par 'gyur dgos pa'i phyir / thugs rje chen po
de chos can / rgyu med dang ma mthun pa'i rgyu las mi 'byung ste / rang
gi rigs 'dra snga ma goms pa las grub pa'i phyir / snying rje chen po de
nyid theg pa chen po'i lam sgom pa'i thog ma'i sgrub byed yin pa dang .
. . . (GT 252)*

I translate:

When the Greatly Compassionate One accomplished [the state of] an authoritative person, [his accomplishment] necessarily first was preceded [by great compassion], because it was necessary that, having first generated the compassion that desires to free [sentient beings] from all their sufferings, he then accustomated a method of pacifying suffering, and from that he became the teacher. Great compassion does not arise causelessly or from inappropriate causes, because it is accomplished through ACCUSTOMATION WITH previous homogenes. Great COMPASSION IS THE ESTABLISHER of the beginning of meditation on the Mahāyāna path. . . . (IEP 222)

It is interesting to note that, though he usually reproduces both the order and exact wording of the Tibetan root-verse in his commentary, rGyal tshab rje here never adds the instrumental *s* to *thugs rje*, leaving the exact relation between that central term and both *sgrub byed* and *goms* less than totally obvious. His discussion is further complicated by the fact that, here as

elsewhere, he uses the term *sgrub byed* in a double sense, as meaning both logical proof *and* spiritual accomplishment. In this particular instance, the grammar and syntax seem to me to point toward the latter reading,¹⁰ and where *spiritual* accomplishment (i. e., becoming an authoritative person) is at stake, it is not compassion itself, but its accustomation (or, as Franco would have it, “repeated practice”¹¹) that is the “establisher” (*sgrub byed*). I have made it clear in my notes and elsewhere that I understand perfectly well that when we take *sgrub byed* in the sense of *logical* establishment, that it is “compassion” (rather than “accustomation with compassion”) that serves as the logical reason; it is only when we take the term as referring to *spiritual* establishment that “accustomation” may serve as the “establisher”—but it is *primarily* in this latter sense that I see rGyal tshab rje interpreting the verse, hence my retrojection of a translation of the root-verse that would seem at odds with the grammar of the verse.¹²

The *type* of argument I have made here about PV 34a may be applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to my retrojected translation of PV 34bc,¹³ which, like that of 34a, may not fit a straightforward reading of the Tibetan, let alone the Sanskrit, but accurately reflects the way in which rGyal tshab rje incorporates the verse into his commentary (see GT 252, IEP 223). This much Franco concedes (DPC 125), and yet he proceeds upon a lengthy disquisition on references to Lokāyata similes in Dharmakīrti’s commentators (DPC 125-129). His comments are erudite and interesting, but the springboard for them—his sense that my statement that “[t]hè probative reasons and examples are supplied by rGyal tshab rje” (IEP 223, n. 6) implies that rGyal

10. It might be possible to construe *thugs rje chen po de tshad ma’i skeyes bu de sgrub byed pa la* as “As for compassion, the proof of authoritativeness”; however, the fact that “authoritativeness” (not “compassion”) appears to be the subject of the following clauses makes this reading a less promising one.

11. As noted already in the book (IEP 169, n. 11), I’m not thrilled with “accustomation” as a translation for *goms/ abhyāsa*. It may, perhaps, convey greater passivity than “repeated practice”; on the other hand, unlike “repeated practice,” “accustomation” does manage to convey the cumulative sense that is an important aspect of the term.

12. My need to respond to Franco in such detail has made me think that I should have commented on this issue in a footnote. I did note rGyal tshab rje’s deliberately ambiguous usage of *sgrub byed* upon its first appearance in the commentary [IEP 170, n. 14], but a reiteration of the fact in relation to verse 34a might have conserved both ink and spleen.

13. “[THE LOKĀYATAS] SAY: [COMPASSION] IS NOT ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH ACCUSTOMATION,/ BECAUSE MIND IS BASED ON THE BODY.”

tshab rje “designed certain reasons . . . and provided their examples independently on the basis of his acquaintance with Indian Lokāyata sources” (DPC 126)—requires a reading of my text that is, to put it gently, rather imaginative.

Furthermore, his condescending observation (DPC 126), that to understand the Lokāyata similes it is not necessary to be familiar with the ideas of Gilbert Ryle, for “[a]ll one has to do is read the classical commentaries on this verse,” demonstrates how little he understands of the philosophical purpose of my footnotes (or the book as a whole), which is to provide educated readers who do not have access to “the classical commentaries” with some tools whereby they might understand Dharmakīrti’s and / or rGyal tshab rje’s analysis in terms that are familiar to them. I am not suggesting that there is a precise parallel between Lokāyata arguments and those of Ryle, or some other materialist; I am suggesting, here and throughout the book, that there are strong analogies between the issues and arguments developed by Indians and Tibetans and those that have arisen in the West. (This, incidentally, strikes me as a potentially controversial claim that actually is worth arguing about, but Franco does not raise it at all; I begin to suspect that he simply did not *see* the philosophical concerns that animate the book.)

Thus, as with the more recondite verses at the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter’s outset, so with later and “simpler” [sic] verses, an examination of the way in which rGyal tshab rje construes Dharmakīrti often will produce a reading of the root-verses that is different from that yielded by a “straightforward” reading of either the Sanskrit or Tibetan of Dharmakīrti’s text—but should not, simply for that reason, be considered a “wrong” translation of Dharmakīrti, any more than an accurate translation of rGyal tshab rje should be considered “wrong” if it seems to differ from what a “straightforward” reading of the Sanskrit (or even, on occasion, Tibetan) version of the verses would lead an interpreter to think rGyal tshab rje *ought* to be saying. These last comments bring us squarely to the real nub of Franco’s critique of *Is Enlightenment Possible?*, which is methodological, and it is to those issues—in my opinion the most interesting he raises—that I will turn at last.

It is Franco’s contention (DPC 131) that my translation leaves us with a view not only of Dharmakīrti’s original verses, but of rGyal tshab rje’s commentary upon them, that is spoiled by the “indistinct haze” emitted by a faulty methodology. Franco’s methodological criticisms are scattered rather unsystematically throughout his review, but I would summarize the major

points, in descending order of generality, as follows: (1) It is a mistake to assume that commentary, by its very nature, distorts the meaning of an original text; to make this assumption is to invite indifference to the original text and an improper appreciation for the accomplishment of the commentator; (2) it is a mistake, all too typical of North American scholarship, to attempt to present Tibetan commentaries on Indian texts without careful, indeed, primary attention to the original Indian sources, both the “root-text” and its commentarial tradition; and (3) rGyal tshab rje’s commentary on the *Pramāṇavārttika* cannot stand comprehensibly on its own, for if it is allowed to do so, we lose sight of the original it is supposed to be explaining (and through which we should explain it), to the point where it might even appear that rGyal tshab rje has failed to understand Dharmakīrti properly! Let me briefly consider each of these points in turn.

(1) Franco cites with considerable disapproval (DPC 124) my statements to the effect that (a) original Indian philosophical texts *often* require commentary to be comprehensible (IEP 11, emphasis added), but (b) commentary necessarily involves distortion of the original, and the greater the temporal and geographical distance between a commentary and its original text, the greater the likelihood of distortion (IEP 159). This, for Franco, entails the following absurd syllogism (DPC 124): “All root texts require commentary to be comprehensible. All commentaries distort their original root-texts. Therefore, root-texts have to be distorted to be comprehensible.”

This is an amusing bit of sophistry, and provides Franco with the main title for his review, but makes a caricature not only of my position, but, I suspect, of his own as well. I do not, in the first place, claim that *all* root-texts are obscurely concise. On the other hand, the existence of a large and lively commentarial tradition surrounding a text like the *Pramāṇavārttika* seems to testify in part at least to the fact that its meanings are *not* all and instantly apparent, even to a highly educated reader¹⁴; surely Franco would concede that many important Indian texts can be and have been elucidated by subsequent commentary. Nor, I suspect, would he want to deny that commentary does, inevitably, involve some distortion: one does not have to adopt a radical reader-response approach to authors and their texts¹⁵ to

14. Recall the legend of Dharmakīrti’s repeated destruction of Devendrabuddhi’s attempts at a *Pramāṇavārttika* commentary, whose third draft he finally, grudgingly, accepted as barely adequate (IEP 114).

15. For a recent Buddhological example, see C.W. Huntington, Jr., “A Way of Reading,” *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 18.2, (1995) 279-308. If Franco is unhappy about the degree to which my book, intended in part as a contribution to Dharmakīrti studies, seems often to have lit-

appreciate the broader hermeneutical point, made by Heidegger, Gadamer and so many others, that any reader of or commentator upon a text bears an ambiguous relation to it: he or she seeks to understand or explicate what seems to require clarification, and in the process inevitably brings to bear his or her own culture and concerns, hence at the same time both illuminating and obscuring the text that is under consideration.

Now, the fact that texts are difficult to read and that the commentaries they prompt will distort them to some degree, does *not* mean that there are not better or worse commentaries, or that an author's original meaning is so utterly lost to us (let alone unimportant or nonexistent) that we should not bother attempting to retrieve it. I believe that it is precisely the task of historically informed philological scholarship to attempt such retrievals. Let me simply reiterate that the text and author I am concerned to "retrieve" in *Is Enlightenment Possible?* is not primarily Dharmakīrti, but rGyal tshab rje, and that the philosophical standpoint I am most intent on exposing is that of the Tibetan, rather than the Indian, tradition.

(2) My focus on rGyal tshab rje at the apparent expense of Dharmakīrti Franco finds "symptomatic for [sic] a current trend among [North American] scholars of Tibet who attempt to understand the Tibetan philosophical tradition 'as such' independently of the decisive background and long-lasting influence of the Indian tradition" (DPC 109-110). But, Franco maintains, "a genuine understanding of the older indigenous Tibetan commentaries on Indian Buddhist texts, or of independent works mainly based on these texts, is not possible without a thorough, first-hand understanding of these 'root-texts' and their Indian exegesis, of course, in their original language if they are preserved in it" (DPC 131).

Now, I would certainly agree that the *more* one knows about the background of any text, the more nuanced one's appreciation and exposition of it is likely to be. Thus, any Tibetan commentary or treatise, especially one that is linked explicitly with an Indian text, is likely to be *most fully* understood against the background of its Indian forerunners. The question is not whether such background is interesting or even important, but, rather, whether, as Franco maintains, it is *essential*. I would maintain that such background—especially a detailed exploration of it—is only essential in a primarily Indological context, where one's real concern is with the original Indian text, and the Tibetan commentary or treatise is valued only for the

tle to do with Dharmakīrti, I can only imagine his apoplexy in the face of Huntington's discussion of Nāgārjuna, which seems to relate to practically everyone but the great Mādhyamika!

light it may shed on the original. If, on the other hand, one's concern is primarily with the *Tibetan* textual or philosophical tradition, a detailed exploration of the Indian background sources is of considerably less importance than an attempt to understand the meaning that the *Tibetan* text must have had for its author and audience—even if that meaning seems at times to “deviate” from that which one would expect from a careful consideration of the Indian background texts.

What is more, the attempt to read a Tibetan text through an Indological prism—even a very well-constructed one—runs as great a risk of distorting the way a text was received in Tibet as does its converse, reading a Sanskrit text through its Tibetan translation or commentary *and then claiming that the original has thereby been captured*. I doubt seriously that Franco's characterization of the methods of North American Tibetology, cited above, is very accurate. To the degree, though, that there have been and are scholars (e. g., Hopkins, Klein, Lopez, Cabezón, myself) who in some of our works focus quite deliberately on the Tibetan side of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist equation, our methodology is irresponsible only if we make excessive claims for it, i. e., naively insist (or, perhaps more insidiously, imply by silence) that (a) Tibetan translations are faithful to their Sanskrit originals, (b) Tibetan commentators perfectly preserved the interpretive traditions of Indian Buddhism, and therefore (c) Tibetan translations and commentaries give us access to the unalloyed meaning of the original. If, on the other hand, we make it clear that we are concerned above all to represent a primarily Tibetan, rather than Indian, textual and philosophical tradition, and make no claims to the effect that the Tibetan interpretation is a philologically accurate equivalent of the Indian original, then I think we have discharged our methodological obligations in good faith.¹⁶

(3) What, finally, of the method I have applied to the presentation of Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje in *Is Enlightenment Possible?* While I cannot deny that my translation and exposition of rGyal tshab rje's *Pramānavārttika* commentary might have been enriched by a more detailed consideration of the Indian commentarial tradition than I have undertaken, or that I might have clarified more often than I did the ways in which rGyal

16. This point has been made not only by many in the “younger” generation of North American Buddhist scholars, but also by such very different, yet respected, representatives of the previous generation as Herbert V. Guenther (in many works) and David Seyfort Ruegg (especially in his Leiden inaugural lecture, *The Study of Indian and Buddhist Thought: Some Problems and Perspectives* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967]).

tshab rje's commentarial glosses on Dharmakīrti entail a less-than-straight-forward reading of his root-verses, I am not convinced that my omissions on this score reflect an essential weakness in either the approach or the content of the book. My central purpose, recall, was "to make available . . . to readers of English an important source of past and present Buddhist philosophizing" (IEP 13), namely, rGyal tshab rje's commentary on the *Pramāṇasiddhi* chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, which has been a profoundly influential source of dGe lugs pa Tibetan philosophy of religion from the time of its composition down to the present—where it still is actively studied and expounded. I believe that it is entirely possible to read rGyal tshab rje's text from a Tibetan-oriented perspective that employs Indian sources sparingly, and have it make sense as a philosophical document. That, after all, is precisely the way that most of rGyal tshab rje's contemporaries read his text, and certainly the way it has been read by dGe lugs pa intellectuals since. If I have presented rGyal tshab rje's version of Dharmakīrti's arguments accurately most of the time, and cast some light on them in my footnotes, then I will have succeeded in the central purpose for which I undertook the translation.

Franco, of course, believes that I have *not* presented rGyal tshab rje clearly most of the time. I hope, however, to have shown above that, almost invariably, his sense that I have misconstrued the *rNam 'grel thar lam gsal byed* is a result of his inability to accept that the way in which rGyal tshab rje utilizes the *Pramāṇavārttika* may sometimes take him quite some distance from a "straightforward" reading of the Tibetan translation, let alone the Sanskrit original, of the root-verses. It is interesting to observe that, as unambiguously critical as Franco is of my approach to rGyal tshab rje, he seems very much of two minds about rGyal tshab rje himself. Earlier in his review, he maintains that rGyal tshab rje's "differences" from Dharmakīrti cannot be so great as they sometimes seem in my translation, for this would imply not only that rGyal tshab rje had misunderstood Dharmakīrti, but that the entire Tibetan tradition of Pramāṇa commentary had been considerably over-valued. Later in the review, however, he seems increasingly to acknowledge that there *are* significant ways in which rGyal tshab rje departs from Dharmakīrti; as a result, he ends up quite ambivalent about the value of rGyal tshab rje's commentary—ambivalent enough, it appears, that the distorted version of Dharmakīrti he sees himself as criticizing in the review is, in his subtitle, not mine alone, but "the rGyal-tshab-Jackson interpretation." The problem with insisting either that rGyal tshab rje *must* have read Dharmakīrti "correctly," hence I have misread rGyal tshab rje; or that rGyal tshab rje has strayed sufficiently from Dharmakīrti

that his commentary can have little value, is that both positions are based on a thoroughly Indocentric perspective, wherein a Tibetan commentary's only importance is in its faithful (or unfaithful) representation of an original Indian text. Once one frees rGyal tshab rje from the requirement that he be read through Dharmakīrti and the Indian tradition or not all, it becomes possible to regard him as a Tibetan intellectual who is intrinsically interesting in his own right, as well as for the ways in which (like all commentators) he appropriated his source text in ways that sometimes were "faithful to the original" and sometimes quite "creative" (even if distorting) in their utilization of it.

As for my presentation of Dharmakīrti: I made it clear in the book, and have reiterated here, that the verses that head each section of the translation are intended *not* as straightforward renditions of the Tibetan—let alone the Sanskrit—of Dharmakīrti's verses, but as indicators of the way in which rGyal tshab rje has used them in his commentary. Sometimes, therefore, my translation may happen to coincide with a straightforward reading of the Tibetan (or even Sanskrit) verses, but often it will not. As long as the reader does not think that I am trying to pawn off those verses, or the commentary, as something they are not, and is content with exploring an argument that is Dharmakīrtian without always being precisely Dharmakīrti's (do we cease to study Plotinus because his doctrine is Platonic without being Plato's?), he or she may find my translation of some value. If, on the other hand, like Franco, the reader is an Indological and philological fundamentalist, or an uncompromising Dharmakīrti-centrist, he or she may be incapable of seeing any value in a book that is frankly Tibetological and philosophical, and only secondarily concerned with issues of commentarial fidelity. In that case, I can only regret the disappointment I have caused (and, of course, any errors that I have committed), but not that I wrote the book that I did, or as I did. The ocean of Buddhological meanings and methods is vast, and I am confident that there is room in it both for the sorts of fish favored by Franco and for the types that I prefer. And, as Kierkegaard might remind us, the secret (perhaps not the whole secret, but a very real part of the secret) to our readings and delectations—and even to the words of learned commentators we seek to understand—lies, at last, in an arbitrariness that never entirely can be eliminated, but can, perhaps, be attenuated to the degree that we are willing to acknowledge it.