EXCLUSION, VIOLENCE, AND REFERENCE:
A POSTSTRUCTURALIST READING
OF THE CLASSICAL NYĀYA AND BUDDHIST
PRAMĀNA DEBATES

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I AT MĀNOA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
PHILOSOPHY
AUGUST 2011

By
Amy K. Donahue

Dissertation Committee:
Mary Tiles, Co-Chairperson
Ron Bontekoe, Co-Chairperson
Arindam Chakrabarti
Vrinda Dalmiya
John Zuern

Keywords: Indian Philosophy, Poststructuralism, Queer Theory, Feminism, Postcolonial Theory
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible, in its conception or completion, without the support and mentorship of unusually muse-ical friends, mentors, advisors, writing group partners, and comrades. Thank you to each of you, including especially my co-chairs, Mary Tiles and Ron Bontekoe, and my other committee members, any one of whom could, and probably should, also be listed as co-chair — Arindam Chakrabarti, Vrinda Dalmiya, and John Zuern.
ABSTRACT

The dissertation draws on the work of contemporary poststructuralist queer, feminist, and postcolonial theorists to set the ground for a poststructuralist reading of the classical Nyāya and Buddhist Pramāṇa debates. In the process, it problematizes comparative philosophy’s currently prevalent, colonially overdetermined framing of these debates, and shows how both Buddhist and Nyāya epistemologies and semantic theories offer resources that poststructuralists can use to bolster critiques of modern, liberal epistemological and semantics assumptions, and develop practices of judgment and reason that regulate or correct structuralists’ distinctive philosophical errors. It specifically problematizes modern assumptions that individuals are passively continuous with unproblematically intuited and generally representative normative epistemological subjectivities, and that to know, individuals must appear as representative members of already established subject categories.

The dissertation uses the Buddhist textual tradition’s “no-self” metaphysics and “exclusion of the other” semantics, as they have been developed in Buddhist pramāṇavāda, to situate poststructuralist and anti-essentialist philosophies in a broader historical and cultural context, and shows how even the non-modern Nyāya realist tradition offers resources that could benefit poststructuralist feminist, gender, and cultural theorists who now seek to imagine alternatives to modern epistemological frames. Simultaneously, it draws on the work of Subaltern Studies historian, Partha Chatterjee, to correct what Nietszche called philosophers’ congenital defect — a lack of historical perspective — by situating the currently prevalent comparative philosophical framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates in the context of South Asia’s postcolonial history, with specific attention paid to the emergence of a modern Indian middle class national subject.

In addition, because comparative philosophers customarily read South Asia’s epistemological and logical traditions through an analytic philosophical lens, this scholarship is among the first to initiate mutually informed conversation between poststructuralist feminist and queer theories of subjectivity and knowledge, including the work of theorists such as Judith Butler, Gayatri Spivak, and Michael Warner, and twentieth century analytic epistemology and philosophy of language, including WVO Quine’s naturalized epistemology and Bertrand Russell’s theory of definite descriptions.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

I. A Question of Audience ................................................................. 7
II. Remarks about the Project and its Aims ........................................ 11

CHAPTER ONE:
A POSTCOLONIAL CRITIQUE OF PREVALENT COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMINGS OF THE NYĀYA-BUDDHIST PRAMĀṆA DEBATES

I. ‘Exclusion of the Other’ in the Modern Imagining
   of the Indian Middle Class .......................................................... 16
   (A) The Rule of Colonial Difference ............................................. 16
   (B) ‘Othering’ and the Self-constitution of India’s
       Nationalist Middle Class .......................................................... 20

II. ‘Othering’ and Colonial Difference in Framings of
    the Nyāya-Buddhist Debates ....................................................... 23

CHAPTER TWO:
‘CLASSICAL’ BUDDHIST ARGUMENTS AGAINST MODERN EPISTEMOLOGICAL SUBJECTS

I. Preliminary Housekeeping about the Nature of ‘Thing-ness’ .............. 33
II. Diññāga’s Defense of Discontinuity between Actual
Things and Things in General ................................................................. 41

III. A Philosophical Reconstruction of Pramāṇa-Samuccaya,

Chapter V ............................................................................................... 45

IV. A Poststructuralist Reading of Diññāga’s Anyāpohavāda ................. 50

V. Final Thoughts on Deploying Diññāga to Argue Against

The Global Incorporation Thesis ............................................................ 54

CHAPTER THREE:
STRETCHED BETWEEN MODERNITY AND MYSTICISM —
THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF STRUCTURALIST COMPARATIVE
PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS ON THE CLASSICAL INDIAN
BUDDHISTS

I. Janus-Faced Observation Sentences and the Diññāga-Dharmakīrti

Tradition’s Hybridic Model of Semantic Value ...................................... 60

II. Quine’s Commitment to a Continuum Model of Language and

Queer Interventions ............................................................................. 65

III. Were the Classical Indian Buddhists Quinean? ............................... 73

CHAPTER FOUR:
CAN THE ‘OTHER’ OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY SPEAK? — ON THE
EPISTEMOLOGICAL VIOLENCE OF THE CONTINUUM MODEL OF
LANGUAGE

I. The Phenomenon of Normalization .................................................. 83

II. The Continuum Model of Language from a Quinean Perspective ....... 90

III. The Continuum Model of Language from a Buddhist Perspective ... 98
CHAPTER FIVE:
HOW MIGHT THE ‘OTHER’ OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY SPEAK? — A FEMINIST READING OF BUTLER’S PROPOSED NONVIOLENT PROGRAM OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

I. What are the Prospects for a Nonviolent Epistemology? ......................... 110
II. Feminist Searches for Legitimacy and Illegitimacy .............................. 114
III. ‘Cultural Translation’ as a Strategy for Post-Identity Feminist Politics ...... 122

CHAPTER SIX:
BEYOND A GLOBAL CORPORATIST VALUE-SYSTEM — INTERPRETING NYĀYA AND BUDDHIST NON-MODERN EPISTEMOLOGIES AS POTENTIAL NONVIOLENT KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES

I. Global Capitalism and Quine’s Model of Radical Translation ................. 133
II. Quine’s Rejection of the Museum View of Meaning .......................... 140
III. A Poststructuralist Reading of the Nyāya-Buddhist Pramāṇa Debates .... 150

BIBLIOGRAPHY ...................................................................................... 171
INTRODUCTION

Publics are queer creatures. You cannot point to them, count them, or look them in the eye. You also cannot easily avoid them. They have become an almost natural feature of the social landscape, like pavement. (Warner 7)

Each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation; and the considerations which guide him in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are, where rational, pragmatic. (Quine "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" 46)

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone. (Orwell 1984, quoted in Warner 127)

I. A Question of Audience

When Winston first sits in 1984 to begin his diary, he is stalled by a problem of audience. He knows that his words will matter to no one. They will not help to topple the totalitarian state that he lives in, or help to end any injustice. No one whose thoughts and expressions are free will see any point to his work, and no one in his totalitarian state will listen to it. From the start, therefore, Winston, the writer, cannot practically hope to communicate. Yet, as Michael Warner observes, even this isolated and apparently private act of writing demands some assumption of publicity, of risky communication with strangers — of a politics — which is why the fledgling deviant is hit with writer’s block just when he realizes that no audience can possibly receive his words. “He falters,” Warner narrates. “A tremor goes ‘through his bowels.’ He feels helpless. ‘For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing his diary’” (125-26)? The reading of the Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates to be developed here will seek to preserve epistemological possibilities for individuals who find themselves, as Warner says, in a situation like that of Orwell’s diarist.
In 1984, all recognizable circuits of public communication, including those that might seem intimate and personal, are viscerally primed against thoughts like Winston’s. “The diary has nowhere to go except into the hands of the police,” Warner notes. “Its address can only be internal projection. It has no readers, no scene of circulation. It stands for the pure wish that such a scene exist, that it might be oriented — as in fact it cannot be — to a horizon of difference.” Because of social realities, Winston would be mad to think that his thoughts could fruitfully meet with anyone in “a near future, linked to him by a chain of continuous transformation.” If he is to articulate them at all, he must address “a placeholder for others,” a purelyopaquely cognized audience (126).

The imaginary status of his diary’s readership, and the possible solipsism of its diarist, should be critically thought about, as Warner recommends. Nonetheless, Warner suggests, because hope for a hardly imaginable readership is a condition of the diary’s possibility (Ibid.), one should also be wary of possible chauvinism about the potential meaningfulness of this “solipsistic” style of address. When people refuse its intelligibility out of hand, they implicitly seek to deny the diaries of individuals like Winston reality. Consequently, as we will see, they may facilitate epistemologies that operate in ways analogous to the totalitarian regime that Orwell fictionalizes in 1984, by sustaining illusions of established, common truth and sense only through the derealization of individuals and their utterances.

In Orwell’s dystopian novel, social institutions “vaporize” persons and expressions they mark as perverse or ambiguous, and they regulate such boundaries of reality and fantasy, of sense and insanity, to make their alignment with an otherwise nebulous generalized subject, or “Big Brother,” seem natural. Expressions and individuals in Orwell’s dystopia are dismissed, in
other words, not as classical epistemologists would expect, because they deviate from truth and reality; to the contrary, in 1984’s epistemological framework, private constructions of public truth and reality, and of generic collective subjectivity, are made to seem natural, as Warner says, “like pavement,” only through the systematic devaluation and derealization of particular selves and words. Acts of derealization call into being the only worlds that Winston can practically foresee.

In Orwell’s novel, refusals of “solipsistic” styles of address themselves construct the publics that citizens of Oceania, such as Winston, can seem unambiguously to intend. The Party’s policing not only defends but also composes the strikingly narrow and homogenous field of thought that it wishes to represent as collective. Because it is their systematic alienation from, and within, this epistemological project that motivates individuals like Winston to write, and is also what can make them seem unsociable, one may, by denying the intelligibility of their address, effectively assert that people cannot know unless they are recognizable as members of already publicly established linguistic frameworks, structures, or identity categories. One would assert, in other words, that individuals who cannot be, or refuse to be, incorporated within given protocols of translation, equivalence, and exchange are semantically and existentially valueless. The first chapter will term this structuralist insistence of modern identity politics the global incorporation thesis. Chapter Five will associate it with what feminist theorist Gayatri Spivak calls global capitalism.

When Winston sits to write his diary, he wishes to assert some possibility of meaning — of truth, fellowship, intelligibility, and sanity — that exceeds the bounds of the externally imposed and subjectively unintelligible norms that the ruling state deploys to constrain his
expressions. He hopes to assert some possibility of meaning that exceeds conventional thought. Hence, as Warner indicates, it is no accident that Winston can solve his case of writer’s block only by writing something like the following piece of solitary, melancholic, world-making poetry:

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone — to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink — greetings! (31)

Winston writes for a placeholder of publicity specifically to assert space for knowledge and meaning that the Party seeks to exclude. By denying the possible epistemic worth of his address, scholars may second the very sanitizing efforts that purge him from existence and sense.

Warner understands of course that the totalitarian regime that Orwell describes in *1984* is exaggerated. Not even the most oppressive states today annihilate their dissenting populations and fabricate their preferred realities with nearly so much efficiency. Nonetheless, Warner proposes, some in allegedly free democratic states, and in particular “people in minor or marginal positions or people distributed across political systems” (69), “might very well feel that they are in a position analogous to Orwell’s diarist: writing to a public that does not yet exist, and finding that their language can circulate only in channels hostile to it, they write in a manner designed to be a placeholder for a future public” (130). For their public claims to happen, these individuals’ addresses demand a “poetic or creative function” that may remind one of Winston’s diary dedication. They must seek, through their solitary address, to call dimly imagined and practically impossible political selves into being.

This dissertation is written for those systematically alienated individuals who find that they can express their thoughts only in this peculiar lyrical style. It is also written, as the next
section will elaborate, for comparative philosophers who wish to articulate alternatives to now prevalent but colonially overdetermined interpretations of the Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates. Together, strangers, we address a fiction that we can barely conceive. Greetings!

II. Remarks about the Project and its Aims

This critical analysis of how comparative philosophers sometimes frame debates between Nyāya and Buddhist intellectuals has two less specialized aims. The first, which you might consider broadly epistemological, is to problematize epistemologies that trust that publicly given conceptual frameworks or structures need to mediate knowledge occasions. The second, which you might judge strictly political, is to sketch a schema of epistemological possibilities that would be practicable for those whom all foreseeable circuits of public communication alienate. These two objectives and the fields they range across, however, should not and cannot be separated. By definition, the systematically alienated individuals whom this dissertation seeks to imagine practicable epistemological possibilities for cannot realistically hope to be recognized as knowers or as viable epistemological subjects in public contexts, no matter how small or “personal” these contexts might appear to be. It follows from this definition that, if established publics or communal subjectivities must mediate knowledge events, then systematically alienated individuals must lack capacities to know. To imagine epistemologies that are practicable for these individuals, which is our second, “political” objective, we must problematize the thesis that visible incorporation within some given structure of intersubjective recognition and understanding is prerequisite for knowledge occasions, which is our first, “epistemological” concern.
This dissertation’s first aim is similarly related to its second. Subsequent chapters will seek to “problemize,” in a Foucauldian sense, epistemologies that trust that given public subjectivities have to mediate knowledge events.¹ For our purposes, we will term the assumption that, to count as sensible or as a viable epistemological subject, an individual must appear as a representative constituent of some publicly given, or “transparent,” linguistic framework or “we,” the global incorporation thesis. We will see how adherence to this uniquely modern thesis produces politically narrow and epistemologically problematic effects. Specifically, shared, public subjectivities can seem unproblematically given only through acts of differentiation. Consequently, demands that all knowledge be mediated by transparent, given publics implicitly require that the knowledge and sensibilities of “others” be rendered impossible, or be preemptively dismissed from only opaquely cognized, “empty” notions of shared, ordinary subjectivity. Because they assume that authoritative and transparent² epistemological subjectivities must mediate knowledge events, global corporatist epistemologies arguably blind themselves to these acts of alienation, as well as to their specific political effects. As Michael Warner suggests, the figure of the systematically alienated individual, which he terms “queer,”

¹ In “Polemics, Politics, and Problemizations,” a 1984 interview by Paul Rabinow with Michel Foucault, Foucault distinguishes his method of “problemization” from certain methods in philosophy. He writes, “It is true that my attitude isn’t a result of the form of critique that claims to be a methodological examination in order to reject all possible solutions except for the one valid one. It is more on the order of ‘problemization’ — which is to say, the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics. For example, I don’t think that in regard to madness and mental illness there is any ‘politics’ that can contain the just and definitive solution…. It is a question, then, of thinking about the relations of these different experiences to politics, which doesn’t mean that one will seek in politics the main constituent of these experiences or the solution that will definitively settle their fate. The problems that experiences like these pose to politics have to be elaborated. But it is also necessary to determine what ‘posing a problem’ to politics really means. R. Rorty points out that in these analyses I do not appeal to any ‘we’ — to any of those ‘we’s’ whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework for a thought and define the conditions in which it can be validated. But the problem is, precisely, to decide if it is actually suitable to place oneself within a ‘we’ in order to assert the principles one recognizes and the values one accepts; or if it is not, rather, necessary to make the future formation of a ‘we’ possible, by elaborating the question. Because it seems to me that the ‘we’ must not be previous to the question; it can only be the result — and the necessary temporary result — of the question as it is posed in the new terms in which one formulates it (384-385; italics added).

² For background on how terms such as “transparent” and “opaque” are used here, please review Althusser’s introduction to Part I of Reading Capital.
therefore functions as the perceptible limit of modern, global corporatist epistemologies’
representational abilities (217).

The problem posed by systematically alienated individuals to the politics of modern
epistemology is not that any field of apparently normal, general understanding will by definition exclude them. Systematically alienated individuals do not disrupt the politics of modern epistemological structures simply because they cannot be normalized. What is more problematic for the political bases of global corporatist epistemologies is that these individuals are the effects of hostile, “epistemologically violent,” practices that precede, and are necessary conditions of, any apparently unproblematic presentation of shared, commonsense epistemological subjectivity. Arguably, the political subject that is supposed to serve as the transparent basis of knowledge determinations in a global corporatist episteme is opaquely understood, if it is understood at all. Consequently, as we will see, to make “normal” circumstances, and modern epistemological success, seem obvious or transparent, some individuals must be systematically alienated. Systematically alienated individuals therefore function as unconcealed but methodologically ignored symptoms of global corporatists’ failed assumption that knowledge cannot happen without mediation by given publics, or already transparent “we-s.”

To help to orient the reader to a thesis that, from the some perspectives, may initially seem unclear, and perhaps off-putting, Chapter One will show, in one narrow academic domain, what is troublesome about epistemologies that are premised on the global incorporation thesis. Specifically, it will draw on what Subaltern Studies historian Partha Chatterjee terms the rule of colonial difference to suggest that the seemingly apolitical and innocuous epistemological framing of the classical Nyāya-Buddhist debates that is now prevalent in the subfield of
comparative philosophy has narrowly interested and politically specific effects. As we will see, this framing assumes a strict contrast between the Nyāya and Buddhist positions, and, through historically overdetermined, too transparent understandings of “commonsense,” works to normalize an emerging, globally respectable subject of Indian philosophy. Chapter Two will then read relevant sections of Diñnāga’s *Pramāṇa-Samuccaya* in ways that challenge the prevalent framing’s assumption of a transparent and globally enduring ordinary epistemological subjectivity, while Chapter Three will show how the prevalent Quinean reading of the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition uncritically attributes the structuralist global incorporation thesis to classical Indian Buddhist scholars. The prevalent framework abides by the rule of colonial difference and therefore “shuttles” the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school between dialectically disjoined poles of modernity and mysticism. Chapter Four will apply Warner’s and Judith Butler’s critiques of modern processes of “normalization” to Quinean readings of the classical Indian Buddhists, and suggest that Diñnāga’s “exclusion of the other” (*anyāpoha*) theory of conceptual determination can help queer and poststructuralist feminist theorists explain why modern knowledge frameworks necessarily engage in “epistemologically violent” practices that shuttle individuals in minor, marginal, and intersectional political positions across dialectically disjoined poles of identity and otherness. Chapter Five will then show how this shuttling effect, which Spivak terms global capitalism’s “international division of labor” ("Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value" 230), is an inevitable, and systematically alienating, consequence of epistemologies premised on the global incorporation thesis. The final chapter reads both Buddhist and Nyāya *pramāṇa* theories in ways that do not assume the global incorporation
thesis, and suggests how attention to their epistemologies might help contemporary poststructuralist theorists to imagine practicable nonviolent knowledge practices.

As we will see, the prevalent comparative philosophical framing of the classical Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates is specifically, and problematically, political; it is does not simply represent in more general and globally significant terms an enduring philosophical debate between classical Indian rivals, but facilitates, through systematic “othering,” the emergence of a globally respectable and distinctly Indian middle class national epistemological subject. The “queer,” “no-self” reading of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates to be developed here will promote a less disjunctive, poststructuralist understanding of the rival classical Indian schools, and suggest that both realist and anti-realist non-modern textual traditions offer resources that could help contemporary theorists to accommodate the epistemological capacities of individuals whom modern knowledge structures systematically alienate.
I. ‘Exclusion of the Other’ in the Modern Imagining of the Indian Middle Class

Subaltern Studies historian Partha Chatterjee argues that, within modernist contexts, individuals can seem to intelligibly manifest identities only through acts of differentiation. In part, he suggests, the need to exclude others to define oneself is simply structural. “In a fundamental sense,” he writes, “all identity has to be disclosed by establishing an alterity” (138). In addition, he notes, historical conditions practically limit the specific forms that such differentiation can take. In colonial and postcolonial India, he contends, a rule of colonial difference constrained, and arguably continues to constitute, an emerging middle-class norm of generally representative Indian-ness. The following pages will apply his history of India’s emerging middle class epistemological subject to the currently prevalent framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates in comparative philosophy. Arguably, the apparent generality of this specialized framing depends on acts of “othering” that the rule of colonial difference prescribes.

(A) — The Rule of Colonial Difference

Chatterjee writes that possibilities of seeming to speak in generally respectable and knowledgeable ways were framed during the British Raj by a social rule or norm that aligned the colonialists with an idea of humanity-in-general and differentiated this transcendental subject from the colonized. Colonial difference was an epistemological prerequisite “of representing the ‘other’ as inferior and radically different, and hence incorrigibly inferior” (33). In a basic sense,
the rule sustained colonial power by preserving the alienness of the ruling group (10). More specifically, it insisted that the colonialists be identified with a unitary, global, and enduring subjectivity and that the colonized be excluded from this domain of generalized sense; it asserted “the inherent incapacity of Indian society to acquire the virtues of modernity and nationhood” (173). Chatterjee notes that, because the rule of colonial difference delineated possibilities of “generally” sensible speech during the Raj, it also limited the forms through which an epistemologically viable anti-colonial nationalist subject might disclose itself.

To contest present instantiations of the rule of colonial difference, apparently civilized and would-be expert nationalists had to either recognize the universality of modern British ideals, and challenge the colonized’s exclusion from the category of humanity-in-general, or insist that these formations were contingent, and challenge the colonialists’ conflation of themselves with legitimate epistemological subjectivity. Neither strategy could be wholly eschewed, Chatterjee argues, and neither in itself made sense. A recognizably decorous nationalist would need to affirm the universality of modern ideals, such as equality and self-determination, to make the nationalist cause seem generally sensible. But such rationalization would also risk legitimating the universal basis of British rule and its “civilizing” mission. To destabilize the British colonialists’ attempted identification of themselves with humanity-in-general, respectable, responsible nationalists therefore also needed to insist on the contingent character of modern, British conceptions. But such insistence would risk undermining the universal principles that the nationalists cited to legitimate their refusals of colonial authority.

Constrained in this dual way by the rule of colonial difference, a nationalist class of “respectable folk” (bhadralok) disclosed itself during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries only by
tactically navigating within the bounds of intelligibility that this principle of group supremacy legislated. It was therefore no coincidence, Chatterjee observes, that, in some contexts, sensible nationalists insisted on the utter contingency of Western ideals, and hence differentiated Indian-ness essentially from the West, and in others, respectable nationalists insisted on the universality of modern ideals, and hence protested the colonized’s unequal access to characteristically general rights and services. In still further cases, responsible nationalists recognized historical differences between Western (general) and Indian (parochial) practices, but called for state programs, such as public schools, to eliminate the divergence. By adopting these various paths, often simultaneously, the bhadralok were not ideologically inconsistent. Instead, to be able to seem to speak sensibly and responsibly, nationalists had to conform their expressions and conceptual associations to an unspecific and internally heterogeneous field of not excluded possibilities. To be seriously listened to, and not, say, shrugged off or locked away, they needed to restrict their ideas to an indefinitely anticipated, empty discursive space that the rule of colonial difference negatively prescribed (18).

Chatterjee’s analysis suggests that burdens of consistency necessitated further acts of differentiation within this negatively constituted field. The emerging nationalist class challenged its subordination in political and economic institutions by demanding that the British respect universal rights (74). If the nationalists had adhered solely to this humanistic strategy, however, they would have undermined the intelligibility of their project, which, per the rule of colonial difference, was premised on some strict difference between the ruling class and the colonized. Consequently, this political and economic domain needed to be distinguished from some essentially “other” sphere, wherein, unlike in the economic and political realm, differences
between colonizers and colonized would be asserted rather than denied. Unless differences between colonizer and colonized that had been effaced in one context were simultaneously reified in another, a generally respectable and distinctively Indian middle class subject could not have presented itself.

The nationalist rediscovery of a field of distinctly Indian humanities during the Bengal Renaissance was therefore no fluke, Chatterjee implies, but helped to offset the emerging nationalist middle class’ embrace of the universality of colonial formations in a strictly “material” domain. In the material sphere, the emerging middle class challenged colonial rule by insisting on the universality of modern ideals and protesting the colonized’s exclusion from the affordances of humanity-in-general. However, in a categorically different cultural, religious, philosophical, or “spiritual” context, the new middle class asserted essential differences between colonizer and colonized, and resisted the colonialists’ substitution of themselves for humanity-in-general. Chatterjee’s analysis suggests that revitalized interest in Sanskrit philosophical texts during the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries helped to create a specific exclusion class against which an unspecific class of respectable and non-repulsive (from the colonialists’ perspective) bhadralok appeared to incorporate itself within economic and political modernity.

In this context, recall now that Bimal K. Matilal, a key progenitor of the modern comparative philosophical study of the Nyāya and Buddhist pramāṇa debates, presents India’s distinctive intellectual traditions as analytic, systematic, and critical (representatively general) philosophies explicitly to resist portrayals of them as hyper-spiritual (non-representative and parochial) mysticisms. In the introduction to an early text, he laments: “Indian philosophy has unfortunately come to denote a group of occult religious cults, a system of dogmas, and an odd
assortment of spirituality, mysticism, and imprecise thinking, concerned almost exclusively with spiritual liberation” (xii). To dislodge these caricatures, he set out to show that, far from serving as a distinctive spiritual, mystical, antirational counterpoint to the universality of Western logic, India’s intellectual traditions are at least as systematic, penetrating, and subtle as the Anglo-American schools that classicize themselves to ancient Greece. Indian philosophers, he insisted, are “more concerned with logic and epistemology, with the analysis and classification of human knowledge, than they are with transcendent states of euphoria.” To prove his point, he showed how the historical Indian Nyāya and Buddhist pramāṇa debates intersect with concerns that absorbed canonical Anglo-American analytic philosophers. The subsequent pages will show, however, that, in the comparative philosophical framework that has emerged from his work, Buddhist semantics and epistemology have appeared perennially more difficult to dislodge from the parochial, specifically Indian sphere and to incorporate within the globally relevant, historically Anglo-American field of analytic philosophy. Generally unlike their Nyāya rivals, and arguably not by chance, but in a manner that reflects our specialization’s still active investment in a colonial heritage, the philosophically representative rank of the classical Indian Buddhists is repeatedly called into question.

(B) — ‘Othering’ and the Self-Constitution of India’s Nationalist Middle Class

In The Nation and its Fragments, Chatterjee emphasizes the medial location of India’s emerging bhadralok. The respectable Indian middle class did not, and could not, disclose itself simply by opposing itself with “the West.” It simultaneously needed to differentiate itself from the majority of the colonized. Such differentiation was required, Chatterjee argues, because a
unitary, persistent, and shared “classical” Indian spiritual tradition did not transparently manifest itself to the thoughts of nineteenth century Bengali intellectuals. Rather, an immediately apparent variety of actual particulars needed to be synthesized in ways that could seem, at the moment, respectable and smart. “Modern Bengali high culture — its language, literature, aesthetics, religion, philosophy,” classicized itself to the Vedic age, Chatterjee writes. The “Indian tradition” that emerged from this classicization work tended to articulate itself in terms that would seem sensible to a modern, colonially educated ear. It also incorporated diverse “particulars,” “including such overtly anti-Brahmanical movements as Buddhism, Jainism, and the various deviant popular sects” (73). Conversely, this newly constituted and internally heterogeneous “tradition” expunged Islamic culture fully from itself. The emerging nation-state’s history was therefore divided not merely into colonial and pre-colonial ages, but into distinct Colonial, Muslim, and Hindu periods. This othering of Islam from an otherwise unspecific and heterogeneous notion of authentic Indian culture was no mere coincidence, Chatterjee argues. Rather, the local, plural, and fragmented characteristics of the colonized’s immediately perceived realities and their stark contrast with the newly imagined unitary and homogeneous Indian “spirit” demanded that a vast manifold of present individuals in South Asia be specifically refused rank as generally representative Indians (102).

It was not only South Asian Muslims who were denied generally representative, authentic status. The new nationalist middle class imagining of Indian womanhood, for example, determined itself not just through distaste for Westernized female elites, but also through aversion to most women in India, whom seemingly transcendental colonial discourse stereotyped as backward and barbaric (127). This emerging distinctly Indian woman-in-general was therefore
specifically not to be associated with the traits that were imagined to be characteristic of most women in India. “The new woman defined in this way was subjected to a new patriarchy,” Chatterjee stresses.

The new patriarchy was also sharply distinguished from the immediate social and cultural condition in which the majority of the people lived, for the “new” woman was quite the reverse of the “common” woman, who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal oppression by males. Alongside the parody of the Westernized woman, this other construct is repeatedly emphasized in the literature of the nineteenth century through a host of lower-class female characters who make their appearance in the social milieu of the new middle class — maidservants, washer women, barbers, peddlers, procuresses, prostitutes. It was precisely this degenerate condition of women that nationalism claimed it would reform, and it was through these contrasts that the new woman of nationalist ideology was accorded a status of cultural superiority to the Westernized women of the wealthy parvenu families spawned by the colonial connection as well as to common women of the lower classes. (127)

Likewise, Chatterjee writes, the newly emerging, but classicized, nationalist middle class imagining of caste contrasted not just with Western humanism, as Louis Dumont thought, but also with the contingent, changing, and fragmented particulars of “caste” in India. Like today, “jāt” in the vernacular described multiple forms of social classification, and these forms variously designated individuals (180). The emerging bhadralok conception of caste could therefore privilege itself as the generic, authentically Indian understanding only by foreclosing the intelligibility of most of these various expressions. The bourgeois, allegedly representatively Indian, norm of caste, Chatterjee suggests, is a “one-sided identity” that differentiates itself, not only from the “egalitarian” West, but also, through habitual, systematized aversions, from equally narrow subsets of the more general notion (180-87).

Because India’s bhadralok is governed by the rule of colonial difference, it cannot help but determine itself into a medial class position. While it distinguishes its identity categorically
from Western humanism, the particularly Indian nationalist bourgeois political and
epistemological subject must repeatedly distinguish its respectable and formally general status
from most of the actualities that it seeks to totalize within itself. It must distinguish itself
discursively, if not materially, from the West while simultaneously representing itself as the
unambiguous, recurring trace of a generalized Indian-ness that is imaginatively purged of, and
repulsed by, ordinary, actual things determined, for example as licentious Muslims, abhorrent
caste transgressions, and lewd women. “In fact,” Chatterjee writes, “it is this ‘middleness’ and
the consciousness of middleness that I wish to problematize” (35). It is the subject’s medially
situated character that makes it bourgeois.

II. ‘Othering’ and Colonial Difference in Framings of the Nyāya-Buddhist Debates

The reading of Chatterjee’s history of India’s bhadralok presented above has been
implicitly informed by Diñnāga’s Pramāṇa-Samuccaya (PS), as comparative philosophers who
are familiar with the text may have noted. In the PS, Diñnāga contends, against those who argue
that words are immediate causes of knowledge, that generally characterized things
(sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s), or the unitary, persistent, and pervasive things that words, such as “caste”
and “Hindutvā,” seem to designate, are never manifestly given, or transparent, to thought.
Rather, this fifth to sixth century CE Buddhist philosopher argues, all that is immediately present
within cognition are momentary, unique, and ineffable particulars (sva-lakṣaṇa-s). Generally
characterized things, such as a distinctly Indian understanding of femininity, appear manifest in
thought only through a reflexive, repulse-driven process of conceptual determination that
Diñnāga terms anyāpoha, or “exclusion [apoha] of the other [anya].”
Notwithstanding possible intersections between Diñnāga’s arguments and the work of contemporary postcolonial, poststructuralist critics such as Chatterjee, many in our field of comparative philosophy tend to make sense of the classical Nyāya and Buddhist philosophical debates through a frame that, thanks largely to Matilal’s prodigious effort, is now pretty well set. The Naiyāyika-s offer a realist and “somewhat Platonist” theory of meaning, as he puts it (28). The Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school, in contrast, offers a phenomenalist and nominalist one. Phenomenalists prioritize sensation, and nominalists assert that concepts and objects endure only as names, or are only nominally real. Matilal portrays the Buddhists as phenomenalists because they ground all sense in the direct perception of svalakṣaṇa-s, which he describes as “internal consciousness moments” or “external point instants” (28). The Buddhists are nominalist because they assert that only these unique momentary particulars exist, and that enduring objects and universals (sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s) are mere conceptual constructions (vikalpa-s) that are determined through “exclusion of the other” (anyāpoha). In contrast, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika-s base meaning in actually existent and enduring “medium-sized” objects, such as pots, lecterns, people, and cows, and in the properties that qualify them, such as pot-ness, lectern-ness, people-ness, and cow-ness. Matilal describes the Naiyāyika-s as “somewhat Platonist” because they believe that universals really exist, but only immanently, in their instantiations.

Commitment to rival theses defines the Naiyāyika-s’ and the Buddhists’ respective theoretical positions and burdens, according to this prevalent comparative philosophical framing of their debates. The Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school’s distinction between svalakṣaṇa-s and sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s entails the thesis, as Jonardon Ganeri phrases it, that “sensory experience presents something other than ordinary physical objects” ("Apoha, Feature-Placing and Sensory
“Ordinary physical objects” are the presumed ontological referents of words and concept-laden perceptual judgments, such as “Cow,” “That is a pot,” and so on. Members of the Buddhist Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti school hold that these referents are never smelled, touched, heard, tasted, or seen. Bystanders can come to know a fire-in-general from someone screaming, “Fire!” but can never know the very vivid burning phenomenon that a screaming person might want to inform bystanders about (C.f., Siderits *Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction* 209). In contrast, the Naiyāyikas hold that veridical sensory experience, as well as words and inference, present ordinary physical objects to people’s attentions. Because they assert this *ordinary physical objects thesis*, they are not tasked to bridge a gap between conceptual (general) and non-conceptual (particular) content.

This prevalent structuring of the Nyāya and Buddhist disputes also assigns these two rival positions different proportions of *a priori* plausibility. Regardless of one’s eventual sympathies for its perspective, the Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti tradition’s refusal of the ordinary physical objects thesis is initially marked as globally heterodox. In contrast, the Naiyāyika-s’ commitment to the thesis of ordinary physical objects is aligned analytically with an enduring common sense or philosophical subjectivity. Arindam Chakrabarti writes that commonsense “undeniably feels” that people perceive “particular physical objects” or “ordinary objects” (309). Matilal asserts that “middle-sized, middle-distanced objects… are our conceptual firsts” (26). Mark Siderits similarly asks, though he is friendly with the Buddhist position, “Why does the Yogacārā-Sautrāntika [Buddhist] reject this counsel of commonsense?” (*Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction* 214). Unlike the Buddhist counterclaim, the Naiyāyika-s’ ordinary physical objects thesis is thought to begin from a state of coincidence with normal, generally representative
philosophical understanding. Characterizations of the classical Buddhist-Nyāya debates regularly assume that the more general and ordinary view is the Nyāya one; namely, the view that verbal awareness and sensation sometimes present the same property-rich objects, although they present these objects differently. Meanwhile, the Buddhist position is assumed to be relatively more globally aberrant and peculiar.

Matilal, for example, explicitly portrays the classical Buddhists as attempted revisionists of a commonsensical and normative semantic perspective (24-26). The dialectic that he uses to structure the two schools is therefore hierarchic. The Naiyāyika-s appear as advocates of a universal, persistent, and pervasive subjectivity. In contrast, for reasons that are internal to their own tradition, the Buddhists are said to lack this transcendental subject’s ordinary resources. On these grounds, Matilal questions both whether the Buddhists can accommodate their unusual semantics to minimal demands of epistemic practice and whether philosophers-in-general can have any cause to adopt their extreme position (26). Similarly, after presenting the Naiyāyika-s as advocates of a commonsensical, ordinary commitment to physical objects, Chakrabarti casts the Buddhists in suspect terms. He calls their account of direct, conceptually unmediated (nirvikalpa) perception of unique, momentary particulars a kind of “immaculate perception” (312) and compares it to a “baby’s first experiences of the world” (311). In contrast, he says, the vast majority of an “average intelligent” adult’s sense experiences are conceptually mediated. Chakrabarti seems to assume that, if objects are not perceptibly property-laden, they must be indistinguishable, and, therefore, that svalakṣaṇa-s must be both indistinguishable and unique (311-12). However, insofar as scholars assume that transparent generic properties are necessary for veridical perceptual knowledge, they may seem to beg the question against the
Buddhists, for they foreclose the possibility of the Buddhist counter-thesis apparently by assuming, in a distinctly modern and structuralist way, that commonly recognized properties — whatever they might be — must be present in vivid perception. The reader is also of course meant to associate the average intelligent adult’s alleged sense experiences with an enduring conception of epistemic normality and intelligibility (viable epistemological subjectivity), and the “infant’s” supposedly “immaculate” perceptions with abnormality and unintelligibility (epistemological failure / solipsism).

This modern framing of classical Indian Nyāya and Buddhist theories of meaning has specific consequences for our understanding of these traditions. The Naiyāyika-s become aligned with an ordinary, transcendental subjectivity that “we,” an indefinitely specified but in practice quite narrow community, allegedly also represent. On the other hand, the Buddhists appear to have their work quite clearly cut out for them. Unlike those who allegedly adhere to the counsel of commonsense by accepting the ordinary physical objects thesis, the Buddhists’ distinction between actual things and things-in-general is said to create extraordinary problems. To qualify as generally respectable epistemological subjects, the prevalent framing demands that the Buddhists construct facsimiles of ordinariness.

Some contemporary philosophers, such as Ganeri, suggest that the Buddhists can explain how unique particulars may normatively constrain concept-laden judgments despite their lack of normal people’s transparently given universals or properties. Others, such as Georges B. Dreyfus, argue that the Buddhists can bridge the gap that they discern between svalakṣaṇa-s and sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s only by inviting enduring entities, such as agreed-on social fictions, into their semantics. Regardless, according to this interpretative framework, the success of the Diñnāga-
Dharmakīrti school’s project is implicitly or explicitly to be evaluated according to the degree to which their “Spartan” and “parsimonious” semantics may nonetheless permit them to approximate the normative epistemological powers that modern philosophers and the Naiyāyikas already allegedly have at hand, thanks to their posit of the ordinary physical objects thesis. According to this framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates, the Buddhists succeed as globally respectable, currently relevant philosophical subjects only insofar as they restore some functional equivalent of referential transparency into their epistemologies, and minimize their difference with a presumably transparent social understanding of “us.”

Some contemporary scholars, such as Dreyfus, doubt that members of the Diānāga-Dharmakīrti school are as uniformly nominalist as their categorical distinction between real svalakṣaṇa-s and fictional sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s suggests. More scholars seem to question whether the Buddhists can sustain both a robustly nominalist semantics and a minimally satisfactory epistemology. “The notion of a strictly nominalistic language is an oxymoron,” Siderits writes. “Such a language could contain only names for particulars. It would thus be incapable of expressing facts concerning the relations into which particulars enter” ("Buddhist Nominalism and Desert Ornithology" 95). Norms of belief need language, and communication demands more than logs of discrete individuals. If unique momentary particulars were to exhaust semantic value then it would seem to be impossible to explain how particulars sometimes cohere across time and space, and how meaningful communication can sometimes happen. Such an extreme position would force people, Matilal suggests, to “abandon in despair all attempts at reasoned analysis” and serve “as impoverished mourners at philosophy’s funeral” ("Buddhist Logic and Epistemology" 132).
Through comparative analysis with contemporary scholarly work in the philosophy of perception, Ganeri demonstrates how an “exclusion of the other” theory of conceptual construction of the sort that the Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti school espouses might “bridge the gap” between conceptual (general) and non-conceptual (particular) content that the Buddhists’ distinction between svalakṣaṇa-s and sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s creates. Specifically, he shows that three moments of exclusion may be needed to explain how “perceptual experience can supply normative constraints on belief and judgment, given that one has non-conceptual content and the other has conceptual content” ("Apoha, Feature-Placing and Sensory Content" 1n2). His interpretation of the Buddhists’ “exclusion of the other” theory of conceptual determination (anyāpohavāda) suggests that the Buddhists may not need to choose between conceptual nominalism and basic epistemic competence. In any case, the classical Indian Buddhist epistemological project that emerges from this framing is unequivocal. To qualify as representatives of global philosophical subjectivity, members of the Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti school must create space in their theories for something like referentially transparent ordinary physical object properties — for example, “proto-concepts” in Ganeri’s work, and social fictions in Dreyfus’. The Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti school’s anyāpohavāda, or exclusion theory of conceptual determination, is then to be read merely as a prosthetic device that the Buddhists attempt to use, satisfactorily or not, to approximate powers and conceptions that “we” assume ordinary people possess.

While this framing of the Nyāya and Buddhist debates interprets the Buddhists’ epistemological project as an effort to approximate the alleged resources of a transcendental philosophical subject, it also tends to attribute the Buddhists’ rejection of the ordinary physical
objects thesis to parochial, non-transcendental theoretical commitments, such as the tradition’s
deep commitment to a principle of *pramāṇa-vyavāsthā*, a dogma that only one kind of object can be known by any one means of knowledge. To succeed in their epistemological endeavors, the Buddhists must then struggle to bracket off or rationalize these peculiar, and perhaps embarrassing, ontological lacks and constraints. Matilal writes:

This suggested paraphrase of “cowhood” by “denial of or exclusion of non-cow predication” may be regarded as philosophic reparsing. [We can take this paraphrase to be somewhat like the “paraphrasis” in Jeremy Bentham’s theory of fiction. As W.V. Quine has noted, this is a method which enables a philosopher, when he is confronted with some term that is convenient but ontologically embarrassing, to continue to enjoy the services of the term while disclaiming its denotation.] Diṅnāga’s motivation in explaining cowhood as exclusion of non-cows was not very far behind. For indeed Dharmakīrti found the real universals of Nyāya ontologically embarrassing and suggested that they can be conveniently explained away by using the notion of “exclusion” and “otherness.” (17; brackets in original)

It is now standard to follow Matilal’s interpretation of *anyāpohavāda* as, if not philosophical reparsing, certainly an attempted approximation of the Naiyāyika-s’ ordinary physical objects thesis. When we do so, however, comparative philosophers renew constructions of the Nyāya and Buddhist debates along a binary, hierarchical axis, with the former occupying a privileged, more generally representative and normal, location, and the latter occupying a place that is more suspect, idiosyncratic, and potentially solipsistic. Furthermore, these positions are overdetermined by the very “colonizer=universal” / “colonized=parochial” structure that the rule of colonial difference prescribes.

This specialized community’s discursive framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates therefore echoes distinctions of status that the rule of colonial difference legislates. The Diṅnāga-

---

3 Scholars who take Lacan seriously might be interested to note that Diṅnāga uses the term *lirigā* to mean a sign for a universal or property, and that, according to the modern, structuralist framing, it is these *lirigā*-s that Buddhist ontology lacks and that Buddhist epistemologists supposedly need to compensate for.
Dharmakīrti school’s entire *anyāpoha* semantics is assumed, as is arguably typical in colonial / postcolonial middle class imaginings of otherness, to be motivated by a wish to meet minimal, global standards of competence, specifically by repressing or attempting to normalize deviant and unintelligible tendencies within itself. One unspoken assumption of this way of interpreting the Nyāya and Buddhist debates is that, as generally respectable, bourgeois people like “ourselves,” the ancient Indian Buddhists would have internalized the ultimatum, or rule of colonial difference, that modernity, in its institutional guise as the authoritative representative of philosophy’s universal, posthumously legislates for them.

It is of course possible to weigh the terms of the “Commonsense Naiyāyika-s / Nominalist Buddhists” binary differently. Rather than saying that the Buddhists face special problems because they deny a thesis that ordinary philosophers share, one might instead argue that the transparent privilege that the prevalent framing associates with the thesis of ordinary physical objects allows “us” to ignore Buddhist epistemological arguments that might otherwise destabilize “our” contemporary medial class position. One might argue, for example, that the ordinary physical objects thesis only obscures the gap between actual things and things-in-general, and the systematic exclusions that are needed to obfuscate this gap, that classical Buddhists and postcolonial Marxists, such as Chatterjee, direct their opponents to. Repeated doubts expressed in comparative philosophy publications about the Buddhists’ general philosophical status and attribution to them of parochial or facetious interests might then function as one mechanism by which a cognitively empty, but historically Anglo-American,

---

4 A parallel fantasy appears in liberal development narratives: some abject “other” of the twenty-first century is assumed structurally to long for allegedly “normal” or “basic” Western affordances. Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach exemplifies this kind of narrative.
structure of ordinary, commonsense philosophy appears to expand, globally, to incorporate an emerging Indian middle class.

In the following pages, we therefore propose to read the Buddhists’ anyāpohāvāda and the Naiyāyika-s’ universals (jāti-s), not as prosthetics for colonial constructions of transcendental subjectivity, but as resources that might help to explain how structuralist assumptions of continuity between non-fungible, peculiar individuals and fungible, unitary, persistent, and pervasive subjects demand practices of systematic alienation. This poststructuralist interpretation of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates will of course be no less political than the interpretation that today’s comparative philosophers have inherited. However, by problematizing the prevalent “Commonsense Naiyāyika-s / Nominalist Buddhists” dichotomy in this way, we may bring new resources into comparative philosophical discussions, and allow studies of the Nyāya and Buddhist debates to help scholars to creatively imagine alternatives to epistemologies that alienate individuals from fictions of shared perspective.
CHAPTER 2:
“CLASSICAL” BUDDHIST ARGUMENTS AGAINST MODERN
EPISTEMOLOGICAL SUBJECTS

Current publication records suggest that there is little, if any, intersection between the things-in-general that concern modern comparative philosophers, such as Matilal, and the things-in-general that concern contemporary postcolonial critics of modern epistemological subjects. Keyword searches through the archives of *The Journal of Indian Philosophy* for references to critical theorists such as Partha Chatterjee, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhaba yield zero results. Similarly, keyword searches in *Public Culture* for “Diñana,” “Dharmakīrti,” “Nyāya,” “Matilal,” and “Gangeśa” turn up empty. Nonetheless, it is intriguing to note that some of the ancient epistemological and semantic arguments that comparative philosophers study resonate with arguments that contemporary critics of modern epistemological subjects now deploy in their apparently unrelated field. For example, as we will see, Diñana appears to imply, like Partha Chatterjee, that any epistemology that assumes that people cannot know unless they are recognizable as members of transparently understood linguistic or communal structures, or that assumes what we termed in the introduction the *global incorporation thesis*, will be vulnerable to at least two objections.

First, these theorists separately appear to argue, whatever is transparently manifest to consciousness must be manifest at some historically, causally, and spatially unique moment. Chatterjee, for example, points to the diversity of expressions of caste and Indian-ness variously present to people’s minds in nineteenth century Bengal. Shared subjectivities, in contrast, are formally homogeneous. They are uniform, generic entities that span across differences of time,
space, and circumstance. For example, the bourgeois, bhadralok notion of Indian-ness supposedly stretches back in time to “classical” India. Such totalities therefore cannot be transparently manifest to thought. Instead, both theorists imply, phrases that signify enduring frameworks of intersubjective recognition, knowledge, and understanding, including collective “we-s” such as “Hinduvā” and “ordinary epistemological subjectivity,” must be referentially opaque — they can only signify “empty” entities, or function as mere placeholders in thought.

Second, Diṃnāga’s and Chatterjee’s analyses both arguably imply that, because modern, generally representative epistemological subjects can only be opaquely given, they can seem transparent only if specific “others” are preemptively, and perhaps violently, excluded from their otherwise indefinite fields of extension. Chatterjee, for example, writes that immediately present varieties of relation and expression, as well as the hegemony of what he calls the rule of colonial difference, have forced modern India’s emerging bhadralok subject to disclose itself through acts of differentiation, not only from constructions of allegedly universal colonial subjectivity, but also from most of the heterogeneous, non-fungible individuals in the subcontinent that it seeks to incorporate within itself. Otherwise, this (non-) subject would have appeared heterogeneous and momentary instead of uniform, pervasive, and persistent. Similarly, in a manner that resonates in certain respects with Chatterjee’s historical analysis, Diṃnāga’s “exclusion of the other” (anyāpoha) theory of conceptual determination implies that conceptual judgments (e.g., “Now this woman is respectable!”) work only through habits of hostility or repulsion (virodha) to what is determined to be “other.”

The following pages will show how Diṃnāga’s Pramāṇa-Samuccaya (PS) may be read as a sustained critique of modern constructions of epistemological subjectivity, and therefore how
the text may provide further theoretical support for poststructuralist arguments against epistemological and political ultimata, such as the rule of colonial difference, that structure bourgeois boundaries of intelligibility. By extension, it will follow that the now prevalent comparative philosophical framing of the Nyāya and Buddhist pramāṇa debates, which aligns the Naiyāyika-s with a general, enduring, and transparently given epistemological subject and reduces the Buddhists’ anyāpohavāda to the status of a theoretical prosthetic, is politically, and epistemologically, problematic — it helps to disclose a globally respectable Indian philosophical subject through specifically interested acts of exclusion, and, even while it appears emphatically apolitical, participates in the practices of modern identity formation that Chatterjee problematizes.

Members of the Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition contend that words are about things-in-general, and that these things-in-general (vastumātra-s) — merely nominal “things” — differ wholly from actual things (vastu-s). Actual things are tied to places, times, and conditions (they are deśakālavasthāniyata). Things-in-general, in contrast, appear to be unitary, pervasive, and persistent. They are characteristically universal. What people mean by “cow” does not change when they say it of a brown creature rather than a white one, or of Flossie instead of Bossie. We can call any of innumerable living things “cow.” No matter how these instances differ, the alleged category, essence, or property that they exemplify will be unitary. The properties that signify things-in-general also pervade their instances. The cowness of Flossie is not confined to her left side, or to any trait. Cowness pervades her being. Things-in-general also persist or endure. What one means by “cow” this afternoon will be no different from what one
means by “cow” this morning. In contrast, whatever one senses is characteristically unique. One grasps it in a specific, non-recurring moment.

Such observations lead members of the Diṅṅāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition to conclude that sensory cognitions and verbal cognitions regard diametrically opposed kinds of things. Everything that a person hears, tastes, sees, touches, and smells is unique and momentary. Everything that a person determines through words or infers indirectly from signs is completely different from this. It appears to be unitary, persistent, and pervasive. Hence, these Buddhist logicians say, what words are about differs strictly from seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and feeling. Episodes of sensing grasp unique, momentary particulars (svalakṣaṇa-s) in causally, spatially, and temporally specific instances of awareness. Episodes of verbal understanding determine generic characteristics (sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s), the loci of which are never met in experience.

As against the Diṅṅāga-Dharmakīrti school’s way of separating sensory objects from conceptual objects, the realist Naiyāyika-s accept that seeing and hearing present knowledge differently from words, but do not conclude from this difference that sensory and verbal cognitions regard fundamentally different realms. Rather, they assert that people sometimes know the same things differently. A person can hear a cow approaching by the sound of her bell and simultaneously see her. Similarly, a person can hear about a cow through words and also smell and touch her. Whether one learns of Flossie through sensation or words, one comes to know the same cow. The Naiyāyika-s are allegedly not challenged to bridge a gap between conceptual (general) and non-conceptual (particular) content because they, unlike the Buddhists, accept that veridical sensory experience and verbal cognition present “ordinary physical objects.”
Comparative philosophy’s prevalent framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates assumes that the Buddhist and Nyāya perspectives are strictly contradictory. The Naiyāyika-s allegedly endorse an “ordinary physical objects thesis” that the Buddhists reject. However, the conflict between the two schools is arguably hardly that clear-cut. Diṅnāga explicitly distinguishes between the semantic values of svalakṣaṇa-s and sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s on epistemological rather than ontological grounds and is clearly less concerned with what does or does not exist than with how knowledge can possibly happen. The Naiyāyika-s’ ordinary physical objects thesis is, on the other hand, strictly ontological. It regards the natures of referents (specifically their identities), and does not itself address the modes through which referents can be known. Hence, it is at least conceivable that the ordinary physical objects thesis that the Naiyāyika-s allegedly share with “us” functions not so much as a more commonsensical alternative to the Buddhist distinction between actual things and things-in-general, but as a fiction of shared perspective that modern comparative scholars construct in part through institutional disregard of theoretical possibilities that politically interested, specifically liberal habits of repulsion reflexively consider nonsense.

For the sake of argument, and to begin to destabilize the dichotomy that the now prevalent framing of the Nyāya and Buddhist pramāṇa debates asserts, let’s assume that the Nyāya response is right, and that the things that people access through words and sensation are sometimes identical. The Flossie people talk about is sometimes the same cow as the Flossie people see and hear. After conceding this much, we will still need to disambiguate what we mean by “thing.”

I. *Preliminary Housekeeping about the Nature of “Thing-ness”*
Theoretically, one can distinguish between a thing that is consciously grasped in a cognitive episode, and a thing that a cognition seems to refer to. Let’s call what a cognition consciously grasps its “internal content,” and call what a cognition seems to refer to its “external object.” Some philosophers would deny the intelligibility of such a distinction. Semanticists whom we will term “externalists” would say that the Flossie one intends in a veridical cognitive episode is just Flossie, the cow that different people designate in different ways on different occasions. These philosophers would either deny that any internal content is transparently grasped in veridical cognition, or deny that internal contents affect what cognitions are about. If these externalists were also to hold that transparent actual things, rather than opaque things-in-general, function as external objects, they would appear to struggle, as we will see, to account for referentially opaque contexts, or for contexts in which identical expressions might access different entities. Semanticists whom we will term “internalists” might say that the Flossie one intends in a veridical cognitive episode is just Flossie, the cow as one’s attention subjectively grasps her. These philosophers would then either deny that any external object is referenced in veridical cognition, or deny that external objects affect what cognitions are about. Consequently, these internalists would appear to struggle to explain how transparently given cognitive contents cohere across time and space, and how communication between people can happen. Between these two extremes, other positions are theoretically possible. For example, one might hold that both internal contents and external objects constitute what cognitions are about, and that these are sometimes identical. The textual tradition started by Diñnāga appears to assert that contents and external objects more or less coincide in sensation, but are discontinuous in verbal and
inferential awareness. As contemporary comparative philosophers stress, the Buddhists’ exclusion model of conceptually loaded cognition includes a bridge between conceptual and non-conceptual aspects — namely, individuals’ spatially, temporally, and causally specific dispositions to exclude.

We will provisionally go along with Parimal Patil in assuming a notion of “semantic value” that is neutral between descriptivist and non-descriptivist disagreements in semantics. Patil writes, “On my use of the term, ‘semantic value’ is neutral to whatever it is that a semantic theory associates with the expressions of the language it interprets. It is, in other words, the ‘object’ that a semantic theory assigns to an expression” (200n8). He notes that some semantic theories (descriptivist ones) assign individual objects holistically, by making their assignments conditional on whole sentences or theories, and that others (non-descriptivist ones) assign objects atomically to sub-sentential components, and then build complex sentences and theories syntactically from these assignments. Like his, our initial use of “semantic value” will have no stake in these debates. We will, however, recognize that the “things” that a semantic theory assigns to expressions might be complex. Following the distinction introduced above, we will hold that a cognition’s total semantic value might include both internal content and external objects. We will also insist that these aspects of semantic value are relevant only insofar as they are somehow apprehended, and not insofar as they exist. Like Diṇnāga, we shall be interested in how external objects can be cognized, rather than in external objects themselves. To concern us, they must be somehow properly “associated” with or “assigned” to a cognition.

---

5 The phrase “more or less” means to accommodate doctrinal differences between Yogācāra and Sautrāntika Buddhists.
Since the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school’s primary focus is on epistemology rather than ontology, we will be concerned with external things only insofar as they contribute to a cognition’s semantic value, or to what a cognition is consciously about. As Chakrabarti points out, a highly plausible way of interpreting all epistemologies in the classical Indian context, including even those of metaphysical realists, is to read “object” as what is meant etymologically by “<em>artha</em>” — something that one can do something with or want. Even in Nyāya epistemology, whatever exists is knowable and cognizable. Hence, although we grant the Naiyāyika-s’ ontological assertion that the things that people access through words and sensation are sometimes identical, we will insist that such objects interest us only insofar as they can be cognitively accessed, or properly “associated” with some cognition. We will also explicitly broaden Patil’s notion of semantic value, as he implicitly does, to fit classical Indian philosophical contexts. Rather than linking semantic values with expressions, as is customary in modern Anglo-American philosophy, we will associate semantic values with episodes of intentional cognition or awareness (<em>jñāna</em>-s). Otherwise, we would appear to beg the question against both the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school and its Nyāya opponents by implying that semantic values are necessarily linguistic. For our purposes, “semantic value” means the “thing” that is assigned to a cognitive episode, and is potentially complex, including potentially both some internal content and an external object insofar as it is associated with awareness. This complex notion of thing-ness is meant to help us interpret Diñnāga’s claim that actual things and things-in-general are strictly distinct, and assess whether the Nyāya “alternative” is relevant to Diñnāga’s argument. We will use his arguments to show that all external objects of verbal or inferential cognition are referentially opaque, or empty, and, therefore, that appearances of
ordinary, respectable epistemological / political subjects rest on habits of exclusion, as Chatterjee suggests.

II. Diñṇāga’s Defense of Discontinuity between Actual Things and Things-In-General

Diñṇāga states the central thesis of his *PS* in the second sūtra of the first chapter. The work will show, he states, that inference (*anumāna*) and sensation (*pratyakṣa*) are the sole instruments of knowledge (*pramāṇa*-s). This conclusion follows, he says, because only two kinds of entities are knowable, and these kinds are mutually exclusive and divided strictly between *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna*. Richard Hayes reconstructs and translates the relevant portions of the text as follows:

Sensation and reasoning are the only two means of acquiring knowledge, because two attributes are knowable; there is no knowable object other than the peculiar [sva-] and the general [sāmānya-] attribute [lakṣaṇa]. I shall show that sensation has the peculiar attribute as its subject matter, while reasoning has the general attribute as its subject matter. (Brackets inserted 133)6

Being known uniquely is incompatible with being known generically, and all facets of semantic value are either uniquely characterized or generically characterized. The *PS* will show that, because the semantic values of *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are distinct and exhaustive of all forms of knowing, they are the only pramāṇa-s.

6 "pratyakṣam anumāṇaṁ ca pramāṇe… lakṣaṇa-dvayam prameyam. na hi sva-sāmānya-lakṣaṇābhyaṁ anyat prameyam asti. sva-lakṣaṇa viśayaṁ hi pratyakṣam sāmānya-lakṣaṇa viśayaṁ anumāṇam iti pratipādayisyāmaḥ"

My preferred translation would be: “Sense perception and inference are the only pramāṇa-s. What is known is characteristically twofold. Indeed, nothing is known except through unique and generic characteristics. The external object of sense perception is uniquely characterized while the external object of inference is generically characterized. This is what I shall show.”

Subsequent references to the *PS* will be to Hayes’ translation and commentary.
The Diñāga-Dharmakīrti school’s Vedic opponents insist that there are more ways of knowing than through sensation and inference. For example, they claim, people can gain knowledge immediately through words (śabda). The PS aims to discredit this contention by distinguishing between the kinds of semantic value that veridical cognitions can possibly present. Diñāga argues that the complex thing-ness presented in verbal understanding is not discernibly unlike the thing-ness presented in inferential understanding, but is unlike the semantic value of sensory understanding. Hence, knowledge gained through words is a kind of inference.

We saw above why Diñāga concludes that the form of thing-ness presented in verbal cognition is different from the form of thing-ness presented in sensory cognition. The external objects of verbal cognitions are generically characterized, while the semantic values of sensory episodes are uniquely characterized. Being understood in a way that is unique is incompatible with being understood in a way that is generic. Unique cognitive images (pratibhā-s) are vivid (pratibhāsa), while generic cognitive images are not. A unique particular is accessed simply “through the fact of its being seen” and is “not named through its essential property.” In contrast, generic things are accessed only through some sign or essential property (hetu or liṅga) that bears three traits. The objects of sensation and inference are therefore essentially distinct (PS II 1.0.0 — 3.0.0).

Conversely, Diñāga argues, the external objects of anumāna and śabda are not discernibly dissimilar. Both pramāna-s access their objects through a general designation, or universal (jāti), that serves as a hetu on some occasion. This hetu, or essential property, must satisfy three conditions. It must be apparent in a present subject (pakṣa) of thought, be understood to occur in further cases with some other property or general designation (the
śādhyā), and be understood not to occur in instances that lack this other property. What one comes to know through the hetu — the sign-feature that is putatively co-located with the śādhyā-feature — is the external object (bāhyah arthah), or, members of the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition say, the thing-in-general.

In the prototypical case of inference, a person sees smoke on a hill and infers the presence of fire. The hill is the pakṣa, the smoke is the hetu, the inferred fire’s property of being a fire is the śādhyā, and the inferred fire is the external object. Upon seeing smoke on a hill, the person recalls that smoke has signified fire in other instances, and that smoke never happens without fire. After seeing smoke, the person construes its property of smokiness as a hetu for the property of being a fire. Through this construal of a unique presentation (the pakṣa) as a general sign (a hetu), the person comes to know of something on the hill characterized as “fire.”

Diñnāga’s most important innovation, as Siderits notes, is to recognize that coming to know through words repeats this paradigm (*Buddhism as Philosophy : An Introduction* 214). When drivers see hexagonal signs and reflexively judge, “Stop,” they first grasp some unique presentation through pratyakṣa. They then realize that this particular is one of a class of things that has signified a command to stop in the past, and that never signifies things that are not commands to stop. Hence, through a threefold construal of unity (ekatvādhyavasāya) with other instances, they determine that the thing before them is a stop sign.

We will unpack this comparison of inference and verbal knowledge. For now note, as Diñnāga does, that its model of conceptually loaded cognition implies that the semantic values of inferential and verbal cognitions are, unlike bare sensation, always twofold (*PS II, 3.1.0*). What is initially and immediately grasped — the pakṣa — is uniquely characterized (it is a
However, what is mediately determined and named — the thing-in-general — is a
generic representative of a class (it is a sāmānyalakṣaṇa). Following the distinction introduced
above, one might say that, according to Diṇnāga’s model, the form of thing-ness presented in
conceptually loaded cognition is always complex, with a pakṣa serving as content and a thing-in-
general serving as external object. In concept-laden perceptual judgment, the content is the
unique presentation that provokes the judgment, “This is a stop sign,” and the determined
external object is a generic token (ūrdhvā-sāmānyā) of a class (Patil 215). In paradigmatic
inferential judgment, the content is a unique construal of a generic token of a class, or a spatially,
temporally, and causally specific nexus of provoked expectations, memories, and desires (254).
After directly grasping this pakṣa, one determines a type-universal (tīraya-sāmānyā), e.g., stop
sign-ness, by construing the threefold conditions (a hetu) (256-61). In both cases, the
characteristics of the two facets of inferential and verbal semantic values are incompatible, with
a unique particular serving as internal content and a determined thing-in-general serving as
external object. In contrast, pratyakṣa cognitions show no similar bifurcation of semantic value.

One might ask why anyone should accept this complex account of the cognitive contents
of verbal knowledge. Diṇnāga’s answer, which he provides in the fifth chapter of PS, appears to
be that no alternative exists. Internalism is patently absurd, as contemporary comparative
philosophers commonly recognize, for it eliminates any possibility of informative speech. Yet if
one were to attempt to adopt an externalist model, Diṇnāga suggests in the PS, then one would
either restrict external objects to the sphere of ontology, and divorce these actual things from a
cognition’s semantic value, or retreat to the absurdities of internalism.
III. A Philosophical Reconstruction of Pramāṇa-Samuccaya, Chapter V

Diṇnāga argues that what people determine through words and inference are neither actual things (svalakṣaṇa-s), general classes of things (sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s), nor relations between things and classes. Since all facets of semantic value are either uniquely or generically characterized, the external objects of verbal and inferential cognitions, unlike their internal contents, must never be apparent to consciousness.

An unlimited number of entities can be determined by a word such as “a cow,” he contends, but no one can comprehend this entire diversity every time they use the phrase. General designations are also fickle and unruly (vyabhicāra). They can designate one individual at one time, but fail to designate the same individual at another. Hence, the external objects that people determine when they know through words and inference cannot be positively given, transparent, actual things. Nor, however, can they be transparent classes or relations. People’s thoughts do not change when their cognitions determine classes instead of generic members of a class, Diṇnāga observes. They do not think anything manifestly different after determining, “Red” rather than “Red object,” or “Real cow” rather than “Cow.” Yet if words presented sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s or relations between sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s and svalakṣaṇa-s to people’s attentions, there would need to be some manifest difference between attending to a concept, such as “red” or “reality,” and attending to individuals that are subsumed within it. Therefore, Diṇnāga concludes, the external objects that people determine through words and inference are neither universals nor relations between universals and individuals (2.0.0 — 2.3.3).

It could be, Diṇnāga suggests, that general designations such as “cow” do not transparently present actual individuals, universals, or relations between universals and
individuals to a person’s consciousness, but instead manifest a state that all individuals that belong to a class or that bear a certain trait happen to share. In that case, there would be no problem of inconstancy, for a word would designate the same general feature or state-of-being on every occasion. And there would be no problem of inexhaustibly numerous referents, for a person could positively discern the term’s “meant object” by attending to a single common feature, rather than to an indefinite diversity. Finally, the lack of discernible difference between conceptions of a class and representations of a token would pose no problem, for, in any case, one would simply conceive of the state (4.0.0 — 4.1.1).

Diññāga offers three seemingly powerful arguments against this counterproposal, which would otherwise allow his opponents to avoid the conclusion that inferential and verbal cognitions are always referentially opaque, or empty. First, each universal would then be grammatically subordinate to the state of bearing that specific universal. The semantic value of the word “real” and its external object, reality, would be subordinate to a third thing — the state of being real. However, each universal would then indicate a distinct, self-contained state — an essence — which would remain intact irrespective of its relations. Diññāga contends that associations between concepts would then be lost. “Pot” would simply designate the state of being a pot. It would not imply that, if it is right to call something a pot, then it must also be right to call it “physical,” for, if pot-ness were not at all dependent on other properties, then a gaseous or fictional thing might also be rightly considered a “pot.” If general terms presented specific states to people’s attentions, then expressions would designate independently of interrelationships, and all things and properties would relate merely as contingent, detachable units, much like “white” and “sweet” (4.2.0 — 4.2.2).
Second, the notion that a general term presents a specific state to people’s attentions can at best make figurative sense. To say of something that it is “real” may be to understand reality figuratively through it, but it is surely not to assert that the thing is literally Reality, or that the object is what it means to be real. Yet if general terms literally designated the essential state of bearing a property, then each instantiation would have to epitomize the quality signified by the word (4.3.0 — 4.3.1).

Third, applications of general terms to instances cannot even figuratively present such states to people’s attentions. Figurative meanings cannot be manifest without some qualitative resemblance, and qualitative resemblance can happen only through either the metaphorical transfer of a notion from an apprehended instance to a general state or its literal transfer. An understanding of some of a property’s instances cannot metaphorically transfer to an understanding of the general state of bearing a property, for metaphorical qualitative resemblance demands some awareness of difference from a term’s original use. Calling a leader a servant works metaphorically, Diṅnāga notes, only if one expects some difference of the leader. The leader cannot be altogether servile. Yet such difference is unapparent in cognitions of a general state. Apprehensions of reality *per se* are not unlike apprehensions of the reality of a specific pot — there is no apparent qualitative difference between cognizing reality-in-general and cognizing the reality that an actual pot manifests. Hence, people are not figuratively aware of general states through the metaphorical transfer of their understandings of property instances (4.4.0 — 4.5.1). However, Diṅnāga suggests, nor are people figuratively aware of the states of bearing properties through the non-metaphorical, literal transfer of their occasional understandings. If they were, then figuratively apprehended general states would be no different from specifically apprehended
property instances, and there would be as many properties as there were instantiations of properties. People would then speak sequentially, Diñnāga notes, of “the white colour of a jasmine flower and a conch shell and so forth.” That is, people would be left with languages consisting only of discrete labels for each instance, as internalism absurdly implies. Hence, it follows, if sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s were in a semantically relevant sense grounded in cognitively external “ordinary physical objects” like Flossie the cow, then what people understood through words would count as knowledge only if people vividly apprehended the objects themselves simply by hearing about them (5.0.0 — 5.1.0). To preserve the occasional veridicality of speech, and to avoid reducing languages to sequences of names, or to the sorts of ledgers that some scholars worry that the Buddhists’ position entails, the external objects of conceptually loaded cognition, unlike their internal contents, must never be manifest to awareness (6.0.0). That is, in other words, the Naiyāyika-s’ “ordinary physical objects” thesis arguably cannot function as a genuine alternative to the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school’s strict distinction between things and things-in-general.

Diñnāga’s arguments appear to imply that, even if one assumes the thesis of ordinary physical objects and grants that sense perception and words may sometimes access ontologically identical “things,” the external objects of verbal and inferential cognition still cannot be associated with or assigned to these ontological entities in any epistemologically relevant sense. For if they were, then what people knew through words and inference would have to be radically different. Specifically, people would need to vividly conceive the unique properties of things just by inferring or hearing about them. Upon hearing about a blue pot, a person would have to intuit its exact shade of blue and its exact sort of pot-ness to know it. Since both properties pervade all
the vessel, people would need to know both properties to know either of them. By extension, they would need to know all of an object’s properties to know any. Diñnāga’s arguments therefore suggest that, if the “ordinary physical objects” that some comparative philosophers hypothesize were relevantly associated with the semantic values of conceptually loaded cognition, then uncertainty about reference, and referential opacity, would be impossible (18.0.0 — 18.2.0). It follows that “our” allegedly more commonsensical alternative would either not be an alternative, since it would be irrelevant to the epistemological issue at hand, or would not be commonsensical, since it would reduce to internalism.

Diñnāga’s arguments in the fifth chapter of *PS* suggest that, even if property-laden enduring entities like fires and cows exist independently of people’s cognitions, these cannot unproblematically ground the external aspects of verbal and inferential semantic values. Śabda and *anumāna* determine indefinite numbers of things and are fixed to no individuals in particular. They can equally signify universals and things that bear universals. They can determine objects without revealing all of their properties. In contrast to these characteristically generic attributes, the actual things with which we are immediately acquainted are unique and non-fungible. Therefore, because there are no modes of knowing that are neither unique nor generic, verbal understanding is not a distinct means of knowledge, and *pratyakṣa* and *anumāna* are the only two *pramāṇa*-s. For our purposes, it would also seem that the actual referents of expressions like “ordinary physical objects” are never transparent to thought.

Diñnāga nonetheless observes that general designations are not random. A person does not haphazardly call Flossie a cow on one day and a pot the next. The grasped *pakṣa* of a verbal cognition — the immediately apprehended and occasion-specific nexus of expectations, desires,
and memories that an utterance causes — does not exhaust its semantic value. Instead, he claims, external objects of verbal and inferential cognition are determined negatively, through *anyāpoha*, or exclusion (*apoha*) of the other (*anya*). Because words do not transparently manifest external objects to consciousness, all that an intended external object shares with other members of a category is the word that negatively determines the category (10.0.0 — 11.3.0). If one assumes that external objects must be manifest to people’s cognitions, as structuralists apparently do by positing the epistemic priority of publicly given normative epistemological subjects, one risks blinding oneself to these practices of exclusion. It seems at least conceivable, therefore, to read Diṅnāga’s *anyāpohavāda* not merely as a means of bridging universals and particulars, and equipping the Buddhists with a prosthetic for “our” allegedly globally ordinary powers, but perhaps also as a semantic model that might alert those who trust in cognitively transparent enduring entities, such as the enduring subjects, or selves, of modern epistemologists, to habits of exclusion that would be needed to support such trust.

**IV. A Poststructuralist Reconstruction of Diṅnāga Anyāpohavāda**

According to Diṅnāga’s apparent formulation of the *anyāpoha* hypothesis, words determine their external objects much as inference passes from signs to signified objects, through threefold considerations of association and incompatibility. Just as a presentation of smoke can alert people to a distant fire if they realize that smoke is associated with fire and is always incompatible with its absence, a presentation of the word “fire” can alert people to a distant fire if they realize that the word “fire,” when uttered by an honest and knowledgeable person, is associated with fire and is always incompatible with its absence (13.0.0 — 13.0.1). Recognition
of a word at some unique moment prompts a person to construe a set of expressions that are incompatible with it, and to then determine an external object as that remainder which is excluded from this set. Hence, Diñnāga contends, words determine their external objects in a way that is not unlike anumāna.

An utterance of “pot” does not exclude expressions of wider extension, such as “vessel,” terms of narrower extension, such as “blue pot,” or terms of equal extension, such as “pot” (25.0.0). Instead, it prompts one to anticipate a range of terms whose extensions are narrower, wider, and equal. In some cases, Diñnāga argues, a narrow term makes one anticipate a wider term. For example, after hearing “blue pot,” one might validly anticipate, or infer, a thing that is a pot. The given content does not itself determine the judgment, for an apprehension of “blue pot” can validly signify a thing that is a pot, a vessel, manufactured, and breakable, since these categories are wider but inclusive of it. Because the expression can lead one to expect various wider terms, it does not cause awareness of any specific one (27.0.0). Narrow terms that are not excluded by a wider term are also anticipated only indefinitely. An utterance of “pot,” for example, might provoke people to validly infer an external object that bears color, but leave them unsure about the color it bears. Likewise, the expression “blue pot” might provoke one to know by inference that a pot is blue, but would leave one uninformed about the specific shade of blue (26.0.0). Validly provoked anticipations of wider terms (e.g., “globally respectable Indian-ness”) are accompanied by doubt about which of many narrow terms obtain, as one should expect if the external objects of concept-laden cognition are empty, or are never transparently present in thought.
At the same time that words provoke unspecific sets of anticipations, Diṅnāga argues, they also provoke specific oppositions or repulsions (*virodha*). A narrow term, he says, is unfriendly with other categories that are incorporated within its same class. “Like the sons of a king, each expropriates their common property for himself. Therefore, they begrudge one another the property they have in common” (28.1.0). “A maple tree” precludes determining an external object as a willow, since the tree-ness of a maple is specific to maples, and the tree-ness of a willow is specific to willows. Similarly, the animality of a cow excludes the animality of a horse. Hence, hearing an animal described as a cow repulses one from picturing it as a horse.

Each subtype commandeers the wider class for itself, substituting itself as the class’ generic representative. Narrow terms also exclude designations that are opposed by general classes that they fall within. Hearing something described as “a maple” inhibits anticipation of a pot, since the wider term “tree” is antagonistic to “pot.” Likewise, “brown pot” precludes expectation of a brown cow, since the wider term “pot” is extensionally incompatible with “cow” (28.0.0 — 28.1.1).

Subsequent Buddhist logicians, including Dharmakīrti, have variously elaborated Diṅnāga’s contention that a word means what it does not exclude. Even at this preliminary stage, however, a complex, neither internalist nor externalist, account of semantic value appears to be already basic to *anyāpohavāda*. Following an intelligible utterance, a person immediately grasps a *vikalpa*, or a momentary and unique nexus of expectations, apathies, and aversions. This internal content then prompts a person to determine an external object, not by positively manifesting anything to consciousness, but, like the modern bhadralok subject, by constructing, or enacting, some set of exclusions. Hence, the external object that one comes to know through...
an occasional expression is not a transparently manifest, actual thing, but is rather merely an “unspecific collection” of traits that one’s determining cognition does not foreclose. A thing-in-general is a nominal similarity class (sajātīya) that is constituted through exclusion from a specific dissimilarity class (vijātīya) (Patil 215). For example, globally respectable Indian-ness could be an opaque similarity class that is constituted through exclusion from specific “others,” e.g., through novel, reiteratively renewed expectations associated, for instance, with religion, caste, sex, gender, sexuality, region, and class. Crucially, such acts of foreclosure appear in Diṇnāga’s text neither as mere lacks of attention nor purely propositional negations. Rather, from the start, anyāpoha involves affectively loaded habits of preemptively, repetitively, and perhaps sometimes violently ruling out — like the sons of a king struggling against one another to secure a crown for themselves. What one means by “cow” is what is not unexpected of cows, and what is unexpected of cows is what one is primed, at some unique, actual, and ineffable moment, to dismiss as not being cow-like. And so on, for fidelity to any jāti.

Unlike supposed alternatives, this model of conceptual determination allows for referential opacity. After learning that a thing is real and not fantastic, one may still not know that it is substantive. After learning that it is substantive and not abstract, one may still doubt whether it is solid, and not, say, liquid or gas. After discovering that it is solid, one may still wonder whether it is a tree, rather than a pot or cow. With anyāpoha, uncertainty accompanies every increase of certainty. Hence, referentially opaque contexts should be expected. Moreover, although all conceptual and linguistic external objects are then assumed to be cognitively opaque, this uncertainty does not appear to be practically debilitating. Vaguely and generically conceived things-in-general may still amplify understanding, for just as uncertainty accompanies
every verbal certainty, some set of certainties, or repulsions, accompanies every uncertainty. Therefore, to doubt whether a real, substantive, solid thing is a tree, pot, or cow, one must not doubt that it is neither liquid nor gas, or is “solid.” One must not doubt that it is not abstract, or is “substantive.” And one must not doubt that it is neither fictitious nor fantastic, or is “real.” To know generically, through words and inference, is to avail oneself of specific certainties (PS V, 12.0.0), and these certainties, Diñnāga contends, are exclusions (35.0.0).

IV. Final Thoughts on Deploying Diñnāga to Argue Against The Global Incorporation Thesis

Diñnāga’s arguments for anyāpoha and against the independent status of śabda can be used to problematize the thesis that, to count as sensible or as a viable epistemological subject, an individual must appear as a representative constituent of some publicly given, or “transparent,” linguistic structure or “we.” Because anything that is given to cognition must be present at some spatially, temporally, and causally unique moment, expressions that refer to unitary, persistent, and enduring external objects, such as shared epistemological subjectivities, must never present these entities transparently to thought. Instead, these fictional, merely nominal (vastumātra-s) entities can only be determined negatively, through occasional, reiterative acts of repulsion; if they were not, then unspecific and heterogeneous individuals could not appear to be incorporated within a common, shared identity category. Diñnāga’s arguments for anyāpoha and against the independent status of śabda as a pramāṇa may therefore be used to show, with contemporary postcolonial scholars such as Chatterjee, that public fields of common understanding, including modern comparative philosophers’ anticipated “conceptual
firsts” — “ordinary physical objects” — can seem unproblematically and collectively established
only through affectively loaded, and perhaps violent, habits of exclusion.

In an apparently different context, Chatterjee shows that the modern Indian bourgeois subject occupies a distinctively “middle” position because, in this contemporary colonial / postcolonial political moment, expressions cannot seem both generally respectable and distinctively Indian except by being set against not only hegemonic Western pretensions of cultural universality but also against the vast diversity of thoughts, behaviors, and bodies in the Subcontinent. The unique and various peculiarities that eyes, noses, tongues, ears, and skins touch within South Asia starkly differ from the characteristics of the imagined typical decorous Indian subject. Nonetheless, like the son of a king who attempts to seize a common property, *Hindutvā*, for himself, this ideological construct increasingly monopolizes the region’s economic, political, and cultural resources. Predictably, yet for the sake of commitment to an otherwise absent object of thought, this privileging proliferates new material barriers in the region, including, for example, those that increasingly alienate the majority from historically common, public waters and lands. Only by systematically denying the epistemological and political agency of the majority can one formally unspecific but in practice increasingly narrow collection of heterogeneous yet select people appear obviously, undeniably, and fortuitously Indian and global. Together, Chatterjee’s historicization and Diṅnāga’s *anyāpohavāda* therefore suggest that inattention to the priority of these acts of exclusion in the determination of concepts, including conceptions of shared sense and identity, may underlay some of our era’s most sanguinary, and seemingly interminable, cycles of social and political violence.
The figure of the systematically alienated individual consequently emerges within Diṅnāga’s *PS* as the perceptible limit of global corporatist epistemologies’ representational abilities, not only in India, but elsewhere. This “queer” body, which “normal,” middle-class hostilities reiteratively and tangibly mark, is not epistemologically problematic merely because fields of ordinary, formally generic understanding do not incorporate or value his/her kinds of thought; rather, this body emerges as a problem because s/he is the systematically ignored but ineradicable symptom of structuralists’ failed assumption that knowledge cannot happen except through preestablished epistemological subjectivities. Insofar as the now prevalent framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates remains governed by the rule of colonial difference, it functions as yet another epistemologically and politically problematic mechanism by which diverse people are “othered” to support a narrow yet internally heterogeneous community’s pretensions of manifest respectability and privilege. However, by framing the Nyāya-Buddhist debates differently, and attending to resources in fields that structuralist comparative philosophers typically “other,” such as critical postcolonial studies and queer theory, philosophical reconstructions of these traditions may offer resources that could help poststructuralists recognize the epistemological capacities of those whom modern anticipations of normative subjectivity reiteratively alienate.
CHAPTER 3:

STRETCHED BETWEEN MODERNITY AND MYSTICISM —
THE POLITICAL EFFECTS OF STRUCTURALIST COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS ON THE CLASSICAL INDIAN BUDDHISTS

What Partha Chatterjee terms the *rule of colonial difference* constrains many contemporary comparative philosophers’ efforts to make sense of the classical Nyāya and Buddhist *pramāṇa* debates, as the previous two chapters have shown. We will see in this chapter that structuralist comparative philosophical interpretations consequently tend, to borrow a metaphor from Gayatri Spivak ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 298-301), to “shuttle” the classical Indian Buddhists across poles of apparently modern, allegedly generally representative Anglo-American subjectivity, on the one hand, and traditional, parochial, objectified Indian-ness, on the other. Within the prevalent framework, the Buddhists appear identical, in certain respects, with a philosophical subjectivity that many in the academy reflexively deem generally legitimate and intelligible. Simultaneously, in certain other perhaps more colorful, respects, the Buddhists appear essentially different — they hold positions that seem intractably local, mystical, and non-modern. This framing’s stretching of the Buddhists across poles of modernity and mysticism arguably reflects a quite specific, and epistemologically problematic, institutional political interest — by determining the conditions through which the Buddhists can sensibly speak, the framing prescribes, in a colonially overdetermined way, what classical Indian Buddhist philosophers can intelligibly say. Much as *bhadralok* constructions of middle class *Hindutvā* constrict ranges of expression, embodiment, belief, and behavior that Indian subjectivities might intelligibly enact, the currently prevalent structuralist framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist debates
politically restricts the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition’s possibly disruptive non-modern epistemological potential.

Contemporary comparative philosophical scholarship commonly suggests that Diñnāga and his Buddhist successors argue that, at the level of samvṛti (conventional) reality, and therefore in all cases of conceptual judgment, culturally and socially representative norms properly adjudicate knowledge claims. For example, Georges Dreyfus writes, as we will see, that social and communal fictions determine samvṛti knowledge in the Yogācāra-Sautrāntika textual tradition. Conversely, few in our field of comparative philosophy claim to make sense of the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition’s assertion that, at the level of paramartha, ultimate reality, knowledge is the conceptually unmediated sensing of unique and momentary particulars (svalākṣaṇa-nirvikalpa-pratyakṣa). From the perspective of the prevalent comparative philosophical framing of their debates, therefore, members of the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school hold that, within general, ordinary philosophical contexts, all knowledge is inferential and subject to the authority of a given field of social norms, while within a parochial, mystical, and allegedly “ultimate” realm, only direct, non-conceptual, unique, and momentary sensing qualifies as knowledge. This structuralist splitting of Buddhist epistemology across poles of modernity and mysticism shapes the textual tradition’s boundaries of intelligibility, much as the rule of colonial difference stretches India’s emerging middle class between a modern material sphere and a distinctly Indian spiritual domain.

Arguably, like other forms of postcolonial middle class subjectification, this framing enacts a uniquely structuralist kind of violence onto the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition. The Buddhists’ primary theoretical task is prescribed to them by a politically interested
ultimatum, the enforcement of which effectively limits the terms through which they might appear to know and communicate knowledge. According to the prevalent framing, the Buddhists must, if they are to qualify as globally respectable yet distinctly Indian philosophers, replicate the epistemological powers of ordinary, conventional epistemological subjects while simultaneously preserving their traditional, individual commitment to the ultimacy of conceptually unmediated perception of particulars. At the conventional level of knowledge, as we will see, the classical Indian Buddhists consequently appear to endorse what Michael Warner calls a distinctly modern “continuum model of language” (137). Simultaneously, in a seemingly mysterious and distinctly Indian paramartha sphere, the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti tradition espouses the ultimacy of concept-free, nirvikalpaka perception of svalākṣaṇa-s. If they fail to occupy this middle, internally divided, and structurally secondary position, they will violate the terms of comparative philosophy’s now prevalent epistème; as Matilal warns, they will “serve as impoverished mourners at philosophy’s funeral” (Matilal and Ganeri 132).

We will see in this chapter that textual evidence does not clearly support the attribution in the samvṛti domain of a continuum model of language to the classical Indian Buddhists, but that when this model is attributed to them, the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school’s distinction between paramartha and samvṛti levels of knowledge aligns with structural constraints that the rule of colonial difference imposes. At a globally intelligible, ordinary samvṛti level of analysis, the Buddhists allegedly espouse an epistemology that is largely indistinguishable, for example, from W.V.O. Quine’s pragmatist naturalized epistemology, as the first section will show. The second section then demonstrates that Quine is committed to a modern “continuum model of language” while the third examines poststructuralist queer theorists Michael Warner and Judith Butler
arguments against this model. As we will see in the last section, not only is there insufficient
textual evidence for the supposition that the Diññāga-Dharmakīrti tradition shares Quine’s
commitment to a modern continuum model of language, but the frequent comparative
philosophical attribution of a such a model to the Diññāga-Dharmakīrti tradition also undermines
the stated aims of the PS. By relegating nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa to an epistemologically irrelevant
mystical domain and superimposing a modern ideology of epistemological subjectivity onto the
classical Buddhists, the prevalent framing attributes a flawed modern model of language to the
Buddhists, generates queer textual effects, and, by naturalizing colonially overdetermined
ultimata, limits the disruptive philosophical potential of the Diññāga-Dharmakīrti school’s non-
modern theories of knowledge.

I. Janus-Faced Observation Sentences and the Diññāga-Dharmakīrti Tradition’s Hybridic
Model of Semantic Value

Contemporary comparative philosophers commonly, and not unreasonably, read the
Diññāga-Dharmakīrti Buddhist textual tradition through a Quinean lens. Quine argues that the
objects and concepts that people intend when they talk of things such as rabbits, bachelors, and
baldness amount to mere placeholders in language. Because all linguistic expressions are
referentially opaque, claims are not true or false because they correspond or fail to correspond
with actual things. Similarly, the Diññāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition contends that the
referents of verbal and inferential cognition are “empty,” or are merely fictional and referentially
opaque things-in-general (vastumātra-s) rather than actual things (vastu-s). Quine also argues
that conceptual judgments fuse momentary and ineffable sensory contents with intersubjective
theoretical habits, and that expressions are therefore true or false, and meaningful or nonsensical, only insofar as they cohere or fail to cohere with occasional private experiences and intersubjective conventions. He contends that conceptual understanding always has an active, inferential function, which situates momentary sense occasions in fictional matrices of theoretical / linguistic association, and an immediate sensory function, which joins apparently persistent theoretical understandings with occasional experience. The sensory aspect of a semantic element imbues a sign, or “sentence,” with private empirical content, while the theoretical or inferential aspect imbues this sense with general, intersubjective significance. Somewhat similarly, the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition espouses a complex, dyadic model of conceptually laden cognitions. As we saw in Chapter Two, Diñnāga argues that concept-laden judgments are complexes of unique and ineffable moments of sensation (svalaksana-s) and fictional unitary, pervasive, and persistent constructs (sāmānyalaksana-s).

In Quine’s mature philosophy, “observation sentences” idealize the hybridic form that all occasions of knowledge allegedly share. He writes that they are “Janus-faced.” Each “faces outward to its subject matter and inward to the range of neural intake that is keyed to trigger it” (“In Praise" 109). He further asserts that, if an expression is semantically valuable, then it must be directly or indirectly associated with observation sentences (From Stimulus to Science 15-26). It follows that, for Quine, all semantically valuable conceptual judgments are dyadic. As with Diñnāga, in Quine’s nominalist epistemology, the form of semantic value that is characteristic of conceptual judgments is neither internalist nor externalist, but demands private, internal content and some public, external “object.”

The “inward” or empirical aspect of a Quinean observation sentence functions much like
svalaksana-s in the Diśnāga-Dharmakīrti textual tradition. This aspect is, Quine claims, “subjective or solipsistic.” It immediately connects a significant theoretical element with bodily occurrences or “global stimuli.” “Global stimuli” are visceral responses to circumstantial provocation. Quine intentionally defines the term broadly as a “temporally ordered class of [neural] receptors triggered during [some] specious present” (From Stimulus to Science 17). This empirical facet is also purely reactive. It is “most closely linked causally… physically, physiologically, neurally” to “the impact of molecules and light rays on our sensory receptors; just this and some kinaesthetic incidentals” (“In Praise" 108). Finally, like svalaksana-s, the pure empirical facet of an observation sentence is ineffable. To ask how to discern momentary and particular global stimuli or how to infer from visceral stimulation to reality would be to misconstrue its shape:

This is the wrong picture. We are not aware of our neural intake, nor do we deduce anything from it. What we have learned to do is to assert or assent to some observation sentence in reaction to certain ranges of neural intake. It is such sentences, thus elicited, that serve as experimental checkpoints for theories about the world. Negative check points. ("In Praise" 111)

As immediate and purely passionate cognitive responses to momentary phenomena, the empirical facet of a conceptual judgment, according to Quine, lacks linguistically characterizable significance. It amounts to a reflexive gesture, like a knee movement, flushing face, dilation, or yawn, that may or may not seem publicly significant. To contribute to the semantic value of verbal judgments, Quine argues, this internal empirical aspect needs to occur within a linguistic structure, which, he claims, provides the converse, theoretical side of the inscrutable “subjective or solipsistic” facet of observation sentences.

Quine characterizes the theoretical aspect of an observation sentence as “objective” and
“intersubjective” ("In Praise" 109). This facet contextualizes the purely passionate and immediate sense of an occasion by inferentially extending it across intersections of a matrix of intersubjective linguistic habits. In an early work, Quine advises his readers to imagine that a linguistic structure’s non-logical signs are divorced from any association with global stimuli.

Suppose… that in the statements which comprise the theory, that is, are true according to the theory, we abstract from the meanings of the nonlogical vocabulary and from the range of the variables. We are left with the logical form of the theory, or, as I shall say, the theory-form. ("Ont. Rel." 204)

A theory-form is, in the abstract, a set of all syntactic orderings that a discipline or community takes to be true regardless of occasional phenomena, with each non-logical sub-element of these sentences (i.e., each constituent name or concept) posited as if it had no association with sensory occasions. Quine calls formulae in a theoretical framework that are true largely regardless of circumstances, “standing sentences.”

Just as sensory occasions are void of independent theoretical significance, Quine’s ideal theory-forms are in and of themselves empirically senseless. For meaningful conceptual judgment to happen, private, unique sense experience and intersubjective, generic words must be fused in a conceptual judgment, he insists, not as disjoined elements, but instead as twin facets of a single expressive event. He writes:

It is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement. Taken collectively, science has its double dependence upon language and experience; but this dependence is not significantly traceable into the statements of science taken one by one. ("Two Dogmas of Empiricism" 42)

Note that there is a potentially important difference here between the Buddhists’ and Quine’s dyadic accounts of semantic value. According to Quine, all semantically valuable elements, which he takes to be sentences, are necessarily embedded in “models.” Hence, he upholds the
thesis that knowledge cannot happen without mediation of “subjective or solipsistic” sense by publicly established, shared conceptual structures. Consequently, in his semantics, individual sense occasions are assumed, as a matter of principle, to be senseless if they lack continuity with socially representative subjects’ conceptual habits. Because Diñnāga and his successors admit the immediate perception of unique particulars, or svalaksana-s, as not only a legitimate but also as the ultimate source of knowledge, they do not share Quine’s commitment to this global incorporation thesis.

Unlike idealized pure theory-forms and pure sensory occasions, Quinean models are theoretical frameworks with at least some association with global stimuli. These associations occur logically, he writes, when some of the conditions of satisfaction of a theory-form’s standing sentences are made somewhat definite — “by picking… a universe for its variables to range over, and assigning objects from this universe as extensions of the one-place predicates, and so on” (“Ont. Rel.” 204). Hence, what ultimately distinguishes standing concepts from relatively observational ones is, for Quine, the width of the inferential gap between unique and ineffable moments of experience and unitary, persistent, and pervasive theoretical designations, the distance between a sentence’s twin Janus faces, or, in other, less metaphorical terms, the variety of sensory possibilities that might potentially fail to disrupt a linguistic categorization. Relatively more standing theoretical elements, such as, “A Bachelor is an unmarried man,” are “standing sentences” because they are less vulnerable to correction, or negative checks, by diverse ranges of empirical provocation than are relatively more observational theoretical elements, such as, “That Bachelor is bald.”

In Word & Object, Quine writes that certain non-logical elements, such as “bachelor,” and
presumably “marriage,” are relatively “non-observational” because linguistic novices could never develop apparently single and harmonious understandings of these terms simply by being directed to specific ranges of “bachelor” or “marriage” associated phenomena. Without considerable background empirical-theoretical content, the circumstances that linguistic experts would think to point at would vary too much to provoke generally harmonious linguistic dispositions. “Sample stimulations belonging to the affirmative stimulus meaning of such a sentence, for the given [expert], would show no tempting common traits by which to conjecture further cases, or none but such as fail to hold up on further tries” (Word and Object 46). In this respect, relatively “non-observational” or standing categories are like relatively “wider” categories in Diñnāga’s anyāpoha semantics. They incorporate, or are not disrupted by, a wide variety of words and experiences. In contrast, Quine claims at this stage of his career that diverse “red”-related phenomena are somehow more naturally connected — or “stimulus synonymous” — because children and other linguistic ingénues learn their meanings at relatively early stages of their educations, apparently without dependence on large stores of background understanding. In the terms of Diñnāga’s anyāpoha semantics, one might say, Quine’s standing sentences are “wide” while observation sentences are “narrow.”

II. Quine’s Commitment to a Continuum Model of Language and Queer Interventions

Quine means his philosophy to give individuals in language communities normative, though not ultimate, epistemological guidelines. Rational discussion is to be pragmatically regulated, he writes, by a rule of “conservatism, or the maxim of minimum mutilation” (From Stimulus to Science 49). Whenever individuals evaluate their own and others’ occasional
judgments, they are supposed to consider how generally representative subjects within their communities would react to that occasion (From Stimulus to Science 76). If these subjects would endorse an expression, then individuals ought to act as if the judgment counted as knowledge. If they would not, then individuals ought to consider the issue debatable. In any case, individuals are obliged to upset the verbal habits of the subjects who govern their societies to the minimal possible extent. Quine intends publicly given subjects, and not individuals, to be epistemologically normative.

Throughout his career, Quine sought to bridge the gap that his semantics recognizes between empirical and theoretical aspects of semantic value by appealing to the epistemological normativity of unproblematically emergent, transparently given public subjectivities. In a frequently quoted passage, Quine writes:

For my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer’s gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. ("Two Dogmas of Empiricism" 44)

As with his famous analogy of “radical translation,” in which the ordinary reactions of a wholly unfamiliar “Jungle”-speaking people determine the accuracy of two anthropologists’ translation manuals, and as with his paradigmatic case of language learning, in which a mother assesses her child’s ability to approximate expressive habits that she shares with other adults, Quine’s naturalized epistemology relativizes knowledge to supposedly transparent, publicly given structures of normative subjective understanding.

Though neither Michael Warner nor Judith Butler directly criticizes Quine’s epistemology, and neither seems to have mentioned him in their published work, Warner calls “primitive” the
ideology of public expression that Quine’s epistemology presupposes (137). This ideology,
Warner explains, posits a seamless continuity between causally, historically, and spatially unique
contexts of “face-to-face argumentative dialogue” and abstract spheres of normal, communally
representative linguistic behavior. “The dominant ideology of the public sphere, dating at least
from the early eighteenth century,” Warner writes, asserts that citizens “form opinions in
dialogue with each other, and this is where public opinion comes from” (143). According to this
“continuum model of language” (137), distinct contexts of expression, ranging from “common
conversation to PTA meetings, to parliamentary forensics, op-ed pieces, or critical essays” (143),
unproblematically yield fields of ordinary, common linguistic anticipation and behavior.
Similarly, Quine imagines that, thanks to evolution and shared social circumstances, the
epistemological and conceptual norms that govern a community naturally spring from face-to-
face discussions between individual members, or, as Warner suggests, “an idealized version of
such dialogue” (143). Quine routinely appeals to romanticized accounts of individuals’ linguistic
interactions, such as conversations between parents and children and anthropologists and
“Jungle” natives, to show how culturally relative totalities of normative understanding
transparently present themselves to heterogeneous individuals.

Warner argues that the kind of continuum model of language which Quine appeals to is
incorrect. “Publics do not in fact work that way” (143). This structuralist model of
intersubjective knowledge “relies on a language ideology in which ideas and expressions are
infinitely fungible, translatable, repeatable, summarizable, and restatable” (146). However,
Warner theorizes, the contexts of discussion that actual public expressions travel are discrete and
non-fungible. Individuals, unlike subjects, navigate linguistic contexts that are shaped by
particular, non-substitutable conditions, such as specific departments, canonical texts, political regimes, and so on. “Publics do not exist simply along a continuum from narrow to wide or from specialist to general, elite to popular,” Warner argues. “They differ in the social conditions that make them possible and to which they are oriented” (147). Academic writing, for example, presupposes audience members with narrow “reference points, career trajectories, and subclass interests” (148). Modern “journalistic publics,” on the other hand, prescribe commitment to a “headline temporality.” The conditions of intelligible circulation in both spheres are not only different, but are also opposed. Academia privileges complex expressions in narrowly defined fields of pre-certified participants. Conversely, because they privilege breadth of audience, “the media that matter” in journalistic / mass cultural contexts are “contracted,” and the circuits that publicly intelligible speech can travel in these contexts are “those whose scale and scarcity of access are most forbidding” (148). Circulation in both forms of public discussion is extremely restricted, since circulation in both contexts presupposes some limited, non-fungible range of conditions, temporal horizons, backgrounds, instruments, purposes, etc. It follows, therefore, that contexts of individual face-to-face dialogue are quite unlike the unitary fields of “ordinary” intersubjectivity that Quine takes to govern theoretical frameworks. There is no empirical basis to trust that heterogeneous contexts of individual experience and expression should naturally yield harmonious understandings of normal, communally representative social subjectivities, particularly since any circuit of public communication that an embodied person navigates will be specific and nonequivalent. Because people do not meet generic persons or frameworks in their experiences, individuals and subjects are discontinuous.

Judith Butler likewise argues that individuals’ experiences of public spaces should not
invite trust in anyone’s immediate familiarity with normative epistemological subjectivities. Individuals in public spaces are not naturally acquainted with ordinary, generally representative others. Instead, she insists, public experience is more like having an armpit forced into your face; a person’s sense of being embodied is immediately marked by vulnerability and exposure to peculiar others. “My body relates me — against my will and from the start — to others I do not choose to have in proximity to myself (the subway and the tube are excellent examples of this dimension of sociality)” (Undoing Gender 21). Embodiment, according to Butler, demands that, before any understanding of an abstract, normalized “I” or “We” can emerge, an individual’s self be partially and immediately dispossessed in exposure to otherness, not familiarity.

As Quine’s final criteria of observationality show, he, unlike Butler and Warner, trusts in the continuum model of language, and accepts that, strictly speaking, publicly representative and transparently given subjects, not individuals, are the primary agents of knowledge. To satisfy his first, “private” criterion of observationality, a range of empirical stimuli must immediately and involuntarily present itself to a person as an instance of a particular totality or kind. To use the language of the Dīnāga-Dharmakīrti school, an individual must reflexively determine a presented occasion’s unity with other members of a class (ekatvādhyavasāya). “The private requirement,” Quine writes, “is just that the sentence be keyed directly to a range of perceptually fairly similar global stimuli” (From Stimulus to Science 43). The more that doubt intervenes before an individual determines the external object or concept that an expression intends, the less observational that expression can properly be said to be. To satisfy Quine’s second “public” criterion of observationality, every ordinary member of a language community must be similarly disposed to interpret the occasion. “The public requirement… [is] namely unhesitating
concurrence by all qualified witnesses” (*From Stimulus to Science* 44). If every qualified, respectable member of a person’s society is as immediately and involuntarily disposed to judge an occasion, “Red,” then it will be reasonable, and pragmatic, for an individual to assume that the occasional expression, “Red,” is grounded in common, intersubjective, and objective sense, and not just in idiosyncratic, “subjective or solipsistic” experience. Conversely, the more that interpretations would likely vary among relevant community members, or the more that communally representative, generally respectable people would likely hesitate before agreeing, the less, Quine claims, a reasonable, practical person will consider an interpretation observational and authoritative. It follows, one can say, that in Quine’s naturalized epistemology, the “objective” or “intersubjective” intuitions and reflexes of transparently recognizable ordinary society members, or generally representative subjects, always take formal priority over the potentially “subjective or solipsistic” intuitions and reflexes of specific people, or individuals.

According to Quine’s final, settled view, sentences qualify as “observational” only if representative people in a community typically act as if they are observational. “The very freedom vouchsafed us by the indeterminacy of reference allows us to adopt ostension as decisive for reference to observable concrete objects,” he writes (*From Stimulus to Science* 75). When subjects are disposed to assume that they can “purely and simply” point out the intended reference of an expression, then individuals within a community are meant to act as if these expressions are obviously sensible and true. Conversely, if subjects would hesitate or disagree about the meaning of a sentence, then, Quine asserts, individuals in the community should, if they are reasonable, let conversations about these matters regress to more common and less contentious linguistic terrain. For instance, if communally representative subjects considered talk
of “rabbit horns” disruptive, then individuals within a language community would be normatively obliged to avoid foisting such terms into ordinary people’s conversational contexts. Due to a “preestablished harmony,” or unproblematically transparent continuity, that allegedly exists between individuals’ and normative epistemological subjects’ observational dispositions, Quine argues, discussions among epistemologically competent individuals naturally end at terms like “rabbit,” rather than regress to “perverse alternatives,” such as “undetached rabbit part” and “rabbit sliver” (*From Stimulus to Science* 190).

Butler and Warner both take implicit issue with the continuity that Quine assumes between individuals and subjects. The kind of continuum model of language that he presupposes, Warner argues, overlooks what distinguishes modern, public forms of address from other sorts of language games, such as gossip and feudal debate. To speak publicly is always to address a “crucial background horizon of ‘public opinion’,” or to use the singular plural “we” in a uniquely abstract way. It is to seek to be held accountable to an indefinite number of others whom one is only rhetorically, or stylistically, related to. While other forms of debate address familiars, public discourse, he contends, is primarily oriented to strangers (74). Presenters at academic conferences do not, for example, merely address the people in the rooms they speak before. By ostensibly reading papers before these individuals, they primarily hope to dialogue with communities, disciplines, and fields. Similarly, even if they outwardly appear to do so, newspaper columnists never write op-ed articles for audiences of one. The public form of their writing demands that they principally address a generically conceived readership. “The category of the public,” Warner writes, is “an essentially imaginary function that allows temporally indexed circulation among strangers to be captured as a social entity and addressed
impersonally” (144). Consequently, Warner implies, the subjects whom Quine means to adjudicate sensible linguistic behavior should be cognitively opaque rather than familiar. Insofar as normative subjects represent communities as imagined, enduring totalities, they differ radically from the motley, transparently obvious individuals whom people ostensibly interact with in public discussions and whose habits individuals in society can unproblematically and transparently know.

Butler likewise suggests that, contrary to Quine’s thesis of “preestablished harmony,” socially authoritative subjects and individuals are discontinuous. When individuals try to deploy concepts, their utterances are immediately “vulnerable to another perspective, one that might subject the words and deeds to a reinterpretation” (Undoing Gender 166). Because individuals’ bodies and bodily expressions are immediately vulnerable to others, the felicity of any attempt to cite or deploy a concept, such as a gender or racial identity, must depend, in part, on how the attempt is taken up by the individual others whom the person is momentarily stuck with. An applicant’s effort to successfully project a normalized gender or racial identity in a job interview, for instance, will depend not merely on the applicant’s intentions and linguistic prowess, but also on how the interviewer “reads” the applicant’s gender or racial performance. Actual individuals and publicly representative normative subjectivities are therefore precariously related, rather than continuous. “The norm is analytically independent of its incorporations,” Butler writes. A norm, or concept, “is a measurement and a means of producing a common standard.” In contrast, individual utterances are subsumed, or not, by the norms that they attempt to cite (Undoing Gender 48-50).

Quine commonly speaks as if the vast majority of people in any community would qualify
as legitimate epistemological subjects, or as language experts. Subjects, he implies, are people in
a social context who achieve minimal standards of linguistic competence. These individuals
allegedly embody the subjectivity, or structure of empirical and theoretical associations, that
happens to be authoritative for people in their context, and they do so because their upbringings
and circumstances naturally overlap with those of their peers. These people’s reflexive reactions,
anticipations, and aversions supposedly passively harmonize with the linguistic habits that are
ordinary, or representatively general, in their social and cultural place. Poststructuralists such as
Butler and Warner vigorously critique this supposition.

III. Were the Classical Indian Buddhists Quinean?

Contemporary comparative philosophers commonly read a structuralist commitment to
the continuum model of language in the samvṛti, or “conventional,” epistemological domain of
the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti school. Hayes, for example, suggests that Diñnāga holds that already
apparent social conventions ought to decide whether words legitimately exclude certain others.
Citing the first meter of PS V 31.0.0, “An alternative is that preclusion is due to non-
observation,” he writes:

We know that one term is contrary to another by virtue of our observations of the usage
of the two terms in question. If one term is never observed to be applied to objects to
which another term is applied, then the terms are contraries. (208)

The purpose of this passage from Diñnāga’s text (“An alternative is that preclusion is due to non-
observation”) is obscure, as Hayes acknowledges. Regardless, its apparent suggestion that words
can legitimately repulse certain others because of non-observation might assert no more than one
part of Diñnāga’s standard threefold criterion of signification — a word legitimately works as a
sign or *hetu* only if there are no observed instances in which the *sādhya* has excluded the word. Hayes, however, interprets this passage in a way that appears to reiterate the continuum model of language’s trust that bodies of authoritative social convention unproblematically appear to individuals in the *samvṛti* domain. “If pressed to answer why two terms have disjoint extensions,” Hayes writes, “we can only say that this is due to the fact that our linguistic conventions are such that the two words are not conventionally applicable to the same range of objects. But there is not necessarily a basis in reality for our conventions being as they are” (208).

Dharmakīrti elaborates Diñnāga’s account principally by showing how an “exclusion of the other” theory of conceptual determination might indirectly root veridical conceptual judgments within a distinct domain of unique and ineffable, but causally potent particulars. In the process, he may also appear to move Diñnāga’s *anyāpohavāda* to a more explicit embrace of the continuum model of language. In his auto-commentary to 1.75b-c of the *Pramāṇavārttika*, Dharmakīrti asserts that “vyavahāra” guides the exclusions that determine external objects (Dunne 346-47). As John Dunne notes, Dharmakīrti tends to use *vyavahāra* in the sense of “action,” or practice. Dunne also observes, however, that, in non-philosophical contexts, the term commonly designated legal contracts and business agreements (258n58). “Convention” is therefore an excellent translation of *vyavahāra*. Nonetheless, to include others’ practices or conventions among the causal conditions that might influence one’s own conceptual determinations is not necessarily to posit transparently given and epistemologically normative public subjectivities. An individual could be home-schooled by cult leaders, or critical
intellectuals, and therefore internalize conceptual habits that “our” middle class linguistic
conventions would likely oppose.

Dreyfus explicitly attributes the stronger continuum model of language to Dharmakīrti.
He writes that a vikalpa, or conceptual construct, is, for Dharmakīrti “not completely
nonexistent,” because it “differs from the object of a dream or fantasy in that it is
intersubjectively valid. It is a convenient fiction, a shared myth, that allows us to function in the
world” (145). Dreyfus’ interpretation echoes Quine’s famous depiction of physical objects and
the gods of Homer as nothing more than cultural posits. A vikalpa, Dreyfus continues,
is a kind of public creation, a second-order reality, different from both the given of
unmistaken perceptual experience and the purely imaginary realm of errors, dreams, and
illusions. This intermediary realm of conceptuality is social; it is made of agreed on
fictions, myths, and convenient labels, all of which are created in relation to language.
(146)

Notwithstanding vyavahāra’s use in non-philosophical contexts to designate such things as
business agreements, it is of course possible to be influenced by the expressive habits of other
individuals without anyone implicitly or explicitly “agreeing on” the rules of expression that will
govern their cultures, societies, or disciplines as totalities. It is also possible to be influenced by
others without agreeing with these people. By attributing the more ambitious, and historically
specific, continuum model of language to Dharmakīrti, arguably without sufficient textual
grounds, Dreyfus superimposes a modern theory of publics — a theory premised on the
continuum model of language — onto the samvyrti domain of the classical Buddhist
pramāṇavādin-s.

Siderits also suggests that the Diṇṇāga-Dharmakīrti school supports a commitment to the
continuum model of language. While discussing a scenario that appears to deliberately evoke
Quine’s paradigmatic case of childhood language learning, he writes, “What we want is for her [the child] to form a mental image [vikalpa] that she can use in the future to determine whether the word applies. She will do this by calling up that mental image and comparing it to what she is then experiencing” (Buddhism as Philosophy: An Introduction 223). Quine’s behaviorism would of course not countenance talk of mental images. Nonetheless, Siderits repeatedly appeals, like Quine, to idealized parent-child interactions to explain how social norms are passed on and shared between individuals within societies and how these interactions ultimately support the conceptual conventions of transparently obvious normative public subjectivities. Like Dreyfus and Quine, who write as if unproblematically apparent unitary, persistent, and pervasive intersubjective verbal fictions are continuous with contexts of individual linguistic interaction, the classical Buddhist pramāṇa theorists, Siderits suggests, hold that conventional word meanings are authoritative and enduring, or “copied and repeated,” cultural myths.

The no-self members of the Diṅnāga-Dharmakīrti tradition who emerge from these modern restorations into a field of normal, globally respectable epistemological practice are hardly distinguishable, at the level of conventional, samvṛti truth, from twentieth century American pragmatists such as Quine. Just like Quine, the reconstructed classical Indian Buddhists appear to root conceptual norms in the dispositions of “ordinary,” communally representative subjects, and to be primarily motivated to secure minimal conditions of conventional, practical, and publicly authoritative knowledge. Meanwhile, in a categorically different and apparently mysterious spiritual realm, the Buddhists are said to reduce knowledge to a kind of “immaculate perception” of unique, momentary, and propertyless particulars. Ordinary, modern philosophical subjects do not and cannot be expected to understand what
nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa is, or how it might bolster the authority of conventional, everyday property-rich savikalpaka cognition.

Modern comparative philosophical representations of the classical Nyāya-Buddhist debates therefore tend to split the Buddhist pramāṇa theorists into distinct subjective and non-subjective poles, and to hinge their potential for global philosophical significance on their abilities to bridge this “gap” between the parochial, non-general “ultimate” (mystical) side of themselves and the universally significant “conventional” (modern) other half. As the rule of colonial difference prescribes, the classical Buddhist intellectuals are told to either suture this gap, and appear materially, if not spiritually, indistinguishable from modern epistemologists such as Quine, or be relegated to an essentially inferior, unintelligible, and non-philosophical domain. As one should expect from any theoretical framework that the rule of colonial difference governs, a politically unequal but allegedly apolitical ultimatum frames modern reconstructions of classical Indian Buddhist epistemology from the start. They must either reconnect the sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s and svalakṣaṇa-s that they so carefully dissociate, for instance by appealing to the modern continuum model of language, and in the process make practically irrelevant the gap between actual things and things-in-general that they principally appear to want to alert their opponents to, or fail to meet minimal standards of modern, globally respectable epistemological subjectivity.

Ironically, though the PS principally seeks to reduce śabda to anumāna, classical Buddhist pramāṇavāda, in this modern dress, defers practical epistemological agency to established linguistic totalities. Unique, actual, and deśakālāvasthāniyata particulars are relegated to a distinct and epistemologically nonsensical “private” spiritual realm, while all
intelligible and meaningful thought is said to depend on direct, unproblematic familiarity with conventional word meanings — the very category that the PS aims to reduce to inference. Given these queer textual effects, is appropriate to ask, riffing off of Butler, who riffs off of Spivak, whether the “other” of comparative philosophy can, in this modern framework, speak.
CHAPTER 4:

CAN THE ‘OTHER’ OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY SPEAK? — ON THE
EPISTEMOLOGICAL VIOLENCE OF THE CONTINUUM MODEL OF LANGUAGE

An actual field linguist would of course be sensible enough to equate ‘gavagai’ with ‘rabbit’, dismissing such perverse alternatives as ‘undetached rabbit part’ and ‘rabbit stage’ out of hand. (Quine "Ont. Rel." 190)

Fantasy is not the opposite of reality; it is what reality forecloses, and, as a result, it defines the limits of reality, constituting it as its constitutive outside. The critical promise of fantasy, when and where it exists, is to challenge the contingent limits of what will and will not be called reality. (Butler Undoing Gender 29)

‘Does Big Brother exist?’
‘Of course he exists. The Party exists. Big Brother is the embodiment of the party.’
‘Does he exist in the same way as I exist?’
‘You do not exist,’ said O’Brien. (Orwell 275)

To exemplify the violences that she believes follow from epistemologies that suppose continuity between individuals and normative epistemological subjects, or what Michael Warner calls the continuum model of language, Judith Butler points to David Reimer, who committed suicide in 2002 at the age of thirty-eight. As an infant, Reimer’s penis was accidentally destroyed during a medical procedure. Subsequently, one of the more respected and credentialed sexologists of the time, Dr. John Money of Johns Hopkins University, advised Reimer’s parents to raise their child as a girl. They would socially condition her/him as if s/he were female, and later subject him/her to female hormone therapy and genital surgery. Money prescribed a lifelong sequence of disciplinary interventions on Reimer’s body, apparently to retrieve the child’s supposedly lost potential for a normal, natural, and healthy life. Butler contends, however, that, because normal, normative subjects are not transparently given, but may only be opaquely
conceived, these bodily interventions effectively functioned, not to help Reimer to more closely approximate, or serve as a facsimile of, a normal social subject’s embodiment, but to repeatedly mark his/her present form as unthinkable and illegitimate. “When Brenda [Reimer] looks in the mirror and sees something nameless, freakish, something between the norms, is she not at that moment in question as a human, is she not the specter of the freak against which and through which the norm installs itself,” she asks. One may similarly question whether, because the “ordinary physical objects” that the Naiyāyika-s and “we” associate with concept-laden perception are cognitively opaque instead of familiar, the threat of solipsism and linguistic incapacity that the Buddhist nominalists are repeatedly queried about is the specter of the freak, of epistemological nihilism, partially against which and through which a modern middle-class Indian philosophical subjectivity installs itself.

If Warner’s and Butler’s arguments are sound, then people such as Winston of 1984 are not alone in their attempts to address their words, not principally to tangibly and uniquely familiar others, but to mere placeholders in thought. Winston is systematically alienated, then, not because he tries to address a hardly imaginable subject, but because a totalitarian state marks him as an abject possibility — as an individual who is grossly incompatible with the normative social subjectivity that Big Brother seems to transparently measure and represent. Arguably, as Warner notes, Winston’s discursive position bears analogy to the predicament of those who occupy minor, marginal, or intersectional political positions in modern democracies and wish to challenge these publics’ structural conditions of intelligibility (130). Such individuals are the (im)possibilities who, through predictable acts of alienation, are made to mark prevalent disciplinary frames’ boundaries of recognition. They appear as freaks, monstrosities, and
question marks so that an allegedly “given” and epistemologically authoritative political identity, or abstract yet transparent “we,” may seem to materialize through their derealization.

One assumes that Money intended his interventions to “retrieve” the infant’s anticipated but shunted chances for a normal life, or to replicate the continuity that Reimer's individual body supposedly would have had with a normal, socially representative subject if not for one tragic, unthinkable, freak medical accident. According to Butler’s reading of Reimer’s case, however, the horror that Money’s scientific intervention sought to exorcise from social perception was not born of a single, aberrant crisis, but was instead the target, and sign, of a pattern of violence, the reiteration of which is needed to make any normative subjectivity seem transparent. Butler points elsewhere, for example, to the bodily interventions that many intersexed children endure and that hardly differ from those that Reimer was subjected to. As a matter of institutional practice, these children’s bodies are surgically altered, not because they are intrinsically weird (if one looks patiently, no individual’s body is less strange or unique), but, she argues, to limit the range of possibilities that sexed bodies might intelligibly seem to range over, and to thereby help to define, or construct, what normally sexed bodies ought to look like and do.\footnote{See Suzanne Kessler’s “The Medical Construction of Gender: Case Management of Intersexed Infants” (\textit{Signs} 1990) for an interesting account of how expectations of capacity for penetrative heterosexual intercourse were regularly used to distinguish infants’ otherwise ambiguous penises/clitorises.} If normative sexed and gendered subjectivities are assumed to be transparently understood, then there is a need, Butler argues, for apparently well meaning experts to mark certain bodies as signifiers of impossibility and crisis, for without such acts of “derealization,” myriad, equally odd others could not begin to seem unproblematically continuous with a homogenous normal and normative epistemological subjectivity. To translate Butler’s contention into the terms of Diñnäga’s anyāpoha semantics, unspecific, anticipated sets of heterogeneous, not excluded individuals can

anyāpoha semantics, unspecific, anticipated sets of heterogeneous, not excluded individuals can
be cognized as the referents of verbal designations, such as “male” and “female,” only through the active, constitutive exclusion of certain sets of others. This is “the knife of the norm,” Butler writes. “Here the ideality of gendered morphology is quite literally incised in the flesh” (Undoing Gender 53).

This chapter will apply arguments from Warner and Butler, as well as Diñnāga and Quine, to the modern continuum model of language, and show how epistemologies that are premised on it function only through systematically alienating practices of “epistemological violence.” As we will see, the currently prevalent comparative philosophical framing’s shuttling of the Buddhists between poles of modernity and mysticism works according to the very logic that Butler argues is needed to sustain appearances of modern, naturally fixed, sex and gender norms. Rather than superimposing a continuum model of language onto Diñnāga’s anyāpohavāda, we will therefore instead propose a reading of his doctrine that will show, with Butler and Warner, that epistemological violence is endemic to theories of knowledge that are committed to the structuralist continuum model of language.

Below, the first section introduces a phenomenon that is arguably characteristic of knowledge contexts premised on the continuum model of language and that both Warner and Butler term “normalization.” The second and third sections then show that, when enduring social selves are assumed to be transparently given, Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of reference and Diñnāga’s anyāpohavāda both imply the necessity of this phenomenon. The final section will argue that enduring social selves, or subjects, should not be assumed to be transparently obvious because, first, the assumption is viciously circular, second, knowledge systems premised on the assumption necessarily institutionalize acts of epistemological violence,
and, finally, no epistemology that takes the continuum model of language for granted can accommodate the epistemological capacities of systematically alienated individuals, such as David Reimer and Winston of 1984.

I. The Phenomenon of Normalization

The poetic form of address that is left to individuals who wish to contest their systematic alienation from modern public spaces arguably reveals a specific, and violent, epistemological process that Warner and Butler both term “normalization.” This logic occurs, they contend, when public subjectivities and normative conceptual meanings are assumed to emerge transparently and seamlessly from individuals’ heterogeneous contexts of discussion, as they are in the Quinean epistemology that comparative philosophers frequently associate with the classical Buddhist pramāṇavādin-s. “The phenomenon of normalization,” Warner writes, is “one of the most pervasive and troubling effects in mass society” (135). This phenomenon occurs, he says, when individuals in public structures incorrectly assume that normative, generally representative subjectivities are transparently and passively understood. “Ideas of the good” then become “distorted in ways that escape nearly everyone’s attention, because they have been silently adjusted to conform to an image of the mass” (Ibid.). According to Butler, “the process of normalization” is “the way that certain norms, ideas and ideals hold sway over embodied life, provide coercive criteria for normal ‘men’ and ‘women’,” and, in this way, “govern ‘intelligible’ life, ‘real’ men and ‘real’ women” (Undoing Gender 206). This process occurs, she argues, when normative subjects are assumed to be unproblematically and transparently manifest to myriad individuals. “If we take the field of the human for granted, then we fail to think critically — and
ethically — about the consequential ways that the human is being produced, reproduced, deproduced” (*Undoing Gender* 222).

When familiar ranges of individuals substitute themselves for opaque normative subjects, standards of knowledge and intelligible speech are silently adjusted, Warner claims, “to conform to an image of the mass.” Familiar and transparent representations of opaque epistemological subjects do not merely “naturally privilege the majority over less familiar views,” but also “distort the judgment of the majority itself, precisely *qua* majority” (135). Individuals who hope to be recognized as subjects in epistemologies that are premised on the continuum model of language must, he notes, outwardly adopt tastes and ideas that they *expect* to be widely shared. Consequently, they will be compelled, on penalty of apparent unsociability and incompetence, to outwardly recognize the normativity, not of transparent social subjects, but of momentarily arising *images, ideas, or stereotypes* of representative subjectivity. For instance, as Partha Chatterjee shows, aspiring middle class Indian nationalists in nineteenth century India were bound, for historically and colonially specific political reasons, to either fail to appear respectable, worthy, and smart, or to adopt “classical Indian” beliefs and values that are not, in any historical sense, representatively and “classically” Indian. Rather, they were imaginative constructs that one could expect, in some fleeting, historically unique context, not to fail to appear intelligible and culturally representative.

Warner suggests that the phenomenon of normalization causes epistemologies that are premised on the continuum model of language to systematically alienate most of those whom they claim sovereignty over. When “the extensiveness of the reading audience is taken into consideration in advance by that very reading audience” (137), individuals who wish to speak
meaningfully have to outwardly limit their expressions to images of collective identity that, in
some historically, geographically, and politically distinct context, *appear* to be publicly
representative. “People rely on expressions that are precertified for them as common
currency…,” he writes (135). Consequently, Warner suggests, these epistemologies demand a
phenomenon that Theodore Adorno calls “alienation”: “an imitative style of mass comprehension
that defensively resists the unpredictability of thought” (*Ibid.*). Epistemologies premised on the
continuum model of language impose ultimata of conformity or unintelligibility upon anybody
who wishes to speak, and therefore divide most individuals from conditions of epistemological
agency. For example, the emergence of a distinctly Indian middle class subjectivity in the
nineteenth century proliferated new forms of discipline throughout South Asia. Momentarily
arising nexuses of anticipation, memory, sensation, and habit yielded fleeting, changing
standards of truth and reality, and these historically occasional images guided practices of
judgment that have marked vast ranges of behavior and expression as contrary to ordinary Indian
subjectivity. As with *1984*, in which Winston’s grasp of truth, meaning, and existence is made to
hang, through constant threat of vaporization, onto repeatedly occurrent faces of Big Brother,
epistemologies such as Quine’s that are premised on the continuum model of language allow
momentarily arising signs or constructs of otherwise opaque subjectivity to substitute themselves
for public, authoritative standards of knowledge. Knowledge practices premised on the
continuum model of language can make unspecific sets of heterogeneous individuals seem
unproblematically continuous with unitary, pervasive, and persistent normative cultural
subjectivities only by alienating individuals from the means of epistemological production.

Butler likewise cautions against a “process of normalization” that she believes to be
specific to “late modern forms of power” (*Undoing Gender* 55). All knowledge systems, she notes, depend on practices of discipline and surveillance, of constriction and exclusion. Because individuals are partially and necessarily vulnerable to others before abstract notions of “I” or “We” can possibly emerge, juridical forms of power are necessarily imbricated within any individual’s conditions of fulfillment and survival. Such norms are not particular to modernity — they include “the aims and aspirations that guide us, the precepts by which we are compelled to act or speak to one another, the commonly held presuppositions by which we are oriented, and which give direction to our actions” (*Undoing Gender* 206). The conventions that develop between individuals in specific times and places, and the rituals and protocols of presentation that allow people’s expressions to circulate and be understood in particular contexts, such as families, departments, feudal monarchies, and gossip circles, are included among them. Butler writes:

> My reflexivity is not only socially mediated, but socially constituted. I cannot be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of the norms that precede and exceed me. In this sense, I am outside myself from the outset, and must be, in order to survive, and in order to enter into the realm of the possible.” (*Undoing Gender* 32)

Because embodied individuals are necessarily “beside themselves” (*Undoing Gender* 20) in others to whom they are immediately vulnerable, “normativity” is, in this one sense, necessary to any person’s possible satisfaction, sustenance, and thought.

Butler accepts that all linguistic contexts, and not only those that are shaped by modern discourse, rely on practices that exclude certain others. Communication everywhere, including in non-modern societies, demands acts of social control, or “juridical forms of power” (*Undoing Gender* 55). In Quine’s instead of Foucault’s terms, Butler recognizes that adults everywhere and during any era must guide children’s learning processes by repeating words like, “No,” and
correcting their expressions. They might shake their heads, for instance, to dissuade talk of pet rabbits as collections of “undetached rabbit parts” (“Ont. Rel.” 190). In Dharmakīrti’s terms, Butler recognizes that an expression like “Pot” cannot be understood without background habits of exclusion, and that the practices, or conventions, of the others with whom individuals interact will partially shape how they determine their worlds. “There is no way to argue away this condition of a primary vulnerability, of being given over to the touch of the other,” she writes (Undoing Gender 24). There is nobody, and can be no body, with cognitive and linguistic aversions, apathies, and associations that have not been considerably shaped by the others on whom they immediately depend and to whom they are immediately vulnerable.

Butler contends that these relations, and the care that individuals take when using negative norms to discipline the behaviors and expressions of their companions, can vary ethically. “For some,” she writes, “this primary scene is extraordinary, loving, and receptive, a warm tissue of relations that support and nurture life” (Undoing Gender 24). However, for others, it invites “another range of touch” that is violent. “Violence is surely a touch of the worst order,” she writes. It is “a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the willful action of another” (Undoing Gender 22). She points, for example, to the physical and verbal harassment of people who are or are discovered to be transgender, Israel’s violence against occupied Palestinians, the U.S. state's torture and confinement of detainees in Guantanamo, and assaults against refugees and immigrants in modern U.S. politics (Butler and Spivak 1-69).

All conceptual knowledge practices depend on restrictive norms, or acts of exclusion and
constraint, as Diṅnāga’s anyāpohavāda also contends. The late modern “process of normalization” that Butler criticizes, however, exceeds this merely negative juridical form of power and distinguishes itself as a historically unique phenomenon through its use of “exclusion of the other” to produce abstract and culturally representative totalities, or modern normative epistemological subjects. This process of normalization or productive form of normativity that Butler believes to be particular to late modernity is, in Foucault’s terms, an effort to establish a transparent and publicly given “‘we’… whose consensus, whose values, whose traditions constitute the framework for a thought” (385). This historically distinct process not only excludes others, but excludes others in ways that seem to positively constitute socially normative subjects. Epistemologies that are premised on continuity between individuals and subjects, Butler argues, require a “process of normalization” to materialize “normal” subjects. They demand a kind of “regulation” that appears to make individuals visibly “regular” (Undoing Gender 55, 206). This productive and historically specific sense of “normalization” metamorphoses heterogeneous, vulnerable individuals into homogeneous tokens of a category.

The positive form of normativity “relies on categories that render individuals socially interchangeable with one another,” Butler writes (Undoing Gender 55). To appear as potentially responsible, respectable, and knowledgeable subjects, and not merely as occasional, finite, nonequivalent others, people must “present [themselves] as bounded beings, distinct, recognizable, delineated subjects before the law, a community defined by sameness” (Undoing Gender 20). Individuals’ capacities for epistemic agency are consequently made to depend on their abilities, and willingness, to present outwardly, not as the non-fungible, partially dispossessed, and weird individuals that conditions of embodiment demand, but as
homogeneous, interchangeable tokens of natural or cultural types.

Butler tracks late modern processes of normalization in various contexts, ranging from the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersexed individuals and subjects, to the exclusion of critical feminists from university Philosophy departments. In each of the contexts that concern her, some totality of meanings, values, or constituents is assumed to be already transparently established and generally representative. Butler argues, however, that, because such fields of commonality are cognitively empty (they are complexes that are “permanently deferred”), normative subjects can seem transparent only if certain vividly present people and expressions are retroactively deemed “illegible, unrecognizable, or impossible…” (Undoing Gender 14). Modern epistemological subjects, she claims, are produced through acts that derealize particular individuals from fields of existential and semantic possibility. It is these acts, in part, that Butler describes as “a touch of the worst order.”

She observes such normalizing practices of epistemological violence in contexts that seem mundane, such as the exclusion of feminist, queer, and critical race theorists from academic centers, and in contexts that are clearly and quite literally mortal. “Nearly every feminist philosopher I know is no longer working in a philosophy department,” she writes (Undoing Gender 245). Even if they are lucky to be working as reputable academics, they have been driven out to “minor,” “marginal,” and “interdisciplinary” programs such as Women’s Studies by apparently well intentioned and intelligent gatekeepers, hiring committees, and editors. For a more tangibly obvious instance of epistemological violence, Butler points to the case of David Reimer. Despite the efforts and concern of his medical and familial caregivers, his body was not an “extraordinary, loving and receptive [scene].” Instead, for the sake of what amounted to
imaginary and fleeting caricatures of “femaleness,” “maleness,” and “normality,” Reimer’s body was marked throughout his life, by the very authorities who, Butler says, “should be offering such subjects protection from violence” (*Undoing Gender* 30), as something horrific, unthinkable, and unintelligible. The violence that epistemological authorities inflicted on his body was not even recognized as violence. And the allegedly natural, normal state whose loss apparently caused Reimer to be labeled “scientifically” as a freak, and as one whose life was, as a matter of “intersubjective” fact, not worth living, was nowhere and never apparent. Throughout his/her thirty-eight years, fleeting, shifting stereotypes of authoritative, publicly transparent, “normally” sexed and gendered subjectivity were produced, in part, through acts that preemptively excised her/his personal sexed and gendered experience from possible inclusion in communal meaning and truth.

II. *The Continuum Model of Language from a Quinean Perspective*

Butler’s and Warner’s arguments imply that epistemologies that are premised on the continuum model of language, such as Quine’s, demand that certain ranges of people and expression be not only excluded from linguistic contexts, but be actively *derealized*, or purged from anticipated fields of possible meaningfulness and existence. However, as we will see, we do not need to rely on Warner’s possibly “idiosyncratic” Habermasian or Butler’s perhaps “mistaken” Foucauldian analyses to conclude that epistemologies such as Quine’s demand practices of epistemological violence, for we can reach the same conclusion from within Quine’s own obviously established and legitimate philosophical framework.

We must each already participate in and transparently understand some theoretical
structure, he argues, for verbal associations and empirical sense are intertwined in every intelligible expression, and if both aspects determine a statement’s conditions of satisfaction, then the empirical sense of any expression must depend in part on the places in a theoretical coordinate system of every sentence, name, and predicate that is included among an expression’s antecedent conditions. In turn, these other statements must be “theory-laden,” and hence be conditioned by the intended empirical-theoretical values of other sentences, names, and predicates. Consequently, if any expression counts as knowledge, then every sensible expression must be placed in some logically antecedent structure of experience-theory — a conceptual framework or model — that determines, as a unitary totality, which theoretical categories an empirical occasion might properly be said to satisfy.

Logical positivists such as Rudolf Carnap believed that any element with semantic value would be reducible to claims that are true or false either through direct correspondence with sensory evidence, or to occasion-independent linguistic associations. “Analytic” claims, or claims that are true only propositionally, were meant to be statements that would hold up regardless of their circumstances of use (e.g., “A bachelor is an unmarried man”). “Empirical” claims, or claims that are true only through direct correspondence with unique particulars, were meant to be claims that one could ostensively demonstrate (e.g., “That bachelor is bald,” said while pointing). Any sane, honest, and competent person who was shown the right sort of evidence would immediately draw the right conclusion. Carnap’s verification theory of meaning further hypothesized that statements that cannot be reduced entirely to purely analytic and empirical claims are meaningless. Quine’s descriptivist account of semantic value nullifies both tenets, or “dogmas,” for, if sense and signification are intertwined in every valuable non-logical
element, then attempts to dissociate analytic and synthetic sentences must be circular, and verification must regress infinitely.

Quine dismisses the positivists’ figuring of meaning and reference in “Ontological Relativity” as “the mentalistic myth of the meaning museum” ("Ont. Rel." 186). When people adopt the museum view, he observes, they enter an infinite regress, for, if the positivist account were correct, then the meaning of non-analytically and non-empirically justified conceptions would depend directly or indirectly on sentences that could be analytically or empirically justified. But no sentence (e.g., “Only a union between a man and a woman constitutes a marriage”) can be analytically or empirically shown to be analytically or empirically true. “A question of the form ‘What is an F?’ can be answered only by recourse to a further term,” Quine writes: “‘An F is a G’. The answer makes only relative sense: sense relative to an uncritical acceptance of ‘G’” ("Ont. Rel." 204). Theories that encourage naïve or uncritical acceptance of concept-laden meanings and objects are absurd, as Dīnāga demonstrates in the PS, and as Quine shows elsewhere. Therefore, logical positivist frameworks endlessly chase after sense and significance.

By “naturalizing” epistemology, and championing a continuum model of language, Quine seeks to pacify the regression, rather than escape it ("Ont. Rel." 201). Because some background of experience-theory must be antecedent to any judgment, he argues, individuals can “regress” into intersubjective theoretical and empirical heritages without losing their abilities to distinguish between meaningful speech and nonsense. Specifically, his naturalized epistemology asserts that

---

8 In “On What There Is,” Quine shows how assumptions that referentially transparent meanings and objects establish semantic value lead to the (absurd) loss of possible distinction between meaning and nonsense, and to the (contradictory) acceptance of an infinity of semi-existent non-existent entities. These arguments are analyzed in Chapter Six.
the conceptual habits that are prerequisite for any occasion of individual conceptual judgment are collectively transparent, epistemologically authoritative, and socially shared. “Unlike the old epistemologists,” he writes in a later work, “we seek no firmer basis for [normative epistemological subjectivity] than [normative epistemological subjectivity] itself” (From Stimulus to Science 16). Quine’s effort to “naturalize” epistemology therefore joins a rejection of Carnap’s “dogmas” with a modern continuum model of language. In the following, we will present Quine’s attempt to defend the continuum model of language, and then turn to his own arguments to explain why this model is problematic.

To defend his shift to what he calls “naturalized epistemology,” Quine argues that similarities of embodiment and circumstance, and the unavoidably interactive character of language, guarantee that individuals share overlapping observational and theoretical dispositions. Though they are diverse, he observes, people have evolved in similar ways across common environments. They share needs, vulnerabilities, and passions. And these similarities naturally cause them, Quine contends, to develop generally harmonious and coherent sets of “primitive” observation sentences. He writes:

So we see a preestablished harmony of perceptual similarity standards. If two scenes trigger perceptually similar global stimuli in one witness, they are apt to do likewise in another. This public harmony of private standards of perceptual similarity is accounted for by natural selection. The individual’s initial standards of perceptual similarity are inculcated, we saw, by natural selection, and so, thanks to shared ancestry and shared environment, will tend to harmonize across the tribe. The changes in standards subsequent to birth will also tend to harmonize, because of the shared society and environment. There is also the discipline imposed by the vocal signals themselves and, later, language: random deviation among individuals gets correctively canceled out by their hearing the signals from one another. (From Stimulus to Science 21)

In Quine’s paradigmatic case of theory model induction, a linguistic expert, the “parent,” teaches

---

9 “Normative epistemological subjectivity” replaces “science” in both instances.
a novice, the “child,” to reflexively associate specific patterns of private global stimulation with public theoretical elements, such as “Milk!” and “Red!” Of course, Quine recognizes that children cannot experience the specific “subjective or solipsistic” stimuli that provoke their parents any more than parents can perceive the private experiences of their children. However, he asserts, evolution and broadly similar environments ensure that much of an ordinary person’s “solipsistic” experience is effectively intersubjective and public, at least in the context of the particular tribes that the individual is brought up within. People in a group or community tend to react to ranges of phenomena in similar ways, he contends. Therefore, by the time that any individual might reflect enough to doubt the immediate knowledge conveying powers of words, as the Buddhist pramāṇa theorists also do, they will have already been disposed, Quine says, to react to certain sensory presentations in ways that people in their context typically deem sensible: “Milk!”, when provoked by some but not all glasses of liquid; “Dog!”, when confronted with some vaguely definite range of tail-wagging creatures; “Freak!”, when witness to some sorts of bodily peculiarities but not others, and so on. Subjects share a “preestablished” core of common sense, Quine assures his readers, because individuals naturally reckon their ontologies in generally harmonious and uniform ways.

Individuals could not reach even elementary levels of reflection unless they first internalized stores of inherently interactive observational dispositions, Quine observes. Similarly, he argues, new language inductees naturally learn to combine sets of observation sentences into harmonious expectations of linguistic association. If something is milk, then a normal child will come to expect that it could be okay to drink. If something is a rabbit, then an ordinary anthropologist will expect that it might be all right to pet. Similarly, using Diññāga’s examples, a
person with basic linguistic competence will expect a pot to bear some kind of color and to be physical. By internalizing such shared expectations or “observation categoricals,” Quine says, individuals naturally become sure that, for example, a sentence like “Where there is smoke, there is fire” is always true, while an expression like “The son of a barren woman is outside” is self-evidently ludicrous. Observation categoricals are “reified,” he claims, when people fit otherwise referentially opaque nexuses of sensory-theoretical associations, or non-logical linguistic expressions, into culturally antecedent totalities of socially representative anticipation and habit. Consequently, the vast majority of individuals find that they naturally react to certain of their seemingly private experiences and emotions in publicly significant and harmonious ways — as subjects and not merely as individuals.

As a self-described nominalist, Quine will happily accept that language games are incommensurable. He allows that the sets of observation sentences that languages share may be extremely thin, and contends only that some small sliver of commonality must exist if translation between particular languages is ever to be possible. Nor does Quine presume a literally existent generic linguistic subject; he assumes, rather, that individual expressions will perceptibly harmonize, or not, without any generic subject ever truly existing anywhere. Warner and Butler’s arguments suggest, however, that Quine’s trust in preestablished harmony is misguided, for it overlooks a necessary discontinuity between individuals and subjects, and that when such continuity is assumed, the assumption has distorting and epistemologically violent effects.

Quine defends his assumption of continuity between subjects and individuals by positing a “preestablished harmony” between individuals’ “subjective and solipsistic” visceral reflexes and the “objective” or “intersubjective” conceptual norms of communally representative subjects.
However, his posit of preestablished harmony arguably glosses over the mutual dependence of the empirical and theoretical facets in his own hybridic account of semantic value. These facets cannot be preestablished to harmonize if they cannot sensibly or significantly preexist their harmonization.

Despite his appeals to preestablished harmony, or to natural continuity between individuals and subjects, Quine’s own theory of reference implies that social subjects are opaque instead of transparent. He observes that people sometimes think they can point out the meanings of expressions like, “That bachelor.” However, if semantic value is always dyadic, then people can only “point at” an object or concept that they intend by presenting phenomena that they take to signify the fictional nexus of empirical-theoretical associations that they mean to talk about. To show that they are married, people can brandish rings on their fingers, or submit pieces of paper with government seals. To indicate a rabbit, they can gesture at ears sticking out of a burrow, or at a rabbit-like side at some particular moment. But if all observation is theory-laden, then individuals can never point directly at the rabbit, or to any allegedly persistent object, including ordinary, culturally normative subjectivities. “My simple argument for indeterminacy of reference,” Quine writes, “is… sweeping, applying as it does to objects indiscriminately…. What matters for any objects, concrete or abstract, is not what they are but what they contribute to our overall theory of the world as neutral nodes in its logical structure” (From Stimulus to Science 74-75). As with the positivists’ regress, Quine’s naturalized epistemologists can explain the meaning of “F” only by gesturing to something they call “G,” and they can explain “G” only by gesturing to something they call “H,” and so on, until they regress to a point that is no less referentially opaque but nonetheless ought not to be challenged. Quine’s observation sentences
mark these points where, he believes, regress ought to stop, and it is precisely with these “Janus-faced” entities that he asserts seamless, and as we will see, viciously circular, continuity between individuals and authoritative subjects.

Quine’s theory of reference consequently implies that socially normative epistemological subjects can seem unproblematically apparent only through violence, or by labeling certain apparent possibilities as illegible and solipsistic “perverse alternatives.” The positivists’ regress never ends, but merely appears to halt at “observation sentences,” which allegedly provide public and private “negative check points.” Quine tends to describe the public aspect of these negative disciplining processes in terms that, though rarely plainly violent, clearly contrast with the dulcet concept cloud that customarily surrounds the normative activities of reasonable and pragmatic epistemological subjects: “the harmonious flow of conversation,” “the maxim of minimum mutilation,” “empathy,” “simplicity,” etc. He writes that conceptual norms, like normative morality, require “recourse to birch rod and sugar plum” (“Moral Values” 61) to pass without “semantic creep” (“In Praise” 110) from generation to generation. In From Stimulus, he muses about the possibility of applying controlled sequences of rewards and penalties to individuals’ brain stimulations to test their private standards of stimulus synonymy (From Stimulus to Science 18). He also supposes that deviations from standard language use will, and should, be “correctively canceled out” by the disciplinary actions of the group in general (From Stimulus to Science 20-26). More conspicuously, the hierarchically ordered binary between public, generally representative subjects and private, potentially solipsistic individuals that structures Quine’s conditions of observationality extends to his paradigmatic case of language learning, which he develops to explain how shared and normative conceptual frameworks seamlessly emerge from
contexts of interaction between individuals. The “parent” has unquestionable authority over the “child” and is, unlike her structurally juvenile companion, transparently ensconced as an equal, socially representative subject. If the “child” wishes to achieve some capacity for knowledge, then she must accede without hesitation to the expectations of the authoritative “parent.” Otherwise, she would fail to satisfy Quine’s second, public criterion of observationality, and, as a result, would be relegated to a solipsistic domain of epistemological incapacity.

Let’s briefly note again that when this model of the processes that transform, or “develop,” individuals into publicly respectable, generic epistemological subjects is superimposed onto the Diññāga-Dharmaśīla tradition, it parallels the rule of colonial difference that constrains comparative philosophy’s now prevalent framing of the Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates. A historically and specifically Anglo-American philosophical perspective is aligned analytically with epistemological commonsense, and the Buddhists are, like children, assigned an ultimatum: they must either adopt an “imitative style of mass comprehension” and present themselves as tokens of a colonially overdetermined category, or forego status as a generally respectable and distinctly Indian instance of Philosophy writ globally.

III. The Continuum Model of Language from a Buddhist Perspective

Although comparative philosophers frequently read classical Buddhist epistemology through a Quinean lens, Diññāga’s arguments in the PS would also appear to destabilize Quine’s assumption that individuals somehow transparently recognize ordinary, normative social subjectivities. Suppose, for example, that people in a cultural context are directly acquainted with the proper meaning of “normal subjectivity,” as they would need to be to abide by Quine’s
criteria of observationality. Diñnāga might then argue that individuals could achieve this acquaintance by cognizing either the set of normal subjects themselves, the totality (normal subjectivity), or some relation between the two. But, he might say, people cannot possibly know the proper meaning of “normal subjectivity” through direct familiarity with some set of normal, generally representative subjects, for they would need to acquaint themselves with an indefinite number of individuals before they could understand the concept. They would also be hindered by the fickle and unruly nature of such designations, which appear to apply to certain individuals at some times and places, but fail to apply at others. Nor can people understand the meaning of “normal subjectivity” through direct familiarity with the concept itself, for, as Quine’s thesis of the indeterminacy of reference also recognizes, there is no apparent difference between apprehending normal subjectivity per se and apprehending some apparent individual signifier of it. As when one supposedly sees another’s marital status, people can only appear to acquaint themselves with normal, culturally authoritative subjectivities through occasional signs, such as spouses, children, and home mortgages.

One might argue that people just understand the state of a thing being a normal epistemological subject when they understand the meaning of “normal subjectivity.” But as Diñnāga might argue, this counterproposal would fail for three reasons. First, normal subjectivity would have to be a self-contained state; consequently, connections between normal subjectivity and other traits, such as knowledge, would lack any basis. The designation “normal subjectivity” could apply or fail to apply to anything whatsoever, and would relate to other properties in much the same way as “white” and “sweet.” Second, the notion that people cognize the state of an individual being a normal subject when they recognize a normal subject cannot be literally true,
for, if it were, then every apparently normal subject would exemplify normal subjectivity. Third, if individuals were immediately acquainted with the meaning of “normal subjectivity” through familiarity with the state of an individual being a normal subject, then they could cognize the resemblance of this instance to the state either metaphorically or non-metaphorically. If, on the hand, the state of being a normal subject only metaphorically resembled each proper occasion of normal subjectivity, then people would have to be aware of some difference between each normal subject and the state of normal subjectivity itself. Metaphorical relations require awareness of difference, Diññāga notes, just as calling a leader a servant of the people works metaphorically only if the leader does not appear altogether servile. But this difference is precisely what people overlook when they conceive of individuals as tokens of a uniform state of cultural subjectivity. On the other hand, the state of being a normal subject might non-metaphorically resemble each individual occasion of normal subjectivity. But, in that case, Diññāga suggests, people would speak sequentially of different kinds of normal subjectivity, and there would be as many different kinds of normal subjects as there were individuals whose subjectivities could theoretically be considered normal.

Therefore, instead of trusting that Diññāga would have followed Quine in assuming a continuum model of language, it appears more sensible, both philosophically and exegetically, to expect him to account for meaning in the samvyṛti, conventional sphere through some other mechanism, such as anyāpohavāda, or the “exclusion of the other” theory that he develops to explain how individuals determine concepts. The Diññāga-Dharmakīrti tradition’s Buddhist semantics might then also be used to support Butler’s and Warner’s association of the modern continuum model of language with epistemological violence, or practices of “normalization.”
IV. The Circularity of the Continuum Model of Language

There is a “circularity inherent in all publics,” Warner writes. “Public language addresses a public as a social entity, but that entity exists only by virtue of being addressed” (129). Moreover, this circularity is formally vicious whenever individuals are assumed to be unproblematically familiar with the subjects who are supposed to have sovereignty over their claims, or “when the extensiveness of the reading audience is taken into consideration in advance by that very reading audience” (137). In a Quinean epistemology, reasonable individuals must foresee how epistemologically supreme, public subjects would react to their words, and adjust their behaviors to fit these expectations. Simultaneously, Quine appeals to the behaviors of individuals to explain how the judgments of subjects can be unproblematically anticipated. But this relationship between subjects and individuals is viciously circular. “Vicious circles…,” Whitehead and Russell write, “arise from supposing that a collection of objects may contain members which can only be defined by means of the collection as a whole” (39). Therefore, because they ignore the discontinuity between contexts of individual discussion and epistemologically normative subjects, Quine’s “pragmatic” epistemological norms beg the question. Though culturally representative epistemological subjects may be anticipated, they can never be met in experience. Consequently, appeals to the continuum model of language cannot suffice to halt the infinite regress that Quine associates with Carnap’s logical positivist semantics. If normative epistemological subjectivities contribute at all to conditions of

---

10 “Given any set of objects such that, if we suppose the set to have a total, it will contain members which presuppose this total, then such a set cannot have a total.” Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell, *Principia Mathematica*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, UK: Merchant Books, 1910) 39.
knowledge, then they must do so in a way that is not transparently obvious.

Butler also identifies a vicious circularity in epistemological frameworks that assume that normative subjectivities are naturally and unproblematically continuous with individuals. An epistemology such as Quine’s that posits continuity between epistemologically normative subjects and individuals, she suggests, “moves in two directions at once: it establishes the referent [ordinary, communally representative subjectivity] first as that which the representation reflects and re-presents and, second, as that which is effectively performed and performatively effected by the representation” (“The Force of Fantasy” 185). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler destabilizes constructions of feminist subjectivity, in part, by attending to this very pattern of vicious circularity. The subject of feminism, she notes, is split “by the distinction between sex and gender” (*Gender Trouble* 9). Gender is allegedly cultural, and sex is allegedly biological. However, if these spheres of material embodiment and intersubjective culture were distinct, as feminists have held, then feminists would have no cause to expect individuals’ sexed bodies to harmonize passively with cultural gender norms. “If gender is the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes, then a gender cannot be said to follow from a sex in any one way. Taken to its logical limit, the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders” (*Gender Trouble* 10). Nonetheless, feminist narratives commonly presuppose continuity between these empirical and theoretical facets of representative feminist subjectivity. For instance, many assume that female bodies naturally correlate with feminine genders, and that dimorphic gender categories harmoniously emerge from a natural sexual dimorphism. However, Butler argues, this assumption of continuity can seem to operate only if the meaning of “sex” is implicitly informed by assumptions about gender norms, and if
the meaning of “gender” is implicitly informed by assumptions about sexual norms (Gender Trouble 11). Therefore, Butler suggests, these feminist narratives are viciously circular: they appeal to a naturally harmonious female/feminine complex to serve both as the epistemologically authoritative subject of feminism, or as that which feminism reflects and represents, and as that which feminism itself effectively performs or performatively effects. Similarly, by effectively hand-waving toward an evolutionist ideology, Quine appeals to a complex of ordinary individual/subject behavior to serve both as that range of prediscursive (“subjective or solipsistic”) reactions that an epistemologically normative subject reflects and represents, and second, as that postdiscursive (“intersubjective” or “objective”) effect that the supreme subjects of society effectively perform or performatively call into being, for instance, as a convenient cultural myth or shared social fiction.

By attempting to build knowledge practices on viciously circular foundations, epistemologies that assume a continuum model of language demand epistemological violence. “Experts” must act as if normal, and normative, conceptual understandings and behaviors were already unproblematically and collectively established; as a result, they are necessarily hostile to diversity. As Quine notes, because of the indeterminacy of all reference, the proper meaning of a phrase like “rabbit” can seem to materialize only through the reflexive dismissal of “perverse alternatives,” such as “undetached rabbit part.” As Warner observes, epistemologies that are premised on the continuum model of language demand an approach to communication, and otherness, that “defensively resists the unpredictability of thought.” As Butler argues, in epistemological practices that assume transparently established normative subjects, occasional presentations that upset momentary, specifically invested expectations must be retroactively
removed from sensibility and existence. Money’s approach to Reimer is, she contends, only one instance of this active marking as horrors and expunging from possible existence and sense — of these acts of derealization — that are required to produce normative illusions of shared and cognitively transparent epistemological subjects.

In many but not all ways, classical Buddhist doctrines have happened to seem more queer to modernist ears than Naiyāyika ones. They have seemed to more obviously challenge several of modernity’s apparently standing philosophical assumptions. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that some contemporary comparative philosophers who work in institutions that the rule of colonial difference has partially shaped have worked so hard, with intentions that are not ethically better or worse than Dr. Money’s, to normalize the Buddhists within “our” allegedly shared, commonsensical, and expert assumptions about Philosophy. Arguably, such readings do the Buddhists no favors, even when they appear to act on their behalf. They relegate unique, actual, and deśakālāvasthāniyata particulars — the category that the Buddhists consider ultimate — to a distinct and philosophically nonsensical “private” spiritual realm, while claiming that, according to the Buddhists, all practical knowledge depends on direct, unproblematic familiarity with conventional word meanings — the category that the PS aims to reduce to inference. Although such interpretations are not as clearly problematic as the physical harm inflicted on some individuals, the evidence of the violence they do is nonetheless visible on the surface of the normalized but undeniably freakish bodies of the translated classical Indian Buddhist texts.
CHAPTER 5:

HOW MIGHT THE “OTHER” OF COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY SPEAK? — A FEMINIST READING OF BUTLER’S PROPOSED NONVIOLENT PROGRAM OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

The question we pose to the Other is simple and unanswerable: ‘who are you?’ The violent response is the one that does not ask, and does not seek to know. It wants to shore up what it knows, to expunge what threatens it with not-knowing, what forces it to reconsider the presuppositions of its world, their contingency, their malleability. The nonviolent response lives with its unknowingness about the Other in the face of the Other, since sustaining the bond that the question opens is finally more valuable than knowing in advance what holds us in common, as if we already have all of the resources we need to know what defines the human, what its future life might be. (Butler Undoing Gender 35)

The previous chapter identified problems with knowledge practices that suppose that individuals and normative epistemological subjects are continuous: epistemologically, these practices are viciously circular and, politically, they are literally vicious. Diverse weird individuals cannot appear as constituents of a transparently manifest shared subjectivity unless “others” are first derealized, or are actively and repeatedly purged from inclusion within a normalized, imaginary realm of reality and meaning. Before modern epistemological subjects can materialize, others must not merely be excluded from social systems, as any grouping of individuals would also require, but must also be ontologically and semantically condemned. If systematically alienated people could speak, then modern spheres of “common sense” would not be obvious and modern epistemological subjects would not be manifest.

Sarah Lucia Hoagland describes her experiences as a target of such normalization processes “in” the U.S. Academy in the 1970s:

I ran into a wall trying to argue against those who argued with scientific confidence that
women’s natural place was subordinate to men, and that women, with the exception of a few crazed suffragists and feminists, were content with their lot. I argued that pronouncements on women were not empirical or factual, but rather prescriptive. An empirical proposition is one it makes sense to deny, yet counterexamples to claims about femininity were not countenanced, and claims that women accepted subordination were not falsified by the existence of Lesbians and the many women who did not accept the official description. Instead, we were discounted as not-real-women. (126)

To actively participate in prevalent epistemological circuits, Hoagland needed to contest fleeting, momentary stereotypes that made the outward acceptance of ideologies of women’s subjugation and heterosexual superiority prerequisite for legitimate epistemological subjectivity. These constructs would deny her and other lesbian feminists inclusion in academic discussions, much as conventions that govern gossip circles tend to exclude strangers, and those that govern feudal monarchies tend to exclude non-blood relations. However, the intersubjective context that Hoagland sought to join did not merely deny her entry; it also championed a field of allegedly transparent normalized epistemological subjectivity. Therefore, as with other modern frameworks, it demanded that she either conform her behaviors to contingent fictions of normality or be expunged from participation in spaces of communal sense and significance. “An empirical proposition is one it makes sense to deny,” she tried to protest, “yet counterexamples to claims about femininity were not countenanced, and claims that women accepted subordination were not falsified by the existence of Lesbians and the many women who did not accept the official description.” In the name of allegedly transparent and culturally representative norms of subjectivity, she and others were excluded from circuits of communication as “not-real women.” They were cast from anticipated normative objective or intersubjective public spaces into supposed non-spaces of deviance and epistemological inability. We saw in the previous chapter
how such productive acts of epistemological violence sometimes operate literally on people’s bodies.

Because modern normative epistemological subjects are viciously circular, people cannot appear as material exemplars of generic social subjectivities except through acts of derealization. Further, because the object of any viciously circular presentation is cognitively absent, it follows that intuition of these empty concepts cannot itself cause or inspire people to actively derealize others. Epistemological violence is a product, therefore, not of intention (e.g., of misguided commitment to “knowledge,” “truth,” “nature,” “culture,” or “God”), but of anxiety. Describing the systematic alienation that Theodore Adorno argues modern epistemologies produce, Michael Warner writes:

The tastes and ideas that become those of the majority do so because people need to believe that their tastes and ideas will be widely shared. The result is a kind of invisible power for dominant norms, even though the people who make these normalizing judgments of taste do so not to exercise power (they are not, in other words, simply wielding the tyranny of the majority) but simply to fit in. Adorno implies, with pathos, that people rely on expressions that are precertified for them as common currency out of a kind of defensiveness; they are alienated from the labor of judgment. (135)

Members of modern knowledge institutions enact epistemological violence primarily not because they are committed to narrow, illiberal ideals, but because they are alienated from their own epistemological labors. Their epistemological contexts are structured by implicit, invisible ultimata, and to function within them, individuals must repeatedly choose between enacting or acquiescing to violent practices, and avoiding exclusion from a materially manifest yet imaginary range of normative subjectivity, or actively challenging these practices, and immediately seeming to lose epistemological and political credibility.
How, then, can systematically alienated individuals assert their capacities to know? Perhaps individuals could somehow persuade political authorities to correct epistemologically violent frameworks by choosing to recognize derealized and marginalized people’s epistemological capacities? To be listened to, however, these individuals would presumably first need to appear as tokens of some class, or as subjects instead of mere individuals. Because epistemologies that assume transparent normative subjects depend on acts of derealization, such recognition would require aquiescence to and collaboration with the epistemologically violent processes that the individuals seek to challenge. Conversely, individuals might look to disassociate altogether from epistemological practices that are premised on the continuum model of language. However, if this disassociation nonetheless reiterated practices of subject production, then it would amount to no more than rhetorical posturing. “Postmodern” epistemologies that reinstituted systematic alienation and epistemological violence would offer no discernible ethical or epistemological advantage over the kinds of knowledge practices that derealized Hoagland in the 1970s.

Warner gently criticizes theorists who appear to suggest that the speech of those who are systematically alienated, such as *1984*’s Winston, might count as a form of public expression even if it is jettisoned from all public contexts. Systematically alienated individuals face the “paradoxical task,” he writes, of using public practice to redefine public practice. Their poetic form of address is “a way of imagining a speech for which there is yet no scene, and a scene for which there is no speech” (158). The relationship of this mode of expression with its intended but nonexistent audience is therefore hopeless — a non-relation — and the form of public address that is left to systematically alienated individuals is therefore a predicament, rather than a space
that is sufficient for political resistance. The “challenge” that these individuals’ speech poses to
structures premised on the continuum model of language is, in itself, no more than a vain idea or
wish, like cursing after the boss has left.

If critical public discussion must be oriented to unfamiliar others, Warner notes, then
occasions of public discussion must also be oriented to some possibility of unexpected challenge,
transformation, and disruption. “Any public includes strangers, present or future. The quality of
risk… is just this orientation to strangers and the submission of discourse to estranging paths of
circulation” (150). Hence, when people write or speak in styles that, whatever their cause, can
“circulate” among others only in imaginary ways, then their critical public engagement may also
be merely stylistic. Warner concedes, therefore, that mainstream feminists who contend that
queer theorists such as Butler espouse ersatz political activism might well have a point.

When Pollitt complains that academic intellectuals postulate their own radicalness in a
way that entails no risk and reduces to pseudo politics, the strong version of her point is
that the public of academic work is being misrecognized. Like most academic expertise,
it circulates only in a well-defined path mediated almost entirely by the university
system; but it no longer understands itself this way. It seeks to overcome the separation of
academic, trade, and political publics by means of its topical content rather than its public
circulation.” (149)

Given that solitary individuals’ melancholic and poetic styles of expression are not enough for
political action, it may seem that feminist and queer theorists might only hope to “challenge”
epistemologically violent practices by collaborating with others either through forms of
communication that are intelligible only within specialized counterpublic contexts, or through
forms of communication that could potentially circulate through a wider variety of public spaces.
In the first case, they would appear to commit themselves to the production of a newly emergent
countercultural subject — an academic “queer” subjectivity — that would not only lack the
elements of risk and exposure to the Other that more than nominal political engagement demands, but would also institutionalize practices of epistemological violence that any materialization of a normative subjectivity requires. In the second case, because solitary, melancholic, poetic expression cannot itself suffice for political action, feminist and queer theorists would presumably have to regulate their expressions so that they could travel through other presently visible, and normalizing, circuits of communication. They would presumably need to accede to the anxieties that shape the boundaries of intelligibility of some already established media circuit. Therefore, it may seem that to engage in more than ersatz political action, feminists and queer theorists cannot help but acquiesce to and collaborate with the very normalizing processes that they wish to challenge and disrupt. Our possibilities of effective critical action may consequently be bounded, regardless of our wishes, by bourgeois rules of knowledge and sense, much as the possibilities of individuals who have constructed the prevalent comparative philosophical interpretation of the Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates seem to be have been constrained, regardless of intentions, by the rule of colonial difference. In the following pages, we will therefore try to understand, through the work of Gayatri Spivak, how Butler’s nonviolent model of “cultural translation” might navigate this double-bind.

I. What are the Prospects for a Nonviolent Epistemology?

In the epigraph to this chapter, Butler writes that a nonviolent epistemology would not foreclose people’s immediately embodied vulnerability to unknown and peculiar others such as David Reimer. “The nonviolent response,” she writes, “lives with its unknowingness about the Other in the face of the Other.” Conversely, she argues, through anxiety, or desire for stability, a
violent epistemology would seek the Other’s erasure. Butler contends that, to negate the violently productive logic of epistemologies premised on the continuum model of language, and to accommodate the epistemological capacities of those who are systematically alienated, one must “learn to live in the anxiety of that challenge, to feel the surety of one’s epistemological and ontological anchor go, but to be willing, in the name of the human, to allow the human to become something other than what it is traditionally assumed to be” (*Undoing Gender* 35). She specifically proposes a process of epistemological engagement that she calls “cultural translation.” She writes,

“It is crucial to recognize that the notion of the human will only be built over time in and by the process of cultural translation, where it is not a translation between two languages that stay enclosed, distinct, unified. But rather, *translation will compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other*, and this apprehension, at the limit of what is familiar, parochial, and already known, will be the occasion for both an ethical and social transformation.” (*Undoing Gender* 38; italics in original)

If individuals are to receive and act upon Butler’s call for nonviolent meaning making in ways that do not differ merely stylistically from frameworks that are premised on the continuum model of language, then her model must somehow structurally differ from the epistemologically violent Quinean model of radical translation that the previous chapter criticized. In Quine’s analogy, two anthropologists work to understand an unfamiliar “Jungle” language by constructing separate translation manuals, or by creatively mapping occasional utterances onto elements of already given linguistic frameworks. In Butler’s proposed nonviolent epistemology, in apparent contrast, conceptual norms are displaced in ways that enable unfamiliar individuals’ liminal apprehensions of, or tenuous interconnections with, one another. As a result of this methodological shift, society will supposedly be different and ethically better. How though might practices of cultural translation structurally differ from violent approaches?
Butler repeatedly cautions progressive activists against any hope that they might resist epistemologically violent structures by incorporating systematically alienated individuals within new, distinctive countercultural forms of subjectivity. *Gender Trouble*, for instance, tries to disrupt French feminist theorists’ confidence in a transparent feminist subject. Those who trust in the obviousness of feminism’s subject reify epistemologically violent ideological structures, she argues. “It seemed to me, and continues to seem, that feminism ought to be careful not to idealize certain expressions of gender that, in turn, produce new forms of hierarchy and exclusion” (*Gender Trouble* viii). In *Undoing Gender*, she similarly cautions against hope that efforts to incorporate oppressed people’s knowledge capacities within new transparently obvious subjectivities can possibly ameliorate epistemological violence (*Undoing Gender* 2). Individuals may be socially recognized and valued as countercultural subjects only by consenting to acts that make other individuals’ lives and bodies unthinkable. Conversely, she also argues against apparently progressive efforts to incorporate minority groups into already established circuits of public legitimation. While criticizing the movement among middle class LGBT activists to extend marriage rights to same-sex couples, she writes:

There is outside the struggle between the legitimate and the illegitimate — which has as its goal the conversion of the illegitimate into the legitimate — a field that is less thinkable, one not figured in light of its ultimate convertibility into legitimacy. This is a field outside the disjunction of illegitimate and legitimate; it is not yet thought as a domain, a sphere, a field; it is not yet either legitimate or illegitimate, has not been thought through in the explicit discourse of legitimacy. Indeed, this would be a sexual field that does not have legitimacy as its point of reference, its ultimate desire. The debate over gay marriage takes place through such a logic, for we see the debate break down almost immediately into the question of whether marriage ought to be extended legitimately to homosexuals. (*Undoing Gender* 105-06)

In this passage, Butler extols the critical potential of spaces of action and recognition that are not structured by dichotomies of legitimacy and illegitimacy, and criticizes same-sex marriage
proponents precisely because this dichotomy structures their vision. The desire for modes of recognition that assume the normativity of a transparent and quite specific subjectivity (i.e., married life versus other, structurally less legitimate forms of relating) overlooks the acts of epistemological violence, the practices of derealization, and the forms of systematic alienation that such modes of recognition inevitably demand. They work only by “undoing” certain individuals — by making particular others illegitimate, by condemning them to non-spaces of illegitimacy — even as they promise to assimilate oppressed groups into more expansive and liberated spheres of normality. Such projects do not promise progressive or liberatory epistemological change, Butler argues, but instead function as “[sites] of power by which the human is differentially produced” (Undoing Gender 2).

Nonetheless, as Warner’s reading of Butler suggests, individuals who attempt to apply her program of cultural translation might begin to suspect, after they have been told to desire neither illegitimate countercultural identities nor legitimate cultural identities, that her ideal of nonviolent epistemological engagement, or program of cultural translation, is entirely impractical. Much as Winston of Orwell’s 1984 melancholically orients his diary to a nonexistent, barely thinkable audience, “to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone” (Warner 127), Butler might appear to wax poetic, to dream of a hardly conceivable “field outside the struggle between the legitimate and the illegitimate.” Further, if her proposal were no more practicable than Winston’s expression, then it would follow that societies that were “shaped” by her program of cultural translation would not practically differ from or be ethically better than those shaped by Quine’s model of radical translation. Cultural translators’ interactions could not be less burdened by others’ conceptual
habits and potential for violence, for Butler acknowledges that “negative” interpersonal norms necessarily mediate every individual’s capacity for thought. Further, because the “enclosed, distinct, unified” languages that Quine’s radical translators presuppose are viciously circular, and therefore nonexistent, Quine’s radical translators would not be more burdened than Butler’s cultural translators by these nonexistent linguistic totalities. It may seem, therefore, that her “nonviolent” cultural translators will be neither less nor more affected by the invisible warping effects of modern social norms.

To begin to see how Butler’s program of cultural translation navigates this double-bind, and to find practical epistemological agency for systematically alienated individuals in the “field outside the struggle of the legitimate and illegitimate,” the following section will first present and critique feminist activists’ searches for legitimacy and illegitimacy. We will invite Sandra Harding’s program of “strong objectivity” to stand in for the feminist desire for legitimacy, and Hoagland’s program of “conceptual separatism” to represent feminist efforts to embrace illegitimacy. Section III will then turn to Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak” to explore the nonviolent possibilities that Butler glimpses beyond this structural binary.

II. Feminist Searches for Legitimacy and Illegitimacy

Sandra Harding grounds her proposed feminist program of “strong objectivity” on twentieth century empiricism’s turn from direct correspondence and realist theories of meaning. “Few thinkers today are quite as confident as heretofore,” she writes, “concerning such central Enlightenment assumptions as the possibility of glassy mirror minds, the uniquely describable rational order of the universe, and the potentially good fit between the two” (332). Instead, she
claims, scholars generally accept that “there is enough slack in belief-sorting to permit social values and interests to fully permeate these processes and their results” (331). Nonetheless, she argues, a problem of “might makes right” (337) persists in epistemologies that reject positivist semantics but ground their theories of knowledge in a continuum model of language.

In a section titled, “No Essential Women’s Life,” she writes:

‘Women and the homogeneity of ‘women’ is an elitist fiction…. This ‘matrix theory’ developed by women of color enables us to think how each of us has a determinate social location in the matrix of social relations that is constituted by gender, class, race, sexuality, and whatever macro forces shape our particular part of the social order…. Women are located at many positions in this matrix…” (344).

Notions of passively manifest, unitary, and homogenous epistemological subjectivities are, she argues, “elitist fictions.” Because unique, heterogeneous individuals have various bodily pleasures, wants, and abilities, harmonious, homogeneous social subjectivities can only seem passively preestablished and transparently obvious if one ignores the political activities that push certain individuals to the social margins while locating certain others in cultural “centers.” A set of heterogeneous individuals can seem to share one homogenous core of desires and expectations only through the work of norms (“macro factors”) that differentially and materially rank individuals’ enjoyments, abilities, and interests.

Harding believes that empiricists, and implicitly Quine, can strengthen their understandings of ‘objectivity’ by rejecting the continuum model of language and opening the epistemologically violent practices that constitute normative epistemological subjects to criticism from the social margins. She observes that acquiescence to, and investment in, the institutional norms that constitute normalized epistemological subjects make it relatively hard for individuals who are ensconced in institutional centers to recognize and police acts of epistemological
violence. In contrast, Harding argues, those who are placed further to the “peripheries” of institutional knowledge practices tend to be better situated not only to reevaluate those normative exclusions that they have been trained to consider normal or preestablished, but also to find worth and sense in enjoyments, capacities, and ambitions that institutions reflexively deem “not real” or unintelligible. Therefore, “in any particular research situation,” Harding writes, “one is to start off research from the lives of those who have been disadvantaged by, excluded from the benefits of, the dominant conceptual frameworks” (344). By adopting scientific methodologies that deliberately give voice to those whom knowledge practices systematically exclude, Harding believes, feminist standpoint epistemologists can develop “stronger” understandings of ‘objectivity’, and generate understandings of normative epistemological subjectivity that are “theoretically and empirically more accurate and representative” (344).

Harding carefully distinguishes her proposed feminist standpoint epistemology from more prevalent modern epistemological frameworks. Currently prevalent empiricist models can recognize only one kind of political threat to objectivity, she argues, although the twentieth century’s rejection of positivism and emergence of hybridic, “theory-laden” accounts of semantic value ought to imply that normative epistemological judgment faces two distinct political threats. The first threat, she writes, is “conceptualized as acting on the sciences from the outside, as politicizing a science that was otherwise free of politics – or, at least, of that particular politics” (335). Prevalent empiricist epistemologies effectively police this threat of “intrusive politics,” for, as Quine’s criteria of observationality demonstrate, their epistemological norms systematically seek to prevent idiosyncratic and socially aberrant judgments from intruding on and distorting fields of epistemologically normative subjectivity (337). But Harding notes,
because prevalent empiricist epistemologies are premised on the modern continuum model of language, they are entirely blind to a second, logically prior threat that she terms “institutional politics.”

As her rejection of the elitist myth of homogeneous and transparent subjectivities implies, Harding holds that individuals’ intuitions of normative epistemological subjectivity are not passively preestablished to harmonize. People do not passively and collectively intuit who should role-play “parent” and who should submit as “child” as Quine’s paradigm of language learning assumes. Instead, the characteristics and limits of normative epistemological subjects are constantly contested. "Standpoint theories…," she writes, "begin from the recognition of social inequality. Their models of society are conflict models, in contrast to the consensus model of liberal political philosophy assumed by empiricists" (341). Because prevalent twentieth century empiricist models incorrectly assume that shared, socially representative subjectivities passively manifest themselves (339), or that individuals and subjects are continuous, they fail to regulate the productive and epistemologically violent acts of derealizing “others” — the acts of “institutional politics” — that are needed to make any normative epistemological subject seem transparent.

The theory-laden character of all judgment, Harding argues, implies that empiricist attempts to protect fields of properly depoliticized, normative epistemological subjectivity from “outside” or “special” interests simultaneously produce the very subjectivities that they supposedly guard. “Paradoxically, this kind of politics functions through the depoliticization of science – through the creation of ‘normal’ or authoritarian science,” she writes (335). But because epistemologies that are premised on the continuum model of language trust that
harmonious social subjectivities are naturally preestablished rather than contested, they blind themselves to this second, institutional threat. Empiricists such as Quine consequently allow a principle of “might makes right” to rule their systems of knowledge production. Epistemologies that are premised on a continuum model of language share conceptions of “objectivity” that are “too weak” (334).

Harding assumes that feminists should strive to improve, or strengthen, empiricists’ notions of ‘objectivity’. The underlying desire of her program is to produce fields of normative epistemological subjectivity that are “theoretically and empirically more accurate and representative.” However, Hoagland questions this desire. “It is too easy to say we are all part of a system of meaning, seeing it as a comprehensive whole such that any development must refer back to it,” she writes (139). Instead, she insists, “the dominant frame has its own agenda.” She points to the roles of an African-American doctor and African-American nurse in the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. These people were told by the white funders of the study that their black patients would be treated after a cure had been discovered. When it eventually became clear that the deliberately infected patients would not be cured, the African-American medical providers faced a difficult choice. “Try to imagine what it was like for a Black man who struggled to become a doctor in the United States. In the 1930s,” Hoagland writes. “His options of resistance as a doctor/scientist were severely limited. Had he simply walked away from the White funders and the study, he would have been ‘proving’ to them that Black men aren’t rational, can’t do science” (139-140). Hoagland explains that the doctor continued to lead the study, and the nurse, who was tasked to recruit subjects to participate and continue with the experiment, chose not to tell her patients the truth. In this case, the dominant epistemological frame operated
independently of the intentions of those who participated in it by continually threatening them with derealization, by repeatedly imposing ultimata on them. The dominant frame continues to have “its own agenda,” as Hoagland writes, regardless of whether one starts off from the margins, or invites minorities to collaborate with one’s research. Because feminist projects such as Harding’s do not challenge the alienating threats that structure modern fields of epistemological and semantic legitimacy, they do not substantially resist epistemological violence. Instead, feminist efforts to assimilate into fields of epistemological legitimacy function, as Butler promises, as “[sites] of power by which the human is differentially produced” (Undoing Gender 2).

Hoagland emphasizes the status of derealized people as objects — as individuals who are paradigmatically named, or undone, as existential and semantic aberrations. In contrast, Harding emphasizes their status as subjects — as individuals who presumably share a uniform abstract subjectivity with the dominant but whose views and experiences are systematically subtracted from contemporary sense-making practices. For this reason, Harding can contend that marginalized populations are inappropriately subtracted from knowledge practices, and that prevalent empiricist models yield results that are relatively inaccurate and unrepresentative (344). In contrast, Hoagland attends more to the acts of epistemological violence that are needed to manifest any subjectivity, including those that allegedly share merely nominal essences. Dominant knowledge institutions not only exclude, but actively and systematically degrade and assault, and they do so to materialize fictions of shared, normal subjectivity.

Unlike Harding, Hoagland is well aware that feminists cannot hope to develop more just and representative knowledge systems simply by persuading dominant institutions to “start off”
their research from marginal lives. In an explicit critique of Harding’s program of strong objectivity, she writes, “I see no reason to believe that if scientists open their work to a discussion of values, justice values will be embraced” (131). Rather, she observes, we should expect the “results” of any such increased receptivity or openness to the margins to instead continue to bolster the appearance of some dominant class as the authoritative material exemplar of abstract, normalized subjectivity.

To resist epistemological violence, Hoagland believes that feminists and other derealized individuals should abandon any hope of reforming “the practices of men or Whites who can’t help themselves” (131), and instead align themselves with others who are objectified or excluded from realms of sense and significance. Feminists should work creatively and playfully with other pariah groups to forge new meanings, she contends, while willfully disregarding dominant society’s continued efforts to subsume and subtract them and their projects (142). “Must we see our capacity to make sense, meaning, as only embedded in the dominant tradition,” she asks (139)? “My discontent lies in remaining focused on hegemonic, oppressive discourse…, and not shifting to disruptive, resistant practices” (131). Specifically, she proposes a “double operation” (140). Feminists will align themselves with practices of sense-making that normal epistemological subjects derealize, or “paradigmatically name” as nonsense. In addition, they will disassociate themselves wholly from dominant institutions, such as “the logic/language-games of hegemonic medical, legal, and scientific models.” By disengaging from “the West’s” historically specific dominant classes, and limiting their epistemic collaborations to those whom hegemonic discourse makes systematically ridiculous and insignificant, Hoagland believes,
feminists will eventually destabilize the ability of privileged classes to show up as material exemplars of normative epistemological subjectivity (135 — 143).

Harding does not consider the acts of epistemological violence that would be needed to allow individuals in minor, marginal, and intersectional political positions to appear to academic and scientific researchers, from the start, to occupy epistemologically worthwhile standpoints. Unlike Harding, Hoagland emphasizes the qualitative, categorical, material differences between those whom epistemological structures systematically alienate and those whose privilege is secured through acts of derealization. However, her proposed program of conceptual separatism arguably succumbs to the very problem of insularity, and pseudo-politics, that Warner cautions queer theorists against. By deliberately seeking to disassociate from “dominant” public contexts, Hoagland wants to limit whom she will allow to challenge, disrupt, and question feminist claims, while simultaneously expanding her focus of concern to all targets of derealization.

Furthermore, her program fails to resist epistemological violence. She writes:

I have been particularly interested in resistance in the form of separatist political strategies: Black separatism, Jewish separatism, Lesbian separatism…. However such spaces have often also retained dominant logic, usually about other groups: racism among White Lesbians, sexism among Black men…. Few successfully reinterpreted dominant logic about experiences and practices of those we didn’t identify with and so most remained lodged one way or another in the dominant paradigm about Others (whoever Others were, relative to us). (127)

Feminist conceptual separatists hope, not without reason, to predetermine the terms of their embodied vulnerability to weird, heterogeneous others by restricting the range of circuits of public communication that they will choose to respond to. However, for this reason, their program cannot help to lessen epistemological violence. They will need to know from the start which identity groups they and others belong to, and how their respective degrees of dominance,
privilege, and oppression ought to be valued and ranked. To practice her call for progressive radicals to embrace illegitimacy and disassociate from legitimate knowledge frameworks, her conceptual separatists cannot help but assume a transparently given, positively established, and insular — legitimate and privileged — subject of feminism, and will be unable to resist the practices of epistemological violence that are continually required to constitute this subject. Hoagland’s proposal is unequipped to resist epistemologically violent and systematically alienating frameworks because it merely reverses the terms of modernity’s structural binary, and aligns with illegitimacy instead of legitimacy.

III. ‘Cultural Translation’ as a Strategy for Post-Identity Feminist Politics

To glimpse the space of nonviolent epistemological practice that Butler finds outside legitimacy and illegitimacy, and to begin to imagine a practicable program of “cultural translation,” it will help to read her proposal through the lens of Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Butler directly references this work in the last chapter of Undoing Gender, which she titles, “Can the ‘Other’ of Philosophy Speak?” More pertinently, Gender Trouble opens by highlighting a distinction between forms of representation that is also central to Spivak’s canonical essay. “On the one hand,” she writes, “representation serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said to either reveal or distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (Gender Trouble 3-4). In her diagnosis of knowledge practices that deny epistemological agency to systematically alienated individuals, Spivak writes:
Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as ‘speaking for’ [Vertretung], as in politics, and representation as ‘re-presentation’ [Darstellung], as in art or philosophy…. These two senses of representation – within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other – are related but irreducibly discontinuous. To cover over the discontinuity… reflects again a paradoxical subject privileging. (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 275)

The distinction between these two senses of ‘representation’ originates for both feminists in the work of Althusser. A Vertretung works as a proxy for, or political representation of, the interests of heterogeneous members of a class. In contrast, a Darstellung works as a portrait, or name, for a singular totality (e.g., a class’ shared essence or collective subjectivity). In the passage above, Spivak suggests that epistemologically violent practices work by equivocating in a specific way between these two senses of “representation.” On the opening pages of Gender Trouble, Butler connects these forms of representation with the desire for legitimacy, and with feminist efforts to forge new forms of non-oppressive and empowering subjectivity.

Spivak’s main goal in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” is to alert feminists to the double-bind that Butler opens Gender Trouble with and returns to in Undoing Gender. “The radical intellectual in the West,” Spivak writes, “is… caught in a deliberate choice of subalternity, granting to the oppressed either that very expressive subjectivity which s/he criticizes or, instead, a total unrepresentability” (“Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography" 287). The “very expressive subjectivity” that Spivak mentions is the transparent subjectivity that the continuum model of language presupposes. It is the allegedly collective and unproblematic appearance of a politically representative and normative epistemological subject. Spivak’s ostensible opponents in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” are Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. Yet she explicitly intends to engage would-be progressive feminist scholars. These scholars hold positions of privilege in the western academy (“the West”), wish to align politically with those who are systematically
alienated and oppressed (“radical theorists”), and emphasize what she calls “the most important contributions of French poststructuralist theory” ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 271-72). She writes,

The participants in this conversation [i.e., Deleuze and Foucault], emphasize the most important contributions of French poststructuralist theory: First, that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive – a persistent critique is needed; and second, that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society’s Other. ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 272)

Spivak, a poststructuralist, of course does not want to reject those theoretical contributions that she describes as “the most important.” She is instead arguably concerned, like Butler, with epistemological violence, and with the risk that, by rejecting epistemologies premised on the continuum model of language, but leaving intact a pattern of equivocation that produces subjects through acts of derealization, feminists will only facilitate the emergence of new epistemologically violent middle class subjectivities.

We have seen that epistemologies premised on the continuum model of language mask the politically unrepresentative character of epistemological subjects’ class interests by presenting a class of “normal” people as the material exemplars of an otherwise imaginary and empty subjectivity’s enjoyments and values. This fetishizing of material substitutes for an otherwise purely opaque subjectivity, or assumption that normative epistemological subjects are transparent or “expressive,” is precisely the trick, Spivak suggests, that feminist scholars risk repeating when they reject epistemologies premised on the continuum model of language without disrupting the underlying ultimata that structure these epistemologies’ fields of intelligibility. As we will see, a certain pattern of equivocation between distinct forms of representation requires political representatives to appear as material proxies for the abstract subjectivities that all
members of a polis, class, or standpoint allegedly re-present. This appearance, and fetishization, of material proxies for *Darstellungen* is not an effect of intention or choice but of a form of alienation that is endemic to any knowledge practice that assumes that viable epistemological agents must be recognizable as members of already established public linguistic or communal frameworks, structures, or identity categories — i.e., that assumes what we have called the global incorporation thesis.

To question the possibility of a nonviolent epistemology that rejects the continuum model of language but remains constrained by dichotomies of legitimacy / illegitimacy, Spivak highlights Deleuze’s identification of “the workers’ struggle” with “the desire to blow [power] up completely,” as if this struggle, and the power it resists, were not only homogeneous and fungible, but was also the sort of entity that French workers could unproblematically, and progressively, appear to re-present ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 272). Similarly, she argues, Foucault’s statement that he sought “to establish conditions where the prisoners themselves would be able to speak” ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 274) indicates a lingering, implicit confidence in the possibly unproblematic political representation of normative epistemological subjects, much like Deleuze’s claim that “reality” is “what actually happens in a factory, in a school, in barracks, in a prison, in a police station” ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 275). Both theorists, she claims, ignore an important point made by Marx — that, in any commodity-based system of valuation, and regardless of choices to totalize or naturalize, shared, re-presentative interests can seem materially apparent, or visible, only if they are first transformed into, or are substituted by, representations of a categorically different, and materially unrepresentative, form.
Recall that Spivak notes that *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* forms of representation differ from each other in the same way as “a proxy and a portrait” ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 276). Portraits, or *Darstellungen*, are re-presentations of universal properties or traits, such as “feminism” or “respectable Indian-ness” ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 277). They signify an abstract linguistic category or description, or subjectivity, that an individual may or may not instantiate. Proxies or *Vertretungen*, in contrast, are material or political representatives of a class. They stand in for, or represent, the political interests of a specific group. Only heterogeneous, weird individuals operate as proxies or *Vertretungen*. In contrast, as re-presentations, *Darstellungen* are analytically homogeneous, fungible, and equal. In epistemologies that assume that individuals cannot know unless they are recognizable as members of materially transparent public linguistic or communal categories, or assume what we have termed the global incorporation thesis, certain *Vertretungen* must be fetishized as material exemplars of otherwise absent, re-presentative, existentially and ontologically legitimate subjectivities.

It is this pattern of equivocating between unique and generic kinds of representation that places Harding’s strong objectivists in a double bind. To attempt to disclose and know the discourse of the Other, her strong objectivists must continually choose between nominating certain sets of individuals as the “paternal proxies” of “the Other,” or leaving this otherwise opaque collective identity essentially and wholly undetermined, and existentially and semantically worthless. Regardless, the authority of the center will remain fully in place, with recurring ultimata still normatively gauging everyone’s measure of concrete yet imaginary re-presentative / representative subjectivity.
Hoagland advises her audience, whom she explicitly intends to occupy alienated political positions, to resist practices of derealization, or what she calls “paradigmatic naming,” by forging and sustaining connections with other individuals who are targets of epistemological violence. She believes that progressive non-dominant academics and activists can undermine the apparent fixity and necessity of epistemologically violent structures and develop non-dominant and resistant models of rationality by deliberately dwelling in “spaces in between” (143).

Unfortunately, she does not consider the violences that would be needed to allow oppressed individuals to appear as legitimately representative members of alienated groups, even to others who are non-dominant. Instead, she is exasperated to find that epistemological violences — and the visceral aversions and anxieties that are particularly characteristic of modernity — persist in separatist counterpublics.

Spivak contends that, rather than creating conditions in which systematically alienated individuals might make sense and know regardless of their capacities, and willingness, to translate their unique, weird embodiments into some fungible, equivalent form of subjectivity, feminist scholars such as Harding and Hoagland nominate new, not coincidentally Western (i.e., visibly legitimate), material champions of feminist subjectivity. “The workers’ struggle” that Deleuze portrays, for example, takes French workers’ priorities and conceptions to be politically exemplary while subsuming, without being affected by, for instance, Chinese Maoism ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 272). Therefore, despite fracturing the continuum model of language’s ideal of unitary, homogeneous, passively apparent subjectivities, Spivak suggests, these theorists posit homogeneous, equivalent, and re-presentative subjects and then represent locally situated Westerners as the material exemplars of these re-presentations. “This parasubjective matrix,
cross-hatched with heterogeneity, ushers in the unnamed Subject,” she writes. In the name of pluralizing subjectivity and promoting recognition of the “Other,” she charges, “radical” feminist theorists such as Harding and Hoagland posit new passively transparent fields of shared subjective value, and consequently “align themselves with bourgeois sociologists who fill the place of ideology with a continuistic ‘unconscious’ or a parasubjective ‘culture’” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 274). Why, Spivak asks, “should such occlusions be sanctioned in precisely those intellectuals who are our best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other?” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 272). Arguably, knowledge practices that attempt to reject the continuum model of language while assuming the global incorporation thesis cannot help but reiterate the viciously circular substitutions of forms of political and epistemological representation that necessitate epistemological violence.

A genuinely radical decentering of the subject, Spivak argues, would take the systematic production of material representatives (Vertretungen) of formally ambiguous value (Darstellungen), or what Spivak calls “global capitalism,” into account. Global capitalism, she writes, is:

The subject-production of worker and unemployed within the nation-state ideologies in its Center; the increasing subtraction of the working class in the Periphery from the realization of surplus value and thus from ‘humanistic’ training in consumerism; and the large-scale presence of paracapitalist labor as well as the heterogeneous structural status of agriculture in the Periphery. (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 272)

The worker and unemployed in the West and the Periphery are all expected to be imbued, insofar as they form one class, with some measure of “value,” of formally ambiguous, wholly abstract subjectivity (e.g., “proletariat-ness”). But the Vertretungen of this wholly abstract subjectivity must systematically “subtract” the heterogeneous materialities of the working class in the
Periphery if they are to manifest this shared subjectivity and themselves as its champions. Though they are materially specific, they must appear, or be reflexively seen, as the definitely denoting representatives of the abstract value that all working class people re-present. The material proxies whom Deleuze and Foucault nominate accordingly are, Spivak writes, not coincidentally “neither labor nor management.” They hold a “‘strong’ passport,” use a “‘strong’ or ‘hard’ currency” and enjoy “unquestioned access to due process” ("Can the Subaltern Speak?” 272). Though their unique and non-fungible enjoyments, experiences, and bodies are supposed to transparently present the opaque, abstract subjectivity that every alienated individual, in the Periphery and the West, allegedly also re-presents, this subjectivity is “certainly not the desiring subject as Other.” Instead, the twentieth century empiricists’ habit of taking the most dominant to represent shared, normatively reckoned subjectivity and actively derealizing “others” persists unabated.

Unlike Harding and Hoagland, Butler is persistently aware of the problematic character of efforts to resist epistemological violence by sustaining exposure to unfamiliar and weird individuals while nonetheless keeping the global incorporation thesis, or what Spivak calls global capitalism, intact. Conditions of embodiment and agency, she writes, create “a lively paradox” (Undoing Gender 21). Personal recognition cannot happen without mediation by social norms and concepts. However, the modern practices of subjective determination that would be needed to make some non-dominant people’s lives, such as middle class gays and lesbians, appear meaningful and recognizable in global corporatist contexts necessarily derealize relatively more marginal, minor, and intersectional others. Therefore, even as she advocates a model of cultural translation that strongly resonates with feminist calls for “border-crossing” and dwelling
in “spaces in between,” Butler remains persistently aware of the need to destabilize practices of subject production. “In a critical democratic project,” she writes, “we must follow a double path in politics: we must use this language to assert an entitlement to conditions of life in ways that affirm the constitutive role of sexuality and gender in political life, and we must also subject our very categories to critical scrutiny” (Undoing Gender 37-8). To subject categories of gender and sexed subjectivity to critical scrutiny, she contends, cultural translators must recognize the epistemological potency of individuals’ immediately embodied and uncommodified states of vulnerability to others — they must practice contingent, malleable, and receptive knowing and learning in spaces outside of modern epistemologies’ structural binary between legitimacy and illegitimacy. These are the spaces of action, and epistemological and political agency, that embodied individuals occupy, before, as, and after collective identity categories are abstractly reified, before, as, and after individuals appear as subjects.

The space for a critique of practices of subject production therefore emerges for Butler, not in fields that appear transparently legitimate or illegitimate, but in every individual’s immediately embodied and unshakeable relations with weird, non-substitutable others. This is the space, she argues, that all individuals occupy at all moments, even if distinctly modern anxieties and ultimata can distract people from it, and make it hard to glimpse. A nonviolent epistemology, Butler writes, resists modern tendencies to secure appearances of “knowledge” and authoritative subjectivity by hastily foreclosing individuals’ embodied vulnerability to the others they are related to. It operates in spaces, and occasions, where vulnerable individuals have the courage to attempt the perilous but intimate political task of listening to and allowing themselves to be transformed by strangers, by what is strange. A nonviolent epistemology, she
writes, is one that “lives with its unknowingness about the Other in the face of the Other, since sustaining the bond that the question opens is finally more valuable than knowing in advance what holds us in common, as if we already have all of the resources we need to know what defines the human, what its future life might be.”

Nonviolent epistemologies potentially find meaning in the bodies of individuals such as David Reimer because they do not assume that these people’s worth and survivability hinges on their abilities to appear as token members of middle class identity categories. “If that’s all they think of me, that they justify my worth by what I have between my legs, then I gotta be a complete loser,” Butler quotes Reimer as saying (Undoing Gender 71). To resist epistemological violence and practice nonviolent programs of cultural translation, progressives must recall spaces of epistemological agency beyond modernity’s structural binaries, and somehow find practical meaning in uncommodified occasions of translation. Because South Asia’s classical philosophical traditions are non-modern, the details of their theories of knowledge may offer resources that could assist “us” in this urgent yet hardly imaginable poststructuralist epistemological and political project.
CHAPTER 6:
BEYOND A GLOBAL CORPORATIST VALUE-SYSTEM: INTERPRETING BUDDHIST
AND NYĀYA NON-MODERN EPISTEMOLOGIES AS POTENTIAL NONVIOLENT
KNOWLEDGE PRACTICES

If contemporary knowledge practices are to accommodate the epistemological abilities of those whom modern knowledge institutions systematically alienate, then they must reject what we have called the global incorporation thesis — the assumption that individuals cannot know unless they are recognizable as members of transparently established linguistic or communal frameworks. People must be potentially able to know as diversely, weirdly, and uniquely embodied and related individuals, and not just as equal and generic subjects. Nonetheless, while readers may now agree that nonviolent epistemologies should accept that uncommodified individuals are a locus of epistemological agency, they may still wonder how, and whether, such epistemologies might practically work. To address this concern, the following pages first associate Quine’s model of radical translation with the system of value that Spivak urges progressive theorists to reject — global capitalism. We then show how this value system trades on the assumption that individuals are epistemologically capable only insofar as they are recognizable as representative / re-presentative members of already transparently established linguistic or communal structures. Next, we examine Quine’s arguments against positivist semantics and for naturalized epistemology and outline a schema of theoretical alternatives that he dismissed or overlooked. Finally, we show how classical Indian Buddhist and Nyāya theories of knowledge may both be read in ways that fit within this schema of non-global corporatist and non-positivist epistemological possibilities. Attention to these particular non-modern
philosophies may therefore help scholars and activists to develop techniques and processes that
do not reiterate the modern problems of epistemological violence and systematic alienation that
global corporatist knowledge institutions reiterate. As we will see, both Nyāya realism and
Buddhist nominalism offer resources for contemporary theorists now striving to articulate
creative responses to specifically modern epistemological and political crises.

I. Global Capitalism and Quine’s Model of Radical Translation

In Capital, Marx argues that any system of evaluation that is premised on the
unproblematic re-presentation (Darstellung) of forms of fungible, abstract value by
heterogeneous non-fungible proxies (Vertretung) demands a particular pattern of substitutions, or
“peculiarities.” Further, he contends, this pattern necessarily subtracts a class of politically
minor, marginal, and intersectional people (“the proletariat”), whom he associates with the
production of materially non-fungible use-values, from another class of politically dominant
persons (“the bourgeoisie”), who “work” by appropriating measures of fungible and qualitatively
identical “surplus value.”

First, Marx writes, “use-value becomes the form of appearance of its opposite,
value” (148). The kind of unambiguous and materially particular worth that specific things bear
must assume “the form of appearance of its opposite” — a generic, abstract value that other
things also re-present. They must become things-in-general rather than actual things. Further,
some categories of generally re-presentative things-in-general, or commodities, must appear as
material proxies for this imaginary value standard. For example, Marx writes, to measure the
abstract “weight” of a thing like a sugar loaf, some materially non-substitutable product, such as
a piece of iron, must substitute itself for that abstract quality which is purportedly re-presented,
in a qualitatively identical way, “in” both items. Second, Marx writes, “concrete labor becomes the form of manifestation of its opposite, abstract human labor” (150). For the first substitution to occur, the materially specific experiences, pains, and enjoyments that produce a materially non-fungible kind of object must seem to re-present the abstract form of “common” experience, pain, and enjoyment that allegedly produces fungible products. For example, the phenomenally specific work of boiling, filtering, pouring, drying, etc., that turns raw sugar into sugar loaves would need to seem to re-present the same ambiguous, abstract “work” that produces paradigmatically “weight”-bearing iron nuggets. Otherwise, the products could not be joined in one market, or web, of differential labor valuation.

Commodity-based economic systems, Marx writes, therefore demand a third equivocation or “peculiarity” (151). The individuals whose materially different labors and longings seem to reproduce objects that bear one and the same abstract value cannot appear as the diversely embodied, fleshy people they are (e.g., as materially specific and non-fungible individuals who either do or do not sweat in sugar refineries, or who do or do not tend to die of malnutrition or police violence), but must instead seem to re-present a singular abstract subjectivity. “Thus,” Marx writes, “the equivalent form has a third peculiarity: private labour takes the form of its opposite, namely labour in its directly social form” (151). In “Can the Subaltern Speak,” Spivak calls this ultimately authoritative concrete yet imaginary form of category membership, the “legal subject of socialized capital” (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 275). To bear sense, it must be materially represented, like weight, by some set of specific and non-fungible exemplars (Vertretungen). Certain heterogeneous people must show up as the political representatives of the abstract subjectivity that all people in a class supposedly re-present.
Subsequently, individuals working in a refinery may all appear, regardless of their specific activities, as generic refinery workers — as equal citizens under “the” law — each of whom is allegedly subject to one set of factory rules, despite potentially extremely different prospects of accessing and navigating the due processes that concretize this wholly abstract, re-presentative form of subjectivity. It follows, therefore, that, in commodity-based economic systems, some specific class (the proletariat) is necessarily subtracted from the class of middle class individuals (the bourgeoisie) who appear as concrete representations of the single, abstract essence that all people in a context allegedly re-present.

By now, we have seen this pattern of substitutions and productive alienation operate in various modern fields, ranging from the materialization of a “traditional” middle class bhadralok subjectivity in nineteenth century Bengal, to the historically specific and creative constitution of “naturally” sexed and gendered bodies in the twentieth century U.S. academy and American medical establishment. The first two chapters of this dissertation showed how an internally heterogeneous class of individuals increasingly appears in the Subcontinent, through the promulgation of derealizing practices of social regulation, as the concretely obvious and epistemologically authoritative exemplar of a revitalized yet imaginary collective Indian subjectivity. Chapter Three showed how modern comparative philosophical scholarship tends to materialize a generally respectable and distinct subject of Indian Philosophy in part by shuttling Buddhist texts across poles of concretely recognizable philosophical subjectivity (modernity) and an unintelligible, idiosyncratic, mystical realm. In Chapter Four, we also saw Butler argue that, in contemporary America, intersexed infants’ bodies, as well as the bodies of individuals like David Reimer, are prescriptively acted on and surgically altered to make specifically
heteronormative ideologies of “normally” sexed women and men appear naturally preestablished. Invisible ultimata structure the bounds of intelligibility in each such context: to appear as bearers of an imagined abstract and homogeneous epistemological subjectivity — as potentially objective knowers and not merely as solipsistic individuals — individuals must restrict their expressions to politically narrow and otherwise indeterminate fields of not-excluded material possibilities. Those who violate this foundational imperative risk derealization, much as Winston risked vaporization in 1984. Consequently, they appear to lose potential as epistemological and political agents.

For Butler’s nonviolent, poststructuralist program of cultural translation to be viable, it must differ structurally and not merely rhetorically from Quine’s model of radical translation. Note now that the model of radical translation that Quine develops in logic, epistemology, and semantics is structurally isomorphic with the commodity-based economic system that Marx criticizes. Viable programs of cultural translation must therefore intervene in or resist the pattern of equivocations between things-in-general and actual things, and individuals and subjects, that is characteristic both of Quine’s naturalized epistemology and global capitalism.

In Capital, Marx lists four forms that abstract value must take in any commodity-based economic system. The first form is “$x$ commodity A = $y$ commodity B” or “20 yards of linen = 1 coat” (139). One particular expression (“Gavagai,” or commodity A) must re-present a measure of abstract, homogeneous value (indeterminate reference) that some other expression (“Lo, a Rabbit,” or commodity B) paradigmatically represents. The specific worth of commodity A, or “Gavagai,” will then be only relatively intelligible, as a magnitude of the value or sense that commodity B, or “Lo, a Rabbit,” which is materially different, gauges. Marx’s second form, “$z$
commodity A = \( u \) commodity B or = \( v \) commodity C or = \( w \) commodity D or = \( x \) commodity E or = etc” or “20 yards of linen = 1 coat or = 10 lb. tea or = 40 lb. coffee or 1 quarter of corn or = 2 ounces of gold or = \( \frac{1}{2} \) ton of iron or = etc.” (154), pluralizes the first by recognizing that the first form of commodification does not occur in a binary relation, but in a world, or network, of potentially fungible commodities. For example, “Gavagai” might be incorporated within, or described through, any member of a potentially limitless disjunction of different generally descriptive English theoretical elements: “Lo, a rabbit,” “rabbit,” “hare,” “rabbit time-sliver,” “collection of undetached rabbit parts,” etc. “As a commodity it is a citizen of that world,” Marx writes. “The endless series of expressions of its value implies that, from the point of view of the value of the commodity, the particular form of use-value in which it appears is a matter of indifference” (155). “Gavagai” will appear valuable or meaningful only through its potential exchangeability with, or translation into, materially different elements of an undefined web or market of abstract and strictly inscrutable valuations. As with the global incorporation thesis, commodity-based, global capitalist economic systems demand that individual expressions and creations, or use-values, be either incorporated within a structure or web of value equivalence or denied existential and semantic value.

As Marx notes before presenting the third form of commodification, a limitless disjunction of variously translatable general designations would hardly work for practicable exchange. The second form is too tolerant of possibility. “The relative expression of value of the commodity is incomplete, because the series of its representations never comes to an end…. It is a motley mosaic of disparate and unconnected expressions of value” (156). Therefore, commodity-based economic systems require a third form, which is the relativistic second form
rendered, or totalized, as a limited, definite framework. One particular commodity “acquires the form of universal equivalent, because all other commodities make it the material embodiment of their uniform and universal form of value” (160). One particular, non-fungible set of heterogeneous entities must appear, like material, political proxies for supposedly harmoniously established normative epistemological subjects, to possess “a directly social form” (161). In the fourth and final form of commodity-based economic systems, the universal form of value of this Vertretung (e.g., “Rabbit”) is naturalized. The material proxies for the abstract value that all subjects allegedly re-present acquire a social monopoly and attain “objective fixedness and general social validity” (162). The privilege of some politically dominant, “normal” group is reckoned ontologically.

We can see that the “subjective and solipsistic” and “objective” or “intersubjective” facets of Quinean observation sentences differ in much the same way, respectively, as “use-value” and “value” in Marx’s Capital. Within Quine’s epistemology, individuals’ experiences are materially “subjective or solipsistic,” or formally unique and non-fungible, like use-values. Conversely, the subjectivities that allegedly unify all individuals within a cultural context are homogeneous and purely abstract, like value. As Althusser’s analysis of Vertretungen and Darstellungen suggests, Quine’s naturalized epistemology can therefore operate only by equivocating between, or surreptitiously substituting, these two senses of “represent.” Naturalized epistemologists must represent a set of individuals’ unique and non-fungible empirical conditions as proxies for (representations of) some homogeneous and otherwise purely abstract subjective totality, and if they did not, their normative yet imaginary conceptual frameworks could not seem concretely intelligible and obvious. Simultaneously, they must
assume that this set of individuals’ material conditions re-presents that totality, or that their privilege is somehow fated or preestablished, for if they did not, the first representation would appear merely political, contingent, and not epistemologically authoritative. Quine’s naturalized epistemology is therefore viciously circular, as we saw in Chapter Four. It must appeal to knowledge of individuals’ subjective and solipsistic experiences to explain knowledge of the behaviors of typical subjects, and appeal to knowledge of typical subjects’ behaviors to explain knowledge of the “shared” characteristics of individuals’ subjective and solipsistic experiences.

The isomorphism of Quine’s global corporatist semantics with the commodity-based economic system that Marx criticizes suggests that one cannot escape or regulate modern forms of alienation and epistemological violence without disrupting the substitutions that magically transform heterogeneously embodied individuals into normative epistemological subjects. Hence, a practicable program of cultural translation must not merely deny modernity’s prevalent continuum model of language, but must also somehow substantially, yet non-positively, recognize and value the epistemological capabilities of uniquely embodied, uniquely related, uncommodified individuals. Otherwise, even epistemologies that ostensibly sought to resist epistemological violence would remain caught in modernity’s double-bind, and individuals would continuously be forced to “choose,” reiteratively and anxiously, between political and epistemological inaction and the violent, spurious production of transparent political and epistemological subjects.

Fortunately, the isomorphic structure of Quine’s global corporatist epistemology to global capitalist economics suggests that one way to track nonviolent and non-corporatist epistemological possibilities would be to analyze Quine’s arguments for his naturalized
epistemology and schematize theoretical alternatives that he either overlooked or dismissed. In the following section, we therefore examine Quine’s justifications for his epistemology with the aim of constructing a theoretical framework that will help to interpret Buddhist and Nyāya pramāṇa theories as poststructuralist and potentially nonviolent knowledge practices.

II. Quine’s Rejection of the Museum Theory of Meaning

In an early work, Quine offers two main arguments against direct correspondence theories of sense and reference, or what he describes as the museum view of meaning. These theories hold that expressions are meaningful only if they map onto transparently cognized extra-linguistic entities, such as objects and propositions. In “Ontological Relativity,” Quine calls this semantics “the mentalistic myth of the meaning museum” (“Ont. Rel.” 188). “Uncritical semantics is the myth of a museum in which the exhibits are meanings and the words are labels” (“Ont. Rel.” 186). To justify his naturalized epistemology, he formulates two apparently strong arguments against the museum view of meaning.

First, he observes, people can talk meaningfully about a potentially infinite number of theoretically possible but nonexistent things. For example, it may sometimes seem informative, and urgent, to assert a statement such as “That person [e.g., Big Brother] does not exist.” However, Quine argues, if names and concepts gained meaning and sense, as museum theorists hold, only by acting as labels for transparently given things, then people who attempted to dismiss a thing as nonsensical or nonexistent would immediately affirm its ontological value. Otherwise, their denials could correspond to nothing, and therefore could be neither sensible nor true. Consequently, Quine concludes, direct correspondence theorists commit themselves to
ontologies that burst with potentially infinitely numerous semi-existent nonexistent entities.

“How many possible men are in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones” (From a Logical Point of View : 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays 4)?

Second, if people were to live in realities that were tolerant of infinitely many semi-existing non-existents, they would immediately sacrifice the possibility of any even subjectively intelligible distinction between meaning and nonsense. If round-squares existed as pseudo-entities to support the possible sensibility and truth of their denials, then “meaning” and “nonsense,” and “existence” and “nonexistence,” would signify rival, and equally viable realms. There would then be no cause to ground judgments in a realm of real or meaningful things instead of realms of impossible or nonsensical ones. Consequently, accepting the museum view of meaning causes one to lose distinctions between meaning and nonsense, and existence and nonexistence (From a Logical Point of View : 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays 5). When people assume that expressions are semantically valuable only if they correspond with given objects, Quine argues, they assert absurd ontologies of infinitely many semi-existent nonexistent things and throw themselves in states of wholesale aporia about the sense or validity of any distinction.

Note that the statements that Quine focuses on to reject the museum view of meaning are formally like those that Butler says that global corporatists use to “derealize” others. If direct correspondence theories of meaning were right, then proponents of transparent and preestablished normality who declared that lesbians and feminists were not-real-women would simultaneously recognize the ontological status of some class of women who were not-real-women. These not-real-women could then be only subsequently and dogmatically erased, or derealized, to be refused possible agency and reality. There is some reason, therefore, to suspect
that Quine’s naturalized epistemology does not solve the problems that motivated its development.

To avoid wholesale *aporia* and the absurdity of a potential infinity of semi-existing nonexistents, Quine rejects the “museum view of meaning” and instead suggests a path in semantics that Bertrand Russell charted in “On Denoting.” In this essay, Russell argues that ordinary proper names, such as “Scott,” are disguised definite descriptions. They do not specify transparently cognized objects, but, if they refer to anything, signify only opaque gaps in thought — “essentially and wholly undetermined” $x$-s (42) — that sentences characterize in ways that are either true or false.

Russell defines denoting phrases as expressions that, when put into sentences, typically seem to signify or describe things. “A phrase,” he writes, “is denoting solely in virtue of its form....”

By a ‘denoting phrase’ I mean a phrase such as any one of the following: a man, some man, any man, every man, all men, the present King of England, the present King of France, the centre of mass of the solar system at the first instant of the twentieth century, the revolution of the earth around the sun, the revolution of the sun around the earth (41).

Solely from the perspective of semantic form, these phrases fall neatly into two classes – those that denote ambiguous or generic particulars, and those that denote unique or unambiguous ones. The typical placement in a sentence of an expression like “all men” or “every man” will make the phrase appear to represent a manifold of individuals who share a property or belong to a totality. Similarly, the typical placement of an expression like “a man,” “some man,” or “any man” will make the expression seem to signify a random, generic constituent of a specified category, or, as Russell wrote, “an ambiguous man” (41). On the other hand, the typical placement of an expression that is preceded by “the,” or that functions as an ordinary proper
name, such as “Sir Walter Scott,” will make the phrase seem to signify an individual who could not be substituted by any other, or an unambiguous, unique, or non-fungible particular (44).

Like Marx, Russell recognized that ambiguously cognized entities do not present the same kind of meaning as uniquely cognized things. You would expect a person who told you to get a flower to be happy to get any of possibly many flowers, and would expect a person who told you to bring every flower to want a whole collection but no flower in particular. In contrast, you would know that a person who told you to bring the or that flower desired one flower especially, or a non-generic, non-fungible particular (e.g., this carnation). In speech, definitely denoting phrases present a kind of sense or meaning that differs in kind from the sense or meaning that ambiguously denoting phrases present.

In “On Denoting,” Russell especially attends to expressions that seem to refer to unique rather than generic individuals. Like the notion of “use-values,” the unambiguous form of sense that they convey appears basic to intentional thought, but is nonetheless notoriously hard to understand (44). For example, he observes, “the morning star” and “the evening star” apparently denote unambiguous individuals. But it is possible for people to know that the morning star is Venus yet not know that the evening star is also Venus. Despite their form, he concludes, these apparently unambiguously referring phrases therefore cannot convey meaning by transparently presenting objects to thought. Much like Diñnāga, Russell contends that assumptions of transparently cognized enduring objects create intractable problems.

To handle reference to persistent things, Russell proposed a strategy that has since become standard in first order predicate logic. Propositions that make points primarily about specific objects assert two kinds of claims. First, they contend that there exists an otherwise purely
opaque and ambiguous entity \(x\) that a definitely denoting expression (C) picks out and another denoting expression (\(\Phi\)) further describes. For example, “The father of Charles II was executed,” asserts, in part, that “the father of Charles II” (C) ambiguously designates an individual (\(x\)) and that this individual is generally describable, or vaguely conceivable, as a member of that totality of things that have been executed (\(\Phi\)). Other examples Russell gives include “Scott is the author of Waverly” and “Scott is Scott.” In each case, a phrase that seems to pick out a specific object, “Scott” (C), designates at least one “essentially and wholly undetermined” individual (\(x\)) that some further phrase (\(\Phi\)) — “is Scott” or “is the author of Waverly” — generally and ambiguously describes. Contemporary symbolic logic represents the form of this component of definitely denoting propositions as \(\exists x (Cx \& \Phi x)\). Yet as Russell observes, this first component of definite denotation is too tolerant of possibility to do the work that semantics asks of it, for it speaks only of ambiguous entities, although unique things and generic things give different kinds of sense. “What we wish to say,” Russell writes, “is equivalent to ‘One and only one entity wrote Waverly, and that one had the property \(\Phi\)” (51), but the first clause asserts only that an entity called C bears \(\Phi\). Without change, a sentence such as “Scott is the author of Waverly” would assert only that there is some random thing that can be denoted by “Scott” and “the author of Waverly.” Similarly, an expression like “Please pass the red flower” would request a flower that was red, but would appeal for no unique flower.

To more accurately represent what people mean when they designate definite things, Russell adds a second clause to the first. This universalizing rule asserts that, in some domain, if the expression “C” ever designates anything, then it denotes that very same ambiguous particular that “C” picks in the first clause. Russell writes, “To get an equivalent of ‘\(x\) was the father of
Charles II’, we must add, ‘If $y$ is other than $x$, $y$ did not beget Charles II’, or, what is equivalent, ‘If $y$ begat Charles II, $y$ is identical with $x$’ (44). By adding this *uniqueness clause* to the first, he argues, logicians can approximate the kind of unambiguous meaning that definitely denoting phrases convey. When people say, for instance, “The drink that is more full is mine,” they mean that there is something that can be signified as “the drink that is more full” and be described as “mine,” and that if “the drink that is more full” ever designates anything in this context, then it designates that same opaque thing (which can also be described as being “mine”). The full symbolization of a sentence involving a definite description therefore works out as $(∃x)[(Cx \& Φx) \& (∀y)(Cy \rightarrow y=x)]$.

Quine believes that, by adopting Russell’s theory of descriptions, he can evade the endlessly erupting semi-existing nonexistents and wholesale *aporia* that direct correspondence theories of meaning apparently entail. If designated entities were opaque gaps in thought that general categories might or might not qualify, then, he writes, people would not need to posit infinitely many semi-existing non-existent entities. “We are convicted of a particular ontological presupposition,” he says, “if, and only if, the alleged presupposition has to be reckoned among the entities over which our variables range in order to render one of our affirmations true” (*From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays* 13). If a variable, or placeholder, ranges over a kind of thing that cannot possibly exist (e.g., biological sons of barren women), then intelligible statements about these things will not necessarily assert their “existence.” Instead, the phrases will designate spaces in thought that, according to some ontological reckoning, can never be filled. “To be assumed an entity,” Quine concludes, “is purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable” (*From a Logical Point of View: 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays* 13).
Note that Quine dismisses space that Russell leaves in his theory of definite descriptions for “logically proper names.” At the time of “On Denoting,” Russell divided apparently uniquely denoting phrases into two theoretical categories – those that appear to pick out unique individuals but really specify possibly many (i.e., that implicitly function as ambiguously denoting definite descriptions), and those that pick out only one uniquely intended thing (i.e., that function as genuine proper names). Unlike ordinary proper names, such as “Scott,” logically proper names transparently designate unique particulars. Because he holds that to be assumed to exist “is purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable,” Quine forecloses this possibility.

As he accounts them, the ontological possibilities that remain after a shift to a descriptivist semantics hinge on the kind of explanation that is given to account for the possible satisfaction of the \( x \)-s, the singular gaps in thought, that are bound in sensible definitely denoting assertions. “Realists” and “logicists,” he writes, believe that bounded variables in true statements reserve space for actual “abstract entities [that] have being independently of the mind” (From a Logical Point of View : 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays 14). Unlike direct correspondence theorists, these metaphysicians believe that the variables in meaningful denoting expressions hold places in thought for possibly existent things, specifically, the entities that the bound variables intend to range over. Preferring a slightly different model of ontological reckoning, “conceptualists” and “intuitionists” do not ascribe actuality to the things that they believe make the variables in definite descriptions potentially significant. Instead, they believe, these \( x \)-s reserve space for what Quine derisively terms mentalistic or “mind-made” entities. They are cognitive posits instead of real existents.
Quine rejects both of these models for essentially aesthetic reasons. The realists and conceptualists who adopt Russell’s theory of definite descriptions avoid the epistemic crises that the museum view apparently entails, as we have seen. But their ontologies can seem unnecessarily complex. Because the external objects that denoting expressions signify are only opaquely understood, Quine argues, nothing is gained by attributing independent ontological status to them. “Our acceptance of an ontology is, I think, similar in principle to our acceptance of a scientific theory, say a system of physics: we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme…” (Quine From a Logical Point of View : 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays 16). Because realist and conceptualist theories of meaning do not appear to Quine to discernibly benefit from the opaquely conceived extralinguistic entities that they posit, he concludes that epistemologists should prioritize a “nominalist” metaphysics and a purely descriptivist semantics.

By embracing what he thought of as a nominalist metaphysics, Quine endorses the thesis of global incorporation. As he writes, in his naturalized epistemology, even ordinary proper names are no more than “insignificant notations,” or individually valueless nodes in broader “webs” of mutually conditioned, general descriptions (From a Logical Point of View : 9 Logico-Philosophical Essays 15). Consequently, he finds no potential semantic value or epistemological agency for uncommodified expressions and individuals. Two additional theses that Quine derives from his nominalist metaphysics and descriptivist semantics — fact-meaning holism, which asserts that conceptual frameworks or totalities alone determine semantic value, and underdetermination, which asserts that individual expressions and experiences can never suffice to transform, or correct, normative theoretical judgments — also make his commitment to a
global corporatist value system evident. An individual ("x") is meaningful or existent only insofar as it is a constituent of a theory model.

According to Quine’s naturalized epistemology, an entity is sensible or real only if it is subsumed by some set of generally denoting categories (e.g., “C,” “Φ,” etc.) that representative / re-presentative subjects reckon to be meaningful. It follows, therefore, that an entity is sensible only if it is incorporated within some set of collectively significant descriptive phrases, or disjunction of other sets of generally denoting expressions. Naturalized epistemologies therefore entail fact-meaning holism. The disjunction of sets of ambiguously denoting descriptions that form the conditions of sensibility for any an entity must not be limitless, as Marx also realized, but must, if it is to solve the direct correspondence theorists’ apparent problem of wholesale aporia, be ontologically reckoned, or totalized, within a materially limited framework of value-exchange. Consequently, the potential meaningfulness of certain otherwise possible sets of general descriptions ("the temporal rabbit-sliver over there") must be foreclosed, and subtracted from possible existence and sense, before any normative conceptual framework will seem concretely and transparently manifest. Quine’s global corporatist epistemology consequently entails underdetermination. Within his model of knowledge, an individual occasion’s significance is determinable only through its measure of qualitatively uniform and abstract semantic value.

Quine hopes that his global corporatist epistemology will diminish the problems of infinitely many semi-existing non-existent and wholesale subjective aporia that disrupt the museum view of meaning. After embracing this model, however, and as poststructuralist theorists such as Spivak and Butler implicitly point out, he can avoid wholesale aporia and
appearances of a potentially limitless disjunction of ontologically shadowy entities only by positing a viciously circular, and literally vicious, sequence of substitutions between individuals’ “subjective and solipsistic,” materially specific experiences and the purely abstract and fungible, “interactive” and “objective” behaviors of subjects. Because a viciously circular step in a valid argument is not any step, it should come as no surprise that Quine fails to solve the philosophical problems that he hoped to address. Instead, as indicated earlier, he can appear to foreclose the meaningfulness of expressions that are not “cultural posits,” and avoid wholesale subjective aporia, only by substituting materially specific disjunctions of norms as the form of a “preestablished,” or naturalized, universal equivalent — that is, by progressing, through acts of derealization, from Marx’s relativistic second form of commodification to the totalizing and naturalizing third and fourth forms. Just as global capitalism necessarily produces a structurally oppressed proletariat class, these unavoidable acts of foreclosure proliferate new, materially specific forms of illegitimate subjectivity — “others.”

Hoagland’s antagonists in the academy, for example, categorized lesbians and feminists as not-real-women, and by repeatedly purging individuals like her from material centers of legitimate Philosophy, helped to proliferate new fields of illegitimacy, for instance in the slums of fringe academic disciplines, such as Women’s Studies, Cultural Studies, etc. As Marx observes, no less than the direct correspondence theories that Quine argues against, global corporatist modes of valuation proliferate alienated classes. Consequently, like global capitalism and the museum view of meaning, Quine’s naturalized epistemology can offer individuals no even privately intelligible basis to choose between realms of legitimacy and illegitimacy; it prescribes fear and anxiety as foundational epistemological norms.
Quine rejects at least three theoretical alternatives as he shifts from the museum view of meaning to the global incorporation thesis. Two come after he embraces a descriptivist semantics, and assume the partial contribution to semantic value of cognitively opaque “external objects.” These are entities whose contributions to meaning are allegedly not exhausted by a cognition’s or utterance’s internal content. For example, *realist descriptivists* hold that the gaps in sensible denotative thought reserve space for opaquely cognized things that may or may not independently exist. In contrast, descriptivists who are *conceptualists* or *intuitionists* contend that the variables in denoting cognitions reserve space for independent yet ambiguously designated ideas, or mind-made entities. The third structural alternative precedes Quine’s embrace of a fully descriptivist semantics and allows transparently cognized, non-descriptively understood unique things to contribute to semantic value, provided that this allowance does not lead to the kinds of problems that Quine, Russell, and Diññāga associated with direct correspondence theories of meaning. For example, Russell leaves space in his theory of descriptions for the potential meaningfulness of logically proper names. Poststructuralist theorists who seek to regulate modernity’s problems of epistemological violence and systematic alienation may therefore look to escape the double-bind of global corporatist epistemologies and develop practicable nonviolent logics by exploring alternatives within this field of otherwise excluded possibilities.

*Section 3 – A Poststructuralist Reading of the Buddhist and Nyāya Pramāṇa Theories*

The *pramāṇa* theories of the Naiyāyika and Buddhist textual traditions do not comfortably fit within either of the two purely descriptivist alternatives. While the Naiyāyika-s are realists about objects and properties, they cannot be called descriptivists, for they hold that, in
cases of veridical perceptual cognition, cognitions literally coincide with transparently given objects and object properties. According to Nyāya’s theory of perception, sense organs grasp independent, actual, property-rich things. Likewise, Buddhist pramāṇa theorists are certainly not realists about enduring objects and likely are not conceptualists, for although they hold that enduring objects are imaginative constructs (vikalpa-s), they contend that these “ideas” are objects of knowledge only in a secondary, figurative sense, and that, ultimately, only momentary particulars are directly known. Renderings of the Nyāya and Buddhist textual traditions as either realist or conceptualist descriptivists would be wrong.

Nonetheless, it should also be clear that neither tradition’s pramāṇa theories reiterate the museum view of meaning or Quine’s naturalized epistemology. The Buddhists can only be problematically and tendentiously said to share Quine’s modern commitment to the continuum model of language, as we saw in Chapter Three. Further, the tradition clearly rejects the museum view’s thesis of transparently cognized enduring external objects. Similarly, although the Naiyāyika-s allow for the transparent perception of enduring and property-rich actual things, their account is considerably more complex and subtle than the museum view of meaning that Quine criticizes, particularly as it developed after Diñnāga’s intervention. Further, both traditions accommodate something like the transparent, non-descriptive perception of unique individuals that Russell preserved as the province of logically proper names. The Buddhists count only direct, conceptually unmediated perception (nirvikalpaka pratyakṣa) of momentary unique individuals (svalaksana-s) as genuine knowledge. Meanwhile, objects of perception in Nyāya thought are always specific things extended in space and time, rather than abstractions. Although the tradition holds that properties are perceptible, they are perceptible only in and through
sensibly grasped, non-fungible objects. We will examine shortly whether this doctrine requires something structurally like the sequence of substitutions between use-values and value that Marx criticizes.

Chapter Two attended in detail to Diñnāga’s arguments for his “exclusion of other” (anyāpoha) theory of reference and reduction of all conceptually loaded (savikalpa) judgment to the status of inference (anumāna). We can now situate these doctrines within the context of Quine’s defense of naturalized epistemology. First, at the level of conventional truth, the Buddhist textual tradition clearly shares Quine’s commitment to a descriptivist semantics. The tradition holds that the external objects of savikalpa cognition are always empty, or amount merely to placeholders or gaps in thought. Diñnāga also justifies his reduction of verbal knowledge, or śabda, to inference principally by arguing against the possibility of transparently cognized enduring external objects. Second, Diñnāga’s anyāpoha theory of conceptual determination appears to anticipate Russell’s solution to the problem of definite descriptions. To say that two otherwise empty things are identical is to say no more than that they do not differ. Therefore, Russell’s proposed solution to the problem of definite descriptions implicitly recognizes, with Diñnāga, that ordinary names and definite descriptions function only through exclusion. For “Scott is the author of Waverly” to refer to the man who wrote the book, the general description, (∃x) (Cx & Φx), must be supplemented with a uniqueness clause stipulating that, if anything satisfies the description “C & Φ,” then it be not other than x, i.e., (∃x)[(Cx & Φx) & (∀y)(Cy → ~(y ≠ x))].

The question therefore arises of the extent, if any, that the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti tradition’s pramāṇa theories differ from Quine’s naturalized epistemology, and whether these
differences are structurally significant enough to offer contemporary theorists tools that they
might practically use to regulate or correct our modern era’s problems of epistemological
violence and alienation. We argued in Chapter Three that the textual grounds are insufficient to
attribute a Quinean continuum model of language to the Buddhists and that this attribution would
have odd textual effects. Yet it likely remains unclear whether the Buddhist texts propose any
practical alternatives. While we have noted that, unlike Quine, the Diñnāga-Dharmakīrti textual
tradition keeps space in its pramāṇa theories for the meaningfulness of something like logically
proper names — the immediate concept-free sensing of unique particulars — it is still doubtful
whether this form of conceptually unmediated perception can help contemporary theorists to
develop sustainable nonviolent epistemological practices, particularly given that the tradition
itself divorces this category of truth from the kind that governs conceptually mediated practical
judgment. We will return to these questions after we situating the Nyāya tradition’s pramāṇa
doctrines analytically within this field of dismissed or ignored schematic possibilities.

In some respects, and particularly in their theories of perception, the Naiyāyika-s seem to
endorse precisely the museum model of meaning that Quine and Russell problematize. Recall
that, according to Quine, museum theorists treat elements of denotative speech as labels and
intended objects or concepts as exhibits. The name “Flossie” would be meaningful only if there
were some specific entity, i.e., Flossie, whom the expression directly connected with. Similarly,
according to the Naiyāyika-s, any occasion of knowing, or prāma, references a particular, actual
thing. In perceptual knowledge (pratyakṣa), the locus of cognition is a singular object. People’s
visual senses literally grasp Flossie when they see her, and in this moment of perception, observe
her cowness and other relevant properties, such as the specific color of her hide. The intended
objects of other sources of knowledge — inference (anumāna), testimony (śabda), and analogy (upamāna) — are less vibrantly cognized but are also nonetheless unambiguous. According to the tradition, there is a single, actual entity, Flossie the cow, whom people specifically but indefinitely cognize with the help of their individual recollections when they speak or infer things about her.

Quine contends that the museum model of language cannot accommodate meaningful speech about nonexistent singular things. For a phrase such as “Big Brother isn’t real” to be sensible, some unambiguous singular thing, e.g., Big Brother, would need to exist. Otherwise, if “Big Brother” signified nothing, it would be nonsensical to assert his nonexistence. In some existentially restricted sense, Big Brother must “exist” for museum theorists to deny his existence. Further, Quine argued, if nonexistent things did exist in a qualitatively weak way, then “existence” and “nonexistence” would signify rival but equally plausible realms of being. Consequently, he concluded, the museum view of language leads to an absurd infinity of semi-existent nonexistents, and deprives people of possible principled grounds to choose between meaning and nonsense. As we have seen, Russell and Diñnāga raise additional concerns about the museum theorists’ ability to accommodate referentially opaque knowledge of singular things. If the meaning of “the evening star” and “the morning star” were simply the object, Venus, then it would seem impossible for a person to know the meanings of “the evening star” and “the morning star” and yet not know that they were identical.

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition does in fact allow for veridical knowledge of a potential infinity of actual things, including absent, illusory, and impossible entities, such as sons of barren women. As D.N. Shastri, a twentieth century opponent of Nyāya realism, writes about the textual
tradition’s theories of absence: “However contradictory it may seem, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika actually holds that non-existence exists (abhāvaḥ asti)” (395). It would perhaps be more charitable to translate abhāva as “absence” instead of nonexistence. Still, at a superficial level, the apparent contradiction of postulating real nonexistents persists. According to the Nyāya tradition, individuals veridically perceive absences with their senses, and do so because their sense organs grasp substances that really are qualified by the absences of particular things. A farmer is able to look in her barn and see that her cow is missing because she is able to perceive material circumstances that are actually incompatible with the presence of her cow.

The Nyāya tradition’s realist account of meaning is similarly liberal about fictional, illusory, and impossible entities. People can intelligibly speak about Big Brother, the tradition suggests, only if there is a fictional character, Big Brother, whom they cognize, more or less accurately, through the use of their memories, imaginations, and other mental functions. Shastri apparently shares Quine’s incredulity about such a proposition. “The principle that every experience has its counterpart in the external world was carried… to its extreme limit by the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika” (395).

It is a central and early tenet of Nyāya semantics and epistemology that all cognitions have an ontologically real causal basis — they do not and cannot arise ex nihilo — and these causal bases are what cognitions are about. “For each intentional [mental] object,” Matilal writes, “a causal explanation is possible and this explanation will reveal its foundation in some material object or other” (Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 408). Stephen Phillips and N.S. Ramanuja Tatacharya write that Nyāya’s recognized sources of knowledge, or pramāṇa-s “reveal objects that not only exist independently of cognition but also
cause it.” Causes of conscious experience are “viewed as natural processes, as part of the universe’s causal web” (13). Whether cognitions are of fictional things, such as Macbeth’s dagger, or real things, such as Flossie the cow, they are generated by materially actual causes, and are veridical only if they present these objects as they actually are.

Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika’s semantics and epistemology builds on the striking insight that, to some extent, objects of cognition must always be temporally and spatially expansive. The Vaiśeṣika-s are ontological atomists, and early in their tradition, noted that sense organs cannot possibly grasp the infinitesimal atoms that things are made of. Therefore, people must primarily perceive things that have atoms as their parts — i.e., wholes (avayavin-s) — and not atomic particulars. Matilal summarizes this argument from atomism as follows:

If perception has to grasp anything, it must grasp things that have parts or constituents. This means that unless the imperceptible atoms come together to form a whole, either provisionally or really, there will be nothing except the impartite, imperceptible atoms left there to be perceived, and since such atoms are imperceptible, there will be nothing to be perceived! (Perception : An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 260)

Parts cannot be perceived, or thought, except as constituents of wholes that are, to some degree, spatially and temporally fat. Therefore, people must primarily see, not unique particulars, but wholes. From here, it is easy to see how the atomistic Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika tradition from committed itself to the necessary perceptibility of universals and properties. According to the Naiyāyika-s, a cognized thing, such as a red tomato, is a compound material substratum of property occasions (e.g., this red, this tomato, this taste, etc.) that specific property universals (e.g., red-ness, tomato-ness, sweetness, etc.) inhere within (Perception : An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 283).
Early Vaiśeṣika scholars recognized six distinct ontological categories, or kinds of things that words intend (padārtha-s) — substance (dravya), quality (guṇa), action (karma), universal (sāmāṇya), individualizer (viṣeṣa), and inherence (samavāya). Later Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika-s introduced absence (abhāva) as a seventh category. In any case, throughout the traditional literature, cognized objects appear as real syntheses or compounds of elements of these various categories. Nyāya’s objects, Ganeri writes, resemble “a group of marionettes: the bodies of the puppets are the branching structures of substances, and the strings will be the threads running up to the level of universals and individuators” (Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason 79). Each is the locus of substances, or dravya-s, that are formed of parts and are the locus of sets of qualities (guṇa-s), or “property-particulars.” These qualities are unique manifestations of universals, and universals are themselves unqualified but inherent in multiple qualities, substances, etc.

Long before Diṅnāga defended the counter-thesis in his Pramāṇa-Samuccaya, Gotama, the author of the Nyāya root text, and his commentators appealed to the necessary cognition of wholes to argue against the reduction of verbal knowledge (śabda) to inference (anumāna). These early arguments hinge primarily on the conditions of inference that were then accepted by members of the scholarly community. How, Gotama asks, could perceived instances themselves satisfy criteria for a valid inference? If properties such as cow-ness were not perceived, then instances could never satisfy the criteria for a valid inference. What would they be perceived as instances of? No awareness of various discrete and unique parts can prompt a person to infer “cow” or “fire” if that person has no knowledge of properties such as cow-ness and fire-ness. A person who is ignorant of “fire-ness” cannot not infer fire from smoke, and no one who is
ignorant of “cow-ness” could soundly judge that a creature before them is actually a cow (Shastri 252).

Diñnāga develops his anyāpohavāda to answer Nyāya critiques such as these while rigorously defending a reductivist view of śabda, as we saw in Chapter Two. If general characteristics, or sāmānyalakṣaṇa-s were transparently given, he contends, then a different “universal” would need to inhere in each unique object, and people would need to know all of an object’s properties just by knowing any single one. Subsequent Nyāya theorists subtly reworked, and in some cases radically revised, traditional Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika positions to respond to these challenges. In particular, the Naiyāyika-s’ criteria for real universals seem to have grown increasingly strict.

Uddyotakara (6th — 7th century) states two conditions for universals. First, they should have some causal basis or source (nimitta). This criterion rules out wholly speculative “universals.” Real universals are not purely possible, for example, as “grue-ness” would have been if Goodman had not invented the example, and as the “fat-ness” of the man in Quine’s doorway would have been if Quine hadn’t thought of the quip. Second, “that ground should be a simple (non-compound) and unitary property or entity which cannot be analyzed or explained away otherwise” (Matilal Perception : An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 418). Apparently compound universals, such as “three-legged-ness,” “blue-pot-ness,” and “monkey-in-tree-ness,” are not really jāti-s. Instead, according to Uddyotakara, these bogus universals are just accidental features (upalakṣaṇa-s) or epistemological-semantic artifacts whose basis of application is fully given by the objects that allegedly house them. For example, the cognitive grounds of a person’s visible “barefooted-ness” are just the compound visible
features of that person’s feet. “In each case,” Matilal observes, “the presence of some particular or other is enough to warrant our use of such general terms” (Perception : An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 419). Because the causes of these alleged universals are just combinations of the various property rich things that cause people to see, and because meanings are causal, the “wholes” that unify these accidental combinations should not be included as part of the furniture of the Naiyāyika-s’ world.

Following Uddyotakara, Udayana (eleventh century) also distinguishes between objective universals (jāti-s) and merely nominal universals (upādhi-s). According to him, upādhi-s are “relation-particulars uniquely contrived for the occasion” (svarūpa-sambhanda-viśeṣa) (Perception : An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 418). They are not jāti-s, but are instead substances, or viśeṣa-s, which, like other substances, should be analyzed through their constituent elements (Perception : An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge 419). Udayana’s criteria for real universals are somewhat stricter than Uddyotakara’s. He claims that jāti-s, unlike upādhi-s, should not be “cross-cutting.” They should not be concomitant on some occasions and not on others (Ganeri Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason 80). Later Navya-Nyāya thought accommodates this perhaps overly strict condition by distinguishing between properties that are “locus-pervading” and equally inherent in all of an object’s parts, and properties that are non-pervasive and merely occurrent (avyāpya-vṛttitva) (Philosophy in Classical India: The Proper Work of Reason 87). Still, the trend across the Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates is clear — the Naiyāyika-s’ universals are restricted to an increasingly small, and increasingly analytic, subset of all apparently generally denoting terms. “Except for certain basic abstract properties belonging to some natural and metaphysical kinds,”
Matilal writes, the Naiyāyika-s agree that “we should explain [apparent universals] away, whenever we can, in terms of observable features of concrete things and human behavior” (*Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* 420).

Through centuries of debate with the Buddhist and other textual traditions, Nyāya philosophers distinguished between the traits of universals, property-particulars, and substances, and natural kinds and nominal artifacts. Simultaneously, they developed tools to distinguish their semantics from the museum view of meaning that Quine criticizes. The fictional object, “Macbeth’s dagger,” they might say, would be shorthand for a causal complex that caused some specific, temporary, and actually occurring cognitive event. Consequently, one would not need to assume that Macbeth’s dagger existed in a netherworld of semi-being to deny its existence. It would exist as an actual object of discussion, and so there would be no reason to postulate a potential infinity of semi-existent nonexistents. As Matilal writes, a fictional object:

> Endures as long as the ‘inner’ episode lasts, its existence being entirely dependent on the episode itself. Hence, according to Nyāya we need not posit in this sense a separate realm of ‘intentional’ objects where such objects are waiting to be grasped by some intentional (i.e., inner) episode. There is no other world than the actual world we live in. (*Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* 410)

Because they are realists about absences, the Naiyāyika-s can parse phrases such as “Macbeth’s dagger does not exist” into phrases like “this material locus is characterized by an absence of Macbeth’s dagger,” where “this locus” refers, not to anything semi-existent yet nonexistent, but to a complex and ostensible state of material occurrences, and “Macbeth’s dagger” references a particularly occurring synthetic, imaginative complex of things that this state of affairs happens, in fact, to be incompatible with.
The material parts of an object are, according to Nyāya, substances, or *dravya*-s, while universals are what make these substances the parts of a complex whole. Qualities are features that make parts of wholes cognizable. Therefore, according to Nyāya, Flossie is a cow and not merely a heap of quality rich substances because the natural kind, cow-ness, inheres in her parts and unifies them into one organism. If cow-ness were not inherent in these parts, then, members of the tradition argue, her parts would not be cognizable as parts of anything. The objects of Nyāya semantics are therefore like the bearers of semantic value in contemporary predicate logic, as others have noted. “A perceptual awareness is a perceiving expressible, minimally, as something a being qualified by a qualifier F (Fa)” (Phillips, Ramanuja Tatacharya and Gaṅgeśa 15).

Nonetheless, comparisons with contemporary predicate logic can only be superficial. Nyāya philosophers contend that people perceive, talk, and make inferences about wholes that are the organic substrata of various parts, features, and universal properties. Whether people’s sense organs merely catch the bill of a platypus, its backside, or its splashing, they first and foremost grasp the platypus. It is possible therefore to represent this object of perception iconographically, not as Fa, where F is a gappy description “… is a platypus” and a is some particular that is subsumed by the general description, but using a particular image. For example:
Further, because, according to Nyāya, a person primarily sees the platypus, and not particular parts or features of the platypus, one may represent this same semantic object, *Fa*, through any of a potentially limitless disjunction of different pictures of the animal. For example:

Regardless of the particular sensory occurrences that provoke a perceptual cognition, people primarily cognize wholes. Consequently, in Nyāya, a single organism can be represented semantically through any of an endless sequence of pictures. In each occasional image, much like with the museum view, a Nyāya semanticist can then identify certain substantial constituents, features, and universals, and stipulate how these various elements inhere in this particular, unique, spatially and temporally fat organism. For example, the picture below shows that a particular animal organism is a locus of a property-particular “platypus,” which is also a locus of the natural kind or *jāti*, “platypus-ness.” The picture also reveals various substantial, property rich parts, such as this platypus’ uniquely black bill. These logical relations can be represented as follows, with each arrow signifying an inherent relationship:

Unlike modernists who embrace the continuum model of language, and unlike first order predicate logics which do not distinguish between property universals and property particulars,
the Naiyāyika-s distinguish between the powers and limitations of universals, qualities, and substances. Each functions differently in the cognition of an object. Although the tradition holds that knowledge could not happen without awareness of natural kinds, it recognizes that universals are not perceptible in the same way as substances and features. Jāti-s inhere in qualities and substances, but nothing inheres in a them. Qualities, or property-particulars, are unique, but natural kinds are quality-less and insubstantial. As Matilal writes, “Awareness of cowness as such (pure, ‘uncoloured’ cowness) is… an essential part of our awareness of a cow as a cow” (421-22). Yet, because this cow-ness cannot be the locus of any feature or substance, it can “appear” in perception only without qualities or material specificity. Consequently, the Naiyāyika-s’ jāti-s are not, in Althusser’s sense, “transparent.”

For example, Nyāya semantics would suggest that David Reimer either had, or hadn’t, a natural kind, maleness, that inhered within him, or that his maleness was merely a contingent conjunction of various observable traits that some pseudo-universal, ‘maleness’, ought to be analyzed into. In the first case, Reimer would have manifested maleness at different times in qualitatively unique ways, even as his body was altered to appear feminine. His sex would then be naturally determined and unchangeable, but no action that he possibly took, including feminine gender expressions, could violate, challenge, or diminish the general property of maleness inherent within him. Consequently, Nyāya appears to suggest with Butler that, if sex categories were natural kinds, then there could be no grounds to assume that maleness generally correlated with sets of “masculine” features, such as having male genitalia, and that femaleness generally correlated with sets of “feminine” features, such as having female genitalia. Second, if “male-ness” were merely an epistemological-semantic artifact, then people’s sexes would merely
be occasional, contingent, and ever-changing pseudo-properties. They would entirely depend on fluctuating confluences of detectable characteristics, such as hormone levels, bodily traits, and chromosomes. When any one of these constituent elements changed, a person’s “sex” would also change, and there would then be no cause to restrict “kinds” of sexed bodies to two, three, four, etc.

After Diñnāga’s intervention, Nyāya’s semantics clearly does not permit the sequence of substitutions between generic traits and materially specific use-values that Marx criticizes. Because the Naiyāyika-s’ universals cannot appear with particular features, the global corporatist sequence of substitutions between individuals and subjects is technically forbidden. Apparent universals are either natural and eternal categories (re-presentations) that cannot themselves be directly characterized, or fluctuating pseudo-categories (upādhi-s — representations) that directly appear to people’s cognitions. If “humanity,” for example, were a real universal, then no subset of human representatives could paradigmatically re-present it. Instead, the jāti would be a colorless element of reality that brought plural, diverse individuals into one particular type of organic whole. Individual cognizers would use their particular memories to differently identify persons who exemplified humanity, but no one representation could objectively exhaust the representative concept. The following, for instance, would be one of potentially infinitely many Nyāya representations of humanity:
Genuine subject terms must be pluralistically represented in the Nyāya system and do not demand that “others” be derealized so that materially specific subsets can privilege themselves as the category’s natural, preestablished champions. Instead, acts of derealization and material privileging would indicate a failure to correctly distinguish between qualities and universals.

Nyāya’s theorists of knowledge and meaning are neither advocates of the museum view nor global corporatists. Still, as with the Buddhist model, one can still wonder whether the Nyāya tradition offers contemporary epistemologists resources that they might practically use to address modern problems of epistemological violence and systematic alienation. For example, it may still be doubtful whether unqualified, colorless jāti-s can function except, at some point, through furtive appeal to given, transparently established fields of common, homogeneous understanding. A primary objective of future poststructuralist studies of classical Indian epistemology should be to develop practical knowledge systems to respond to these concerns.

For now, let’s examine the Nyāya and Buddhist pramāṇa theorists’ operative epistemological criteria for perceptual judgments and consider whether they implicitly or explicitly require that knowers be homogeneous and exchangeable, rather than merely individual, embodied, and occasional. Both traditions locate knowledge in cognitive occasions,
instead of realms that multitudes of people could possibly share. As Phillips and Tatacharya write, a \textit{jñāna} or cognition in Nyāya is ontologically “a short-lived episodic quality of an individual self” (13). They agree with the Buddhists that epistemological agency, and the accurate grasping of reality, occurs in embodied individuals rather than subjects.\footnote{Matilal contends, I think problematically, that “knowledge is usually understood by the philosophers of the Western tradition, and by ordinary people of any tradition, not as a momentary episode of the mind, but as a more stable, intersubjectively communicable item” Bimal Krishna Matilal, \textit{Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986) 101.}

The Naiyāyika-s’ criteria of perceptual knowledge are strictly external and objective. Sūtra I.I.4 of the \textit{Nyāya-Sutra-s} defines \textit{pratyakṣa} as a cognition that is generated from the contact of a sense organ with an object. This contact should be decisive (\textit{vyavasāyātmaka}), non-deviating (\textit{a-vyabhicārin}) and non-verbal (\textit{a-vyapadeśya}) \cite{Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge}. Because having the nature of certainty is a material characterization of a kind of psychological event, the first criterion would rule out cognitive occasions that are not judgments that an individual has reached at a particular time and place. For example, it would disqualify doubt (\textit{saṃśaya}) as a form of perceptual knowledge. According to the Naiyāyika philosophers, knowledge is an occurrent psychological state that critical investigations and analyses of related and embodied individuals should aspire toward. Conversely, doubt, which is materially and qualitatively different from certainty, is an occurrent psychological state that propels critical investigation and analysis \cite{Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge}. The second definitional criterion of perception, \textit{a-vyabhicārin}, rules out perceptual judgments that subsequently turn out to be false. If a person’s occasional perceptual judgment “cow” can later be trumped by another perceptual judgment (e.g., “cow costume”), then it cannot now qualify as a knowledge occasion.
The Nyāya tradition treats perceptual knowledge as an objective question — it is an event that either happens or doesn’t, regardless of how people judge it and whether they are reflectively aware of it. Nonetheless, the tradition gives individuals’ practical guidelines that they can use, with the unique others’ whom they happen to be momentarily entwined with, to gauge the pramāṇa credentials of specific cognitive judgments. For example, to distinguish genuine perceptual knowledge and mere perception-appearances (pratyaksābhāsa-s), people should look for several potential defects (dosa-s) among the causes of a doubtful cognition, such as an environment that is conducive to natural illusions, material problems with a sense organ, and so on. To distinguish between genuine inferential knowledge and mistaken inferences, Nyāya also advises people, as Phillips and Tatacharya write, “to check the process to make sure that it is based on a pervasion of F-hood by G-hood, considering an inference from Fa to Ga” (11-12). If individuals doubt that some inferential cognition is pramāṇa-generated, they can check for other materially evident positive correlations, e.g., concrete examples of other things that are both F and G, and materially evident negative correlations, e.g., an absence of counterexamples of actual things that are F but are not G. Through these sorts of tools, the Naiyāyika-s argue, embodied individuals have fallible means of relieving themselves of doubts and correcting mistakes.

As we saw in Chapter Two, the Buddhist pramāṇavādin-s argue that perceptual judgments operate through inference. People are presented with unique sensory provocations (e.g., a) on specific occasions and then infer, through threefold considerations of compatibility and incompatibility, that an “entity” before them is a kind of thing such as a cow (Fa). The Naiyāyika-s use their theory of natural kinds to explain people’s abilities to perceive in
conceptually-rich ways, whereas the Buddhists explain this process by citing the behavioral and linguistic habits and aversions that happen to govern actual, embodied individuals on specific cognitive occasions. Despite these doctrinal differences, both traditions offer specific, practicable criteria that individuals can use to critically reflect on people’s judgments and check for mistakes.

One could still wonder whether epistemologies that do not share modernity’s assumption that knowledge is shared and impersonal can practically function. What, for example, would possibly stop the kind of “semantic creep” that Quine warns against? Can either Buddhist or Nyāya pramāṇa tradition claim that someone who reaches the following sequence of perceptual judgments is wrong?

“Cow!” “Cow!” “Cow!” “Cow!” “Cow!”

First, in both traditions, such a sequence of cognitions would need to occur to pose any potential problem. Merely theoretical cognitions, or prospective cognitions that do not have materially specific, causal bases would cause no concern. Second, in the Buddhist tradition, every member of this sequence would be ultimately erroneous. The apparent “cow” in each case (whether it was “really” a cow or “actually” a rabbit) would be no more that a heap of qualities that an individual had imaginatively synthesized according to a particular, momentary set of purposes, habits, aversions, etc. If, in addition, a member of the sequence was also conventionally wrong, then, the
Buddhist texts indicate, this cognition would eventually fail to satisfy the particular expectations and desires that prompted the individual to conceptually construct it. Additionally, given any cause to doubt, critical reflection might help a person to avoid future disappointment by prompting some consideration of whether a trait that appears to be invariably associated with cows, such as a dewlop, occurs in each judgment, such as the last member of the sequence.

With the Naiyāyika-s, the last judgment of the sequence would simply be objectively wrong, for, as you can see, the animal is qualified by being a rabbit, and the quality of being a rabbit is incompatible with the natural kind, cow-ness. People who sought to intervene against this individual’s judgment might therefore work to identify possible causal defects with the individual’s cognition, as well as their own. In particular, they might prod their memories about the meaning of “cow” and about cows they had previously encountered. This prodding would end when they were no longer in doubt.

Note the important role that doubt plays in this proposed practice of nonviolent practical logic. As Phillips and Tatacharya write, “disagreement is one of several conditions leading to real doubt, and real questions can arise” (12). In cases of disagreement, and other causes of cognitive wavering and hesitation, the Nyāya texts teach people to attempt to identify the apparent category of knowledge on a particular occasion, and consider whether the cognition satisfies the conditions for that pramāṇa. In particular, people involved in the debate should look for symptoms of excellence and defect in the causal process that generated a doubtful cognition. It follows, therefore, that according to Nyāya and Buddhist pramāṇavādin-s, people who are generally interested in critical inquiry, and truth, should make themselves vulnerable to possible challenges by unfamiliar, and perhaps apparently woefully misguided others. By exposing
embodied cognitive processes to causes for doubt, and conducting critical investigations
according to the Nyāya system, people will, Gotama suggests in the first sūtra of the Nyāya-
Sūtra-s, help to bring about the supreme good.

Neither party of the Nyāya-Buddhist pramāṇa debates appears to be implicitly or
explicitly obliged to agree that transparently obvious epistemological subjects must mediate
knowledge occasions, and yet neither seems to collapse into relativism, wholesale aporia, or
absurdity. They can adequately show that some occurrent inferences are valid, and that others are
not. There is therefore some cause for hope that poststructuralist theorists may begin to imagine
practicable alternatives to modern practices of epistemological violence and systematic
alienation in part by creatively attending to these traditions’ epistemological resources. If
Hoagland’s antagonists in the academy had been committed to the Nyāya system instead of an
overly confident global corporatist epistemological framework, for example, they ideally would
not have dismissed her challenge out of hand, but would have instead recognized the relevance
of the specific counterexamples she mentioned, noticed that these examples challenged certain
logically relevant assumptions even if Hoagland and her expressions themselves seemed queer,
and have therefore been caused, if only for awhile, to doubt.
Bibliography


