

## The Mind-Body Problem in Three Indian Philosophies, Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta, Gaṅgeśa's Navya Nyāya, and Aurobindo's Theistic Monism

What is the mind-body problem? What's the complaint? Knowing the difficulty, we can better assess advice to be garnered from Indian philosophies. A theme of this paper is that there is no single mind-body problem but a family of related difficulties concerning the relationships between consciousness and matter. Like the proverbial lump in the rug, philosophers move the problem around, and none, I think, avoids it altogether.

Probably the best starting point is the famous "explanatory gap" from a scientific point of view concerning what is called phenomenal consciousness. Thomas Nagel in a famous paper entitled "What's It Like To Be a Bat" (1974) distinguished (a) our sense of our own experiences from the inside from (b) understanding even the most perfect description or theory of these that did not presuppose personal acquaintance with that which is being described. According to Nagel, not even the best theory could make us understand what's it like to be a bat from a bat's perspective. Although there are research programs that target cognition and thought and other mental abilities, no one seems to have a clue about how our experiences as they are to us from the inside might be explained.

Briefly let me rehearse the primary positions on the impasse. (1) Eliminativism denies that there is any such thing as consciousness, the term "consciousness" and others such as "desire" and "will" belonging to a folk psychology that will be replaced eventually by proper science, the terms destined to disappear from scientific discourse like "flogiston" and "ether." (2) Reductionism (comprising physicalism, functionalism, and similar views) acknowledges the reality of consciousness, but insists that the explanatory gap is not unusual, that the biology of the future will understand consciousness just as fully as photosynthesis is understood now. (3) Naturalistic non-reductionism finds no reason to regard consciousness as a non-natural phenomenon but concludes that human concepts are for various reasons inadequate to the explanatory task. And, finally, (4) dualism, transcendentalism, and all views proposing that consciousness is non-natural or at least non-physical. All three of the Indian philosophies that I propose to survey fall into this last category, but their strengths, or presumed strengths, are very different.

A presumed strength or merit, first, of Advaita Vedānta is compatibility with any development in science, second, of Nyāya its formulation of laws of mental-physical interaction without bias about the sorts of entities that

can be related, and, third, of Aurobindo's theistic monism a mind-body bridge in God's self-determination. But I shall show that to each case of merit there is attached a mind-body fault. The lump in the rug may be moved or even flattened, but I don't think that it disappears.†



Let us begin with Advaita Vedānta, where consciousness is the primary reality, at least consciousness of a certain sort. Advaita, like all Vedānta, is a spiritual philosophy, supporting yoga and other consciousness disciplines so that, we might say, the primary reality might be better manifest. Now recent literature on the mind/body problem has identified several distinct types of consciousness. Phenomenal consciousness, access-consciousness, monitoring-consciousness, and self-consciousness, for example, have been shown to be different through assiduous intellectual labor in what is now a major subfield of contemporary philosophy. The type of consciousness that Advaita extols, in contrast, has not been given much attention—not, that is, by philosophers ignorant of Indian traditions who, unfortunately, are numerous in the United States. Now this type of consciousness might be called self-consciousness, as it is indeed in Sanskrit by its champions. But in recent philosophical literature, self-consciousness is usually talked about as the possession of a concept of self or as the ability to use such a concept in thinking about oneself, whereas the self-consciousness upon which Advaita focuses—an immediate and intrinsic, “non-dual” awareness of awareness—is said to be non-conceptual and independent of all thought even that about it. It is also supposed to be independent of material determinations and states.

What would an Advaitin have to say about the quandary known as the mind-body problem? In brief, the Advaitin would see the gap between science and this non-dual consciousness as uncloseable because self-consciousness according to Advaita is self-illuminating consciousness and, if not unconnected to material states, is connected in a way that cannot be determined in thought. Self-illuminating consciousness is inaccessible to representation and all third-person point of view. The central plank of Advaita philosophy is the transcendence of self-illuminating consciousness. And the self-illuminating nature of this consciousness secures both a compatibility with science and an insularity from scientific explanation, so an Advaita would argue, as I will explain.

First, some terminological clarification. Even if this were an audience of classical Indian philosophers, use of the term “self-consciousness”

would be contentious, for there are many different views of self-consciousness in Indian philosophy. Thus what the Advaitins are about is better termed “self-illuminating consciousness,” an expression found in the earliest strand of the Vedānta tradition, the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (c. 800 BCE). The usage occurs in a passage about transformations of consciousness in dream and mystic trance. A person is said first to dream by her “own light” and then to become “self-illuminated,” *svayaṃ jyotiḥ* (4.3.9). Light is chosen as an analogue apparently because light illumines itself. A lamp illumines objects other than itself but does not require another lamp to be itself seen. Furthermore, in the *locus classicus* for Advaita views, in the works of Śaṅkara (c. 700 CE), namely, we find the insistence that this consciousness is “non-dual,” *a-dvaita*, that is to say, that it knows itself by being itself, knows itself non-reflectively in a non-intellectual and indeed non-observational manner. Thus “self-illuminating consciousness” seems the appropriate expression, capturing what seems to be kind of a phenomenal self-content.

In other words, what the Advaitins appear to have in mind is a phenomenal consciousness whose content is itself. This is nevertheless supposed to be a *state consciousness*, not a *consciousness-of*, not a transitive consciousness but a, so to say, intransitive one. Alternatively, we could say that this is a *consciousness-of* in a sense; it is a consciousness of itself. So here the *consciousness-of* relationship would have to be understood not as the asymmetrical relation it is normally taken to be but rather as something like identity. Note that in the Advaita understanding of this as self-consciousness, “self” is not taken to refer to the body or even the person but rather only the consciousness that is self-aware.

Discussions of types of consciousness normally proceed by presenting examples that are analyzed as exhibiting the one type in contradistinction with others with which it might be confused. But here, by the admission of distinguished members of Śaṅkara’s very own school, the best that can be done is a dubious so-called “indicatory” or ostensive definition. Directions are given where self-illuminating consciousness may be found (e.g., the injunction, “Meditate”), which are said to be like a phenomenal definition of “red” that describes conditions under which one would normally experience the color. Now I say this indicatory definition is dubious because in Advaita’s classical adversary school of Nyāya or “Logic” there is, I think, cogent criticism of the move, as I will explain later. Nevertheless, Advaitins claim that this consciousness is available to anyone capable of understanding the directions (“Meditate”) such that consciousness attends to itself. But there is no third-person access to this con-

consciousness, so it is said. It is denied that it shows itself in action. The gap between this consciousness and everything else makes discourse that seems to be about it problematic—perhaps the tell-tale weakness of the Advaita view, as I shall argue in accordance with the Nyāya criticism. For the moment, however, let us ignore the difficulties about language.

For, Advaitins do contrast self-illuminating consciousness with other types of consciousness or cognition, *jñāna*, presupposing, it seems, an audience of compatriots who know directly, or who could know, what this consciousness is. That there is a specialness to self-illuminating consciousness is said to be proved by a sublatability argument. Now this argument is not put forth to show that the capacity of other types of consciousness to guide action should be questioned; Advaitins are mislabelled illusionists and skeptics. They do not deny the epistemic value of perception, for example, but use epistemic terms to distinguish self-illuminating consciousness. The *contrasting* argument, then, goes as follows.

Everything dualistically experienced is at risk of being shown to have been misrepresented through experiential sublation. Thus all cognitions could be sublated and shown to be non-veridical—except self-illuminating consciousness. For, since among cognitions only self-illuminating consciousness is not an appearance of one thing in or qualifying another, only in its case is a precondition for sublation not met. That is to say, a perceptual illusion can be sublated because a perception presents an object as qualified by or bearing a property. (In Sanskrit it is said that the property is cognized as *located* in the property-bearer as well as, in an alternative expression, that the object is cognized as *qualified* by the property.) And a property presented may not qualify the object in fact, as in the case of silverhood presented as qualifying what is in fact a piece of mother-of-pearl. Perceptual cognition is qualificative; something *a* is cognized as *F*. Sublation is an ensuing experience that shows the *a* not to be *F*. But self-illuminating consciousness is not in this way “qualificative,” to render the Sanskrit expression, *vaiśiṣṭya*. Its non-dualistic mode of presentation precludes sublation, in sum. It cannot possibly be non-veridical—unlike all perception and indeed all thinking (remembering, inferring, understanding what someone has said, et cetera), all normal cognition which is invariably consciousness-of of the transitive type. Thus self-illuminating consciousness is self-authenticating, at least so Advaitins say. Interestingly, Advaitins also say that there can be no real point to any question about authentication. To itself, self-illuminating consciousness stands self-revealed.

It is not my intention to pursue today the sublatability argument. I

mention it mainly in the contrasting spirit mentioned above. Still, we do need to know that Advaitins also extol the value of self-illuminating consciousness along such lines. All contrasts drawn serve the agenda of encouraging people to attend to this. Indeed, the Advaita school is defined by its commitment to the reality and value of self-illuminating consciousness. What I want to show now is how this connects with a theoretical minimalism and Advaita's attitude towards science.

Advaitins over their long history—from Śāṅkara to modern advocates such as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan—have been able to align themselves with distinct theories about the operation of the sense-organs and the generation of cognitions through physical processes because of a great merit of the Advaita view that Advaitins themselves point out. This is that the commitment to self-illuminating consciousness is compatible, at least so goes the thesis, with all science and externalist theory, except, it seems one has to add, that which would propose to explain self-illuminating consciousness itself. More about the exception shortly. First it is important to see that there is no call from the Advaita side to explain the world in relation to self-illuminating consciousness. For, self-illuminating consciousness is self-contained, whereas explanation presupposes a relationship between explanandum and explanans. An explanation would employ terms that are learned through ostensive training by teachers of pupils and the customs of everyday life. Self-illuminating consciousness cannot serve even as an explanatory first principle since it is to such terms and teaching unavailable. As we have already learned, the radical internalism of Advaita about self-illuminating consciousness is said to have the consequence that speech can only indicate it, not refer to it directly. We'll come back to this claim about language. The main point now is that self-illuminating consciousness is non-relational whereas an explanation would purport to find a tie between explanandum and explanans. Self-illuminating consciousness does not explain anything.

Nor can it be explained, for the same reason. That there is thus mystery in consciousness revealing diversity, and in the transition from the one to the other, is readily admitted by Advaitins. That is to say, why there are both self-illuminating consciousness and the worldly display is part of what is inexplicable, *a-nirvacanīya*. This thesis flows from the non-relationality of self-illuminating consciousness and the nature of explanation as supposing a relation between explanandum and explanans.

The list of great Advaita philosophers includes several who are expert at dialectics, expert at finding counterexamples and disputing philosophic theories. Often one can find no motive behind the Advaita refutations

other than sheer sport. And, to come to the point, Advaitins typically embrace the science of their day (although there are exceptions). Nevertheless, there are, from the Advaita point of view, theories—let us call them metaphysical theories—that overstep the bounds of science and purport to explain self-illuminating consciousness itself. Invariably, they try to do so in relational terms, try, that is, to integrate an understanding of “self-consciousness” into a holistic theory. Such theorists, say the Advaitins, necessarily make a mistake, because they treat self-illuminating consciousness as related to other things.

In this context, it is important to evoke an epistemic perspective, because epistemology provides the canons of winning and losing a debate or dispute and we are now engaged in a dispute, so say champions of the Advaita cause. Self-illuminating consciousness is self-authenticating and, unlike other conscious states and material phenomena, has an exclusive access to itself. Thus only it has the right to pronounce on itself, so to say. Of course, about itself it has nothing to say—it does not speak—but it knows itself directly. Those who would explain self-illuminating consciousness are trespassers in this domain invariably misrepresenting an explanandum.

Personally, however, I find the non-relational thesis that underlies this line of argument unsatisfactory. My second concern, the classical philosophy of Nyāya, convinces me that there is an impossible tension at the core of the Advaita stance. Just how is it that Advaitins know—such that they may outloud say—that self-illuminating consciousness cannot be related to other things? The idea seems to be that this consciousness’s being absorbed in itself translates into its being explanatorily unavailable. An explanation would be like an unwanted disturbance violating self-illuminating consciousness’s self-absorbed trance. But how is it that Advaitins know so much about this “self-absorption” to say “self-absorption,” “self-illumination,” and the other things they do say including suggesting (but at the end backing away from) why this consciousness should be inexplicable? This brings us back to the problem of the language Advaitins use.

The insularity from other areas of theory is purchased by Advaita too cheaply. Advaitins draw a distinction between attributive use of words and the indicatory, as I mentioned earlier. There is supposed to be a difference between (1) describing Devadatta’s house, saying what a house is—say, to a child—and (2) indicating Devadatta’s house conversationally by saying that it is the one where some crows pointed to are hovering. The same distinction is now well-known in contemporary philosophy of

language, the referential/attributive distinction—which, then, let me just for one moment digress, was known in India more than a thousand years earlier, being used, moreover, by philosophers again and again in various contexts and arguments. Indicators (*upalakṣaṇa*) and qualifiers (*viśeṣaṇa*) are to be distinguished, so goes a prominent theory, in relation to negations to be made known. More precisely, negations, such as “(It’s a cow, therefore) *not a horse*,” can be inferred from a qualificandum, a property-bearer (the cow), brought into focus by either an indicator (hovering flies) or a qualifier (cowhood) as a bit of express “predication content” of an experience. In the former case, the relation between the predication (hovering-flies) and the inferendum (not-a-horse) is indirect, whereas it is direct in the case of the latter, where the true qualifier (cowhood) is presented. In the case of the hovering crows pointed to to indicate Devadatta’s house, that the house does not have, for example, the shape of a lotus pond is an inferendum specified by a *qualifier* presented as predication content (the shape of Devadatta’s house), whereas it is not an inferendum specified by an *indicator* presented (the hovering crows). Thus the distinction is an experiential version of that between linguistic attribution and mere reference—as when we say that Jones is Smith’s murderer (*attributing* murderousness to Jones) in contrast to saying that Smith’s murderer (i.e., Jones, who is on trial) is innocent (using “Smith’s murderer” merely *referentially*, merely to indicate Jones, like the hovering crows mentioned to indicate Devadatta’s house). So understood, the distinction cannot be used by Advaitins in the way they try, so argue the Nyāya realists and referentialists and, I must say, I agree.

The distinction is that between true and pseudo-qualifiers in connection with use of words to pick out something by way of a property it really has as opposed to words used to direct a hearer’s attention to something by means of a thoroughly contingent and accidental relation it has to the words’ literal and direct referendum. But, so Nyāya philosophers argue, the distinction provides no help to the Advaitin in his trying to direct our attention to self-illuminating consciousness, because even mere pointing implies a relation, a line connecting, however ephemeral, the sign and the signified. In the reverse direction, in what appear to be attributive usages, Advaitins consider themselves to know some true properties of self-illuminating consciousness. Why else would they say that it is self-illuminating, or non-relational, and then reason according to these attributions? We Naiyāyikas do find self-awareness, which is an awareness that takes another awareness as its object or indication. We do not find, however, any self-illuminating consciousness, nor have we been told coherently

where to find it.

Now there is a long and complex debate between Nyāya and Advaita over the concept of self-awareness and the question of how consciousness is itself known, to which Buddhists add arguments on the Advaita side along with Mīmāṃsakas of at least three different camps and to which, on the opposite side, on the side of the Naiyāyika externalists, are joined various voices in a diverse theistic camp. But over all this today we shall have to skip. Let us turn directly to the positive theories of Nyāya, my second topic, and to the question of the advice Naiyāyikas would give to those vexed by a mind-body problem. Advaita would purchase compatibility with science by maintaining that the “explanatory gap” cannot be closed. Yet by its own premises it fails to show us why it cannot be closed, why self-illuminating consciousness cannot be explained. Is there a similar lump in the rug of Nyāya?



Nyāya is itself straightforwardly dualist in the sense of admitting the reality of distinctively mental properties and entities such as selves along with atoms and other material things. Indeed, Nyāya is ontologically pluralist, finding nine types of substance and several types of property as distinguishable ontological items. An awareness is a psychological property, for example, distinct from physical properties such as colors and shapes that belong to rocks and other things that are made of material atoms. An awareness rests or occurs in a self, which is another distinct type of entity, and only for an instant before giving way to another awareness, each indicating an intersubjective object or objects other than itself.

To move quickly to our question, Nyāya’s peculiar take on the mind-body problem would be to deny that there is an explanatory gap. For this point and its elaboration, I draw principally from the classic text of Navya or “New” Nyāya, the *Tattvacintāmaṇi* of Gaṅgeśa (c. 1325), but Gaṅgeśa’s followers, too, who comment on his views at great length, would also deny any gap. All these Nyāya philosophers formulate causal principles on the basis of positive and negative correlations without a bias about the sorts of things that can be correlated. For example, sensory connection with an object *a* that possesses a property *F* is found to be a cause—in the sense of a necessary condition—of a veridical and reliable perceptual awareness with *Fa* as its object. An induction is made relating mental entities, e.g., perceptions of such a type, and physical entities, the *F*-possessing objects that come to be in sensory connection. Correlations



are made, similarly, between efforts with propositional content and certain physical, i.e., bodily, acts.

Thus Nyāya has an ingenious strategy for the mind-body quandary, following the motto, “Look for correlations, but don’t overinterpret. Be economical.” It’s a strategy that deserves close attention, but I, for one, do not think that all versions of the mind-body difficulty would thereby be side-stepped. For I think the problem shows up in Nyāya despite its distinctive ignorance of it and the plausibility of many of the mental/physical correlations it propounds.

First, a few further remarks of an introductory character. Nyāya’s thrust, it is often said, is epistemological. This is right: the school is principally concerned with, we may say, warranted belief. But Naiyāyikas try to attune their epistemological principles to a picture of a world of things external to cognition and bound together by causal laws. Epistemology establishes the relevance of causal determinations, but the determinations themselves express natural regularities. Cognition is a part of the natural world. A cognition, or awareness (*jñāna*), is a psychological property or event that is the effect of perceptual, inferential, and other physical/mental processes. A cognition is itself a cause of the formation of memory-dispositions as well as—it may be, depending on other factors—of a particular line of action. As a psychological property, a cognition is distinct from the properties of a person’s body and of the objects grasped by the external organs of sense. A cognition rests or occurs in a self, which is not a material entity. A cognition lasts only a brief instant, being replaced by another partly by means of the nature of a current awareness but also according to several further factors. For example, a new sensory connection such as of the organ of hearing with a loud sound can force its way into consciousness, overriding other factors such as a desire to focus on something else, a taste, for example. So, there are, according to Nyāya, causal continuities and processes involving entities that are physical and mental—in the one direction through the operation of the sense organs, sight, hearing, and so on, and in the other in guiding action, voluntary action, to be sure, including the speech act of describing something perceived, i.e., verbalizing a cognition’s content or, technically, objecthood (*viśayatā*). There is also a third type of cognitive causal relationship, a kind of mind/mind causation exhibited in the causality obtaining between two successive cognitions.

A problem in the Nyāya picture that I wish to reveal, following the arguments of the modern Vedāntin Sri Aurobindo, is the presumed perceptual availability of properties previously perceived through retrieval by

means of memory. There is here a kind of physical/psychological interaction that is typical of Nyāya in its formulations of cognitive laws. My complaint is that the absence of an explanation of mind-body interaction in Nyāya shows up as a gap through which non-realists can drive a whole herd of tenets antithetical to Nyāya's realism. Nyāya philosophers are forced to recognize "extraordinary" connection in the case of a property perceptually presented through the operation of memory. The problem is that if properties can be supplied mentally and there is no phenomenological difference between those mentally supplied and those supplied physically, why not jettison the distinction? This could occur in many directions, for example, the idealism of Nyāya's Buddhist opponents or, indeed, in the very different type of realism promoted by Aurobindo, to expand the context of the classical controversy.

In other words, Naiyāyikas tell us they are direct realists; a perceptual awareness whose objecthood is "Fa" is veridical just in case the object *a* grasped by the sense organ is F. Normally *a*'s being F is responsible, in part, for generating the perception whose object is Fa though there are, as Naiyāyikas are aware, so-called Gettier-style cases where the object that a pseudo-perceptual awareness is about is indeed an F but has not in fact generated the awareness verbalized as "*a* is F." These cases, however, will not be our concern here, but rather Nyāya's explanation of non-veridical perception. The story goes as follows in the case of an illusory cognition of silver when the object in front is in fact mother-of-pearl.

A perceiver has had previous veridical experience of silver that has formed a memory-impression, *saṃskāra*, that when revived for whatever reason (such a reason is called an awakener, *udbodhaka*) triggers a remembering that has silver as its object. Now when this perceiver sees a piece of mother-of-pearl as silver what has happened is that the memory-impression of silver has similarly been revived but instead of triggering a remembering has fused a previous perceptual content or objecthood into a current perceptual presentation of an object in front. The perceiver would verbalize the current perception as, "This is silver," and he would be right about the "This," right about there being an object in front that he is perceiving and referring to as "This." What is right about the perception concerns its qualificandum portion, as Naiyāyikas would put it; the object of the cognition qua property-bearer is successfully hit. But the qualifier or predication content portion presented (*prakāra* in Sanskrit, the "way" an object is perceived or what it is perceived as), here the being-silver, or silverhood, is not true of the object in front, and this "content" is furnished, says the Naiyāyika, not by the normal perceptual process but by

memory. Still, the predication content from the perspective of the perceiver is thoroughly experiential. He reaches out for the mother-of-pearl that he regards as silver because he is perceiving it as silver. Being-silver is perceptually presented. The causal analysis of the illusion has it that the memory-impression, as opposed to the object's being silver in fact, plays a causal role. Note, finally, that this is to consider it all from a third-person or externalist standpoint.

Naiyāyikas call the sensory connection characteristic of illusion “extraordinary,” *a-laukika*, and thereby signal their own version of a mind/body problem. The ordinary sensory connection provides Nyāya its chief link between body and mind. When we see a blue lotus, normally it is the lotus's being blue, its blueness, that is causally responsible for the “blue” part of our perception. The causal process works crucially through a sensory connection with the qualificandum on which the qualifier rides piggyback, the qualifier, that is, that appears as predication content. In the case of a perceptual illusion “*Fa*,” there is still required a fact of *Fs* and indeed of our subject's having encountered an *F* previously; otherwise, he would have no memory-impression of *Fs* as required by the causal account. So there is in a sense a sensory connection with *Fs* in the case of the illusion “*Fa*,” though considering the *F* part, the predication content, such a connection works through memory and is thus “extraordinary.” Illusion shows us sense data, says the phenomenalist contradicting Nyāya's realism, shows us that the perceptual object or content belongs to the perception itself and not some worldly thing. Naiyāyikas refuse to countenance sense data or qualia; perceptions present the world which is intersubjective, not properties internal to perceptions themselves. Indeed, even perceptions and all cognitions are real things, related to all other real things. They are properties of a self, and may be grasped in apperception which is a distinct cognition having a target cognition as object or content, what it is about. But by admitting that the sensory connection with silver is extraordinary in the case of a piece of mother-of-pearl misperceived that way, the Naiyāyika beholds a mental/physical explanatory gap that is exploitable by his opponent. How is it that physical objects somehow intended by sense data can be responsible for them? To see that we must rely on memory to cognize *Fa* in certain instances is to admit that no physical fact *Fa* has to be assumed.

To be fair, it should be pointed out that illusion is not the only case that the Naiyāyika identifies as involving an extraordinary sensory connection. The role given memory in the account of illusion is not entirely *ad hoc*; there are other, non-illusory instances of memory retrieval—or revival,

perhaps we should say—of a perceptual content. These are illuminating. For example, so long as the fragrance of sandalwood has been previously experienced, even the visual organ can provoke an awareness of it, through this same type of mentalized sensory connection called by Naiyāyikas extraordinary. That is, a visual perception of a piece of sandalwood at several meters distance which would be verbalizable as, “A piece of *fragrant* sandalwood,” is cited as a non-illusory example of the phenomenon. This would involve an “extraordinary” sensory connection in that the fragrance is said to be visually presented—to speak of the most immediate role of a sense organ—although, of course, the experience of the fragrance is of a smell. A memory created by a previous smelling experience gets fused “extraordinarily” and becomes perceptual content, although there is no current contact of the smelling organ with the sandalwood. Apparently something like this is borne out phenomenologically: people sometimes say they smell the fragrance of a piece of sandalwood that, in a physical sense, they only see. Thus, as in error, a memory-impression would play a crucial causal role.

The theory of extraordinary sensory connection has wider application still. It is invoked to explain recognitions, e.g., “This is that Devadatta I saw yesterday.” On the Nyāya account, a recognition is a perception informed by a memory-impression as an auxiliary cause. In other words, the problem of how an object’s thatness—its being that thing that was experienced yesterday—can be perceptually presented currently is solved through this same theory of extraordinary sensory connection, *a-laukika-samṅnikarṣa*. A current sensory encounter with Devadatta, who has been previously perceived by the person S now recognizing him, sparks S’s memory to project into the perception the “thatness,” and S says, verbalizing his perception, “This is that Devadatta.” It is to be stressed that, for the Naiyāyika—and also for other classical realists—Devadatta is thought of as qualified by the thatness in fact. A recognition depends on memory for the “thatness” cognitively, but the thing recognized is the *that* in fact. The presentation of the *that* qualifier has a memory-impression as an auxiliary cause and is thus extraordinary, not the fact that Devadatta has thatness. So just as in the case of memory’s reviving a smell previously experienced and making it a part of a current perception of sandalwood, we have here an example of a veridical perception where memory plays a causal role parallel to its role in illusion.

There is a lot one could say in criticism and also in defense of this theory, and a lot indeed has been said in the numerous texts of classical Indian philosophy. But let me draw out only the morale that I indicated at



consciousness and the realism of Nyāya about the physical world, and would close the explanatory gap by reversing the terms of the consciousness/body relationship. Consciousness becomes the explanans. That consciousness *self-determines* is Aurobindo's byword. Consciousness by nature can make itself material. The universe is the body of God—says this early twentieth-century thinker who thus associates himself with a family of philosophies of theistic Vedānta, the closest of which is probably Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta.

As transition to Aurobindo, let us consider another dimension of Nyāya's causal realism, its theology. Later Naiyāyika authors in particular are much occupied by a causal argument to God. God is inferred as the agent who has brought about things like the earth. Nevertheless, just as Nyāya does not speculate on what makes it possible for mental and physical events or properties to stand as causal factors one for the other, so Nyāya refuses to speculate on the connection between God and the finite things that directly or indirectly God brings about. To be sure, along with the inference to God, the later Naiyāyikas attribute omniscience (*sarvajñatva*) to God as a property God must have to bring about the effects the *īśvara* is posited to explain. But it seems to be school policy not to elaborate, not to speculate further on God's nature, nor—in the words of an objection often discussed in the classical literature—to say how it is possible that God, who is generally assumed not to have a material body, can create earth and the like which are material things. Furthermore, some things God does not create, such as individual selves, which are eternal and uncreated. Because of these and other features of the view, some contemporary interpreters have judged Nyāya's theistic dimension as on the whole peripheral to its central tenets. Aurobindo, in contrast, provides rich theistic theory. Probably it would be hard to imagine any metaphysics richer than his. He speculates on the deep connection between spirit and matter, of which God's creative activity is an instance.

Now Aurobindo does indeed use the Advaita concept of self-illuminating consciousness as a starting point for his attempt to explain matter in spiritual terms. He says consciousness by nature “knows itself by being itself,” and “knowledge by identity” is not only part of his view of the essential nature of the Absolute Brahman (who is God) but it also lies at the center of Aurobindo's mystically psychological picture of human consciousness. However, Brahman's *sva-rūpa*, Brahman's “essential nature,” includes more than self-knowledge in the Advaita sense of the term. It includes power, power to self-determine. And why shouldn't

God have the power to make itself material? What's extra in Aurobindo's metaphysics is a view of Brahman as *cit* (or *cit-śakti*, "consciousness-force") on a yogic model. Let us focus on this and come back later to the notion of knowledge by identity and the inclusion of the Advaita stance.

"One-pointed-ness of concentration" (*ekāgratā*) is crucial to yogic accomplishment, according to authorities from Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* to Aurobindo himself. Aurobindo views Brahman as "exclusively concentrating" in the process of creation, which he calls involution. Creation is self-manifestation that proceeds through self-contraction. The Absolute is continuous in its being with the universe that it manifests—the continuity accounting for the deep possibility of our own self-knowledge, our own knowledge by identity, as will be explained—but in manifesting Brahman's essence becomes implicit and submerged. That is to say, while Brahman is, as with all classical Vedānta, essentially infinite *saccidānanda*, "Existence-Consciousness=Force-Bliss," Brahman wills on itself a process of contraction, a process of "involution," to use Aurobindo's word, whereby God puts aspects or characteristics of itself behind a veil, through involution, to bring our world about. This involution is modeled psychologically on yogic "exclusive concentration," *ekāgratā*.

That is, "exclusive concentration," which is in yogic traditions a power of consciousness responsible for *siddhi*-s as well as for a person's achieving *samādhi* or "mystic trance," is for Aurobindo the analogical springboard to his understanding of Brahman as *cit*, which he renders as "consciousness-force" (*cit-śakti*). In Sanskrit, the word "*ekāgratā*" is an abstract noun formed from *eka*, "one," and *agra*, "point" or "tip," thus "one-pointedness." In Patañjali's *Yogasūtra* (c. 300 CE ?), it is identified as the mental or volitional quality of concentration of attention, as in meditation on a single object, without the mind wandering, without admitting distraction (e.g., *YS* 3.11 and 3.12). And, as mentioned, yogic authorities view *ekāgratā* as key to mystic accomplishment, to the psychological breakthrough called *samādhi*, where consciousness knows itself as it is essentially.

Consonantly, a theme of Aurobindo's yogic teaching is that yoga is power. He argues that our ability to concentrate one-pointedly helps us accomplish whatever we want to do, whether it be something physical like carpentry or mental like writing a book. Further, he provides the psychological gloss on the everyday phenomenon of exclusive concentration that it involves a putting into the background other concerns of ours or other aspects of our personalities, without our ceasing to value those other

things or our ceasing to be the fuller person. The batter who thinks about his wife misses the pitch, but the one who hits it, not letting his concentration stray, should not *ipso facto* be accused of not loving the wife. He simply cannot think about her and bat successfully at the same time. The concentrated action requires a willed ignorance, Aurobindo would say. Thus according to this understanding even everyday concentration involves *a-vidyā*, a “not-knowing” with respect to Y and Z, or a not-being-aware of Y and Z, that permits a full awareness, and power, concerning X. Thus it is that Aurobindo would connect the power of consciousness with *a-vidyā*, a notion that reverberates in his metaphysics, as I will now elaborate, as it does also, albeit interpreted differently, in previous Vedānta.

As mentioned, Aurobindo sees Brahman as “exclusively concentrating” in the process and maintenance of creation, in “involution.” In essence, perfect Being, Consciousness-Force and Bliss or Value (so Aurobindo renders the traditional characterization, *sac-cid-ānanda*), Brahman involutes aspects of itself—that is to say, contracts or becomes purposely ignorant, assuming an *a-vidyā*—so that certain finite possibilities can emerge. There is thus no mind-body problem because self-manifesting Brahman remains a unity; Aurobindo’s view is as much a monism as any materialist reductionism. Brahman’s own exclusive concentration is the creative process linking spirit with the emergence of matter, Brahman’s way of being each of us and all finite things. Involution has an outer limit in the “inconscious” energies of matter, where Brahman’s native awareness and bliss are put almost entirely behind a veil. This is the cosmic *a-vidyā*. But since Brahman is essentially consciousness, the inconscience of matter can be only apparent, and an evolution of consciousness is natural wherever there is the chance. Matter cannot everywhere remain unconscious because it is nothing but Brahman. Thus there is an evolutionary *nisus* and a *telos* to cosmic biological process which is founded in the *cit* of Brahman.

To continue with the metaphysical picture, let me stress that, according to the great yogin, nothing essential to Brahman, though it be put behind the veil by Brahman’s power of exclusive concentration, can remain behind the veil forever. This is perhaps Aurobindo’s central argument, repeatedly formulated with different emphases. One way to interpret it is to say that conceivable universes that are incompatible with Brahman’s essential nature are strictly impossible. A universe of absolutely insentient matter Aurobindo judges incompatible with Brahman. Thus living, conscious material beings are destined to evolve somewhere



(indeed everywhere there is the chance). To move very fast to the future that Aurobindo envisages for our planet, the philosopher claims that many of us or our progeny are destined to know themselves as Brahman. God works within limits, and could not, for example, make  $2 + 2 = 5$ . God could not create an entirely insentient world since God is constrained by the metaphysical law *ex nihilo nihil fit* (“nothing from nothing”) to create out of God’s own nature of Consciousness and Bliss (“How can being arise from non-being?” *katham a-sato saj jāyeta, Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 6.2.2). Thus this world is destined, he says, to evolve sentient material beings and eventually a divine life conceived as a society where many have a rather direct experience of themselves as Brahman.

In sum, creation, according to Aurobindo, is self-manifestation that proceeds through an exclusive concentration, an involution, a kind of self-contraction. Brahman is in essence infinite *sac-cid-ānanda*, “Existence-Consciousness=Force-Bliss.” It requires an involution—that is, God’s putting aspects or characteristics of God’s essential nature behind a veil through a willed ignorance, *a-vidyā*, psychologically modeled on yogic *ekāgratā*—to bring our world about and to sustain it. This process reaches its outer limit in the apparently inconscient energies of matter. But the consciousness involved in matter has to evolve out of matter eventually into a “divine life.” According to Aurobindo, the inconscience of matter is no more intrinsic than the ignorance involved in scenes of exclusive concentration in ordinary human life. Only the immeasurably great Brahman, the supremely conscious, could so exclusively concentrate as to have become the apparently inconscient material universe, but not even Brahman can hide itself from itself forever. Matter reflects Brahman’s power, but through its spiritualization in persons such as ourselves other aspects of Brahman become manifest.

Now to the mind-body problem. According to Aurobindo, Brahman’s being matter explains how it is possible that we who are material beings can know ourselves immediately, self-illuminingly, as taught in Advaita. Matter’s being Brahman also explains how there can be the sensory connections that Nyāya seems correct to identify but struggles with, as we have seen, as well as, to quote Aurobindo, how “genes and chromosomes [can be] the cause of hereditary transmissions, not only of physical but of psychological properties” (1973, p. 299), a possibility that is not explained by science. Similarly, it ceases to be a mystery, again to quote Aurobindo, “how a fixed formula for the combination of oxygen and hydrogen comes to determine the appearance of water which is evidently something more than a combination of gases, a new creation, a new form

of substance, a material manifestation of a quite new character’’ (1973, p. 298). Since matter is consciousness involved, material forms can be the vehicles of mental determinations and all the emergent phenomena that Aurobindo intends to suggest by means of these and other examples.

Interestingly, we may go on to note, Aurobindo’s philosophy of Brahman as *cit-śakti* allows him to put the Advaita notion of self-illuminating consciousness to new use. Knowledge by identity makes possible conscious control. By knowing myself as my hand I can move it, et cetera. A primary teaching in the *Yogasūtra* is that through *saṁyama*, ‘‘control through conscious identification,’’ instanced in the control that we have over our own bodily limbs, we can expand the sphere of things subject to volition, as in consciously regulating the breath (*prāṇāyāma*, producing well-attested results for health) and in achieving, so says the *Yogasūtra*, such *siddhi*-s as reading minds and provoking friendship among all in the yogin’s immediate environment. We might also mention here craftsmanship and athletic ability, which are developed through training, through conscious attention to what Aurobindo would see as an extension of our essential selves to handle expertly external tools as well as our own bodies and minds. (‘‘Yoga is skill in works,’’ says the *Gītā*, in a line of which he is fond, *yogaḥ karmāsu kauśalam*, 2.50.) Aurobindo’s take on the mind-body problem would be to emphasize possibilities—which he would call yogic—to develop our consciousnesses through discipline (yoga) and to extend the sphere of the voluntary. In his teaching, the extension should occur in two directions, outward in mastery of matter and inward in mastery of desires and our less conscious parts along with integration with our higher selves. Thus we see the spiritual thrust of Aurobindo’s metaphysics, the values that flow from it. Let us just quickly note how different these are from the rather nihilistic sides of the materialisms that are its monistic rivals.

The lump in Aurobindo’s rug is of course evil. The explanatory gap is closed in his philosophy at the cost of making Brahman both responsible for evil and the bearer of it. For Brahman both creates and maintains the universe in its all-comprehensive being and knowledge. Now Aurobindo acknowledges the difficulty and devotes hundreds of pages of his masterwork (1973) to accounting for it without abandoning his rich theology. Unfortunately, this effort on his part is itself much too rich for us to do more than sketch. My main point is simply that the difficulty is for Aurobindo severe. He reverses the explanatory relationship and thus encounters not the problem of explaining consciousness but of explaining how our life and world could be so bad. Given Brahman, our world of

Brahman's manifestation should be a lot more glorious with not so many foul spots and so much suffering. How could a theistic Absolute, as the Buddha argued, allow disease, old age, and death?

Evil, answers Aurobindo, is rooted in the insentience of matter and the limitations it imposes on life. These, then, are to be just the converse of valuable possibilities matter secures, namely, ourselves and the good things of life and the value of things future. In fact, the value of ourselves and this universe as we are now is not quite, in Aurobindo's conception, valuable enough. There has to be further evolution, development of individuals with finite bodies and minds who are nonetheless aware—mystically, yogically—of Brahman, who do not cease thereby to be individuals materially embodied but who no longer suffer from the fundamental spiritual ignorance (*a-vidyā*) of failing to know ourselves as manifestations of Brahman. As I suggested earlier, Aurobindo does not believe that a world like ours without further development in the direction of the grand telos he envisages would even be possible. That is to say, in Aurobindo's estimation our world as it is now, fixed in all its evil, would be incompatible with the reality of Brahman and thus could not be. Thus he takes evil as a sign of future evolution. In considerable measure it is indeed the value of future "divine life" that discounts, he reasons, the evil made possible and even necessary by the insentience of matter inasmuch as matter and involution make possible our evolutionary world. Biological evolution is for Aurobindo not merely a matter of life transformations but of progress, teleological change. Thus the fundamental nature of matter has to include—for metaphysical reasons—an "evolutionary nisus" that insures the emergence of individuals capable of mystical experience in which the supreme reality, Brahman, is revealed. This notion of an evolutionary nisus, or urge or material drive, is the bottom side of Aurobindo's fresh concept of Brahman.

Thus Aurobindo in facing his own version of a body-mind difficulty again relies on the conceptual tool of *a-vidyā*, "ignorance," as the necessary complement of the "exclusive concentration," *ekāgratā*, whereby Brahman self-manifests and creates our and any world of finite things. Ignorance is required for creation and maintenance of our universe, and thus Aurobindo would get a step up on the task of discounting evil. It only superficially seems that on the premise that the supremely real is Brahman, *saccidānanda*, things should be a lot better here. In this way, Aurobindo marshals, I would say, his best resources to the explanation of evil. It is not, however, my point today to try to evaluate this effort, though I will say that the approach would have to be a bit strained, it

seems, in certain applications. Again, my main point is just to point to the lump. The final question seems to be, then, where one prefers to find it.

†I thank Ram-Prasad for a careful reading and comments on a version read at the MiCon2002 conference held at the Indian Institute of Technology, January 2002. I am grateful in particular for his criticism of the target of my fault-finding with Nyāya, which should be, more generally, as I now indicate, its “intentionality” concept (*viśayatā*). The problems probed here about “extraordinary” sensory connection are only an aspect of a larger difficulty. I may also note that Ram and I have different readings of Advaita. But to discuss the issues at bottom here would require at least another paper. On Brahman’s self-determination being the key concept in Aurobindo’s philosophy we agree.

I also thank IIT, Kharagpur, and Chanda Chakrabarti, for inviting me to the conference and the Infinity Foundation for making my attendance possible.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aurobindo, Sri (Ghose). *The Life Divine*. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust, 1973.
- Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* of Śaṅkara. With the *Bhāmātī* commentary by Vācaspati Misra. Ed. J. L. Shastri. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.
- Chakrabarti, Kisor. *Classical Indian Philosophy of Mind*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1999.
- Nagel, Thomas. “What Is It Like To Be a Bat,” *Philosophical Review* 83, 1974, pp. 435–50.
- Nyāyasūtra* (Nyāyadarśanam). With four commentaries, the *Nyāya-sūtra-bhāṣya* of Vātsyāyana, the *Nyāya-sūtra-vārttika* of Uddyotakara, the *Nyāya-sūtra-vārttika-tātpāryaṭikā* of Vācaspati Mīśra, and the *Vṛtti* of Viśvanātha. Ed. A. M. Tarkatirtha, Taranatha Nyayatarkatirtha, and H. K. Tarkatirtha. Calcutta Sanskrit Series 18. 1936–44. Reprint, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985.
- Phillips, Stephen H. *Aurobindo’s Philosophy of Brahman*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986.
- . “The Conflict of Voluntarism and Dualism in the *Yogasūtra*.” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 13, No. 4, Dec. 1985, pp. 399–414.

- . *Classical Indian Metaphysics*. Chicago: Open Court, 1995. (Indian edition) Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1996.
- . “Two Problems about Perception and Mental Intermediaries in the Nyāya Dualism: Focus and Extraordinary Sensory Connections with Perceived Properties,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy and Religion* 5, Oct. 2000.
- Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli. *An Idealist View of Life*, 2nd ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937.
- Tattvacintāmaṇi* of Gaṅgeśa, vol. 1, *pratyakṣa-khaṇḍa*. With the *Prakāśa* commentary by Rucidatta Miśra and a subcommentary by Rāmakṛṣṇādhvarin. Ed. N. S. Ramanuja Tatacharya. Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha Series 20. Tirupati, 1972.
- Tattvacintāmaṇi* of Gaṅgeśa, vol. 2, part 1, *anumāna-khaṇḍa*. With the *Prakāśa* commentary by Rucidatta Miśra and a subcommentary by Rāmakṛṣṇādhvarin. Ed. N. S. Ramanuja Tatacharya. Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha Series 33. Tirupati, 1982.
- Tattvacintāmaṇi* of Gaṅgeśa, vol. 2, part 2, *anumāna-khaṇḍa*. With the *Prakāśa* commentary by Rucidatta Miśra and a subcommentary by Rāmakṛṣṇādhvarin. Ed. N. S. Ramanuja Tatacharya. Kendriya Sanskrit Vidyapeetha Series 33. Tirupati, 1999.
- Yogasūtra*. With the commentaries of Vyāsa and Vācaspati Miśra. 3rd. ed. Ed. Jibananda Vidyasagara. Calcutta, 1940.

Stephen H. Phillips  
Department of Philosophy  
University of Texas  
Austin, TX 78712 USA  
phillips@mail.utexas.edu  
<http://asnic.utexas.edu/asnic/phillips/>