ALTERNATIVE TALK OF THE INDEFINITE:

A CROSS-CULTURAL EXAMINATION OF EPISTEMIC AND SEMANTIC PROBLEMS IN THE METAPHYSICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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DEDICATION

For my family
near, far, past, present, and future…
I could only express my love for you all by never not talking about it

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the linguistic nature of metaphysical theorizing about consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness is typically characterized in terms of the subjective character of experience (Nagel 1974). But the conventional reference of the term encompasses the brute fact of phenomenal character (*phenomenality* for short), which, unlike *subjective* experience, is neither attached to *a* point of view nor outside the realm of objective facts *par excellance (*Ibid). Utilizing classical nondualist Vedānta, I show that phenomenality invariantly pervades all subjective *and* objective phenomena, including all linguistic phenomena. I argue that we would need to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality to express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, but would face a powerful dilemma in trying to do so. On the one hand, because it *cannot be differentiated from* language, phenomenality cannot be tracked as a referent by our determinative linguistic utterances; it is inexpressible *in this sense*. On the other hand, for the same reason, it also cannot be coherently extended in concept by any utterance expressing its inexpressibility. To untangle this impasse, I engage the Jaina theory of sevenfold modal description (*syād-vāda*) and the Neo-Vedāntic concept of *alternation* to demonstrate the semantic functionality of a description of phenomenality consisting in an unconstrained series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances. Then, engaging the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva tradition and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, I argue that such a dynamic description would embody a distinctive species of knowledge by acquaintance with its 'referent' and an intersubjectively accessible variant of release (*Mokṣa*) from the existential anxiety of seeking absolutist knowledge. I argue systematically for these theses and, along the way, offer a reading of several schools in the Indian philosophical tradition which foregrounds their consensus on our inability to linguistically *capture* that luminosity which pervades all things and what it is like to know it.

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INTRODUCTION

A History of the Hard Problem

Consciousness has long been considered a mysterious phenomenon. The mystery of consciousness may be thought of as consisting in two questions: first, what *is* consciousness? Call this the *descriptive* question about consciousness. Second, how does consciousness relate to the apparently non-conscious processes that constitute the brain, body, and external environment of conscious beings? Call this the *explanatory* question about consciousness. In discussions surrounding both these questions, consensus is scarce. Consciousness has been called a "mongrel concept" (Block 1995, 1); theorizing about consciousness is significantly complicated by the fact that the word 'consciousness' is not univocal (Levy 2014, 129). Philosophers distinguish between multiple senses of the word, perhaps most notably between *phenomenal consciousnes* and *access-consciousness* (Ibid). Phenomenal consciousness is notoriously difficult to define in a non-circular way. It seems as if we can only point to phenomenal consciousness (P-consciousness) by using rough synonyms: "P-consciousness is experience. P-conscious properties are experiential properties. The totality of the experiential properties of a state are "what it is like" to have it" (Block 1995, 230). On a prevailing characterization of phenomenal consciousness, for an organism to be phenomenally conscious is for there to be 'something it is like' to be them (Nagel 1974, 436). Access-consciousness, on the other hand, is "a kind of availability of informational contents" (Levy 2014, 129). A state is access conscious if, in virtue of one's having the state, a representation of its content is "inferentially promiscuous", i.e., poised for use as a premise in reasoning, or for rational control of speech or action (Block 1995, 231).

Demystifying consciousness is thus not a singular task. It is common to distinguish between the easy problems of consciousness, which pertain to the explanation of a system's

capacities to process and integrate information (that is, to the explanation of access conscious phenomena), and the 'hard problem' of consciousness. The 'hard problem' of consciousness is the problem of explaining phenomenal consciousness, or experience (Chalmers 2003, 3). Explaining access consciousness is supposed to be 'easy' because there's no in principle issue with the idea that a physical system could be conscious in the sense of implementing access consciousness (machines have states the contents of which are poised for use in intentional action of a sort), and there's no obvious obstacle to an eventual explanation of access conscious phenomena in physical (information processing, functionalist, etc.) terms (Chalmers 2003, 2). By contrast, it is difficult to explain phenomenal consciousness in physical terms, and unclear how the physical systems that implement cognitive processes could give rise to experience (Chalmers 1996, 2003; Levy 2014, 4). Notably, the difficulty of explaining phenomenal consciousness has been put like this: "even once one has an explanation of all the relevant functions in the vicinity of consciousness—discrimination, integration, access, report, control—there may still remain a further question: why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience?" (Chalmers 2003, 3). The idea here is that 'experience' is a "further explanandum" over and above the capacities of a physical system that are explicable in physical terms (ibid., 11). Accordingly, we can think of the mystery of consciousness as consisting in the descriptive and explanatory questions about *phenomenal consciousness* , or experience, rather than access consciousness.

There are many theories of consciousness which address these questions. For clarificatory purposes, I'll distinguish between *metaphysical* theories of consciousness, which aim to locate consciousness in the overall scheme of reality and *specific* theories of consciousness, which offer detailed accounts of its nature, features and role (Van Gulick 2014). Metaphysical theories of consciousness bear more directly than specific theories on the descriptive and explanatory

questions about consciousness, although specific theories often carry or imply commitments about what consciousness is and how it relates to phenomena typically categorized as 'physical'.

In this dissertation, I am focused on the metaphysical landscape, first because it is in that context that the most fundamental attempts to unravel the mystery of consciousness are made, and second, because the further explanandum at issue in discourse surrounding the mystery is significant. Phenomenal consciousness *matters* (Levy 2014, 127)—we make moral judgements on the basis of the absence or presence of phenomenal consciousness (e.g., as in cases of abortion or assisted suicide). Moreover, our basic conceptions of phenomenal consciousness inform how we think of ourselves as conscious beings in relation to other conscious beings, in relation to apparently non-conscious entities, and in relation to the vast world(s) around us. We may think, for example, that phenomenal consciousness is or is not present in animals or in concrete phenomena, is or is not irreducibly perspectival, is or is not something over and above a system's capacities to discriminate stimuli or report information, etc. Each of these metaphysical views have potential ethical, practical, and psychological consequences for us as individuals and collectives. In my view, the stakes involved in the enterprise that is the metaphysics of consciousness are quite far-reaching.

It is worrisome and fascinating that the metaphysical landscape is fraught with conceptual and terminological ambiguity. Terms like 'mental' and 'physical' are "precariously ambiguous and vague" (Feigl 1958, 387). There are, for example, multiple conceptions of what it is for a phenomenon to satisfy the condition of being 'physical'. On the 'theory-based' account a property (or, by extension, a phenomenon) is physical *iff* it is the sort of property that physical theory tells us about (Stoljar 2022, 1). On the 'object-based' account, a property is physical *iff* it is the sort of property had by paradigmatic physical objects and their constituents (Ibid). Both of these

conceptions of the physical are obviously circular—in characterizing something that satisfies the condition of being physical, both appeal to the notion of something physical (a theory or an object) (Ibid). We cannot independently account for how a *theory* or an *object* might satisfy the condition of being physical if the meaning of the term 'physical' is fixed by reference to a physical theory or object in the first place. A further issue with the theory-based conception is that it allows for wider application of the term 'physical' along with the expansion of physical theory. Let's imagine that physical theory expands, such that it begins to explain properties (or, more broadly, phenomena) we do not take to be physical at present, for example, mental properties. Our continued use of the term 'physical' would be arbitrary in that world, or at least markedly dissimilar in terms of its reference and meaning. The term 'physical' is already vague but it at least tacitly *connotes* a class of phenomena opposed to the class of phenomena we typically categorize as 'mental'. The expansion of physical theory, wherein the mechanisms by which a theory might satisfy the condition of being physical are already intractable, and such that mental and other apparently non-physical phenomena are subsumed under the category of the 'physical', is arguably co-extensive with transcendence of the sphere in which the term 'physical' has meaningful, albeit equivocal, applicability.[1]

Hempel (1980) expresses a similar worry concerning the physicalist claim that all empirical statements can be expressed in the language of physics:

> …the language of *what* physics is meant? Surely not that of, say, the 18th century physics; for it contains terms like 'caloric fluid', whose use is governed by theoretical assumptions now thought false. Nor can the language of contemporary physics claim the role of unitary language, since it will no doubt undergo further changes, too (ibid., 195).

The physicalist's reference to the language of physics cannot be to the terms characteristic of past physical theories, because many of those theories have been shown to be false or untenable.

[1] A similar intuition is captured in Hempel's Dilemma.

Similarly, they cannot mean that the current language of physics can serve as a unitary language of science, because the terms characteristic of contemporary theories are characteristic of theories subject to change. Hempel does not explicitly mention the language of a future physics here, but his comments have been interpreted as setting up a dilemma involving reference to an unspecified future physics. The dilemma has been called 'Hempel's Dilemma' and has been formulated variously.

Crane and Mellor (1990) have interpreted the dilemma along these lines: for some physicalists, what it is for a science to be 'physical' is for it to be reducible in principle to physics. The question is, *what* physics is so equipped with suitable bridge laws? The view that the sciences are reducible in principle to current physics "entails that any future extensions of it would not be physical" (Crane and Mellor 1990, 188). And nobody believes that current physics is complete. If, on the other hand, we apply reducibility in principle to an unspecified future physics, "we shall not be able to say which sciences are physical until we know which of them *that* physics must cover—which is just what the principle was supposed to tell us" (Crane and Mellor 1990, 188). On their view, the dilemma entails that the concept of the physical cannot be defined as that which is reducible in principle to physics. According to Firt, Henmo and Shenker (2022), the main gist common to various formulations of the dilemma goes like this:

> "On the one hand, there are good reasons to think that contemporary physics (let alone past physics) is false, at least to some extent; on the other hand, the nature of future physics is, to a significant extend, unknown. Therefore, the reference (or more generally meaning) of 'physics' is either false or so ambiguous as to be, for all practical purposes, empty" (Firt, Hemmo, and Shenker 2022, 2).

Here they frame the dilemma in more general terms and point to an issue regarding the ambiguity of the *reference* of term 'physics'. The reference of the term 'physics' is either false or ambiguous. For them, the dilemma entails that physicalism is unacceptable. My concern is not with any entailment about physicalism, but with the precarity of theoretical terms in general.

In expressing his concern about physicalism, Hempel does indirectly note the precarity of the term 'physical'. After noting the incompleteness of contemporary physics, he says, "the thesis of physicalism would seem to require a language in which a true theory of all physical phenomena can be formulated. But it is quite unclear what is to be understood here by a physical phenomenon, especially in the context of a doctrine that has taken a determinedly linguistic turn" (ibid., 195). The meaning of this sentence is not clear on the surface, but is analyzable in terms of Hempel's (1969) critique of reductionist theses that are construed as ontological claims. He considers both the thesis that biological phenomena are basically nothing else than physicochemical phenomena governed by physicochemical laws, and the thesis that mental phenomena (mental states or events) are basically just bodily phenomena (bodily states or events). The latter reductionist thesis expresses the "empirical component" of psychophysical identity theory (Hempel 1969, 183). His general point concerning these reductionist theses is that there is reason to give them a "linguistic turn" (Ibid) and giving them a linguistic turn renders the reference of their terms extremely obscure.

Consider, for example, the thesis (U) that "For every kind M of mental state or event there exists a kind B of bodily state or event such that a person experiences a state or event of kind M if and only if a state or event of kind B occurs in his body" (Hempel 1969, 183). On at least one conception of a bodily state (wherein a person's body is in a state *iff* that person is in a mental state), *U* is trivially true. To avoid such triviality, the scope of the notions of a mental state and a bodily state must be indicated, which requires specifying the theories that provide the conceptual frameworks which serve to settle these matters (Ibid). This renders the distinction underlying *U* a distinction between phenomena characterized by psychological theories and phenomena characterized by physico-chemical-biological theories. And *this* recommends giving *U* a linguistic

turn: “for every characterization of a state or event that makes use of psychological terms, there is a coextensive one expressed in physical, chemical and biological terms alone” (ibid., 185). But this formulation is inadequate. It allows for thinking that coextension may obtain between terms characteristic of false or untenable theories. That being so, the linguistic variant of *U* must be further re-formulated as the thesis that “for any mental-state characterization occurring in a *true* psychological theory, there exists a coextensive bodily-state characterization in some *true* physico-chemical-biological theory” (Ibid). But this re-formulation of the thesis appeals to the notion of *any* true physico-chemical-biological theory (call it a true physical theory), which is an “extremely elusive idea” (ibid., 182). We might say that a true physical theory is one that is true of all physical phenomena. But on the theory-based account of the physical, what it is for a phenomenon to be physical is for it to be explained by a physical theory. Circularity lurks in this construal of *U*: in appealing to the notion of a true physical theory we appeal to the notion of a theory true of all physical phenomena, but to know that a theory is true of all physical phenomena we’d have to know which phenomena are physical, which is what the theory is supposed to tell us in the first place. I think this is what Hempel is suggesting when he says that it's unclear what is to be understood by a physical phenomenon in the context of the linguistically bent physicalist doctrine.

I have a further point to make: in the context of the linguistically bent *U*, which is roughly the thesis that the terms characteristic of psychological theories are coextensive with the terms characteristic of physical theories, the terms ‘mental’ and ‘physical’ lose the determinative power they had when their references were mutually excluded. Hempel says something similar: “if every mental state is identical with a physical state, then there can be no empirical characteristics that differentiate mental states from physical states: the distinction will pertain to alternative ways of characterizing the same state” (Hempel 1969, 185). He notes that in giving U a linguistic bent we

fail to express its philosophical intent, which is reducing the mental to the physical. We end up with two ways of referencing the same thing, not the reduction of one sort of thing to another. My point is similar but related; I'm not concerned precisely with reductive theses construed as ontological views, although I agree with Hempel's call for the linguistic turn, and I agree that the linguistic turn undermines the relevant philosophical intent. The point to note for my purposes is that when theoretical terms no longer denote exclusively, they denote ambiguously. They reference *some* phenomenon, but *do not express what that phenomenon is in itself*. This is a consequence of the linguistic re-formulation of reductionist theses construed as ontological views. It is also a consequence of the theory-based conception of the physical itself, which allows for the expansion of physical theory beyond the sphere in which the terms 'mental' and 'physical' are opposed.

Furthermore, although philosophers distinguish between phenomenal consciousness and access consciousness, phenomenal consciousness is gestured at rather than defined—it is characterized by use of rough synonyms like 'experience', by appeals to instances of phenomenal consciousness, or by understandably but woefully self-referring statements like "phenomenal consciousness is the kind of consciousness such that there is something it is like to be phenomenally conscious" (Levy 2014, 129). All this goes to say that the meaning of the concept 'phenomenal consciousness' is amorphous, and this is indicated at the level of language—we aren't able or sure how to say what it *is*, at least not precisely. Hence, the venture of trying to sort out what consciousness *is* (the metaphysics of consciousness). As I see it, the fact that our concept of the explanandum at issue in discourse about phenomenal consciousness is amorphous and imprecise should encourage us to be careful when referring to it. However, some liberty is taken when using synonyms for phenomenal consciousness. Chalmers, for example, sees the differences among the terms 'consciousness', 'experience', 'qualia', 'phenomenality', "phenomenal",

'subjective experience', and 'what it is like' as "mostly subtle matters of connotation" (Chalmers 1996, 6). But there are potentially weighty denotative differences amongst these terms. There's also some perplexity involved in referring to an undefined phenomenon by pointing to instances of it. I'm not claiming that it's impossible to correctly identify instances of a phenomenon without knowing exactly what that phenomenon is. But it's certainly tricky to know that all instances identified are indeed instances of that phenomenon and not of some closely related but subtly distinct phenomenon. Let's imagine, for example, that we can point to instances of epistemic injustice, like "identity-prejudicial credibility deficit" (Fricker 2007, 86). We have a vague notion of epistemic injustice as injustice pertaining to knowing, and we intuitively grasp that there's something troubling about a speaker expressing some knowledge and receiving less credibility than she otherwise would have because of a stereotype embodying a prejudice that works against her. But, in this scenario, we don't know what epistemic injustice *is*. We don't know that epistemic injustice is "a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*" (ibid., 20). We might, in this case, identify credibility *excess* as an instance of epistemic injustice. We might think that there is something troubling about a speaker expressing some knowledge and receiving *more* credibility than she is due because of some stereotype regarding her identity. But we would fail to see that "while credibility excess may (unusually) be disadvantageous in various ways, it does not undermine, insult, or otherwise without a property respect for the speaker *qua* subject of knowledge", so in itself it effects no epistemic injustice (Ibid). The instance of epistemic injustice identified would at most be an instance of "injustice as distributive unfairness"—the sort of injustice that occurs when someone gets more than their fair share of a good (ibid., 19). The instance identified would be an instance of injustice, which is related to epistemic injustice, but would not be an instance of epistemic injustice. Analogously,

we might have a general notion of the explanandum explanation of which would suffice for explanation of phenomenal consciousness, but not know what that explanandum is, and as a result identify some instances of that explanandum that are actually closely related but distinct phenomena.

On my view, philosophical discourse about consciousness needs to be clarified by attending more carefully to the linguistic nature of theorizing about consciousness. To be fair, there has been discussion of the precarity of theoretical terms (Feigl 1958; Hempel 1969), the definition of theoretical terms (Lewis 1970), and the linguistic dimensions of the philosophy of mind (Chomsky 2000). But the repercussions of these cogitations have been piecemeal—from a bird's-eye view, debates about consciousness have continued much the same. Terminological ambiguity is still a problem, consensus about how theoretical terms should be defined remains scarce, and explicitly linguistic interventions have targeted *individual* metaphysical projects, rather than the metaphysical landscape as a whole. Chomsky (2000), for example, critiques the use of philosophical arguments in explaining consciousness. But his critique poses a dilemma for those who endorse methodological naturalism (the commitment to theorizing phenomena by pursuing methods typical of the sciences) and at the same time use terms and concepts at home in the discipline of metaphysics. Those uncommitted to the naturalistic project need not heed his commentary. He is also critical of the idea that we can integrate our theories of the 'mental', including, in particular, linguistics, with our theories of the brain and other relevant domains by means of reduction (Smith 2000, viii). I'll say more on this point later on. For now, I'll just note that Chomsky's lines of critique most obviously threatens the individual metaphysical project of reducing the 'mental' to the 'physical', not the broader metaphysical landscape.

Regarding the metaphysics of consciousness in general, there has, to my knowledge, been no systematic examination of its linguistic nature. Little fuss has been made of two facts: first, the 'further explanandum' at issue in metaphysical debates about phenomenal consciousness is intimately connected with linguistic phenomena (words, symbols, sentences, arguments, theories, etc.)— in theorizing consciousness, we describe or explain the phenomenon *referred to* by the word we use to represent it, rather than the *word* 'consciousness' itself. Refence and ideation are causally interrelated—our minimal conception of the *phenomenon* we *mean* when we say 'phenomenal consciousness' is influenced from the very beginning by how we refer to it (even before we understand what it *is*). The basic ambiguity of the term 'consciousness' (more precisely, 'phenomenal consciousness') is thus a problem that cuts across divisions in the metaphysical terrain—it's a threat to the possibility of having coherent debates about consciousness in general. The confusion and conflation of theoretical terms has the potential consequence of theories of consciousness being theories of dissimilar phenomena. Moreover, there is 'something it is like' to think, hear, read, write or articulate any linguistic phenomena. Put baldly, the point is that we can't purloin phenomenal consciousness from the domain of language. Second, *all* metaphysical theories of consciousness *themselves* consist in linguistic phenomena (words, symbols, sentences, arguments, etc.). Considered together, these two facts should cause serious pause: in theorizing consciousness at all (even if we take ourselves to be explaining it *away*) we are using language to analyze something intimately connected with language. Even without further analysis of the potential conundrums involved in doing so, we should sense at least a hint of questionable recursiveness. This dissertation is an exercise in acknowledging, appreciating, and examining the significance of the linguistic nature of theorizing about consciousness, which, I argue, is non-trivial with respect to the possibility of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness.

I begin this exercise by examining how inquiry into the ontological status of phenomenal consciousness is constrained from the very beginning by the ambiguity of the term. I argue that the conventional reference of the term phenomenal consciousness encompasses the brute fact of phenomenal character, which I call *phenomenality* for short; all subjective and objective phenomena, if they are phenomenal at all, have co-present phenomenality. Discourse about phenomenal consciousness is largely organized around examination of *subjective* explananda. But there is this broader, neither exclusively subjective *nor* exclusively objective explanandum which, I argue, we would need to explain or fix in concept to satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing complete determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. All subjective explananda normally designated by the term 'phenomenal consciousness' (e.g., all points of view and all qualia) have co-present phenomenality, and phenomenality *itself* is an even further explanandum beyond, although not in reality separate from, the domain of subjective explananda. Phenomenality is invariantly co-present with and indistinguishable from all subjective and objective phenomena, including all linguistic phenomena. Because we would need to apprehend phenomenality by speech to satisfy the relevant metaphysical ambition, the metaphysical enterprise organized around this ambition faces a peculiar dilemma. This dilemma arises from the ubiquity of this even further explanandum in language, and consists in its paradoxical inexpressibility. By 'inexpressible' here I mean 'resistant to determinative conceptual and linguistic capture'. Because phenomenality is *inseparable* from linguistic phenomena, it cannot be tracked as a referent by the sort of utterances we employ to express determinative knowledge, i.e., utterances which express the act type of referring to some phenomenon and extending its concept by applying a property or set of properties to it. Such speech acts would be problematically intentional and dualistic relative to an *ideal* (targeted) referent (i.e., phenomenality) which simply

cannot be distinguished from any linguistic phenomenon whatsoever. This is the first horn of the dilemma I think faces the metaphysics of consciousness. Paradoxically, this problematic intentionality would be a property even of utterances we might employ or imply in accepting *that* phenomenality resists conceptual and linguistic capture in this way. This is because, I argue, expressing that phenomenality *is inexpressible* (even, on my view, in principled silence) is logically equivalent to a determinative linguistic utterance problematically intentional relative to an ideal referent that cannot be distinguished from linguistic phenomena. Construed in general terms, this second horn of the dilemma is that even apophatic approaches to talking about phenomenality are intentional, and thus subtly inadequate for directing our awareness to what we are trying to talk about (something radically inseparable from the linguistic domain). Having argued that the philosophical enterprise organized around the ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness faces a dilemma arising from the intimacy of this even further explanandum and language itself, I explore how an alternative, dynamical, *broadly* nonintentional way of talking about phenomenality might resolve the dilemma by expressing what phenomenality is, *in a sense*, without expressing determinate knowledge *of* it. I add that this alternative approach to theorizing phenomenality offers further philosophical boons, e.g., embodying a species of knowledge by acquaintance with what it theorizes, therein significantly complicating the traditional epistemological distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquittance, and, additionally, demystifying what *liberation* from the existential anxiety of seeking absolutist knowledge might look like in the midst of conceptual and linguistic proliferation.

I should note here that many of the arguments in this dissertation are informed by the conceptual resources of schools in the Indian philosophical tradition. The Indian philosophical

tradition is staggeringly diverse. It is dangerous, and typically unhelpful, to generalize over schools in the tradition—in so doing we risk suggesting a reductive, monolithic conception of 'Indian philosophy'. At the same time, the history of Indian philosophical activity is distinctive for a few reasons, not in the least for its long-standing focalization around analyzing language. The scriptures (Vedas), which gave birth to the proliferation of the commentarial tradition, and the development of the six orthodox (*āstika*) systems of thought (Vireswarananda 1962, ii), were always regarded as embodying truths derived from revelation, and were understood as a body of statements (Matilal 1990, 4). The "linguistic nature" of the Vedas promoted awareness of language or "verbal testimony" as a source of knowledge, which in turn promoted inquiry about how "a bit of language, a word or a sentence, imparts knowledge to the hearer" (Ibid). Analyzing language thus played a central role in classical theorizing about sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*s): "the question was: how does a linguistic utterance, through communication of its meaning, impart knowledge to the hearer?" (ibid., 5). The theories expressed by the orthodox schools were grasped *as linguistically communicated*, and were therefore analyzed in terms of their linguistic nature and function. Due to the focalization of the history of Indian philosophical activity around analyzing language, various schools in the tradition are well-equipped to assist me as I attempt to course-correct the enterprise.

It would be appropriate to characterize my methodological approach as being consistent with the spirit of the classical Indian grammarians (Bhartṛhari, for example) who, like some modern philosophers in the West (Dummet, Wittgenstein, etc.), view the philosophy of language as the foundation of "all the rest in philosophy" (Matilal 1990, 4). I do not take on this mantle arbitrarily—I consider the grammarian's approach particularly apt in any discussion driven by a set of descriptive and explanatory questions about 'consciousness'. If we pause and reflect for a

moment, we should have no trouble seeing that what we mean by 'consciousness' (in both colloquial and technical contexts, i.e., as when people say 'my cat is conscious' just as when philosophers use the term 'phenomenal consciousness') is intimately related to language. There is always 'something it is like' to think, read, write, or utter a word or sentence. Even in the absence of further analysis, the obvious intimacy of what we mean by 'phenomenal consciousness' and language should cause us to theorize 'consciousness' *by means of language* cautiously and curiously.

Chapter Summaries

In part I of this dissertation (chapters 1-3, including the addendum to chapter 2), I examine the linguistic nature of metaphysical discourse about phenomenal consciousness and direct attention to an even further explanandum beyond, *although not in reality separable from*, subjective explananda. This even further explanandum is one we would need to apprehend by speech to satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. Then, I argue that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness arising from the ubiquity of this explanandum in the domain of language. In broadest possible terms, the dilemma is this: on the one hand, we cannot coherently express determinate knowledge of phenomenality. On the other hand, we cannot coherently express *that we cannot express* determinate knowledge of phenomenality.

In chapter 1, I disambiguate the concept of phenomenal consciousness and argue that there is an even further explanandum in the metaphysics of consciousness. I distinguish between, on the one hand, subjective experience (considered inclusive of what Uriah Kriegel (2009) calls 'the subjective character of experience'—the *fact* that there is something it is like to be an organism—*and* 'the qualitative character of experience'—the *specific* way contents of experience show up for

subjects i.e., qualia), and on the other hand, the brute fact of phenomenal character, which I call *phenomenality* for short. I use the term 'phenomenality' as a heuristic, to guide attention to that luminosity which is the invariant condition and concomitant of subjective phenomena, and no less the invariant condition and concomitant of all *objective* phenomena. I argue, on the basis of this disambiguation, that the hard problem of consciousness is ill-framed as *the* problem of phenomenal consciousness or experience—it is better understood as the problem of explaining the phenomenon that calls out for explanation from the perspective in which physical explanation has priority, and *that* further explanandum is *subjective experience* (in the sense of my use of the term). Phenomenality is an *even* further explanandum (albeit one not separable in reality from subjective phenomena), and it resists subjective and objective explanation alike. It resists explication in the sense that it cannot be distinguished from *any* component of *any* explanation and is therefore not possibly an explanandum in an explanation, which is a *mere*, single component of an explanation. This is a very general and preliminary account of why phenomenality resists explication.

In chapter 2, I offer an extended reconstruction of classical nondualist Vedānta (Advaita Vedānta) to establish that the conceptual distinction I've drawn between subjective experience and phenomenality has solid historical precedent. Śaṅkara, the primary exponent of Advaita Vedānta, famously holds that pure nondual consciousness (*Brahman*) alone is real, and the phenomenal world of diversity is false (*mithyā*). In my reconstruction of Śaṅkara's nondualist view (*advaita-vāda*), I attend to subtler aspects of the view which temper its seemingly absolutist proclamations. In particular, I emphasize that Śaṅkara's idiosyncratic concept of falsity (*mithyātva*) has sweeping relevance to the conceptual semantics of the theory overall. In this context, the false is indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) as either absolutely real or unreal. I argue, for reasons I go into depth about in the chapter, that *any* expression of determinate knowledge of Brahman—even the

thesis that pure nondual consciousness alone is real—will be false (*mithyā*) in the relevant Advaitic sense of the term. Overall, I argue that Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* does not express an absolutist metaphysical thesis but instead highlights our inability to wrap our words and concepts around that luminosity which pervades all finite things. My reconstruction of Śaṅkaran nondualism allows me to analyze phenomenality on analogy with the concept of the witness (*sākṣin*), both in terms of it being conceptually distinguishable from *subjective* experience, and in terms of it being something which radically, paradoxically resists conceptual and linguistic capture (even *as* something beyond the realm of name and form). In doing all this, I also foreground resources which support my subsequent argument that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness.

In the addendum to chapter 2 (chapter 2a) I show how my reading of Śaṅkaran nondualism deals with the contemporary interpretive view that Śaṅkara maintains a stark anti-realist stance on the phenomenal world, including macrolevel subjects (Gasparri 2022). In resisting the anti-realist interpretation of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda*, I reinforce my view that Advaita Vedānta does not, all things considered, express any absolutist metaphysical thesis, and expand on how it highlights our limitations relative to the ideal of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness.

In chapter three, I argue in earnest for the thesis that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness consisting in the paradoxical inexpressibility of phenomenality (understood on analogy with the concept of the witness (*sākṣin*) in Advaita Vedānta). My argument proceeds in two parts: first, I argue for the thesis which communicates the first horn of the dilemma: we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality in the sense that our determinative linguistic utterances cannot track it as a referent. The *de facto* referent of any determinative linguistic utterance will be something distinct from the utterance itself, and thus not

the *ideal* referent of that utterance (i.e., phenomenality). Then I argue for the thesis which communicates the second horn of the dilemma: we cannot express *that we cannot express* determinate knowledge of phenomenality in the sense that explicit or implied negative speech acts (e.g., "phenomenality is *not* susceptible to linguistic capture") are logically equivalent to determinative linguistic utterances. The *de facto* referent of an expression of phenomenality's inexpressibility will be something distinct from the utterance itself, and thus not the *ideal* referent of that utterance (i.e., phenomenality).

In part II (chapters 4-6), I explore the idea that resolving the semantic dilemma for the metaphysics of consciousness might involve embracing a *broadly* nonintentional way of describing phenomenality. On my view, by oscillating between alternatively, non-absolutely valid expressions of phenomenality's inexpressibility, we may concretely evince the radical, paradoxical inexpressibility of our desideratum without expressing complete determinate knowledge *of* it. I purpose that a theory of phenomenality consisting in an indefinite (that is, dynamic and unbounded) series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances expressing seemingly contradictory properties of phenomenality (e.g., "inexpressible", "*not* inexpressible", etc.) could demonstrate what phenomenality is, *in a sense*, without reifying it. I then explore the epistemological and liberative dimensions of this solution to the semantic dilemma.[2]

[2] In this section of the dissertation, I use somewhat unusual terms to characterize the mode of description I am theorizing. For example, I call the activity of oscillating between qualified expressions of determinate knowledge of phenomenality 'semantic alternation'. And I also call semantic alternation, when formalized as an indefinite series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances 'indefinite modal description'. I realize that my use of highly idiosyncratic terms like these may generate the feeling that what I am talking about is highly abstract and rarified. But I use these terms because they are both apt and relevant to the primary literature I engage in this dissertation. And what I am talking about is really just the idea that when we find ourselves at the furthest limit of language in trying to characterize something that is paradoxically inexpressible because *all-pervasive*, we can playfully dance across that limit. We can literally go back and forth between affirming and negating the inexpressibility of what we're trying or talk about, with awareness that in doing so we never completely capture it.

In chapter 4, I foreground the fact that determinative linguistic utterances would fail to track phenomenality as a referent in virtue of being *problematically intentional* and thus dualistic with respect to an ideal referent that cannot be differentiated from any linguistic phenomena. This suggests, on my view, that we might find a solution to the semantic dilemma by developing a *broadly* nonintentional approach to describing phenomenality. In characterizing what such broadly nonintentional description could look like, I integrate resources from Advaita Vedānta, Jainism and Neo-Vedānta. I draw an extended connection between the concept of falsity (*mithyātva*) in Advaita Vedānta, the concept of alternation in K.C. Bhattacharya's Neo-Vedānta, and the doctrine of non-one-sidedness (*anekānta-vāda*) in Jainism: my view that we could coherently describe phenomenality by oscillating between qualified determinative linguistic utterances about phenomenality's inexpressibility, each of which have qualified (non-absolute) validity, is consistent with my view that any determination of Brahman will be false in the relevant Advaitic sense of the term, and with K.C. Bhattacharya's indication that encountering 'the absolute' in the mode of consciousness we call 'language' will occur in alternation (an aspect of his thought informed by Jaina non-absolutism). I call this oscillatory process 'semantic alternation'. I then appeal to the Jaina theory of sevenfold modal description (*syād-vāda*), otherwise called the sevenfold formula (*sapta-bangi*), to concretely model what semantic alternation or 'indefinite modal description' of phenomenality could look like. Modeling alternative talk of phenomenality on the Jaina *sapta-bangi* grounds my analysis of the *broad* nonintentionality of such talk. I highlight the indiscernibility of the distinction between the 'referent' and the description *itself* in the case of indefinite modal description of phenomenality by attending to its formal properties, i.e., being variously qualified, being unlimited, etc. I elaborate on all this in the chapter.

In chapter 5, I argue that although indefinite modal description of phenomenality does not generate determinate knowledge of its explanandum, it is epistemically rich. I engage resources in the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva tradition to argue that indefinite modal description of phenomenality would embody a species of knowledge by acquaintance with its nominal 'referent'. This species of knowledge by acquaintance would be indeterminable with respect to its locus. I argue along these lines by analyzing phenomenality (which at this point in the dialectic of the dissertation has already been analyzed on analogy with the concept of the witness (*sākṣin*) in Advaita Vedānta) on analogy with how the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosopher Utpaladeva characterizes the primary essence (*mukhya ātma*) of Śiva. Broadly speaking, Śiva is supposed to be the consciousness which manifests as differentiated and transforms into the entire world of mutually opposed subjects and objects (Prueitt 2016). In drawing this connection, I offer a comparative analysis of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhjijñā wherein I engage the spirit of the Jaina doctrine of non-one-sidedness to explain why I consider the two views non-contradictory and potentially collaborative. Having explained this, I examine the Pratyabhijñā notion of 'attaining the state of Śiva'. I argue that attaining the state of Śiva should be understood as having no indeterminable locus. On my view, direct, unmediated acquaintance with Śiva should not be considered divorced from the process of successively grasping and failing to absolutely grasp its essence. Similarly, I propose that understood on close analogy with attaining the state of Śiva, having knowledge by acquaintance with the 'referent' of the term phenomenality should not be considered divorced from carrying out indefinite modal description of it. I substantiate this account of attaining the state of Śiva by noting that the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosopher Abhinavagupta links immersion in Śiva's primary essence with the classical Indian concept of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*), which he characterizes as being neither in the subject nor the object of aesthetic experience.

In chapter 6, I explore the soteriological dimension of dynamically describing phenomenality. Various traditions view attachment as the root of suffering. In the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the canonical ethical text of the classical Indian tradition, the central concept of desireless action (*niṣkarma karma*) is of doing one's duty (*dharma*) without concern for the fruits of one's actions. *Mokṣa* (liberation, release from suffering) is only attainable by *niṣkarma karma*. All other actions perpetuate the karmic accumulation of residual tendencies (*samskara*s), which precludes freedom from being *disposed* to act, and promotes the continuance of the samsaric cycle of rebirth. The metaphysical commitments of the *Bhagavad Gītā* are up for interpretation. But, on my view, we may interpret the *Gītā* as being parameterized by a broadly nondualist, linguistically-bent perspective similarly to that of Śaṅkara's. Based on this interpretation of the *Gītā's* philosophical intent, I argue that desireless action (*niṣkarma karma*) should be understood not as a *means* to attaining the release from dualistic apprehension consisting in merging with universal nondual consciousness (*Brahman*), but as an *intrinsically liberative* concretization of that release. I argue, furthermore, that indefinite modal description of phenomenality is a kind of *niṣkarma karma*, and thus intrinsically liberative. To emphasize its unique virtue, I comparatively analyze indefinite modal description of phenomenality and other activities construable as kinds of desireless action, e.g., *Kuṇḍalinī Yoga*. I argue through this comparison that the intersubjective accessibility of the liberation intrinsic to indefinite modal description of phenomenality is relatively broad. One could say that I view alternative talk of the indefinite (i.e., the ubiquitous even further explanandum which proves radically recalcitrant to linguistic capture) as dissolving the divide between liberation from the existential suffering of dualistic apprehension and the very activity by which it is attained. It significantly demystifies *at least one way* to taste the sustained joy (*ānanda*) of freedom from feeling compelled to express absolutist knowledge in general (and, specifically, of that bafflingly

uncatchable vividness which saturates the entire phenomenal world of "mutually opposed subjects and objects" (Prueitt 2016)).

Overall, in this dissertation, I argue systematically for the view that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness which may be dissolved through dynamically describing that luminosity which invariantly attends and pervades all things without expressing determinate knowledge *of* it. At the same time, I offer an extended reconstruction of multiple resources in the Indian philosophical canon (Advaita Vedānta, Jainism, Neo-Vedānta, Pratyabhijñā, the *Gītā*) which reveals how they basically agree on the radical, paradoxical inexpressibility of that luminosity which pervades all subjective and objective phenomena, and on its unmitigated freedom from being apprehended by speech, even *as* being something we cannot talk about.[3] My reading of these schools also demonstrates their common understanding that *what it is like* to *know* the ungraspable presence which pervades all finite subjective and objective phenomena is neither something we can fix in concept with words, nor something we can coherently apprehend as an ineffable state of spiritual awareness absolutely divorced from conceptual and linguistic activity. All of these resources, in one way or another, indicate that liberation or release from the suffering of dualistic apprehension and strict identification with limited subjectivity *may* manifest dynamically at the level of language.

In sum, the dissertation demonstrates that there is a sweeping thematic affinity between (a limited set of) seemingly disparate and mutually opposed schools of thought in the Indian philosophical tradition, which very broadly construed consists in all these schools of thought indicating that joyful enjoyment of the very form of absolute reality/truth may dwell quite

[3] The Jaina contribution here is less a view of our limitedness in talking about phenomenality and more a view of our limitedness in talking determinatively about reality in general (but we may note that insofar as phenomenality pervades all things, talking about limits on our capacity to talk about phenomenality is talking about limits on our capacity to talk about the perennial notion of the totality of all things, or reality/being itself).

concretely in an adaptive mode of being *in* the phenomenal world that is differentiated by name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*). A broad upshot of this interpretation is that these schools offer insights for resisting both the conception of philosophy itself as the search for one answer to rule all others, and for resisting the tendency to think of the most profound philosophical insights as being perpetually mysterious or accessible only by a specialized few.

One should note, in reading this dissertation, that Jaina non-absolutism is both a specific tool I engage in part II to concretely model what indefinite modal description of phenomenality could look like, and an analytical framework which orients and guides my efforts in this dissertation overall. The Jaina view that differently parameterized perspectives may collaboratively contribute to description of a given phenomenon grounds and substantiates how I integrate various resources in analyzing the linguistic nature of the metaphysics of consciousness, the concept of phenomenality, the semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness, and the alternative talk which could dissolve it. Overall, this dissertation is an exercise in illustrating how ostensibly opposed perspectives may contribute to sustained, vital knowledge by acquaintance with a given explanandum. So although I make *many* determinative claims throughout this dissertation, my overall philosophical intent is to gradually ease points of tension in our conceptual schemas regarding phenomenality *through integrating multiple perspectives on it* in a way that all things considered evinces its paradoxical inexpressibility without expressing determinate knowledge of it. In other words, this dissertation is basically one long indefinite modal description of phenomenality. This means that I do not consider this dissertation a fixed phenomenon which expresses determinate knowledge of its explanandum. But I do not think this means it lacks epistemic richness. Although this dissertation is as much a rigorous excise in cross-cultural analytic philosophy as anything else, it is also my attempt at exemplifying what it might

look like to dance across the limits of language when faced with the profound difficulty of talking about that aspect of reality which is intimately connected with *every* aspect of one's own inner sense of self *and* one's lived experience in the outer world. So, above all, I would playfully characterize this dissertation an unorthodox quest with no particular destination—a journey which traverses various standpoints on a perennial mystery, ends up becoming the mystery itself, and brings its unfolding somewhat down to earth.

PART I: THE SEMANTIC DILEMMA FACING THE METAPHYSICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

CHAPTER 1. PHENOMENALITY: AN EVEN FURTHER EXPLANANDUM AT ISSUE IN DEBATES ABOUT PHENOMENAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Introduction

In this chapter, I examine the linguistic nature of discourse about phenomenal consciousness and disambiguate the concept represented by the term: I distinguish between, on the one hand, subjective experience (considered inclusive of what Uriah Kriegel (2009) calls 'the subjective character of experience'—the *fact* that there is something it is like to be an organism—*and* the qualitative character of experience—the *specific* way contents of experience show up for subjects, i.e., qualia) and, and the other hand, the brute fact of phenomenal character, or *phenomenality*. I show that phenomenality is a peculiarly inexplicable even further explanandum beyond, although not in reality separable from, subjective experience.

I begin with some preliminary conceptual and terminological disambiguations to explain how I'm using the term 'phenomenality' and to contextualize the distinction I will draw between subjective experience and phenomenality (1.1). Then I offer a specific argument for drawing the distinction (1.2). Next, to substantiate the distinction and cement my claim that phenomenality is an even further explanandum, I argue that the standard hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers 2003) is ill-framed as *the* problem of phenomenal consciousness (because it is actually the problem of explaining subjective experience) (1.3). Having done this, I offer a preliminary argument for the inexplicability of phenomenality (1.4). This argument lays the groundwork for how I engage the conceptual resources of Advaita Vedānta in chapter 2, and begins to advance the thesis I argue for in earnest in chapter 3: there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness consisting in phenomenality's paradoxical inexpressibility.

1.1 Preliminary Disambiguations

Here I disambiguate the concept of phenomenal consciousness by analyzing a few terms often used as synonyms for 'phenomenal consciousness': 'qualia' (the felt, subjective, introspectively accessible, ineffable, private qualities of experience), 'subjective experience' and 'phenomenality'. On my view, treating the differences between terms like 'qualia' 'subjective experience' 'experience' 'what it is like' and 'phenomenality' as "mostly subtle matters of connotation" (Chalmers 1996, 6) is a mistake that has the potential consequence of allowing for theories of 'phenomenal consciousness' to be theories of dissimilar phenomena. I argue that *phenomenality* is an even further explanandum beyond, although not in reality separable from, subjective experience (considered inclusive of what Uriah Kriegel (2009) calls the subjective character of experience—the *fact* that there is something it is like to be an organism—*and* the qualitative character of experience—the *specific* way contents of experience show up for subjects). By 'phenomenality', I mean the brute fact of phenomenal character, which is *the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena*. By 'invariant' I do not mean something like 'qualitatively similar' or 'diachronically identical' or 'substantively the same' or anything along those lines; I just mean 'always co-present, and at no points abstractable or distinguishable'. I argue that phenomenality, unlike qualia, is not inessential with respect to access-conscious states, and unlike subjective experience, is not attached to *a* specific point of view—*all* access-conscious states and *all* points of view have co-present phenomenality. In arguing along these lines, I suggest that the conflation of subjective experience and phenomenality is causally explained in part by the tendency to reference Nagel's (1974) characterization of the subjective character of experience.

I hesitate to use the term 'phenomenality' at all, for fear of smuggling in unwanted connotations. This term is sometimes used in contemporary discussions for the *specific* 'phenomenal feel' or 'phenomenal character' of a state—for the totality of the experiential properties of a state. When I use the term 'phenomenality', I do mean the brute fact of phenomenal character *in general*, or perhaps better, phenomenal-*ness* or phenomenality, but I don't mean *specific* phenomenal character. I see the term 'phenomenality' as a pretty direct synonym for 'is-like-ness', a generalized version of the 'is-like' portion of 'what it is like'. Despite room for potential confusion, and for heuristic purposes, I will use the term 'phenomenality'. The term is helpful for signifying that aspect of phenomena without which phenomena would not be *phenomena*.

1.1.1 Conventional Reference to Phenomenal consciousness

Phenomenal consciousness is often characterized in terms of qualia and subjective experience, and for good reason. There is something it is like to be an embodied organism that's affectively perturbed by its environment (Smith 2022). And phenomenal consciousness may, *in a sense*, be nothing over and above the various vast multitude of viewpoints for which the qualitative properties of perceptual and mental states are salient. But, in my view, these aspects of phenomenal consciousness have been conflated with phenomenal consciousness whole-scale, which has resulted in the obscuration of phenomenality.

This terminological and conceptual confusion has been perpetuated by the way that the hard problem is articulated: the hard problem is supposed to be the problem of explaining *experience*, but it is really phrased as the problem of explaining a phenomenon that calls out for explanation from the vantage point of the priority of physical explanation. *Subjective* experience

is that further explanandum. Here's why: physical explanations are objective in the sense that they are accessible from multiple points of view. The subjective character of experience is attached to *a* specific point of view: "any shift to greater objectivity—that is, less attachment to a specific viewpoint—does not take us nearer to the real nature of the phenomenon; it takes us farther away from it" (Nagel 1974, 445). There is difficulty in principle with seeing how any physical, objective explanation could suffice to explain the subjective character of experience. The subjective character of experience, including subjective states, apparently resists objective, physical explanation. To be sure, explanation of the performance of functions accompanied by experience in physicalist terms leaves the *subjective* character of experience unexplained. But we have a robust and sophisticated lexicon for describing experiential states and qualities from a first-personal point of view. First-personal experiential states and qualities are only further explananda when viewed through the paradigm of physicalist explanation. The 'physical' world made up of apparently non-conscious things is a further explanandum when viewed through the paradigm of first-personal explanation. We can describe and explain how things appear to us (as perspective-having subjects of experience), but we must step (a bit) outside of our first-personal perspectives and make use of inter-personal tools to explain and determine the causal mechanisms that account for causal connections between things that aren't *only* apparent to us (objects of experience).

In short, when we help ourselves to the terms of neuroscience or physics we come up short in our explanations of subjective states, including qualia, and *vice versa*. Physical phenomena are further explananda from the vantage point of first-personal explanation, and the subjective character of experience is a further explanandum from the vantage point of physical explanation. Chomsky (2000) makes a similar point regarding reductive analyses of language. Smith (2000) summarizes Chomsky's view like this: "the assertion that the physical or the physiological has

some kind of priority is misconceived: theories in linguistics are as rich and make as specific predictions across a wide domain as do theories of chemistry or biology" (Smith 2000, viii). Linguistic and scientific theories provide reasonable analyses in *their own domains*. Similarly, there is a bi-directional gap between first-personal (subjective) and physical (objective) explanation. Here I'm not talking about the 'explanatory gap' of explaining how physical functions give rise to experience. I'm talking about the gap between *the domains* of first-personal and physical explanation—the gap is bi-directional in the sense that it obtains from within the perspective of either domain with respect to the other. Despite this gap, there is a respect in which our first-personal and third-personal means of describing the world do not differ: both subjective and objective explanations have co-present phenomenality.

1.1.2 An Even Further Explanandum

This means that there is an *even further* explanandum, which is apparent from both vantage points—that which is attached to all felt qualities of experience, all points of view, and even, I contend, all objective phenomena. By 'objective phenomena' I mean phenomena like access-conscious states, middle-sized perceptual objects, physical and scientific explanations, etc. It is equally attached to all *linguistic phenomena* (words, symbols, sentences, explanations, theories, etc.), which are in some ways subjective (in so far as they privately understood or interpreted) and in some ways objective (in so far as they are publicly articulated or written down in books). Call it 'phenomenality'. In arguing this, I do not offer a metaphysical theory of consciousness. I do not intend to absolutely determine an aspect of phenomenal consciousness as the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena. It's simply difficult to avoid the appearance of doing so in the course of getting an adequate minimal conception of the phenomenon

on the table. My preliminary analysis of phenomenality is meant to re-train our minimal conception of the 'further explanandum' (Chalmers 2003) at issue in debates about the ontological status of phenomenal consciousness , and to set the stage for the thesis of the first part of this dissertation.

The minimal conception of the even further explanandum I hope to indicate is of that which we cannot *detach* and thereby *distinguish* from any phenomenon, including any linguistic phenomenon. The thesis of the first part of this dissertation is that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness: the further explanandum at issue in debates about the metaphysics of consciousness is *undetachable and thereby indistinguishable* from all subjective *and* objective phenomena, including all linguistic phenomena. It is insufficiently characterized in terms of the *subjective* character of experience. *This* even further explanandum (by 'even further' I mean broader than but not separable from 'experience' characterized as irreducibly subjective) resists physical and non-physical linguistic determination alike, because of its penetrating intimacy with any linguistic utterances which might be employed to express its essential character. I will extend and argue for this claim in chapter 2. In this chapter, I focus on phenomenality.

1.2 Subjective Experience vs. Phenomenality

In this section, I distinguish between, on the one hand, subjective experience considered inclusive of the subjective character of experience and the qualitative character of experience (i.e., qualia) (Kriegel 2009), and, on the other hand, phenomenality. The distinctions I make in this section are didactic rather than determinative—I do not think we can metaphysically distinguish between these aspects of phenomenal consciousness. But in failing to note that there is an aspect of phenomenal consciousness that's underappreciated as *just* organized around qualia and viewpoints, we fail to recognize the phenomenon explanation of which would be sufficient for explanation of phenomenal consciousness.

When Block (1995) uses rough synonyms to point at phenomenal consciousness, he tacitly distinguishes between something like phenomenal consciousness in general, and phenomenal consciousness as it is instantiated in properties, states, and creatures. Or, at the very least, the grammar of his nod towards whatever is *meant* by 'phenomenal consciousness' does not preclude the reasonableness of such a distinction. Despite this, phenomenal consciousness is typically described by reference to its instantiations; it is characterized in terms of qualia—the felt qualitative properties of experience—and/or in terms of Nagel's expression that there is "something it is like" to be a phenomenally conscious organism (1974). Both methods of describing phenomenal consciousness are apparent here:

> "Unfortunately, it seems impossible to define phenomenal consciousness (Chalmers, 1996). The best we can do is to point to instances of it. Phenomenal consciousness is the kind of consciousness such that there is something it is like to be phenomenally conscious (Nagel, 1974). There is something it is like to taste a glass of pinot noir, to hear the opening notes of *Tristan and Isolde*, to feel the warmth of the sun on your face, or to feel a pain in your left knee. Each of these experiences has a distinctive phenomenal quality to it. That quality seems inexpressible. We often use metaphorical language to communicate that quality ('it is a dull throbbing ache'; a 'sharp stabbing pain'; 'a rich lush red'), but when we do so we seem to rely on our shared experience with such phenomenal qualities to calibrate our talk" (Levy 2014, 129).

Levy follows Block here: he admits the apparent impossibility of *defining* phenomenal consciousness. In pointing to instances of phenomenal consciousness, he's modeling the best we can do. There's a valuable insight in his transparency—when we gesture at phenomenal consciousness by pointing to instances of it, we refer ambiguously to something we don't know *exactly* how to categorize. There is a tendency, as I see it, to underappreciate this point.

Philosophical discourse is a deeply linguistic practice—any debate about the classification of a phenomenon hovers around a word or a set of words signifying that phenomenon. The nature of the signification at the hub of a debate's wheel has a role to play in adjudicating whether theoretic contenders track the phenomenon at issue. In other words, how we reference a

phenomenon in question is significant with respect to the success conditions of our theoretical offerings. If our reference to a phenomenon is ambiguous, we should at least question whether explaining instances of it will help us achieve our end of expressing knowledge of its essential or fundamental character.[4]

1.2.1 Specific Reasoning for Drawing the Distinction

We can avoid this sort of pitfall by attending to the grammatical properties of the terms we use to set up our philosophical forums. The term 'qualia' (phenomenal qualities; phenomenal feels; felt qualities of experience), for example, is plural. When we use the term, we indicate that there are *many* of what we refer to. Moreover, the term 'qualia' denotes phenomena that are non-essential with respect to access-conscious states (Levy 2014). Access-conscious states may always have some co-present quale or another (Ibid), but they don't essentially have *one specific* co-present quale. I might, for example, have a thought the content of which is poised for my use in reasoning (e.g., "it is dangerous to swim in murky waters") and at that time, feel a positively valanced fluttering in my stomach, or a nauseating sensation tinged by anxiety, or something else entirely distinctive in terms of its qualitative character. *Specific* qualia may or not be present with respect to access conscious states. But *that* there is *at least some co-present phenomenality* (is-like-*ness)* with respect to all access-conscious states cannot be denied. Even so-called non-experiential competencies like blindsight have co-present phenomenality. Consider the patient who is blind or

[4] Here I have in mind the likes of Dennett (1991), whose explanation of consciousness hinges on some reductive analyses of qualia. Of course, his arguments are more complicated than this. My point is just that we lack a sort of basic grammatic grounding for *assuming* that explaining qualia, construed as the private, subjective, indelible, introspectively accessible, ineffable felt qualities of experience, is sufficient for explaining phenomenal consciousness. I don't presume to claim that philosophers like Dennett explicitly assume that explaining qualia is sufficient for explaining phenomenal consciousness. But I do think that scientific explanations of subjective states are invoked in debates about phenomenal consciousness in a way that conceals the possibility that there might be more to explain.

less aware in one part of their visual field, but still able to respond to stimuli in that area (Weiskranzt 1986), or even the patient who is blind across their visual field but still able to navigate around unseen stimuli in their surroundings (Gelder et al. 2008). These patients may be unacquainted with the phenomenal character of the relevant stimuli, but there will still be something it is like for them to not see and yet still respond to those stimuli. In pointing to capacities like blindsight we do not point to capacities lacking at least some co-present phenomenality. Blindsight isn't *globally* non-phenomenal or unconscious vision.

One might think that co-present phenomenality is *non*-essential with respect to access-conscious states because there are machines that implement access-consciousness but lack phenomenal consciousness. This is the most obvious rejoinder to my claim. But to think this way would be to forget that a machine's access-conscious states *are* phenomenal, perhaps not for the machines themselves (although we may want to curb our epistemic hubris on this point) but definitely *for us*. A standard response to this claim would be that the access-conscious states of machines lack co-present phenomenality because those states exist (or function or occur or operate) even when we aren't looking at them, recording them, etc. To this I would say that the access-conscious states we *know* as existing (or functioning, etc.) outside the purview our *immediate* perceptual attention still have co-present phenomenality *as existing (or functioning, etc.) outside the purview of our immediate perceptual attention*. This is not me endorsing metaphysical idealism. The view that objective phenomena like access-conscious machine states don't exist or operate when we aren't viewing or thinking of them is radically dissimilar from the point I'm trying to make. The point I'm trying to make is just that we don't have access to non-phenomenal access-conscious states. We think of them, but as thought of, they are still phenomenal. Put simply, access-conscious machine states are objective *phenomena*. There simply

are no non-phenomenal *phenomena*. This may seem a rather brute point, but I'm happy to embrace the brutality of it. All access-conscious states have co-present phenomenality. We do not refer to non-phenomenal states when we refer to access-conscious states exhibited by systems we take to lack phenomenal consciousness in themselves. *We* cannot find any states, processes or systems that lack co-present phenomenality whatsoever. Accordingly, we can nominally distinguish between qualia, which are non-essential with respect to access-consciousness states, and phenomenality, which is not.[5]

1.2.2 On an Objection Regarding Qualia

Alternatively, one might critique my claim that there is at least some co-present phenomenality with respect to all access-conscious states on terminological grounds—perhaps it would be better to say that there is at least some co-present *quale* with respect to all-access conscious states. This may be sort of right. But the view that access-conscious states always have phenomenal qualities associated with them is just the view that qualitiv*ness* is essential with respect to access-consciousness states. It is not the view that *specific* qualia are themselves essential with respect to access-conscious states, or even the view that the *specific character* or *specificity* of a quale is essential with respect to access-conscious states. The co-present quale of one access-conscious state will be distinct from the co-present quale of another access-conscious state by virtue of its *specificity*. But the qualitative*ness* of both qualia will not differ from one to the other. We can

[5] This may read as a sort of Kantianesque-epistemic idealism. I think this comparison is generally apt, although, as I will explain in the chapters that follow, the specific picture I'm drawing is more consistent with that of classical non-dualist Vedānta. If I were to use a term to refer to my preliminary account of phenomenality in this chapter, I would use the term 'non-dualism' rather than 'idealism', and I would qualify that even the term 'non-dualism' shouldn't be understood as representing the content of some metaphysical theory of consciousness. As in Advaita Vedānta, the aim here is not to advance a metaphysical theory of consciousness that can be captured with any single term or statement, but to direct our attention to the undeniably pervasive co-presence of phenomenality with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena.

nominally distinguish between qualia and qualitative*ness*. The former is multiple, and inessential with respect to access-conscious states. The latter is, for lack of a better term, multiply instanced, and essential with respect to access-conscious states. The fact that we can make this (still nominal) distinction should reinforce the intuition that explaining qualia may be insufficient for explaining a broader aspect of phenomenal consciousness.[6] Here's a further argument to pump this intuition:

> **Premise 1:** On one conception of instantiation, for X to be multiply instanced is for X to be *immanent* in its various instances (x1, x2, x3…xn).
> **Premise 2:** We can nominally distinguish between qualia and qualitativeness: qualia are multiple and inessential with respect to access-conscious states, whereas qualitativeness is multiply instanced, and essential with respect to access-conscious states.
> **Premise 3:** A phenomenon that is multiply instanced and immanent in its various instances is an immanent universal.
> **Premise 4:** A paradoxical phenomenon has two apparently contradictory aspects.
> **Premise 5:** An immanent universal has two apparently contradictory aspects: it is, in a sense, *nothing over and above* its various instances, and, in a sense, *irreducible to just* its various instances.
> **Conclusion 1:** Therefore, an immanent universal is a paradoxical phenomenon.
> **Premise 7:** Qualitativeness (on one conception of instantiation) is an immanent universal.
> **Premise 8:** Qualia constitute one aspect of qualitativeness.
> **Premise 9:** Explication of one aspect of a paradoxical phenomenon is insufficient for complete explication of that phenomenon.
> **Conclusion 2:** Explication of qualia (on one conception of instantiation) is insufficient for explaining qualitativeness.

The metaphysical intuition I hope to summon is that a universal may remain unexplained *in itself* even after instances of it are explained, and even if it is (in a sense) nothing over and above its exemplifications. I won't go so far as to argue that this concept of instantiation is right. I just contend that it's a viable concept of instantiation, so we shouldn't flippantly rule out the possibility that explaining qualia is insufficient for explaining the *non-particular* qualitative aspect of phenomenal consciousness —the aspect that is essential to (in the sense of being co-present with respect to) all access-conscious states. At this point one might suggest that by 'phenomenality' I

really mean ‘qualitativeness’ or perhaps ‘feeling’. To this I’d respond that these terms may well be good synonyms. But I figure that it's a bit more difficult to conjure a sense of the minimal concept I’m after by talking of qualitativeness or feeling, because we are so accustomed to thinking about *specific* qualia and specific feelings. I take no issue with the view that phenomenality is always qualitative or affective, and I’ll have more to say on this point in subsequent chapters. I’ll persist in using the term ‘phenomenality’ for now.

1.2.3 Nagel’s Influence on Discourse About Phenomenal consciousness

Confusion about phenomenal consciousness is compounded, I think, by the tendency to reference Nagel when distinguishing between access-consciousness and phenomenal consciousness. Nagel (1974) was concerned with “the subjective character of experience”, which he characterizes as being “fully comprehensible only from one point of view” (ibid., 444). Because the subjective character of experience—what it is like to be an organism—is linked with a specific point of view, it seems to fall outside “the domain of objective facts *par excellence*” (Ibid). It cannot be observed or understood as what it is most essentially from multiple points of view. But the term ‘phenomenality’ does not, like “subjective experience” refer to that which is inextricably linked with *a* specific point of view. All points of view have co-present phenomenality. There is something it is like to be me, something it is like to be you, something it was like to be Shakespeare, something it is like to be my cat (or at least I think so), etc. At this point, one might take stock of what I’ve claimed so far—all access-conscious states and all viewpoints have co-present phenomenality—and reply that phenomenality appears to be nothing over and above the subjective character of experience, which is always qualitative or affective. That is, one might think that

phenomenality is just coalesced around the individual, embodied viewpoints for which the qualitative properties of access-conscious states are salient.

Perhaps so, but to say *this* is still not to say or show that phenomenality is attached to *a* specific viewpoint. Specific viewpoints have something in common—something in virtue of which they are non-distinct. Or, rather, specific viewpoints are not distinct from one another by virtue of their co-present phenomenality. Phenomenality may be co-extensive with all viewpoints, but then by 'phenomenality' we mean something other than 'the subjective character of experience', at least according to the sense associated with Nagel's usage of the phrase. Furthermore, we should not forget that realm of objective facts is always accessed from some point of view or another (even the most hard-nosed scientist can't deny this); it is objective *because* accessible from multiple points of view. If phenomenality is coextensive with all points of view it is feasibly no less coextensive with the realm of objective facts. We simply can't identify non-phenomenal phenomena of any sort, be they attached to a specific viewpoint or accessible from many. Even phenomena observable from multiple points of view, e.g., brain states, access-conscious machine states, formal arguments, scientific explanations, etc., are non-different in respect of their co-present phenomenality.

I should reiterate that I don't think we can *actually* or absolutely distinguish between phenomenality and any other aspects of phenomenal consciousness. It's not as if we can pluck phenomenality out from any specific qualia or any single point of view, or even from qualitativeness or perspectivalness in general. In fact, one of the main things I'm claiming in this chapter is that we can't extricate phenomenality from anything whatsoever. The distinctions I've made are meant to be edifying; they are meant to get at the point that although phenomenality is

bound up with feels and subjects, it is equally bound up with all those things we take to be outer, objective, concrete and physical.

1.3 Against the Hard Problem as *the* Problem of Phenomenal consciousness

Here I argue that standard ways of talking about the hard problem contribute to the conflation of phenomenal consciousness with subjective experience, including qualia, and occlude awareness of the even further explanandum I call 'phenomenality'. Whenever we investigate or seek to explain some phenomenon, we necessarily begin with some minimal conception of whatever it is we hope to know better. I've pointed out that the grammatical properties of the theoretical terms by which we *refer* to the phenomenon at issue in metaphysical debates have implications for the explanatory success of our metaphysical theories. Whatever minimal conception we have at the starting point of our investigation, which is determined in part by our act(s) of reference to it, has some influence on how we proceed from there and on whether we make good on our goals in the end. In my view, the standard enunciation of the hard problem endorses a minimal conception of phenomenal consciousness that is inadequate for guiding inquiry into its location in the overall scheme of reality.

1.3.1 Chalmers' Framing of The Hard Problem

I'll quote Chalmers directly at this point, because the way he formulates the hard problem is at least significant if not authoritative. According to Chalmers, the hard problem is hard because "even once one has an explanation of all the relevant functions in the vicinity of consciousness—discrimination, integration, access, report, control—there may still remain a further question: why is the performance of these functions accompanied by experience?" (Chalmers 2003, 3). He then

suggests that a solution to the hard problem "would involve an account of the relation between physical processes and consciousness, explaining on the basis of natural principles how and why it is that physical processes are associated with states of experience" (Ibid). Implicit in these statements is a certain view of what it is for a phenomenon to be a mystery. What it is for a phenomenon to pose an easy problem rather than a mystery is, he suggests, for it to be plausibly explicable in physical (neurobiological or computational) terms (Ibid). This implies that physical explanation is sufficient and satisfying—if we can explain a phenomenon in physical terms, we are not left scratching our heads. It also implies, or at least does not exclude a reasonable inference to the effect that a phenomenon is a mystery if it is *im*plausibly explicable in physical terms. In the explanation of the problem of explaining experience, there is no indication that a solution to the problem could override the priority of physical explanation, or dissolve the meaningfulness of the term 'physical'. To imply that physical explanation is sufficient and satisfying, that phenomena are mysterious if implausibly explicable in physical terms, and that physical explanation will remain sufficient and satisfying from the outset to the end of inquiry *is to presuppose the priority of physical explanation*. The presupposition of the priority of physical explanation has programmatic consequences for the science and metaphysics of consciousness.

1.3.2 The Hard Problem as the Problem of Subjective Experience

The hard problem is *supposed* to be the problem of *experience*. But the 'further explanandum' that appears from the perspective in which physical explanation has priority—the perspective embedded into the standard enunciation of the hard problem—is *subjective* experience. By 'subjective experience' here, I mean the subjective character of experience in general, inclusive of phenomena typically taken to be subjective, like qualia. The issue is that the subjective character

of experience is just one aspect of phenomenal consciousness, or experience. There is a deeper, more pervasive aspect of phenomenal consciousness that attends all subjective and objective phenomena. Put baldly, phenomenal consciousness (experience) is all over everything—we can't remove it from any objective phenomena or from the realm of objective facts in general. It's thus not right to think of phenomenal consciousness (experience) just in terms of the subjective character of experience. The phenomenon we're trying to reckon with is much grander, and a great deal stickier with respect to all the tools we might try extricate from it to use *on* it. We could call it phenomenal consciousness, experience, consciousness, qualitativeness, experiential-presence (Fasching 2020), etc. I use the term 'phenomenality' because it comes with less colloquial baggage. My analysis of phenomenality should not be understood as a metaphysical theory of consciousness—it is a basic, phenomenological analysis that amounts to a rather brute fact. All phenomena have co-present phenomenality.

1.4 The Inexpressibility of Phenomenality: A Preliminary Sketch

I've argued that Phenomenality is the ever-faithful companion of all subjective and objective phenomena, in the sense that it is co-present with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena. In this section, I show that the invariant co-presence of phenomenality with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena entails the inexplicability of phenomenality. My arguments in this section are preliminary: they pave the way for my arguments in the third chapter, which establish that phenomenality is paradoxically inexpressible and inexpressible *as* inexpressible.

Grasping the sense in which phenomenality is inexplicable requires grasping that phenomenality cannot be *externally* differentiated. In other words, it cannot be differentiated *from anything else*. To differentiate between the co-present phenomenality of one phenomenon—

subjective, objective, explanatory, linguistic, physical or otherwise—and the co-present phenomenality of another, we might try appealing to some sort of qualitative difference between the two. But any *qualities* that may be invoked to distinguish between one co-present phenomenality and another will *themselves* have co-present phenomenality. They (the qualities) may differ from *one another* in virtue of their qualitative *specificity*. But there will be a respect in which they do not differ: their co-present phenomenality. What will be established is a difference between specific qualities, not a difference regarding their invariant condition and concomitant, co-present phenomenality. No real difference regarding phenomenality will be established. There is an infinite regress of co-present phenomenality, which strips differentia like qualities of their capacity to operate as differentia.

Similarly, we cannot distinguish the co-present phenomenality of a phenomenon and either that phenomenon itself or another phenomenon, because in order for any phenomenon to be an item available to be distinguished, it must have co-present phenomenality. It's not possible to extract, extricate, detach, abstract (what have you) co-present phenomenality out from any given phenomenon, without that phenomenon leaving the realm of the phenomenal and becoming unavailable to contrastive perception or cognition. Because the co-present phenomenality of a phenomenon cannot be detached from that phenomenon, it cannot be distinguished from that phenomenon. We can only nominally distinguish between two things that are, on reflection, simply inseparable.

1.4.1 A Preliminary Argument for Phenomenality's Inexplicability

Because phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated from any explanatory phenomena, it cannot be analyzed as *just* the explain*ed* component of any explanation. In any explanation, the

explanandum is *different from* the explanans. In an explanation of that which cannot be externally differentiated from any explanatory phenomena, that difference does not obtain. Consider the following argument:

1. Phenomenality pervades all components of all explanations.
2. Explanations are phenomena.
3. That which pervades all components of a phenomenon can't be a mere component of that phenomenon.
4. To be explained, a phenomenon must be an explanandum in an explanation.
5. An explanandum is a mere component of an explanation.
6. That which pervades all components of an explanation cannot be an explanandum.
7. Phenomenality cannot be an explanandum.
C: Phenomenality cannot be explained.

This is a very preliminary account of the pragmatic paradox involved in attempting to extend the concept of phenomenality. I develop this account further in Chapter 2, where I subsume explanation under the category of linguistic determination, and offer a more technical argument for the thesis that we cannot linguistically determine what consciousness is.

1.4.2 How Phenomenality Calls for Explanation

My present goal is not to *exhaustively* argue for the view that phenomenality is inexplicable. My present goal is just to convey a sense of the inexplicability of phenomenality to clarify a way in which it calls out for explanation. It calls out for explanation in at least two ways: first, it is nominally distinguishable from qualia and subjective experience. I've argued on the basis of this distinction that explanation of subjective experience is insufficient for explanation of the further explanandum at issue in metaphysical discourse about phenomenal consciousness.

Second, phenomenality calls out for explanation in the sense that it *resists* physical and non-physical explication. The co-present phenomenality of any physical explanation is an even further explanandum *for that very explanation*, in the sense that co-present phenomenality cannot

be externally differentiated from that explanation, and thus cannot be what is explain*ed* by that explanation. In other words, there is something unexplained *in* (and all over) any physical or non-physical explanation, which is not possibly what is explained by any given explanation. Chomsky seems to makes a similar point regarding reductive analyses of linguistics:

> "Linguistics have a reasonable understanding of different kinds of "deviant" linguistic structure, where deviance is defined in terms of departure from principles of grammar, and it now appears that such differences correlate with particular patters of electrical activity in the brain. Such correlations have been taken to suggest that linguistic facts can be explained in terms of neurology. But here, and in a range of other cases, it is linguistics that enables us to make any sense at all of the results, as there is no relevant electrophysiological theory in existence. It is as impossible to express interesting generalisations about language in terms of the constructs of cells or neurons, as it is to express generalisations about geology or embryology in terms of the constructs of particle physics. In both cases demands for reduction have gone to far" (Smith 2000, viii).

What I take from this passage is perhaps beside its main point. Here, Smith (2000) is primarily explaining Chomsky's view that linguists and neuroscientists have reasonable explanations of "deviant structure" and "event-related brain potentials" in their own domains respectively. But he also points to the issue with thinking that any sort of neuroscientific theory could suffice to explain linguistic facts: linguistics is needed for making sense of neuroscientific results regarding linguistic facts. There is a sort of recursiveness here. Linguistics *in general or in total* can't be explain*ed* in terms of neurology, because linguistics would be involved in the explanation of itself (by giving the interpretative generalization of the relevant results). I'm making a similar point regarding explanation of phenomenal consciousness. But my point pertains to the inadequacy of explanation with respect to phenomenality in general, not just to physical, scientific or reductive explanation of the even further explanandum. Phenomenal consciousness *considered generally*, which must be minimally conceived as having the extent of co-presence with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena, cannot be explain*ed* by the adducing of any physical or non-physical explanans, because it would be involved in that explanans and would be effectively explaining itself. The problem with the idea of something explaining itself runs deep: it arises from

the duality involved in explanation. It is a condition on the possibility of an explanation that the explanans is distinct/separate from the explanandum. In the absence of such a distinction, no explanation is possible. I'll have more to say on this in the next chapter. For want of a perfect analogy, we might think of trying to touch one's whole body. Certainly, I can touch my face with my hand. But I cannot with my hand touch my all parts of my body all at once. The metaphysical ambition of expressing knowledge of what phenomenal consciousness *is* like the proprioceptive urge to step outside one's own bodily position and grasp one's own body *a capite ad calcem* (from head to heel).

The mystery here is not that we can't fit consciousness into our conception of the natural world, or that we can't explain how or why physical processes give rise to consciousness. It's that any (physical *or* first-personal; objective or subjective) explanation leaves an even further explanandum—the invariant condition and concomitant of each of its components, which cannot be externally differentiated, and therefore cannot be its *mere* explanandum. For a phenomenon to be explained, it must possibly be an explanandum in an explanation. At the very least, this is the way explanations works. The deeper mystery is thus the gap between all explicable phenomena and that which resists explication in this sense.

Explanations and, more broadly, theories of consciousness go wrong when they fail to recognize that co-present phenomenality is indistinguishable from all recognized instances of phenomenal consciousness. In other words, the invariant condition and concomitant of all explanations, phenomenality, is indistinguishable from the invariant condition and concomitant of all qualia and all viewpoints. All these phenomena have co-present phenomenality. We mistake what we mean when we say 'phenomenal consciousness' for *what* it is like for *me* or *you* or some perspectival subject to undergo some bodily state or cognition. When really, what we aim to

understand is *is-like-ness*, which is common to all inner and outer (subjective and objective) appearances.

1.5 Clarifications and Conclusion

I've distinguished between subjective experience (considered inclusive of the subject and qualitative characters of experience) on the one hand, and phenomenality on the other hand. I've argued that we should recognize that the standardly framed hard problem is just the problem of the subjective character of experience (including subjective phenomena like qualia), rather than *the* problem of phenomenal consciousness. The *root* problem of phenomenal consciousness is not, in my view, the explanatory gap between phenomena explicable in physical terms and phenomena explicable in first-personal terms. There is a bi-directional gap between physical and first-personal explanation. Explication of physical phenomena is no less a problem from the perspective in which first-personal explanation has priority than explication of subjective phenomena is from the perspective in which physical explanation has priority. The deeper mystery of consciousness is the explanatory gap between all apparently explicable subjective *and* objective phenomena, and that which is inseparably coupled with all subjective and objective phenomena, including all explanations. This even further explanandum resists explication in the broad sense that it is presupposed by all explanations, and is thus not a mere explanandum in an explanation. I've clarified that these initial distinctions and arguments are meant to (a) re-train our minimal conception of the further explanandum at issue in debates about phenomenal consciousness and (b) convey a sense of the way in which an even further explanandum calls out for explanation. I've analyzed phenomenality as the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena, which cannot be externally or internally differentiated.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to articulate this minimal conception of the even further explanandum that resists physical and non-physical explication without appearing to explain it. It may look as if I have expressed the panpsychist thesis that consciousness *is* fundamentally and ubiquitous in the natural world. But my view is more subtle. I have not claimed that phenomenality is *the same* across subjective and objective objects. When I say that phenomenality is the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena, I just mean that we can't *remove* co-present phenomenality from any aspect of any phenomenon. If we were to remove it from a phenomenon or from any part of a phenomenon, that phenomenon would cease to be what it is (a phenomenon).

Thus far, I have only broadly presented the inexplicability of phenomenality, to characterize the way in which it calls out for explanation. In the next chapter, I precisify this account of the even further explanandum at issue in debates about phenomenal consciousness, and argue that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness.

A few final clarifications are in order. I have not meant to suggest that all metaphysical theories of consciousness presuppose commitment to the priority of physical explanation—many theories provide non-physicalist solutions to the hard problem, and effectively eliminate the category of the 'physical' by subsuming 'physical' properties, states or events under the category of the 'mental'. I have meant that the standardly articulated hard problem is inadequate for making sense of the deeper mystery of consciousness, and for guiding inquiry into the ontological status of the even further explanandum tacitly at its center. The failure to recognize phenomenality as an even further explanandum precludes recognition of the limits on our capacity to metaphysically theorize about consciousness.

CHAPTER 2. PHENOMENALITY AND THE WITNESS (*SĀKṢIN*) IN ŚAṄKARA'S ADVAITA-VĀDA

Introduction

In this chapter, I offer an extended reconstruction of classical non-dualist Vedānta (Advaita Vedānta). In doing so, I show that the nominal distinction I have drawn between subjective experience and phenomenality has rich historical precedent, and foreground conceptual resources which will support my argument in the next chapter for the thesis that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness.

I begin with a broad overview of Śaṅkara's nondualist view (*advaita-vāda*), and a summary of my interpretive outlook on it (2.1). Having established these conceptual preliminaries, I offer a specific, detailed reconstruction of his *advaita-vāda*, while paying special attention to his phenomenological analysis of everyday life (*lokāvyavahāra*) (2.2), his tiered ontology, his idiosyncratic conception of falsity (*mihtyātva*) (2.3), and his distinction between two forms of the Upaniṣadic concept of *Brahman—Brahman* with qualities (*saguṇa Brahman*) and *Brahman* without qualities (*nirguṇa Brahman*) (2.4). Then I examine how the central concept of falsity bears on the conceptual semantics of Śaṅkaran nondualism in a way that undercuts the reasonableness of viewing it as expressing any absolutist metaphysical thesis (2.5). Finally, I draw an explicit connection between phenomenality and the concept of the witness (*sākṣin*) in Advaita Vedānta (2.6). This connection informs my argument in Chapter 3.

2.1 Introducing Śaṅkara's Nondualist View (*advaita-vāda*)

Vedānta,[7] is one of the six orthodox (*āstika*) schools of the classical Indian philosophical tradition. The word *Vedānta* literally means "the end of the Vedas", and stands for the Upaniṣads—the last literary products of the Vedic period (Panda 2018. xi). Although the Upaniṣads are known as being the most philosophical of the Vedas, they are not themselves systematic philosophical treatises (Ibid). They were systematized variously—most notably, for my current purposes—by Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahma Sūtras*. The *Brahma Sūtras* are 555 aphorisms which "attempt to reconcile the seemingly contradictory and diverse statements" across the various the Upaniṣads and the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Panda 2018, xiii). These reconciliatory aphorisms in turn inspired a series of commentaries on their own. Advaita Vedānta is a variant of Vedānta typically associated with Adi Śaṅkaracharya's commentary (*bhāṣya*) on Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahma Sūtras*, wherein he articulates a non-dualist interpretation of the Upaniṣadic concept of *Brahman* (a Sanskrit term I intentionally leave untranslated here). That said, Advaita Vedānta is not a monolithic school of thought—there are many Advaitins (exponents of non-dualist Vedānta), some of whom follow Śaṅkara less than others. Advaitins disagree amongst themselves on several finer points. In my reconstruction of Advaita Vedānta, I will mostly bracket intra-school disagreements, since my aim is to convey a sense of the core, cohesive spirit of the non-dualist view in order to offer a philosophical reconstruction of the view that will help me address the dialectical situation I outlines in chapter 1. But, to avoid over-generalizing, I will focus on Śaṅkara's non-dualist view (*advaita-vāda*), largely as it is expressed in his *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, and include selective input from his followers and commentators when and where apt.

[7] Vedānta is otherwise called Uttara-Mīmāṁsā.

2.1.1 Summarizing a Nuanced Interpretation of the advaita-vāda

The three most conspicuous theses of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* are succinctly stated in his *Brahmajñanavalimala*: Brahman alone is real (*sat*), the world (*jagat*) is false (*mithyā*), and the individual self (*jīva*) is Brahman.[8] It will take time for me to spell out what these theses mean.[9] Śaṅkara characterizes Brahman as having the nature of eternal purity (*nitya śuddha*), intelligence (*buddhi*), and freedom (*mukta*) (BSBh I, I, 2), as being that which has consciousness (*caitanya*) for its very self (BSBh IV, I, 2) and as being "one; not two" (*emkam eva advitiyam*) (BSBh III, II, 21). The term 'world' (*jagat*) refers to the entire phenomenal terrain differentiated by name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) (BSBh I, I, 2). The term (*jīva*) refers to the empirical individual that is, like you or me, *an* agent (*kartṛ*) of action, and *an* enjoyer/experiencer (*bhoktṛ*) (BSBh I, I). In other words, the individual self is the limited, perspectival subject of experience who thinks, feels, knows, wills, etc. The term 'false' (*mithyā*) signifies idiosyncratically in the Advaitic context—the unique, nuanced meaning of the term can only be conveyed through protracted analysis, which I intend to provide most directly in this chapter but will expand on in all those that follow as well, but it is often represented with the English word 'illusory'. It is thus appropriate to *gloss* Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* with the theses that pure, universal, non-dual consciousness alone is real, the entire phenomenal terrain characterized by plurality is illusory, and the individual agent and enjoyer in everyday life is really Brahman.

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[8] *Brahma stayam janganmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*

[9] In the context of Advaita Vedānta, there are multiple theoretical terms that cannot be straightforwardly translated, either because they are akin to but not exactly proper nouns (e.g., *Brahman*), or because they have multiple or idiosyncratic meanings. Where I leave Sanskrit terms untranslated upon first use, my intent is to disclose the sense of those words through subsequent analysis. In other cases, specifically regarding terms that have standard English counterparts but multiple or idiosyncratic meanings, I first insert the Sanskrit term in parentheses after its standard English translation, and subsequently use it untranslated in the prose. In these cases, my intent is to gradually dislodge the grip of habitual associative processes on our comprehension, and direct our awareness towards meanings that may remain occluded if the English term is never dropped.

Considering the appropriateness of this gloss, it should come as little surprise that Śaṅkara has been characterized as propounding some sort of absolutist metaphysical thesis. By 'absolutist metaphysical thesis' I mean a thesis which expresses *determinate knowledge* of what reality *is*. Often Śaṅkara is thought of as defending an austere brand of monistic idealism, which asserts the absolute reality of pure, universal, non-dual consciousness, and either trivializes or completely negates the reality of all difference and diversity (Gasparri 2022; Shani 2022). Interpretive formulations of Śaṅkara's metaphysical commitments vary,[10] but it is common to view him in one way or another as proffering a definitive view of what is absolutely real (*pāramārthika sat*) and, at the same time, of what consciousness essentially *is*, i.e., non-dual, or pure, or undifferentiated, or unqualified (note that these terms mean basically the same thing). But, as I see it, there are a few subtler aspects of the *advaita-vāda* which bear on its linguistic nature, and temper its seemingly absolutist (monistic; idealistic; anti-realist) proclamations. In my reconstruction, I track these subtler aspects of the view. Doing so will yield a number of philosophical boons, such as getting a more philosophically nuanced and accurate representation of Śaṅkara's thinking, and getting a reconstruction in view which can do explanatory work for us in adjudicating contemporary disputes about the metaphysics of consciousness and the semantics of phenomenal concepts.

The first of these subtler aspects of Advaita Vedānta is a layered phenomenological analysis of everyday, worldly life *(lokavyavahāra)* (BSBh I, I) which *yields* awareness of the witness (*sākṣin*) (BSBh I, I) of all the mind's modifications, and of *all* things differentiated by

[10] Bina Gupta (1998), for example, has emphasized that Śaṅkara's analytical method is phenomenological, and has hedged on characterizing Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* as absolutely monistic. I reconstruct Śaṅkara's view along similar lines, but foreground its linguistic nature to a greater extent, and explicitly argue that the view does not, all things considered, express an absolutist metaphysical thesis for reasons beyond its phenomenological approach. Some contemporary philosophers (Gasparri 2022; Shani 2022), on the other hand, have interpreted Śaṅkara as advancing a stark anti-realist stance on all denizens of the phenomenal world. I will explain how my reading of Śaṅkara's view bears on this contemporary interpretation in the short addendum following this chapter.

name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*) (BSBh I, I, 2). This witness (*sākṣin*) is successively recognized as the real inner self (*ātman*)—the substratum on which the modifications of the mind, or the 'internal organ' (*antaḥkaraṇa*) (BSBh I, I), are superimposed, giving rise to the appearance of the individual self (*jīva*)—and as the universal "cause" of the "effect" that is the entire phenomenal world (BSBh II, I, 14). Finally, the inner self (*ātman*) which witnesses the mind's modifications is realized *as* the self of *all* finite things (*Brahman*)—a realization expressed by the well-known Upaniṣadic statement "thou art that" (*tat tvam asi*) (BSBh IV, I, 2; CU VI, 8, 7). The three most conspicuous theses of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* should be understood as being arrived at *through* and only meaningful against the backdrop of this phenomenological analysis. This first aspect of the view is the foundation for understanding other aspects which more directly contribute to my resistance against the assumption that the *advaita-vāda* expresses determinate knowledge of absolute reality (*parmarthika sat*) and, at the same time, consciousness (*caitanya*).

The second aspect of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* which functions to assuage its absolutist façade is a *tiered* ontology comprised in part by the idiosyncratic Advaitic ontological category of falsity (*mithyātva*). I should preface the following discussion with the note that my analysis of *mithyātva* differs from contemporary characterizations of the term which suggest that it signifies unreality or entails a severe brand of illusionism (Gasparri 2022; Shani 2022). My stance is that the 'false' is neither unreal nor illusory in the way of a hallucination or a mirage. The false world of diversity is very much apparent (as opposed to nothing at all), empirically real, and full of practically efficacious phenomena. Moreover, I will argue, falsity itself is not *absolutely opposed* to absolute reality. This is because falsity (*mithyātva*) and absolute reality (*pāramārthika sat*) turn out to be mutually opposed categories; in the context of Advaita Vedānta, the distinction between

them implies their mutual superimposition (*adhyāsa*) on the substratum of their appearance (*Brahman*), which in turn constitutes their indeterminacy relative to that substratum.

For all this to make sense, I need to say more about how the concept of *mithyātva* figures in the ontological schema advanced by Śaṅkara and his followers. The Advaitin distinguishes between three orders of reality (*sattva*)—the transcendentally or absolutely real (*pāramārthika sat*), i.e., Brahman, the empirically or practically real (*vyāvahārika sat*) and the apparently real (*prātibhāsika sat*) (PPV II, 165/1-2).[11] The phenomenal world (*jagat*) consists of both empirical and apparent objects (things which have practical efficacy and things which do not, respectively), and it is categorized as false *(mithyā*), wherein falsity (*mithyātva*) is opposed both to the (transcendentally or absolutely) real *and* the unreal (VC, III). In explicating the concept of falsity, I appeal to the Advaitic theory of the superimposition (*adhyāsa*): that which is false is that which is *superimposed* on Brahman, and that which can be sublated (*bādhita*) via direct cognition of the substratum of its appearance (TaD, p. 34).[12] The sublation of one experience or cognition by another can be understood *on analogy* with everyday perceptual illusions, such as when the appearance of a snake in a dimply lit room is overridden by the subsequent appearance of a rope when the light is turned on, and the snake is seen for what it is—a rope (BSBh I, IV, 6). Because the world appears in/on the substratum of Brahman but can be sublated, it is indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) as either different or non-different from that which is *never sublated*, i.e., Brahman. Brahman is *pāramārthika sat*. *As* indeterminable as either different or non-different from that which is *pāramārthika sat*, the world is indeterminable as either absolutely real (*sat*) or absolutely

[11] These three orders of reality are enumerated in the *Pañcapādikāvivaraṇa* of Yati Prakāśātman (a 10th century CE Advaitin), which addresses the *Pancapādikā* of Padmapāda (a disciple of Śaṅkara). I follow Mirdula Bhattcharyya (2015) in incorporating *Yati Prakāśātman's* elucidation of the *Pancapādikā* in my reconstruction of the Advatiic concept of *mithyātva*.

[12] This characterization of *mithyātva* is found in the *Tattva-dīpanam* of the Advaitin Akhaṇḍānanda Muni (A.D. 1350), which is a gloss on Prakāśātman's commentary on the Pañcapādikā (the major text of Padmapāda, one of Śaṅkara's principle disciples).

unreal (*asat*). In short, the world cannot be said to be absolutely real, and cannot be said to be absolutely unreal. The message of the *advaita-vāda* has to be understood through the lens of this tired ontology, and with keeping this idiosyncratic concept of falsity in mind.

The thesis that pure consciousness *alone* is real is deeply related to the doctrine of the falsity of the world. In the *advaita-vāda,* the world is not false in the way we normally mean. Normally, when we say something is false, we mean that the statement is untrue because the state of affairs it purports to represent *is not the case*. But that's not what falsity means here. Here, the world is false in the sense that its absolute ontological status *cannot be determined* relative to the pervading foundation of its manifestation. The falsity of the world—*qua* Brahman's being *pāramārthika sat*—preserves much of what we want to say about the world in ordinary discourse; the idiosyncratic notion of falsity (*mithyātva*) applied to the phenomenal world does not entail a global illusionism about things that manifest as non-*Brahman*. Moreover, *Brahman* alone is real *in a particular sense*—a sense which can only be expressed in terms of the relationship between *Brahman* and world, which is itself *indeterminable*. The conceptual semantics of the metaphysical thesis that Brahman alone is real are indeterminate. By this I mean that the conceptual element by which we understand the metaphysical thesis that Brahman alone is real is *itself* false (*mithyā*) in the relevant sense. Accordingly, the thesis that Brahman alone is real is also false. But this does not mean that the thesis is untrue, or that the state of affairs it represents is not the case. It means that in apprehending the absolutist metaphysical thesis we are still immersed in the realm of empirical reality. We are still immersed in illusion, but not the sort of illusion which entails that our statements aren't meaningful or pragmatically efficacious for everyday purposes or even release (*Mokṣa*) from existential suffering. This alone should cause us to hesitate from sloganizing

the *advaita-vāda* such that the view seems to express *determinate* knowledge of reality/consciousness.

The third aspect of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* I will explore is a multi-dimensional conceptual distinction drawn by Śaṅkara between two forms of Brahman: Brahman with qualities (*saguṇa Brahman*) and Brahman without qualities (*nirguṇa Brahman*) (BSBh II, I, 14; BSBh III, II, 21). *Saguṇa* Brahman is Brahman viewed as the universal "cause" (*karaṇa*) of the world, which is to all things differentiated by name and form as sea-water is to waves and sea-foam, or as a clod of clay is to jars, dishes, pails, and so on (BSBh II, I, 14). *Nirguṇa Brahman*, on the other hand, is Brahman described negatively, that is to say, not in terms of having *positive* qualities (being all-pervasive; being subject to modification) but as undergoing no modifications, and thus having no qualities whatsoever. On one possible interpretation of the distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman, the intent is simply to assert that absolute reality (Brahman; pure consciousness) *is* singular, unmodified, and unified, rather than multiform, immanent in all things, and permutating. But, on my interpretation of the distinction, the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman *on one level* straightforwardly advertises the soteriological merit of conceiving of Brahman as a unity undergoing no modifications whatsoever, Śaṅkara says as much (BSBh II, I, 14), but on another level coheres with Śaṅkara's insistence on the impossibility of *apprehending* the witness (of whatever is apprehend*ed*) by speech (BSBh III, II, 24).

Brahman, on my view, is to be understood as without qualities (*nirguṇa*) in the sense of being *indicated* by non-duality and lack of plurality, but as really being *inapprehensible* by speech. The concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman *indicates* that transcendental reality *about which we cannot express determinate knowledge*. Ironically, both the ascription of the quality 'without qualities' (*nirguṇa*), regardless of the sense attached to the term, and the assertion that Brahman is

inexpressible in this sense, consist in apprehending Brahman by speech, or in expressing determinate knowledge of Brahman. In this sense, the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman multiply rebounds on itself: it first indicates a singular, undifferentiated absolute reality excluding multiformity from its extension, then an inapprehensible, inexpressible, unfathomable presence, with which we are intimately connected whenever we see, know, talk, etc. But, then again, it also ensures the non-ultimacy of even *that* grasp of said presence, by speech, *as* inapprehensible, inexpressible, etc. The distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman actually indicates the *paradoxical* inexpressibility of Brahman, which means that even at this seemingly ultimate level of analysis, the *advaita-vāda* does not straightforwardly express any absolutist metaphysical thesis. The view doesn't even express determinate knowledge of Brahman *as* inexpressible. This conception of Brahman anticipates my formulation of phenomenality in chapter 1. This conception of Brahman is also philosophical and exegetically important for understanding Advaita Vedānta, for in working with this conception of Brahman (as being inexpressible, even *as such*) we can appreciate Advaita Vedānta as a school of thought which genuinely guides its students towards *release* (*Mokṣa*) from the mode of dualistic apprehension wherein Brahman could possibly be *apprehended* by speech.

Finally, I explore the relevance of the doctrine of the falsity of the world with respect to the non-dualist view (*advaita-vāda*) itself. The 'world' (*jagat*) that is false according to Śaṅkara consists not just of individual, perspectival subjects of experience, apparently self-existent external perceptual objects, and so on. The reference of the term *jagat* encompasses *all* that is differentiated by name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*)—all having definite places, times, and causes (BSBh I, I, 2). We should not forget that all *teachings* are differentiated by name and form, and by different limiting conditions such as place, time or some specific cause or another. I do not wish to highlight that

Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* is historically contingent, although of course it is. I wish to note that all teachings (single linguistic utterances, sets of aphorisms, well-worked theories, theses within theories, what have you) participate in the world, which is an "effect" in the relevant Advaitic sense of being indeterminable as either different or non-different from the witness (*sākṣin*), and thus indeterminable as either absolutely real or unreal. Worldly things are those things which appear *different from* one another in virtue of their attributes (e.g., a pot versus a bowl, a large wave versus a small patch of sea-foam), but which *only appear as such* due to their mutual superimposition on the witness. I methodically show that each of the key semantic-theoretic elements (statements; distinctions; theses; doctrines) constituting the *advaita-vada* are false, in the relevant idiosyncratic Advaitic sense of the term. The distinction between Brahman and the world is false. The distinction between *saguṇa* Brahman and *nirguṇa* Brahman is false. Even the assertion that *nirguṇa* Brahman is absolutely real is false. The central Advaitic concept of falsity (*mithyātva*) permeates the semantic-theoretic structure of the *advaita-vāda*, renders the entire theory false in the sense of being indeterminable as either real/true (*sat*) or unreal (*asat*), and thus functions to constrain the *absolute* truth/reality of the theory as a whole.

2.1.2 Broader Implications

Having attended to these subtler aspects of the *advaita-vāda*, I offer a broader interpretive perspective on the theory overall which reflects the paradoxical fact that even *falsity is false*. Falsity itself is apparent only in virtue of the contrast between the categories of reality, falsity and unreality—a contrast which presupposes the invariant presence of the witness (*sāskin*) across the three-fold ontic schema—absolute reality (*pāramārthika sattva*), empirical reality (*vyāvahārika sattva*) and apparent reality (*prātibhāsika sattva*), all of which are opposed to unreality (*asattva*),

or non-presence—and implies the sublatability of each category. This is a paradox of sorts because, on the one hand, the distinction between absolute reality and falsity is helpful for understanding why the world as we experience it is not absolutely real/true (*sat*), but, on the other hand, the very distinction between these two categories is itself not indicative of absolute reality/truth (*sattva*). This paradox has a further implication for the semantic-theoretic structure of the *advaita-vāda*. Falsity (*mithyātva*) permeates the semantic-theoretic structure of the theory. In this sense, the theory is false. But *as* false, the *advaita-vāda* is false. This brings me to the crux of my reconstruction: in my view, the *advaita-vāda* may be thought of as having a life of its own—as being active, with its activity consisting in it repeatedly *self-sublating*.

The theory may seem to assert that the witness (*sāskin*; *ātman*; *Brahman*) which is referenced as having the nature of pure consciousness *is* ultimately ineffable (inexpressible; indeterminable; inexplicable), but the theory builds the concept of falsity into itself—a concept which ends up mitigating the absolute ontic-alethic[13] status of the key distinctions and assertations which indicate the absolute ineffability of Brahman. Having self-restricted *via* this internal mechanism—having falsified itself—the theory turns in on itself again and restricts the import *of that very restriction*. I propose that this vacillating movement of the theory has no end. In other words, no one formulation of the theory wins out over the others. This interpretive view of the *advaita-vāda* is unusual, but consistent, all things considered, with Śaṅkara's insistence that Brahman *cannot be apprehended by speech* (BSBh I, I VI). The implication of Śaṅkara's stance on the limits of language is that even *his* view *itself* cannot function to apprehend Brahman by speech. And this implies that the philosophical intent of Śaṅkaran nondualism cannot be summed

[13]We should note that the Sanskrit term '*sat*' means both 'truth' and 'reality'—to be false is to be opposed to both absolute truth/reality and absolute non-truth/unreality. For *nirguṇa* Brahman to be false is for *nirguṇa* Brahman to be indeterminable as either different or non-different from absolute truth/reality.

up in or reduced to one statement or sentiment. The *advaita-vāda* may seem to be a theory of consciousness which expresses an absolutist metaphysical thesis, but it does not reach a dead end (i.e., an expression of complete, determinate knowledge of consciousness or reality) in its original formulation, in its first self-sublation, or in the next. And this is precisely the point I want to make: the *advaita-vāda* isn't supposed to lead us to one, single, final answer about what reality or consciousness is or is not. It is meant to show us that trying to find *the* expression of determinate knowledge of the presence accompanying all subjective and objective phenomena (the witness) to trump *all others* is inevitably an exercise in falsity (*mithyātva*), or indeterminacy.[14]

I close by drawing a series of brief, explicit connections between phenomenality as I defined it in chapter 1 and the witness (*sāskin*) of Advaita Vedānta. Like phenomenality, the witness is not aptly categorized as *subjective*, for it is present with respect to *all* mental modifications and *all* external finite things alike. Like phenomenality it cannot be externally differentiated. By 'externally differentiated' I mean differentiated from anything *else*. And, like phenomenality(and *vice versa*), the witness cannot be *apprehended* by speech. We cannot *express* determinate knowledge of what the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena (phenomenality; pure consciousness) *is,* not even by expressing that we cannot express determinate knowledge about it. In Chapter 3, I sharpen this line of reasoning by focusing on the pervasiveness of phenomenality, understood as the witness of Advaita Vedānta, with respect to all linguistic phenomena.

[14]This is the message I think Advaita Vedānta has to share with the enterprise that is the metaphysics of consciousness. I develop this message further in the chapters that follow, specifically by rendering the *advaita-vāda* via the Jaina theory of sevenfold predication.

2.2 Specific Reconstruction of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda*

In this section, I begin to reconstruct the non-dualist view *advaita-vāda* of Śaṅkara and his followers by reconstructing their phenomenological analysis of everyday, worldly life *(lokavyavahara)* especially as it is articulated in Śaṅkara's *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*. This analysis *yields* awareness of the witness (*sākṣin*) of all inner (subjective; mental) and outer (objective; physical) phenomena as both the real, inner self (*ātman*) and the "cause" of the entire phenomenal world (*Brahman*). Finally, the two—*ātman* and *Brahman*—are recognized as non-different. This focus is apposite for my philosophical purposes, because this phenomenological analysis of *lokavyavahāra* is the background against which the subtler aspects of the *advaita*-vāda, which temper its seemingly absolutist claims, can be understood.

It is helpful to think of the Advaitic analysis of worldly life as an encounter with the *sākṣin* carried out on two converging paths—call them Path A and Path B. On the first of the two converging paths we zoom inwards, and introspectively attend to our sense of being *an* agent (*kartṛ*) of action and *an* enjoyer/experiencer (*bhoktṛ*). This empirical individual, which is normally identified with the *self*, is called the *jīva*. On the other path, we zoom back out, adopt a wide-angle lens, and attend to the entire phenomenal world (*jagat*), which includes not just our own self, but all agents and enjoyers, along with all things differentiated by name and form (external objects, ideas, etc.). The concept represented by the term *sākṣin* is basically the same on paths A and B (but easily mistaken for being otherwise). The concepts represented by the terms *ātman* and *Brahman* have slightly different senses, or emphases, on the two paths, but at the point of their convergence they mean the same thing.

2.2.1 Śaṅkara's Phenomenological Analysis of Everyday Life (lokāvyavahara)

In the following two sub-sections, I analyze paths A and B of Śaṅkara's phenomenological analysis of *lokāvyavahara*.

2.2.1.1 Path A: the *jīva*

In everyday, worldly life (*lokāvyavahara*) "I" appear to be *an* agent (*kartr*) of action, and *an* enjoyer, or experiencer, (*bhoktr*). "I" see, hear, smell, taste, and touch various perceptual objects, e.g., trees, books, sunsets, and carry out various tasks. "I" think various thoughts, feel various emotions, have various desires, etc. Normally, I identify this agent and experiencer with my *self*. The Sanskrit term for this "I", which is normally identified with the self, is *jīva*.

Śaṅkara intervenes on this typical (*naisargika*) association of the *jīva* and the self in part by appealing to the Upaniṣadic analogy of the two birds: "two birds, inseparable friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating" (BSBh I, I, 4).[15] In this analogy, the bird eating the sweet fruit represents the *jīva*. The analogy is meant to communicate something we can introspectively observe: whenever "I" am engaged with some object or another, there is a sort of presence witnessing my being in relation to that object. This presence, which is simply there, and which witnesses my being in relation to the intentional object of my awareness or activity, is called the witness (*sākṣin*). In the full form of this analogy, the bird eating the sweet fruit eventually realizes that they were the bird looking on, without eating, all along. Here one might think that the analogy doesn't do any explanatory work for us, i.e., it doesn't help us understand how the bird eating the sweet fruit is really the bird looking on, because there's no way to construe the two birds as being identical in the analogy. This is right, but not a problem—

[15] '*tayoranyaḥ pippalam svādvattyanaśanannanyo abhicaākaśīti'* (Mu. Up. 3, 1, 1).

the explanatory power of the analogy pertains to *how we can come to realize* something about ourselves. And what is realized is not exactly the identity of the empirical individual and the *sākṣin* but the real nature of *the self*. We can come to realize that if anything is fit to be regarded as the self (*ātman*) it is really the *sākṣin,* not the empirical individual (so the analogy tells us) by shifting our introspective attention to that presence which is not opposed to any particular object or a world of objects. This is meant to represent the possible shift in *self*-awareness from identification of self with the subject who is always engaged with some object or another, to identification of self with that presence in virtue of which our being in relation to a world of objects is anything at all.

This shift can be occasioned by recognizing the nominal difference between the self that is engaged with a world of objects and the witness (*sākṣin*): "I" am intimately connected with the presence illuminating my being in relation to any given object. But, I cannot say that this presence is *just me*. For, unlike me, this presence is not *opposed to* and engaged with some object. Yet, "I" cannot remove this presence from myself—whenever "I" am, there is also this presence. Eventually, I can come to realize that I am mistaken if I think that "I" am *just* the individual agent and experiencer I normally appear to be. Unfortunately, as is true of most analogies, the two-birds analogy is imperfect. It indicates that the bird looking on without eating stands apart from, and external to the bird eating the sweet fruit. But the witness (*sākṣin)* should not be thought of as standing apart from or external to the *jīva*. To tease out this point, I will take a bit of a detour, examine the crucial Advaitic theory of superimposition (*adhyāsa*), and then return to the two-birds example.

In his prolegomena to his *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, the *Adhyāsa Bhāṣya,* Śaṅkara offers a condensed explanatory account of the appearance of the individual self (*jīva*). He states that the *jīva* appears due to the *superimposition* (*adhyāsa*) of the attributes of the body, the sense-organs

and the 'internal organ' (*antaḥ-karaṇa*)—with emphasis of those of the 'internal-organ'—on the *sākṣin,* which is said to be the real self (*ātman*) (BSBh I, I):

> Extra personal attributes are superimposed on the Self, if a man considers himself sound and entire…attributes of the body are superimposed on the Self, if a man thinking of himself (his Self) as stout, lean, fair, as standing, walking or jumping. Attributes of the sense-organs, if he thinks 'I am mute, or deaf, or one eyed, or blind'. Attributes of the internal organ when he considers himself subject to desire, intention, doubt, determination, and so on. Thus the producer of the notion of the Ego (i.e. the internal organ) is superimposed on the interior Self, which, in reality, is the witness of all the modifications of the internal organ, and visa versa the interior Self, which is the witness of everything, is superimposed on the internal organ, the senses, and so on. In this way there goes on this natural beginning and endless superimposition, which appears as the form of wrong conception, it is the cause of individual souls appearing as agents and enjoyers (of the results of their actions) and is observed by every one (BSBh I, I).[16]

In this passage, Śaṅkara talks of the body, the sense organs, and the internal organ. We may think of him as talking, overall, about the psycho-physical organism we normally call a human being, or a person. What he means by 'body' (*deha*) is clear enough. And it is fairly obvious that by 'sense-organs' (*indriyadharmān*) he means the ears, eyes, nose, etc. But here he does not specify the precise nature of the internal organ (*antaḥ-karaṇa*). The standard Advaitic view of the internal organ can be gleaned from the writings of other Advaitins, and attributed to Śaṅkara.[17] The 9th century Advaitin Sarvajñātman states that the psycho-physical organism consists, in its psychical aspect, in the five senses of knowledge, five senses of action, five-fold vital-air, and the internal organ, in its two-fold aspect of mind (*manas*) and the intellect (*buddhi*) (SŚ 3, 16). Often, as in this case, the *manas* and the *buddhi* are emphasized as the two aspects of the *antaḥ-karaṇa*. But it is also standard for Advaitins to think of the internal organ as being four-fold, in accord with various statements across the Upanisads. The generalized Advaitic view of the internal organ is thus of a

[16] *adhyāso nāma atasminastadbuddhirityavocāma | tadryatha putrabhāryadiṣu vikaleṣu skaleṣu vā ahameva vikalaḥ sakalo veti bāhyadharmānātmanyadhyasyati, tathā dehadharmān-sthulo'ham, kṛśo'ham, gauro'ham, tiṣṭāmi, gacchami, laṅghyāmi ceti | tathendriyadharmān-mukaḥ, kāṇaḥ, klibaḥ, badhiraḥ, andho'hamiti | tathā'ntaḥkaraṇdharmānkāmasamkalpa - vicikitsādhyavasāyādin | evamahampratyaīnāmaśoṣasvapracārasākṣini pratyagātmanya-dhyasya tam ca pratyagātmānam sarvasākṣinim tadviparyayeṇāntaḥkaraṇādiṣveshyāsyati | evamayamanādirananto naisargikao'dhyāso mithyāpratyayarūpaḥ kartṛbhoktṛtvapravartakaḥ sarvalokapratyakśaḥ*

[17] The general scope of what is meant by the term '*antaḥ-karaṇa*' is not, as far as I can gather, a topic of significant controversy amongst Advaitins.

sort of psycho-physical complex, comprised of the sensing-mind (*manas*), the higher intellect (*buddhi*), the ego-sense, or "I-ness" (*ahamkara*) and consciousness (*citta*) (Praś. Up. 4, 8). I will interpret Śaṅkara's use of the term along these lines.

In his commentary on Śaṅkara's *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāṣya*, the 9th century Advaitin Vācaspati Miśra states that the mind unaided by the sense-organs cannot function with respect to external objects (BT, 19). This indicates the Advaitic view that the *manas* comes into contact with external objects by going out through the sense-organs, assuming the forms of external objects, and thereby forming percepts. The *buddhi*, on the other hand, is that aspect of the internal organ which operates on the percepts formed by the *manas*, making determinations (e.g., "that is a lion") and engendering abstracta. This interpretation of the *buddhi* is consistent with the distinction Śaṅkara implies when comparing animals and human beings: the two are similarly affected by objects through the senses, but 'man' is distinguished by the higher intelligence (*buddhi*) (BSBh I, I). Overall, the *antaḥ-karaṇa* is not just the 'mind' that thinks, judges, infers, etc. It is better understood as a concept representing that internally variegated psycho-physical aspect of the psycho-physical organism which is intricately connected with the body parts that facilitate contact with the external world. In short, the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, which is the 'mind' of Advaita Vedānta, is complex, and very much embodied.

Let us return to the main point presently at issue: Śaṅkara says that the attributes of the internal organ are superimposed on the witness (*sākṣin*) of all the modifications of the internal organ, and *vice versa*, and that this superimposition accounts for the appearance of individual agents and enjoyers. Keeping in mind the embodiment of the internal organ, we may think of the modifications of the internal organ as psycho-physical states; states that have phenomenal

character,[18] and exist in virtue of at least some contact between the sense-mind (*manas*) and the world, facilitated by the sense-organs. Keeping all this in mind, let's examine what it might mean for such states to be superimposed on the witness.

To grasp this point, we must look at closely at the Advaitic concept of superimposition (*adhyāsa*). The Sanskrit word *adhyāsa* literally means 'to throw over' (*adi* + *as*). In the *Adhyāsa Bhāṣya*, Śaṅkara offers successively narrower definitions of *adhyāsa*. This successively narrowing definitional analysis of *adhyāsa* could be considered significant as a pedagogical strategy relevant to a historical dialectic about the nature of perceptual error (Rao 1998): Śaṅkara works from an intuitive conception of perceptual error (e.g., seeing a rope where there is a snake) towards a stringent definition of such error *as superimposition* (an understanding of what goes wrong in erroneous perceptual cognition which then does a lot of explanatory work in Śaṅkara's specific theories of mind and empirical individuality).

First, *adhyāsa* is said to involve reciprocal non-differentiation. The state of one thing's nature is put in the other, and the properties of the one and the other are mutually superimposed. Even though the two are of distinct kinds, we bring them together and confuse truth and falsity (BSBh I, I). This definition is exemplified with everyday perceptual illusions like "mother-of-pearl appears like silver" or "the moon although one only appears as double" (BSBh I, I).[19] In the case of the shell-silver example, the properties of the silver (e.g., being valuable) are put in the shell,

[18] This exegetical point that the modifications of the *antaḥ-karaṇa* can be understood as psycho-physical states having phenomenal character is grounded in Śaṅkara's phenomenological approach to explaining empirical individuality. On his view, the individual subject of experience *(jīva*) is an appearance causally explained by the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the attributes of the *antaḥ-karaṇa* on the witness. The implication of this phenomenological explanation is that we can observe the presence of the witness in all attributes of the internal organ. For the witness to be present in all psycho-physical modifications is for them to have phenomenal-character. My intent in characterizing modifications of the internal organ as phenomenally conscious psycho-physical states is not to indicate that Śaṅkara first defines them as such and then concludes that they are phenomenal. My point is that it is a fact of the matter that the modifications of the internal organ have phenomenal character, or co-present phenomenality.

[19] *śuktikā hi rajatavadavabhāsate, ekaścandraḥ sadvitiyavaditi*

and the properties of the shell (e.g., luminescence) are seen as in the silver. *Adhyāsa* is subsequently defined as an experience, appearance, or cognition of something having the form of memory seen somewhere else created by a prior experience (BSBh I, I).[20] In the shell-silver example, the cognition of silver has the form of memory (silver was seen before somewhere else due to a prior experience). Śaṇkara finally defines *adhyāsa* in a very narrow and stilted way, as "that cognition in/on not that" or "in/on not that, cognition of that" (BSBh I, I).[21] Put otherwise, *adhyāsa* at its narrowest construal is experiencing one thing where there is something else. In the shell-silver example, silver is cognized where there is a shell. The thing that is really there (in this case, the shell) where something else is seen is the substratum (*adhikaraṇa*) on which what is erroneously seen in that location is superimposed.

Accordingly, we can understand the superimposition of the internal organ on the witness in these senses: its modifications are thrown over the witness (this sense corresponds to the literal meaning of the word *adhyāsa,* 'to throw over'), attributed to the witness, mixed up with the witness, and located where, and only where, there is the witness. The witness is the substratum of the appearance of the modifications of the internal organ. On the Advaitic view, all this is introspectively observable with the right level of mental discipline. We may think of any particular psycho-physical state; examples include thinking about the hard problem of consciousness, running in the woods in the evening, craving chocolate cake, enduring a deep paper cut, seeing a flower blowing in the breeze. In every single case, the *sākṣin* is there—witnessing not just the "I" that is thinking, running, craving, feeling or seeing, but also whatever is thought, felt, done, craved or seen, *and* the very relation between the agent/experiencer and the intentional object (possibly just the world at large) in the given psycho-physical modification.

[20] *smṛti rūpaḥ paratra purvadṛṣṭa avabhasāḥ*
[21] *adhyāsa* as *atasmin tad buddhiḥ*

This aspect of Śaṅkara's explanatory account of the *jīva* can be reconstructed as *a sort* of transcendental argument for the view that the *sākṣin* is the condition of the manifestation of empirical individuality. The *jīva* is organized around the modifications of the internal organ—it is the "I" that sees, thinks, feels, acts, sees, and so on. This "I" would be nothing without those modifications. And those modifications would be nothing without the witness. This is evidenced by the invariable concomitance of said modifications and the witness. Whenever and wherever there are modifications of the internal organ, which involve contact with the external world, there is the witness (*sākṣin)*. We should keep in mind that examples of everyday perceptual illusions are of limited assistance in conceptualizing the relation between the witness and all modifications of the mind. We may think of the witness as the luminosity that *is thoroughly and pervasively mixed up with* any given psycho-physical modification, across the relevant subjective and objective prongs. And we can think of this pervasion in terms of thoroughgoing immanence—there is no part or aspect of any given psycho-physical modification from which this luminous (self-revealing) presence is absent. The *sākṣin* is thus the condition of the possibility of the modifications of the internal organ, and in turn of the *jīva*. The essential ingredients for *jīva*-hood (modifications of the internal organ) are anything at all, as it were, because of and where there is (at all points and pervasively) the *sākṣin.*[22] Here, one might be unclear on why I'm characterizing this as a transcendental argument: the witness is not the condition of the possibility of mental modifications in the sense of being something the absence of which would ensure the strict impossibility of mental modifications. The invariant co-presence of the witness across mental modifications is an empirical fact, and from this fact alone we cannot conclude that if the witness were absent there

[22] We may note that Śaṅkara also argues that the witness is fit to be regarded as the self because it abides even in deep sleep (BSBh I, I, 9), but I find the transcendental argument succinctly lurking in the *Adhyāsa Bhāṣya* more invulnerable to critique, and more intuitive.

would be no modifications of mind. However, we persist in finding no modifications of mind without the witness. Accordingly, we can think of Śaṅkara's explanatory account of the *jīva* as a *weak* transcendental argument, in that it shows how the witness happens to be the condition of the *manifestation* of all mental modifications (i.e., wherever are such modifications, there is the witness).

Note that what is offered here is *not* a reductive analysis of the *jīva* into *just* a collection of psycho-physical modifications. Indeed, this is far from the point. It should be helpful to note that the relevant controversy concerns what is fit to be *regarded* as the self—not whether the self exists. Normally, we think of the self as being the "I" that thinks, feels, wills, etc. But, when we look closer at this "I" (which we appears in relation to a world of objects) we can discover something that with which we are always intimately bound up with, which is more—forgive the unavoidable allegorical language—constant, omnipresent, and expansive than our own individual, embodied, en-worlded perspective.

Let us return to the analogy of the two birds. The *jīva* is the bird eating the sweet fruit. The *sāskin* is the bird looking on without eating. But the two birds are not really separate; the higher bird is in the lower bird all along, as the condition of the possibility of its appearance, which is at no point removable from its appearance (remove the witness, and nothing appears at all—no psychical modification appears without the witness). We are like the lower bird—normally we identify that individual organized around various psycho-physical modifications with our self. But we can feel that presence which sustains our entire field of awareness at any given time—which goes beyond *us* since it illuminates us as much as anything *else*, and does not stand *in relation* or *opposition* to any particular object or a world of objects.

At this point, one might wonder if it is the internal organ that is superimposed on the witness, or the *jīva* or both. In my view, we must answer that it is both. The modifications of the internal organ are indeed superimposed on the witness. This superimposition causally explains the appearance of the *jīva as different from the witness* (as being the self). But, at the same time, the *jīva* is apparent in/on the substratum of the witness, and exists at no point without the witness. In a sense, this is just an empirical fact about us—we never encounter mental modifications giving rise to empirical individuality without the witness. But the fact *that* this is an empirical fact about us does not reduce the relevance of the ubiquity of the *sākṣin* to our normal identification with the *jīva*. The ubiquity of the *sākṣin* is equivalent to its permanence across mental modifications, which does imply (a) that what is most substantial about empirical individuality is this luminosity (the witness; *sākṣin*) and (b) that if anything is to be regarded as the self *(ātman*), the basic identifier of which is permanence, it is the *sākṣin*.

Once more, the point is not that the *jīva* is illusory at the empirical level of analysis, or that it is really just a bunch of psycho-physical modifications. The point is that if *anything* is fit to be regarded as the self (*ātman*), it is the witness. If we think that we are *just* individuals—perspectival, embodied subjects opposed to a world of objects and other subjects—and that we are nothing more, we fail to recognize our intimacy with the presence within, with which we are inextricably and thoroughly mixed up with in every act of seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling.

This presence *within* happens to be the condition of the possibility of any subject-object *relation/opposition*, and as much the invariant condition and concomitant of our own sense of individuality as of the appearance of the world of objects to which our individuality is opposed.

2.2.1.2 Path B: *jagat*

Now, let us zoom back out and return to the "world" (*jāgat*) at large, which is, on basic reflection, constituted by a vast plurality of inner (subjective; mental) and outer (objective; physical) objects differentiated by name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*), including many subjects (*jīva*s) to which said objects appear (BSBh I, I, 2). We can directly observe that the phenomenal terrain is characterized by radical *distinctness*: books, trees, animals, persons, behaviors, events, ideas, etc. are differentiated by labels, categories, designators, shapes, locations, specific causal conditions, etc. All inner and outer objects *of* consciousness, including the *jīva* (the object of *self*-consciousness), differ with respect to their names, forms, places, causal conditions, and so on.

But, we can see that there is a respect in which all differentiated things *do not differ*. The respect in which all things differentiated by name, form, etc. do not differ is that they are *witnessed*. The observation is not that all inner and outer things are witnessed by some individual, perspectival subject or another, although this is also evident. Rather, it is that there is always a luminosity in virtue of which any object is apparent in relation to some subject, which is bound up with and literally all over the object itself. This is true regardless of *which* subject the object in question happens to be apparent to. When understood as the luminous presence attending all finite things—all constituents of the phenomenal world—the witness (*sākṣin*) is called *Brahman*:

> Brahman is the source…which lamp-like illuminates all things; which is itself all-knowing as it were. (BSB I, I, 3).[23]

Here, Śaṅkara calls Brahman the "source" which illuminates all things. He also says that Brahman is the "cause" of all things:

[23] *mahatma Ṛgvedādeḥ śāstrasyānekavidryāsthānopabṛmhitasya pradipava-tsarvārthavdryotinaḥ sarvajñkalpasya yoniḥ kāraṇam brahma | nadidṛśasya śāstrasyargvedādilakśaṇasya sarvajñaguṇānvitasya sarvajñadanyataḥ sambhave'sti |*

> That omniscient omnipotent cause from which proceed the origin, subsistence, and dissolution of this world—which is differentiated by names and forms, contains many agents and enjoyers…that cause, we say, is Brahman (BSB I, I, 2).[24]

These designations—'source' and cause'—can be misleading, especially if they are taken outside the context of the Advaitic qualification that the effect pre-exists in its cause (*satkāryavāda*):

> The refutation contained in the preceding Sūtra was set forth on the condition of the *practical* distinction of enjoyers and objects of enjoyment being acknowledged. In reality, however, that distinction does not exist because there is understood to be non-difference of cause and effect. The effect is this manifold world consisting of ether and so on; the cause is the highest Brahman. Of the effect it is understood that in reality it is non-different from the cause, i.e. has no existence apart from the cause (BSBh II, I, 14).[25]

In these lines, Śaṅkara expresses that the effect is non-different from the cause, and clarifies that non-difference, at least with respect to Brahman and the manifold world, is to be understood in terms of invariant concomitance. The effect that is the manifold world does not ever exist or appear without the cause that is the witness (Brahman). Brahman does not cause all things in the way that a billiard ball causes a rack of balls (a pyramid) to come apart—it causes all things in the sense that it manifests *as* all things. Brahman is like sea-water is to waves, foam, and other modifications of sea-water (BSB II, I, 14). It is, in this sense, the cause or origin of the world which *transforms into* all things. Inner and outer objects of consciousness appear to be distinct from one another, and self-existent. But all differentiated objects are illusory *as such*—they appear to be distinct and self-existent, but just as the absolute distinctness/self-existence a wave in the sea cannot be established—neither from other waves nor from sea-water—their absolute distinctness from each other and from Brahman *cannot be established*. And just as the witness of the modifications of the

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[24] *asya jagato nāmarupābhyām vyakṛtasyānekakartṛbhoktṛsamyukttasya pratiniyatadeśakālanimittakriyāphalāśrayasya manasāpyacintyaracanārūpasya janmasthitibhañgam yataḥ sarvajñātsarvaśakteḥ* ***karaṇābhdavati tadbrahmeti vākyaśeṣaḥ***

[25] *abhupagamya cemam vyāvahārikam bhoktṛbhogyalakṣanam vibhāgam syāllokavaditi parihāro 'bhihitaḥ | natvayam vibhāgaḥ paramārthato 'sti yasmāttayoḥ kāryakāranayorananyatvamavagamyate | kāryamākaśādikam bahuprapañcam jagat kāraṇam parambrahma, tasmātkāraṇatparamārthate 'nanyotvam vyatirekeṇābhāvaḥ kāryasyāvagamyate |*

internal organ is not outside those modifications, this "cause" of all finite things is not *outside* finite things. It is *all-pervading* and hidden *within* all finite things (BSBh I, I, 4).

The non-difference of the "cause" (Brahman) and the world (*jagat*) can also be explicated with the concept of superimposition (*adhyāsa*). The world is superimposed on Brahman in the same way that the mind's modifications are superimposed on the *ātman*. In either case, things differentiated by name and form are thrown over the witness, in the sense of being apparent only because the witness is there. And in either case—regardless of whether we are talking of the superimposition of the modifications of the internal organ on the witness or the superimposition of finite things on the witness—the relation between the substratum (*adhikaraṇa*) of the superimposed object(s) and whatever is superimposed is like that of sea-water to waves. In any given wave, there is no point at which sea-water is *absent*. Any given wave is thoroughly and completely sea-water. And yet, it is seen as a wave. A wave is always seen in/on the substratum of sea-water. Similarly, the entire phenomenal world, including any particular agent/enjoyer, is superimposed on the witness (here called Brahman). At no point whatsoever is Brahman elsewhere, outside of, or absolutely distinguishable from any given thing.

Finite things are not erroneously identified with the self, like the *jīva*. But they are erroneously judged to be *different from* each other, and from their universal "cause", the witness. With respect to finite things, the Śaṅkaran point is that they appear as different from the witness, but *only appear as such* because of their invariant concomitance with the witness, and are never without the witness.

2.2.2 The Convergence of Paths A and B:

The pinnacle of the Advaitic phenomenological analysis of worldly life (*lokāvyavahara*) is the realization that the 'interior self' on which the mind is superimposed is non-different *in the sense of not being distinguishable from* the universal "cause" of the world. In other words, the witness of all modifications of the internal organ cannot be distinguished from the witness of all finite things. Śaṅkara expresses this point by explaining the meaning of the well-known phrase "thou art that" (CU VI, 8, 7):

> The phrase 'Thou art that' teaches that what is denoted by the term 'thou' is identical with what is denoted by 'that'. Now the latter term denotes the subject of the entire section, viz. the thinking Brahman which is the cause of the origin and so on of the world; which is known from other passages such as 'Brahman which is true knowledge, infinite', 'Brahman which is knowledge and bliss'; 'That Brahman is unseen, but seeing; unknown, but knowing'; 'not produced', 'not subject to old age, not subject to death'; 'not coarse, not fine; not short, not long'. In these passages terms such as 'not produced' deny the different phases of existence such as origination; such terms as 'not coarse', deny of it the qualities of substances such as coarseness; and such terms as 'knowledge' declare that the 'luminousness of intelligence constitutes its nature'. The entity thus described—which is free from all the qualities of transmigratory experience, has consciousness for its Self and is called Brahman—is known, by all students of the Vedānta, as what is denoted by the term 'that'. They likewise know that what is denoted by the term 'thou' is the inward Self (*pratyagātman*); which is the agent in seeing and hearing, is (successively) apprehended as the inward Self of all the outward involucra beginning with the gross body, and finally ascertained as of the nature of intelligence (BSB IV, I, 2).[26]

What Śaṅkara explains here is that the phrase "thou art that" represents the realization that what one *really* is (the witness that is the substratum over which psycho-physical states are thrown, giving rise to one's appearance as an individual agent and experiencer), is non-different from what *all* things really are. One might wonder here whether Śaṅkara can say, on my interpretation of his

[26] *apica tattvamasityetadvākyam tvampadarthasya tatpadārthabhāvamācaṣṭe | tatpadena ca prakṛtam sadbrahmekśitṛ jagat janmādikāraṇamabhishiyate 'satyam jñānmanantam brahma'…'vijñānamānandam brahma'* (Bṛ 3 | 9 | 28)*,'adṛṣṭam draṣṭṛ'* (Bṛ 3 | 8 | 11), *'ajamajaramamram' 'asthulamnaṇvahrasvamadirdham'* (Bṛ 3 | 8 | 8) *ityādiśāstraprasiddham | tatrājādiśabdaurjanmādayo bhāvavikāranivartitāḥ | asthulādiśabdauśca sthaulyādayo dravyadharmaḥ | vijñānādiśabdaiśsca caitanyaprakāśātmatmakatvamuktam | eṣa vyāvṛttasarvasamsārasharmako'nubhavātmako brah-samjñakastapadartho vedāntābhoyuktānām prasiddhaḥ | tatha tvampadārthe'pi pratyagatmā śrotā dehādārathya pratyagātmatayā sambhāvyamānaścaitanyaparyantatvenāvadhāritaḥ |*

view, that the self is *really* the witness. This is an important worry: I am suggesting that Advaita Vedānta doesn't have an absolute metaphysics because of the limits of our language and the indeterminacy of the conceptual semantics of the thesis that Brahman alone is real. But here, I seem to be emphasizing that there *really is* an identity claim at work. One would be spot on in thinking that I can't have it both ways. To address this worry I will note that I use the term 'non-different' rather than 'same' for an important reason. Śaṅkara himself doesn't exactly say this, but the non-dualist point simply cannot be that there is qualitative or quantitative identity regarding the *ātman* and Brahman. This is because it is quite clear that both terms refer to that which has no qualities of its *own*, and that which shines everywhere and in all things, rather than in some particular place or space. Neither identity nor difference could be established between what is meant by *ātman* and *Brahman* respectively, because neither have any qualities, locations, causal conditions *of their own*. We can only differentiate between things that have qualities, locations, causal conditions, or distinguishing features of some sort of their own. Also, there is no quality, attribute, name, form, time, place or causal condition that could be used to differentiate the *atman* from Brahman, because both are precisely that presence in virtue of which any/all qualities, attributes, names, forms, times, places, etc. which could function to differentiate the 'two' have any appearance at all. In other words, neither the *atman* nor *Brahman* can be externally differentiated from anything whatsoever. By 'externally differentiated' I mean differentiated from anything else. One might be confused about why this is so for *ātman*—one might think that the term *ātman* signifies the subject-pole of the intentional arc, and, accordingly, that the reality signified by term can indeed be externally differentiated from the realm of objective facts *par excellance* (Nagel 1974). But here, the meaning of the term *ātman* is no different from the meaning of the term *Brahman* (the universal cause' of all things differentiated by *nāma* and *rūpa*). It should

be helpful to call that the controversy addressed by Śaṅkara's explanation of empirical individuality is the controversy of what is *fit to be regarded as* the self. On the classical Indian philosophical terrain (in both orthodox and heterodox camps), the term '*ātman*' is often used for the concept of a permanent immaterial substance with the quality of consciousness (Chakrabarti 1999).[27] But at this level of analysis of Advaita Vedānta, the term *ātman* does not even remotely denote a permanent immaterial substance with the quality of consciousness; the term denotes that presence[28] which is neither inner (subjective; mental; immaterial) nor outer (objective; physical; material), because of being *all* pervasive. The *ātman* and *Brahman* are the 'same' just in the sense that both cannot be externally differentiated from anything whatsoever.

Note that we can recognize the non-difference of the *ātman* and Brahman at the empirical level of analysis, just as we can see without any sort of transformation of consciousness that we can't absolutely distinguish any given wave in the sea from sea-water. But to understand the meaning of the phrase 'thou art that', and to understand that the real self (*ātman*; *Brahman*) cannot be externally differentiated, and is 'non-dual' in that precise sense (BSBh III, II, 21), is not exactly ultimate disillusionment from erroneous cognition of plurality, diversity, duality, distinctness, etc. The phenomenal (*vyāvahārika*), manifold realm (*prapañca*) differentiated by name and form—the plane of awareness within which the *jīva* appears as the self and the world as separate from the self—is to be sublated (attenuated) at the empirical level by statements such as "thou art that" and "Brahman is one; not two", but ultimately to be sublated (dissolved) by *direct cognition* of the substratum over which all plurality is thrown (TaD, p. 34). Śankara states:

[27] This is the view of Nyāya, which is often the target of Buddhist no-self arguments.
[28] Note that the witness (*sākṣin*), which is both *ātman* and *Brahman*, is said to be of the nature of consciousness (*caityanya*), even though the term does not mean 'non-physical' at this level of analysis. The meaning of the English word 'consciousness' is conceptually linked with subjective experience, which makes it difficult for English speakers to grasp the meaning of the term *caityanya*.

> For so long as nescience remains so long the soul is affected with definite attributes, etc.; but as soon as nescience comes to an end, the soul is one with the highest self, as is taught by such scriptural texts as 'Thou art That' (BSBh I, IV, 6).[29]

This point can be expressed through the canonical example of the rope that is seen as a snake (BSB I, IV, 6): Imagine walking into a dimly lit room, and seeing a snake coiled on the floor. Imagine jumping back in surprise, flipping on the lights, and seeing that where you saw a snake there is actually just a rope. In this case, it is cognition of the rope that *sublates* the appearance of the snake. This does not mean that the snake is nothing at all. It is a peculiar sort of illusion: one that really is seen, but seen only because of the rope present there, and seen *as what it really* is (a rope) when the limiting condition of dim lighting is removed.

Similarly, the *jīva* is not nothing at all, and neither is the world nothing.[30] The phenomenal world is really under the limiting condition of primal nescience (*avidyā*), but only apparent *as such* because of the presence of the witness. When the limiting condition of ignorance (*avidyā*) is removed by direct, unmediated Brahman-knowledge (*Brahma-jñana*), the self (*ātman*; Brahman) is no longer "affected with definite attributes" and the typical (*naisargika*) experience of the *jīva* being the self and the world being separate from the self melts away (BSBh III, II, 21). This 'knowledge' is said to arise "of itself".[31] This "knowledge" (*Brahma-jñana*) which arises of itself and removes *avidyā* is basically a sort of direct, unmediated acquaintance with the substratum on which all plurality is superimposed. It is also called 'release' (*Mokṣa*) (BSBh II, I, 14).

We can think, at the empirical level of analysis, of *Brahma-jñana* as a release from the normal, dualistic mode of apprehension/experience in which the individual, perspectival subject

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[29] *...yāvaddhyavidya na univariate tāvadharmādigocaratvam jīvasya jīvatvam ca na nivartate | tannivtṛtau tu prajña exam tattvamasīti śruyā pratyāyyate*

[30] Recall that the *jīva* is the empirical individual, and the *ātman* is really just Brahman.

[31] He says this even though he also says that *Brahma-jñana* is *indicated* by Vedic statements expressing the non-duality of Brahman.

of experience is opposed to a world of external objects, including other subjects. But this is too quick—I will have much more to say on the subject of *Mokṣa* in subsequent sections.

In sum, the Advaitic analysis of everyday, worldly life (*lokāvyavahara*) can be thought of as being carried out on two converging paths—one constructed around introspective self-conscious reflection, the other constructed around wide-lens, simultaneously extraverted and introverted consideration of all differentiated phenomena—which *together* lead to the point at which the invariant condition and concomitant of all psycho-physical phenomena giving rise to one's sense of individuality and the invariant condition and concomitant of all phenomena apparent due to differentia (qualities, names, forms, attributes, features, causal conditions, etc.) are realized to be indistinguishable. This is the backdrop against which other, even subtler aspects of the *advaita-vāda* must be understood.

2.3 Śaṅkara's Tiered Ontology, Including the Category of Falsity (*mithyātva*)

Situated with the Advaitic phenomenological analysis of everyday, worldly life in view, we are now in a position to deeper dive into the ontological schema of the *advaita-vāda*.

2.3.1 Three Orders of Reality

Śaṅkara recognizes three orders of reality (*sattva*)—the transcendentally or absolutely real (*pāramārthika sat*), the empirically or practically real (*vyāvahārika sat*) and the apparently real (*prātibhāsika sat*) (PPV II, 165/1-2). Brahman—all-pervasive, undifferentiated consciousness/luminosity—is *pāramārthika sat*. The phenomenal world (*jagat*)—all that is differentiated by name and form—consists of both empirical and apparent objects (things which have practical efficacy and things which do not, respectively). But the world is not categorized as

unreal: it is categorized as false *(mithyā*). And, in the Advaitic context, falsity (*mithyātva*) is opposed both to the (transcendentally or absolutely) real (*sat*) *and*—this is important—the unreal (*asat*) (VC, III).

2.3.2 Examining the Advaitic Concept of Falsity

Śaṅkara clearly states in his *Brahmajñanavalimala* that the world (*jagat*) is false (*mithyā*).[32] And in his *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi,* he specifies that false objects are indeterminable (*anirvanīya*) as real, unreal, or both, or as different from Brahman, non-different from Brahman, or both (VC, III). Here, one might question the point of the category of the unreal (*asattva*)—one might ask, "if Brahman is absolutely real and the phenomenal world is false, what explanatory work is the concept of unreality doing?". In response to this worry, I would respond that having the concept of unreality (i.e., that which never manifests at all, like a square circle) is precisely what enables recognizing of the falsity of the world. It is largely because the world *does indeed appear* that it is an empirically real but indeterminable as either absolutely real or unreal phenomenon, rather than a merely hallucinated, unimportant fiction.

Let's continue without our analysis of the Advaitic concept of falsity while keeping this point about the concept of unreality in mind. Śaṅkara himself doesn't provide an exhaustive examination of the concept of falsity. The doctrine of the falsity of the world, and the concept of falsity itself, is expanded on variously by Śaṅkara's followers. I incorporate the views of the Medieval Advaitins Padmapāda (8th century), Vācaspati Miśra (9th or 10th century), and (11th century) Ānandabhodha Bhattāraka, which I consider complementary.[33]

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[32] *Brahma stayam janganmithyā jīvo brahmaiva nāparaḥ*

[33] There are many exponents of Advaita Vedānta other than Śaṅkara. Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* can be reconstructed without reference to the works of other Advaitins. But a *robust* understanding of Śaṅkara's highly idiosyncratic

It is quite clear that the falsity of the world with respect to reality and unreality is understood by Śaṅkara at least in terms of inner and outer objects finite things being indeterminable as either different or non-different from Brahman. But this understanding must be enriched by some insight into the criterion of reality governing the determination that Brahman is absolutely or transcendentally real (*pāramārthika sat*) and the functional role of unreality as a contrast class for both transcendental and empirical reality. We might, following Vācaspati, think that Brahman is *pāramārthika sat* because Brahman alone is never *contradicted*, such that the unreal is eternally contradictory (like a square circle) and the false is cognized but subsequently contradicted, and thus neither real (never contradicted), nor unreal (eternally contradicted), nor both (BT, p. 23/11-12). We may recall here that unreality is marked off for things that could not even be apparently real, i.e., things which never appear or manifest *at all* (e.g., a square circle or a sky flower). Or, following Ānandabhodha Bhattāraka, we might think that Brahman alone is real because Brahman is never *cancelled* or never sublated (*abhādhya*) (SD, p.1/7-8). On this latter view, the unreal is that which never appears at all (again, like a square circle), and the false is that which appears but can be sublated (*bhādya*). To my mind, these two depictions of the sense in which Brahman is *pāramārthika sat,* along with the correlative conceptions of unreality and falsity, have slightly different emphases but are quite compatible. It is because all things comprising worldly life cannot be differentiated from or shown to be identical from that which is *never contradicted or cancelled in experience* (*sākṣin*; *ātman*; *Brahman*) that the world consisting in manifold objects cannot be determined as either real or unreal or both. We can further analyze Brahman as never being contradicted or cancelled in terms of the view of the superimposition (*adhyāsa*) of the world on Brahman.

conception of falsity (*mithyātva*) can be built through consideration of how his followers and fellow Advaitins (e.g., Padmapāda, Vācaspati Miśra and Ānandabhodha Bhattāraka) analyze the concept.

Adhyāsa is fundamentally that appearance/cognition of the not-self in/on the self (BSB I, I). The world of inner and outer objects is cognized in/on the witness (which is the real, inner self, and the 'self' of all finite things). When the substratum of the appearance of the world (*sākṣin*; *ātman*; *Brahman*) is cognized, the appearance of the world of inner and outer objects is cancelled or sublated (BSB II, I, 14). But Brahman can never be contradicted or cancelled by some other cognition or experience, because all cognitions and all experiences as of inner and outer objects thoroughly presupposes and exist in/on Brahman's pervasion. The world appears but can be sublated. Because it appears in/on Brahman, it cannot be said to be absolutely different from Brahman. But because it can be contradicted/cancelled (by direct cognition of the substratum of its appearance), unlike Brahman, it cannot be said to be absolutely *non*-different from Brahman. Since the world cannot be determined as either different or non-different from Brahman, which is *pāramārthika sat*, it cannot be determined as either absolutely unreal (completely opposed to that which is never contradicted/cancelled) or absolutely real (absolutely identical to that which is never contradicted/cancelled). In short, the manifold world (*jagat*) is false (*mithyā*) in the idiosyncratic sense of being *indeterminable* (*anirvacanīya*) as either absolutely real (*sat*) or absolutely unreal (*asat*). And its falsity does not undermine its empirical and practical reality (*vyāvahārika sat*).

2.3.3 The Relevance of this Ontology for the Interpretation

Now I will explore the relevance of this tried ontology, including the concept of falsity, for the typical assumption that the *advaita-vāda* asserts some sort of absolutist metaphysical thesis. Recall that by 'absolutist metaphysical thesis' I mean a thesis expressing determinate knowledge, in one way or another, of what reality *is*. On its surface, and even once the subtler aspect that is its three-

fold ontic schema is taken into account, the *advaita-vāda* may seem to assert that universal, undifferentiated consciousness *is* the absolute, sole reality. And, on this interpretation, the relevant expression of determinate knowledge about reality is also an expression of determinate knowledge of consciousness (*caitanya*). But we should not forget that the assertion of Brahman's absolute reality emerges *from* the observation that the entire phenomenal world is superimposed on Brahman. Brahman *alone* is real in the sense that Brahman alone is never contradicted/cancelled *unlike* empirical (*vyāvahārika*) and apparent (*prātibhāsika*) objects. The thesis 'Brahman alone is real' expresses the reality of Brahman *in contrast with and relation to* the falsity of the world.

Let us undertake an analysis of the semantics of this thesis. The conceptual element by which we understand the thesis "Brahman alone is real" is a *distinction* between Brahman and the world. Recall that the world (*jagat*) is, on Śaṅkara's view, comprised of all that is differentiated by name and form. The version of Brahman that is alone real is a version of Brahman that is comprehensible in virtue of a distinction (the distinction between that which can be contradicted/cancelled and that which is never contradicted/cancelled), and is thus a member of the manifold, phenomenal world. Here one might wonder how the ground of all being could be *a* being among other beings. I should clarify a few things: my intent here is not to claim that *Brahman* is actually *a* denizen of the world (*jagat*) differentiated by name and form. My intent is to draw attention to the fact that *conceived* of *as* the ground of all being, Brahman is *de facto* differentiated by *name* and *form*. The intentional object of the utterance that Brahman *is* the universal cause of all finite things *is* a finite thing. This finite thing (the relevant intentional object) is not the actuality of that which grounds all being (*Brahman*). As a member of this world, the *conception* of Brahman as *alone* real is, as it turns out, categorizable according to the Advaitin's own ontic schema *as false* (*mithyā*). I am not saying that this is how an Advaitin would explicitly characterize their own view

in the course of trying to teach it, but I do think that the falsity of the thesis that Brahman alone is real can be appreciated *via* an all-things-considered interpretation of the view (an interpretation which attends to subtler aspects of the school, i.e., the interpretation I am in the process of offering in this chapter).[34]

It is important to note that the Sanskrit word *sat* means both 'true' and 'real' in the context of Advaita Vedānta (Deutsch 1973). Normally, these two terms ('true' and 'real') refer differently—'real' is predicated of things and states of affairs. 'True' is predicated of propositions which represent things and states of affairs. But in this context, the same word does the work of both those terms: to say that Brahman alone is *sat* is to say that Brahman is absolute reality, and absolute truth. All phenomena differentiated by name and form are indeterminable as absolute reality/truth or absolutely unreality/non-truth. This includes conceptual and linguistic phenomena. Both the thesis "Brahman alone is real" and the concept represented/indicated are cognizable in virtue of being differentiated by name and form, and are thus (a) part of this manifold world and (b) opposed to absolute reality/truth and absolute unreality/non-truth. The concept of Brahman as being *pāramārthika sat* is just as *mithyā* as the *thesis* representing that concept is *mithyā*. The *advaita-vāda* thus does not express an absolutist metaphysical thesis (express determinate knowledge of reality or consciousness) by asserting that Brahman alone is real, in relation to the world. This assertion is *indeterminable* in the very context-dependent sense of being part of the world of plurality, and thus not absolutely different or non-different from the substratum of its appearance.

[34] I am not alone in thinking about Advaita Vedānta in this way. Mirdula Bhattacarya (2015) similarly draws attention to the falsity of the category of falsity itself. Similarly, my analysis of the falsity of the thesis that *Brahman* alone is real is grounded in an analysis of the falsity/indeterminacy of the conceptual element by which it is understood (the distinction between absolute reality and falsity).

In the next two sections, I will enrich and defend my analysis of the conceptual semantics of the *advaita-vāda*. In response to my claim that the thesis 'Brahman alone is real' is indeterminable rather than absolutely real/true (*pāramārthika sat*), one might object that the Brahman said to be *pāramārthika sat* in relation to the manifold world is only one of the two forms of Brahman admitted by Śaṅkara, namely Brahman with qualities (*saguṇa Brahman*). Accordingly, one might maintain that the thesis 'Brahman alone is real' is only indeterminable on one interpretation of the concept represented by the subject term 'Brahman'. One might maintain that the Brahman which is *really pāramārthika sat* is Brahman *without* qualities (*nirguṇa* Brahman). In the next section, I will detail Śaṅkara's distinction between these two forms of Brahman, and show that even the assertion that *nirguṇa* Brahman is *pāramārthika* sat is false in the advaitic sense of being indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) with respect to absolute reality/truth and absolute unreality/non-truth.

2.4 A Distinction Between Two Forms of Brahman

Śaṅkara repeatedly distinguishes between *saguṇa* Brahman (Brahman with qualities) and *nirguṇa* Brahman (Brahman without qualities) (BSB I, I, 11). Brahman is apprehended under two forms—as, on the one hand, being qualified by limiting conditions owing to the multiformity of the evolutions of name and form, and, on the other hand, being the opposite, i.e., free from all limiting conditions whatsoever. Note that in the translation of the passage below, the term 'Lord' is used for the form of Brahman that is qualified by the limiting adjuncts of name and form. The Sanskrit term for 'Lord' is *Iśvara*. Basically, Iśvara is Brahman conceived of as transforming into and manifesting all finite things—as being the 'self' or essence of all things. This is the version of Brahman that I focused on in much of my reconstruction of the Advaitic phenomenological

analysis of *lokāvyavahara*. This transmuting, omnipresent, all-pervasive, immanently-present-in-all-things version of Brahman is Brahman with qualities (*saguṇa* Brahman):

> Thus the Lord depends (as Lord) upon the limiting adjuncts of name and form, the products of Nescience...the Lord's being a Lord, his omniscience, his omnipotence, etc. all depend on the limited due to the adjuncts whose Self is Nescience; while in reality none of these qualities belong to the Self whose true nature is cleared, by right knowledge, from all adjuncts whatever. Thus scripture also says, 'Where one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, understands nothing else, that is the Infinite' (Ch. Up. VII, 24, 1); 'But when the Self only has become all this, how should he see another?' (Bṛ. Up. II, 4, 13)…The view of Brahman as undergoing modifications will, moreover, be of use in the devout meditation on the qualified (*saguṇa*) Brahman (BSB II, I, 14).[35]

Here Śaṅkara clearly distinguishes between the form of Brahman that transforms into all things, and thus has infinite qualities, attributes, locations, etc., and the form of Brahman that is opposed to this. The form of Brahman that is "cleared from all adjuncts whatever" by "right knowledge" is Brahman without qualities (*nirguṇa* Brahman). It may seem as if Śaṅkara is saying that *saguṇa* Brahman is the empirically real/true form of Brahman, and that *nirguṇa* Brahman *is* the absolutely real/true Brahman. But things are bit more complicated than that.

2.4.1 The Logic of the Distinction

It is important to understand *why* Brahman is apprehended under two forms. This explanatory point, on my view, pertains to how *saguṇa* Brahman entails *nirguṇa* Brahman. The recognition that Brahman pervades all things, including all differentia, conceptually entails the recognition that Brahman has no qualities of its own. It is all-pervasive, even of the individual self, and *therefore* without qualities. It cannot be described as having any qualities of its own; it can only be described

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[35] *ityādiśruitibhyaśca | evamadidhyākṛtanāmarupopādhya - nurodhiśvaro bhavati, vyaomeva dhaṭkarakādhupādhyarodhi | sa ca svātmabhutāneva ghaṭākāśasthānīyānavidhyāpratyupasthāpitanāmarūpakṛtakāryakaraṅsamdhātānurodhino jīvākhyānvijñānātmanaḥ pratiṣṭevyavahāraviṣaye | tadevamavidhyātmakopādhi -paricchedāmeveśvarasyeśvaratvam sarvajñatvam sarvaśaktitvam ca na paramārtheto vidhyāyā - pāstasarvepādhisvarūpa ātmanīśitrīśitavyasarvajñatvādivyavahāra upapadhyate | tathācoktam -- 'yatra nānyatpaśyati nānyacchṛṇoti nānyadvijānati sa bhumā'* (Ch. Up. 7 | 24 | 1) *iti, 'yatra tvasya sarvamātmaivābhuttatkena kam paśyet* | (Bṛ. Up. 4 | 5 | 15)*...apratyākhyāyaiva kāryaprapañcam pariṇāmaprakriyām caśrayati **saguṇa**ṣupāsaneṣupayokśyatiti*

as ‘not this’ and ‘not that’ (*neti neti*), or as not having *this* quality or *that* quality (BSBh II, I, 14). Brahman with qualities and Brahman without qualities are like two sides of the same coin. In the previous section on falsity, I argued that the thesis ‘Brahman alone is real’ is indeterminable as either true (*sat*) or untrue (*asat*), because the conceptual element by which we understand the meaning of the thesis is a distinction between Brahman and world. One might think that things are getting a bit muddled, because the term *sat* signifies the concept of reality, but here I am talking of truth. One might think that a thesis, statement or proposition has truth conditions, not reality conditions. Accordingly, one might question the sense of saying that the thesis ‘Brahman alone is real’ is indeterminable as either *sat* or *asat*. But we should recall that in the context of Advaita Vedānta, the term *sat* means both real and true (Deutsch 1973). As such, the concept of falsity (*mithyatva*) can apply either to theses/statements/propositions or to states of affairs. To say that a thesis is false, in this context, is to say that it is indeterminable as either absolutely true or absolutely *not* true. And to say that a state of affairs is false in this context is to say that it is indeterminable as either absolutely real or unreal. Also, one *could* say that a thesis is neither absolutely real or unreal, as I see things, and just mean that the relevant thesis corresponds neither to absolute reality nor unreality. Keeping this in mind, we may note that here, the idea that *nirguṇa* Brahman is absolutely real is indeterminable, because the conceptual element by which we understand the meaning of this thesis is necessarily a distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman.

2.4.2 The Soteriological Intent of the Distinction

Moreover, Śaṅkara is clear that concept of Brahman as being without qualities occasions release (*Mokṣa*) from the typical (*naisargika*) but erroneous dualistic experience wherein the self appears to be different from the world:

> Moreover, while the cognition of the unity of Brahman is the instrument of final release, there is nothing to show that any independent result is connected with the view of Brahman, by undergoing a modification, passing over into the form of this world. Scripture expressly declares that the knowledge of the changeless Brahman being the universal Self leads to a result; for in the passage which begins, That Self is to be described by No, no,' we read later on, 'On Janaka, you have indeed reached fearlessness' (Bṛ. Up. IV, 2, 4). We have been to accept the following conclusion that, in the section treating of Brahman, an independent result belongs only to the knowledge of Brahman as devoid of all attributes and distinctions, and that hence whatever is stated as having no special fruit of its own—as, for instance, the passages about Brahman modifying itself into the form of the world—is merely to be applied as a means for the cognition of the absolute Brahman, but does not bring about an independent result; according to the principle that whatever has no result of its own, but is mentioned in connexion with something else which has such a result, is subordinate to the latter. For to maintain that the result of the knowledge of Brahman undergoing modification would be that the Self (of him who knows that) would undergo corresponding modifications, as the state of final release (which the soul obtains through the knowledge of Brahman) is eternally unchanging (BSBh II, I, 14).[36]

Grasping that the luminous, self-revealing presence that *pervades* all things, and *therefore* lacks qualities of its own cannot be distinguished from that presence which also pervades and sustains one's own individuality is supposed to bring about a powerful transformation in the way that one experiences both one's own self and one's relation to the world. Śaṅkara communicates that the function of Upaniṣadic statements which assert the unqualified nature of Brahman is to indicate Brahman *as* being nondual—an indication which results in a knowledge *arising of itself*. This

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[36] *ityādhābhyaḥ sarvavikrayāpratiṣeshaśrutibhyo brahmaṇaḥ kuṭasthatvāvagamāt | nahryekasya brahmaṇaḥ pariṇāmadharmatvam tadrahitatvam ca śākyam pratipattum | sthitigātivatsyāditi cet | na | kuṭasthasyeti viśeṣaṇaut | nahi kuṭasthasya brahmaṇaḥ sthitigātivadaneka-dharmaśrayatvam samchavati | kuṭastham ca nit yam brahma sarvavikriyāpratiṣedhādityavocāma | naca yathā brahmaṇa ātmaikatvadarśanam mokśādhanamevam jagadākārapariṇāmitvadarśanāmapisvatantrameva kasmaicitphalāyābhipreyate | pramāṇabhāvāt | kuṭasthabrahmātmatva - vijñānādeva hi phalam darśayati śāstram - 'sa eṣa neti neyātmā' ityupakramya 'abhayam cai handka prāpto'si* (Bṛ. 4| 2 | 2) *ityevamjātiyakam | tatraitatsiddham bhavati - brahmaprakaraṇe sarvadharmaviśeṣarahitabrahmadarśanādeva phalasiddhai satyām yattatrāphalam śruyate brahmaṇe jagadākārapariṇāmitvādi tadbrahmadarśanopāyatvenaiva viniyujyate, phalavatsamnidhāvaphalam tadaṅgamitivat | natu svatantram phalāya kalpyata iti | nahi pariṇāmavattvavijñānātpariṇāmavattvamātmanaḥ phalam syāditi vaktum yuktum, kuṭsthanityatvānMokṣasya |*

knowledge (*Brahma-jñāna*) sublates the apparent plurality superimposed on Brahman by primal nescience, or ignorance (*avidyā*) (BSBh II, II, 21).

In this general section of his commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*, we find an extended dialectic between Śaṅkara and an ambiguous opponent regarding whether the scriptures are injunctions (commands). I cannot relate the details of the dialectic here, but it should suffice for me to note that Śaṇkara argues against the view that the scriptures are injunctions. But he admits that they are *indications* of the nature of Brahman, which brings about Brahman-knowledge (*brahma-jñana*), arising of its own accord. *Brahma-jñana* melts away the proliferation of names and forms, and thus radically transforms the constitution of the very realm in which Brahman could ever be definitely represented as *this* or *that*. The general upshot of this dialectic is evidence that Śaṅkara understands statements which deny the plurality, qualification, non-duality and transmutation of Brahman—statements which assert the reality of *nirguṇa* Brahman—function to *point us* to *Brahma-jñana*, which springs up of its own. As such, Brahman cannot itself be cognized or apprehended through the ascription of qualities, not even the quality of being unqualified (*nirguṇa*) or non-dual (*advityā*).

This conception of *brahma-jñana* suggests that the things way appear to be *now* is not how things would be upon grasping the non-difference of *ātman* and *nirguṇa*. But, at the same time, the state of affairs occasioned by indications of the non-duality of the cause of all things (*brahma-jñana*) cannot be *captured* by designators such as 'non-dual' or 'unqualified'. This is because *brahma-jñana, or* release (*Mokṣa*) is nothing but *being* Brahman (BSBh I, I, 4).[37] And Brahman cannot be apprehended by speech.

[37] *brahmabhāvaśca Mokṣaḥ*

The statement that *Mokṣa* is nothing but being Brahman has a few important implications. First, it implies that the actuality of Brahman dwells in a sort of freedom from the empirical realm—the realm conditioned by limiting adjuncts such as name and form. This actuality which dwells in freedom from limiting adjuncts cannot be represented as 'this' or 'that', precisely because it is free from the very mode of consciousness in which it could ever be an object *of* consciousness (anything cognized as having some quality or another is necessarily an object *of* consciousness). This freedom also cannot be represented as being *beyond* the empirical realm. Here's why:

Śaṅkara emphasizes the fruitfulness of the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman over *saguṇa* Brahman: on one level, the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman is the flip side of the coin that is the concept of the all-pervasive, transmuting, immanent Lord. On this level, *nirguṇa* Brahman is just as much conditioned by a limiting adjunct as is *saguṇa* Brahman (the limiting adjunct is the *distinction* between the two).

2.4.3 The Epistemic and Semantic Dimensions of the Distinction

On another level, the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman *gestures* at that which cannot be represented as this or that because it *is* basically release from the dualistic mode of consciousness in which an individual, perspectival subject of experience contemplates some object. Śaṅkara says as much (BSBh I, I VI):

> Nor, again, can we connect Brahman with acts by representing it as the object of the action of knowing. For that it is not such is expressly declared in two passages, viz. 'It is different from the known and again above (i.e. different from the unknown) (Ken. Up. I, 3); and 'How should he know him by whom he knows all this? (BR. Up. II, 4, 13). In the same way Brahman is expressly declared not to be the object of the act of devout meditation, viz. in the second half of the verse, (Ken. Up. I, 5), whose first half declares it not to be an object (of speech, mind, and so on), 'That which is not proclaimed by speech, by which speech is proclaimed, that only know to be Brahman, not that on which people devoutly meditate as this…the Śāstra's purport is not to represent Brahman definitely as this or that object, its purpose is rather to show that Brahman as the eternal subject (*pratyagātman*, the inward Self) is never an object, and thereby to remove the distinction of objects known, knowers, acts of knowledge, etc., which is factiously created by Nescience. Accordingly, the Śāstra says, 'By whom it is not thought by

> him it is thought, by whom it is thought he does not know it; unknown by those who know it, it is known by those who do not know it' (Ken. Up. II, 3); and 'Thou couldst not see the seer of sight, though couldst not hear the hearer of hearing, nor perceive the perceiver of perception, nor know the knower of knowledge (Bṛ. Up. III, 4, 2). [38]

Śaṅkara explicitly claims that Brahman is never an object, and talks of the removal of distinctions between knowers, acts of knowledge and known objects. These assertions indicate Brahman as that absolute, transcendental reality which cannot be known as an object or apprehended by speech (note: there is a close conceptual connection between that which cannot be known as an object and that which cannot be apprehended by speech; when we reference something as having some quality we know it as an object, and when we know something as an object we reference it as having some quality). However, even *this* representation of Brahman as being release from distinctions between knowers, acts of knowledge and known objects, and as being inapprehensible by speech must be confined to the order of empirical (*vyāvahārika*) reality. In stating that Brahman cannot be apprehended by speech, we paradoxically apprehend Brahman by speech *as such.* In stating that Brahman cannot be apprehended by speech, we express determinate knowledge of Brahman, which constitutes knowing Brahman as an object. *In* knowing Brahman as an object (through our expression of Brahman's inexpressibility) we certainly remain within the dualistic mode of apprehension.

Another wrinkle deserving of attention is that Śaṅkara says that Brahman is "different from the known and the unknown" (Ken. Up. I, 3). Here the known (*vidita*) could be correlated with

[38] *naca vidikriyākarmatvena kāryānupraveśo brahmaṇaḥ, ˈanyadeva tadviditādatho avaditādhi (kena Up. 1 | 3) iti vidikriyākarmatvapratiṣeshāt, 'yenedam sarvam vijānāti tam kena vijāniyāt' (Bṛ 2 | 4 | 13) iti ca | tathopāstikriyākarmatvapratiṣesho'pi bhavati - 'yadvācānabhyuditam yena vāgabhyudhyate' ityaviṣayatvam brahmaṇa upanyasya, 'tadeva brahma tvam viddhi endam yadidamupāsate' (kena Up. 1 |4) iti | avaṣayatve brahmaṇaḥ śāstrayonitvānupapattiriticet | na | avidhyākalpitabhedanivṛttiparatvācchastrasya | nahi śāstramidamtayā viṣayabhutam brahma pratipipādayiṣati | Kim tarsi party gātmatvenāviṣayatayā pratipādayadavidhyākalpitam vedhya-veditṛ-vedanādibhedamapanayati | tatha śāstram - 'yasyā'matam tasca matam matam yasya na veda saḥ | avijñātam vijānatam vijñātamavijānatām' (kena Up. 2 | 3) ˈna dṛṣṭerdraṣṭaram paśayeḥ', 'na vijñātervijñatāram vijānīyāḥ (Bṛ 3 | 4 | 2)*

empirical reality, which encompasses a vast multitude of 'effects' (things differentiated by name and form; objects *of* consciousness), and the unknown (*avidita*) could be correlated with unreality. The statement that Brahman is different from the known and the unknown means that release from dualistic apprehension cannot be apprehended as an empirical object of consciousness, yet it is also just that presence with which we are intimately connected whenever we know. Śaṅkara devotes significant time to arguing that release (*Mokṣa*) is not some end or state to be attained (despite the fact that he says scriptural statements indicate Brahman):

> That the knowledge of Brahman refers to something which is not a thing to be done, and therefore is not concerned either with the pursuit or the avoidance of any object, is the very thing we admit; for just that constitutes our glory, that as soon as we comprehend Brahman, all our duties come to an end and all our work is over" (BSBh I, I, 4 55).[39]

Release is just being Brahman. Brahman is all-pervasive. We have already seen that. So, release can't be represented as some separate, noumenal reality, *beyond* dualistic apprehension. Just as the bird eating sweet fruit was the bird looking on all along, all this (knowers knowing objects) is release, which is just Brahman, right now. It is wrong to think of Brahman as possibly being known as an object of knowledge. It is also wrong to think of Brahman as beyond some thing or state *beyond* knowers, acts of knowledge, and known objects. But again, Brahman cannot be represented as *just* all this. The indication of Brahman's non-duality is what brings us face-to-face with that knowledge which arises of its own accord (*Brahma-jñana*).

The picture I am painting is of *nirguṇa* Brahman *indicating* that which cannot be known as an object or apprehended by speech—not as an absolute unity, not as absolutely non-dual, not as absolutely all-pervasive, and not even, paradoxically, as *being absolute beyond conceptual or linguistic apprehension*. Even at this seemingly ultimate level of analysis, where we seem to have

[39] *yadapyakartavyapradhānamātmajñanam hānāyopādādāya vā na bhavatīti, tattathaivetyabhyupagamyate | alamkāro hyayamasmākam yadbrahmātmāvagatau satyām sarvakartavyatāhāniḥ kṛtakṛtyatā ceti | tathā ca śrutiḥ - 'ātmānam cedvijāniyādayamasmīti puruṣaḥ | kimicchankasya kāmāya śarīramanusamjvaret* || (Bṛ. 4 | 4 | 12) *iti* ||

moved beyond all possible empirical representations of Brahman and finally ascertained that Brahman is inexpressible, we get bumped back into the *vyavāharika* realm in virtue of our either stated or implied (in silence, for example) expression of determinate knowledge of Brahman *as such*. Indeterminacy is all over any thesis representing what *pāramārthika sat* actually is. For this reason, I maintain that the philosophical intent, or message of the *advaita-vāda* is *not* the assertion of an absolutist metaphysical thesis. In the next section, I precisify this point through anexamination of how the concept of falsity bears on the semantic structure of the *advaita-vāda*.

2.5 The Pervasion of Falsity in the *Advaita-Vāda*:

Here I consider the relevance of the concept of falsity (*mithyātva*) with respect to the non-dualist view (*advaita-vāda*) itself. The 'world' (*jagat*) that is false according to Śaṅkara does not consist only of individual macrolevel subjects, apparently self-existent external perceptual objects, etc. The reference of the term *jagat* encompasses *all* that is differentiated by name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*), having definite places, times, and causes (BSBh I, I, 2). We should not forget that all *teachings* are differentiated by names and forms, and the *advaita-vāda* is no exception. All key semantic-theoretic elements—all explicit and implied, but, in either case, articulable, theses—constituting the *advaita-vāda* are false in the idiosyncratic Advaitic sense of the term. Falsity pervades the semantic-theoretic structure of the view. As such, the view is false. It is also,

paradoxically, false *as such*. As false, the theory is false.[40] Here, a concern could be raised along these lines: if everything is false in the way I'm claiming, then this is clearly a revisionist notion of falsehood. This could raise the question of where the conventional concept of truth fits in to all this, especially since it is something that we tend to be used in evaluating the truth values of sentences about these topics. I would answer that *a* conventional concept of truth is very much alive and well in Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda*, specifically in his distinction between empirical and apparent reality. All sorts of events in the phenomenal world are empirically real/true, i.e., just not those akin to hallucinations. The world is false, but its falsity is also its empirical reality.

2.5.1 The Falsity of the Falsity of the World

We know by this point that the world is supposed to be false. This is one of the three conspicuous theses I noted at the beginning of this chapter: the manifold, phenomenal world (*jagat*) is false (*mithyā*). I have shown that the conceptual element by which we apprehend the thesis expressing the sole reality of Brahman is the distinction between Brahman and world. The conceptual element by which we understand the doctrine of the falsity of the world is the very same distinction. Both

[40] I have already explicated the falsity (*mithyātva*) of the world in terms of the superimposition (*adhyāsa*), and I have already shown that many of the key semantic-theoretic elements of the view are false, e.g., the thesis Brahman alone is real, the view that *nirguṇa* Brahman is absolutely real, and even the implied assertion that absolute reality is inexpressible. I have explicated the falsity of the world in this way: Brahman can never be contradicted or cancelled by some other cognition or experience, because all cognitions and all experiences as of inner and outer objects thoroughly presupposes and exist only ever in/on Brahman. The manifold world appears but can be sublated (*bhādita*) *as it appears* by direct cognition of the substratum of its appearance (*Brahma-jñana*). Because the world appears in/on Brahman, it cannot be said to be absolutely different from Brahman. But because it can be contradicted/cancelled (unlike Brahman) it cannot be said to be absolutely *non*-different from Brahman. Since the world cannot be determined as either different or non-different from Brahman, which is *pāramārthika sat*, it cannot be determined as either absolutely unreal (completely opposed to that which is never contradicted/cancelled) or absolutely real (strictly identical to that which is never contradicted/cancelled). Finite things are erroneously judged to be *different from* the self (the witness). With respect to finite things, the Śaṅkaran point is that they appear to be different from one another and from the witness, but *only appear as such* because of their superimposition in/on the witness. They can be sublated (*bhādya*) *as they appear* by direct cognition/experience of the invariant condition and concomitant of their appearance (*kāryākāreṇa pariṇatājñānanivṛttir bhādha ityanugataṁ lakṣaṇam*) (TaD, p. 34). Here I simply zero in on the falsity of the theses constituting the *advaita-vāda*, with a particular focus on semantic implications of Brahman being indicated as being 'non-dual' (*ekamevādvitiyam brahma'*) (BSBh III, II, 21).

the thesis that Brahman alone is real and the doctrine of the falsity of the world are false in the sense that they are externally differentiated, superimposed on the witness, and sublatable in the relevant sense.

Perplexities regarding the doctrine of the falsity of the world have not gone unnoticed before this: in his canonical text *Advaita-Siddiḥ* the Advaitin Madhusūdana Sarasvatī acknowledges and responds to a dilemma regarding the falsity of the world:

> The opponent: If the aforesaid falsity be false, we get the truth of the world by inference which is based on the rule: If, of the two opposite characters in respect of the same subject, one is found to be false, the other is admitted to be true. And if the said falsity is true, then also the truth of the world has to be conceded. In either case the thesis of non-dualism gets affected (AS, IV).[41]

In short, the dilemma is this: If the falsity of the world is false, then 'falsity' should not be predicated of the world (*jagat*). If the falsity of the world is true, then the world is true *as false*, not false.

In a recent article, Mirdula Bhattacharya (2015) helpfully reconstructs the same of dilemma:

> The prime questions of the opponent is whether falsity of the world is itself false or true. The objector argues that the admission of any of these two alternatives makes one face difficulties that stand in the way of establishing the non-dual reality of Brahman…The opponent further argues that the falsity of the world cannot be taken to be true. If the Advaita Vedāntins admit the falsity of the world to be true, cognisability (*drśyatva*) can no more be taken to be the probans that proves the falsity of the world, inasmuch as, cognisability or *drśyatva* will not be universally concomitant with falsity. The Advaitins advocate the cognisability of the falsity which is capable of being comprehended through the process of inference. In view of this, the opponent contends that just as the falsity of the world is real, in spite of its cognisability, the world also may be real, in spite of its cognisability (Bhattacharya 2015, 39).

In response to this worry, Madhusūdana maintains that the falsity of the world is false, and that this does not entail the reality of the word:

> Reply: No (the objections do not stand). Even if the falsity be false, the truth of the world does not follow. Of the two opposite characters, the falsity of the one implies the reality of the other

[41] *nanu---uktamithyātvasya mithyātve prapañcasatyatvāpātaḥ, ekasmin dharmaṇi prasaktayo'avaruddhadharmayorekamibhyātve aparasatyatvaniyamāt, mithyātvasatyatve ca tadvadeva prapañcasatyatvāpatteḥ, ubhayatha'pyadvaitavyādyātaḥ--iti cet?*

> only when the character that determines the falsity of the false does not belong to both opposites (AS, VI).[42]

The character that determines the falsity of the false is *cognisability,* and *that same character*, cognisabiltiy, belongs to the reality of the world (Ibid). Reality and falsity are contraries not contradictories—they "cannot coexist but they can be co-absent" (Ibid). Both reality and falsity "can be negated as determined by the character of being an object of cognition (*drśyatva*)" (Bhattacharya 2015, 41). Both can be sublated *as they appear* (different from one another) both at the empirical level of analysis, due to their mutual superimposition on the witness, and by direct cognition of the substratum of their mutual appearance. Since neither can be determined as absolutely real—both are cognizable and thus sublatable—and neither can be determined as absolutely unreal—both are cognized, precisely in relation to each other and in virtue of the invariant presence of the witness—both are indeterminable as absolutely real or unreal or both. This means that in the context of Advaita, both are false. The falsity of the world is equally as false as the reality of the world. And the falsity of the world does not entail the reality of the world.

2.5.2 The Falsity of the Distinction Between Brahman and World

Just as we can ask whether the falsity of the world is true/real (*sat*) or false (*mithyā*), we can ask whether the *distinction* between Brahman, which is said to be real, and the world of plurality, which is said to be neither real nor unreal, is real or false. If the distinction is real, then Brahman is opposed to something and not non-dual (undifferentiated; without qualities). This would contradict the central Advaitic indication of the non-duality of Brahman. If the distinction between

[42] *...tatra hi viruddhayodharmaryorekamithyātve aparasattvam, yatra mithyātvāvacchedakamubhayavṛti na bhavet, yatha parasparaviraharypayo rajatatvatadabhāvayoḥ śuktau, yathā vā parasparavirahavyāpakayo rajatabhinnatvarajatatvayo - statraiva; tatra niṣdhyatāvacchedakabhedaniyamāt, prākṛte tu niṣeseshyatāvacchedakamekameva dṛśyatvādi, yatha gotvāścatvayorekasmin, jage niṣeshe jagatvātyantābhāvavatāpyatvam niśedhyatāvacchedakamubhayostulyamiti naikataraniṣedhe anyatrasattvan tadvat |*

Brahman and world is false, one might think, the very characterization of Brahman as *not* the world is negated, so Brahman must be not non-dual (plural). This, again, would contradict the central Adviatic thesis of the non-duality of Brahman. In other words, the falsity of the distinction between the real and the false entails the falsity of the non-duality of Brahman and the reality of the distinction between the real and the false entails the same. I think we must, in the same vein as Madhusūdana's affirmation of the falsity of the falsity of the world, grant that the distinction between Brahman as real and the world as false is itself false, in the particular sense of being indeterminable as either real, unreal or both. We must recognize that distinctions between different levels of being are "confined to the order of appearance" (Deutsch 1973, 26). And yet, both the falsity of the distinction and the reality of the distinction can be negated as determined by the character of being an object of cognition (*dṛśyatva*).

2.5.3 The Falsity of the Identity of Brahman and World

The same line of reasoning must apply to the possible *identification* of Brahman and world. The recognition that distinctions between different levels of being are "confined to the order of appearance" (Deutsch 1973, 26) may be thought to yield the insight that Brahman and world are non-different from the perspective of Brahman-experience. But a *negation* of the distinction between the real and the apparent is yet another distinction, and yet another false worldly thing (in the Advaitan sense of those terms). The term 'non-different' is still a *negation* of difference which, *as a negation*, turns out to be *a kind of difference*. Even the *non-difference* of Brahman and world (*saguṇa* Brahman) must be seen *as appearance*. In other words, if we realize that the distinction between Brahman and world is false and say instead that Brahman and world are non-different, we rebound into indeterminacy (falsity). The upshot is that the distinction between Brahman and

world is false, the identity of Brahman and world is false, the falsity of the distinction between Brahman and world is false, and the falsity of the identity of Brahman and world is false.

2.5.4 The Falsity of Falsity

The falsity of falsity follows from the nature of the false. The false is that which appears but can be sublated by Brahman-experience. All apparently particular, plural, inner and outer objects of consciousness—all inner and outer objects that can be distinguished from one another through contrast, mutual exclusion or application of differentia—appear, but can be sublated *as they appear* (as particular and distinct from one another) by recognition of the fact that they are never manifest without that pervasive presence which itself cannot bear the application of differentia. Even falsity is illusory, or false. To be false is to be indeterminable as either real (*sat*) or unreal (*asat*). Falsity is false because it appears to be distinct from the real and the unreal, but *that* appearance of the distinctness of falsity can be sublated by cognition of the invariant substratum of the appearance of falsity, reality, and their difference.[43]

2.5.5 The Falsity of Nirguṇa Brahman

We might realize the falsity of any distinction or relation between Brahman and world, and perhaps even the falsity of the falsity of any distinction/relation, and thereby sublate both the reality and the falsity of the distinction/relation between the two, and yet still think that we can distinguish between direct, ineffable *Brahman*-experience, and all appearances as of Brahman. But the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman—*Brahman* that is completely beyond conceptual linguistic capture—depends on a *distinction* between *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* Brahman. *Nirguṇa Brahman* is contrasted

[43] Recall that falsity is itself indeterminable—it appears as *distinct* from the real and the unreal, but can be sublated as such.

with the sayable and apparent Brahman, and is thus made to appear *outside* of the very negation of the identity between *nirguṇa* and *saguṇa* Brahman.[44] This means that the appearance of *nirguṇa* Brahman as contrasted with *saguṇa* Brahman is false, or indeterminable as either real or unreal.[45]

2.6 Final Connections: Phenomenality and the Witness (*sākṣin*)

This brings me finally to drawing a series of brief connections between the witness (*sākṣin*) of Advaita Vedānta, and my notion of phenomenality from chapter 1. Moving forward in the dissertation, these connections will serve to ground my argument that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness, and inform my positive thesis that we may embrace and therein dissolve the dilemma through an alternative kind of linguistic activity (a linguistic activity deeply resonant with the Adviatic concept of falsity in terms of its formal semantic structure).

Like phenomenality, the witness is not aptly categorized as *subjective*, for it is present with respect to *all* mental modifications and *all* external finite things alike. In the previous chapter, I showed that phenomenality is co-present with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena.

[44] But this contrast makes *nirguṇa* Brahman an object of consciousness and presupposes Brahman yet again as the condition of the possibility of the contrast.

[45] We may understand that the conceptual element by which we understand the reality of *nirguṇa* Brahman (Brahman considered beyond conceptual and linguistic capture) is the distinction between two forms of Brahman, and thereby sublate the absolute reality of Brahman as ineffable, inexpressible, or beyond conceptual and linguistic capture. But the conceptual element by which we understand *this* constraint on the reality of *nirguṇa* Brahman will still be the three-fold ontic schema (of reality, falsity, and unreality), which is indeterminable in the relevant sense. The conceptual foundations of the semantics of even the falsification of the absolute reality of *nirguṇa* Brahman is indeterminate. Furthermore, I have argued that all explicit and implied key semantic-theoretic elements of the *advaita-vāda* are false. The view is pervaded by falsity, and is itself false in that sense. But, because of the paradox of falsity, the view is false even *as false*. The conceptual element whereby we understand the falsity of the theory as a whole (in its parts considered all together) is still the three-fold ontic schema which is superimposed on the witness and sublatable *as it appears* (as involving absolutely real/true distinctions between different ontological categories) by direct cognition of the substratum its appearance. And all this follows from the Advaitic doctrine of falsity. Note that in order for this argument to go through, I do not need to prove that all differentiated things superimposed on the witness are sublatable by direct cognition of the substratum of their appearance. I need only appeal to the fact that this is the view. Brahman is said to be *pāramārthika sat* because Brahman alone is unsublatable—never contradicted or cancelled. And the doctrine of the falsity of the world pertains to the sublatability of the world. In this sense, the view is self-sublating: the criterion of reality (and the implied criterion of unreality) that establishes the falsity of the world ensures that the entire theory is part of the world, and thus false, and also false *as such*.

In this chapter, I explained that the witness is always present with respect to all of the mind's modifications, and all outward things, i.e., with respect to the entire world differentiated by name and form, including the individual, perspectival subject of experience. We can nominally distinguish between subjective experience and phenomenality. We can similarly nominally distinguish between the witness that is mixed up with and delimited by the modifications of the psycho-physical organism, including the *antaḥ-karaṇa*, giving rise to the appearance of the individual self/soul, and, on the other hand, the witness of all inner and outer things differentiated by name and form. The latter is a further explanandum over the former, but the two are not actually separable.

I have also argued that phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated. By 'externally differentiated' I mean differentiated from something *else*. On the basis of this argument, I provided an initial argument for the conclusion that phenomenality is inexplicable. The inexplicability of phenomenality was cashed out in terms of the non-difference of phenomenality and all components of all explanations. In this chapter, I explained how the witness, which is shown to be present with respect to all inner and outer objects, cannot be differentiated from all things differentiated by name and form—not really—because it is like sea-water is to waves, and bits of sea-foam. It is, on at least one important level of analysis, immanent, all-pervasive, and omnipresent. Because of this, it cannot be determined as different or non-different from the world, and visa versa.

In the context of Advaita Vedānta, the point about inexplicability can be made by analyzing the *conceptual entailment* between *saguṇa* Brahman and *nirguṇa* Brahman. Our incapacity to absolutely differentiate the witness from anything whatsoever (*saguṇa* Brahman) is the window into understanding that we cannot wrap our concepts or words *around* the witness (*nirguṇa* Brahman). The *all-pervasiveness* of that which is the invariant condition and concomitant of all

subjective and objective phenomena (phenomenality; *sākṣin*) is what accounts for it being *indeterminable as distinct* from all phenomena, which is what in turn accounts for its evasion of absolute conceptual and linguistic capture.

Objects are always known in relation to some knowing subject, and to other known objects. There is a close relationship between knowledge and language, and between knowing and linguistic expression: when we say what something *is*, we bring it into the sphere of the *known*. For this reason, we cannot say what the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena (phenomenality; pure consciousness) *is*, not even by saying that we cannot say what it is. In Chapter 3, I sharpen this line of reasoning by focusing on the pervasiveness of phenomenality(understood in terms of pure consciousness in Advaita Vedānta) with respect to all linguistic phenomena.

To close, I will note that, considered holistically, the *advaita-vāda* evinces the non-absoluteness of any given expression of *determinate* knowledge about that with which we are intimately connected whenever we think, feel, hear touch, see, etc. The *message* of the *advaita-vāda* simply cannot be that absolute reality *is* unitary consciousness which excludes multiplicity, or even that it *is* unmodified or inexpressible. If one studies Advaita Vedānta, takes seriously the concept of falsity, and yet goes back to characterizing the view as *absolutely* monistic, or starkly anti-realist, or all things considered at variance with a level-headed, world-affirming spirit, or as unambiguously expressive of any absolutist metaphysical thesis, one has indeed mistaken the ladder for the loft (note that the distinction communicated by this metaphor is just as practically real (*vyāvahārika sat*) any other teaching). The message of the *advaita-vāda* also cannot be that absolute reality *is* an ineffable state of awareness.

The intent of the *advaita-vāda* is soteriological, but not in an obvious way—yes, it is meant to occasion release (*Mokṣa*), which is described as the removal of the distinctions between objects known, knowers, acts of knowledge (BSBh I, I, 4). This, understandably, leads students of Advaita Vedānta to identify Brahman with a state of consciousness that can be experienced directly but not described. But, at the same time, the *advaita-vāda* is not meant to indicate something *beyond* itself, or to gesture at some *result* of reflection on the *Sūtras* (even though it does both at the *vyāvahārika* level of analysis). On my view, Śaṅkara is quite clear on this point. The purpose of meditating on the *Brahma-Sūtras* through the *advaita-vāda* is to *be* Brahman (BSBh I, I, 4)[46], an actuality the essential nature of which cannot be determinatively expressed, *not even* (paradoxically) *as determinatively beyond determinate conceptual or linguistic representation*.[47]

[46] *brahmabhāvaśca Mokṣaḥ*
[47] Neither as *saguṇa* Brahman or as *nirguṇa* Brahman.

2a On Contemporary Characterizations of Advaita-Vedānta

Introduction

In this short addendum to chapter 2, I show how my reading of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* can refute a significant contemporary interpretation of his view, and re-frame our thinking about the relevance of Advaita Vedānta for the metaphysics of consciousness. On a current, dominating interpretation, Śaṅkara is antecedently committed to the reality of a unique, all-embracing awareness, and at the same time is an *anti-realist* about the phenomenal world, specifically in virtue of *eliminating* its denizens (physical objects, individual subjects of experience, and so on) from his ontology (Gasparri 2022). This interpretation of Śaṅkara's view—an interpretation advanced by Luca Gasparri (2022) but also, to varying degrees, adopted by others (Shani 2022; Vaidya 2022)—has been articulated in the scope of an ongoing debate about the relevance of Advaita Vedānta for the contemporary revival of *cosmopsychism* in analytic philosophy. Cosmopsychism is the metaphysical thesis that consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the world at the *cosmic* level.

To explain the dialectical context of the anti-realist, eliminativist interpretation of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda*, and to demonstrate how Advaita Vedānta has been viewed on the analytic terrain, I will summarize the sentiments that have spurred renewed interest in cosmopsychism (2a.1). Having done so, I will reconstruct the anti-realist, eliminativist interpretation in a bit more detail, show how my reading of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* deals with it (2a,2), and close by reiterating that Advaita Vedānta is misconstrued in discussions of phenomenal consciousness when it is treated as a metaphysical theory of consciousness like any other—i.e., when it is not understood as a theory that offers critical insight regarding our capacity to coherently express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness (2a.3-4).

2a.1 The Contemporary Revival of Cosmopsychism

The contemporary revival of cosmopsychism is part of the contemporary revival of *panpsychism*—the view that consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world. In recent years, panpsychism has been viewed with increasing enthusiasm as "an attractive middle way between physicalism on the one hand and dualism on the other" (Goff et al., 2022, 1). Physicalism is roughly the thesis that everything is fundamentally physical. And dualism is roughly the thesis that everything is *not* fundamentally physical (Chalmers 2013, 3). The very general thinking behind renewed interest in panpsychism goes that physicalism and dualism are both unsatisfying metaphysical theories: physicalists about consciousness either deny the manifest (the fact of experience) or, in one way or another, inadequately account for consciousness.[48] Dualists about consciousness either leave us with the deep difficulty of explaining how separate metaphysical substances interact or offend against all our folk psychological concepts by holding that psychophysical causation only runs in one direction.[49] Panpsychism, on the other hand, promises a satisfying account of consciousness and a unified conception of reality (Ibid). Panpsychism does better than physicalism because it finds a clear place for consciousness in the natural world. It does better than dualism because it collapses the explanatory gap between consciousness and the brain, body, and external environment of conscious beings.

[48] Physicalists may inadequately account for consciousness by, for example, offering physical explanations of mental processes which do not explain how or why such processes happen to be accompanied by subjective experience. This is the 'explanatory gap' which poses the so-called hard problem of consciousness.

[49] The idea that psychophysical causation only runs in one direction—that physical events cause mental events in the brain but not *vice versa*—is called epiphenomenalism (Huxley 1874; Wundt 1912).

2a.1.1 Chalmers' Argument for Panpsychism

Another significant force that has impelled the contemporary analytic revival of panpsychism is Chalmers' (2013) argument for panpsychism. I will reconstruct it here, in part, to offer a further sense of the dialectical climate surrounding the anti-realist, eliminativist interpretation of Śaṅkara's view, and the recent uptick in discussion of Advaita Vedānta as a metaphysical theory of consciousness.

Chalmers understands panpsychism "as the thesis that some fundamental physical entities are conscious: that is, that there is something it is like to be a quark or a photon or a member of some other fundamental physical type" (Chalmers 2013, 1). He notes that it may be tempting to dismiss this view as crazy or counterintuitive, but maintains that given the difficulties of detecting consciousness in other systems, we do not have direct evidence against it (Ibid). But he argues that we do have "indirect reasons of a broadly theoretical character" for taking panpsychism seriously (Ibid). Chalmers' argument for panpsychism follows the Hegelian thesis-antithesis-synthesis structure: physicalism[50] is the thesis, dualism is the antithesis, and panpsychism is the synthesis.[51]

[50] Chalmers uses the term 'materialism'. I use the term 'physicalism' instead, as this is the current norm.

[51] Here, 'physicalism' is physicalism *about consciousness*. The view is that truths about consciousness are grounded in the fundamental truths of a completed physics (ibid., 3). And 'dualism' is dualism *about consciousness*. The view is that truths about consciousness are *not* grounded in the fundamental truths of a completed physics (Ibid). There are a few things we should note here: Chalmers couches the dialectic at the level of truth claims. But the truth claims in this dialectical situation are construals of matters of fact. Phenomenal truths are supposed to be truths about the instantiation of phenomenal *properties* by *entities* (paradigmatically, biological organisms). For Chalmers, phenomenal consciousness is *itself* a phenomenal property—an entity has the property of phenomenal consciousness when there is something it is like to be that entity (Chalmers 2013, 4). He also mentions 'specific' phenomenal qualities, by which he means *qualia*—the felt qualities of experience (e.g., redness). An entity has a specific phenomenal property like redness "when it has that sort of conscious experience" (Ibid). Physical truths are supposed to be truths about the instantiation of physical *properties* by physical *entities*. Finally, Chalmers understands grounding in terms of full metaphysical constitution.

According to Chalmers, physicalism and dualism are in a sort of standoff, and panpsychism functions as a synthesis by capturing the virtues of both and the vices of neither. [52]

The most powerful argument against physicalism, according to Chalmers, is the conceivability argument for dualism. The conceivability argument for dualism goes roughly like this: if non-conscious beings microphysically identical with us (zombies) are *conceivable*, such beings are metaphysically *possible*. Microphysical identity is presumably exact sameness at the level of the fundamental physical constitution. If zombies are metaphysically possible, consciousness isn't fundamentally physical, and physicalism is false.

The most powerful argument against dualism, according to Chalmers, is the causal argument for physicalism. Here, Chalmers talks of physical events; a physical event is presumably one or more physical entities engaging in an activity at a specific point in space and time. The causal argument establishes that phenomenal properties are grounded in physical properties by appealing to principles of causal explanation. The argument looks like this:

> 1. Phenomenal properties are causally relevant to physical events
> 2. Every caused physical event has a fully causal explanation in physical terms
> 3. If every caused physical event has a fully causal explanation in physical terms, then every property causally relevant to the physical is itself grounded in physical properties.
> C1. Phenomenal properties are grounded in physical properties.
> 4. If phenomenal properties are grounded in physical properties, physicalism is true.
> C2. Physicalism is true
> (Chalmers 2013, 6; insertions mine)

The first premise represents the basic observation that qualia (e.g., the feeling of hunger) often seem to trigger physical events (e.g., eating food). The second premise follows from the theory of

[52] The notion that panpsychism captures neither's vices is a bit vague. The point in more precise terms is that panpsychism does not succumb to the most powerful arguments against both physicalism and dualism, as defined here. I should clarify before moving forward that my intent is not to endorse Chalmers' Hegelian argument; my intent is still just to communicate in some detail the nature of panpsychism's revival.

physical causal closure, which holds that all physical events have physical causes; if all physical events have physical causes, all physical events can be casually explained in terms of the physical events casually relevant to their occurrence. The third premise is supposed to reject overdetermination in causal explanation. If an event has a *full* causal explanation in physical terms, any *other* causal explanation involving factors that are *not* grounded in events that are aptly represented by physical terms would amount to causal overdetermination by independent events. Chalmers says that the fourth premise is true by definition (Chalmers 2013, 6).[53] Physicalists and dualists do not give up their positions when faced with the conceivability and causal arguments respectively, but they are, nevertheless, caught in a sort of standoff.[54] The standoff basically consists in the fact that the argument for dualism refutes physicalism and the argument for physicalism refutes dualism.

According to Chalmers, a specific variant of panpsychism synthesizes physicalism and dualism. There are two major variants of panpsychism. *Micropsychism* is roughly the thesis that consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the world at the micro level. *Cosmospychism* is roughly the thesis that consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous at the cosmic level. There are many sub-variants of both major variants. A sub-variant of micropsychism is the synthesis in Chalmers' Hegelian argument. On this micopsychist view, the fundamental entities underlying the

[53] This is interesting, since his initial definition of physicalism is broader than the thesis that phenomenal *properties* are grounded in physical properties. Physicalism is supposed to be, on his own account, the thesis that *truths* about consciousness are grounded in the fundamental truths of a completed physics. He does specify that he is especially concerned with phenomenal properties. But he does not *establish* that *all* truths about consciousness are truths about the instantiation of phenomenal *properties* (as opposed to other phenomenal types or things). He also does not provide justification for the view that phenomenal consciousness is itself a property in the relevant sense. To my mind, the fourth premise is not *obviously* true by his own definition. In any case, the causal argument is considered a strong argument for physicalism and against dualism.

[54] Katie Balog makes a similar point, but with different emphasis: "each side can unseat the other side's core assumption if they are permitted to make their own core assumption. The anti-physicalist appeals to the anti-physicalist principles, the physicalist appeals to the conceivability of a purely physical world with phenomenality. Both can show that, once granted that one core assumption, their view is consistent and can rebut challenges from the other side. Neither side can, without begging the question against the opponent, show that the other's position is untenable" (Balog 2012, 20).

structures, dispositions and dynamics captured by the language of physics bear phenomenal properties, or quiddities.[55] Here, quiddities are theoretical posits—they are thought of as the underlying properties that realize (cause) the dispositional and structural properties typically associated with physical entities. They aren't *macro*phenomenal properties—they aren't properties characterizing what it is like to be a macroscopic entity like you or me. They are theoretically properties characterizing what it is like to be a fundamental physical entity. They are also supposed to be causally responsible for macro experience—the sort of experience had by macro-conscious beings.[56]

The view that the fundamental entities underlying the dynamics captured by the language of physics bear phenomenal properties deals with the conceivability argument, in simplest terms, by broadening the metaphysical category of the 'physical'. On this view, fundamental physical entities *are*, in a sense, phenomenal (they bear phenomenal properties).[57] So beings microphysically identical with us but lacking consciousness would not be conceivable. We might think of this variant of micropsychism as an alternative, re-vamped physicalist-*ish* position that refutes the conceivability argument for dualism while rejecting traditional phsyicalism. The thesis that microphysical entities bear phenomenal properties deals with the causal argument similarly: if the fundamental entities underlying the structures and dynamics captured by the language of physics were to have phenomenal properties (were to be phenomenally conscious in some sense),

[55] Chalmers calls this view *constitutive Russellian panpsychism*.

[56] I won't get into the specifics of Chalmers' explanation of how this variant of panpsychism deals with the conceivability and causal arguments alike. Doing so would be unnecessary for achieving my present goal of contextualizing the contemporary analytic revival of panpsychism. I will just briefly summarize the tail end of Chalmers' argument, and then offer some more general thoughts on how one might move from appreciating the antinomy of physicalism and dualism to seriously considering some version of panpsychism.

[57] I would argue that this view collapses, or at least radically shifts, the metaphysical category of the 'physical'—normally the term 'physical' connotes things *not* of or relating to consciousness. Entities that bear phenomenal properties aren't physical in the normal sense. For example, we would not say that the body alone bears the property of subjective experience. It is the whole *psycho-physical* organism that has the property of subjective experience.

caused 'physical' events would *not* have full causal explanations in *narrowly* physical terms.[58] The full causal explanation of a physical event would include factors captured by the language of a *complete* physics—a physics revealing the intrinsic, *phenomenal* nature of matter. Accordingly, we may think of this variant of panpsychism as the position of a physicalist who is radically open-minded about what the word 'physical' means (and what the corresponding metaphysical category encompasses), such that they can refute not only the conceivability argument for dualism but also the causal argument for *traditional* physicalism.

The broad upshot of Chalmers' argument may be put in these terms: we are faced with limited logical alternatives when it comes to locating consciousness in the overall scheme of reality. Most of us accept or assume that there is a world of concrete phenomena, which we call 'physical' reality. Against the backdrop of this commitment, there seem to be two options regarding consciousness: either consciousness is fundamentally physical in terms of its metaphysical constitution, or it is not. But the antinomy of physicalism and dualism lessens the viability of both alternatives. So perhaps we should re-think our commitment to the very concept of the 'physical'; perhaps the fact of experience should be the immovable, indubitable given against which we attempt to understand the intrinsic nature of 'physical' reality. This paradigm shift broadens our set of logical alternatives: perhaps physical entities, properties and events are all metaphysically constituted, *in some sense*, by phenomenal consciousness. There is a direct correlation between appreciating the arguments for and against physicalism and dualism, and entertaining the seemingly wild idea that ordinary, middle-sized objects are made of consciousness.

[58] That is to say, they would not have full causal explanations in terms of current physics, which reveals the structures and dynamics of matter but not its intrinsic nature (Russel 1921; Chalmers 2013, 9).

2a.1.2 Cosmopsychism and Advaita Vedānta

My intent has been to explain, in some detail, how and why there has been renewed interest in panpsychism on the analytic terrain. Chalmers' argument for panpsychism has bolstered the movement, and its ongoing significance should be appreciated. But his argument is specifically for a variant of *micro*psychism. There has also been interest in *cosmo*psychism—the thesis that phenomenal consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world not as a property of microphysical entities, but as an all-inclusive metaphysical infrastructure of some sort. Recent discussions of Advaita Vedānta wherein Śaṅkara has been characterized as an anti-realist about the phenomenal world, including macrolevel subjects, have occurred in the context of discourse about cosmopsychism.[59]

Ganeri and Shani (2022) have suggested that cosmopsychism gains momentum only once one appreciates the insolubility of *the combination problem* for micropsychism.[60] The combination problem was first posed by William James (1890). The problem pertains to explaining how the microphenomenal properties of the fundamental entities underlying physical structures and dynamics could combine to yield the macrophenomenal properties of entities like you and me (e.g., what it is like to be me, what it is like to be my cat, etc.). The enduring difficulty of the combination problem has led some philosophers to consider cosmopsychism as an alternative (Vaidya 2022): perhaps it would be better to think that consciousness is everywhere, but in the sense of being a

[59] And, in my view, his argument perpetuates the typical conflation of phenomenal consciousness with subjective experience (Chalmers understands phenomenal consciousness as a property instantiated by entities, not as the pervasive existence dimension of all subjective and objective phenomena).

[60] I happen to think that that the appeal of *something like but importantly dissimilar from* analytic cosmopsychism (Advaita Vedānta) can arise from simply from appreciating the undeniable pervasiveness of phenomenal consciousness. But by 'phenomenal consciousness' I do not mean (as Chalmers does) a property characterizing what it is like to be an entity. I mean phenomenality—the existence dimension of all subjective and objective phenomena. And I contend that the *advaita-vāda*, unlike analytic cosmopsychism, does not express any absolutist metaphysical thesis.

property of *the whole cosmos* itself (rather than of fundamental metaphysical entities), or in the sense of being the *universal* material substratum, as it were, of all things.

But cosmopsychism faces a similar issue. *The decombination problem* for cosmopsychism is the problem of explaining how a conscious cosmos could yield a *plurality* of macrolevel subjects of experience. Phenomenal consciousness is typically associated in concept with subjective experience, and, accordingly, understood as being attached to *a* specific point of view. The idea that *one* large point of view could become *many* smaller points of view without losing itself entirely in the process makes little sense. The decombination problem is probably most salient for those who are committed to the ineliminable perspectivalness of phenomenal consciousness and convinced of the metaphysical possibility of a cosmic conscious subject (probably for broadly theoretical reasons).[61] If phenomenal consciousness always belongs to a subject, the thesis that consciousness is fundamental and ubiquitous in the world at the cosmic level is the idea of a cosmic conscious *subject* (Vaidya 2021, 3). It is unclear exactly how *a* cosmic subject would generate *many* "individual conscious centers of experience" (Ibid). We might think of the decombinaiton problem as a variant of the perennial problem of the one and the many, and as a simple explanatory question regarding the specific mechanics of a cosmopsychist universe.

The difficulty of the decombination problem has lead some philosophers (Albahari 2019; Gasparri 2022) to consider whether classical non-dualist Vedānta may have resources for assisting the revival of analytic cosmopsychism. Albahari (2019), for example, argues that Advaita Vedānta avoids the decombination problem because *Brahman* is a field of consciousness without any

[61] Vaidya (2021) distinguishes between the modal aspect of the decombination problem, and the mechanical aspect. He frames the modal aspect of the problem as a question about the logical or metaphysical possibility of a cosmic conscious subject which contains all individual finite minds (Vaidya 2021, 3). The mechanical aspect of the problem assumes that there is an answer to the modal aspect and asks how a cosmic conscious subject actually generates individual finite minds.

subject. Since Brahman isn't one big subject, the problem of explaining how Brahman yields many subjects doesn't arise. The idea is that Advaita Vedānta *seems* to develop the central cosmopsychist thesis without generating the decombination problem. But there has been debate about whether Śaṅkara's view is indeed equipped to assist the revival of cosmopsychism. In this debate, Luca Gasparri (2022) has argued that Śaṅkara's view is *not* equipped, because it avoids the decombination problem at the cost of being at odds with the world-affirming spirit of analytic cosmopsychism. In the next section, I will summarize Gasparri's interpretation of Śaṅkara's view, and argue against it. I should note that my goal in resisting the anti-realist interpretation is not to argue that Advaita Vedānta *should* be viewed as a school of thought with resources for assisting the revival of analytic velvet chair cosmopsychism. In the last section of this chapter, I briefly appeal to my reading of Advaita Vedānta to say that it *should not* be viewed as such.

2a.2 Against the Anti-Realist Interpretation of Śaṅkara's *Advaita-Vāda*

Gasparri (2022) suggests that Advaita Vedānta avoids the decombination problem in virtue of holding that human subjects are *unreal*. Śaṅkaran Monism, according to Gasparri, "combines the assumption of a unique all-embracing awareness" with a "stark antirealist stance on all denizens of our pretheoretical image of the world, including physical objects, change, and macrolevel subjects themselves" (Gasparri 2022, 80). He claims, further, that "the monism of the framework *eliminates* macrolevel subjects…[and that] macrolevel mineness isn't taken to track anything we should be serious about in our ontology" (Ibid; emphasis and insertion mine).

2.a.2.1 Śaṅkaran Monism

Understood along these lines, Śaṅkaran monism avoids having to explain how human subjects emerge from universal consciousness by eliminating human subjectivity, but remains antithetical to the world-affirming spirit of analytic cosmopsychism. Śaṅkaran monism is not world-*affirming* in the obvious sense that it maintains a stark antirealist, eliminativist stance on all denizens of the phenomenal world, including human subjects and physical objects. Gasparri's interpretation has motivated others "to explore…varieties of Vedānta, which do not follow Śaṇkara's lead" (Ganeri and Shani 2020, 5). Itay Shani, for example, says that "the irrealism, or *acosmism*, of Śaṅkara exacts a heavy toll on metaphysics, and…does not sit well with the world-affirming spirit that animates most work on cosmopsychism" (Shani 2022, 20). My arguments in this section will target Gasparri's interpretation, but only because Gasparri's interpretation has been so influential. My arguments really target the contemporary *trend* of thinking of Śaṇkara as an anti-realist who eschews level-headed acknowledgement of the phenomenal world's appearance.

2a.2.2 Resisting the Image of Śaṅkaran Monism

Śaṇkara's *advaita-vāda* is *not* anti-realist, irrealist, or acosmic. First, it is certainly not right to think of the Advaitic framework as *assuming* a unique all-embracing awareness. The arc of the phenomenological analysis I have detailed evinces that Advaita Vedānta is very much rooted in acknowledgement of the phenomenal world, including individual, perspectival subjects of experience. It is *through* intimately attending to what it is like to be an individual, perspectival subject of experience, and *through* deep reflection on the appearance of the vast world of objects and subjects outside us that we come to recognize the *all-pervasion* of the witness (*sākṣin*), which is what enables the cognition of the identity of the *ātman* and *Brahman*. Here, my opponent may

think they are in a position to grant my characterization of the arc of this analysis while denying that this acknowledgement of the phenomenal world, which appears in the process of achieving *Brahman*-knowledge (*Brahma-jñāna*), keeps the Advaitin from eventually eliminating the world through the analysis. They might think that Śaṅkara *begins* by acknowledging the phenomenal world, and *ends* by claiming that it is sublated by *Brahman*-knowledge. But this objection would have force only if we could express determinate knowledge of Brahman-knowledge (which is just Brahman). I have argued at length that Śaṅkara maintains that we cannot. The view that the sublation of the world by Brahman-knowledge *is* the elimination or erasure of the phenomenal world rests on the erroneous assumption that characterizations of what becoming Brahman is like have anything more than indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) status.

The second aspect of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* I would note to resist the anti-realist reading is its tiered ontology, which is comprised in part by the idiosyncratic ontological category of falsity (*mithyātva*). The assertion that the world is false or *indeterminable* as either real or unreal is decidedly dissimilar from the assertion that it *is unreal*.[62] The unqualified assertion that the phenomenal world is *unreal* is simply absent from the *advaita-vāda*.[63] It would be a serious mistake to say that this doctrine of the falsity of the world amounts to eliminativism or irrealism about the world and all its denizens. Appearances as of inner (subjective; mental) and outer (objective; physical) objects, which depend for their appearance on the pervasive substratum of

[62] The phenomenal world is indeterminable as either real or unreal because it is neither different nor non-different from that which is unsublateable in experience, and thus absolutely real in the relevant ontological schema (Brahman).
[63] Although it is an unfortunate fact that the term *mithyā* is sometimes translated as "unreal". See Gorege Thibaut's (2018) translation of Śaṅkara's commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras*. And even when the translation is fine, without a nuanced understanding of the tirerd Advaitic ontology, scholars tend to read falsity too much in the way of unreality, and thus get the metaphysics wrong (by attributing global anti-realism about the phenomenal world of subjects and objects to Advaita Vedānta).

universal non-dual consciousness,[64] are *not* nothing at all, or unreal, or even *just* illusions. They are empirically real, and they are *opposed* to the unreal.

Gasparri is aware of the Advaitic doctrine of the falsity of the world. But he misunderstands its function in the theory. On his view, the manifestation of the phenomenal world is a *problem* for Advaita Vedānta. And, on his view, the Advaitic response to the problem of the manifestation of the phenomenal world within a system hostile to it is not a solution to the problem but "rather the assertion of a particular instance of mysterianism about the realm of appearances" (Gasparri 2022, 83). He says, further, that "questions about the appearance of the phenomenal world are indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*), and conceptual inquiry is constitutively unfit to adjudicate the nature of *māyā* and *avidyā*" (Ibid., 83). It is not clear what it would mean to 'adjudicate' the nature of illusion and ignorance—Gasparri *seems* to mean that conceptual inquiry is unfit to answer questions about the phenomenal world, since it is illusory and apparent due to primal nescience. But there is something amiss with the idea that the doctrine of *anirvacanīya* is an instance of mysterianism. The world is indeterminable as either real or unreal *specifically because it appears but can be sublated by direct cognition/experience of the substratum of its appearance*. To say this is actually to demystify the appearance of the world by giving a precise account of what it means for an appearance to be indeterminable relative to a transcendental reality which is the condition of appearances appearing at all. For the phenomenal world to be determinate would be for it to be determin*able* as real (*sat*), according to the relevant Advaitic criterion of reality (nonsublatability). For the phenomenal world to be false is simply for it to be indeterminable as either real or unreal, because it appears but can be sublated. Recall that the world of many subjects and objects can be sublated even at the empirical (*vyāvakārika*) level of analysis by the recognition that Brahman is

[64] Wherein 'non-dual' signifies not being externally differentiated, and not possessing qualities.

the universal cause of all finite things (i.e., grasping the nature of *saguna Brahman* transforms our previous cognition of the world as being characterized by absolutely real diversity). The idea that the world is sublated by Brahman-knowledge (direct, unmediated acquaintance with non-dual consciousness) is a bit more difficult to use in any argument, since we cannot express determinate knowledge of *Brahman*-knowledge.

From a limited, empirical perspective we can at best say that Brahman-knowledge, when it arises, is supposed to *somehow* transform the appearance of the phenomenal world such that it no longer appears exactly as it did before. Still, the indeterminacy of the phenomenal world is *not* asserted as a response to a problem against the backdrop of antecedent commitment to eliminativism. The doctrine of the falsity (indeterminacy) of the world captures the essential Advaitic grasp of the invariant condition of the appearance of the world, and the mechanism by which that appearance can be sublated.[65] But we should tread carefully here: in wrapping our minds around this Adviatic concept of sublation, we should not rely too much on the rope-snake example. In the rope-snake example, the object of the initial erroneous perceptual cognition (the snake) appears and then *disappears* due to the subsequent perceptual cognition of the rope. But the snake in the rope-snake example is a *specific* empirical object which is erased by a perceptual cognition as of another specific empirical object. The phenomenal world is *not* a specific empirical object—it is the totality of all specific empirical objects and their existential relations—and it is not cancelled (at least not when we're talking about Brahman-knowledge) by a cognition as of some specific empirical object or another. We can characterize the snake as being *nothing at all*, other than a memory, after the rope is seen because at the time of the rope's appearance we are

[65] The indeterminacy of the world is not attached to the Advaitic thesis *post facto*. That is to say, it is not tacked on to the view as a way of addressing the fact that the phenomenal world does appear. It is integral to the view that Brahman alone is real.

still immersed in the phenomenal world of specific empirical objects. The *absence* of the snake is apprehensible in relation to the presence of the rope, the ground, the other objects in the vicinity, the perceiver, etc. We cannot characterize the phenomenal world as being absent, erased, or eliminated in or following its sublation, because absences are apparent in dualistic apprehension, and the sublation of the phenomenal world is supposed to be *release* from dualistic apprehension. My opponent cannot claim the Advaitic idea of the sublation of the phenomenal world by *Brahma-jñana* as a win for the anti-realist.

In resisting the anti-realist, eliminativist interpretation, we should also keep in mind the complex, multi-dimensional nature of the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman, that is Brahman without properties. On one level of analysis, Śaṅkara affirms the reality of *all*-embracing witness. But this is *saguṇa* Brahman, Brahman with properties, namely, the property of transmuting into all finite things. One another level of analysis, Śaṅkara seems to assert the reality of a *unitary* pure consciousness , i.e., he seems to assert that Brahman is without qualities, and thus unified and singular. The assertion that Brahman is unqualified *does*, on the one hand, indicate an image of Brahman as being free from limiting conditions (names and forms), devoid of all qualities, attributes and distinctions and, therefore, absolutely unified and singular. This image of Brahman does indeed support the interpretive thesis that Advaita Vedānta is a starkly anti-realist school of thought. Śaṅkara does indeed say that only the cognition of Brahman as being unmodified is an instrument of final release (*Mokṣa*) (BSBh II, I, 14). For these reasons, it is understandable that Śaṅkara is thought to assert that absolute reality (*pāramārthika sattva*) *is* unmodified, unchanging, singular, pure consciousness (*nirguṇa* Brahman). But it is also very clearly stated in Śaṅkara's commentary that *Brahman is never an object of knowledge* (BSBh I, I, 4). This is the flip side of his description of Brahman being unqualified (*nirguṇa*): Brahman is unqualified not in the sense

that it is unified and singular, but in the sense that it cannot be known as an object or apprehended by speech. Śaṅkara's insistence that *Brahman* can never be known as an object or apprehended by speech means that the intentional object of the cognition represented by the singular referring term '*nirguṇa* Brahman*'* is *not* Brahman, at least not absolutely. The intentional object, or referent, of the term *nirguṇa* Brahman is known as an object and apprehended by speech *as unqualified*. Brahman cannot be known or apprehended by speech as such, so Brahman is not ultimately unqualified. The very concept of unqualified non-dual consciousness is dual natured. The term/concept points beyond itself—beyond its initial state of being about that which has no qualities whatsoever, and towards being about that which cannot be determinatively grasped with concepts or words. Because the concept of *nirguṇa Brahman* is dual natured, we should understand the distinction between qualified and unqualified Brahman on two levels: the distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa Brahman* is, on one level, a distinction between a mutating totality and a static singularity, i.e., between *saguṇa Brahman* understood as immanent in all finite, changeable things, and *nirguṇa Brahman* understood as unmodified, unqualified, singular and unified. But on another level, the distinction between *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman is a distinction between the conceivable and expressible Brahman (a type of which both terms in the first contrasting set, *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman, are tokens), and the inconceivable and inexpressible Brahman. On this level of analysis, what appears to be *pāramārthika* (absolutely real), is that which cannot be *captured* with concepts or words (*apprehended* by speech).

The view that Brahman is a static singularly cancelling out the multiformity of being rather than the vital, immanent, transmutable being of the whole cosmos is, it turns out, not the ultimate *meaning* of the view that Brahman is *nirguṇa*. This is because the term *nirguṇa Brahman* secondarily signifies *Brahman*'s inexpressibility, and this signification limits the ultimacy of the

term's primary meaning/reference (to unqualified Brahman). Moreover, and ironically, the very same can be said of the statement that Brahman is absolutely beyond the scope of conceptual and linguistic capture. What is indicated at the empirical level of analysis by the assertion that Brahman is inexpressible *also* is not *pāramārthika sat*. Śaṅkara maintains that the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman occasions release (*Mokṣa*) and says that release is nothing but being Brahman (BSBh I, I, 4).[66] The concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman *indicates* freedom from dualistic apprehension—a freedom which itself cannot be captured as anything in particular, *not even as being without qualities or as beyond apprehension by speech*. In sum, the *advaita-vāda* does not, all things considered, express the metaphysical thesis that all-embracing consciousness (*saguṇa Brahman*) is absolutely real; it does not express the metaphysical thesis that singular, unified unqualified non-dual consciousness (the primary reference of *nirguṇa Brahman*) is absolutely real; it does not even express the metaphysical thesis that inapprehensible, ineffable, non-dual consciousness (the secondary reference of *nirguṇa Brahman*) is absolutely real. Because the *advaita-vāda* does not express any absolutist metaphysical thesis which would implicitly negate the reality of the phenomenal world, we should reject the anti-realist interpretation.

In this section, I have shown why we should reject the anti-realist interpretation by attending to Śaṅkara's phenomenological analysis, his tired ontology, his concept of falsity (*mithyātva*), his nuanced distinction between two forms of Brahman, and his insistence on Brahman's defiance of conceptual and linguistic capture. I will now briefly show how this puts us in a position to resist an upshot of the anti-realist interpretation, i.e., the sentiment that Śaṅkara's thinking is broadly incoherent and analytically unhelpful, because it basically forces us to either deny that the phenomenal world appears at all (which we cannot do) or admit that unqualified

[66] *brahmabhāvaśca mokṣaḥ*

awareness is not the sole denizen of reality (which would, on the anti-realist interpretation, constitute contradicting the major idea behind Śaṅkaran Monism).

2a.3 An Aside on the "Paradox of Elimination" in Advaita Vedānta

Because Gasparri thinks that "Śaṅkaran Monism" combines the assumption of a unique, all-embracing awareness with a stark anti-realist stance on all denizens of our pre-theoretical image of the world, he identifies a *paradox of elimination* in Advaita Vedānta.

2a.3.1 The Supposed Paradox

The paradox supposedly goes like this: one the one hand, Śaṅkara intends to explain the "properties of ordinary experience" through the assumption that Brahman (an "unqualified, monistic awareness") alone is real (Gasparri 2022, 81). On the other hand, by assuming that Bahman is the sole denizen of reality, Śaṅkara makes it impossible to acknowledge ordinary experience at all. This is supposed to be a paradox, it seems, because the intent of the view (to explain ordinary experience) is undermined by its most essential content (assuming Brahman's absolute reality). We cannot acknowledge that the phenomenal world appears, Gasparri contends, because then we antecedently grant that there is something other than unqualified awareness. We must assume the sole reality of unqualified awareness, but if we start off with a radical monistic claim, "razoring the ontology to a unique unqualified awareness", we jeopardize our ability to acknowledge the appearance of the phenomenal world. In short, we *must* acknowledge the phenomenal world in order for the view to have explanatory power. But, paradoxically, we *cannot* acknowledge phenomenal world, both because doing so contradicts the view itself, and because the view makes

it impossible to do so. Here I will briefly reject the idea that there is a "paradox of elimination" in Advaita Vedānta (Gasparri 2022, 81).

2a.3.2 Dissolving the Paradox

First, the Advaita view does not pursue the "metaphysical agenda" of explaining the properties of ordinary experience through the assumption that a unique monistic awareness is all there is (Ibid). The intent of the *advaita-vāda* is to occasion release from dualistic apprehension and existential anguish through first encouraging awareness of how all properties of ordinary experience are indistinguishable from that presence which invariantly pervades them. The paradox of elimination arises if one thinks that Śaṅkara's view is primarily supposed to explain ordinary experience as being illusory relative to a transcendental reality which is the condition of its appearance. Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda does do this*, but in the service of facilitating the organic, independent ascent of *Brahma-jñāna* and *Mokṣa*. The intent of the view is not to explain the properties of ordinary experience.

Moreover, the view neither assumes nor asserts the metaphysical thesis that a unique, monistic, unqualified awareness is the sole denizen of reality. It is a simple fact that the Advaitic phenomenological analysis of everyday life proceeds towards recognizing the pervasiveness of the witness, which culminates in the recognition of the non-difference of the *ātman* and Brahman. And I have argued that the *advaita-vāda* does not ultimately express the metaphysical thesis that Brahman (on any particular conception) is absolutely real. So not only does the view not *assume* that reality reduces an unqualified monistic awareness, it also does not *assert* this.

Finally, acknowledging that the phenomenal world does not mean acknowledging something *other* than unqualified awareness—the phenomenal world is categorized as false

(*mithyā*) in the idiosyncratic sense of being indeterminable as either real or unreal, and, I have shown that *even the distinction* between Brahman and the world is false in the sense of being *indeterminable* as either different or non-different from that which is never cancelled (*sākṣin*; *ātman*; *Brahman*). So, we cannot say that the world is *other* than Brahman. Acknowledging the appearance of phenomenal world does not involve contradicting the primary Advaitic thesis that Brahman alone is real. Furthermore, the *advaita-vāda* does not make it *impossible* to acknowledge the phenomenal world. This is both because the view does not assume the sole, absolute reality of a monistic awareness in the first place, and because in acknowledging the phenomenal world we do not acknowledge something *other* than Brahman (understood as the witness that invariantly attends all subjective and objective phenomena, and that profoundly resists conceptual and linguistic capture). The phenomenal world must be acknowledged for the view to make sense at all. A paradox of elimination does not arise.

2a.4 Re-framing the Contributions of Advaita Vedānta to Contemporary Discourse

One might think that because Advaita Vedānta isn't anti-realist or eliminativist about the phenomenal world, it may in fact be of assistance in the contemporary revival of cosmopsychism. But to think this would be to think that Advaita Vedānta is a metaphysical theory of consciousness like analytic cosmopsychism. And I have argued that the school of thought does not express any absolutist metaphysical thesis. The Advaitic analysis of everyday life indicates that the invariant condition and concomitant all subjective and objective phenomena is *paradoxically* resistant to linguistic capture, and *this* encourages release from dualistic apprehension. Release, which is basically *being* Brahman (BSBh I, I, 4), *is not* strictly identical to the conceivable, expressible Brahman, not even when Brahman is expressed *as* non-dual, inconceivable, inexpressible consciousness. *The very concept of non-dual consciousness* is itself confined to the empirical level

of reality, and the assertion which expresses the idea that non-dual consciousness is everywhere, everything is itself of the nature of falsity (*mithyātva*). The contemporary trend of treating Advaita Vedānta as a metaphysical theory of consciousness misses the critical input the school has to offer the very enterprise of the metaphysics of consciousness. The critical input is this: we are limited when it comes to determinatively wrapping our concepts and words around the presence which invariantly attends and pervades *all* mental *and* physical properties, entities and events.

CHAPTER 3. THE SEMANTIC DILEMMA FOR THE METAPHYSICS OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue in earnest for the thesis of the first part of this dissertation: there is a dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness, one arising from its *linguistic* nature. By 'the metaphysics of consciousness', I mean the philosophical enterprise animated by the ambition of expressing *determinate* knowledge of consciousness, specifically *phenomenal consciousness*. By 'phenomenal consciousness' I mean the "further explanandum" (Chalmers 2003, 11) typically characterized with reference to subjective experience (considered inclusive of the fact *that* there is something it is like to be an organism (Nagel 1974; Block 1995; Kriegel 2009) and the *specific* way contents of experience show up for subjects).[67] The dilemma arises from the fact that we would need to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality to satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. But, on the one hand, we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality because it cannot be tracked as a referent by our determinative linguistic utterances. And, on the other hand, we cannot express *that we cannot express* determinate knowledge of phenomenality for basically the same reason (expressing that phenomenality is inexpressible is a determinative linguistic utterance which cannot track phenomenality as a referent).

In the first section of the chapter, I review what I have done thus far in the dissertation and offer a general framework for appreciating the dilemma (3.1). Then, before getting into my argument, I entertain a preemptive dialectic on the objection that we should abandon talking about

[67] What Uriah Kregel calls 'the subjective character of experience' and 'the qualitative character of experience' respectively.

phenomenality upon starting to realize that it resists conceptual and linguistic capture (3.2). That objection considered, I offer a two-pronged argument for the thesis that there is a semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness (3.3). This argument has two parts: the first part of the argument is for the thesis expressing the first horn of the dilemma, i.e., we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality (3.3.1). This implies that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. The second part of the argument is for the thesis expressing the second horn of the dilemma, i.e., we cannot express that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, which implies the same about phenomenal consciousness (3.3.2).

3.1 Context for Appreciating the Dilemma

In chapter 1, I noted that the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness resembles the proprioceptive urge to step outside one's own bodily position and observe one's own body *a capite ad calcem* (from head to heel). This ambition, whether participants in the enterprise admit so or not, is the ambition to express the nature not just of *some* part or aspect of the reality referenced by the term 'phenomenal consciousness', but to linguistically communicate the nature of that reality *itself*, in its entirety, or all-aspects-included. I have shown, furthermore, that there is a presence intimately, immanently, and inextricably co-present with respect to all perspectives and all felt qualities of experience which, at the same time, cannot be differentiated from the realm of objective facts *par excellance* (Nagel 1974, 444). For heuristic purposes, I have called this presence 'phenomenality', and have connected it with the concept of the witness (*sākṣin*) in classical non-dualist Vedānta. This presence (phenomenality; *sākṣin*) pervades *all* perspectives, *all* feels, *all* 'physical' objects, *all* explanations, *all* linguistic phenomena, etc. It is the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective *and* objective

phenomena, which is to all (subjective and objective) things differentiated by name and form as seawater is to waves and bits of sea-foam (BSBh II, I, 14).

We could not satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness—of linguistically communicating the nature of that reality itself—without expressing determinate knowledge of *this* presence. If we only express determinate knowledge of subjective experience and/or qualia, we fail to express determinate knowledge of an integral aspect of what we *mean* by 'phenomenal consciousness'—that inextricable aspect of both subjective experience and qualia which extends beyond the subjective dimension (including subjective and qualitative character). In short, expressing determinate knowledge of subjective experience and/or qualia is insufficient for satisfying the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. Satisfying the ambition would at least (and perhaps, precisely) require expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality. And *this*, I will argue, is a major problem for the enterprise on account of the fact that phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated (i.e., differentiated from anything else, including any linguistic phenomenon) and thus cannot be the actual intentional object *of* any determinative linguistic phenomenon.

It is very important to note that I am not—*especially* not at this point in the dialectic—in the business of proposing that we *should* wish or try to express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, or even of phenomenality. It is just a matter of fact that philosophers (and scientists, and other people, for that matter) do try to say what phenomenal consciousness *is*. This fact is evidenced by the vast proliferation of *metaphysical* (rather than specific) theories of consciousness. Recall that *metaphysical* theories of consciousness aim to locate consciousness in the overall scheme of reality and *specific* theories of consciousness offer detailed accounts of its

nature, features and role (Van Gulick 2014). We cannot locate a phenomenon in the overall scheme of reality without saying what it is, either in itself, or in relation to some other thing or set of things. When we categorize a phenomenon according to some ontological schema, we express what it *is*, and *vice versa*. I am not promoting this practice, or saying that we have to carry it out. I am not saying that we *should* satisfy the ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of consciousness; I am calling out a dilemma *for* the enterprise animated by the ambition. *If* one wants to locate consciousness in the overall scheme of reality, one must express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, and if one wants to do *that*, one must express determinate knowledge of phenomenality (that which thoroughly pervades but is not reducible to the subjective and qualitative characters of experience). If these conditions are met, one faces a dilemma arising from the fact that phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated (differentiated from anything *else*), even with respect to linguistic phenomena. I am simply acknowledging and appreciating the fact that metaphysical theorizing about consciousness is a commonly pursued, inescapably linguistic affair. With this note in mind, let us consider how we generally go about expressing determinate knowledge of phenomena.

It is a basic, observable fact that we express determinate knowledge of phenomena with statements like '*a* is F' or '*a* is F and not P' or '*a* is neither F nor P'. I call statements like these *determinative linguistic utterances*. By 'determinative linguistic utterance' I mean an utterance which expresses the act type of referring to a phenomenon represented by singular referring term, expressing a property, or set of properties, and predicating that property or set of properties of the phenomenon referred to (call it act type D) (Hanks 2015). Recall that the enterprise of the metaphysics of consciousness is animated by the ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, which I have argued requires expressing determinate knowledge of

phenomenality. We may, on the one hand, try to straightforwardly express determinate knowledge of phenomenality with some determinative linguistic utterance expressing the act type of referring to phenomenality by a singular referring term, expressing a property or set of properties, and predicating that property or set of properties of phenomenality. But the act type of referring to phenomenality, expressing a property (or set thereof) and predicating that property of phenomenality is *intentional*, as is the utterance used to express it. I understand intentionality as the quality of mental states, speech acts or other phenomena being directed towards or *about* some object or state of affairs. Due to its intentionality, the relevant utterance *instantiates* a distinction between *itself* and its *intentional object*. But phenomenality, I have shown, *cannot be externally differentiated* from any subjective or objective phenomenon, *including any linguistic phenomenon*. This means that the *de facto* intentional object of any determinative linguistic utterance which attempts to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality by tracking phenomenality as a referent *is not* actually phenomenality (i.e., the *de facto* intentional object is not what it is *supposed* to be). Determinative linguistic utterances which attempt to predicate properties of phenomenality and thereby extend or fix its concept inevitably fail in virtue of referencing something other than their ideal (targeted; aimed for) referent. This is the first "horn" of the dilemma. I will provide more detailed arguments for the thesis expressing this horn of the dilemma—we cannot successfully express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, and therefore of phenomenal consciousness—in the sections that follow.[68]

A few further clarificatory notes are in order. First, setting Advaita Vedānta aside, most metaphysical theories of consciousness aren't obviously or self-consciously *about* phenomenality.

[68] I recognize that as yet I have not provided a full explanation of the structural reasons accounting for why any determinative linguistic utterance which would attempt to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality by referencing it, expressing a property, etc., would fail. I provide a full explanation, in the form of an extended argument, in the rest of the chapter.

It's not as if proponents of historical or contemporary metaphysical theories of consciousness typically take themselves to be elucidating the ontological status of the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective *and* objective phenomena. Usually, metaphysical theories of consciousness are theories which decide the ontological status of subjective experience, usually including qualia. I have argued that expressing *determinate* knowledge of phenomenal consciousness *would require* expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality. There is not wide consensus on this point. I have been laboring towards *making* this point. So, in thinking through how we might go about expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality, I lack obvious examples to reference (other than examples from Advaita Vedānta and views bearing resemblance to the school like Pratyabhijñā, which will come into play in the fifth chapter of the dissertation). For this reason, I deal mostly with hypothetical examples. Basically, and in short, I

am saying this: if one *wants* to say what consciousness *is*, one must say what phenomenality is, and here's what doing so *could* look like.[69]

Again, my intent is not to say that we *should want* to explain or express determinate knowledge of phenomenality. We could simply ignore it or say nothing about it. But I'm not sure why we would do either, unless we had some insight into its relative unimportance, or definitive knowledge that it's not something we can talk about. And, as of yet, I see no reason to think that phenomenality is unimportant, and I have not thoroughly weighed in on the latter. We could ignore it due to our epistemic limits in spite of its importance, but I'm not sure why we would do that unless we first appreciated the fact of our epistemic limitedness. This fact is precisely what I am in the process of establishing. Here's where the second "horn" starts to take shape.

Realizing all this—realizing that determinative linguistic utterances of phenomenality fail to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality in virtue of being problematically intentional

[69] I would also like to reiterate, still in the context of thinking through a hypothetical effort at expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality, that any physicalist attempt to express that phenomenality is physical, in the sense of being explicable via some physical explanation, would in principle fail for basically the same structural reasons I have begun to highlight. Any physical explanation of phenomenality (which would do the work of establishing that phenomenality is physically explicable) would generate an infinite regress of physical explanation. The relevant physical explanation would have co-present phenomenality—this cannot be denied. As such, the physical explanation would need to *explain itself* in order to explain its explanandum in its all-aspects-included aspect. But any physical explanation of phenomenality, if determinative, would be logically equivalent to a determinative linguistic utterance expressing act type D. *As* logically equivalent to a determinative linguistic utterance, a physical explanation is intentional. The intentional object of a physical explanation—*what is explained by it*—cannot be that physical explanation itself. Phenomenality, the purportedly *explained* explanandum in this hypothetical instance of physical explanation—is *inextricable* from the physical explanation itself. Another physical explanation would be needed to explain the co-present phenomenality which cannot be extracted from the initial physical explanation, which would in turn present the need for *another* physical explanation, and so on. One might think that, dialectically, my view lacks resources to argue against physicalism here without appealing to anti-physicalist arguments internal to regular metaphysical disputes about the possibility of reducing consciousness. But I think it important for me to thoroughly establish that the explanandum I am talking about *is indeed* an explanandum (albeit, one that profoundly resists explanation and apprehension by speech, as I am currently endeavoring to show) before officially moving on to the arguments which will establish its paradoxical inexpressibility. And I cannot succeed in doing so without addressing how the generalized physicalist position—i.e., everything is physical—would, on at least on the conception of the physical wherein being physical means being explicable via some physical explanation, seem to undercut the purport of my endeavors by trivializing phenomenality's status *as explanandum*. I have not provided a substantive argument against physicalism here. I have just established that phenomenality is indeed an even further explanandum (although, recall that it is not a *separate* explanandum metaphysically beyond the subjective and qualitative characters of experience) because it resists physical explanation. Of course, as I noted in chapter 1, it resists first-personal explanation as well.

with respect to an ideal referent that can't be externally differentiated, we may, on the other hand, accept that we *cannot* express determinate knowledge of phenomenality with any determinative linguistic utterance, and directly or indirectly express that phenomenality is inexpressible (or ineffable, or indeterminable, or unsayable, or inexplicable).[70] In other words, we may *re-assert* the conclusion entailed by recognizing the problematic intentionality of determinative linguistic utterances with respect to an explanandum that cannot be externally differentiated. We may say that phenomenality is an even further explanandum which we cannot express knowledge of by referring to it and predicating properties of it. We may say that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality (which would mean, in turn that we cannot satisfy the metaphysical ambition of determining what phenomenal consciousness *is*). *But*, in so doing, we would ironically *yet again* express the act type of referring to a phenomenon, expressing a property ('inexpressible', or some synonym), and predicating that property of phenomenality. Again, our linguistic utterance, although *negative*, would be *intentional* (it would express an intentional act type) and would necessarily instantiate a distinction between itself and its intentional object. But phenomenality, I have shown, is undeniably indistinguishable from all subjective and objective phenomena, including even negative speech acts. The intentional object of any negative linguistic utterance—any linguistic utterance which expresses that we *cannot express determinate knowledge*—used to gesture at phenomenality *is not* phenomenality. Negative linguistic utterances about phenomenality, which are just as much determinative linguistic utterances as utterances which obviously express act type D, inevitably direct awareness away from their intended denotatum. One may feel ever more invited to the possibility of principled silence. But I will argue that we

[70] I acknowledge that sometimes these terms are used to convey slightly different concepts. I treat them as roughly interchangeable. Whenever I use the term 'inexpressible' or some rough equivalent, I do not mean something like 'cannot be put into words whatsoever'. I mean 'inexpressible in the very specific sense of escaping full linguistic determination or absolute, complete apprehension by speech'.

remain ensnared on the horns of this semantic dilemma even in such quietude—so long as we remain in the domain of discourse about a specific explanandum, principled silence about that explanandum has the illocutionary effect of expressing that explanandum's inexpressibility. I will elaborate on this rejoinder in subsequent sections and chapters.

Either way—no matter what we *say* (even if what we say is that we can't say anything) we end up indicating an inadequate image of what we should aim to know *if* we want to satisfy the ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. The first horn of the dilemma I am laying out is that we cannot successfully express determinate knowledge of phenomenality (by extension, phenomenal consciousness). The second horn of the dilemma is that we cannot successfully express *that we cannot express* determinate knowledge of 'phenomenality (by extension, phenomenal consciousness).

3.2 A Preemptive Dialectic Addressing the Option of Quietism

Before I get to the main arguments of this chapter, I want to preempt an important line of objection. One might think that if we define, or fail to define, this even further explanandum in this way—as that which is peculiarly recalcitrant to linguistic capture—then a reasonable thing to do would be to abandon any pretense to explaining or defining it. To this I would respond that I first need to *show* that we fail to express determinate knowledge of this even further (but not separate) explanandum. *I am still in the process of arguing to this end.* Also, in thinking this, one would fail to grasp the nature of dilemma: it has two horns. The second horn of the dilemma is logically equivalent to the meaning of the *articulation that* a reasonable thing to do would be to abandon any pretense to explaining phenomenality, i.e., "phenomenality is inexpressible". *In* concluding that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, we *express determinate knowledge of phenomenality*.

Someone might persist in this vein and ask: "why not think that there is an even further explanandum and leave it at that? Why does this even further explanandum have central explanatory purchase in our explanations given that it, by nature, seems to resist any and all explanation? Why can't we just be quietists about it?" To this I would say that we must remember two things: I am not saying that we *need* to explain phenomenality in general, or even that we need to explain it *in order to explain* 'subjective experience' or 'qualia' in ways sufficient for budling specific (rather than metaphysical) theories of either. We may be able to articulate sufficiently explanatory specific theories of the subjective and qualitative characters of experience without expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality. My intent is not to claim that the further explanandum I have been talking about has central explanatory purchase in our *specific* theorizing about phenomenal consciousness. It is right to say that it has *relevance* to the success conditions on satisfying the *metaphysical* ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, which is basically the urge to step outside phenomenal consciousness and express what it *is* in its entirety or holistic aspect. Still, phenomenality doesn't have *actual* explanatory purchase relative to this metaphysical ambition, in the sense that it resists first personal and physical explanation. Perhaps it has, once could say, *hypothetical* explanatory purchase relative to this metaphysical ambition, in the sense that it would need to be explained for the ambition to be satisfied. This point may be somewhat trivial in the scheme of things, but I want to emphasize for good measure that I do not think or wish to imply that we can actually explain phenomenality in the normal sense and thereby satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing complete determinate knowledge of consciousness. My intent has been to show that phenomenality is so thoroughly intimate with, but also not reducible to *just* subjective experience and/or qualia that any expression of determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness lacking expression of

determinate knowledge of phenomenality is insufficient for satisfying the metaphysical ambition of saying what phenomenal consciousness *is*.

It also important to remember that this is a dilemma for those who *want* and *try* to express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. Second, at the risk of repeating myself, regarding the view that we should be quietists about phenomenality, I have two things to say: I am not sure how we would arrive at the view that we should be quietists about this even further explanandum without fully appreciating its peculiar inexpressibly. To fully appreciate its peculiar inexpressibility, one must come to understand both horns of the dilemma. Thus far I have only offered preliminary arguments which suggest how phenomenality is tricky to talk about. My aim in this chapter is to deepen those arguments and to crystalize both horns of the dilemma. Second, the view that we should be quietists about phenomenality is logically equivalent to the assertion that 'phenomenality is inexpressible'. In the context of discourse about the ontological status of phenomenal consciousness, even the implied assertion that we should pass over phenomenality in silence would have the illocutionary effect of the very same conclusion/assertion which *gives rise* to the second horn of the dilemma. Put simply, endorsing quietism about phenomenality is tantamount to asserting the inexpressibility of phenomenality, and is thus just as much a linguistic utterance problematically intentional with respect to an explanandum that cannot be externally differentiated, and just as much unsuccessful at expressing that explanandum in its holistic aspect.

The interlocutor I've been entertaining may launch a final front; they may say, "ok let's say I acknowledge this even further explanandum, beyond qualia and perspectival subjectivity. It's still not clear that discourse about phenomenal consciousness should revolve around a minimal conception of this even further explanandum. This is so because a) the even further explanandum is hard to see and b) perhaps impossible to even talk about. So, even if I grant you that what you're

talking about is real, that there is something there beyond perspectivalness and qualia, I don't see why all discourse should revolve around it given how utterly recalcitrant it is to linguistic capture. Why not embrace a pragmatic constraint on discourse and on issues of centrality and peripherality in discourse that says you shouldn't talk about things that can't be talked about?" To this final iteration of the objection, I would say, first, that the relevant even further explanation is not really *beyond* qualia and perspectival subjectivity. It is not actually separable from either. Furthermore, this interlocutor has misunderstood my order of operations. I *first* claim that satisfying the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness would require expressing determinate knowledge of this even further (yet not separate) explanandum. *Then* (*and I am still in the process of doing so*) I show that this even further explanandum is multi-dimensionally tricky to talk about. It is not as if I show that it is tricky to talk about and then say that we should express determinate knowledge of it to satisfy the relevant metaphysical ambition. It being recalcitrant to linguistic capture shouldn't be considered a reason against it being something around which a certain sort of discourse should revolve—a robust image of its recalcitrance *becomes apparent* through considering how it could be categorized, given that it must be if the relevant metaphysical ambition is to be satisfied.

More importantly, I am not saying that *all* discourse about phenomenal consciousness should revolve around phenomenality. Only metaphysical discourse *if it is indeed aimed at deciding the location of consciousness in the overall scheme of reality* (which requires or constitutes expressing determinate knowledge of consciousness) should go so far as to express what phenomenality *is*. We could embrace a pragmatic constraint on discourse by abandoning any pretense to deciding the *ontological* status of consciousness. And this is certainly an option on the table. But we would only get to the table on which this constraint appears as an option *via* being

convinced that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, which I have not yet done in full.

Finally, we must again remember the nature of the dilemma: there is a second horn. I am repeating myself here, but to say that we should embrace a pragmatic constraint on discourse and not talk about phenomenality because it can't be talked about *is logically equivalent to expressing that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality*. And *this* sort of negative linguistic utterance (articulated or implied) gives rise to the second horn of the dilemma: in expressing that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality we express determinate knowledge of phenomenality *as* inexpressible in that sense. Expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality *as inexpressible* is still problematically intentional with respect to an explanandum that cannot be externally differentiated. The intentional object of the assertion that we *should* embrace a pragmatic constraint on discourse and not talk about that which can't be talked about (when the 'that' is phenomenality) simply is not phenomenality. The assertion directs our awareness to a clear, definite object *of* awareness which cannot be talked about, and therein directs our awareness to something that is not phenomenality. The full sense in which phenomenality is recalcitrant to linguistic capture can only be appreciated by appreciating the second horn of the dilemma: phenomenality is inexpressible and paradoxically inexpressible *as such*. *After* having shown that phenomenality is recalcitrant to linguistic capture *in this sense*, any position logically equivalent to the assertion that phenomenality is inexpressible will be much less viable, unless it doesn't mind staying caught on the horns of the dilemma. *After* appreciating that phenomenality is recalcitrant to linguistic capture in the sense of being *paradoxically* inexpressible and inexpressible *as such*, it would be rather confusing for us to *simply re-assert* that we should pass over phenomenality in silence. One certainly *could* be silent about phenomenality, but unless

one is a completely unsocialized monk dwelling in a remote cave, never *broadcasting* the logic or object of one's silence, one takes a stance by first acknowledging the even further explanandum (phenomenality; the witness) and *sharing* that one has for some reason decided to say nothing about it.

3.3 An Extended Argument for the Thesis that there is a Semantic Dilemma

Having detailed this preemptive dialectic about the option of being quietist about phenomenality, I will now offer arguments which *yield* a sense of the paradoxical inexpressibility of phenomenality and eschew the reasonableness the *stance* of being silent about phenomenality. I offer a two-part argument for the thesis that expresses the first horn of the dilemma. We may recall here that, on my view, expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness would require expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality. By 'phenomenality' I mean that luminosity or presence (the brute fact of phenomenal character) which is co-present with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena, including all linguistic phenomena. I also mean that which cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective or objective phenomena, including any linguistic phenomenon. And I have analyzed this even further explanandum in terms mean the witness (*sākṣin*) of Advaita Vedānta.

In the previous chapter, I detailed the Advaitic position that Brahman (the witness understood as the universal "cause" of the world differentiated by name and form) is without qualities of its own, and therefore inapprehensible by speech. Now I extend this Advaitic position by focusing on the fact that phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated from any linguistic phenomena. The locus of my analysis will not be just explanations or just referential terms—it will be the articulated logical constituents of hypothetical metaphysical theories of phenomenality. In terms of their propositional content, metaphysical theories either explicitly consist in or are

logically equivalent to a single determinative judgement or a set of determinative judgements. In terms of their semantic structure, they either explicitly consist in or are logically equivalent to a single linguistic utterance expressive of a determining judgement, or a definite set thereof. I call linguistic utterances of this type *determinative linguistic utterances.*

In the course of arguing for both horns of the dilemma, I reference some of the arguments in chapter 1, and extend some of my appeals to the conceptual resources of classical non-dualist Vedānta (Advaita Vedānta) which I reconstructed in chapter 2.

3.3.1 The First Horn of the Dilemma

In this section, I argue for the thesis that expresses the first horn of the dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness, which I call the 'semantic dilemma'. The thesis is that we cannot successfully express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, which means that we cannot successfully express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness.

Since the argument is long, I've split it in two: part A and part B. Part A formalizes the argumentative content of chapter 1 regarding phenomenality and solidifies the view that the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena (phenomenality) *cannot be externally differentiated from linguistic phenomena.* Part B extends this argumentative line and involves analysis of structural aspects of the sort of linguistic utterance by which we might express determinate knowledge of phenomenality. A key premise in the second argument is that determinative linguistic utterances—the sort of linguistic phenomena explicitly or implicitly constituting metaphysical theories—express intentional act types, and are therefore distinct from the referents of their subject terms (their intentional objects). This fact poses an issue for any linguistic utterance featuring the subject term phenomenality, for phenomenality is *meant* to

represent that which cannot be externally differentiated from any/all linguistic phenomena. The conclusion of the argument is the thesis that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality. Since expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality is required for doing the same for phenomenal consciousness, this means that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. I end by comparing my analysis of the inexpressibility of phenomenality with Moore's paradox of analysis (Moore 1903).

3.3.1.1 Part A

Here is the first premise of the argument:

> **1a.** The meaning of a statement is a function of the meaning of its parts and how they are combined.

In the formulation of this premise, I appeal to a tempered version of the principle of compositionality, a principle central to Richard Montague's semantics (Montague 1970): "the Principle of Semantic Compositionality is the principle that the meaning of an expression is a function of, and only of, the meaning of its parts together with the method by which those parts are combined" (Pelletier 1994, 1). The principle has been treated by some as obviously true and attacked by others on empirical, theoretic or methodological grounds. In any case, the first premise of my argument hedges on the claim that the meaning of an expression is *only* a function of the meaning of its parts and their syntactic combination. I claim only that the meaning of an expression is *at least partially* a function of the meaning of its parts and their syntactic combination. I consider this tempered version of the principle of semantic compositionality obviously true.

The second premise of the argument sets up a condition for the possibility for the parts of sentences adverted to in 1a to be meaningful:

2a: Parts of statements are meaningful and able to bear syntactic combination because they are distinct from and yet related to one another.

2a can be justified by observation of the structure of explanations and determinative linguistic utterances. In chapter 1, I noted that in *any* explanation, including any physical explanation, there is some explanandum (a phenomena to-be-explained) and some explanans (a sentence or set of sentences adduced as explanation of the phenomenon that is the explanandum), and some explainer or grasper of the explanation as a whole. Similarly, in any determinative linguistic utterance, there is a subject term, a referent of the subject term, a predicate, a predicative, a web of other terms that make the subject, the predicate and the predicative meaningful (via contrast), a relation constituted by the attribution of the predicative to the subject term and to its referent, a distinction between the subject term and its referent, and so on.[71] We can consider the sentence "pain is A fibers synapsing at the C fibers' location in the spinal cord". First, we distinguish between the word "pain" and its referent—the phenomenon we feel, distinguish from other sensations, recognize as our own, and relate with the word 'pain'. The predicative "fibers synapsing at the C fibers' location in the spinal cord" applies not to the *word* 'pain' but to the *referent* of the word "pain". Second, we meaningfully attribute predicatives to subjects by understanding what predicatives mean, which requires that we conceptually contrast them with other terms which represent other phenomena or concepts. Gareth Evans makes a similar point in noting that there is a fundamental constraint on the nature of "our conceiving", which he calls "the generality constraint" (Evans 1982, 100). On his view, a thought is the result of a complex of abilities, as is the understanding of a sentence (ibid., 101). A subject's understanding of the sentence '*Fa*', for example, is the result of their understanding of '*a*' and their understanding of '*F*', which presupposes their

[71] To clarify, by "predicate" I mean the part of the sentence containing a verb and stating something about the subject of the sentence. By "predicative" I mean the adjective or noun (or property) contained in the predicative, which is applied to the subject in virtue of the act of predication, achieved by the predicate's presence in the sentence.

understanding of many other sentences involving '*a*' and '*F*', e.g., '*Fb*' and '*Ga*' (Ibid). Similarly, the thought *a* is *F* presupposes the subject being able to conceive that *a* is *G* or that *b* is *F*. Evans uses a natural language example to illustrate his point:

> There simply could not be a person who could entertain the thought that John is happy and the thought that Harry is friendly, but who could not entertain—who was conceptually debarred from entertaining—the thought that John is friendly or the thought that Harry is happy. Someone who thinks that John is happy must, we might say, have the idea of a happy man—a situation instantiated in the case of John (he thinks), but in no way tied to John for it's instantiation" (ibid., 103).

In other words, the content of a thought with a subject-predicate structure involves the ability to exercise knowledge of the predicate *(e.g., what it is for something to be F)* in "*indefinitely many* distinct thoughts" (Ibid). I agree with Evans, although I would emphasize that a subject's ability to exercise knowledge of a predicate is causally explained by their ability to distinguish the predicative contained in the predicate from a range of other, dissimilar predicatives (e.g., sad or angry, etc., as opposed to happy) and from a range of specific objects or individuals of which the predicative can be predicated, which is to say that the generality constraint on our capacity to have a thought is fundamentally *contrastive*. To meaningfully predicate "A fibers synapsing at the C fibers' location in the spinal cord" of 'pain' we have to understand the meaning of the terms involved in the predicative: that is, we have to understand the meaning of the terms "fibers", "synapsing", "location", "spinal", etc. We understand the meaning of these terms by contrasting them with and relating them to other terms such as "neurons", "glands", "muscular" etc. Words are *meaningful* only in relation to other words, but moreover (and more importantly), only because those relations can be drawn in the first place.

I should note that in talking of *meaning* I admit that words generally express concepts. The meaning of a word is generally the concept expressed by the word. But this does not mean that the concept is more fundamental—we cannot get at the relevant concept without the relevant word.

As such, it makes good sense to analyze concepts by analyzing words and *vice versa*. Broadly speaking, I am practicing what may be called conceptual semantics, that is, I am engaged in examining how language structures our concepts, and how the conceptual bases of our terms implicate how our terms function, and *vice versa*. I recognize a reciprocal causal relation between concepts and words, and focus my analysis at the semantic level because it is the level at which we make our concepts public.

With this in mind, we can note a final point relevant to establishing this premise, namely, that we grasp the meaning of a compound predicative sentence *as a whole* by attributing the meaning of the predicative to the referent of the subject term. We understand the meaning of the sentence "pain is A fibers synapsing at the C fibers' location in the spinal cord" by brining to mind the referent of the word "pain"—that unpleasant phenomenon we feel—and attributing the compound predicative in question (A fibers synapsing, etc.) to that phenomenon.[72] When an individual, perspectival subject grasps the meaning of a complex predicative sentence, they distinguish between their own presence as a perspectival subject, the meaning of the predicative, the terms involved and their referents, the meanings of other terms in the broader network of definitions and meanings that allows for the meaningfulness of any term, etc. In sum, parts of

[72] The language I am using here in talking of the meaning of pain sentences is very close to that of Kripke's discussion of pain and C-fibers (Kripke 1980, 146-155). However, Kipke is primarily concerned with advancing a conceivability argument against type-type identity theory—the view that any given mental state is identical to a brain state—whereas I am evaluating the constraints on a subject's understanding of the meaning of a sentence, and using a sentence expressing the type-type identity thesis as a quick case study. That said, Kripke's argument relies on the premise that 'pain' is a rigid designator, which bears resemblance to the point I am making here. Kripke says that pain is rigidly designated by 'pain', and that the reference of the designator is determined by an essential property of the referent—its "immediate phenomenological quality" (ibid., 152). I have indicated that a subject's understanding of the meaning of a compound subject-predicate structured sentence featuring 'pain' as the subject term involves their understanding of the meaning of the term 'pain'—its reference—which is first and foremost an unpleasant affect (a negatively valanced immediate phenomenological quality).

sentences are *meaningful* and able to bear syntactic combination because they are distinct from and yet related to one another (premise 2).[73]

The third premise of the argument focuses on the non-difference of phenomena that seem different. This is a principle I endorse at a high level of generality which I will then apply to the specific issue of sentences and their parts.

> **3a:** Distinctions and relations between phenomena are apparent because of the respect in which they do not differ.

For one or more things to be related to one another, there must be some respect in which they do not differ. Otherwise, we run into the same sort of problem that animates the mind-body problem; we run into the problem of explaining how things that share no common metaphysical ground can possibility be related. Importantly, even distinctions and relations themselves must not differ in some respect from the phenomena they distinguish or relate, since distinctions and relations *themselves* are distinct from and related to the phenomena they distinguish and relate.

I now apply my analysis of the concept of phenomenality to the principle I've argued for in 3a:

> **4a:** The respect in which phenomena, including the distinctions and relations between them, do not differ is co-present phenomenality.

This premise can be justified by appeal to my reasoning in chapter 1, and my analysis of phenomenality in terms of the witness of Advaita Vedānta in chapter 2. In chapter 1, I nominally distinguished between subjective experience, which is attached to *a* specific perspective, and

[73] We can also consider the sentence "consciousness is physical". To meaningfully predicate the term 'physical' (or any term for that matter) of 'consciousness', we have to understand the meaning of the term 'physical'. We do this by contrasting the concept represented by the term 'physical' with concepts represented by other terms, like 'insubstantial', 'spiritual', etc.

outside the realm of objective facts *par excellence* (Nagel 1974), and phenomenality, which is co-present with *all* points of view and *all* objective facts. The phenomenological analysis at the heart this line of reasoning is given robust and rigorous explication in classical non-dualist Vedānta, albeit in different terms. phenomenality, like the witness of Advaita Vedānta, is co-present with respect to all subjective and objective phenomena.

This point can also be put in terms of the Advaitic concept of superimposition (*adhyāsa*). In chapter 2, I explained the Advaitic analysis of how all finite things are superimposed on the witness. We can think of two distinct phenomena—X and BRAHMAN. The two distinct phenomena are only apparent because they are invariantly both 'thrown over' the luminous presence that is the witness (*sākṣin*). Their *difference* is seen where there is actually just the witness. The witness is the condition of the possibility of one finite thing being apparent in relation to any other apparent finite thing.

From these four premises, I derive my first conclusion, which is the following:

> **C1a:** Distinctions and relations between parts of statements, which are linguistic phenomena, are apparent because of co-present phenomenality.

Here I apply the principle established in 4a to parts of statements. This conclusion can also be stated like this: invariantly co-present phenomenality is the condition of the possibility of the distinctions and relations between parts of statements. The fifth premise of my argument establishes a fact about phenomenality which ends up explaining why it is recalcitrant to linguistic capture:

> **5a:** The condition of the possibility of the distinctions and relations between phenomena (co-present phenomenality), which is the invariant concomitant of all phenomena, cannot be externally differentiated.

Recall a point that's been made regarding phenomenality *via* analysis of Advaita Vedānta. In my analysis of Śankara's non-dualist view (*advaita-vāda*), I noted that the Advaitic phenomenological analysis of everyday life is carried out along two paths—the path on which we introspectively attend to our sense of being an individual agent and enjoyer, and the path on which we attend to the entire phenomenal realm differentiated by name and form. On the latter path, we find that all things differentiated by name and form are invariantly thrown over the witness. In this context, the witness is said to be the "cause" of the world (Brahman). The sense in which Brahman is the "cause" of the world can only be understood by understanding the Advaitic doctrine of the non-difference of cause and effect (*satkaryavāda*). Brahman is not an external or independent cause which acts on and thereby causes the world. Brahman thoroughly pervades all finite things, just as seawater thoroughly pervades any particular wave. We cannot *externally differentiate* seawater from any particular wave. Without seawater, there are no waves at all. Similarly, we cannot externally differentiate phenomenality form any subjective or objective phenomenon which is apparent only in virtue of being thrown over phenomenality. Without phenomenality there are no distinct phenomena. There is no phenomena that can be externally differentiated from phenomenality, which means that phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated.

Under the plausible assumption that sentences and their parts are phenomena, the second conclusion follows:

> **C2a:** The condition of the possibility of the distinctions and relations between parts of statements (co-present phenomenality), which is the invariant concomitant of all parts of all statements, cannot be externally differentiated.

Here I extend the principle established in 5a to statements. Co-present phenomenality is the invariant and non-dual (not externally differentiated) condition and concomitant of the distinctions and relations between all distinct phenomena, including statements and parts of statements. Put

otherwise, co-present phenomenality cannot be externally differentiated from any statement or any part of any statement.

The rest of the argument follows pretty quickly from what has already been established. There are two more premises and a third conclusion.

> **6a:** That which cannot be externally differentiated cannot be distinguished from anything else.

This is just a definitional premise, meant to equate 'cannot be externally differentiated' with 'cannot be distinguished from anything else'.

> **7a:** The invariant condition and concomitant of the distinctions and relations between parts of statements cannot be distinguished from anything else, including any linguistic phenomena.

Here I apply the basic principle in premise 7 to phenomenality.

> **C3a:** Therefore, the invariant condition and concomitant of the possibility of meaningful statements is indistinguishable from all linguistic phenomena. Call it phenomenality.

In part A, I have formalized the account of phenomenality I offered in chapter 1, and specifically directed attention to the pervasiveness of phenomenality with respect to all linguistic phenomena. Having done so, I can now shed light, in part B, on exactly how and why phenomenality resists linguistic capture.

3.3.1.2 Part B:

In part B, I focus on elucidating the way in which phenomenality escapes apprehension by speech. I start by establishing some general constraints on our capacity to express determinate knowledge, and then show how these bear on the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge

of phenomenality (which, I have argued, would be required for expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness).

The first premise of part B is a descriptive claim about how we express determinate knowledge of phenomena:

> **1b:** When we use language to express determinate knowledge of a phenomenon, we either explicitly or implicitly ascribe a property or set of properties to the referent of a singular referring term and thereby extend its concept.

Here I am appealing to something like Kant's account of a determination in the first Critique: "a determination is a predicate that is added to the subject's concept and increases it; hence it must not already be contained in that concept" (CPR A599/B627). The metaphysics of consciousness is the enterprise of increasing or extending the concept represented by the term 'phenomenal consciousness'. I have argued that to determinatively extend the concept represented by the term 'phenomenal consciousness', we would need to determinatively extend the concept of phenomenality.

Statements which ascribe a property or a set of properties to the referent of a singular referring term and thereby extend its concept are all of the following: (a) categorical statements, (b) individual affirmative or negative statements (c) determinative linguistic utterances which express the act type of referring to a phenomenon represented by singular referring term, expressing a property or set of properties, and predicating that property or set of properties of the phenomenon referred to. Call this act type (D).

This is a descriptive claim about the nature of the linguistic utterances whereby we express determining judgements. A categorical statement is a statement that makes a definite claim which relates two classes of things or some individual to a class. Individual affirmative statements are

statements like '*a* is P. Individual negative statements are statements like "*a* is not P". When we communicate determinate knowledge of a phenomenon, we refer to that phenomenon with some term (which connotes at least some minimal conception of that phenomenon), express some property or set of properties, apply that property or set of properties to the minimally conceived phenomenon we've referred to, and thereby extend its concept. I call a linguistic utterance expressive of act type (D) a determinative linguistic utterance.

Having established a general characterization of the type of utterance whereby we express determinate knowledge of phenomena, I begin to heed specific structural characteristics of such utterances, i.e., their referentiality and intentionality:

> **2b:** The *referent* of the subject term in any linguistic utterance expressive of act type (D) is *distinct from* the singular referring subject term, the other parts of the linguistic utterance (the verbal element, the predicate, etc.), and the linguistic utterance itself.

Let's consider a determinative linguistic utterance with the subject term phenomenality, for example, "phenomenality is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world". The phenomenon represented by the word phenomenality would be different from the linguistic utterance employed to extend its concept *as* fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world because (a) the term 'phenomenality' at least denotes *a referent,* which, as referenced, is distinct from other referenceable phenomena and (b) because linguistic utterances expressive of act type (D) are fundamentally intentional.

In the individual affirmative statement "phenomenality is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world", for example, the term phenomenality does not unambiguously refer to a concrete individual as does a proper name, e.g., 'Gottlob Frege', but it still functions *de facto* as a singular referential term. That is, it refers, and it refers to *something* (whether that is a *particular phenomenon* or a group or a property). We need not look for evidence of this beyond the fact that

by the individual affirmative statement above, we do not mean that the *word* phenomenality is fundamental and ubiquitous in the natural world. We mean that the reality *represented* by the word 'consciousness' is fundamental, etc. Perhaps the term phenomenality in itself lacks clear connotation or intension, but in the context of a categorical statement expressive of a determining judgement that has the form of an individual affirmation, it at least denotes *a referent* which, whether particular or a group, is *different* from the *word* phenomenality and implicitly different from other phenomena which can be referenced.

Moreover, I'm appealing to a rather basic fact about how we articulate determining judgements. Linguistic utterances expressive of act type (D) are *intentional*. Intentionality is the power of a mind, mental state, statement, etc. to be about, represent, or stand for things, properties, or states of affairs. The sentence "phenomenality is nothing over and above the functionally definable capacities of a physical system" is, for example, *about* the (albeit negated) bit of reality *represented* by the word 'consciousness'. Arguably, at least some duality is necessary for intentionality. It makes little sense to say, for example, that X is about Brahman, that X represents Brahman, or that X stands for Brahman if there is not at *least some distinction* between X and Brahman.

In my view, at least some minimal duality is constitutive of intentionality. For X to be about, represent, or stand for Brahman is for there to be at least some minimal distinction between X and Brahman.[74] Even instances of self-reflection and self-reference are minimally dualistic. When I reflect on some aspect of my internal world, the 'I' that is reflecting is peculiarly distinct from the 'me' that, on reflection, has the feeling or thought under examination (even if I

[74] I won't get into the peculiar nature of the self-reference involved in use of the first-personal pronoun here; we might argue that the first-personal pronoun "I" is a sort of non-representational, non-intentional self-reference, but "I" is not a determinative statement.

subsequently identify the two). Sentences expressive of act type (D)—sentences which express determining judgements—are intentional in that they express intentional acts and have intentional objects. The referent of the subject term in a sentence expressive of act type (D) is the intentional object of the sentence. Since at least some duality is constitutive of intentionality, the referent of the subject term in a sentence expressive of act type (A) is distinct from the sentence.

Now that I have shown that determinative linguistic utterances are intentional and dualistic (i.e., *about* and thus distinct/separate from their referents), I introduce the notion of the *ideal referent* of the subject term in an utterance of this kind, which I then contrast with the notion of a *de facto* referent. This distinction allows me to then argue that the *de facto* referent of any determinative linguistic utterance purporting to be about phenomenality is not, in fact, phenomenality.

> **3b:** The *ideal referent* of a subject term in a determinative linguistic utterance is the phenomenon that the speaker of the utterance intends to express determinate knowledge of in virtue of asserting the utterance.

By this I mean to introduce a distinction between the *ideal referent* of a subject term and the *de facto* referent of a subject term, i.e., whatever the referent of the relevant subject term turns out to be due to the conceptual semantics of the relevant linguistic utterance. The ideal referent of a subject term in a determinative linguistic utterance is the phenomenon the speaker *intends* to reference, and the phenomenon that speaker wishes to extend the concept of by asserting the utterance. In the case of the hypothetical expression of determinate knowledge of phenomenality, that which cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective or objective phenomenon is the *ideal referent* of the subject term.

I now employ this notion of an ideal referent in examining what it might look like to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality:

4b: The ideal referent of the subject term ‘phenomenality’ is that which cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective or objective phenomena.

I have spent the past two chapters arguing to establish that we can recognize a presence which attends all phenomena, pervades all phenomena, and cannot be externally differentiated from any phenomena. I have argued that we cannot express determinate knowledge of the “further explanandum” called ‘phenomenal consciousness’ (which is normally characterized in terms of subjective experience and/or qualia) without expressing determinate knowledge of this even further explanandum—that which attends, pervades, and cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective *and* objective phenomena. In the context of attempts at satisfying the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness, then, that which cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective or objective phenomena is the ideal referent of the subject term ‘phenomenality’.

Having established the *ideal* referent of the subject term ‘phenomenality’, I attend to what would be the *de facto* referent of the term, were it to show up in a determinative linguistic utterance:

C1b: In a linguistic utterance expressive of act type (D) featuring the subject term ‘phenomenality’, the *de facto* referent of the subject term is externally differentiated from the linguistic utterance itself.

In other words, the *de facto* referent of any determinative linguistic utterance targeting phenomenality would be the intentional object of that utterance and, therein, would be distinct from the utterance itself.

Here I apply the principle established in premise 2 to determinative linguistic utterances hypothetically featuring the subject term ‘phenomenality’.

> **5b**: In a linguistic utterance expressive of act type (D) featuring the subject term 'phenomenality', the *de facto* referent of the subject term *is not* the *ideal* referent of that term.

The *ideal* referent of the subject term in a sentence meant to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality is that which cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective or objective phenomena, including any linguistic phenomenon. The *de facto* referent of the subject term in any linguistic utterance expressive of act type (D) is the intentional object of that utterance, which is externally differentiated from the subject term, and the sentence itself. The *de facto* referent of a linguistic utterance expressive of act type (D) featuring the subject term phenomenality is externally differentiated from at least one linguistic phenomenon (the relevant utterance), and is thus *not* the ideal referent of the subject term in that utterance. The *de facto* referent of the subject term in a sentence expressive of act type (D) meant to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality *is not* phenomenality. The idea here is that phenomenality cannot actually be distinguished from any statement used to extend its concept. But the distinction between the statement used to talk about something and the something that is talked about is a condition on linguistic reference and determination. So, whatever we manage to get at with sentences of the form 'phenomenality is F', *is not* phenomenality.

Essentially, I have argued that any speech act intending to linguistically capture phenomenality in its entirety would end up capturing something other than the object of its intent. From here, the argument shifts towards showing why this amounts to a failure for a speech act of this type:

> **6b:** To successfully express determinate knowledge of a phenomenon (to linguistically determine what a phenomenon *is*)—the linguistic utterance by which we express that determinate knowledge must have a *de facto* referent that is non-different from the ideal referent of the subject term in that utterance.

This is just a simple observation of the way that knowledge-communication works: to communicate some knowledge we must make use of linguistic tools adequate for the task. If our linguistic utterance isn't fit to communicate knowledge of the phenomenon we wish to know, because whatever it ends up bringing to our awareness is not what we sought to know in the first place, we are at a loss.

From 6b it directly follows that linguistic utterances which have phenomenality as their ideal referent are unsuccessful:

C2b: We cannot successfully express determinate knowledge of phenomenality.

This is the major conclusion of Part B. Still, I wish to make it abundantly clear that a failure to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality is a failure to satisfy the ambition of expressing what the standardly recognized *further explanandum* in metaphysical discussions of consciousness (i.e., phenomenal consciousness) *is* (Chalmers 2003). The remaining premise does this clarificatory work—our inability to apprehend phenomenality by speech constitutes our being thwarted along the path of fixing the ontological status of phenomenal consciousness:

> **7b:** We cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness without expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality.

I have argued for this premise over the first 2 chapters, and at the beginning of this chapter. If we only express determinate knowledge of subjective experience and/or qualia, we fail to express determinate knowledge of an integral aspect of what we *mean* by 'phenomenal consciousness'—that inextricable aspect of both subjective experience and qualia which extends beyond the subjective dimension (including subjective and qualitative character).

C3b: We cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness.

In review, the enterprise of the metaphysics of consciousness is organized around the ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. This ambition is one of linguistically communicating the holistic (not partial) aspect of phenomenal consciousness. As such, it will only be satisfied if determinate knowledge is expressed of a fundamental, pervasive, and expansive aspect of the phenomena normally associated with phenomenal consciousness—the subjective and qualitative characters of experience. This fundamental, pervasive and expansive aspect is that which also happens to be indistinguishable from the entire realm of objective facts (phenomenality; the witness). Phenomenality is to be minimally conceived of as that which cannot be externally differentiated from any subjective or objective phenomena, including linguistic phenomena. The ubiquity of phenomenality across all linguistic phenomena precludes determinative linguistic utterances from tracking the ideal referent of any term meant to represent it. This is not just a problem for theories of consciousness which *hold* that consciousness is ubiquitous. It is a problem for all *metaphysical* theories of consciousness, whether proponents of such theories recognize that their theories must at least express determinate knowledge of phenomenality or not. It is a problem that follows from the blindingly simple fact that we cannot succeed in extricating phenomenality from any phenomena typically associated with phenomenal consciousness. Indetermination of phenomenality is indetermination of what must be at issue if we want to express determinate, *holistic* knowledge of phenomenal consciousness and, more generally, consciousness.

The line of argument I've developed bears some resemblance to Moore's paradox of analysis. The paradox goes that conceptual analysis cannot be correct and informative at the same time (Moore 1903). If the addition of a predicate is correct then its meaning will be identical with

the basic definition of the subject term, and no new information will be added. If the addition of a predicate conveys new meaning, then it will convey that the subject term is something *other* than its basic definition, so the concept of the subject fixed by the addition of the predicate will be incorrect. The paradox I'm pointing to regarding phenomenality is similar, but different. We have to start with some minimal conception of an explanandum—otherwise we wouldn't even be able to form a question about it. The explanandum at hand is phenomenal consciousness. The metaphysical ambition of determining what phenomenal consciousness *is* will only be satisfied if we express determinate knowledge of all aspects of phenomenal consciousness, including phenomenality. By this I do not mean that all discourse about phenomenal consciousness should revolve around the minimal conception of phenomenality—much discourse obviously should revolve around subjective experience and qualia. Those are interesting and important explananda. My point is that if we want to *completely determine* what phenomenal consciousness *is*, we have to account for that which is co-present with respect to all access consciousness sates, all viewpoints, and even all objective phenomena and linguistic phenomena.

This is a problem for the enterprise of the metaphysics of consciousness, not for those *just* interested in explaining the subjective or qualitative characters of experience. The application of any predicate to a subject term representing *this* further explanandum (phenomenality) makes the *de facto* referent of the subject term problematically distinct from the linguistic phenomenon employed to pextend its concept. The linguistic phenomenon employed will therefore be incorrect (incomplete) about the phenomenon that *should* be the referent of its subject term. Even the application of predicates taken to express *just* the minimal conception of the further explanandum (e.g., 'phenomenality is the invariant condition and concomitant of all phenomena') inevitably function to make the referent of the subject term distinct from the linguistic phenomenon employed

to express its basic concept or definition. Neither the basic definition nor any further determination of that which is co-present with respect to all linguistic phenomena can express determinate knowledge of the ideal referent of the subject term phenomenality. This is not where the story ends: the conclusion that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality gives rise to a second horn of the semantic dilemma for the metaphysics of consciousness.

3.3.2 The Second Horn of the Dilemma

The conclusion of my two-part argument for the first horn for the semantic dilemma was that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality and, therefore, of phenomenal consciousness. Unfortunately, and ironically, this conclusion is logically equivalent to the determinative linguistic utterance that "phenomenality is inexpressible". We really need only grasp the force of the argument which entails the conclusion that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality to then grasp that *that* conclusion itself directs our awareness to something other (or less) than the ideal referent of the term phenomenality. The incoherence of expressing that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality is the second horn of the dilemma for the metaphysics of consciousness: we also cannot express that we *cannot* express determinate knowledge. The argument for this horn of the dilemma is relatively, and perhaps mercifully, quite short. The first premise *just is* the conclusion of the argument for the first horn of the dilemma.

> **1c**: We cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness.
>
> **2c**: In expressing that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, we express determinate knowledge of phenomenality *as inexpressible* in that sense.

This premise resonates with my interpretation of the Advaitic concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman. The Advaitic concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman is of that which cannot be apprehended by speech because of its ubiquity and all-pervasion with respect to all finite, differentiated things, along with their qualities. The concept *seems* to imply that Brahman is a sort of noumenal, absolutely unified and singular entity or state beyond the scope of linguistic capture. But the point is not that Brahman is *beyond* language and speech. The image of Brahman conveyed on one level by the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman is of that which appears distinct from the empirical/phenomenal (*vyāyvahārika*) realm differentiated by names and forms. But *this* image of Brahman cannot be what Brahman is. Recognizing the all-pervasiveness of Brahman is the window into grasping that Brahman is *nirguṇa* in the first place. Even the expression that Brahman is *nirguṇa* communicates an image of Brahman as something opposed to something *else*. That is, even negative linguistic determination of Brahman externally differentiates Brahman. But Brahman cannot be externally differentiated. So even negative linguistic determination is unsuccessful. On my view, the concept of *nirguṇa* Brahman indicates that Brahman cannot be *apprehended* by speech, which means at the same time that Brahman cannot be *apprehended* as such. Similarly, in saying that we can't say what phenomenality is, we make phenomenality apparent as externally differentiated from *that* determinative linguistic utterance, and thus end up contemplating something which is not the ideal referent of the term phenomenality (or the ideal referent of any term representing what is basically the witness of Advaita Vedānta).

> **C1c**: We cannot successfully express that we *cannot* express determinate knowledge of phenomenality.

In turn, we cannot successfully express that we *cannot* express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness.

At this point, someone might want to re-animate the idea that silence is the only option with respect to phenomenality and, in turn, phenomenal consciousness. We cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. We also cannot express that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenal consciousness. Perhaps we should just be quiet about the matter. But I will maintain that *this sort* of silence—the sort of silence that emerges as a stance *out of* recognizing the perplexing inexpressibility of the relevant explanandum—has an illocutionary effect tantamount to the meaning of the assertion that we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, which signals continued ensnarement on the horns of the dilemma.

3.4 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have argued at length for the major thesis of the first part of the dissertation: the metaphysics of consciousness considered as a philosophical enterprise in general is in a predicament—one arising specifically from the pervasiveness of the phenomenon we would need to apprehend by speech to satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing complete, conclusive knowledge of what consciousness is. The dilemma consists in the fact that, on the one hand, we cannot linguistically capture that desideratum, because the type of utterances by which we express determinate knowledge are problematically intentional with respect to it, and thus incapable of tracking it as a referent. Any determinative linguistic utterance about that presence which invariantly attends all subjective and objective phenomena would inevitability fail in virtue of extending the concept of something separate from *itself* and therein insufficient for the utterance's supposed denotatum (i.e., that which cannot be abstracted away from *any* linguistic phenomenon). Furthermore, on the other hand, we cannot successfully express *that* we cannot express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, because in admitting our failure we apprehend phenomenality as beyond linguistic capture. In doing so—because of the speech act implied in our resignation—our

linguistically-mediated cognition once again encounters the intentional object *of* a determinative linguistic utterance, which once again is precisely *not* what we sought to spotlight by recognizing the slipperiness of the topic of our discussion (i.e., phenomenality). In the next chapter, I begin to explore what it might look like to coherently talk about phenomenality in light of its paradoxical inexpressibility. I begin by reflecting on the issue of intentionality in linguistic determination, address the worry that perhaps principled silence about this even further explanandum is the best option all things considered, and proceed to explore an alternative mode of description—one that, on my view, escapes both horns of the dilemma, and succeeds in meaningfully theorizing phenomenality without expressing complete determinate knowledge of it.

PART II: DISSOLVING THE DILEMMA

CHAPTER 4. EMBRACING THE SEMANTIC DILEMMA THROUGH INDEFINITE MODAL DESCRIPTION

Introduction

In this chapter, I argue that we can resolve the semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness by alternating indefinitely between qualified determinative linguistic utterances expressing seemingly contradictory properties of phenomenality.

First, I examine the dilemma itself, noting that determinative linguistic utterances fail to track phenomenality as a referent in virtue of being problematically intentional with respect to an ideal referent that cannot be distinguished from any linguistic phenomena (4.1). I suggest that we may explore the idea of theorizing phenomenality at the level of language through some sort of nonintentional linguistic activity. In exploring what this could look like, I integrate resources from Advaita-Vedānta, Jainism, and Neo-Vedānta (4.2). I draw a conceptual connection between the concept of falsity in Advaita Vedānta, the concept of non-one-sidedness in Jainism, and the concept of alternation in Neo-Vedānta. On my view, the conceptual-linguistic activity of moving between alternatively valid determinative linguistic utterances about phenomenality's inexpressibility would be consistent with the Advaitic insight of the falsity (*mithyātva*) of all expressions of determinate knowledge of Brahman, and the Neo-Vedāntic insight (which is informed by the Jaina doctrine of non-on-sidedness of reality and all entities in it) that encountering 'the absolute' (i.e., Brahman) in the mode of consciousness we call language would involve a sort of alteration. I then appeal to a specific analytical resource in the Jaina philosophical tradition—the theory of sevenfold modal predication (*syād-vāda*), otherwise called the sevenfold formula *sapta-bhaṅgī,* to formalize what I call *indefinite modal description* of phenomenality (4.3).

Finally, I analyze how this alternative mode of description would be broadly nonintentional and therein capable of expressing what phenomenality is, *in a sense*, without expressing determinate knowledge *of* it (4.4).

4.1 Taking Stock of the Semantic Dilemma

I have argued that to satisfy the metaphysical ambition of expressing determinate knowledge of consciousness, we would need to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality, but we face the dilemma of being unable to track phenomenality as a referent with any determinative linguistic utterance, yet also being unable to coherently admit this limitation, even in principled silence,[75] without invertedly directing awareness away from our explanandum.

Coherent talk of phenomenality may seem an impossibility. But, as I see things, we have not exhausted our space of logical alternatives. Determinative linguistic utterances which attempt to express what phenomenality *is* are problematically intentional with respect to an ideal referent that cannot be distinguished from any linguistic phenomenon.[76] But *not all* linguistic acts are determinative. Here, I argue that we can move past the ambition of expressing complete determinate knowledge of phenomenality without abandoning the sentiment of the enterprise animated by this ambition altogether; that is, I propose to explore the possibility of expressing what phenomenality is through a *nonintentional* linguistic acts of a sort that I will specify below.

One might consider this quest an immediate non-starter; one might think that the intentionality of a linguistic act is a condition on the possibility of it meaning anything at all, or

[75] The illocutionary effect of remaining quiet about the ontological status of phenomenality *in the context of discourse on it* would be logically equivalent to the assertion that phenomenality is inexpressible.
[76] The de facto referent of a determinative linguistic utterance is inevitably a separate, intentional object *of* knowledge.

giving us any knowledge. But we do find examples of nonintentional, significant, and epistemically rich activities (e.g., dancing).[77] Keeping the notion of somehow theorizing phenomenality *via* nonintentional linguistic activity, let us reflect once more on the nature of the dilemma itself.

4.1.1 Viewing the Dilemma as a Broader Option Set

I think we find, on reflection, that being caught on the two horns of the dilemma constitutes being *compelled*, on the one hand, to assert that phenomenality is inexpressible in the relevant sense, and being *compelled*, on the other hand, to assert that phenomenality is *not* inexpressible, in the sense that asserting its inexpressibility is tantamount to a tacit failure of meaningful reference. In appreciating this dilemma, we are pulled back and forth between asserting and negating the inexpressibility of phenomenality, without at any point being able to *absolutely reject* or eschew either prong of our swinging, conceptual-linguistic movement. Both sides of this seesaw continue to draw our assent, even though they seem to contradict one another. I think we find, if we ease into this oscillating activity, and suspend our urge to escape or overcome it, that a new prong, as it were, emerges—the disjunction morphs into a triadic set of alternatives. The alternative which naturally emerges from prolonged oscillation between asserting and negating phenomenality's inexpressibility is a sense of the *mutual validity* of the two apparent contradictories. However, on this new, third prong, one does not appreciate the *absolute* validity of asserting phenomenality's inexpressibility and the absolute validity of negating consciousness' inexpressibility; one appreciates the structure of the 'dilemma' itself, which is our inclination and capacity to

[77] I will have much more to say about activities of this sort, and the knowledge they contain in the next chapter.

meaningfully and coherently alternate between two apparently contradictory alternatives, neither of which are absolutely true (neither one cancels the other out).

What's more, it is apparent in appreciating this third alternative—the conjunction of the first two, with the qualification that neither are absolutely valid—that in affirming the validity of both asserting and negating phenomenality's inexpressibility in this way we are neither compelled nor able to deny that we must still affirm and negate its inexpressibility as we originally did. The third alterative does not arise and draw our assent in a way that causes us to abandon the first two alternatives, nor does it cause us to avoid subsequently *negating* our affirmation of the validity of both asserting and negating phenomenality's inexpressibility. We are compelled to realize by our very grasp of the third alternative that phenomenality is also inexpressible *as such*. We must admit that it is inexpressible *as* both inexpressible and not inexpressible for the same reason we must negate our original assertion that it is inexpressible. I understand that all this may seem overwrought, or perhaps just overwhelming. But I think this is an accurate description of what happens when we reflect on, appreciate, and allow ourselves to sit with the nature of dilemma.

I think we find, in embracing the dilemma and allowing it to unfold, that it is not a dilemma after all. It is *true* that we cannot successfully express determinate knowledge of phenomenality in the relevant sense. It is also *true* that we cannot coherently gesture at it by expressing its inexpressibility. What we *can* do, in talking of this paradoxically inexpressible explanandum, is assert its inexpressibility, then negate it, then affirm the coherence of both asserting and negating it, then negate our capacity to determinatively gesture at it in *that* way, *and so on*. This is good news, because we find that what first appeared to be a pair of equally unviable options is in fact a proper part of a broader set of non-contradictory, alternatively valid ways of referencing our desideratum and extending its concept.

So far, all of this has been a descriptive account of what happens when we reflect on the dilemma we face in attempting to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality. But I think that what I am describing can also be construed as a solution to the semantic dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness. As a solution to the dilemma, it is a dynamic theory of phenomenality which basically embraces the dilemma, and blossoms into a robust, *broadly* nonintentional way of expressing what that paradoxically inexpressible presence which pervades all finite things *is* within the realm of determinative linguistic activity. By '*broadly* nonintentional' I mean 'not, *all things considered*, directed towards or about some *separate* object or state of affairs'. I will elaborate on this notion of broad intentionality in this chapter.

4.1.2 Laying Groundwork for a Solution to the Dilemma

Overall, I think that there is an intersubjectively reliable path of conceptually and linguistically knowing phenomenality without reifying it—a path without a destination, travelled *in and through* moving between alternatively true, non-absolute expressions of determinate knowledge of it. It will take me time in this chapter and the next to explain and justify this proposal. In this chapter, I focus on formal properties of the theory which explain its semantic functionality and coherence. To do this, I integrate resources from my interpretation of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda*, K.C. Bhattacharya's Neo-Vedānta, and Jainism, a heterodox (*nāstika*) school of thought in the classical Indian philosophical tradition. First, I draw together conceptual resources from classical nondualist Vedānta, Neo-Vedānta and Jainism in continuing to characterize what a dynamic theory of phenomenality could look like. Broadly speaking, there is an affinity between the concept of falsity (*mithyātva*) in Advaita Vedānta, the concept of *alternation* in Neo-Vedānta, and the doctrine of non-one-sidedness (*anekānta-vāda*) in Jainism. A dynamic theory of phenomenality would

basically echo all three of these in terms of its formal constitution. I characterize the dynamic theory of phenomenality I have in mind in terms of *semantic alternation*, i.e., the conceptual-linguistic movement between mutually valid alternatives regarding phenomenality's inexpressibility. Then I concentrate on a specific analytical framework developed by the Jains: the logical-linguistic correlate of their metaphysical doctrine of non-one-sidedness, i.e., the theory of sevenfold modal predication (*syād-vāda*), otherwise called the sevenfold formula (*sapta-bhaṅgī*). I show how the sevenfold formula can be used as a concrete model for semantic alternation and explain why a theory of phenomenality modeled on the sevenfold formula would be broadly nonintentional, and capable of coherently referencing phenomenality and extending its concept without reifying it. Along the way—to ground my use of the sevenfold formula in a solid interpretation of its philosophical intent—I offer my view that the formula is best understood as a highly integrated facet of a network of Jaina doctrines, and engage a few interpretive controversies along the way. Overall, I build up, over the course of the chapter, towards robustly communicating how a theory of phenomenality constituted by semantic alteration and modeled on Jaina modal description could coherently reference and extend the concept of phenomenality at the level of language without expressing complete determinate knowledge of it. In next chapter, I explicate the explanatory and epistemological dimensions of the theory.

4.2 Integrating Classical Non-Dualist Vedānta, Neo-Vedānta, and Jainism

There is an explicit connection between my analysis of Advaita Vedānta and my proposal that we can know phenomenality in and through this sort of oscillating, conceptual-linguistic activity. I have argued that falsity (*mihtyātva*) pervades the semantic structure of Sankara's *advaita-vāda*: all of the theory's constitutive assertions are false (*mithyā*), i.e., indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) as either absolutely true (*sat*) or absolutely not true (*asat*). The assertion that Brahman is unqualified,

nondual and beyond linguistic capture is indeterminable as either absolutely true or absolutely not true. For this assertion to be *indeterminable* is *not* for it to be absolutely not true. It is, in a sense (at the *vyāvahārika* level of analysis) true that Brahman is unqualified, nondual and beyond linguistic capture, because Brahman is all-pervasive. It is also true, in a sense (at the same level of analysis), that Brahman is *not* unqualified, nondual, and beyond linguistic capture, because Brahman is never an object *of* knowledge. *Both* of these assertions regarding Brahman are false—indeterminable as absolutely true, or absolutely not true—which means that they both have *qualified* validity. *Any* assertion we make regarding Brahman will be indeterminable as either absolutely true or the opposite, and will have qualified validity. By moving back and forth between statements, each of which have qualified validity, *with awareness of the relevant qualifications*, we *dwell* in and *evince* the paradoxical inexpressibility of Brahman, without statically or finally determining Brahman as such.

Similarly, by moving back and forth between *explicitly* qualified determinative linguistic utterances, each featuring 'phenomenality' as the subject term and predicating *seemingly* contradictory properties of the referent of the term (i.e., 'inexpressible', 'not inexpressible', etc.), we would exhibit the radically paradoxical inexpressibility of that 'referent', therein meaningfully expressing what it is *in a sense*, but, importantly, without referencing something in particular and *determinatively* extending its concept.[78] Here's why the activity of swinging between qualified determinative linguistic utterances would not, as a prolonged speech act, reference something in particular and determinatively extend its concept.

Determinative linguistic utterances are necessarily intentional. But they are not necessarily intentional with respect to the *entirety* of their referent. Unless some qualifier is present to restrict

[78] I put 'referent' in quotation marks here, because in a very important sense which will only become clear in full over this chapter and the next, the dynamic theory I am talking about has no particular referent.

the scope of its reference, a determinative linguistic utterance will predicate a property (or a set thereof) of the referent of its subject term *ambiguously*, such that the entirety of that referent is by default fixed in concept by the application of the relevant predicative (i.e., property). For example, in the sentence "Socrates is a man", the absence of a qualifier restricting the scope of the reference of the subject term ensures that nothing precludes our cognition from being directed by the speech act to call to mind Socrates himself, in all his various aspects, and think, "*that*—that (previously) living being called 'Socrates' is a man, end of story. But a *qualified* determinative linguistic utterance can predicate properties of an aspect of the referent of its subject term such that the entirety of the referent is *not* fixed in concept. For example, were one to say "Socrates is *sort of* a man", the hearer of one's declaration would be inclined, or at least invited by the qualifier 'sort of', to pause and inquire into what specially about that being called 'Socrates' is characterized by manhood, and what about him is not. They would find, of course, that considered with respect to his embodiment or phenotype during his lifetime, Socrates is indeed a 'man' in the usual (historical) sense of the term. But considered with respect to his occurrent presence in the collective imagination, Socrates is an archetype—a paradigm example of what it is to be a philosopher.

A *single* qualified determinative linguistic utterance would do little to help us in our quest to find an intersubjectively reliable way of expressing what phenomenality is, as it would still, although qualified, express determinate knowledge of the aspect of the referent made salient in virtue of the relevant qualification (e.g., Socrates' embodiment is determined as 'man' by the utterance "Socrates is sort of a man" wherein 'sort of' restricts the scope of the utterance's reference to his embodiment). The *de facto* referent *of* any single determinative linguistic utterance—even a qualified one—cannot be that which pervades *all* subjective and objective phenomena. But an *indefinite* series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances could express

various aspects of the referent of 'phenomenality', therein more holistically theorizing phenomenality 'itself', without at any point predicating a property or a set thereof of the *entirety* of its referent and directing awareness to an intentional object of knowledge (which would not be phenomenality).[79] By 'indefinite', I mean dynamic (not just proceeding asymptotically towards complete description) unbounded (having no end).

We could, for example, describe Socrates by saying, "Socrates *is sort* of a man", "Socrates *is sort* of not a man", "Socrates is *sort of* a man *and* not a man", and so on. In this way, we would build *towards* an informative account of the being signified by this name. But, at the same time, if this description were to continue indefinitely, without any detectable end, it would never express complete determinate knowledge of Socrates in *all* his aspects, and would, moreover, *demonstrate* (in virtue of having no terminus) that the being signified by the name Socrates is not a static, one-dimensional, synchronously apprehensible phenomenon, or a mereological whole. Of course, there is a further important difference between the case of dynamically describing an embodied organism and the notion of dynamically describing that presence which cannot be externally differentiated from linguistic phenomena (phenomenality). The being signified by the name Socrates is not something inextricable from language. The ideal referent of the term phenomenality, on the other hand, is supposed to be that which cannot be externally differentiated from any phenomenon whatsoever, including any linguistic phenomenon. So, in principle, a series of qualified determinative utterances *could not* track various aspects of the reality pervaded by phenomenality and work up towards an exhaustive account of phenomenality. Phenomenality

[79] This still doesn't capture exactly how a dynamic theory of phenomenality would express what phenomenality is, as my wording here struggles to avoid indicating that the referent of the term 'phenomenality' is like a mereological whole which could in principle be completely described by a series of statements which each track and fix the concept of one of its parts. One important thing to note is that a dynamic description of phenomenality would not end, and therefore would never terminate in complete determination of a whole. This is something I will touch on later on in the chapter.

could never be removed from the series itself. This fact—the fact of the indiscernibility of the distinction between designator and designatum in the case of phenomenality—is something that a *dynamic* description of phenomenality consisting in moving between alternatively valid, qualified expressions of its inexpressibility could not only account for but moreover evince. My task in the remainder of this chapter will be to elaborate on why this is so.

For now, I will call this oscillating, conceptual-linguistic activity 'semantic alternation'. In considering the concept of semantic alteration, bear in mind that on my view, the conceptual-linguistic activity of *alternating* between mutually valid, qualified determinative linguistic utterances is basically an enactment of the Advaitic implication of the falsity (*mithyātva*) or indeterminacy of Brahman at the *vyavahārika* level of analysis. To be false in Sankara's *advaita-vāda* is to be indeterminable as either absolutely real or absolutely unreal. Any particular apprehension of Brahman by speech is indeterminable as such—is real/true, but just in a *sense* (not absolutely). Semantic alternation is a way of literally demonstrating the *indeterminacy* (i.e., the *qualified, non-absolute validity*) of any given determinate grasp of that presence which invariantly attend and pervades all subjective and objective phenomena (i.e., phenomenality; *sāksin*; *ātman*; *Brahman*, etc.).

This somewhat unusual term of art—*alternation*—is used by the 20th century exponent of Neo-Vedānta, K.C. Bhattacharya (henceforth, KCB), to characterize the nature of "*the absolute*", (Bhattacharya 1976, 195), a heuristic label of sorts which roughly signifies the perennial concept of ultimate truth or reality, and corresponds on at least one level of analysis to the Upaniṣadic concept of Brahman as it shows up in classical non-dualist Vedānta (Burch 1976, 4). My use of the term 'alternation' differs from KCB's for subtle reasons., However, there is broad, overarching coherence between KCB's thought and my own in general; specifically, his concept of alternation

is broadly similar to the positive thesis at the heart of this dissertation: the thesis that we can coherently express what phenomenality is without expressing determinate knowledge of it through an indefinite, oscillatory mode of description. For KCB, the absolute *has alternative forms*—he says that it is "*an* alternation of truth, value and reality" (Bhattacharya 1976, 195; emphasis mine). These three forms of the absolute correspond to three modes of conscious awareness, i.e., knowing, willing, and feeling. 'Truth' is absolute knowing, 'reality', which he also calls 'freedom' is absolute willing, and 'value' is absolute feeling. Unlike KCB, I am not in the business of analyzing how the absolute manifests in *different* modes of consciousness—my intent, is to explain how we might coherently *talk* about that all-pervasive aspect of what we typically mean by phenomenal consciousness (phenomenality) given its ubiquity in language and the problematic duality of linguistically mediated apprehension. I suppose one could say, in keeping with KCB's dialect, that I am in the business of analyzing the manifestation of the absolute in the mode of consciousness we call language.

Furthermore, the most glaring difference between his use of the term 'alternation' and my own is perhaps that he uses the term to characterize the absolute *itself*, whereas I use the term to signify a formal property of the mode of description whereby we may express the paradoxically inexpressible form of the absolute without reifying it *as such.* But, on my understanding of KCB's thinking, this may be a distinction without an absolute difference—for KCB, the metaphysical doctrine of alternative absolutes is significantly influenced by Jaina non-absolutism, which encompasses a core metaphysical doctrine—the doctrine of non-one-sidedness—(*anekānta-vāda*) as well as a few epistemic and semantic implications. The term *anekānta* means of not one (*an-eka*) aspect (*anta*), and the associated doctrine (*anekānta-vada*) means that the world consists in infinite facets, and similarly, all entities consist in infinite facets (Balcerowicz 2019, 76). The

epistemic implication of this doctrine is that any given object of knowledge is possibly characterized by an infinity of aspects, and "when we *know* [some particular object of knowledge] we are focusing on only one given viewpoint" (Clerbout et al., 2011, 636; emphasis and insertion mine). The semantic-logical corollary of this Jaina ontology is that it is impossible to provide an exhaustive account of any phenomenon, or of reality in general. With every speech act we capture just a tiny slice of whatever it is we refer to (Ibid., 77). All sentences function restrictedly.[80]

The spirit of Jaina non-absolutism, which informs KCB's thinking about the absolute, is consistent with the understanding that facts about reality and facts about our facility of apprehending it by speech are correlated and mutually entailing. It seems only natural, in light of this, to think of KCB's commitment to the thesis that the absolute has alternate forms as *implicating* his commitment to the thesis that the absolute manifests in the mode of consciousness we call language alternatively, or in alternation. KCB does not, as far as I can tell, ever *explicitly* say that we can only coherently express what the absolute is by swinging *open-endedly* between alternatively valid qualified determinative linguistic utterances about it. But he demonstrates *something* of this view by committing himself to the thesis that the absolute is an alternation of truth, value and freedom. In other words, *in* describing the absolute in this way, he reveals his view that coherently talking about the absolute requires alternation of some sort *at the level of language*, even though what he literally says does the work of attributing the property of alternation to the absolute itself. In a way, it seems appropriate to say that alternation is a formal property of KCB's thought and his speech, and in *this* respect, KCB's alternativism broadly coheres with what I am up to in this chapter and the dissertation at large.

[80] The Jainas developed disambiguation strategies to deal with the radical imprecision and incompleteness characteristic of our practice of naming and description (given the multiplexity of reality).

Although the concept of alternation is more obviously characteristic of KCB's thought than that of the Jains, it is in the Jaina doctrine of non-one-sidedness (*anekānta-vāda*)—more specifically, in its semantic corollary, the theory of sevenfold modal description (*syād-vāda*)—that I find the most helpful resource for concretely modeling semantic alteration. It just so happens that the natural unfolding of the dilemma we face in attempting to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality is structurally isomorphic with the Jaina theory of sevenfold modal description (*syād-vāda*), or the sevenfold formula.[81]

KCB's interpretation of the formula—an interpretation which integrally involves the concept of alternation—will remain relevant to my analysis of the isomorphism of semantic alternation and sevenfold modal description. Now that I have provided some sense of how resources and themes from Advaita Vedānta, Neo-Vedānta and Jainism are interwoven and relevant for my project of uncovering what a dynamic theory of phenomenality could look like, we are in a position to examine the Jaina sevenfold formula in detail and appreciate how it could be used as a blueprint for a dynamic theory of phenomenality.

[81] On a brief autobiographical aside, I first came to think of the 'solution' to the semantic dilemma for the metaphysics of consciousness in terms of semantic alternation, and *then* came to realize the structural isometry of the alternative linguistic activity I had in mind, and the Jaina sevenfold formula. I share this just to explain why I have not starkly foregrounded Jaina contributions to similar problematics in this chapter. Dialectically, and as a matter of fact, I do not consider semantic alternation a solution to the dilemma I've laid out because of antecedent commitment to the utility of strategies developed by Jain philosophers. I truly do think that oscillating between mutually valid, non-exclusive determinative linguistic utterances about phenomenality is both interestingly characteristic of *and* pragmatically entailed by the dilemma *as a solution*, and I truly *discovered* that the Jaina sevenfold formula is a helpful way of formalizing this somewhat outlandish panacea. Perhaps some pre-established harmony between the solution that bubbled up in my consciousness and the Jain's formula caused all this to unfold. But I was not aware of such harmony in the early stages of writing and researching this dissertation. The way I have organized this chapter reflects how the path I see through the dilemma actually came to light.

4.3 The Jaina Sevenfold Formula as a Dynamic Theory of Phenomenality

The Jaina theory of sevenfold modal description (*syād-vāda*) derives its name from the Sanskrit word *syāt* which is the root √*as*, *to be*, in the third, singular, optative form (Matilal 1981). It can be translated as "somehow," "in a certain sense," or "from a certain perspective" (Balcerowicz 2017, 90).[82] Formalized, the theory consists in seven basic figures, each of which includes the optative *syāt*, the grammatical subject, the verbal element "is" or "exists" (*asti*), and (sometimes explicitly but always implicitly) a predicate.

4.3.1 The Sevenfold Formula

Keeping the optative untranslated for now, the formula may be represented like this:

(1) *Syāt* a *is* F (*Syāt asti eva)*
(2) *Syāt* a is not F (*Syāt nāsti eva)*
(3) *Syāt* a is and is not F (*Syāt asti nāsti eva)*
(4) *Syāt* a is inexpressible *(Syāt avaktavya eva)*
(5) *Syāt* a is F and inexpressible *(Syāt asti avaktavya eva)*
(6) *Syāt* a is not F and inexpressible *(Syāt nāsti avaktavya eva)*
(7) *Syāt* a is F, not F, and inexpressible *(Syāt asti nāsti avaktavya eva)*[83]

Before I can explain how this formula would work as a dynamic theory of phenomenality (how it would formalize semantic alternation about phenomenality), I need to ground my explanation in an interpretative account of the Jaina sevenfold formula. There is abundant interpretative controversy surrounding the formula—philosophers disagree about how various terms in the formula (including the optative *syāt*) should be translated, about the role played by the optative in

[82] According to Balcerowicz, the Jaina *syād-vāda* is not a many-valued system of logic. It does not offend against the law of non-contradiction (Balcerowicz 2017, 90). We should also note that there is some controversy surrounding translation of the optative *syāt*: '*Syāt*' is sometimes used in ordinary contexts to indicate uncertainty or probability (Matilal 1981, 52).

[83] This rendering of the sevenfold formula is based on that of Vijay K. Jain, *Ācārya Samantabhadra's Āptamīmāṁsā (Devāgamastotra): Deep Reflection on The Omniscient Lord* (Vikalp Printers, 2016): 29. I translate *syāt* as 'in a sense'.

each figure, about whether the figures are contradictory or not, and more (Matilal 1981). A comprehensive engagement with all controversies surrounding the formula unfortunately exceeds the scope of this chapter—accordingly, I will just offer a broad characterization of my interpretive approach, and note a few of its specific implications (those most relevant to understanding how I am using the sevenfold formula to model semantic alternation as a solution to the dilemma facing the metaphysics of consciousness).

On my view, the formula is best understood as a highly integrated aspect of a wider network of Jaina doctrines, i.e., the theory of the multiplexity of reality (*anekānta-vāda*) and the theory of viewpoints (*naya-vāda*). The theory of the multiplexity or non-one-sidedness of reality is the view that reality and all entities in it are infinitely faceted (Balcerowicz 2017). The theory of viewpoints (*naya-vāda*) literally consists in a list of seven viewpoints:

- The comprehensive viewpoint (*naigama-naya)*
- The collective viewpoint (*saṃgraha-naya*)
- The empirical viewpoint (*vyavahāra-naya*)
- The direct viewpoint (*ṛju-sūtra-naya*)
- The verbal viewpoint (*śabda-naya*)
- The etymological viewpoint (*samabhirūḍha-naya*)
- The factual viewpoint (*evaṃbhūta-naya*)[84]

[84] In the comprehensive viewpoint, knowledge involves classifying things by the recognition of the existence of common features or universals (Clerbout et al. 2011, 637), and sentences have unspecified reference—they refer to universals and particulars either indiscriminately or in relation to one another (Ibid., 637). In the collective viewpoint, knowledge is of what is permanent or of that which summarizes particulars, and the elements of a sentence refer to universals or classes of things. In the empirical viewpoint, knowledge is of phenomenal particulars, and an utterance will single out an individual member of a class. In the direct viewpoint, ultimate particulars or infinitesimal atoms (*paramāṇu*) are known, and a statement has a point of reference concurrent with the instant characterized by the action of or condition in which the thing being expressed finds itself (Balcerowicz 2017: 85). This viewpoint emphasizes the particular mode of a thing, "and the substantial and non-momentary character of the entity is intentionally ignored" (Balcerowicz 2017, 85). The direct viewpoint and the next three viewpoints emphasize a selected mode of an object and are thus mode-expressive (*paryāyārthika*) rather than substance-expressive (*dravyārthika*), like the first three. In the verbal viewpoint, epistemic access to an object of knowledge is had by means of language—to know an object is always to know a word. The reference point of an utterance is still the present, but the "role of verbal reference is emphasized" (Balcerowicz 2017, 85). In the etymological viewpoint, there is only one known object for every linguistic expression, in part because synonymy is denied. Two terms that may be taken in the previous viewpoint to refer synonymously are understood as indicating different shades of meaning (Clerbout et al. 2011). Finally, in the factual viewpoint, the known object represented by the descriptive content of a linguistic expression is a unique object of the present, and a statement is true only if the descriptive content obtains at the instant the expression is stated (Clerbout et al. 2011).

The theory of viewpoints has been understood in two distinct but related ways, as, on the one hand, an epistemological theory that distinguishes between epistemic perspectives characterized by different *types of knowledge* (Clerbout et al. 2011) and, on the other hand, a semantic theory about "how we determine the relevant context for utterances and thereby assign truth values to them" (Balcerowicz 2017, 89). On the semantic interpretation, the viewpoints are intermediary indices which function to restrict the context in which utterances are meaningful and truth-apt (ibid., 2017, 88), and the purpose of the theory is to facilitate "indexed determination of the context of an utterance" (Ibid). To carry out indexed determination of the context of an utterance is to figure out the context in which a particular utterance is meaningful and truth-apt by identifying the indices/parameters embedded in it (Ibid).[85] Working with the semantic interpretation, we could employ the theory of viewpoints to determine that the utterance "a swallow is small", for example, is indexed by the comprehensive viewpoint (*saṃgraha-naya*) wherein sentences have unspecified reference (they refer to universals and particulars either indiscriminately or in relation to one another) (Ibid.: 637), rather than the empirical viewpoint (*vyavahāra-naya*) wherein an utterance will single out an individual member of a class.

The theory of sevenfold modal predication (*syād-vāda*) differs from the theory of viewpoints (*naya-vāda*), which aims at yielding the precise context (consisting of a viewpoint indice or a set thereof) in which a *particular* utterance is meaningful/truth-apt/valid, in that it involves utterance of *multiple* perspective-bound statements *towards* complete description of a

[85] The Jain philosopher Siddharṣigaṇi explicitly "links each viewpoint with a particular philosophy" (Clerbout et al. 2011: 636). The *naya-vāda* is for him a framework which includes the main theories of knowledge (Clerbout et al. 2011: 636).

phenomenon, entity, event, or reality (Balcerowicz 2017).[86] The theory of viewpoints, on the one hand, equips us to analyze any single determinative linguistic utterance as offering an incomplete account (*vikalādeśa*) of an object of knowledge—an account applicable only to a particular aspect of the relevant object of knowledge (an aspect made salient by a viewpoint indice or a set thereof). In carrying out indexed determination of the context of a particular utterance we determine, or rather, uncover, *the* context in which *that* particular utterance is meaningful/true. The theory of sevenfold modal description, on the other hand, facilitates us in moving in the direction of giving a *complete* account *(sakalādeśa), via* a number of *qualified* deterministic linguistic utterances*,* of an *infinitely faceted* object of knowledge.

For example, employing the theory of sevenfold modal description, and using 'in a sense' for *syāt*, we could describe 'a swallow' by saying, "in a sense, a swallow is small", "in a sense, a swallow is not small", "in a sense, a swallow is small and not small", and so on. Each qualified determinative linguistic utterance in our extended description of a swallow would be qualified by a parameter (*nikṣepa*), a viewpoint (*naya*) or a layered set of them.[87] This means that a parameter, a perspective, or a layered set of them would be embedded in the *syāt* qualifying each utterance.[88]

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[86] A clarification regarding this contrast between the two theories: I do not mean that the theory of viewpoints enumerates the one and only set of viewpoints relevant to carrying out indexed determination with respect to utterances generally speaking. The seven viewpoints are historically contingent, and basic rather than exhaustive (an infinite number of viewpoints could be discovered, corresponding to the infinite ways in which any given object of knowledge can be known or characterized). Instead, I mean that the theory of viewpoints equips us, with respect to any given *particular* utterance, to specify the *exact* (although probably internally layered) context shaping the aspect of the object of knowledge referenced by the subject term in that particular utterance (Balcerowicz 2017, 88).

[87] This view is somewhat unconventional, as few Jain philosophers explicitly reference the seven viewpoints in explicating the sevenfold formula. For example, in his *Āptamīmāṁsā*, the 2nd century CE Jaina philosopher and ascetic Samatabhadra, seems to reference not the seven viewpoints but the four basic parameters or angles of analysis (*nikṣepa*)—substance (*dravya*), location (*kṣetra*), time (*kāla*) and state/condition (*bhāva*)—in explaining how the figures in the formula are parameterized. But on my view, the fact that Jain philosophers focus on the parameters in explicating the formula does not entail that the figures in the formula *cannot* be construed/understood as being indexed by the seven viewpoints. The view that there is a *limited* set of parameters available for parameterizing the figures of an extended description of an *infinitely* faceted aspect of reality is deeply inconsistent. So, on my view, viewpoints are also parameters (albeit, not the basic four) capable of parameterizing figures in the sevenfold formula.

[88] I Follow Balcerowicz (2017) in characterizing the parameters/perspectives as being embedded in the *syāt*s qualifying the figures in the formula.

On one possible indexed determination of the contexts of this series of utterances, the first utterance "in a sense, a swallow is small" is indexed by the first-order parameter of substance (*dravya*), as well as by the collective viewpoint (*naigama-naya)*, wherein the elements of a sentences refer to universals or classes of things.[89] The referent of 'a swallow', in this case, would be the substantive aspect of that family of birds called swallows. The property 'small', in this case, would be applied to the substantive aspect of the bird family. The second utterance in this extended description of a swallow is indexed by the parameter of substance (*dravya*) again, but this time in conjunction with the empirical viewpoint (*vyavahāra-naya*), wherein sentences designate phenomenal particulars. Perhaps in the context of this second utterance we are attending to a *specific member* of the bird family (*an* individual swallow). And perhaps our utterance is indexed not just by the first order parameter of substance, but by the second order parameter of relation as well, i.e., we are considering the size of an individual swallow relative to a worm. *In this sense*, the referent of 'a swallow' is *not* small. Furthermore, the third utterance "in a sense, a swallow is small and not small" is indexed by all these parameters and viewpoints, along with the second order parameter of verbal designation. Considered specifically with respect to *how it may be referenced* and extended in concept relative to its multifarious substantive aspect, the 'referent' of 'a swallow' is (can be *said* to be) small and not small. In other words, we *can* coherently say that a swallow is small when our utterance is parameterized by reference to the substantive aspect of the bird family designated by 'a swallow', and we *can* coherently say that a swallow is small when

[89] I follow Balcerowicz (2017) in viewing substance, time, place and condition as first-order parameters, which are themselves indexed by second-order parameters such as "mode, aspect, relation, distinction, material substratum, relation, serviceability, verbal designation, and so on" (Balcerowicz 2017: 92). Here, a 'first-order' parameter is basically more sweeping an general than a 'second-order' one. The former is like the widest constraint on the relevant reference, and the latter are more narrow constraints within one of the former. With respect to any given figure in the sevenfold formula, even in the case of the predication of existence (*sat*) or non-existence (*asat*) (wherein the object of knowledge may *seem* to be indexed just by the four *nikṣepa*), we can push indexed determination of the context of that figure's utterance a step further, and thereby determine how the figure is indexed by both first-order and second-order parameters, that is, by both *nikṣepa* and *naya*.

our utterance is parameterized by the substantive aspect of a member of that family, also designated by that term, viewed in relation to a worm. Just as we can carry out indexed determination of the context of a single utterance, as with the theory of viewpoints (*naya-vāda*), we can carry out indexed determination of the contexts of *a series* of utterances pertaining to a phenomenon with the aid of the sevenfold formula and the theory of viewpoints *together* (as I have just demonstrated).

4.3.2 Modeling Semantic Alternation on the Sevenfold Formula

Keeping this general characterization of the sevenfold formula as a highly integrated aspect of a wider network of Jaina doctrines in mind, let us consider how it could help us formalize semantic alternation about phenomenality. As a dynamic theory of phenomenality, the Jaina sevenfold formula could map onto semantic alternation (and *vice versa*) like this:

(1) In a sense, phenomenality is indefinite
(2) In a sense, phenomenality is not indefinite
(3) In a sense, phenomenality is indefinite and not indefinite
(4) In a sense, phenomenality is inexpressible (as either indefinite or not indefinite)
(5) In a sense, phenomenality is indefinite and inexpressible.
(6) In a sense, phenomenality is definite and inexpressible.
(7) In a sense, phenomenality is indefinite, definite, and inexpressible.

Phenomenality is indefinite (figure 1) in the sense that we cannot express determinate knowledge of it (this is the first horn of the semantic dilemma). We might say that this figure is indexed by the substance parameter and the empirical viewpoint. Considered with respect to its substantive or essential aspect, *as* a phenomenal particular (a specific object of knowledge), the referent of the term 'phenomenality' is inexpressible, and indefinite in that sense. Phenomenality is *not* indefinite (figure 2), in the sense that we cannot determinatively express *that we cannot express* determinate knowledge of it (this is the second horn of the semantic dilemma). We might say that this figure is

indexed by the substance parameter, the empirical viewpoint, and the second-order parameter of verbal designation. For, considered with respect to being referenced *as* indefinite (in the sense of figure 1), the 'referent' of the term 'phenomenality' is *not* indefinite. It is definite *as indefinite*. Figure 3 is a conjunction of these. We might say that it is indexed by the parameters and viewpoints indexing figures 1 and 2. Furthermore, phenomenality is inexpressible (figure 4) in the sense that it is indeterminable (*anirvancanīya*) as either absolutely indefinite (inexpressible) or absolutely not indefinite (not inexpressible), and so on. We might say that it is indexed by the figures indexing earlier figures, as well as by the addition of the verbal viewpoint (*śaba-naya*). In the verbal viewpoint, which is mode-expressive (*paryāyārthika*) rather than substance-expressive (*dravyārthika*), epistemic access to an object of knowledge is had by means of language—to know an object is always to know a word. The reference point of an utterance is the present, and the "role of verbal reference is emphasized" (Balcerowicz 2017, 85). Considered with respect to *how it may be referenced at a single time*, taking the parameters and viewpoints indexing earlier figures into account, the 'referent' of the term phenomenality is inexpressible (at that time) *as* either indefinite *or* indefinite. We could carry on with indexed determination of the context of subsequent figures in the formula construed as a dynamic theory of phenomenality from here.

I propose a theory built like this not because of antecedent commitment to the Jaina doctrine of the multiplexity of reality, but because it happens to be structurally isomorphic with the dilemma itself (once embraced), because it captures the virtue of evincing phenomenality's paradoxical inexpressibility, and because it avoids the vice of having a starkly intentional

structure.[90] the Jaina sevenfold formula would avoid the vice of a determinative linguistic utterance's intentionality. Now that we have a more robust understanding of the sevenfold formula and its role in the Jaina system, we are in a position appreciate why a theory of phenomenality modeled on the sevenfold formula would be *broadly* nonintentional. Recall that by '*broadly* nonintentional' I mean 'not, *all things considered*, directed towards or about some *separate* object or state of affairs'.

4.4 On The Broad Non-intentionality of a Dynamic Theory of Phenomenality

Here I explain why a dynamic theory of phenomenality modeled on the Jaina sevenfold formula would be broadly nonintentional, considered specifically with respect to its formal semantic properties.

4.4.1 On the Fact That the Figures Are Qualified

First, the figures in the formula are *qualified.* The optative *syāt* functions to restrict the scope of each statement's reference, such that various properties are restrictively and non-exclusively predicated of the referent of the subject term. To clarify this point, and how it bears on the broad nonintentionality of a dynamic theory of phenomenality, I should offer further insight into how I understand the role of the optative *syāt* in the formula. Because I consider the sevenfold formula and the theory of viewpoints continuous, I favor an interpretation of the term *syāt* which reflects that continuity (recall that on my view, the sevenfold formula is a highly integrated aspect of a

[90] One might wonder how explanatory such a theory would be—it may seem that any and all statements would be permitted in the theory, rendering the theory insufficiently discursive. My short answer is that the theory isn't explanatory in the normal sense, although it does incorporate and demonstrate the inadequacy of any metaphysical theory of consciousness logically equivalent to a single qualified or unqualified determinative linguistic utterance. This is a worry I will elaborate on in the next chapter.

wider network of Jaina doctrines, including the doctrine of non-one-sidedness and the theory of viewpoints). The whole point of the theory of viewpoints, especially when it is understood as a semantic disambiguation strategy, is to help us grasp the *specific* context (perhaps inclusive of a set of viewpoints) in which a given utterance is valid. The various perspectives articulated in the scope of the *naya-vāda* (the comprehensive viewpoint, the collective viewpoint, etc.) are independently coherent, and very precisely formulated in terms of the aspects/facets they constitute or disclose (independently, or, I think, in conjunction). They are not unstable, conjectural, imagined, or vague. On my view, each figure in the sevenfold formula is indexed by one or more of these coherent and precisely formulated viewpoints (note that this is *not* the view that there is one-to-one correspondence between the seven viewpoints and the seven figures in the sevenfold formula). Accordingly, we should think of the formula as expressing that *there is* a perspective *p* according to which *a* is *F*, just as much as *there is* a perspective *q* according to which *a* is ~*F*, and so on, not that there is *possibly* a perspective *p* according to which *a* is *F*, and so on. Even the analysis of *syāt* as a conditional-forming operator (Matilal 1981) fails to capture the requisite levels of specificity and credence.[91] This is because a series of statements expressing how an object of knowledge *would* be if various states of affairs were to obtain would not be consistent with the Jaina philosophical intent of developing strategies to help us describe the *actual* multifariousness

[91] On Matilal's (1981) reading, the Jaina use of the term *syāt* expresses neither doubt nor likelihood—it "amounts to a conditional approval," and by acting as an operator turns a categorical *a* is *F* into a conditional if *p*, then *a* is *F* (Matilal 1981: 51). Pragati Jain (2000) is critical of Matilal's analysis of *syāt* as a conditional-forming operator: he thinks the account "makes reference to a particular standpoint when it is not clear any particular standpoint will do the task" (Jain 2000: 390). Consider the first figure in the formula: *syāt*, *a* is *F* (1). According to Jain, it would be peculiar to single out one particular standpoint *p* for the analysis of (1): "it seems that what is required is a statement that quantifies over standpoints: (1) holds just in case there is some standpoint *p* such that viewed from *p*, a is *F"* (Jain 2000: 390). He favors viewing *syāt* as a modal operator, and suggests that it be translated as *possibly*. I agree with both accounts *to an extent*. I agree with Matilal that the Jaina use of *syāt* expresses neither doubt nor likelihood. The doctrine of the multiplexity of reality (*anekānta-vāda*) is not that any given entity is *maybe* or *potentially* infinitely faceted. The view is that all entities and reality in general are radically complex. The *sapta-bhaṅgī* expresses the same thing, but in a protracted way. Moreover, translating *syāt* as *possibly* signals a failure to evince the continuity of the theory of viewpoints and the sevenfold formula

of reality. It is partially correct to say that a statement including *syāt* amounts to a conditional approval, but only if by *conditional* we mean something like *qualified*. Against the backdrop of Jaina non-absolutism and non-one-sidedness, it makes the most sense to understand the figures (*bhaṅga)* in the formula as *qualified* (indexed; parameterized) by parameters/perspectives, each of which concretize the scope for reasonable predication of a property or set of properties *of some aspect* of the referent of the subject term that is constant across the formula.

I agree with Jain (2000) that *syāt* is a modal operator, but just in the idiosyncratic sense indicated by Balcerowicz: "the sentential functor [*syāt*] turns an assertion or negation into a modal sentence, in which the indicative mood is transformed into a "perspective mood" (Balcerowicz 2017: 91). We may, I suggest, understand *syāt*, as a modal operator that *actualizes* in any given case of its *use* one of an infinite number of *possibly discoverable* perspectives, such that whatever property is predicated of the subject term in a figure qualified by a particular *syāt* is in truth and at that time descriptive of the aspect of that subject term's referent made salient by virtue of the perspective actualized by the operator. It may indeed be "difficult to give an account of what we are to understand by the standpoints" qualifying the various figures in the formula (Jain 2000: 390), but this difficulty is precisely what the formula is supposed to help us tackle. In sum, each figure predicates a property, or a set of them, of an aspect of the referent of the subject term that remains constant across the series. *No figure in the series predicates a property of that referent in its all-aspects-aspect*. This is just a fragment of the explanation of the nonintentionality of this theory.

4.4.2 On How the Figures Are Parameterized

Second, the figures in the formula are not parameterized such that they collectively constitute a complete description of the referent of their subject term. To grasp this point, we should keep the consistency of the *syād-vāda* and the *naya-vāda* in mind. This should help us avoid the pitfall of thinking that different figures simply express different *parts* of phenomenality, such that a long list of them could completely describe phenomenality in its all-aspects-included aspect. The various perspectives embedded into the *syāt*s qualifying different figures in the series do not only express aspects of the referent considered *in itself*. They also express aspects of the referent insofar as those aspects are semantic or syntactic perspectives *on it*. For example, I may consider a thing in itself and distinguish between its substantive aspect and its current condition (e.g. the smallness of a swallow vs. the fact that a particular swallow is swimming at the time of the utterance). But if I consider a thing *as it is bound up with language*, I can distinguish between the aspect in which it is referenceable and the aspect in which it is non-referenceable. This is what the Jaina distinction between object-bound (*artha-dvāreṇa)* and speech-bound (*śabda-dvāreṇa*) viewpoints gives us: the capacity to predicate a property of an aspect of a thing where 'an aspect of a thing' is not a constraint on the object *itself* but a constraint on the semantics involved our awareness of and reference to that object.[92] There is an important asymmetry between an extended description modeled on the sevenfold formula and a description of, for example, a table which consists in a set of statements about its legs, its surface, its role as a desk, etc. If the theory were understood as a set of statements about different parts of phenomenality *in itself*, it would construct

[92] The first four viewpoints are object-bound (*artha-dvāreṇa):* they introduce parameters pertaining to the object considered in itself. The last three are speech-bound (*śabda-dvāreṇa*): they "introduce additional semantic distinctions which no longer relate to the thing itself but to specific devices employed to describe it" (Balcerowicz 2017, 85). What this means is that carrying out indexed determination is not so simple as just distinguishing between different parts of a known or referenced object. It may also require distinguishing between different modes or acts of reference and predication.

phenomenality as a mereological whole—as a definite thing capable in principle of being expressed in its entirety by a single statement or a set of statements.

4.4.3 On the Indefinite Form of the Description

Third, the series of qualified deterministic utterances constituting a dynamic theory of phenomenality would be *indefinite*. By 'indefinite' I mean *dynamic* and *unbounded*. I have said that the all-aspects-included aspect of the referent of the subject term that remains constant across the series would not brought into view or extended in concept by any single statement in the series; it is also would not be brought into view or extended in concept by the series *as a whole*, because the series does not proceed asymptotically towards complete description, and because the series has no end. The figures in the series mutually entail one another, but not in a strict, deterministic direction. It is not the case that the first statement entails the second, but not *vice versa*. One figure may entail multiple others, such that there are points at which the series can permutate in new directions.[93] For example, the conjunction of figure 1 and figure 2 entails figures 3 and 4. But 4 also yields figure 1: to assert that phenomenality is inexpressible in the sense of being indeterminable as either absolutely indefinite or not indefinite is to manifest a sense in which non-dual consciousness is definite *as such*. The figures can also regress—the fifth, sixth and seventh figures each yield the fourth statement. If phenomenality is, in a sense, definite *and* in a sense, inexpressible, it is in that sense indefinite (inexpressible as either). And *as* inexpressible in *that* sense, phenomenality is, in a sense, definite. Figure 4 could lead us back to figure 2 again, or, in

[93] This might look like conceptual proliferation run amuck from, for example, a generalized Buddhist perspective. In a sense, this is conceptual proliferation run amuck, but *not towards some specific end*. Generally speaking, my view, which I will continue developing over the next two chapters, is that because indefinite modal description of phenomenality works towards no specific end and, in a sense, lacks a referent, it constitutes freedom from being compelled to express one single, final, answer about the ideal referent of the term 'phenomenality', i.e., it constitutes a sort of liberation from the existential anxiety of laboring under the notion that there is absolute knowledge to be expressed.

conjunction with earlier figures, it could lead to figure 5. There is more than one route available—the series does not unfold in one direction. Although there are entailment relations between statements, there are option sets at the junctures between them. If the series *just* proceeded asymptotically in one direction (as would the sevenfold formula construed simply as an increasingly complete description), it would only ever approximate its explanandum—it would get closer and closer to zero ambiguity or complete determination of it, but would nevertheless preserve the distinction between itself and its referent (just as the space between the line and the curve is preserved in the case of an asymptote).

But there is no factor excluding the inclusion of figures not directly entailed by the first seven, so there is an infinity of possible permutations (albeit, properly qualified ones; not just any qualified utterance will be admissible in the series).[94] Importantly, my analysis of *syāt* as a modal operator that *actualizes* in any given case of its *use* one of an infinite number of *possibly discoverable* perspectives does not exclude the possibility of discovering other perspectives (beyond those implicated in the first seven figures) from which novel properties may be meaningfully predicated of the object of knowledge under description. Just as with the seven viewpoints, the seven figures in the formula are basic rather than exhaustive. Here, one might raise the concern that the *sapta-bhaṅgī* embodies a trivalent logic, wherein the truth values of the syntactic elements in the first, second and fourth figures, along with the syntax of conjunction yield *only* seven logically possible combinations. This might lead one to think of the *sapta-bhaṅgī* as constituting a complete, definite set of figures, and, consequently, to reject the idea that the seven figures are basic rather than exhaustive. But consider just the seventh figure: *Syāt a* is F, not

[94] One might think that the explanatory power of any theory is its explanatory power, and worry that a theory of phenomenality modeled on the Jaina formula would be too permissive and lacking in explanatory power. I address this concern in the next chapter.

F, and inexpressible. We can provisionally track this figure's transmutations: to grasp that, in a sense, *a* is F, not F, and inexpressible, is, for example, to grasp that *a* is, in a sense, expressible (*as* F, not F, and inexpressible). It is also, in turn, to grasp that *a* is, in a sense, *not* expressible (as just F, or just not F, or just inexpressible). Here's where things get a bit convoluted—I know it is hard to follow—but I see value in staying the course: to grasp that *a* is, in a sense, *not* expressible in this sense is in turn to grasp that *a* is, in a sense, expressible (*as* F, not F, and inexpressible) *and* not expressible (as just F, or just not F, or just inexpressible). This means also that *a* is, in a sense, inexpressible (as either expressible in the relevant sense or inexpressible in the relevant sense), and so on. This is just one example of how a single figure in the formula can generate a figure that can generate others. It may seem as if we simply arrive back at previous figures: in this example, we arrive back at an utterance syntactically equivalent to "*a* is, in a sense inexpressible" twice over. These new utterances look like the original third figure in the formula. But the parameters/perspectives embedded into the *syāt*s of these iterations are subtly unique. The parameter/perspective embedded into the *syāt* of the original third figure, for example, delimits the aspect of *a* that is inexpressible "as either F or not F", not as "just F, just not F, or just inexpressible" or as "either expressible or inexpressible".

All this goes to say that we may think of the seven figures as basic along these lines: any given figure in the formula yields at least one novel figure, which is itself the first of another set of seven figures. Each of the epiphenomenal seven yields at least another figure, which in turn is the first of yet another set of seven figures, such that there are multiple sets of seven blooming from any set of seven, *ad infinitum*. These sets of seven should not be regarded as separate or discontinuous, since they spring from and engender one another, all with respect to one subject term. The example I've used here is not meant to illustrate the one and only way in which the

seventh figure could entail novel figures and sets thereof, nor is it meant to exemplify *the* general form that any emergent series would take. The way in which the figures in the formula produce new figures and sets of figures will depend on the specific parameters/perspectives and predicates involved. Before moving on, it may be helpful to call back the Jaina doctrine of the radical non-one-sidedness of reality (*anekānta-vāda*). The labyrinth of figures I have sketched may seem overwrought. But I think that the drastic profusion of viable determinations of the character of any given thing is precisely what the Jains, in a very level-headed spirit, seek to evince. And I think that embracing the drastic profusion of viable determinations of phenomenality constitutes coherently expressing what phenomenality is, in a sense, without expressing complete determinate knowledge of it.

If a series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances about phenomenality could be construed as having a possible or inevitable terminus, it would be construed as possibly definite, and thus possibly distinguishable from the referent of the subject term that's constant across the series. But the series is not possibly terminal, not possibly definite, and not (at least not because possibly terminal or definite) possibly *absolutely* distinguishable from what it theorizes. In other words, the imnonpossibility of absolutely distinguishing between the designator and designatum in a dynamic theory of phenomenality would be precluded my their mutual lack of definite form. And the *indeterminacy* of the distinction between the designator and the designatum—the formal isometry of the two—precludes the one from being about the other all things considered. In sum: a definite set of modal statements would function as a single determinative linguistic utterance and would be problematically intentional with respect to an ideal referent that cannot be externally

differentiated from any linguistic phenomenon (phenomenality; Brahman).[95] The series is indefinite—it does not constitute a definite set of modal statements—and it is not problematically intentional with respect to its ideal referent.

4.4.4 On Consecutivity and Alternation

Fourth, the figures are affirmed consecutively, or, in keeping with KCB's interpretation of the formula, alternatively. According to Balcerowicz (2017), the formula involves *consecutive* predication of seemingly contradictory properties of one and the same thing: "simultaneity should be interpreted as the case when statements predicate two incompatible sets of properties of a numerically one object from exactly the same reference point. Consecutivity automatically changes the point of reference and a contradiction is dissolved" (Balcerowicz 2017, 92). In other words, if two statements both involving sentential functors are affirmed at the same time, they are effectively affirmed from within the same perspective—the two perspectives embedded in the two modal functors would be subsumed under the one perspective that affirms both, and the distinction between the two perspectives would collapse. The contradictory properties involved would be predicated of one and the same thing from within the same reference point (perspective), and their contradictoriness would obtain. Only by affirming one modal statement, genuinely taking up with that perspective and that perspective alone at that time, and then subsequently affirming another modal statement in the same way, can affirmation of the two modal statements really amount to

[95] To my knowledge, there has been no explicit connection drawn between the concept of falsity (*mithyātva*) in Advaita Vedānta, and the Jaina theory of sevenfold modal description. However, there is an organic affinity between the two; in Advaita Vedānta, all things differentiated by name and form, including the concept of *nirguṇa Brahman*, are indeterminable as either absolutely real or unreal. All assertions regarding Brahman are indeterminable as either absolutely true or absolutely false. In the Jaina sevenfold formula, each figure can be said to have indeterminable semantic value, since each figure is true but just *in a sense*, or from a certain perspective. In the next two sections, I will introduce and offer an interpretive analysis of the Jaina sevenfold formula, and then show how it maps onto semantic alternation, and *vice versa*.

predicating properties of one thing from different perspectives. Only then can the properties involved be rendered non-contradictory. The efficacy of the sentential functor *syāt* as a context indicator (reference restrictor) depends on consecutivity.[96] Here, it should be helpful to note that KCB's interpretation of the figures is consistent with, although slightly different in emphasis from, the contemporary view that the series involves consecutive rather than simultaneous predication of seemingly opposite properties of one and the same thing (Balcerowicz 2017). For KCB, the statements in the sevenfold formula are *alternatively*, not simultaneously true.[97] KCB's general concept of alternation can enrich our conception of the dynamicity of indefinite modal description. The fact that figures in the formula are mutually entailing can be characterized in terms of the series *itself* alternating from one figure to another, back again, then to another, etc. But here the term 'alternation' should be dissociated from the notion of going back and forth in an inevitable, bounded loop, such as when we vacillate between the two equally unappealing options of a destructive dilemma. The fact that the figures in the series cannot be affirmed simultaneously should help us resist the urge to construct the series as something possibly definite or terminal. It is something that has to occur over time.

Furthermore, there is an important conceptual connection between the consecutivity of the figures (put otherwise, the fact that they are affirmed in alternation), the non-contradictoriness of the figures, and the indeterminacy of the series overall. The referent of a determinative linguistic utterance is *fixed* in concept by the predication of a property *which excludes the coherent predication of its opposite*. In being so fixed, the referent is given stronger conceptual

[96] Furthermore, the properties that appear contradictory are actually made different by consecutivity. For more on how apparently contradictory properties are actually different properties see Balcerowicz (2017).

[97] There is some controversy over whether KCB's interpretation of the Jaina sevenfold formula faithfully represents the Jaina teaching (Burch 1976, 30). Kalidas Bhattacharyya has defended KCB's interpretation, because he "cannot believe that the great Jain philosophers were teaching the trivial truism that there are different ways of looking at things", and because they knew that "incompatible features cannot be conjointly true" but must "alternate by not being exclusively true" (ibid., 31).

boundaries—boundaries which support the discernability of its difference from the relevant linguistic utterance. The series avoids giving determinate shape to the 'referent' of its subject term, in part, in virtue of *not* excluding the coherent predication of *an* opposite property (or definite set thereof). Therein, the series avoids introducing the possibility of us making an absolute distinction between the series and its referent. Both the series and its referent are indefinite (dynamic; unbounded; unfixed). In this sense, the two are indeterminable *as* either absolutely distinct or absolutely not distinct. The indeterminacy of the distinction between the series and its referent constitutes the series' *broadly* non-intentional structure. Noting this about the formula helps substantiate my thesis, i.e., semantic alteration modeled on the Jaina sevenfold formula is a broadly *nonintentional* way of expressing what phenomenality *is*.

4.5 Conclusion and Final Clarifications

I have proposed that a dynamic theory of phenomenality consisting in semantic alternation and modeled on the Jaina sevenfold formula is a broadly nonintentional, coherent way of expressing what phenomenality is—of evincing its radically paradoxical inexpressibility—without expressing complete determinate knowledge of it. The theory is an *indefinite*, that is, *boundary-lacking* and *internally dynamic* set of modal statements which begins with the *qualified* determination that its 'referent' is indefinite (i.e., inexpressible *via* any determinative linguistic utterance). 'Phenomenality' shows up as the subject term in all of the statements involved, but the referent of the term that is constant across all of the figures is left, in an important sense, indefinite. For, in the scope of the sevenfold formula, the referent of the subject term is posited variously, without commitment to "what the nature is of the reality underlying it" (Hiriyanna 2009, 164).

A few clarifications are in order: I understand that the theory I am talking about encompasses various intentional determinative linguistic utterances. Each figure in the series is

intentional, but the series *itself*, considered as a dynamic whole, does not pick out or track *an* intentional object, and does not have the fixedness of form a phenomenon must have to be *about* an object or state of affairs. Moreover, phenomenality as the 'referent' of the series moves back and forth between alternatively valid statements *by avoiding* exclusive capture by any one of them. Semantic alternation about phenomenality *is* literally the movement between seemingly contradictory, alternatively valid statements about non-dual consciousness. In this sense, a dynamic theory of phenomenality consisting in semantic alternation and modeled on the sevenfold formula *takes on the form of what it theorizes*. The very distinction between phenomenality—the referent of the series of modal statements—and the series of modal statements itself—the description *of* phenomenality—is *itself* indeterminable.

I am not suggesting that an internally dynamic, (yet still increasingly complete) description will, in the end, terminate in zero ambiguity about phenomenality.[98] This is precisely what I think any linguistic act attempting to express determinate knowledge of phenomenality cannot do. And yet, I think that a theory consisting in what I will henceforth call *indefinite modal description* (IMD) can theorize phenomenality holistically—i.e., express what it *is*, in a sense—without

[98] The series is increasingly complete, although indefinite, in the sense that it's persistence increasingly evinces the radically inexpressible inexpressibility of its nominal 'referent'.

absolutely *reifying* the ideal referent of the term.[99] Much remains to be said in the next chapter regarding the explanatory power of the theory, and its epistemic role and function. One might think that a theory consisting in indefinite modal description is too permissive and inclusive to be explanatory. One might think, moreover, that a theory which does not express determinate knowledge of its referent lacks epistemic significance. To address the first worry, I explain that although a dynamic theory of phenomenality consisting in indefinite modal description does not have normal explanatory power, it demonstrates the insufficiency of (would-be) metaphysical theories of phenomenality logically equivalent to deterministic linguistic utterances. To address the second worry, I engage resources in the Śaiva philosophical tradition to characterize the theory as embodying a distinctive variant of knowledge by acquaintance. This epistemological account will explore both how indefinite modal description of phenomenality complicates the standard distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance (Russel 1912), and how the *broad* non-intentionality of indefinite modal description is related to its epistemic role and function.

[99] My thesis regarding indefinite modal description is complicated by my use of different but closely related terms, i.e., indefinite, inexpressible, indeterminable, alternation, etc. To disambiguate my use of these terms, I really must appeal to the Jaina sevenfold formula. In the course of modeling the basic structure of this theory, I am alternating between different 'senses' of the term indefinite. There is a sense in which the term means 'not expressible with a single deterministic linguistic utterance'. This sense parameterizes the first figure. There is a sense in which it means 'indeterminable as either inexpressible or inexpressible as such'. This sense shows up in the fourth figure, but there it is signified with the term 'inexpressible'. In this sense, the terms indefinite, indeterminable and inexpressible mean the same thing, but from different perspectives. I have also used the term indefinite to describe the series itself. In this sense, the term indefinite signifies that which is unbounded and dynamic. I have characterized the internal dynamicity of the series in terms of alternation. There is thus a sense in which the term indefinite means alternation. Finally, the term alternation is connected with the term indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) because for something to be indeterminable is, in a sense, for it to be expressible alternatively (with the relevant qualifiers) as indefinite, definite, both, neither, etc. IDM consists in an unbounded series of modal statements about phenomenality. It is, in a sense, indefinite. It is indefinite in the sense that it *enacts* the structure of indeterminacy (*anirvacanīyātva*), which is *alternation* between the indefinite as indefinite and definite (in different senses). For the sake of quick reference, I will refer to the series as *indefinite*, and hope that my use of the term can remain differentiated the unqualified idea of that which cannot determined in the sense of figure 1.

CHAPTER 5. ENACTING INDEFINITE MODAL DESCRIPTION: ACQUAINTANCE AND AESTHETIC EMOTION

Dwelling in the midst of the sea of the supreme ambrosia…may I attend to all the common occupations of man, savoring the ineffable in everything (ŚSĀ XVIII.13)[100]

Introduction

Here, I incorporate resources from the Pratyabjijñā Śaiva tradition to argue that indefinite modal description of phenomenality embodies a species of knowledge by acquaintance with its nominal 'referent'. My intent is to communicate that although this alternative approach to theorizing phenomenality does not function to express determinate knowledge of its explanandum, it is epistemically rich.

I begin by noting how this complicates Russel's (1912) epistemological distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance (5.1). Then I summarize my plans for incorporating Pratyabhijñā (5.2). Following this summary, I examine how the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosopher Utpaladeva analyzes the primary essence of Śiva, which is said to be the dynamical consciousness (*caitanya*) which manifests all of cognizable reality (5.3). I draw a connection between phenomenality, which has already been analyzed in terms of the witness of Advaita Vedānta, and Śiva's primary essence. Along the way, I offer a comparative analysis of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā, explaining through the lens of Jaina non-absolutism why I consider the two non-contradictory resources. Then I analyze the Pratyabhijñā concept of 'attaining the state of Śiva'. On my view, attaining the state of Śiva cannot be apprehended by speech as beyond conventional linguistic activity; it has an indeterminable locus. Similarly, having knowledge by acquittance with the 'referent' of the term 'phenomenality' is not divorced from

[100] Translation in Torella (2013, XXXV).

enacting indefinite modal description of it. I then substantiate this account by appealing to how the Pratyabhijñā philosopher Abhinavgupta links attaining the state of Śiva with the expansiveness aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) (5.4).

5.1 Conceptual Preliminaries

I have argued that the semantic dilemma which consists in the paradoxical inexpressibility of phenomenality can be dissolved through an alternative mode of description (indefinite modal description; IMD). In this mode, we dynamically swing between *qualified* determinative linguistic utterances which variously reference and extend the concept of that luminous, animating in-dweller which permeates all finite things and profoundly resists linguistic capture, without seeking or coming to any single, final answer about what it is. One might see how a theory of phenomenality consisting in indefinite modal description would capture the virtue of expressing what phenomenality is, in a sense, while escaping the vice of problematically reifying it, and still wonder about the explanatory power of a theory that does not, *all things considered*, express determinate knowledge of its explanandum. If we grant that a theory's explanatory power is its discriminatory power—its power to separate truth from falsity with respect to its intentional object or explanandum—then the explanatory power of IMD of phenomenality is primarily its capacity to enervate the validity of any thesis which would explicitly or implicitly expresses *unqualified* determinate knowledge of phenomenality (or, in turn, phenomenal consciousness). IMD of phenomenality morphs indefinitely, but it is not so permissive that it allows for *anything* to be true

of its referent—only intelligibly qualified statements are admissible in the series.[101] Moreover, one might wonder about what knowledge, if any, the theory generates.

To grasp what is at stake in this phase of the dissertation, we may recall that I have been laboring in the spirit of the classical Sanskrit grammarians, who were concerned with how a bit of language imparts knowledge to the hearer. The question I think I must answer now is this: what is the epistemic function of unrestricted lexical undulation about phenomenality? I contend that in addition to expressing variously qualified determinate knowledge of that paradoxically inexpressible in-dwelling presence which animates all finite things, indefinite modal description

[101] For example, in indefinite modal description of phenomenality, we would find the figure "in a sense, phenomenality is not indefinite". I have suggested that this figure is parameterized by the substance parameter, the empirical viewpoint, and the second-order parameter of verbal designation. Considered with respect to its substantive or essential aspect, as a phenomenal particular of sorts (a specific object of knowledge), phenomenality is indefinite (this is figure 1 of indefinite modal description of phenomenality modeled on the Jaina sevenfold formal), i.e., inexpressible *via* any determinative linguistic utterance, and, *when referenced as such* (this is figure 2 of the dynamic description of phenomenality modeled on the sevenfold formula), *not* indefinite. In indefinite modal description of phenomenality, we would *not* find the *unqualified* utterance "phenomenality is inexpressible" as a figure in the series, nor would we find the utterance "in a sense, phenomenality is *not* inexpressible" if the perspective embedded into the sentential functor *syāt* qualifying it were instead to make salient phenomenality's *inexpressible* aspect. In other words, the figures in the series must be qualified, and the parameters embedded into the *syāt*s qualifying the figures must correspond to the properties actually applicable in virtue of their inclusion. This is why I want to say that IMD does not allow for *anything* to be true of its referent. At the same time, there is no limit on its number of permutations, and this is not a problem for the theory. IMD simply is not explanatory in the normal sense. It is not supposed to give us the sort of determinate knowledge which could constitute a precise explanation of what phenomenality is, or help us explain in absolute, non-modal terms how it relates to the entities we call the brain, the body, and the world (of changeable, finite 'physical' things), etc. *But this is just the point*. The infinite modal characterizability of phenomenality is, *in a sense*, what the theory is intended to evince. *That* phenomenality is so characterizable is an important bit of information. However, and this is crucial, IMD cannot be reduced to the unqualified determinative linguistic utterance that phenomenality is infinitely characterizable in the relevant sense. I am not suggesting that we could use the propositional knowledge that phenomenality is infinitely characterizable as a premise in any specific or broadly theoretical argument that would yield zero ambiguity about its intentional object/explanandum. I am suggesting that we can keep our incapacity to linguistically *capture* phenomenality in mind as we attempt to express determinate knowledge in general. The 'point' I am talking about here—the *meaning* of indefinite modal description; the *knowledge* it gives us—really cannot be expressed in full at a single moment in time. It dwells in the actual, extended, unfettered activity of oscillating between non-contradictory logical alternatives. Recall that I follow Balcerowicz in thinking that consecutiveness dissolves contradictoriness (Balcerowicz 2017): the fact that the figures in the series are confirmed consecutively—one after the other and—accounts for the perspective-shifting that occurs from one figure to the next. Two seemingly contradictory properties, e.g., *indefinite* and *not-indefinite*, can be applied to the referent of the term phenomenality without contradiction, but one after the other, from/in different perspectives.

of phenomenality *constitutes* an indetermin*able* (*anirvacanīya*) species of knowledge by acquaintance with the nominal 'referent' of the term.[102]

5.1.1 Knowledge by Description vs. Knowledge by Acquaintance

It should be helpful here to foreground Russel's (1912) epistemological distinction between *knowledge by description* and *knowledge by acquaintance* to contextualize my account of the knowledge expressed by IMD. Knowledge by description is supposed to be mediated by concepts, which are paradigmatically represented by singular referring terms (e.g., 'justice') or indefinite or definite descriptions (e.g., '*a* cow' or '*the* cow'). I, for example, know of *the* Sistine Chapel. I also know *that* it is a chapel in the Apostolic Palace of Vatican City, featuring a ceiling fresco painted by the Italian renaissance artist Michelangelo. Knowledge by acquaintance, on the other hand, is characterized as direct, nonconceptual awareness wherein an object is immediately presented to a subject (Russel 1912). Acquaintance, on this view, is nonconceptual and non-propositional but still intentional. Think of standing in the Sistine Chapel, not knowing *that* it is *a* chapel, or *the* Sistine Chapel in Vatican City, for that matter, but simply being presented with the intricate details of the space around you. On at least the traditional Russellian notion of acquaintance, you would have nonconceptual non-propositional knowledge *of* that bit of reality called 'the Sistine Chapel'.[103]

The general concept of acquaintance is also deployed in discussions of non-dual consciousness (e.g., Advaita Vedānta).[104] But here, the term 'acquaintance' refers not to the

[102] I put the term referent in quotes here, because in a very important sense IMD does not have *a* referent. The referent of IMD is actually embedded within the activity itself and is indistinguishable from it.
[103] This is a point of controversy in dialogue about acquaintance. It is arguable that there are all kinds of concepts at work in furnishing one with acquaintance, especially regarding aesthetically complex objects.
[104] See Deutsch (1973).

immediate presentation of an object *to a subject* as in direct perception, but to release (*Mokṣa*) from the mode of conscious being wherein *an* object is presented to a subject (e.g., *Brahma-jñāna*). In this context, the notion of being acquainted with something is more akin to simply *being* that 'thing'. Think of how one is acquainted with one's own body. One *knows*, in a sense, one's body, simply by feelingly inhabiting it from the inside out. The *advaita* (nondual/nonintentional) type of knowledge by acquaintance is 'direct' in this sense: it involves inhabitation or embodiment.[105] In a way, *advaita* acquaintance is like Russellian acquaintance. *Brahma-jñāna*, for example, which is just *being Brahman*, cannot be *the* intentional object of *a* concept or proposition (or a fixed set thereof). In this sense, it is nonconceptual and non-propositional. On the other hand, Brahman is profoundly resistant to conceptual and linguistic capture. This is why *Brahma-jñāna*—the 'knowledge' that is supposed to sublate the phenomenal world—is commonly thought to be an *ineffable* state of awareness. So, in a sense, *Advaita* acquaintance (*Brahma-jñana*) is also opposed to knowledge by description. But I have argued that the judgement that *Brahman-jñāna* (*Brahman*) is ineffable is yet another reification of what it is like to be released from dualistic apprehension—a conceptual-linguistic capture *of* release from dualistic apprehension, which *in itself* is not release from dualistic apprehension. *Advaita* acquaintance cannot be determined as *absolutely* nonintentional, nonjudgmental or non-propositional or as *absolutely* opposed to knowledge by description. For this reason, I prefer to think of *advaita* acquaintance as *indeterminable* (*anirvacanīya*).

[105] Russellian acquaintance is direct knowledge, as in what is known is directly presented to the knower. Advaita acquaintance is direct knowledge, as in the absolute duality of the knower and the known is not presented. Here I am using the term *advaita* as a technical term, not as a label for a school of thought. Recall that the term '*advaita*' literally means 'non-dual'. Advaita *Vedānta* is non-dualist Vedānta. Śaiva *advaita*, for example, would be a name for non-dualist Śaivism.

5.1.2 How Indefinite Modal Description Complicates the Standard Epistemological Distinction

Indefinite modal description (IMD) of phenomenality complicates the distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance on both the Russellian and *advaita* conceptions of the latter. IMD of phenomenality is, in a sense, knowledge of phenomenality by description. In and through dynamic and unbounded semantic alternation, we demonstrate phenomenality's paradoxical inexpressibility, and with each qualified determinative linguistic we express determinate knowledge of an aspect of phenomenality.[106] In saying "in a sense, phenomenality is indefinite", "in a sense, phenomenality is not indefinite", "in a sense, phenomenality is indefinite and not indefinite", and so on, we demonstrate that the 'referent' of the term phenomenality is multiply characterizable, and we also express that it is indefinite in the sense of being inexpressible via any determinative linguistic utterance. IMD of phenomenality is also, in a sense, the direct presentation of the living, ungraspable form of phenomenality to the speaker, and to any witnesses of the linguistic activity of moving between logical alternatives regarding phenomenality's inexpressibility. The dynamicity and paradoxical inexpressibility of the 'referent' of IMD of phenomenality is made apparent *as* the process of alternation unfolds. Finally, *when enacted*, IMD of phenomenality *is* extended release from dualistic apprehension (*advaita* acquaintance). Yes, indefinite modal description *encompasses* dualistic apprehension (each figure in the series has an intentional structure and expresses qualified determinative knowledge). But overall, the referent of the series is never presented as *a* determinate intentional object by the linguistic activity of moving between alternatively valid expressions of determinate knowledge. This is because IMD of phenomenality is dynamic and unbounded, and thus incapable

[106] We should keep in mind that the perspectives embedded in the various modal statements aren't all perspectives which reveal an aspect of the referent *considered in itself*. Some perspectives make salient the referent insofar as it is referenced/referenceable.

of having or producing a fixed intentional object, *and* because IMD of phenomenality and its referent are formally isometric (indistinguishable; indeterminable *as distinct* from one another).

The formal isometry of phenomenality and IMD of phenomenality is the basic, mechanical explanation of how dynamic, unbounded semantic alternation embodies a *sort* of *advaita* (non-dual; nonintentional; indetermin*able*) acquaintance.[107] The 'two'—the series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances and the 'referent' of the subject term which remains across the series—are indistinguishable in terms of their formal structure, and the indiscernibility of the difference between the two precludes the one from being *about* the other all things considered (as much as we can given that neither are static) and recognize their mutual indeterminacy. But it remains for me to explain exactly how this indeterminacy amounts to *knowledge* by acquaintance. On one level, the answer is fairly simple: IMD of phenomenality is extended linguistic apprehension. By 'extended' I mean ongoing, and unfixed. Phenomenality is known by being referenced and extended in concept, at each point as the series permutates. Overall, this knowing is indistinguishable from *what is known* through it. IMD of phenomenality is, in this straightforward sense, a way of knowing wherein no definite distinction between the subject/means and object of knowledge obtains. As I see things, IMD of phenomenality complicates the distinction between knowledge by description and knowledge by acquaintance on both the Russellian and *advaita* conceptions of the latter. IMD of phenomenality is, *in a sense*, a way of knowing by description, *in a sense*, the direct presentation of its referent to the speaker (Russellian acquaintance), and, *in a sense*, extended release from the mode of dualistic apprehension

[107] 'Advaita' acquaintance (e.g., *Brahma-jñāna*) is often mischaracterized as *determinatively* nondual or nonintentional. I have called it *advaita* acquaintance to distinguish it from Russellian acquaintance, but going forward, I will call it *indeterminate* acquaintance to ward off the idea that it is determinately nondual or nonintentional. Still, what I'm talking about is a sort of release from normal dualistic apprehension, and it is *broadly* nonintentional. IMD is broadly rather than narrowly nonintentional in the sense that the distinction between IMD and its referent is apparent, but non-absolute (indeterminable).

characterized by stark subject/object duality (*advaita* acquaintance). My task in this chapter will be to show that although IMD of phenomenality does not express determinate knowledge of its referent and does not have normal explanatory power, it is meaningful and epistemically rich; my task will be to elaborate on and substantiate the thesis that in addition to expressing variously qualified determinate knowledge of that paradoxically inexpressible in-dwelling presence which animates all finite things, indefinite modal description of phenomenality *constitutes* an indetermin*able* (*anirvacanīya*) species of knowledge by acquaintance with the nominal 'referent' of the term.

5.2 Summary of Engagement with Pratyabhijñā Śaiva Resources

To achieve this, I will engage conceptual resources in the Śaiva philosophical tradition.[108] The metaphysical landscape of philosophical Śaivism is vast, and diverse.[109] I will deal with the "monistic" Śaivism of Kashmir (Pandey 1954, I)—the vein of Śaivism which holds that Śiva *is* all things, and defines Śiva as consciousness (*caitanya*). More specifically, I will focus on the school of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*), which is known for systematizing Śaiva monism and typically labelled a non-dualist school of thought.[110] The main section of the chapter will contain two parts.

[108] The Śaiva philosophical tradition is an outgrowth of religious Śaivism—a living faith in Indus valley civilizations, animated by worship of the masculine God Śiva and his feminine counterpart Śakti (Pandey 1954, I). Although Śiva is mentioned variously in the Ṛgveda, philosophical Śaivism developed independently of the orthodox (*āstika*) tradition of commenting on and referencing the authority of the Vedas (Pandey 1954, V). This is not to say that Śaivism is heterodox (*nāstika*) or entirely unrelated to the *āstika* system—Śaiva philosophers do not reject or condemn Upaniṣadic doctrines, and they do interact variously with orthodox Hindu schools of thought (Ibid).

[109] It encompasses multiple variants of dualism, non-dualism and monism.

[110] Pratyabhijñā is a school of thought in the Śaiva philosophical tradition. In monistic Śaivism, the whole of reality—the entire universe—is affirmed as a manifestation of Śiva. Utpaladeva and Abhinavgupta are the primary exponents of Pratyabhijña. The school begins with Somānanda's *Śivadṛṣṭi*, takes its name from Utpaladeva's *Stanzas on the Recognition of God* (*Īśvarapratyabhijñakārikā*; IPK), and finds further expression in Abhinavagupta's commentary on the IPK (*Iśvarapratyabhijnāvimarśinī;* IPV) (Torella 2013). I will deal mostly with Utpaladeva's IPK, since it is a relatively succinct and foundational expression of the Pratyabhijña systematization of Śaiva monism.

In the first part, I draw a connection between, on the one hand, the concept of phenomenality I have been working with, which I have already analyzed in terms of the witness (*sāksin*) of Advaita Vedānta, and, on the other hand, the Pratyabhijña Śaiva concept of the "primary essence" (*mukhya ātma*) of Śiva, i.e., consciousness (*caitanya*), which is inseparably linked with the concepts of light (*prakaśa*), reflective awareness (*vimarśa*), and supreme word (*pāra-vāc*) (IPK I 5, 10). To do this, I will offer an interpretive analysis of how the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosopher Utpaladeva describes Śiva's primary essence, and, along the way, address how his concept of Śiva's primary essence differs from Śaṅkara's concept of the witness (*sāksin*). To put the point plainly, I see Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā as *differentially parameterized* views of that paradoxically inexpressible presence which invariantly attends and pervades all denizens of the phenomenal world of diversity. By 'differentially parameterized', I mean, in keeping with the spirit of Jaina non-absolutism, 'indexed by different parameters which constrain the scope of their meaningfulness and reference such that they predicate seemingly contradictory properties of the same explanandum without actually or absolutely contradicting one another'. I will elaborate on this comparative analysis of the two schools of thought in drawing a connection between phenomenality and Śiva's primary essence. Broadly speaking, Utpaladeva holds that the luminosity which permeates all finite subjects and objects is rapidly quivering, like the nascent thrum of a thought that one feels but can't *quite* put into words.[111] The integrally vibrational and amorphously linguistic aspect of the omnipresent animating presence called Śiva accounts for the fact that the manifestation of this presence is always phenomenologically poignant, rather than "limpid" (IPK I 5.10). This poignancy (reflective awareness; supreme word) is said to "possess" action (*kriyā*) and knowledge (*jñāna*) (IPK I 1.2). Knowledge and action are not separate from the

[111] We should think of this luminosity as no different from phenomenality and *saguṇa Brahman* in Advaita Vedānta.

primary essence (*mukhya ātma*) of Śiva; the affectively charged reverberation which constitutes the phenomenalness of all finite things *is* a kind of activity, and a kind of knowledge. It is not the kind of activity wherein an agent performs an action, nor the kind of knowledge wherein an object is known by a subject; it is something like the sensuous obviousness of phenomenalness itself. Used in this context, the term 'knowledge' (*jñāna*) denotes the self-established (*svataḥ siddham*) nature of reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśaḥ*; *vimarśa*) (ĪPK I 1.3; I 5.11; Torella 2013, 87; 118).[112] It denotes the basal, independently salient quivering which has the capacity to *manifest as differentiated* (*apohana-śakti*) in determinate cognition (IPK I 6.11; I 3.6) and transform into the entire realm of cognizable objects. This, on my view, is one way of characterizing that presence which invariantly attends all subjective and objective phenomena (phenomenality).

In the second part, having connected phenomenality and Śiva's primary essence, I lean on the connection in arguing that we can understand indefinite modal description of phenomenality on analogy with attaining the state Śiva, and therefore as embodying an *indeterminable* species of knowledge by acquaintance by its 'referent'. To make this argument go through, I offer an interpretive analysis of what it means, considering the Pratyabhijñā description Śiva's *mukhya ātma*, to attain the state of Śiva. In general terms, attaining the state of Śiva is something like reaching profound ontological intimacy with Śiva, literally becoming Śiva, being uninterruptedly absorbed in Śiva's nature, or merging with the vibrating, self-established (nondual) form of action-knowledge which is inseparably linked with Śiva's primary essence (*mukhya ātma*). But, on my view, the state of Śiva (much like *Brahma-jñāna* in Advaita Vedānta) should not be characterized

[112] Torella (2013) uses the term 'reflective awareness' for *vimarśa*. I follow Prueitt (2016) in finding difficulty with this English translation, because 'reflective awareness' implies the duality of an object and its reflection, whereas, in Pratyabhijñā, *vimarśa* is supposed to have both dual and nondual forms. Prueitt uses the term 'realization'. But since I am working with Torella's translation, I include his wording here, and integrate alternatives in analyzing the concept of *vimarśa* later on.

as an ineffable state of awareness beyond everyday, empirical determinative linguistic activity.[113] In my analysis of *Brahma-jñāna*, I focused on the concept of Brahman without qualities (*nirguṇa Brahman*), and how it indicates that *Brahma-jñāna* (which is just being Brahman) is paradoxically resistant to linguistic capture, i.e., inexpressible even *as such*. In my analysis of the state of Śiva, I focus more on the fact that the Pratyabhijñā philosophers emphasize the thoroughgoing immanence of Śiva's primary essence (*mukhya ātma*), and characterize Śiva as freedom (*svātantrya*) itself. This freedom *is* Śiva's power of differentiation or exclusion (*apohana-śakti*), whereby all of differentiated cognizable reality—the entire realm of mutually opposed subjects and objects (which are called 'mental constructs', or *vikalpa*s)—is manifested. Attaining the state of Śiva means attaining *this freedom*, which encompasses both the freedom to manifest as differentiated and the freedom from being apprehended in concept or by speech. The most important point here—my overarching thesis—is that direct, unmediated acquaintance with Śiva should not be considered divorced from the process of successively grasping and failing to absolutely grasp its essence. Similarly, I propose that understood on close analogy with attaining the state of Śiva, unmediated knowledge by acquaintance with the referent of the term phenomenality should not be considered divorced from carrying out indefinite modal description of it.

In the secondary section, I substantiate this interpretive account of attaining the state of Śiva as having no determinable locus (and therefore as being indeterminable *as* absolutely beyond determinative linguistic activity) by analyzing its consistency with how the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosopher Abhinavagupta explicates the classical Indian concept of *rasa*. The word *rasa* can be translated as "aesthetic emotion", "flavor" (Coomaraswamy 1918, 30), or "taste" (Pollock 2016,

[113] This is much like the Advaitic concept of Brahman-knowledge (*Brahma-jñāna*). I will comparatively analyze the two schools of thought in the course of my interpretive analysis of Pratyabhijñā.

4).[114] Abhinavgupta is a key figure in the school of recognition (i.e., Pratyabhijñā)—his commentary (*vimarśinī*) on Utpaladeva's *Īśvarapratyabhijñakārikā* (ĪPK), the *Iśvarapratyabhijnāvimarśinī* (ĪPV), is a core text in the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva canon. In explicating the Pratyabhijñā view of Śiva's primary essence and powers, along with the correlated notion of attaining the state of Śiva, I focus on Utpaladeva's ĪPK rather than Abhinavgupta's commentary; the former is a comprehensive and succinct treatise, whereas the latter is a denser, less approachable text.[115] But Abhinavgutpa's account of *rasa*, which he articulates most directly in another text, the *Abhinavabharati*, is more accessible, and, very important for my project. Although one could distinguish between the metaphysical stance elaborated on by Abhinavgupta in his *vimarśinī* and the theory of aesthetic experience articulated in his *Abhinavabharati,* the two are not thematically disjoined, especially not at the ultimate level of analysis.

My thesis, that attaining the state of Śiva should be understood as having an indeterminable locus, is consistent with Abhinavgupta's theory of *rasa*, in that he inseparably links *rasa* with Śiva's primary essence, and at the same time characterizes it as being neither in the subject nor the object of aesthetic experience.[116] Abhinavgupta is known for synthesizing a historical dialectic concerning the locus of *rasa.*[117] For him, *rasa* is the effusive resonance—the feeling, to put the

[114] Pollock (2016) contends that 'taste' is the most direct translation.
[115] Engaging Abhinava's ĪPV in a piecemeal way is certainly not ideal, and comprehensive engagement with the text exceeds the scope of the dissertation.
[116] In Pratyabhijñā, the primary essence of Śiva—thrumming, independently salient, affectively poignant, primordially linguistic activity/knowledge—is equated with "savouring" (*camatkāra*) (IPK IV 4.6; Torella 2013, 212). Savoring just is the primary essence of Śiva. And, for Abhinavagupta, this *savouring* is inseparably linked with aesthetic emotion (*rasa*).
[117] The history of Indian aesthetics is organized around an extended dialectic concerning the locus of *rasa*. Literary and dramaturgical works of art were analyzed as having the capacity to transform everyday, personally-indexed emotions (e.g., *my* fear of spiders, which arose in the first place from *my* startling encounter with a venomous black widow in *my* parents' backyard) into generalized aesthetic emotions (e.g., the terrible *rasa*). Traditionally, the *rasa* (*taste* or felt *meaning*) of a theatrical performance was thought to be a formal property of the performance, manifested in/by the performance itself due to its constituent elements. Over time, philosophers (e.g., Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka) took issue with strictly formal accounts of *rasa* and emphasized that *rasa* is at least significantly located in the subject of aesthetic experience *as a response*. The Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosopher Abhinavagupta incorporates a good deal of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's view in his synthesis of these two approaches.

point plainly— which is generalized or "commonized" *across* the objective *and* subjective prongs of aesthetic experience.[118]

Consider, for example, the aesthetic quality of a performance of Shakespeare's Othello. The gut-wrenching tone of the play is, in a sense, a function of how the drama unfolds, i.e., it is a formal property of the play itself. When performed, the play Othello manifests the basic, everyday emotion (*bhava*) of disgust through a plot that is distanced from the actual lived experiences of members of its audience. Upon having been consumed by irrational jealousy, Othello kills his wife Desdemona and then kills himself. The aesthetic quality of this plot is *commonized* in the sense that it is causally explained by elements of a play, not by any one person's experience. At the same time, the odious (*bībhatsa*) sentiment engendered by the play is the audience's *response* to the drama's unfolding; this response is *commonized* on the subjective side of the aesthetic experience in the sense that in tasting the odiousness of the plot, audience members do not exactly experience their *own* negative emotions. Of course, their personal backgrounds are causally relevant to their aesthetic experience, but the feeling that overcomes them in watching Othello murder his wife for no good reason is not *personal* in an important sense. Because *aesthetic* emotion (as opposed to basic, everyday, personal emotion) is commonized across the objective and subjective prongs of aesthetic experience, it is, on Abhinavgupta's view, nothing other than the *all-pervasiveness* of Śiva's primary essence, which constitutes Śiva's freedom. Put otherwise, *rasa* is indiscernible from Śiva's freedom (*svātantrya*). *Rasa*, like Śiva, is unconstrained by any *absolute* subject/object duality. Attaining the state of Śiva, or becoming Śiva's freedom, is thus characterizable both in terms of merging with nondual/nonintentional knowledge and in terms of the commonized expansiveness of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*).

[118] Pollock (2016).

My aim in this chapter is to draw a connection between phenomenality, which I have already analyzed in terms of the concept of the witness (*sāskin*) in Advaita Vedānta, and the primary essence of Śiva. Making this connection allows me to argue that, understood on analogy with *attaining* the state of Śiva, enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality is characterizable both in terms of knowing the 'referent' of the term by acquaintance and in terms of *tasting* or *savoring* its actual, radically indeterminate form.

5.3 Specific Incorporation of Pratyabhijñā Concepts

Here I begin to flesh out my view that indefinite modal description constitutes an indeterminable species of knowledge by drawing a connection between the concept of phenomenality, which I have analyzed in terms of the witness of Advaita Vedānta, and the Pratyabhijñā concept of Śiva's primary essence. One might think here that I have yet to show how a description can give acquaintance knowledge. This is what I intend to show *through* engaging the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva view. First I will explicate the Pratyabhjiñā account of the primary essence of Śiva. Then I will interpretively analyze the stated goal of the path of recognition, i.e., absorption in Śiva's nature (ĪPK IV 16; Torella 2013, 218).

5.3.1 A Breif Comparative Analysis of Pratyabhijñā and Advaita Vedānta

But first, a few clarificatory comments are in order. From my cursory introduction to Pratyabhijñā, it should be clear that it bears resemblance to Advaita Vedānta. Śaṇkara's *advaita-vāda* plays a principle role in this dissertation, so I think I ought to specify how I understand the two schools of thought in relation to one another. Here I offer a brief comparative analysis of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhjiñā in light of my interpretation of Śaṇkara's *advaita-vāda*, while acknowledging

that I have yet to fully explicate Pratyabhijñā. This comparison should provide the context needed for appreciating how my attention on Pratyabhijñā going forward coheres with my efforts across the dissertation.

Much like Advaita Vedānta, Pratyabhijñā is more a method for attaining freedom from the suffering of existential ignorance rather than a view which expresses an absolutist metaphysical thesis regarding consciousness or reality.[119] Although the soteriological intent and depth of Pratyabhijñā is obvious—Utpaladeva, for example, clearly states that his text lays forth a *path* towards an act of recognition in virtue of which the state of Śiva, i.e., living liberation, is attained (ĪPK IV 16)—it is easy to think of Pratyabhijñā as being starkly different from (because more world-affirming than) Advaita Vedānta in terms of its metaphysical commitments. This is because the path to recognition involves appreciating that the entire plane of conventional reality is a manifestation of Śiva's being. But to think that Pratyabhijñā and Advaita Vedānta are diametrically opposed would be a mistake, since the major exponents of *both* schools of thought emphasize that "ultimate non-dual consciousness" (Prueitt 2016, 1), i.e., *Brahman* and *Śiva* respectively, resists conceptual and linguistic capture. A difference between the two schools of thought at the *absolute* (*pāramārthika*) level of analysis simply cannot be asserted.

We would not want to *erase* the differences between Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā. We would do violence to both, since they are each robust, internally nuanced, highly systematic schools of thought. This is where the Jaina brand of perspectivalism I have reconstructed in this dissertation can provide assistance: it can work as an analytical framework for making sense of the indeterminacy of two views at the ultimate level, without grievously expunging their diversity. As I see things, Advaita Vedānta and Śaiva *advaita*, i.e., Pratyabhijñā, are best understood as two

[119] Utpaladeva explicitly says that his stanzas are intended to trigger the state of recognition (*pratyabhijñā*), which in turn causes entering into the nature of Śiva.

seemingly contradictory but differentially indexed (i.e., indexed by different parameters/viewpoints), mutually valid, and potentially collaborative views on *how best to talk about* all-pervasive 'consciousness' (*caitanya*) in order to trigger release from the typical (*niasargika*) afflicted dualistic mode of conscious being. This means that we may understand the two as being indexed by different *semantic perspectives*.[120]

But they are similar in an important respect, which is that they both offer up the soteriologiccal ideal of limited subjects gradually shedding the layers which keep them ensconced in primal nescience (*avidyā*) and eventually attaining intimacy with ultimate non-dual consciousness. In Advaita Vedānta, this is called Brahman-knowledge (*Brahma-jñāna*); *Brahma-jñāna* is equated with *becoming* Brahman. In Pratyabhijñā it is called attaining the state of Śiva, or entering the nature of Śiva. And Śiva's nature is analyzed as a sort of knowledge (*jñāna*).[121] In both camps, the idea is that the individual subject of experience (you, me, etc.) somehow merges with that luminosity which, *on at least one level of analysis*, is characterizable as manifesting the entire world.[122] And, in both camps, the idea is that to merge with this luminosity is basically to incarnate nondual knowledge.[123] Śaṇkara recognizes that Brahman transmutes into all finite things (*saguṇa Brahman*) but maintains that Brahman without qualities (*nirguṇa Brahman)* is the concept of Brahman most relevant to attaining release. Pratyabhijñā philosophers, on the other hand, emphasize the world-manifesting power of Śiva until the end: the 'act' of recognition which

[120] My position is basically that the semantic perspectives embedded in Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijña are jointly helpful, and collaborative. Further, I feel that both are inadequate in themselves as ways of knowing what they purport to indicate. At the exoteric, articulate (*vaikhāri*) level, both Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijña are logically equivalent to determinative linguistic utterances which function to reify Brahman or Śiva, either as transcendent of the realm of name and form, as immanent in it, or as both. But both theories, I think, are *intended* to be about that which cannot be reified. Following some heavy-handed conceptual/semantic analysis, they can be made salient as such. But the work required to make either independently sufficient suggests that they may function best together.

[121] The 'knowledge' (*jñāna*) that constitutes Śiva's nature is *nondual* in the sense that it is self-evident: it is not revealed by some other source nor known by some subject of knowledge.

[122] In Advaita Vedānta, this is Brahman with qualities, or *Iśvara*. In Pratyabhijñā, this is just Śiva.

[123] Knowledge by acquaintance, where acquaintance means embodiment.

triggers entering Śiva's nature is linguistically represented by an identity statement: the limited self *is* Śiva (light; reflective awareness; supreme word). The recognition of the identity of the limited self and Śiva is grounded in the awareness of Śiva's thoroughgoing immanence.

Nevertheless, it is tempting to think of the state of Śiva as an ineffable state of nondual knowledge which transcends the conventional realm of name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*). Utpaladeva, much like Śaṇkara, maintains that Śiva, although self-evident, does not "enter the sphere of full and definite knowledge" (ĪPKV I 1.3). But much like Brahman, Śiva is "unobjectifiable", and therefore not absolutely opposed to knowledge by description (Torella 2013, 86). On my view, entering the nature of Śiva should not be construed as a transcendent, ineffable state of awareness divorced from everyday, empirical determinative activity. In arguing for this general stance with respect to Advaita Vedānta, my focus was on the concept of Brahman without qualities, and on how this concept indicates Brahman's *paradoxical* inexpressibility.[124] With respect to Pratyabhijñā, my argument will be a bit more straightforward, but parallel in terms of its overall spirit: the non-transcendence of entering the nature of Śiva is directly inferable from how Pratyabhijñā philosophers repeatedly, obviously emphasize Śiva's immanence and freedom when describing Śiva's primary essence as light, reflective awareness, supreme word, etc. There is substantial, overwhelming evidence within Pratyabjijñā to suggest that entering the nature of Śiva cannot possibly be *fixed* in concept or by speech, not ever, and *certainly* not as a state *beyond* the power of differentiation (*apohana-śakti*) manifested at the empirical (*vyāvakārika*) level. We have reason to think that entering the nature of Śiva may be indistinguishable from Śiva's power of differentiation *as it is manifested in us*, i.e., as it shows up in *our* activity of expressing determinate knowledge. This is the line of thinking I will advance in the remainder of this chapter.

[124] I.e., we cannot express determinate knowledge of *Brahman*/*Brahma-jñāna*, not even as inexpressible/ineffable.

5.3.2 On the Primary Essence of Śiva:

Here, I reconstruct the Pratyabhijñā account of Śiva's primary essence (*mukhya ātma*). In his *Stanzas on the Recognition of the Lord* (ĪPK), Utpaladeva characterizes Śiva as having the primary essence of consciousness (*caityanya*), which he inseparably links with the concepts of light (*prakaśa*), reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) and supreme word (*pāra-vāc*) (ĪPK I 5.10-17). He says, additionally, that Śiva has the "powers" of knowledge (*jñana*) and action (*kriyā*) (ĪPKV I 1.3; Torella 2013, 87). The Pratyabhijñā concept of *prakaśa* is quite similar to the Advaitic concept of the witness (*sāksin*). *Prakaśa* is that luminosity which invariantly attends and pervades all things differentiated by name (*nāma*) and form (*rūpa*). The concept of reflective awareness is a bit more challenging to explain, in part because a perfect, uncontroversial translation of the Sanskrit term for this concept is hard to find. The term *vimarśa* has been translated as 'reflective awareness' (Torella 2013) 'grasp' (Ratié 2010) and 'realization' (Prueitt 2016).[125] The term 'reflective awareness' may bring to mind the duality of an object and its reflection, or the duality of a subject taking itself as an object, as in introspection. But I follow Catherine Prueitt in finding difficulty with translations of *vimarśa* which only capture its dualistic aspect, for "reflective awareness has both dualistic and non-dual forms" (Prueitt 2016, 72). The dualistic form of reflective awareness, which spontaneously erupts *within* permeating nondual "realization", is determinative knowledge (ĪPKV I 3.5; Prueitt 2016). The nondual form of *vimarśa* is something like the self-luminosity inherent to light itself. And the concept of supreme word (*pāra-vāc*) corresponds to the linguistic nature of consciousness understood in terms of light and reflective awareness. Consciousness, understood as such, is linguistic in the sense of possessing the power to manifest in/as conventional language and linguistically mediated dualistic apprehension.

[125] The Sanksrit term for this concept is *vimarśa,* or *pratyavamarśa*.

The fact that various terms are used to characterize Śiva's primary essence (and powers) poses a bit of an interpretive difficulty. On my view, it is best to think of these terms as variously extending the concept of Śiva, by highlighting overlapping and, ultimately, indistinguishable aspects of an explanandum that, like Brahman in Advaita Vedānta, is profoundly recalcitrant to conceptual and linguistic capture. In Pratyabhijñā, consciousness (*caitanya*) isn't anything other than the luminosity of all things (their phenomenalness; what I have been calling phenomenality). This luminosity, or light of consciousness (*prakaśa*) isn't anything other than the basic, quivering sentience which enables and saturates subject/object duality (reflective awareness; *vimarśa*). And this reflective awareness isn't anything other than the nascently meaningful hum of awareness which gives rise to conventional language and linguistically mediated dualistic apprehension (supreme word; *pāra-vāc*). The explanandum characterized by all these terms (consciousness, light, reflective awareness, supreme word) is also said to possess the "powers" of knowledge and action (Torella 2013, 87). In short, interpreting the Pratyabhijñā view is complicated by the swarm of concepts used to express knowledge of Śiva's primary essence. But through analyzing the concepts represented by these terms in succession, we can tease out a nuanced, layered picture of the primary essence of Śiva. I will start by analyzing the concept represented by the term 'light' (*prakaśa*).

5.3.2.1 Light (*prakaśa*)

Understood in terms of *prakaśa*, the referent of the term Śiva is basically just what I have been calling phenomenality. *Prakaśa* is that presence which illuminates or accounts for the luminosity (phenomenal*ness*) of any given subjective or objective phenomenon. It is that in virtue of which

all objects, including the individual, limited subject, are manifest at all.[126] Utpaladeva reveals that his use of the term *prakaśa* is on a par with my use of the term phenomenality when he states that *prakaśa* constitutes the very essence of objects that are manifest as external (ĪPK I 4.7; 5.2) and when he states that no object outside light is ever manifested (ĪPK I 5.8-9). These claims may seem to express a variant of subjective idealism or anti-realism about external objects. But Śiva, understood as light (*prakaśa*), is not subjective in the relevant sense. *Prakaśa* is neither attached to *a* specific point of view, nor outside the realm of objective facts (Nagel 1974). Of course, it *is* standard in Pratyabhijñā scholarship to refer to Śiva as the 'true' subject, or the subject *par excellance* (Torella 2013, 86).[127] But I find difficulty with such use of the term—it is tough (and, in the nagging vein of my linguistic intervention on the metaphysics of consciousness, potentially *misleading*) to use the term 'subject' without inadvertently implicating the conceptual schema provided by the paradigm distinction between the subject and object of a cognition. Outside the schema provided by this distinction, it is unclear what the term 'subject' means. In any case, the idea that Śiva is self-luminous light (*prakaśa*) is indeed connected to notion of Śiva being the subject *par excellance*. We just need to partially remove these terms from the normal sphere of their significance. Calling Śiva the subject has the function of indicating that Śiva is not *an* object.

[126] Here, a few clarificatory notes are in order: first, the word "object" signifies objects of perceptual cognitions, memories, and determinate cognitions (e.g., "that is a cat") (ĪPK I 6.8). Relatedly, in the ĪPK, the various states which have intentional objects, i.e., direct perceptual cognitions, cognitions as of previously perceived objects (memories) and determinate cognitions, are all considered types of cognition (Ibid; Torella 2013, 134). And perhaps most importantly, in Pratyabhijñā, a determinate cognition (i.e., determination) in which the duality of a subject and an object obtains, is understood as a "mental construct" (*vikalpa*). The Pratyabhijña Śaiva notion of a *vikalpa* is fundamentally of an ascertainment (*niścaya*) acquired through negation of some opposite, which presents a duality (IPK VI I 6.1; 8). In direct perception, the object manifests spontaneously. In a *vikalpa*—a determinate cognition presenting a duality formed through the exclusion (*apohana*) of some opposite—the object "passes through" a former perception (Torella 2013, 134). In other words, determinate cognitions work on material furnished by former direct perceptions (ibid., 135).

[127] Much like it is standard in Advaita, at the *vyāvaharika* level of analysis, to use the term witness (*sāskin*) for Brahman.

Śiva also is not *a* subject opposed to an object, or a world of objects. Śiva permeates and constitutes *all* subjects and objects.

Utpaladeva says that light (*prakaśa*), which is the primary essence of Śiva, is the "formerly established" self of all beings (*sarveṣam svātmanaḥ*) and the substratum of the establishment of all objects (*sarvārthasiddhisamāśrayasya*) (IPK I 1.2; Torella 2013, 86).[128] This point strongly resembles Śaṅkara's characterization of Brahman as the universal cause of all finite things, which is to all finite things as seawater is to waves and bits of seafoam. In Pratyabhijñā, *prakaśa* is formerly established *not in a temporal sense*, but in the sense that it is the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjects and objects. It is established *a prioi* in all cognition (Torella 2013, 86), and because of this, it is ungraspable as an object *of* cognition. To grasp *prakaśa*, which permeates the subjective and objective prongs of cognition, as an object would be like stepping outside one's own shadow (Ibid). In this context, to say that *prakaśa* is formerly established, or established *a prioi*, is also to say that light is self-luminous (*svaprakāśa*). The self-luminosity of Śiva can be communicated generally with the assertion that Śiva is not illuminated by the 'light' (IPK I 5.1-11) or sentience of any other subject. In normal, everyday experience, objects of perception, memory and determinate cognition are manifest due to the presence of some subject. It is as if my subjective awareness, for example, 'shines' on the objects I perceive, remember and cognize. But, on the Pratyabhijñā view, Śiva is not like *an* object of perception, memory or cognition, which is revealed by the light of some other subjective awareness. It is the self-evident light which pervades all mental constructs (*vikalpa*s). This is just like saying that phenomenality invariantly attends and pervades all subjective and objective phenomena. So far, I have drawn a broad connection between the concept of phenomenality and the primary essence (*mukhya ātma*) of Śiva when it is

[128] *sarveṣam svātmanaḥ sarvārthasiddhisamāśrayasya tatt'tsarvārthasādhanānyathānupapattyā kroḍīkṛtasiddheḥ svaprakāśāsya pramātrekavapuṣaḥ pūrvaiśvaryam teneśvarasya siddhau nirākaraṇe ca jaḍānāmevodhyamaḥ*

characterized as consciousness (*caitanya*) inseparably linked with light (*prakaśa*). I still need to explain how and why I see a connection between phenomenality and the primary essence of Śiva when it is characterized as consciousness or light inseparably linked with *reflective awareness* (*vimarśa*) (IPK I 5, 10). To do this, I will analyze the concept of *vimarśa*.

5.3.2.2 Reflective awareness (*vimarśa*)

As I see things, the Pratyabhijñā concept of reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) is a concept signifying the fact that *prakaśa* (which I have connected with phenomenality) is affectively poignant rather than flat, or rather, rapidly vibrating (*sphurattā*) (I 5.13). For lack of a perfect analogy, one might think of the obvious affectivity of placing one's finger against an object, or even just the primitive pulse of non-specific interoceptive awareness. In both cases, there is a feeling that is very much alive, but not specifically intentional. The luminosity of any given subjective or objective phenomenon (luminosity *itself*) is like this—vital, and manifest, not *to* itself properly speaking, but just in itself. Additionally, the Prayabhijñā view that reflective awareness is self-luminous and nondual is grounded in the observation that the affectively poignant presence which permeates all finite things is not *itself* an ascertainment presenting a duality (a *vikalpa*):

> The reflective awareness 'I', which is the very essence of light [Śiva] is not a mental construct (*vikalpaḥ*), although it is informed by the word (*vāgvapuḥ*). For a vikalpa is an act of ascertainment presenting a duality" (IPK I 6.1).[129]

In these lines, Utpala defines a mental construct (*vikalpa*) as an ascertainment presenting a duality, and maintains that the reflective awareness "I" (*aham-vimarśa*) is not a *vikalpa*. The reflective awareness "I", which is just rapidly vibrating nondual reflective awareness, is formerly established in all determinate, dualistic apprehension and is thus not *an* ascertainment acquired through the

[129] *ahampratyavamarśo yaḥ prakāśātmāpi vāgvapuḥ | nāsau vikalpaḥ hyukto dvayākśepi viniścayaḥ ||*

negation of some opposite. In other words, because *aham-vimarśa* is established *a priori* in all *vikalpa*s—*all* ascertainments presenting a duality—nothing *other* than *aham-vimarśa* is ever manifested.[130] Therefore, the nondual reflective awareness "I" simply cannot be an ascertainment that is salient due to the exclusion of some *other* bit or aspect of reality. It is simply the expansive domain of vibration (*spanda*) in which the apprehension of *any* object through the exclusion of its opposite manifests (IPK I 6.2).

One might wonder about this emphasis on the vibrational quality of *prakaśa*, since the basic concept of *prakaśa* here seems similar to the concept of the witness (*sākṣin*) in Advaita Vedānta (which turns out to be Brahman), but the idea that it is vibrating seems at variance with the Advaitic view. This intuition is spot on, at least on the surface level—traditionally, the fact that Śaṅkara characterizes Brahman as inactive (*niṣkriya*) where Pratyabhijñā philosophers characterize consciousness (*caitanya*) or light (*prakaśa*) in terms of spontaneous activity (*kriyā*) and vibration (*spanda*) is considered substantive evidence of the incompatibility of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā. However, Śaṅkara's characterization of Brahman as *niskriya* can be understood in the broader context of his *advaita-vāda* as a heuristic device. On Śaṅkara's *soteriological* view, apprehending Brahman as unqualified (*nirguṇa*) is important for actualizing release from dualistic apprehension.

The view that Brahman is inactive is connected to the view that Brahman is unqualified, i.e., Brahman without qualities (*nirguṇa Brahman*) is inactive in the sense that it never undergoes change. But recall that this conception of Brahman without qualities is logically entailed by the

[130] Śiva is established *a prioi* in all *vikalpa*s; all mental constructs presuppose the 'true' subject which is just reflective awareness (Torella 2013, 110; IPK I 6.3). Put otherwise, "the being established of the subject always 'precedes', as an *a priori* condition of knowledge, and for this reason eludes any objectification that attempts to capture it, so to speak, from behind" (Torella 2013, 86). The 'subject' mentioned here is just nondual, self-evident reflective awareness, which constitutes the very life of all *vikalpa*s.

basic phenomenological observation that the witness is *all*-pervasive, which grounds the view of Brahman being the universal cause' of all finite things (this is cause' of the entire phenomenal world is Brahman *with* qualities). To put the point plainly, Śaṅkara emphasizes the concept of Brahman as unqualified and inactive over the view of Brahman as the transmuting cause of all things because, on his view, it is the conception of Brahman most adequate for triggering release from dualistic apprehension and thus suffering of identification with empirical individuality. But he does not absolutely negate the reality of Brahman with qualities and, moreover, he maintains that Brahman cannot be apprehended by speech.

I have argued that both conceptions of Brahman (*saguṇa* and *nirguṇa Brahman*) are false (*mithyā*) in the sense that both are superimposed on the witness in contrast with the other, which implies on Śaṅkara's view, that *both* are sublatable by the substratum of their appearance (Brahman, which cannot be apprehended by speech) and therefore indeterminable as either absolutely real or unreal. In short, the view that Brahman is inactive rather than creative and spontaneous (as in Pratyabhijñā) is, even on Śaṅkara's own view, not absolutely real/true (*sat*). Therefore, an absolute difference between Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* and Pratyabhijñā cannot be asserted.

On my view, it is appropriate to think of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā as differentially parameterized, non-contradictory views about that paradoxically inexpressible presence which cannot be eliminated from any aspect of the phenomenal realm characterized by radical diversity. In other words, Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā are both theories of phenomenality—they appear at odds with one another, but really they are emphasizing different aspects of the same explanandum. I will elaborate on this comparative analysis of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā in the final chapter of the dissertation.

The Pratyabhijñā claim that the nondual reflective awareness "I" is *established* in all things is just the view that vibrating sentience is present across the subjective and objective prongs of all forms of cognition. It is important to note, furthermore, that reflective awareness is equated with Śiva's volition or will (*icca*), because it spontaneously (of its own accord; without being compelled) splits itself into an unlimited plurality of mutually opposed subjects and objects (ĪPK I 5.7; I 5.10). This *spontaneity* is the essential activity (*kriyā*)[131] of the self-evident 'knowledge' (*jñāna*)[132] which *is* nondual reflective awareness.

Admittedly, the connection between the concept of vibrating sentience on the one hand and the concept of knowledge on the other hand is not obvious. As I see things, Pratyabhijñā philosophers characterize Śiva in this way to indicate that what they are talking about is evident, or salient, not to itself properly speaking, but just naturally, in itself, in and through its very activity. Characterizing reflective awareness as knowledge is just like characterizing light as self-luminous. There is a sort of redundancy involved in both cases: the point is that what we are talking about isn't something that is illuminated or known (it is not an object of perception, memory or knowledge). But it is nevertheless luminous and evident.

The basic conception of *caitanya* as *prakaśa* is the conception of it as being luminous in itself—like the witness of Advaita Vedānta or the concept of phenomenality I have been analyzing in this dissertation. What we are talking about in all these cases is basically the bare, basic, brute fact of phenomenality, which is *itself* salient or evident or 'known', not in virtue of some subject of experience shining the light of their awareness on it, but just in virtue of being light itself (i.e., phenomenality). Furthermore, in my understanding, Pratyabhijñā philosophers also characterize

[131] To say that Śiva possesses the power of activity (*kriyā*) is to emphasize that Śiva is not to be conceived as being static or inert, or as opposed to the manifest world of temporal and spatial succession.
[132] To say that Śiva possesses knowledge (*jñana*) is just to say that Śiva is vibrating sentience itself, which is not opposed to any object or subject.

consciousness/light as knowledge (*jñāna*) because it is that which enables, sustains and manifests as determinate cognition involving subjects and objects of knowledge. It is knowledge in the sense that there is no conventional knowledge without it. Accordingly, this 'knowledge' (which is just phenomenality, all things considered) is also, overlappingly, the *power* of exclusion or differentiation (*apohana-śakti*) which gives rise to subject/object duality in determinate cognition, and is inherent to nondual reflective awareness itself (ĪPK I 3.6).[133]

In sum, reflexive awareness (*vimarśa*) is nondual knowledge (*jñāna*), for it is self-luminous. Reflexive awareness is nondual, also, because it is not an ascertainment presenting a duality (a *viklapa*). It constitutes *all vikalpa*s. As the constitutive domain in which all ascertainments presenting dualities manifest, reflexive awareness is also the potency to spontaneously manifest *as differentiated* in perception, memory and determinate cognition, which is equivalent to the cognitional activity (*kriyā*) of differentiation/exclusion (*apohana*).

5.3.2.3 Supreme word (*pāra-vāc*)

This spontaneous activity or agency (*kriyā*) which, in its nondual form is a sort of quivering potency, is also, from another (overlapping) perspective, supreme word (*pāra-vāc*). It is supreme word in the sense that it manifests and encompasses the entire conventional world of *linguistically mediated* exclusions. In explicating Śiva's primary essence, Utpala says this:

> Consciousness has as its essential nature reflective awareness (*pratyavamarśa*); it is the supreme Word (*parāvāk*) that arises freely. It is freedom in the absolute sense, the sovereignty (*aiśvaryam*) of the supreme self (IPK I 5.13).[134]

[133] It is important to note that the Pratyabhijñā philosophers appropriate the Dharmakīrtian concept of negation (*apoha*) or exclusion, and employ it in a very different theoretical framework and to very different ends. An entire dissertation could be written on this topic—in fact Catherine Prueitt's (2016) dissertation is exactly this (an extended examination of how Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosophers appropriate and integrate the concept of *aphoha*).

[134] *citiḥ pratyavamarśātmā parāvāk svarasoditā | svātanttyametanmukhyam tadaiśvaryam paramātmanaḥ ||*

Here Utpaladeva characterizes reflective awareness as the supreme word (*pāra-vāc*). Reflective awareness is the supreme word in the sense that it permeates all mutual exclusions which undergird cognizable reality. We can think of think of these mutual exclusions as being linguistically mediated, even in direct perception, which is supposed to be devoid of mental construction (*avikalpajñana*) (IPK I 5.19).

Utpala follows the grammarian Bartṛhari in holding that any cognition (e.g., a perceptual or determinate cognition) contains at least nascent linguistic articulation, which structures the basic exclusion individuating the object of that cognition. Bartṛhari says:

> There is no cognition in the world in which the word does not figure. All knowledge is, as it were, intertwined with the word. If this eternal identity of knowledge and the word were to disappear, knowledge would cease to be knowledge; it is this identity which makes identification [or, in a broader sense, 'reflective awareness'] possible (VP I 131-32).[135]

Bartṛhari communicates that the creation of the phenomenal world is linguistically mediated, or better yet, *a linguistic process*. The unfurling of the supreme word, first in direct perception and then in determinate cognition, is what structures the exclusions which form objects of memory, imagination and cognition. The supreme word (*parā-vāk*) *is* Śiva's reflective awareness, vibration, activity, etc. In other words, the primary essence (*svarūpa*) of *Śiva*, which manifests all things, is the dynamism of language or speech (*vāk*), which is more or less articulate at different levels.

One might wonder something along these lines: if the foundation of reality is inherently dynamical and linguistic, why should we think there are limits to what we can say about that level of reality? The issue here is really no different than it has been across the dissertation: phenomenality is recalcitrant to linguistic capture because all-pervasive, even of linguistic phenomena. Śiva understood as the inherently dynamical, nascently linguistic foundation of all of

[135] Translation in Iyer (1965). See also (Torella 2013, 125).

cognizable reality is linguistic, yes, but no less recalcitrant to linguistic *capture* because of this. What I have been calling phenomenality was linguistic anyway all along—I have emphasized that phenomenality is that presence which invariantly attends all subjective and objective phenomena, including all linguistic phenomena. What the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosophers add, or emphasize, is that the entire phenomenal realm constituted by a vast plurality of finite things differentiated by name and form is linguistically medicated. The invariant condition and concomitant of all finite things (phenomenality) is thus linguistic, *in a sense*, but this does not mean that it can be *apprehended* by language *as such* (not even *as* supreme word). As the foundation of all linguistically mediated determinate cognition it is incapable of being tracked as a referent by any single, determinative, intentional linguistic utterance.

5.3.2.4 Śiva's Freedom (*svātantrya*)

Importantly, this activity of Śiva's which manifests as differentiated through the linguistically mediated power of exclusion in determinate cognition and transforms into all of cognizable reality, is supposed to be free, spontaneous and unfettered, rather than effortful or constrained. The nature of this freedom and spontaneity is variously explicable: it arises on its own (IPK I 5.13), it is unmodified by space and time (IPK I 5.14), it pervades being and non-being, it transforms into *all* objects of cognition (IPK I 5.14), and it *is* the absence of duality (IPK I 5.17). Nothing outside the vast, multifarious realm of many subjects and objects compels its manifestation. Non-being itself is as much a *vikalpa* as the vast realm of what ordinarily counts as *vikalpa*s—it is equally an ascertainment arising from the exclusion of an opposite (being) in the domain of vibrating reflective activity. The idea is that there is no object of perception, memory or cognition, i.e., no object of consciousness at all, which is not constituted by that very domain in which all *vikalpa*s

manifest (*caitanya*; *prakaśa*; *vimarśa*).[136] Śiva's *freedom* is the absence of duality in the sense that nothing *other than* or *outside of* Śiva's activity is manifested (IPK I 6.2). Śiva's activity is established *a prioi* in anything that is manifested whatsoever.

It may seem as if I have taken a deep dive into a quasi-mystical rumination on God's attributes (omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, etc.) without offering substantive arguments for God's existence. It is true that the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosphers talk of Śiva in terms evoke the spirit of traditional metaphysics and medieval philosophical theology. But they, much like Śaṇkara, offer a phenomenological analysis of everyday worldly life, which reveals the ubiquity of luminosity/light (*prakaśa*; phenomenality) in all subjective and objective phenomena. The additional claims Pratyabhijñā philosophers make regarding the inherent dynamicity and linguistic nature of this luminosity are asserted on the basis of this phenomenological analysis. It should be helpful for us to note here that the argumentative structure of Utpala's *Stanzas* has a strongly transcendental bent. His arguments show that a unifying factor (Śiva) is necessary for the *very possibility* of exclusion (*apohana*) which gives rise to subjects and objects; Śiva is the condition of the possibility of the conventional world of mutually opposed subjects and objects (Prueitt 2016**)**. His arguments, at the same time, move from empirical observations about the contingent organization of the conventional world to conclusions regarding the very nature of the condition of its possibility. Utpala argues that Śiva's primary essence must be constituted such that it *is capable of* manifesting cognizable reality as it is contingently organized.

On Utpala's view, everyday worldly objects of perception, memory and determinate cognition manifest according to the power of differentiation (*apohana-śakti*) conditioned by the wills, practical requirements and experiences of individual, limited subjects (IPK II 3.3). This

[136] Think of this point on analogy with my argument that all subjective and objective phenomena have co-present phenomenality and dissociate it from the subjective idealistic thesis that external objects do not exist.

'power' to differentiate is possessed by the limited subject, which is *itself* an ascertainment arrived at through the exclusion of an opposite (a *vikalpa*). In Pratyabhijñā, the limited subject (the empirical, perspectival agent and cognizer) is understood to be an *object* of reflective awareness when it is manifested *as differentiated* in determinate cognition. The manifestation of the power of differentiation in the limited subject which stands opposed to cognizable reality is fundamentally equivalent to the mutual exclusion of the subject and the world of objects—and this is an exclusion which requires their mutual establishment in vibrating reflexive awareness.[137] In other words, the 'power' of exclusion possessed by an individual subject of experience (like you or me) is simply the fact of that subject carving itself out in opposition to a world of objects and other subjects. Reflective awareness is established *a prioi* in the limited subjects' power of differentiation. In other words, there is an affectively poignant presence which invariantly attends the way in which any individual subject manifests in relation to a world of objects and other subjects, according to their own wishes and whims. Essentially, for Utpala, this means that the power of differentiation must be Śiva's power all along. And because differentiation/exclusion (*apohana*) occurs in temporal succession,[138] the subject *par excellance* possessing the power of

[137] The object *of* reflective awareness which is manifested as differentiated through these faculties is supposed to be the limited subject. This limited subject (e.g., you, me) is a *vikalpa*—an ascertainment acquired from the exclusion of an opposite. In other words, "I" always appear in opposition to some other (you, an object, etc.). Conversely, any particular object in cognizable reality is also an ascertainment acquired through the exclusion of some opposite. A particular object always manifests in opposition to some *other* object of perception, memory, imagination, cognition, etc., and in opposition to the limited subject (which is the object *of* reflective awareness when it is manifested as differentiated) (IPK I 6.1). Put otherwise, Śiva manifesting as a plurality of subjects *is* Śiva manifesting as a plurality of objects, and *vice versa*. The manifestation of any given point of view is also the manifestation of cognizable reality as a whole. The manifestation of cognizable reality is also the manifestation of a point of view *on it*. And the mutual opposition of subjectivity and objectivity occurs in the domain of rapidly vibrating reflective awareness. Outside of the domain of reflective awareness, the mutual exclusion of the subject and the world could not occur. Śiva is not *a* point of view that manifests the external world. Śiva is the in-dwelling effulgence of all things, the *opposite* of which is never manifested.

[138] Indeed, it is through Śiva's power of differentiation (*apohana-śakti*), which is a manifestation of Śiva's will to create, that temporal and spatial succession are manifest. The manifestation of *vikalpa*-s occurring one after another, and in different places, is due to their exclusion from one another. This means that Śiva is not bound by time and space; Śiva is the constitutive reality of time and space, which are themselves the *vikalpa*s.

differentiation (Śiva) is said to be an agent of action (IPK I 1.2; 4.18). However, it is best not to think of Śiva as *an* agent of action, on my view, since Śiva isn't an ascertainment presenting a duality (like an empirical self). For this reason, I prefer to emphasize the idea that vibrating reflective awareness possesses the power of action, or literally constitutes the raw spontaneous activity (*kriyā*) which is independently, solely, and pervasively responsible for the manifestation of the world of mutually opposed subjects and objects.[139]

5.3.2.5 Concluding thoughts

In conclusion, the Pratyabhijñā description of Śiva's primary essence is multi-dimensional and complex. Various terms are used to extend the concept of that luminosity which inherently possesses the power to playfully mutate and take on many names and forms, forgetting itself without ever really losing itself in the process. This luminosity is independently salient, rapidly vibrating, spontaneously active, multi-modal of its own accord, capable of splitting itself up, and thoroughly *meaningful*.[140] It is light, reflective awareness (which is, in a sense, action and, in a sense, knowledge), supreme word and freedom (*svātantrya*). The freedom of Śiva is, yet again, multi-dimensional: it is the freedom of the 'subject' *par excellance*, which can never be objectified,

[139] Causality, agency, and action are Śiva's *will* to act. This will to act manifests through different subjects and modes of cognition, all of which manifest as differentiated through exclusion with opposites (objects). But all these—all subjective and objective differentiated phenomena—consist in Śiva's agency. Cognition and action (*kriyā*) are inseparable (IPk III 1.1). Furthermore, differentiation and relation are inseparably linked. A relation between two things, just like a distinction between two things, requires their mutual manifestation in Śiva (IPK I 7.1-2). This applies to logical, temporal and causal relations alike. Temporal succession is based on differentiation, which is Śiva's activity (IPK II 1.3). Spatial extension occurs through the manifestation of diversity, which is Śiva's activity (IPK II 1.5). The categories of action, relation, universal, substance, space and time, all posses a unity, in that they are all manifested through mutual exclusion and therefore in Śiva (IPK II 2.4-*5*). Furthermore, the various types of cognitions—mental representations, affective states (pain, pleasure, etc), direct perceptions facilitated by the sense organs, etc., all must be manifested in Śiva. All denizens of the phenomenal world—perceiving and cognizing subjects, objects of perception and cognition, modes of cognition, categories employed in modes of cognition—are ascertainments acquired through the negation/exclusion of some opposite. The power of differentiation accounts for the manifestation of the entire phenomenal world.

[140] I.e., nascently linguistic.

and it is the freedom reflective awareness has to manifest as differentiated, and transform into the furthest reaches of the phenomenal world.

5.3.3 Attaining the State of Śiva

Now that I have analyzed phenomenality in terms of the primary essence of Śiva, I will argue that just as *attaining* the state of Śiva should not be understood as an ineffable state beyond determinative linguistic activity, having knowledge by acquaintance with the referent of the term 'phenomenality' may be linked with enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality. In other words, there is historical precedent for thinking that a description could give us acquaintance knowledge of that paradoxically inexpressible presence which permeates all finite things. First I must examine what it might mean to attain the state of Śiva.

We should bear in mind that the state of Śiva is supposed to be triggered by an act of recognition.[141] The school of recognition is organized around engendering this act, for the sake of enabling liberation in this life (ĪPK IV 16). Recognition (*pratyabhijñā*) is enabled by first coming to understand that the subject which is opposed to the whole of cognizable reality and that cognizable reality itself share a single, undivided radical "cause" (IPK III 1.9), that is, Śiva, the primary essence of which is rapidly vibrating, self-evident, nondual, reflective awareness and supreme word.[142] The *māyic* cognizer—the cognizer blinded and limited in its powers by cosmic

[141] Utpaladeva concludes the IPK by noting that he has provided logical justification of recognition *as a path* for entering into the state of Śiva, which (he notes) was *experienced directly* by Somānanda (IPK IV 11-15). He explains that the state of Śiva is attained solely in virtue of an act of recognition (*pratyabhijñāmātrāt*), and characterizes the state in terms of uninterrupted absorption (Ibid). From these lines, we can glean that the state of Śiva is *triggered* by the act of recognition.

[142] The manifestation of Śiva's agency in differentiation, and thus in the entire world, is characterized in terms of opening outwards (*unmeṣaḥ*) and closing inwards (*nimeṣaḥ*) of Śiva. At this level of analysis, Śiva is called *Īśvara* (IPK III 1.1). But the opening outwards and closing inwards have the same substratum, Śiva. This realization is represented by the understanding that the closing inwards (represented by the personal pronoun "I") and the opening outwards of Īśvara (represented by the impersonal pronoun 'this') have an identical substratum (IPK III 1.1).

illusion (*māyā*)—does not recognize the non-difference of the substance of their own limited subjectivity and the substance of all of cognizable reality (in both cases, the primary essence of Śiva) (IPK III 1.5-11). But when *all things* appear as constituting the cognizer's own primary essence, and when the world appears differentiated *due to* the cognizer's *own* power of exclusion, the veil blinding the cognizer lifts, and their identity with Śiva shines forth. In grasping oneself as having the power to manifest as the entire world, one attains intimacy with the very freedom and effulgence of Śiva, and becomes Śiva, as it were. This is entering into the state of Śiva. By entering into the state of Śiva, the subject blinded by illusion (*maya*) and bound by habitual, effortful action (*karma*) becomes liberated in this very life (IPK IV 16).

We can conceptualize entering the state of Śiva in terms of *becoming* the supreme plane of nondual reflective awareness "I" (*ahamvimarśanam*) (IPK I 8.11). One might think that becoming the supreme plane of *aham-vimārśa* means transcending the 'impure' (Ibid) realm which is differentiated according to the whims, pragmatic demands and latent defilements of deluded *mayic* cognizers. Accordingly, one might think that the state of Śiva is beyond the realm of determinate cognition, beyond the realm of *vikalpa*s, and beyond the scope of conceptual and linguistic activity altogether. *But to think this*, I contend, would be to forget that "the supreme plane of Śiva resting in his fullness, wherein no trace of the knowable remains" (Torella 2013, XXIX), *is itself a vikalpa.* This image of Śiva's supreme state is still an ascertainment arising from the exclusion of an opposite. In this case, the opposite is *differentiated* reflective awareness as it is manifested in limited subjects. And Śiva (Utpala is quite clear) cannot be a *vikalpa* (IPK I 6.2). Therefore, entering the nature of Śiva should not be determinatively distinguished from Śiva's power of differentiation (*apohana-śakti*) manifested *in us*. Instead, we may think of entering the nature of Śiva as a transformation continuous with this power—as a bountiful expression of the freedom of

aham-vimārśa—such that it becomes less constrained, and *attuned* to its actuality as absolute freedom. This freedom encompasses freedom from personally-indexed, compelled, habitual, biased determinative activity.

It should be helpful here to recall the deeply linguistic bent of Utpaladeva's characterization of Śiva's primary essence. He connects the activity that is effulgent reflective awareness with the supreme word. Even if entering the state of Śiva were attaining unification with Śiva's restful fullness, that restful state would not be static and nonlinguistic. It would still be thrumming with the profound meaning/feeling of a thought that one has not quite found words to express. As such, attaining the state of Śiva should not be characterized as transcending protracted linguistic articulation and merging with the word in its potential, congealed form.

5.3.3.1 A Tension in the View: Asserting Śiva's Freedom

A further wrinkle remains for me to address: affirmation of the *absolute* freedom of *parāvāk* is logically equivalent to a *vikalpa*. Śiva cannot be an ascertainment presenting a duality, and thus cannot be apprehended determinatively *as* absolute freedom. To address this wrinkle, I must emphasize that the freedom that is *parāvāk* is 'absolute' just in the sense that it cannot be expressed in its essence with any single linguistic articulation, for it is the very self of all linguistic articulation. Utpala says as much here:

> The reflective awareness concerning the self, the reflective awareness "I", which constitutes the very nature of light, cannot be called a *vikalpa* even if it's essentially associated with a 'discourse' (*sābhilāpo'api*) since the word that informs it is the supreme word (ĪPKV I 6.1).[143]

In this bit of auto-commentary, Utpala indicates that the primary essence of Śiva (light; reflective awareness; supreme word) cannot be *an* object of any single linguistically mediated determinate

[143] *prakāśāstyātmanyahamiti parāvāgupatvāt sābhilāpo api svabhāvabhūtaḥ pratyavamārśo 'na vikalpa ityucyate' 'sa hi pratiyoginiśedhapūrvo niścayo na ca' atra pratiyogi-sambhavaḥ* ||

cognition, even though it is essentially associated with determinative activity, because it is that which permeates *all* expressions of determinate knowledge. Earlier I raised the potential objection that if reality is inherently dynamical and linguistic, the difficulty of trying to characterize it is not obvious. But here, yet again, we run into the paradoxical inexpressibility of that which invariantly pervades all linguistic phenomena—on the one hand, it is characterizable as absolute freedom, but this very freedom is so absolute that it has to encompass the freedom from being determined *as such*.[144]

Isabelle Ratié (2016) similarly characterizes the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva philosophers as understanding consciousness to be freedom but, paradoxically, admitting the limits of consciousness' freedom:

> "this limit to our freedom as conscious entities has no other cause than the fundamental freedom of consciousness: as soon as we try to grasp a cognition as we would grasp a patch of blue in front of us, we fail to apprehend the singularity of consciousness because we end up reifying its absolute spontaneity, and in this very failure we experience the pure dynamism of consciousness as that which resists any objectification" (Ratié 2016, 14).

With these lines, Ratié communicates that we cannot grasp direct, unmediated absorption in the activity (*kriya*) of Śiva as beyond description, precisely because grasping it as such would reify its dynamicity and limit its freedom. Entering into the nature of Śiva cannot be as simple or as static as any cognition expressed by a definite description or a deterministic linguistic utterance, e.g., "I am that very Lord". The moment the vibrating 'self' (being; essence) of all things is made into a 'that' it loses its essential nature. *But*, and this is very important, it is *caused* to lose its essential nature *by its own activity*. Realizing *this,* it may identify itself as the foundation of its own failure, but therein veil its own primary essence once again, and so on. In our successive failure to objectify

[144] The concept of freedom is much like that of *nirguṇa Brahman* in Advaita Vedānta. It points beyond itself, or has a secondary meaning that sublates its primary denotation.

Śiva, we become intimately acquainted with its dynamism. *Moving between* alternative images of the dynamicity/freedom of Śiva is non-different from entering into Śiva's activity.

Along these lines, we may think of indefinite modal description as a manifestation of the primary essence of Śiva. We may point to the enactment of indefinite modal description as entering into the nature of Śiva. Indefinite modal description is a conceptually mediated, linguistic activity (*kriyā*), which variously expresses determinate cognitions through exclusion (*apohana*). It literally ripples and vibrates - by flowing outward towards qualified determinate knowledge and then retracting moves towards a qualified version of the opposite, then it moves in a new direction, towards novel qualified determinate knowledge. Furthermore, at all points across its range of articulation it constitutes freedom from having to express final, complete determinate knowledge of its referent. It is *self-luminous* knowledge, in the sense that its referent is not determinatively opposed to itself. It *manifests* its referent, or *is* a manifestation of its referent. Each qualified figure in the indefinite series of modal statements expresses some determinate knowledge, but no figure in the series captures what it (the series) manifests in its totality. It is not just *a* determinate cognition, and it is not just conceptual-linguistic activity. It is free, vibrating, unconstrained, dynamic, permutating, creative, conceptual-linguistic activity. It is, in this sense, unfettered reflective awareness, knowledge (*jñana*), and activity (*kiryā*) itself—when enacted, it embodies the primary essence of that which cannot be objectified. For example, in describing phenomenality, we could say "in a sense, phenomenality is indefinite", "in a sense, phenomenality is not indefinite", "in a sense, phenomenality is indefinite and not indefinite", and so on, and in doing this we would literally demonstrate the infinitely characterizable nature of what we are trying to talk about. To embody the essence of something is to know it intimately—it is to be acquainted, not through being presented with an object, but through *being* that object.

In sum, by *embodying* its referent, thus not having a referent, indefinite modal description constitutes a broadly nondual/non-intentional (indeterminate) species of acquaintance with its referent. This species of acquaintance may be understood on analogy with attaining the state of Śiva in our successive failure to grasp Śiva's primary essence. We might say that the acquaintance embodied in indefinite modal description, which enacts the unbounded conceptual-linguistic activity of Śiva, dwells concretely in "active participation in the infinite-finite continuum" (Dyczkowski 1987, 40) rather than in elimination of the appearance of any determination or limitation, such that *actual participation and nothing less will yield acquaintance*. Furthermore, if we combine the view that the activity of Śiva is supreme word with the view that the activity of Śiva is the pulsation from undifferentiation to differentiation, we may conceive of indefinite modal description as active participation in the pulsating continuum of the fullness (freedom; dynamicity; indeterminacy) of the supreme word.

I must note that there is tension between the idea that Śiva is the subject *par excellance* which cannot be objectified, and the idea that Śiva's primary essence can be expressed at all. In *expressing* Śiva's primary essence, Utpaladeva apparently objectifies the unobjectifiable as *caitanya*, *prakāsa*, *vimarśa, pāra-vāc, svātanrya,* etc. This tension is essentially a variant of the paradox that is at the beating heart of this dissertation; it is the pragmatic contradiction involved in attempting to extend the concept of the invariant condition and concomitant of all phenomena, including all linguistic phenomena. In explicating how and why it cannot be objectified with concepts or words, we objectify it *as such*. To my mind, the Pratyabhijña philosophers are well aware of this tension, and of the paradox involved in expressing Śiva's primary essence. Their intent is obviously to guide the student's awareness, through such statements, towards an act of recognition (*pratyabhijña*) which occasions the state of Śiva.

5.3.3.2 Another Wrinkle

Still, this tension carries over to my suggestion that indefinite modal description enacts and embodies acquaintance with the primary essence of Śiva. If we cannot determinatively know the primary essence of Śiva, it seems that we cannot know *that* indefinite modal description embodies Śiva's primary essence. In facing this issue, we should hold two thoughts in our mind: first, Śiva cannot be objectified as being beyond linguistic activity. Second, the very concept of freedom is itself free from specificity. What it is to be free could, in a sense, literally be anything. Think of the trajectory of my reasoning as springing from the basic fact that nothing manifests outside Śiva (and think of this fact on analogy with the fact that all subjective and objective phenomena have co-present phenomenality). Since nothing manifests outside Śiva, Śiva cannot be the object of an ascertainment presenting a duality. Śiva is free from being constructed as something in particular by *any* mode of cognition presenting a duality, e.g., modes of cognition expressed through determinative linguistic utterances. The freedom from being individuated through exclusion is what, in my view, can cannot be denied of Śiva.

Treating this brute phenomenological fact as a foundational premise, we move towards inferring that Śiva's freedom from being objectified and individuated may manifest variously. And although we cannot determinatively express the propositional knowledge *that* Śiva *is* unfettered conceptual-linguistic activity (IMD of phenomenality), we can coherently conceptualize the freedom of Śiva non-absolutely manifesting as such. That is to say, we can conceptualize the notion of freedom indeterminately, such that our use of the term indicates not a determinate object of knowledge, but that which cannot be *captured* or restrained in its potential to self-actualize by any concept or word, even the word 'freedom'. Holding these two thoughts together, we should be able to see that there is no ground for *denying* that Śiva's freedom manifests in indefinite modal

description. The logical possibility of absolute freedom dwelling in dynamic, unbounded linguistic activity remains intact. I cannot exactly say that Śiva *is* indefinite modal description, or *vice versa*. To assert their identity in absolute terms would be to reify their freedom from being objectified and compelled towards static determination. I can only describe the indeterminacy of Śiva and indefinite modal description (i.e., the *acquaintance* I am trying to characterize) through another protracted series of qualified statements: in a sense, indefinite modal description embodies acquaintance with Śiva. In another sense, it does not, etc.

But I must note this: the successive failure to absolutely define the knowledge embodied by indefinite modal description is just like Śiva's playful power of self-veiling and self-grasping. In this sense, the two are the same. But through asserting an identity relation here I have reified that which resists objectification *yet again*, so they are not, etc. *This* is an example of the sort of enactment I'm talking about: in moving back and forth between non-exclusive and non-contradictory alternatives, and in permutating in new directions, the indeterminacy of Śiva and indefinite modal description (the acquaintance I'm trying to characterize) is actually manifested.[145]

In this section, I hope to have shown that the state of Śiva cannot be grasped as an object or expressed in its essence with a single statement, but also cannot be grasped or determinatively expressed as being beyond a series of alternatively valid self-reflections expressed through the enactment of a series of carefully qualified statements about Śiva. I have suggested, moreover, that we can think of indefinite modal description as indeterminate knowledge by acquaintance with the activity (*kriyā*) of Śiva, which oscillates between various non-exclusive self-reflections. Indefinite modal description is a conceptual-linguistic *activity*, which embodies acquaintance with the

[145] Recall that my use of the term 'modal' is idiosyncratic, in keeping with Balcerowicz's (2017) interpretation of the Jaina sevenfold formula. I do not mean that indefinite modal description of phenomenality involves expressing what phenomenality possibly is. I mean that the various figures in an extended description of phenomenality are qualified, such that they reference aspects, or one could say, modes, of the object of knowledge.

freedom and effulgence of that which is paradoxically inexpressible because all-pervasive. Although the state of Śiva can be conceived as active acquaintance, it should not be understood to be beyond the realm of mental elaboration (*vikalpajñana*) and linguistic articulations (*śabdabhāvana*s).

5.4 Indefinite Modal Description and Aesthetic Emotion (*rasa*)

To enrich my account of how indefinite modal description of phenomenality would constitute an indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) species of knowledge by acquaintance with the nominal referent of the term 'phenomenality', I will briefly explore the Pratyabjijñā Śaiva encounter with the classical Indian concept of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*).[146] I have drawn a connection between phenomenality and the primary essence of Śiva, and suggested that just as attaining the state of Śiva (direct, unmediated knowledge by acquaintance with Śiva) has an indeterminable locus and therefore cannot be determined as beyond the realm of determinative linguistic activity, knowledge by acquaintance with the referent of the term 'phenomenality' should not be considered incompatible with indefinite modal description of phenomenality, which is basically the conventional activity of successively failing to express absolute, determinate knowledge of it.[147] This argument has rested on the premise that attaining the state of Śiva has an indeterminable locus.

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[146] The word *rasa* can be translated as aesthetic emotion, flavor (Coomaraswamy 1918, 30), or taste (Pollock 2016, 4). Pollock (2016) contends that 'taste' is the most direct translation. In broad terms, classical Indian *rasa*-theory involves analyzing artworks as having the capacity to transform ordinary or personal emotions (*bhāvas*) into supra-ordinary or generalized emotions (*rasas*). There are multiple veins of thought in the *rasa* theory canon. In some cases, the artwork is analyzed internally—the primary object of analysis is the artwork itself as *rasavant* (having *rasa*) (Ibid). The artwork is seen as capable of manifesting generalized emotion through combination of certain elements. The internal approach places *rasa* in the object of aesthetic experience. In other cases, the artwork is analyzed externally or in terms of its capacity to actualize generalized emotion in the *rasika* (the one who enjoys rasa). Rasa, on the external approach, dwells in the subject as a response (Ibid). These ontologies developed over time through an extended dialectic (Pollock 2016, 43).

[147] At this point in the dialect of the dissertation, I have connected the concept of phenomenality with the concept of the witness in Advaita Vedānta (which is both *ātman* and *Brahman*) and now, with the concept of Śiva's primary essence, which is characterized as consciousness (*caitanya*), light (*prakaśa*), reflective awareness (*vimarśa*) and supreme word (*pāra-vāc*).

5.4.1 Exegetical approach

The enormous depth and influence of Abhinavgupta's view of *rasa* cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, an exhaustive engagement with his aesthetics exceeds the scope of this dissertation. My focus will be on the connection between the Pratyabhijñā characterization of Śiva's primary essence in terms of savoring (*camakṛti*), and the connection between Śiva's primary essence and the concept of *rasa*. In doing this, I will substantiate my view that entering the state of Śiva should be understood as having an indeterminable locus. And I will specify what I mean by 'indeterminable species of knowledge by acquaintance' as being equivalent to the expansiveness of aesthetic experience.

5.4.2 Non-Exhaustive Historical Review of Classical Indian Rasa-Theory

To contextualize my analysis of Abhinavagupta view of *rasa*, I should offer some historical background on classical Indian *rasa*-theory: in Bharata's canonical text *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *rasa* (aesthetic emotion) is said to arise from the conjunction (*samyoga*) of determinants (*vibhāva*), consequents (*anubhāva*s), and transitory moods (*vyabhicāribhāva*) (NŚ I 111-11). *Vibhāva*s are factors, or features of the drama, such as characters, settings and plots, *anubhavāva*s are changes in characters which are symptomatic of the emotions they experience in navigating settings, plots, etc., e.g., trembling, and *vyabhijcāribhāva* are secondary, passing moods which accompany these basic emotions, e.g., longing. Through the performance of the drama, the performance's constituent elements fuse together (*samyoga*) and form the emotional core, or taste (*rasa*) of the artwork. Traditionally, seven basic emotions are correlated with seven aesthetic emotions:

The *bhava*s (basic emotions):

(1) Pleasure, delight or desire (*rati*)
(2) Laughter, humor or amusement (*hāsa*)

(3) Sorrow, pain or grief (*soka*)
(4) Anger (*Krodha*)
(5) Courage or determination (*utsāha*)
(6) Fear (*bhaya*)
(7) Disgust or revulsion (*jugupsā*)

The *rasa*s (aesthetic emotions):

(1) The erotic (*śṛṅgāra*)
(2) The comic (*hāsya*)
(3) The pathetic or compassionate (*karuṇa*)
(4) The furious (*raudra*)
(5) The heroic (*vīra*)
(6) The terrible (*bhayānaka*)
(7) The odious (*bībhatsa*) (NŚ VII 1-3)

Across the classical and Medieval Indian philosophical landscapes, there was profuse dialouge concerning the locus of *rasa*. In the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the primary object of analysis is the artwork itself. The emotional core or 'taste' of an artwork is not equivalent to the affective or mental state of any particular character—it arises due to the *fusion* of *vibhāva*s, *anubhava*s, and *vyabhicāribhava*s. Originally, questions about aesthetic experience were mostly text-focused, and organized around determining whether *rasa* is engendered, inferred or manifested in the elements of the artwork.

Subsequently, the literary theorist Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka (ca. 850-900 CE) brought about a revolution in Indian aesthetics by "directing attention away from the process by which emotion is engendered in the literary text—away, that is, from the formalist analysis dominant across the entire tradition…and towards the subjective experience of the viewer/reader" (Pollock 2016, 145). Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's contribution to classical Indian *rasa* theory is the relevant to the historical dialectic I am working with in that he articulates a view of *rasa* which Abhinavagupta incorporates. And Abhinavgutapa's theory of aesthetic emotion as being connected with Śiva's primary essence and neither subjective nor objective corroborates my view that attaining the state of Śiva should

be understood as having an indeterminable locus. Keeping all this in mind, let us consider the following characterization of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's contribution to classical Indian *rasa*-theory:

> "talk of engenderment, inference and manifestation makes sense only in reference to the character; you do not, as reader, "infer" that you are feeling rasa. You begin to ask how literary language transforms a discourse about the emotions of people you do not know (Rama, Sita) into something you as a reader somehow come to participate in, and how that process—the term Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka coins for it is "commonization"—enables an altogether unique kind of experience." (Pollock 2016, 145)

In this excerpt, Pollock characterizes Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's view that it makes little sense to understand aesthetic emotion just in terms of implicature or manifestation, since the generalized, felt meaning produced by a (literary, dramaturgical, poetic, etc.) work of art is clearly, in part, a response in the *subject* of aesthetic experience. Implicature/manifestation pertains only to the art *object*. Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka borrows from Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics to analyze the transformative power of literature on analogy with that of scripture. By this I mean that he draws a connection between scriptural language, which was the focus of Mīmāṃsā philosophers, and aesthetic experience. Scriptural language is "action-oriented"—it causes us to act, or actualizes our potential to perform some action (Ibid). The "verbal force" or actualization (*bhāvana*) of a scriptural injunction is tripartite: it indicates the *end* and *instrument* of the relevant action, and the *manner* in which it is to be performed (e.g., "one who desires heaven should perform the fire sacrifice).

For Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, the actualization that occurs in aesthetic experience is similarly three-fold. He says:

> We scholars hold that the literary function is threefold: expression, actualization, and experience. Beyond that, we do not accept anything, certainly not what has been called "implicature." Expression is an established fact in the domains of communication; actualization refers to the "commonization" of the aesthetic elements, the factors and the rest; experience refers to the unfettered savoring of *rasa*".[148]

[148] Translation in Pollock (Pollock 2016, 149).

Here Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka explains that the three dimensions of actualization (*bhāvana*) are the literal expression, the emotional commonization (i.e., transformation of basic emotions into generalized, aesthetic emotions), and the experiential absorption wherein the subject is pervaded by the result of commonization (*rasa*).[149] To understand what Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka means by commonization in more depth, we need to appreciate how *rasa*-theory in general presupposes what we *might* consider a pan-Indian psychological view—the view that humans beings having certain "latent tendencies" (Pollock 2016, 20; Deutsch 1975, 6-7),[150] or innate drives organized around basic emotions which are compounded by experiences and continually poised for activation.[151]

By representing basic emotions through commonized scenarios, artworks manifest basic emotions independently of the subject-relative conditions that normally make them available to consciousness. Represented as such, basic emotions become feelable in their vital form, i.e., *without the distraction of all the individual-relative causes that normally occasion their arising.* The artwork is a sort of alchemic process through which latent affects merge with general factors and therein transform into generalized emotions available for contemplation and participation. Normally, we are caused to experience basic emotions by factors tied up with our own aims, anxieties, etc. As such, we experience pleasure, humor, anger (and so on) in relation to our own

[149] Manifestation—the capacity *of an artwork* to communicate meaning in itself—is only a component of aesthetic experience.

[150] Elliot Deutsch summarizes this view in these terms: *"*according to the psychology underlying…*rasa*-theory experience is an awakening …of various innate states (*bhāvas* or *sthāyibhāvas*) which exist in the mind (or "heart") as latent impressions (*saṃskāra*s or *vāsanā*s) that derive from one's past experience…these states, in their essential characteristics, are the same for everyone, coming as they do from a common human life-experience. In actual life each *bhāva* is said to be accompanied by causes (*kāraṇa*), which are understood to be the various situations and events of life that occasion an appropriate response; by effects (*kārya*), the various visible responses (gestures, facial reactions); and by concomitant elements (*sahakārin*), various accompanying mental states such as anxiety" (Deutsch 1975, 6-7).

[151] For a discussion of this topic carried out from a Buddhist perspective, see Smith (2019).

narrow concerns. Artworks affords us opportunities to encounter, relish and dwell upon states fundamental to our consciousness without the barriers imposed by our various self-interests.

5.4.3 Abhinavgupta's View of Rasa

Abhinavagupta is a known critic of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, but in his commentary on Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* (the *Abhinavabharati*) Abhinava integrates much of Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's *rasa*-theory into his own and synthesizes the historical dialectic concerning the locus of *rasa*. In particular, he integrates Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka's view of commonization, but emphasizes that because commonization occurs on both the objective and the subjective prongs of aesthetic experience, aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) is neither in the object nor in the subject. Moreover, he characterizes aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) as a form of consciousness which is devoid of obstacles (*nirvighna*), and he connects this form of consciousness with savoring (*camatkāra*), which is supposed to be Śiva's primary essence.

In the *Abhinavabharati*, he makes these points by analyzing the subject and the object in aesthetic experience. He says that in a qualified subject of aesthetic experience—in one whose heart possesses a spotless power of intuition (*pratibhāna*)—there is a perception consisting in a direct experience (*sāksātkāra*) which is devoid of its particularity (*viśeṣa*) (Abh I, 8).[152] Similarly, in the art object, the sensation is devoid of obstacles (*bighna*) because the elements of the art object aren't absolutely real (*apāramārthika*) (Ibid). To understand what all this means, let us return to the example of Shakespeare's Othello. The factors of the artwork lack particularity in that Othello and Desdemona are fictional characters, not actual living human beings, and the drama that unfolds between them is a fictional narrative, not an actual event occurring in the world. Because of the non-particularity of the artwork's factors (i.e., characters, settings, plots), the emotion manifested

[152] This analysis is informed by the translation in Gnoli (1969).

in the artwork in virtue of the conjunction of those factors lacks the spatial-temporal specificity of the everyday emotion of an *individual*, living breathing person. It is devoid of obstacles (*bighna*) in this sense. The aesthetic emotion (e.g., the odious (*bībhatsa*) *rasa*) is devoid of the conventional obstacles which normally limit the salience of an emotion, i.e., who it shows up for. In other words, the aesthetic emotion manifested in the artwork is not, like an everyday emotion, conditioned by the previous experiences and implicit biases of an individual person.

Let's extend the example in consideration of Abhinava's view of subjective prong of aesthetic experience. Let's say I were able to bracket the jealousy I have felt from being betrayed by loved ones in the past; I could perhaps encounter how the fictional character Othello murders his fictional wife without feeling that his action (which is produced by jealousy) is in some way justified. I might, accordingly, be able to savor the odious (*bībhatsa*) sentiment manifested by his murderous act in its full, unobstructed force. If my heart had a spotless power of intuition (*pratibhāna*) I would be able to have a perception consisting in direct experience (*sākṣātkāra*) with the emotion which lacks obstacles. In general terms, the point is that a person who has set aside their personal history, or somehow neutralized the biases produced in them by their previous experiences, will be able to appreciate or *taste* the aesthetic emotion manifested in the artwork without being obstructed by the limiting factors of their own perspective. What Abhinavagupta points to here is the similarity of aesthetic emotion in the object and subject of aesthetic experience: the art-object manifests an emotion that is not indexed (i.e., constrained in terms of its relevance or salience) by the perspective of any particular individual subject of experience. The emotion in the art object is not limited (*paramita*), but extended (*vitata*) in this sense (Ibid.). The subject of aesthetic experience who tastes such emotion is *itself* purified of the perspective limiting its capacity to appreciate generalized emotion. The emotion in the art subject is not limited, but

extended in this sense. Because the manifestation of aesthetic emotion is unobstructed by an individual's perspective in both the art-object and the subject of aesthetic experience, there is an important sense in which the emotion manifested is characterized by uniformity (*ekaghanatā*) across the subjective and objective prongs of aesthetic experience. Furthermore, the aesthetic emotion may be so devoid of absolute limits or obstacles (*nirvighna*) that it is unfixed with respect to the subjective prong of aesthetic experience—it may be "nourished" equally in *all* subjects involved.

The basic idea here is that the generalized emotion manifested in the artwork (e.g., the odious (*bībhatsa*) *rasa*) activates and purifies universal residual tendencies (*samskara*s) or biases which dwell in all of us (e.g., the tendency to jealousy), such that all of us who witness the performance of the artwork enjoy the activation and *purification* of the relevant tendency, and therein become capable of directly experiencing and savoring the same generalized, impersonal emotion, as it were. *Rasa* is thus neither in the object, nor in the subject, nor in any particular subject as opposed to any other. *Rasa* is paradigmatically that mode of conscious being which is devoid of *determinate* subject-object duality.[153] Understood along these lines, *rasa* is characterizable in terms of joyful enjoyment (*bhohāveśaḥ*) of the form of God (Coomaraswamy 1918, 45), or in terms of complete immersion in the vibration (*spanda*) of an enjoyment *(adbhutabhoga)* which is radically free from obstacles (i.e., Śiva's freedom itself). Here, 'enjoyment of the form of God' does not mean 'knowledge of god as something separate from the act of knowing" (Coomaraswamy 2019, 234). Instead, enjoyment of the form of God essentially means *being indeterminable* with respect to it.[154]

[153] I prefer the term 'indeterminate' over 'non-dual'.
[154] Torella calls *camatkṛti* or *camatkāra* the bliss of "the full achievement" (Torella 2013, 118).

Abhinava also characterizes this expansive mode of consciousness—this immersion in an enjoyment radically free of obstacles—as a perception or mental cognition (*mānasādhyavasāya*) consisting of a direct experience (*sākṣātkāra)* (Abh I, 8). This means that, on Abhinava's view, attaining the state of Śiva—having direct knowledge by acquaintance with Śiva's freedom—is being immersed in the vibration of an enjoyment which lacks obstacles. Aesthetic emotion is thus no different from attaining the state of Śiva, which is no different from Śiva's *mukhya ātma*, or freedom (*svātantrya*). *Rasa is* a sort of direct, sensory, experiential knowing, in the sense that it is constituted by savoring (*camatkāra*) *not some particular object*, but by the inherent affectivity of unbounded sensory-cognitive activity *itself*.

5.4.4 Siva's Primary Essence, Savoring, and Rasa

My intent in incorporating Abhinavgupta's view of aesthetic emotion has been to substantiate my view that entering the state of Śiva should be understood as having an indeterminable locus. It is thus important to note that this notion of savoring is inseparably linked with Śiva's primary essence: in Pratyabhjiñā, the term *camakṛti* is used to explain that Śiva's essence must be light (*prakāśa*) inseparably linked with *reflective awareness*, because otherwise it would be 'limpid' (IPK I 5.10). The vitality of 'light', so to speak, is its felt vibrational quality. In other words, Śiva's activity (*kriyā*) is this savoring (*camatkārka*) (IPK IV 4.6). If light, which we can think of as the invariant condition and concomitant of all phenomena, were in itself static, or limpid, there would be no feeling to it; it would not be like anything at all.

The various concepts of reflective awareness (*vimarśa*), spontaneous activity (*kriyā*), vibration (*spanda*), savoring (*camatkārka*) and aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) are *deeply*, inseparably linked: reflective awareness is the rapidly vibrating, affectively rich, self-luminous, indeterminate

(with respect to its locus), expansive, unfurling essence of that presence which permeates all finite things.

5.4.5 Conclusion

I have argued that indefinite modal description of phenomenality, when enacted, can be understood as embodying an indeterminate species of knowledge by acquaintance in the sense that it enacts and actualizes the *rasa* (taste; meaning; form) that is its 'referent'. Its 'referent', like Śiva, is all-pervasive, paradoxically inexpressible, and radically free. The *form of* this radical freedom (freedom from limitation; freedom to variously permutate) is constitutive of IMD of phenomenality. Just as a theatrical performance actualizes a generalized emotion that consists in a sort of affective state which is indeterminate with respect to its locus, IMD of phenomenality actualizes the freedom of phenomenality not just in itself, but in and for us who participate in its enactment. We can think of indefinite modal description as a process of conceptual-linguistic self-surrender—one must surrender one's personal desire to attain *the* expression of determinate knowledge of phenomenality in order to savor the meaning/knowledge it embodies (indeterminate knowledge by acquaintance). This self-surrender is facilitated by the activity of moving back and forth between successive failures to express complete determinate knowledge of phenomenality.[155]

We cannot absolutely distinguish between IMD of phenomenality and its 'referent'. This is not to say that the two are identical. Rather, the reality of the distinction between the two is indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*). Indefinite modal description does not collapse the distinction between itself and phenomenality into identity. If the distinction between phenomenality and

[155] When enacted, the series consists in an acquaintance with that which is indeterminable as either private or public. It is a conceptual-linguistic activity that can blossom into blissful, neither private nor public, acquaintance with that which cannot be eliminated from any inner or outer phenomenon but cannot be the object of a determinate cognition expressed by any single description.

indefinite modal description were eliminated, we could determinatively assert that phenomenality *is* indefinite modal description. But this would be a single, unqualified, deterministic linguistic utterance, which would rather comically snare us again on the first horn of the semantic dilemma. The knowledge embodied by indefinite modal description cannot be expressed with a single unqualified statement. But this knowledge, or know*ing*, is richly manifest, both in its enactment, and in being witnessed when enacted. A theory constituted by indefinite modal description is suited to theorize that which cannot be externally differentiated from anything whatsoever: indeterminacy spreads out across its entire range of articulation and denotation—across the series, its referent, and the distinction between the two. In a way, this alternative mode of description carries out the structure of Advaitic falsity (*mithyātva*), or indeterminacy, and this transforms a disjunctive seed into a blossoming, vibrating, self-manifesting dialogical freedom.

CHAPTER 6. DYNAMIC DESCRIPTION AS DESIRELESS ACTION

Introduction

In this final chapter, I expand on the soteriological implications of my epistemological account of indefinite modal description of phenomenality by analyzing the type of activity tokened by such description in terms of the Pan-Hindu concept of desireless action (*niṣkama karma*), which is theorized in the *Bhagavad Gītā.*

First, I interpret the *Gītā* as being indexed, much like Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda,* by a linguistically-bent, broadly nondualist perspective (6.2). On the basis of this interpretation, I contend that *niṣkama karma* is not an instrument for, but a concretization of, liberation or release (*Mokṣa*) from the existential suffering perpetuated by dualistic apprehension and identification with limited subjectivity. Then, I offer an argument which links indefinite modal description of phenomenality with the *Gītā*'s concept of *niṣkama karma*, and shows that the intersubjective accessibility of the liberation intrinsic to such alternative talk of the indefinite (phenomenality), understood as desireless action, is relatively broad (6.3). This, on my view, is an added virtue of describing phenomenality by alternating between qualified expressions of determinate knowledge of it.

6.1 Detailed Summary of the Chapter

Broadly speaking, the concept of desireless action is the concept of acting without desire for the fruits of one's actions. In the *Gītā*, the principle of *niṣkama karma* is promoted in an act-deontological framework; it is connected to the view that in deciding what action to take when faced with an ethical dilemma, one ought to do one's duty (*dharma*) rather than act with concern for the projected consequences of one's actions. However, this act-based ethical view is asserted

in the context of a broadly consequentialist doctrine of salvation: one should act in this way for the sake of actualizing the self-knowledge which constitutes release or liberation (*Mokṣa*) from strict identification with individual selfhood and the karmic cycle of rebirth (*samsara*) such identification perpetuates.[156] My intent will be to show how bringing the overarching dialectic of this dissertation into dialogue with the *Gītā*'s unique combination of act-deontology and broad consequentialism can enrich our understanding of the epistemic and salvific dimensions of enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality.

I will begin by sketching the basic plot of the *Gītā*, and its theoretical environs. I will show that although the metaphysical commitments of the *Gītā* are interpretable along various lines, there is solid textual evidence for the reasonableness of engaging with the linguistically bent nondualist interpretive perspective I have been arguing for in this dissertation. Foregrounding the interpretive lens inflected by this perspective, I will analyze the central ethical message of the *Gītā*—we should perform desireless action for the sake of liberation—and argue that although *niṣkama karma* is recommended in a broadly consequentialist context, it should be understood neither as a *means* to attaining release from the suffering (*samsara*) perpetuated by strict identification with limited subjectivity (Brahman-knowledge), nor as a practical tool for *eradicating* individual selfhood. On my view, it should be understood as a concretization of that release—an adaptive mode *of* limited subjectivity which has *intrinsic* epistemic and liberative value.

I will then argue that enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality is one way of acting without desire for the fruits of one's actions.[157] From this, I will conclude that liberation is intrinsic (but, importantly, not limited) to indefinite modal description of phenomenality. This

[156] I am indebted to Vrinda Dalmiya for this characterization of the *Gītā*'s ethics.
[157] This means literally going through the process of first asserting that phenomenality is, in a sense, inexpressible because all-pervasive, then recognizing and asserting that, when referenced *as* inexpressible, it is *not*, and so on.

means, on my view, that by intentionally swinging between alternative grasps of that presence which invariantly attends and pervades all phenomena, with explicit awareness of its non-difference from *all of our own mental modifications*, we may gradually temper our tendency to grasp at *absolute*, unqualified knowledge of reality, of consciousness, and of our own selfhood, and therein become knowingly actualized *as freedom*: freedom *from* the existential anxiety of laboring under the presumption of there being absolutist metaphysical knowledge to be expressed, and freedom *to* variously reflexively determine reality, consciousness, and self without being compelled in doing so by the habitual tendency to seek a stable, doxastic resting place.[158]

Having made this argument, I will analyze the special virtue of indefinite modal description of phenomenality over other variants of *niṣkama karma*. I will argue that because it is *linguistic* desireless action, the *intersubjective* salience of the liberation intrinsic to it is relatively greater than that of non-linguistic (or ambiguously linguistic) tokens of the type. Language is, after all, the primary vehicle of consensus or shared, felt meaning.

In this dissertation, I have argued that the unrestricted, oscillatory process of successively predicating seemingly contradictory properties of the subject term *phenomenality* from different perspectives constitutes an indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) species of knowledge by acquaintance with that 'referent'.[159] To carry out indefinite modal description of the invariant condition and concomitant of all subjective and objective phenomena which cannot be tracked as a referent by any single determinative linguistic utterance is both to be immediately presented with the living

[158] Here the term 'self' signifies not the limited subject, e.g., you or me, but the very activity I have been talking about, which embodies the form of the paradoxically inexpressible immanent cause' of all finite things. This notion of being actualized as freedom is consistent with discussions of freedom found in Neo-Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā.

[159] I put the term 'referent' in single quotes here to indicate that all things considered this oscillatory process does not have a referent. I have called this process indefinite modal description of phenomenality, or semantic alternation regarding phenomenality's inexpressibility.

form of its paradoxical inexpressibility, and to *embody* that form, and therein intimately know it.[160] Understood on close analogy with the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva concept of attaining the state of Śiva, the activity of swinging between mutually valid logical alternatives regarding what phenomenality *is* concretely manifests phenomenality's paradoxically inexpressible, uncapturable 'primary essence' (*mukhya ātma*) without reifying it *as such*. To put this point in somewhat metaphorical terms, it is as if the referent of the basic structure of this activity—the literal series of qualified determinative linguistic utterances which begins with "in a sense, phenomenality is inexpressible"—spreads *itself* out over that series. Manifested as such in its actively embodied form—*as* unconstrained determinative activity (*kriyā*) and knowledge (*jñāna*)—this nominal referent has no determinable locus.[161] Here, the term 'knowledge' denotes neither a conventional act of knowledge wherein a subject knows some object of knowledge, nor a mysteriously nondual, self-luminous (*svāprakaśa*) state of awareness. Rather, it denotes an activity which constitutes knowledge by acquaintance—this active, dynamical *way of knowing* lacks an intentional object (and is in that sense *broadly* nondual and nonintentional) and concretely reveals itself in and through its own activity. At the risk of overcomplicating things with another epistemological perspective on indefinite modal description of phenomenality, we should note that *in* constituting an indeterminable species of knowledge by acquaintance, the activity of alternating between qualified determinate expressions

[160] Just as "I" know my body first and foremost not through having an external perspective on it, but by inhabiting it, enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality involves 'knowing' the nominal referent of the term phenomenality through incarnating it.

[161] *What* is known through indefinite modal description is itself a *sort* of knowledge; it is a sort of knowledge which, like the Pratyabhijñā concept of reflexive awareness (*vimarśa*), is inextricable from its enactment. In indefinite modal description, there is no fixed distinction between the act (activity) of knowledge and its intentional object. The activity *is* the knowledge that is known in and through itself, as it unfolds.

of phenomenality's inexpressibility also constitutes *practical knowledge*.[162] Here, *what* is known is known in virtue of being embodied, and this embodiment is performed.

My primary focus thus far has been on explaining the semantic and epistemic functionality of indefinite modal description of phenomenality.[163] But in connecting the enactment of this alternative linguistic activity with attaining the state of Śiva, which is supposed to constitute "liberation in this very life" (ĪPV IV 16; Torella 2013, 218), I have also implied a soteriological thesis, i.e., the thesis that a sort of liberation dwells in dynamic and unbounded semantic alternation regarding phenomenality's inexpressibility.[164] This liberation may be understood in terms of release (*Mokṣa*) from the dualistic mode of apprehension wherein the limited subject is phenomenologically opposed to a world of objects and other subjects, and ignorant of the extent of their own self-determining and world-constructing powers. Furthermore, I have analyzed the indeterminacy of the knowledge enacted by semantic alternation regarding phenomenality's inexpressibility in terms of the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva view of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*). I have appealed to the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva encounter with *rasa* theory primarily to establish that the

[162] This is a rather crude way of putting it, but it may be helpful to think of the referent of the series which starts with "in a sense, phenomenality is inexpressible" as being Brahman-knowledge (*Brahma-jñāna*) or the state of Śiva. Both are inseparably linked with knowledge (*jñāna*), and both are supposed to be self-luminous, or nondual (not illuminated by the subjective awareness of some other; not an object of knowledge). My point in saying that the referent of the series spreads itself out over the series is not to suggest that some sort of mysteriously nondual, rapidly quivering essence permeates the series of qualified statement. Of course, in my discussion of the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva concept of Śiva's primary essence, I used these terms. But there is an important difference between saying, on the one hand, that indefinite modal description of phenomenality is permeated by a nondual vibrational essence which we can feel but not intersubjectively observe and, on the other hand, saying that indefinite modal description constitutes this 'essence' in terms of its literal, concrete, formal structure. We need not penetrate to some unseen core of indefinite modal description of phenomenality to see its dynamicity or broad nonintentionality. Recall that the series itself, all things considered, is *broadly* nondual/nonintentional and *broadly* self-revealing *qua* knowledge. It is broadly nondual/nonintentional in the sense that it lacks an intentional object and instantiates no absolute distinction between itself and its referent. It is broadly self-revealing in that it reveals *itself* not to itself properly speaking, but concretely in its own performance.

[163] Recall that I am using the phrase 'indefinite modal description' to refer to the literal semantic activity of first affirming that phenomenality is, in a sense, inexpressible, then affirming the negation of that qualified propositional knowledge, but from a different perspective, then, from another perspective, affirming the conjunction of the two, and so on.

[164] I have argued that this 'state' cannot be absolutely differentiated from *Brahma-jñāna* in Advaita Vedānta.

knowledge enacted by indefinite modal description of phenomenality is non-different from the taste, flavor or felt meaning (*rasa*) of such activity, which is indeterminable as either absolutely subjective or absolutely objective, and thus, in a very important sense, *publicly available*. In noting the public availability of the knowledge or felt meaning enacted by indefinite modal description of phenomenality, I have added a layer to the soteriological thesis implied by connecting such activity with entering the nature of Śiva: when enacted, indefinite modal description of phenomenality activates the *feeling* of that determinative activity which is free from being absolutely determined, and free to variously determine *itself* without limitation. In other words, the liberation dwelling in indefinite modal description of phenomenality is emotional, energetic or affective in nature, and is neither just in the subject who dynamically describes phenomenality nor just in the activity itself.

I emphasize the indeterminacy of the liberative nature of enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality for an important reason: my intent is not to connect this linguistic activity with some ineffable, irreducibly subjective state of blissful awareness (the type of liberation adepts might reverently reference and hope to trigger through careful discourse but fail to demonstrate). My intent is quite the opposite: I wish to suggest that the existential bliss normally associated with *transcending* the everyday, practical affairs of the limited subject may be understood as located *nowhere in particular*, and therefore as barred from no corner of the conventional world of mutually opposed subjects *and* objects, or their concrete, seemingly mundane machinations. This account of bliss could entail the pragmatic, psychological thesis that in endeavoring to assist ourselves and others towards experiencing less suffering, we may find it useful to emphasize the *intrinsic* liberative nature of a certain type of practical activity. On my view, indefinite modal description is a token of this type.

6.2 Desireless Action in the *Bhagavad Gītā*

The *Bhagavad Gītā* is a relatively short but significant section of the *Mahābārata*, the celebrated Sanskrit epic which details a war of succession between two related clans (the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas). The *Gītā* opens with the great Pāṇḍava warrior Arjuna standing on the brink of battle, facing a destructive dilemma.[165] He and his brothers have spent thirteen years in exile, and now they stand to reclaim their kingdom. He may, on the one hand, go into war against his cousins, many of whom are in the Kaurava forces. But he is in profound anguish at the idea of killing his kinsmen, and worried about what it would do to his soul in this life and the next. He may, on the other hand, retreat. But then he would face disappointing his family and extending their exile. Gripped by sorrow and terror, Arjuna is addressed by Krishna, an avatar of the god Vishnu. Arjuna conveys his anguish to Krishna. In response, the "blessed Lord" (*śribhagavān*) Krishna tells Arjuna that he is mourning *what he should not mourn* (BG II, 11).[166] This normative claim about Arjuna's grief has a deeply metaphysical justificatory basis. Arjuna should not mourn for the dead, Krishna says, because in all of us there is something eternal, which does not die when the body dies:

> Truly, I never was not
> Nor you, nor these lords of men
> And neither shall we be not
> We all exist from now onward (BG II, 12)[167]
>
> Indeed, know that that by which all this is pervaded
> Is indeed indestructible
> Destruction of this which is eternal
> No one can bring about (BG II, 17)
>
> These bodies have an end;
> The dweller in the body is eternal, imperishable and immeasurable

[165] I thank Vrinda Dalmiya for this characterization of Arjuna's anguish on the brink of battle.
[166] *Aścoyān anvaścosas tvaṁ*
[167] *na tvevāham jātu nāsaṁ na tvam neme janādhipaḥ na vaiva na bhaviṣyāmaḥ sarve vayam ataḥ param*

Therefore, O Arjuna (descendant of Bharata), fight! (BG II, 18)[168]

He who thinks this (the embodied self) the slayer
And he who takes this self to be the slain,
Both do not understand
It does not kill nor is it killed (BG II, 19)

It is never born, nor does it ever die,
Nor once having been does it come not to be
Unborn, eternal, perpetual, primordial
It is not killed when the body is killed (BG II, 20)[169]

This primordial dweller in the body which is unborn and eternal is *Brahman*. Famously, interpretations of the *Gītā's* philosophical intent vary. The *Gītā* embraces Saṁkhya themes, like the ideal of disidentifying with constructed personas and psychological processes (Philipps 2009, 101). But it also seems to eschew the dualism of classical Saṁkhya in favor of a monistic vision of the Upaniṣadic concept of Brahman.[170] These are probably mutually valid perspectives on the *Gītā*'s overall philosophical intent. At the same time, I think that we have good reason to opt for viewing the *Gitā*'s metaphysics from a linguistically bent nondualist perspective, i.e., the semantic perspective wherein the luminosity immanent in all things is recognized as being paradoxically resistant to conceptual and linguistic capture. Here one might worry that I am simply reading my view that phenomenality is everywhere in a paradox generating way into the *Gītā*, i.e., one might think my interpretation of the *Gītā* springs from my antecedent commitments and my human propensity to project my commitments onto novel stimuli.[171] But my thinking on how we can view the *Gītā* is strongly grounded in a set of clear affinities between the *Gītā*'s approach to describing

[168] These translations make some reference to those of Maitra (2018).
[169] *na jāyate mriyate vā kadāchin nāyaṁ bhūtvā bhavitā vā na bhūyaḥ ajo nityaḥ śāśvato 'yaṁ purāṇo na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre*
[170] Historical figures like Gandhi and Vivekananda have interpreted the *Gitā* as a commentary on Vedānta philosophy. See Vivekananda, (1953).
[171] We might imagine this sort of worry coming from a Madhyamka Buddhist perspective.

Brahman and Śaṅkara's approach to doing the same. I will elaborate on these affinities in the next section.

6.2.1 Interpreting the Gītā's metaphysical commitments from a broadly nondualist perspective

On my view, a linguistically bent nondualist perspective is embedded in both Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā.[172] But to characterize this perspective here, I will focus on Advaita Vedānta. This is because Advaita Vedānta is closer to the *Gītā* at the level of language; it encompasses explicit talk of Brahman (unlike Pratyabhijñā).

First, we may note that the Brahman of the *Gītā* is obviously akin to the concept of qualified Brahman (*saguṇa Brahman*) in Advaita Vedānta—it is "the absolute and origin of the universe who…is present in every self" (Phillips 2009, 100). Like *saguṇa Brahman* in Advaita Vedānta,, the *Gītā*'s dweller in the body is the immanent cause of all finite things, including the individual self, which is to all finite things as sea-water is to waves and bits of sea foam.[173]

Second, we find a two-pronged characterization of Brahman in the *Gītā*. On the one hand, the dweller in the body is said to be eternal (*nitya*), indestructible (*avināśinam*), unborn (*ajam*) and imperishable (*avyayam*) (BG II, 21). On other hand, it is said to be unmanifest (*avyaktaḥ)*, unthinkable or unimaginable (*acintyaḥ*) (BG II, 26). This two-pronged characterization of the

[172] This way of putting the point is informed by Jaina perspectivalism; we may understand different theories and statements as being indexed by perspectives or parameters which constrain how they refer.

[173] Here, one could raise the objection that the Gītā is not interpretable through the lens of Śaṅkaran nondualism because the "absolute" of Advaita Vedānta is actually *nirguṇa Brahman*, not *saguṇa Brahman*. But I have argued that the *advaita-vāda* does not express the absolutist metaphysical thesis that a static, singular, unchanging awareness is absolutely real (*pāramārthika sat*) over an immanent, all-embracing, ever-permutating universal presence. *Both* forms of Brahman are objects of dualistic apprehension. Both are indeterminable (*anirvacanīya*) as either different or non-different from substratum of their appearance (Brahman, which is *pāramārthika sat*), and thus indeterminable as either absolute reality (*sattva*) or absolute unreality (*asattva*). The characterization of Brahman as the cause and origin of the world plays a key role in Advaita Vedānta: recognizing the omnipresence of Brahman yields awareness of how Brahman resists conceptual and linguistic *capture*. And this conceptual-linguistic grasp of Brahman is itself false in the relevant sense of ontological and semantic indeterminacy. Since *nirguṇa Brahman* is false (*mithyā*) in the relevant sense, and interminable as absolutely real, we should not diametrically contrast the Gītā's immanent indweller with the Brahman of Advaita Vedānta.

dweller in the body directly corresponds to the Advaitic distinction between *saguṇa Brahman* and *nirguṇa Brahman.* Brahman is said to be, on the one hand, that which pervades and sustains all finite things (*saguṇa Brahman*) and, on the other hand, that which, because lacking any qualities *of its own*, cannot be known as an object or referenced (*nirguṇa Brahman*).

Third, the *Gītā* can be interpreted as endorsing the same criterion of reality (and corresponding criterion of unreality) as Śaṅkara. In both the *Gītā* and the *advaita-vāda*, the unreal is that which never appears and the real is that which is never cancelled or sublated (*bhādita*):

> The unreal has no being
> The real never ceases to be
> The boundary between these two is
> seen by the truth perceivers (BG II, 16)[174]

Here, the unreal could be interpreted as having no being in the sense that it never manifests at all, like the son of a barren woman or a sky flower. And the real could be interpreted as never ceasing to be in the sense that it is never cancelled or sublated in experience, i.e., Brahman. In sum, in both Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* and the *Gītā*, we find the concept of Brahman as the immanent cause of all finite things, the two-pronged characterization of Brahman, and something like the sublatability criterion of reality.

I have previously noted these aspects of Śaṅkara's view in resisting the anti-realist interpretation and arguing that the view does not express any absolutist metaphysical thesis. The philosophical intent of the *advaita-vāda* is to indicate that although we are always acquainted with Brahman, and although we can recognize Brahman's omnipresence at the empirical level of analysis, we cannot express complete determinate knowledge of Brahman, not even

[174] *nāsato vidyate bhāvo nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ ubhayor api dṛṣto'ntas tvanayor tattvardaśibhiḥ*

(paradoxically) with the determinative linguistic utterance that we cannot express complete determinate knowledge of Brahman.[175]

6.2.2 The Normative Dimension of the Gītā

We are now positioned to examine the normative dimension of the *Gītā* in more depth; this examination will substantiate my view that the *Gītā's* ethical concept of desireless action has intrinsic epistemic and liberative value. After telling Arjuna not to mourn the dead because Brahman does not die when the body is slain, Krishna tells Arjuna that he *should* go into battle (BG II, 37). And he should do so in a specific way: he should go into battle holding pleasure and pain, gain and loss, victory and defeat to be alike (BG II, 36). He should be indifferent towards opposites, fixed in truth, free from thoughts of acquisition and comfort, and *possessed* of the self (BG II, 45). He should act, but without attachment to the fruits of his actions (BG II, 51):

> Your jurisdiction is in action alone
> Not at any time in its fruits
> The fruits of action should never be your motive
> Never be attached to inaction[176]
>
> Fixed in yoga, perform actions

[175] We may keep the non-contradictoriness of Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā in mind when interpreting the metaphysics of the Gītā from a broadly nondualist perspective. I have already argued that Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā are not diametrically opposed schools of thought because a difference between them cannot be asserted at the ultimate level of analysis. On the one hand, they are indexed by *different* semantic perspectives: Śaṅkara privileges the soteriological import of referencing Brahman as unqualified consciousness (*nirguṇa Brahman*) over transmuting omnipresent consciousness (*saguṇa Brahman*), whereas Utpaladeva thoroughly emphasizes the immanence of Śiva's primary essence (consciousness; light; reflexive awareness; supreme word) in the world, even when talking of that act of recognition which is supposed to trigger release. But, on the other hand, they are indexed by the *same* semantic perspective; the perspective in which the paradoxical inexpressibility of the all-pervasive substratum of all finite things (Brahman; Śiva) is appreciated. In Advaita Vedānta, the paradoxical inexpressibility of Brahman is recognized through Śaṅkara's repeated references to Upanisadic verses which maintain that Brahman is never an object of knowledge. In Pratyabhijñā, Śiva does not "enter the sphere of full and definite knowledge" (ĪPKV I 1.3). Śiva is "unobjectifiable" despite the fact that Śiva is objectified in a very heavy-handed fashion through the expression of its primary essence (Torella 2013, 86). In sum, in both Advaita Vedānta and Pratyabhijñā, there is talk of that luminosity which, because all-pervasive, cannot be externally differentiated from anything whatsoever, and cannot be captured with concepts or words.

[176] *karmaṇevādhikāraste mā phaleṣu kadācana mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'stv akarmaṇi*

Having abandoned attachment, conqueror of riches,
Having become indifferent to attainment or non-attainment,
This equanimity is yoga, it is said[177]

To summarize, Krishna tells Arjuna that to perform actions without attachment to their fruits is to be fixed in yoga, and to be yoked to wisdom (BG II, 51). To be fixed in yoga and yoked to wisdom is to be freed from the bondage of rebirth (BG II, 51), and contented in the self (BG II, 55).

To become indifferent to attainment or non-attainment of the fruits of one's actions, one must withdraw senses from sense-objects. Dwelling on sense-objects gives rise to attachment, which gives rise to desire, which gives rise to anger when the fruits of one's actions aren't attained (BG 57, 58). To respond to non-attainment or attainment with agitation, passion, fear or anger is to remain mired in the karmic cycle.[178] But to act without attachment to or desire for the fruits of one's actions is to attain the bliss, or release, of Brahman (BG II, 72). Krishna thus draws a connection between attainting equanimity through a yoga which *consists in action* and becoming self-actualized *as* Brahman. We may note that an implicit insight of Krishna's here—the insight that knowledge by acquaintance with that paradoxically inexpressible presence which permeates all finite things isn't construable as a blank or inert state of awareness transcendent of conventional conceptual and linguistic activity—has recurred across this dissertation. I have argued at length that this insight is present in Śaṅkara's indication that *Brahma-jñāna* cannot be known as an object or apprehended by speech (since it is just being Brahman). I have also shown that the Jaina doctrine that reality itself, considered as a whole, is infinitely faceted and characterizable. The Neo-Vedāntic stance of describing the absolute as having alternative forms is suggestive of the view that encountering the absolute in the mode of consciousness we call language occurs in a sort of

[177] *yogasthaḥ kuru karmāṇi saṅgaṁ tyaktvā dhanaṁjaya siddyasiddhyoḥ samo bhūtvā samatvaṁ yoga ucyate*
[178] I will explain the concept of *karma* presently, in the next paragraph.

alternation, or dynamically. Finally, the Pratyabhijñā Śaiva concept of Śiva as freedom encompasses freedom from conceptual/linguistic capture and implies that *attaining the state of* Śiva cannot be captured as such either. Here this insight bears more practical fruits: being motivated to act by concern for the fruits of one's actions entrenches the salience of limited selfhood and precludes self-knowledge. Self-restraint, wherein the self that is restrained is the individual agent (*kartṛ*) and enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*), enables release, which is being Brahman (BG 72).

This account of desireless action explicitly presupposes the (arguably Pan-Indian) principle of action (*karma*), i.e., the principle that all actions have effects. This basic causal principle informs the psychological thesis that the effects of our actions manifest in us as residual tendencies (*saṁskāra*s) (Deutsch 1969, 67; 71).[179] If I, for example, wake up in the morning with an open schedule and go for a walk out of a desire to stay active, the effect of this action manifests in me as a tendency to repeat this behavior, and to prioritize physical activity when faced with similar opportunities. Krishna tells Arjuna that he cannot avoid acting, for even inaction is action. Even if Arjuna were to leave the battlefield to avoid bloodshed, he would produce the tendency in himself to respond similarly when faced with potential violence in future situations. Even inaction born of desire to avoid some outcome produces a tendency in the agent to repeat the same action according to the same desire. But desireless action alone does not perpetuate the karmic cycle of being compelled to act and respond to environmental stimuli by habitual reaction patterns:

> Not from abstention of action
> Does a man attain the state beyond karma
> And not from renunciation alone
> Does he approach fulfillment (BG III, 4)[180]

[179] I follow Eliot Deutsch in translating *saṁskāra*s as "residual traces". Note that in the context of certain Buddhist dialectics, this translation more closely resembles the translation of *anyuśaya*s (Smith 2019).
[180] *na karamaṇām anārambhān nāiṣkarmyaṁ puruṣo śnute na ca saṁnyasanādeva siddhiṁ samadhigacchati*

The message of the *Gītā* is thus that a certain kind of action is required for liberation, one which does not produce *saṃskāra*s. Desireless action does not produce a tendency in one to act according to a similar desire in the future, because one did not act with that desire in the first place. Acting without concern for the fruits of one's actions is acting outside the context in which actions produce residual karmic tendencies—tendencies which sharpen the salience of limited subjectivity. Residual tendencies (*saṃskāra*s) sharpen the salience of limited subjectivity by promoting habitual action (e.g., the habit of experiencing strong reactive attitudes like resentment when one is inconvenienced). Over time, our habits become stronger, and more relevant to our perspectives on the world.

Having a strong habit causally explained by a *unique* set of previous experiences (e.g., tending to resent others when inconvenienced because of having reacted similarly in the past when faced with a number of personal trials) is significantly constitutive of being *an* empirical individual amongst others, i.e., we are differentiated from one another in terms of our habits and we are prone to identify ourselves with our habits (e.g., I *am* righteously aggrieved when hassled!). To put the point in terms roughly consistent with Śankara's *advaita-vāda*, the more habits there are at play in general, the more *ingrained* attributes there are available for superimposition (*adhyāsa*) on the witness (*sākṣin*), which sustains empirical individuality (and the affliction of taking oneself to be *just* that). The superimposition of *ingrained* attributes on *sākṣin* certainly obscures identification with *sākṣin* more than the superimposition of flexible attributes.

Outside the context of acting with desire for the fruits of one's actions, action continues, and limited subjectivity remains salient. But it does not dominate the phenomenological plane. The phenomenological plane opens up and becomes characterized by freedom from being *determined*

and *impelled* to act by residual tendencies. The fulfillment or perfection of the release that is Brahman *is in* this freedom from being determined to act (desireless action).[181]

6.3 The Liberation Intrinsic to Indefinite Modal Description of Phenomenality

Now that I have analyzed this concept of desireless action, I will draw a connection between desireless action and enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality. In connecting the two, I intend to show that a sort of liberation is intrinsic to the activity of dynamically describing phenomenality. The first premise establishes that desireless action is a type of activity.

1. *Niṣkama karma* is a type of activity.

In the *Gītā*, desireless action is straightforwardly understood as a way of acting, or an activity. It is the activity of acting without concern for the fruits of one's actions, and instead doing one's duty.

The second premise links indefinite modal description with the concept of desireless action in the *Gītā*:

2. Indefinite modal description of phenomenality is a kind of *niṣkama karma*.

I have three reasons to offer in support of this premise: First, to enact indefinite modal description of phenomenality is to be fixed in the jurisdiction of action, in this case, verbal action. It is the *activity* of consecutively predicating seemingly opposite properties of the subject term 'phenomenality' from various perspectives on the referent of the term. Just as action is not renounced in *niṣkama karma,* determinative activity is not abandoned in the process of alternating between qualified expressions of determinate knowledge of phenomenality. Second, the activity

[181] Still, the release that is Brahman is not the object of the dualistic apprehension expressed by the statement that release is standing firm in *niṣkama karma*. It remains the case that release dwells in the *actual* enactment of acting without desire in the relevant way.

of describing phenomenality in this way involves indifference to the attainment or non-attainment of complete, determinate knowledge of the referent of the term. It is protracted determinative activity performed *without attachment to its end.* Third, the enactment of IMD of phenomenality is an activity that assuages craving and I-making. Krishna tells Arjuna that he must act without desire because desireless action alone enables attaining *freedom* from the karmic cycle of being *compelled* to react to environmental stimuli by residual tendencies (*saṁskāra*s). Just as Arjuna going into battle out of desire for a certain outcome would produce a residual tendency in him to react similarly in future situations due to the same desire, expressing determinate knowledge of phenomenality (or remaining completely silent about phenomenality *in the context of discourse about its ontological status*) out of a desire to express complete, final determinate knowledge of the referent of the term would produce in us the tendency to desire and seek absolutist metaphysical knowledge. And the wish to find and express *the* answer about some aspect of reality—oneself, consciousness or reality in general—is a *massive* I-maker. In attempting to express *the* answer to a descriptive question about some phenomenon, in this case, phenomenality, one hopes that the answer can be found *from one's own perspective*. In indefinite modal description, one traverses the various perspectives embedded into the modal functors (*syāt*s) qualifying the figures in the series, such that one's own perspective blossoms out over many, becomes less confined, and less phenomenologically dominant of the activity of expressing (qualified) determinate knowledge.

In sum, when enacted, the activity of successively predicating seemingly contradictory properties of the term phenomenality from different perspectives on the referent of that term operates in accord with the "duty" of describing phenomenality, but without attachment to the

possibility of ever expressing complete determinate knowledge of the referent of the term.[182]From these two premises, I derive the following conclusion:

C1. Therefore, indefinite modal description is a type of activity.

This conclusion follows straightforwardly from the first two premises, and lays the groundwork for further analysis of the type of activity exemplified by indefinite modal description.

In the third premise, I lay the groundwork for my view that linguistic activities, i.e., indefinite modal description, are more intersubjectively meaningful than non-linguistic activities:

> **3**. Many activities are pragmatically meaningful as opposed to semantically meaningful. That is, they derive their meaning from the context of their performance.

For example, the action of bowing to a member of the royal family in the UK is meaningful as a gesture of deference and loyalty. In the cultural context of the UK, one would see the action of bowing, and know that it means deference and loyalty to the crown. Let's consider the less

[182] Recall that, on my view, principled silence isn't a coherent option in (hypothetical) discursive contexts about phenomenality, because it would be logically equivalent to expressing the determinative linguistic utterance that phenomenality is inexpressible. Here one might raise an objection along these lines: an interlocutor in the relevant discursive context might choose silence not out of a desire to implicitly assert the claim that phenomenality is inexpressible but out of a wish to avoid suffering. Taking up the mantel of a Buddhist quietist perspective, one might think that chasing after something that is infinitely characterizable sounds exhausting, and refrain from engaging for this reason. To all this I would offer a few responses. First, my intent has not been to claim that a person's principled silence would necessarily imply *their intent* to assert that phenomenality is inexpressible. I grant that an interlocutor in such a context could opt for quietude for at least a few different reasons. My intent has been to highlight that in contexts structured by semantic meaning, silence could (and likely would) be interpreted as indicating that the person in question views the explanandum as being something beyond conceptual and linguistic capture. To avoid indicating to others that the explanandum at issue in the relevant discussion is simply inexpressible (in the sense embedded into the first figure of indefinite modal description of phenomenality) the quietist would need to qualify their silence—they would need to explain that they are choosing to remain silent not because they think they *absolutely* cannot express determinate knowledge of the phenomenon at issue in the discussion, but because they have grasped that there an infinite variety of qualified determinative linguistic utterances which could be asserted about it. If they were to qualify their determinative linguistic utterance in this way, they would probably then need to model such indefinite modal description of the relevant explanandum to get across their meaning and then meaningfully return to silence. My concern has always been not just with what an individual might think about phenomenality's inexpressibility, but with what groups of people might think about it in spaces dominated by specific discourse on the topic.

mundane example of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga*[183]. *Kuṇḍalinī* is the name for consciousness conceived of as the force or energy (*citi-śakti*) present in all things, often latently:

> The Tantric technique of attaining self-recognition is arousal of latent Kuṇḍalini: "At the bodily level, the *kuṇḍalinī* is conceived as lying dormant…at the base of the spine…the path of the expression of the Kuṇḍalinī is the spinal cord" together with the cakra-s and the central yogic nerve (*nādi*). When this pathway is cleared and the cakras are opened, the Kuṇḍalinī is awakened to express itself in its fulness" (Dyczkowski 1987, 143).

In *Kuṇḍalinī yoga,* bodily activity is the means of dissolving points of tension in the body that stopper the flow of latent *kuṇḍalinī* (which we may think of Śiva's *kriyā*). Bodily activity is also the *actualization* of that Kuṇḍalinī. When the latent energy is freed up, it basically takes over the body, in and through its own activity. The activity of practicing *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* is meaningful in

[183] This example may seem a bit left-field, but there are few good reasons for incorporating some discussion of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* in this argument (and, therein, this dissertation). First and foremost, the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is historically linked with the Śaiva philosophical tradition, which I have engaged in this dissertation. One could think of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* as the yogic correlate of the vision of attaining the state of Śiva I examined in the previous chapter. Additionally, even if one were unaware of this historical connection, one could see that *kuṇḍalinī yoga* is quite similar to the sort of linguistic activity I have been theorizing. As such, is important for me to differentiate between indefinite modal description of phenomenality and the practice of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga,* while at the same time acknowledging how similar they are. I have not dedicated a separate section to doing so because of general constraints on the scope of this dissertation, and because I am still learning about the *actual* practice of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* (i.e., how one literally does it, rather than the theory of it). But the brief passage on the practice here functions both to substantiate the premise at hand, and to by a slight of hand address potential questions about how the two are different if at all. An adept of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* would probably read all this and think, "okay, this is just *Kuṇḍalinī yoga*". In fact, on an anecdotal aside, I have shared details of my project with dedicated practitioners of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* (friends or teachers of mine), well after having done the initial research, and have learned that they find the overall philosophical intent of this dissertation either just obvious or obvious and interestingly consistent with their own practice. For one thing, the practice of *kuṇḍalinī yoga*, much like the linguistic activity of alternating between asserting determinative linguistic utterances about phenomenality, literally consists in a series of actions, or *kriyā*s (e.g., twisting one's torso from one side to the other, while breathing in or out with each movement, for three to five minutes, then raising one's hands over one's head, steepling the fingers and chanting to the beat of the diaphragm's movement, etc.) which collaboratively constitute an ongoing, dynamic way of enacting/knowing/feeling/actualizing that paradoxically inexpressible, dynamical 'force' which permeates all finite things (*kuṇḍalinī)*. In an expansive mood, one could say that the linguistic activity I am describing basically arouses the latent dynamicity of its referent, such that that dynamicity takes over the linguistic activity itself, becomes harmonized with it, and therein becomes *evident* both in the practitioner and to others in the vicinity practiced enough to recognize the 'physical' signs of such harmonization. One could draw a direct connection between the 'referent' of indefinite modal description of phenomenality and the concept of *kuṇḍalinī* itself: both are that which pervades all things including all bodily and linguistic activity, i.e., that which cannot be apprehended by speech but can be known through activity of a sort. For all these reasons, I include a brief discussion of *Kuṇḍalinī yoga* here, both to substantiate the premise at hand, and to signal my awareness of the possible fruits of an extended comparative analysis of *kuṇḍalinī yoga* and indefinite modal description of phenomenality.

interactional contexts as a way of freeing up latent vital energy. It is meaningful as such because people report experiencing energetic freedom in and through the practice.

Having established that some activities are meaningful in interactional contexts, I note that linguistic activities are meaningful in interactional contexts *and* in virtue of their syntactic structures:

> **4**. Linguistic activities (e.g., discourse) are both pragmatically and semantically meaningful, i.e., meaningful from the perspective of pragmatics and semantics (the study of meaning in logic and language).

The activity of exchanging ideas in academic settings, for example, is meaningful in interactional contexts as a means of finding truth and generating knowledge. Insofar as this activity is also literally constituted by the exchange of ideas which are represented by words and sentences, it is also semantically meaningful. The sentences exchanged have meaning in virtue of their constitutive syntactic elements (words in combination).

Premise five links indefinite modal description with the type of activity which is both pragmatically and semantically meaningful:

> **5**. Indefinite modal description is a linguistic activity.

Indefinite modal description is an ongoing process constituted by affirming seemingly contradictory but subtly qualified determinative linguistic utterances. It is linguistic in this sense. Since it is a linguistic activity, it is both pragmatically and semantically meaningful.

From this premise, I derive the following conclusion:

> **C2.** Therefore, indefinite modal descriptions are both pragmatically and semantically meaningful.

Having established that indefinite modal description of phenomenality would be both pragmatically and semantically meaningful, I begin to expand on the unique value and virtue of the mode of description I have theorized thus far:

6. Intersubjective access to the meaning of an activity that is both pragmatically and semantically meaningful is relatively broad.

I take this to be a fairly obvious fact about meaning, but I should be precise about what I mean by 'relatively broad'. I mean that the conjunction of pragmatic and semantic meaningfulness in an activity makes that activity *more* intersubjectively meaningful than it would be if it were just pragmatically meaningful. Both pragmatic and semantic meaning are intersubjectively meaningful, and, depending on the context, one kind of meaning may be just as meaningful as the other.

One might say, for example, that the pragmatic meaning of bowing to a queen is equal in measure to the semantic meaning of the sentence "the queen has my loyalty and deference", although the meaningfulness of the two *differ in kind*. But the meaning of a non-linguistic activity can, depending on the context, be quite obvious or quite vague. If one is unfamiliar with the relevant social convention determining the meaning of the activity, one may misunderstand its meaning. For example, if I were unaware of the historical custom of bowing to dignitaries, I may misunderstand the act of bowing as an invitation to dinner, or something along those lines. But words have dictionary definitions—there is a good deal of intersubjective consensus about the meaning of words among language users in the relevant language. Although ambiguity is not eradicated through linguistic expression of meaning, it is certainly decreased by it.

I do not wish to claim that semantic meaning is always more intersubjectively accessible than pragmatic meaning on its own. I mean that a pragmatically meaningful event or activity that is *also* semantically meaningful will be meaningful on two levels, and thus accessible both to those who understand the interactional context, and those who can contend in the relevant language game. We are quick to learn the pragmatic meanings of culturally significant actions, even in

foreign contexts. But when we have language by which to co-refer, i.e., semantic meaning to map onto the pragmatically meaningful activity, we learn even faster.

Imagine, for example, the cultural practice of singing the national anthem. Singing the national anthem in any given country is pragmatically meaningful in its cultural context (and across contexts, if the anthem is famous) as an acknowledgment of national affiliation. Let's say I were to travel to a foreign country without knowing the language or the song; I might encounter a group of people singing, gather that they are singing for some collective purpose, but not grasp that they are declaring devotion to their motherland. But let's say one of the people in the crowd were to know English and quickly whisper a translation into my ear—I would then grasp the pragmatic *and* semantic meaning of the activity. My access to the meaning of the activity would be enabled by the fact that it is semantically, not just pragmatically meaningful. Of course, my new friend in the swarm of people could just whisper "this is our national anthem" and I would grasp the pragmatic and semantic meaning of the activity, to an extent. But I would better understand what the activity means on the semantic level by comprehending the exact words stated and declarations made and would therein better understand the activity as a whole. For all these reasons, the conjunction of pragmatic and *direct* semantic meaning in an activity makes its intersubjective accessibility broad relative to that of an activity that is just pragmatically meaningful or just semantically meaningful or pragmatically and indirectly semantically meaningful.

From these premises, the third conclusion follows:

> **C3**. Intersubjective access to the meaning of indefinite modal description is relatively broad.

To appreciate this conclusion, we may again bring other non-linguistic activities to mind. An *adept* practitioner may be able to view someone's *kuṇḍalinī yoga* practice and savor the pragmatic

meaningfulness of their bodily movement, or the energetic liberation intrinsic to it. But the virtue of indefinite modal description of phenomenality is that, as a phenomenon consisting in intelligible sentences, it is explicitly semantically meaningful. It is an activity that embodies energetic liberation much like *kuṇḍalinī yoga,* but, unlike *kuṇḍalinī yoga,* it is also constituted out of words which have publicly available meanings. In addition to being pragmatically meaningful as an alternative mode of describing that luminous presence which invariantly attends all subjective and objective phenomena and resists linguistic capture, it is semantically meaningful as a literal, intelligible description.

Here I connect the felt meaning of actually oscillating between seemingly contradictory expressions of phenomenality's inexpressibility with *being* free from *compelled* habitual action:

7. The meaning of indefinite modal description of phenomenality is not different from the liberation intrinsic to it.

To grasp this premise, we need to understand how liberation is intrinsic to indefinite modal description of phenomenality. Liberation is intrinsic to indefinite modal description in that it is a kind of *niṣkama karma*, and liberation is intrinsic to *niṣkama karma*. The transformative power of desireless action isn't something that follows from it, but something *integral to it*. Importantly, on my interpretation of the message of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, attaining the release or bliss of Brahman is not equivalent to some state *beyond* desireless action (*niṣkama karma*). Release dwells in *niṣkama karma*, and *vice versa*. Krishna says:

> Abandoning all desires
> The man acts free from craving
> Indifferent to "mine", free from I-making,
> He goes to peace[184]
>
> This is the sagely position, Son of Pṛthā
> Having attained this, he is not deluded
> Fixed in this, even at the time of death

[184] *vihāya kāmān yaḥ sarvān pumāṅścarati niḥpṛhaḥ nirmano nirahaṁkāraḥ sa śāntim adhigacchati*

He reaches the release that is Brahman[185]

Here the impersonal locative pronoun 'in this' (*asyām*) refers to casting away (*vihāya*) desires (*kāmān*), acting (*carati*) free from desire (*niḥpṛhaḥ*), and being indifferent to "mine" and "I-making" (*nirmano nirahaṁkāraḥ*). Here, it is clear that standing firm (*sthitvā*) in desireless action, indifferent to the factors causally relevant to the phenomenological dominance of the individual ego, *is* reaching the state of release that is Brahman (*Brahmanirvāṇa*).[186]

Attaining release from the dualistic mode of apprehension in which the self appears different from other selves and from the world is not possible when the individual self looms large and dominant in the phenomenological plane. Attaining this release requires attenuating the factors supporting the phenomenal dominance of individuality. These factors may be thought of as personally-indexed desires, i.e., desires rooted in the personal history of a living organism. When one acts with desire for the fruits of *one's own* actions, one necessarily acts according to desires indexed by *one's own* limited perspective, one's own previous experiences, etc. To do so is to dwell in that perspective, and to reinforce that perspective through acting on it. To act without

[185] *eṣā brāhmī sthitiḥ pārtha nāninām̐ prāpya vimuhyati sthitvā 'syām antakāle 'pi Brahmanirvāṇa ṛcchati*

[186] To cement our grasp of this point, we may consider Krishna's message in connection with Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda*. According to Śaṅkara, in normal, everyday life (*loyāvyavahāra*), we identify with the individual self—the agent (*kartṛ*) of action and enjoyer (*bhoktṛ*) of the fruits of their actions who acts, thinks, feels, wishes, desires, doubts, and so on. This is the *jīva*. The purport of Śaṅkara's *advaita-vāda* is to show, through phenomenological analysis and introspection, that there is error in viewing the *jīva* as *the* self, and in viewing the phenomenal world consisting of a vast plurality of psycho-physical modifications and sense-objects, including other subjects, as being different from the self (*ātman*; *Brahman*). It is through recognizing the all-pervasion of the witness (*sākṣin*) that our normal erroneous sense of the *jīva* being the self and the world being separate from the self can be sublated. But, as I noted in my reconstruction of the *advaita-vāda*, both the falsity of the *jīva* and the falsity of the distinction between Brahman and world can be grasped at the empirical (*vyavahārika*) level of analysis. Śaṅkara says that release is occasioned by Upaniṣadic verses like "thou art that" (*tat tvam asi*) which express the non-difference of *ātman* and *Brahman.* But release from dualistic apprehension, which is just being Brahman, cannot be the dualistic apprehension *of* the non-difference of *ātman* and *Brahman*. It also cannot be, I have argued, coherently cognized as *beyond* all dualistic apprehension. We may think of the *Bhagavad Gītā* as offering a more practical, exoteric account of this release, wherein the mechanism of the correction of erroneous identification with the *jīva* is not a conceptual grasp of the indeterminacy of the ontological distinction between *jīva*, *jagat*, and *Brahman*, but a practice which destabilizes the phenomenality of those distinctions through its enactment.

desire for the fruits of one's actions, cultivate indifference regarding the results, and remain equanimous in the face of their frustration or achievement, is basically to *dwell* in freedom from the dualistic mode of apprehension phenomenologically dominated by limited subjectivity.

I have argued at length in the previous two chapters that the *meaning* of indefinite modal description—the indeterminable species of knowledge by acquaintance it embodies, which can be characterized also in terms of the expansiveness of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*)—dwells in its a*ctual enactment*. The same is true of the liberation intrinsic to indefinite modal description of phenomenality, as it is a kind of *niṣkama karma*. The two (the meaning and the liberation) cannot be separated, because both consist (but are not strictly equivalent or limited to) in the activity itself.

From the first conclusion and the eight premise, I derive my final conclusion, which is the following:

> **C4**. Intersubjective access to the liberation intrinsic to indefinite modal description is relatively broad.

In sum, I have argued that we may understand semantic alternation regarding phenomenality's inexpressibility as intrinsically liberative, and that the liberation intrinsic to it is more publicly available than that of other activities which exemplify desireless action.

6.4 Final Thoughts

In this chapter I have argued that the release from existential suffering securely nested in the literal activity of oscillating between seemingly contradictory expressions of the primary essence of phenomenality (that paradoxically inexpressible luminosity which attends and permeates all subjective and objective phenomena) is relatively intersubjectively accessible. Many traditions which talk of nondual or universal consciousness (including those discussed in this dissertation) may seem to indicate that that presence which is neither subjective nor objective, in virtue of

pervading all things, is beyond conceptual and linguistic capture. And, in a sense, this is what these resources (Advaita Vedānta, Jainism, Neo-Vedānta, Pratyabhijñā, the *Gītā*) tell us. But, at the same time, they indicate that *in* expressing the inexpressibility of this even further explanandum, we reify its *unmitigated* freedom from absolute, determinate conceptual and linguistic capture. We might be led to think, from all this, that liberation or release from dualistic apprehension dwells in transcending the realm of determinative conceptual and linguistic activity. We might think that we *aren't* liberated if we carry on with conventional thinking and talking or (perhaps worse) that others who think and talk conventionally (by all appearances) aren't liberated. But *none* of the traditions I have engaged in this dissertation suggest that knowing phenomenality (what KCB calls 'the absolute') involves a total, final cessation of thinking and talking. All of these traditions, in one way or another, indicate that *what it is to be* liberated, i.e., *what it is like* (Nagel 1974) to have knowledge by acquaintance with that luminosity which invariantly attends and pervades all finite things—cannot be determinatively apprehended, not even *as* being beyond determinative conceptual and linguistic activity.[187] This suggests that liberation *itself*, (e.g., *Brahma-jñāna*; attaining the state of Śiva, etc.) may dwell in everyday life (*lokāvyavahara*), and, moreover, in a variant of the empirical activity of expressing determinate knowledge through language. I have argued that the empirical activity of expressing variously qualified determinate knowledge of phenomenality is intrinsically liberative, understood as a kind of desireless action (*niṣkama karma*). It is a way of acting (expressing determinate knowledge) without attachment to the fruits of one's actions (expressing *complete* determinate knowledge of one's explanandum) which, much like *niṣkama karma* in the *Gītā*, concretizes freedom from the desire to express one final answer

[187] Here one might think that I am conflating liberation with *what it is like* to be liberated. To this worry I would respond that this is exactly what I mean to do, much like how Śaṅkara conflates Brahman and *Brahma-jñāna*.

about consciousness, the self and reality in general, and blossoms into the expansiveness or aesthetic emotion (*rasa*) of determinative activity itself.

DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

I will briefly conclude this dissertation on a playful note, by taking up once more with the spirit of Jaina non-absolutism, and reflecting on the nature of this dissertation. To my mind, this dissertation has variously manifested the spirit of the Jaina doctrine of non-one-sidedness (*anekānta-vāda*).[188] This spirit structures my basic formulation of indefinite modal description. It is the analytical framework which facilitates my analysis of Advaita Vedānta, Pratyabhijñā, and *Gītā* as being differentially parameterized but compatible views. It is manifested in how I incorporate Advaita Vedānta, Jainism *and* Pratyabhijñā in raising and addressing the semantic dilemma for the metaphysics of consciousness. And it legitimizes the fact that my approach to explicating the concept of enacting indefinite modal description of phenomenality has been to describe its various (epistemological, ethical, soteriological) dimensions.

The Jaina doctrine of non-one-sidedness *is itself* non-one-sided, and this is the beauty of it. It contains a staggering, innumerable variety of potential applications, and it naturally harmonizes with an infinite variety of approaches to knowing and expressing *its own intent*, i.e., communicating the radical indeterminacy of reality, and all entities in it, without reifying *what it is like* to be indeterminate. This dissertation itself may be viewed through the lens of the Jaina *anekānta-vāda*; this dissertation is, in a sense, a theory *of* indefinite modal description. In another sense, it is just indefinite modal description. In a sense it is both. In another sense, it is inexpressible as either, and so on. All this has been an exercise in falsity (*mithyātva*), or indeterminacy. All this has been a protracted effort in relaxing points of tension in our schema of logical alternatives regarding not just consciousness, self, world and reality, but also what it is to express knowledge of all these.

[188] This doctrine is formalized in the Jaina theory of sevenfold modal description (*syād-vāda*).

Finally, I wish to note some broader implications of this dissertation's exercise in indeterminacy. The desire to express *absolutist* metaphysical knowledge *from one perspective* is a personally-indexed desire. As I see things, the dominance of personally-indexed desire in philosophical discourse entrenches philosophical dogmatism and discursive colonization (Mohanty 1984)—the type of colonization wherein the viewpoints of marginalized cultures, traditions or methodologies are afforded credibility deficits, misconstrued as being monolithic, or interpreted through the lens of analytical strategies unduly posited as universal. Happily, the Jaina disambiguation strategies which figured centrally in this dissertation can remedy discursive pathologies without collapsing into vacuous, platitudinal, apathetic, or pessimistic sentiments about truth or philosophical exchange (e.g., 'there is no such thing as truth'; 'discussing ideas is a waste of time'). This is because these Jaina strategies can re-frame *discourse itself* as a collaborative, intrinsically meaningful activity. Freed from the personally-indexed and anxiety-inducing desire to make one perspective rule all others, discursive activity itself can expand the horizons of our awareness, allow us to *responsibly* travel across perspectives, and savor the poignant effulgence of philosophical exchange along the way.

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