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GERMAN IDEALISM MEETS INDIAN VEDĀNTA AND KAŚMIRI ŚAIVISM

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ABSTRACT: *Regarding each philosophy as a variation of that of Spinoza, this article compares the German Idealism of Schelling and Hegel with the Indian Vedānta of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, as well as Abhinavagupta's Kaśmiri Śaivism. It argues that only Hegel's philosophy does not fail. For Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling, the experience of ultimate reality—Brahman for Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, Śiva for Abhinavagupta, the Absolute for Schelling—is self-authenticating and so excludes the possibility of error. However, there is also no possibility of truth as no criterion distinguishes truth from error when individuals make contradictory claims. By contrast, Hegel's Geist is an extended mind that potentially encompasses the human community. Geist develops historically. Experience is conceptual and concepts must be socially recognized to be legitimate. Experience is fallible, for Hegel, and better accounts are obtained through mutual criticism. Although disagreement represents an impassible impasse for Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling, it is the road forward for Hegel.*

Keywords: *Abhinavagupta, Advaita, German Idealism, Hegel, Kaśmiri Śaivism, Monism, Non-Dualism, Rāmānuja, Śaṅkara, Schelling, Spinoza, Vedānta, Viśiṣṭādvaita*

Regarding each philosophy as a variation of that of Baruch de Spinoza (1632-1677), this article compares the German Idealism of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775-1854) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) with the Indian Vedānta of Śaṅkara (c. 788-820) and Rāmānuja (c. 1017-1137) as well as the Kaśmiri Śaivism represented by Abhinavagupta (c. 950-1020). It argues that only Hegel's philosophy does not fail according to its own standard of success.

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1. YOU'RE IT!

Anti-quitsies, you're it, quitsies, no anti-quitsies, no startsies!
(Farrelly and Farrelly 1994)

The ordinary is the hieroglyphic of the profound. Playing tag, children laugh, touch, and shout 'you're it'. 'You're it' nicely renders 'you are that' (*tat tvam asi*), one of the four great sayings (*mahāvākyas*) of the Upaniṣads expressing the unity of Ātman (the self, individual, or, finally, the universe) with Brahman (the godhead, the fundamental ground of the universe or being).¹ Although the notion of Brahman resists any precise definition, an analogy would be a unified field theory, or a theory of everything, which would not only incorporate electromagnetism, the general theory of relativity, quantum theory, and perhaps so-called dark energy but also demonstrate that these fundamental forces are diverse manifestations of a single principle. This article compares two German Idealists (Schelling and Hegel) with two Indian Vedāntists (Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja) and a Kāśmiri Śaivist (Abhinavagupta). Although these formulations are not precise, and will be refined below, as a first approximation it can be said that: German Idealism maintains that mind is constitutive of reality; Indian Vedānta holds that everything is, in some sense, identical with Brahman; and Kāśmiri Śaivism claims that Śiva is the ultimate reality and that the universe is Śiva's expression. What German Idealism, Indian Vedānta, and Kāśmiri Śaivism have in common is that all are nondualists. Not monists, exactly, but each rejects dualism and pluralism. Taking a cue from Clifford Geertz (1926-2006)—who, while not endorsing relativism, nevertheless rejects anti-relativism—the philosophers discussed here might be described as anti anti-monists (Geertz 1984).

This article results from a research project that began with the hypothesis that Rāmānuja's censure of Śaṅkara is isometric with Hegel's criticism of Schelling, that a parallelism could be constructed, such that Śaṅkara is to Schelling as Rāmānuja is to Hegel, and that Rāmānuja's censure of Śaṅkara would apply to Schelling and Hegel's criticism of Schelling would apply to Śaṅkara. The truth, however, is more complicated and interesting. Despite their differences, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling conceive of Brahman, or the absolute, as existing prior to and separate from the universe. The concepts of priority and separateness here are conceptual or logical, neither chronological nor spatial. While all four thinkers agree that the universe is beginningless (*anādi*), they hold that it is dependent upon Brahman. Only Hegel thinks of *Geist*, the Hegelian analogue of Brahman, as a result of the universe.

This article proceeds as follows. It first presents the gist of Spinoza's philosophy and then shows how the philosophies of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, Schelling, and Hegel can each be regarded as variations of Spinoza's philosophy.

¹ "You are that" (*tat tvam asi*) occurs in Chandogya Upaniṣhad 6.8.7. The other *mahāvākyas* are "consciousness is Brahman" (*prajñānam brahma*) in Aitareya Upaniṣhad 3.3, "Ātman is Brahman" (*ayam ātmā brahma*) in Mandukya Upaniṣhad 1.2, and "I am Brahman" (*aham brahmāsmi*) in Brhadaranyaka Upaniṣhad 1.4.10.

During the heyday of structuralism, in the 1960s, Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009) was fond of urging that every myth is a variation of an underlying ur-myth that itself is never articulated (and perhaps could never be expressed). Similar claims were made for cuisine, etiquette, and kinship relations. Structuralism is out of fashion and, in any case, it would not do to make a habit of it. Nevertheless, treating Spinoza as the *ur-philosophie* of nondualism has two considerable advantages. First, showing how each of these philosophies can be regarded as a variation of Spinoza makes for clarity of articulation. Second, were these philosophies to be presented neat, directly, and without mediation, they might seem too fabulous to be considered seriously and so readers might react with dismissive incredulity. “How could anyone believe that?!” they could exclaim, overlooking that millions do. The strange must first become familiar—and so this article is as much elucidative as argumentative. With luck, completing the circuit, what earlier was familiar will subsequently seem strange.²

2. BESIDE SPINOZA, THERE’S NO OTHER

Come to my quarters tomorrow at three.

I can’t.

Please!

It’s immoral. What time?

Who is to say what is moral?

Morality is subjective.

Subjectivity is objective.

Moral notions imply attributes to substances which exist only in relational duality.

Not as an essential extension of ontological existence.

Can we not talk about sex so much?

(Allen 1975)

As noted above, this article treats Spinoza’s philosophy as the nondualism’s *ur-philosophie*. Simplifying, he believes that there is only one substance.³ An attribute is the intellect’s experience of substance. (The intellect? Where did that come from? This will be discussed shortly.) Humans experience the attributes of extension and thought. Modes—that is, ideas, objects, and relations—are presented through either the attribute of extension or the attribute of thought. Nothing presented through one attribute can affect or be affected by anything presented through another. Nevertheless, any mode presented through an attribute has an infinite number of counterparts presented through the infinite attributes. Each of its counterparts *is* that thing, moreover, presented through the other attributes.

² Rather than Spinoza’s philosophy serving as the *ur-philosophie*, the varieties of physicalism—eliminative, nonreductive, and reductive—could do. Whereas Spinoza’s philosophy is securely ensconced in the canon of Western philosophy, though, physicalism may seem insufficiently plausible to provide a familiar point of departure.

³ For a fuller discussion, see Fritzman and Riley 2009.

Substance necessarily expresses itself through the attributes and modes but they have no reciprocal effect on substance. Substance expressing itself through its attributes and modes is nature and nature is God. As a consequence, God is the universe and so does not transcend the universe. All notions of purpose and intention are illusory. Every happening is wholly determined and happens necessarily. Spinoza's nondualism is relevantly similar to Einstein's block universe. There, everything possible is fully actual, all happenings have equal ontological status, and the past, present, and future are perspectival illusions.⁴

3. ŚAṄKARA: THERE'S ONLY BRAHMAN

Do not try to bend the spoon—that's impossible. Instead, only try to realize the truth: there is no spoon. (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999)

Śaṅkara's philosophy can be generated from Spinoza's by emphasizing the claim that the attributes are the intellect's experience of substance. How can there be an intellect to experience anything? Spinoza provides no account of the intellect's status. As a consequence, the way is open for someone to maintain that, because the intellect has no ontological status, only substance exists and that attributes and modes are unreal. Full insight would occur, on this interpretation, with the realization that substance alone is real and that everything else is illusory—including, paradoxically, the illusion that there is anything else. It may well be that this philosophy cannot be coherently expressed. As will be discussed below, it is unclear whether this is a feature or a bug. An approximation would be a quasi matrix-world in which, unlike the movie version, what appears to be the real world outside of the Matrix is as illusory as the matrix itself. Unlike the *Matrix* movie, where only the matrix is illusory, the illusion itself is illusory in the quasi matrix-world.

Śaṅkara advocates an unqualified nondualism (*Advaita Vedānta*) according to which only Brahman is real and the universe is an unreal appearance (*vivarta*) of Brahman. The universe—including persons and objects—is to Brahman, to mention a frequently used analogy, as waves are to the ocean. This is not wholly apt since waves have a reality as modalities of the ocean, whereas Śaṅkara maintains that the universe has no ontological status whatsoever.

⁴ Compare de Broglie 1951, 114: "In space-time, everything which for each of us constitutes the past, the present, and the future is given in block, and the entire collection of events, successive for us, which form the existence of a material particle is represented by a line, the world line of the particle. Moreover, this new conception defers to the principle of causality and in no way prejudices the determinism of phenomena. Each observer, as his time passes, discovers, so to speak, new slices of space-time which appear to him as successive aspects of the material world, though in reality the ensemble of events constituting space-time exist prior to his knowledge of them. Although overturning a large number of the notions held by classical physics, the special theory of relativity may in one sense be considered as the crown or culmination of that physics, for it maintains the possibility of each observer localizing and describing all the phenomena in the schema of space and time, as well as maintaining the rigorous determinism of those phenomena, from which it follows that the aggregate of past, present, and future phenomena are in some sense given *a priori*". See also, Yourgrau 1999.

Śaṅkara distinguishes two paths of knowledge. The first is the path of the mundane world, conventional reality (*laukika*). There, a god with qualities or attributes (*saguṇa Brahman* or *saguṇa Īśvara*), is worshiped. The second path is absolute reality (*paramārthatas*), the supreme vision of Brahman without qualities (*nirguṇa Brahman*). In keeping with this distinction, Śaṅkara initially posits a lower Ātman and a lower Brahman as well as an upper Ātman and an upper Brahman. The lower Ātman and Brahman pertain to the mundane world. Here, Ātman is the individual self worshipping a theistic Brahman, Viṣṇu, a god with qualities who is the universe's creator and sustainer. Śaṅkara describes the mundane world as one of superimpositions, impositions, or designations (*upādhis* or *adhyāropas*). Just as an individual, mistaking a rope for a snake, superimposes on the rope the qualities of the snake, so persons superimpose qualities on absolute reality. Śaṅkara denies that the mundane world is illusory; paradoxically, he nevertheless maintains that it is not real. As will be argued below, that the mundane world is not real results in it being illusory, despite Śaṅkara's intentions, and so his unqualified nondualism collapses into a monism.

The supreme vision, of upper Ātman and Brahman, consists in the realization that Ātman is wholly identical to Brahman such that everything is Brahman. Śaṅkara recognizes that identity presupposes relata which are then identified, he maintains that relata are unreal, and so he denies that Ātman and Brahman are identical. Nevertheless, *pace* Śaṅkara, his notion of Brahman is best conceptualized as an 'absolute identity', an identity without remainder, an identity that contains no relata, distinctions, or differences. Brahman is a nonnumeric one, nonnumeric because this one does not presuppose any number system. Brahman is not the creator of the universe because, at the level of absolute reality, there is only Brahman. Brahman itself is nonintentional consciousness or awareness (*nirviśeṣa cinmātra*); this is a consciousness without an object of consciousness. Śaṅkara holds that there is a consciousness that is not conscious of anything, not even of itself. He believes that, were Brahman's consciousness to be a consciousness of itself, this would introduce a duality into Brahman. However, claiming that Brahman is nonintentional consciousness, consciousness without an object of consciousness, is still not the ultimate truth. This is because Śaṅkara rejects analogical reasoning and so he maintains that, finally, no attributes or predicates apply to Brahman. There is nothing that can be said about Brahman. As a consequence, his theology is entirely negative: neither this nor that is Brahman (*neti neti Brahman*). Describing Brahman as nonintentional consciousness is not correct, finally, but it is the least inadequate description.

Although Brahman cannot be thought, it can be nonconceptually experienced. Waking consciousness (*jāgrat*) is most removed from the supreme vision as waking consciousness depends on external objects for its content. Somewhat closer is dreaming sleep (*svapna*), where the objects of consciousness are internally generated by the mind. Dreamless sleep (*susupti*), is the conscious state that, in the mundane world, comes closest to an experience of Brahman. In dreamless sleep, consciousness exists in its pure state, without any object of consciousness. Finally, there is a fourth

state of consciousness (*turīya*) in which Brahman is apprehended directly (*aparokṣānubhava*). Here, the subject is wholly identical with the object, such that there is not even a notional distinction between them. This is an apprehension that is subjectless, objectless, and conceptually contentless.

What is the relation of the mundane world and absolute reality? There is none. The final truth is that only Brahman is real. From that perspective, although ‘perspective’ is precisely what is absent in absolute reality, there is no mundane world, there is only Brahman. The false belief (*mithyānjñāna*), ignorance (*avidyā*), that there is a distinction between the mundane world and absolute reality is possible only in the mundane world.⁵ This is the level that must be transcended. Śāṅkara would say, then, that the above question is nonsensical. It only seems to be sensible at the level of the mundane world, which is not real. There is only Brahman. In absolute reality, there are no distinctions, no levels, no answers, no questions.

No account can be given of a devotee’s transition from conventional to absolute reality. Such an account could occur only at the level of the mundane world and this would mean that the transition to absolute reality has not yet been accomplished. There cannot be a standard for a successful transition, as any standard or criterion could exist only at the level of the mundane world. There could be no return from absolute reality to the mundane world because there is no mundane world at the level of absolute reality. Having reached absolute reality, there would be no place to return to and nothing to return. Hence, there is no tale of a successful transition. Since Śāṅkara nevertheless has a great deal to say about these matters and argues that alternatives are logically inconsistent, critics could charge him with inconsistency. He would likely respond by urging devotees to not allow worries about coherence, consistency, or logic to distract them from seeking liberation (*mokṣa*).⁶

⁵ Compare Mayeda 1992, 78-79: “*Avidyā* in Śāṅkara’s view is a kind of psychological and perceptual error, or an innate psychological and epistemological defect. *Avidyā* is identical with the original error of all beings, and *mithyānjñāna* (false knowledge) is a synonym for it. In the case of Śāṅkara’s followers, however, *avidyā* is the material form from which all forms of *mithyānjñāna* come; *avidyā* is not *mithyānjñāna* but the cause of *mithyānjñāna*.... The philosophy of Śāṅkara and his followers has generally been called *māyāvādā* (illusion theory). And the term *avidyā* is often taken as a synonym for *māyā* by later Advaitins. However, in Śāṅkara’s philosophy the concept of *avidyā* is different from that of *māyā*, and moreover, *māyā* has little terminological significance”.

⁶ Compare Potter 2002, 167: “There is another possibility, and that is that he doesn’t see problems as either metaphysical or epistemological, but rather as essentially problems of ‘value,’ i.e., of the relative importance of what one believes. On this reading, Śāṅkara’s penchant for talking about relations of causation between Brahman and the world of selves while at the same time denying that causation is in the last analysis intelligible may be explained by pointing out that what Śāṅkara is interested in is not the *truth* of alternative accounts of ultimate causation but rather the relative *importance* of the seeker’s believing in one of them. No theory of causation or relations is true, he may be thought to be saying, but the reason why it is important not to believe what those other fellows—Buddhists, Naiyāyikas, and the rest—believe is because such beliefs block liberation. The belief about causation which doesn’t block liberation is just the belief that everything—world and selves—depends on Brahman. It doesn’t matter what logical faults one may find in this belief—believe it anyway! It is better for you if you do. Such an interpretation makes Śāṅkara out to emphasize nonrational intuition or faith and the negative dialectical criticism of all rationally defended beliefs, while ignoring the logical defects of his own theory”.

It might be objected that Śāṅkara's philosophy does not assert that the universe is illusory, having no ontological status whatsoever, but rather that the universe is not wholly real. Only Brahman is real in the sense of being eternal and not dependent on anything else, the objectors could propose. The universe, by contrast, is temporal and depends upon Brahman for its existence. There are two reasons to reject this proposal. First, neither the (majority of the) advocates nor the adversaries of Śāṅkara's philosophy understand it this way. Instead, they believe that it teaches that the universe is illusory. The other and more powerful reason is that Śāṅkara's philosophy must maintain the universe's illusoriness in order to be distinct from the philosophies of Rāmānuja and Madhvācārya (c. 1238-1317). As will be discussed below, Rāmānuja's philosophy (*Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*) claims that the universe is real because it is an aspect of Brahman (*creatio ex deo*). Madhvācārya advocates an ontological dualism (*Dvaita Vedānta*), by contrast, urging that Brahman and the universe are ontologically distinct, Brahman creating the universe from eternally existing formless matter (*creatio ex materia*).⁷ Were Śāṅkara's *Advaita Vedānta* to abandon the thesis that the universe is illusory, it would collapse into either *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* or *Dvaita Vedānta*.

4. RĀMĀNUJA: EVERYTHING'S BRAHMAN

A philosopher once asked, "Are we human because we gaze at the stars or do we gaze at the stars because we are human?" Pointless really. Do the stars gaze back? Now *that's* a question. (Vaughn 2007)

Rāmānuja's philosophy would be approximated if Spinoza's philosophy were to be morphed such that substance became a theistic God, where the universe was contingently created by God, from God's own being, with each living thing having a soul (*jīva*) that ultimately must escape the cycle of reincarnation (*saṃsāra*) and be with God. A considerable distance from Spinoza's own philosophy, perhaps, but in the neighborhood of its antecedents. Rāmānuja advances a qualified non-dualism (*Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta*). While agreeing with Śāṅkara that everything is ultimately Brahman, Rāmānuja departs from him on several crucial points. Rāmānuja denies that the universe is illusory. He holds, rather, that persons and objects are actually existing qualities, parts, or aspects of Brahman (Viṣṇu). They are modifications of Brahman's own being. Brahman actively creates the universe—which is without a first beginning, having always already been created—from Brahman's own substance (*creatio ex deo*) as, by analogy, spiders produce their webs from themselves. Brahman, then, is both the efficient and material cause of the universe. In contrast, Śāṅkara maintains that only Brahman is real and that the universe is illusory, as discussed above, he denies that Brahman creates the universe or is in any sense the cause of the universe. Another difference between these two is that Śāṅkara rejects

⁷ Another alternative, not found in Indian thought, is that Brahman created the world out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*).

and Rāmānuja accepts analogical reasoning.⁸ Brahman’s goodness, for example, is analogous to human goodness and so it may be understood, albeit incompletely.

Rāmānuja further maintains that humans have free will. They are subject to karma, however, and so what they are able to will is conditioned by their karma. They must finally rely, then, on Viṣṇu’s grace in order to achieve liberation. There’s a debate among Rāmānuja’s successors about whether individuals can contribute to their liberation (as baby monkeys cling to their mother as she carries them away from danger) or if they are wholly dependant on Viṣṇu’s grace (as kittens are carried by their mother).

The universe is the body of Brahman.⁹ The universe is to Brahman as the human body is to the human soul. Nevertheless, Rāmānuja asserts that Brahman is wholly independent of, and unaffected by, the universe. He argues that, just as the soul of a human individual is unaffected by the body, so Brahman is unaffected by the universe. It is not clear how the human soul is unaffected by the body or why Rāmānuja believes this. It is further difficult to understand how Brahman could be completely independent of, and unaffected by, the universe since the universe is ontologically an aspect of Brahman. Brahman intervenes in the universe by taking on avatars, Rāmānuja primarily refers to Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, when evil and wrongdoing might become dominant. It is even more difficult to comprehend how Brahman could intervene in the universe, by taking on avatars or extending grace, while being so isolated from the universe. It might be suggested that Brahman would have no need to perceive the universe to know when to intervene since, having created it, he would be able to foresee its condition at any moment. *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* maintains that humans have free will, however, and it understands free will as libertarian rather than compatibilist. This is difficult, admittedly, as it also believes that the karma of individuals can severely constrain their will.¹⁰ Although a fuller consideration of

⁸ Compare Lott 1976, 85: “Here ... we see the striking contrast between Śankara’s view of the nature of *Brahman*’s transcendence and that of Rāmānuja. For Rāmānuja, *Brahman* is beyond the empirical universe, but yet remains in such a relationship with it that even empirically descriptive language points significantly to *Brahman*, its culminating point. Hence, analogical description of Brahman becomes possible, for *Brahman* contains the universe within his total being, transcending it by his inclusiveness. This may properly be termed *pan-en-theistic* Vedānta. On the other hand Kevalādvaita’s transcendental identity (of *Brahman* and *ātman*) seems to preclude any significant relationship between Brahman and the universe. Thus it stands as the reversal of *pan-en-theism*, being a kind of *pan-ex-Brahmanism* (all is outside *Brahman*—he Transcends all) in which the pure reality of Brahman must stand untouched by any form of empirical existence”.

⁹ Compare Carman 1974, 158: “For Śrī Vaiṣṇavas, this supreme personal name of God used in the cultic formula is Nārāyaṇa, considered as a synonym for the more common supreme name of Viṣṇu. The sect derives its name from the expanded form of the name, also enshrined in a sacred formula, Śrīman-Nārāyaṇa: Nārāyaṇa unified with (or accompanied by) His Divine Consort, the Goddess Śrī (also called Lakṣmī)”.

¹⁰ Perhaps Rāmānuja holds that the soul cannot be affected by the body, karma, or sin; if the soul could ever be affected, he might suggest, liberation would not be permanent since a liberated soul could later be affected. This only increases the difficulties. He also maintains that souls are in bondage because of karma. From what would souls be liberated, if not karma? If the answer is that the soul is liberated

these issues would require a discussion of Brahman's foreknowledge, it seems that, insofar as *Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta* endorses libertarianism, Brahman would need to perceive the universe, and so be affected by it, to decide whether to intervene.

The consciousness of Brahman is another point at which Rāmānuja departs from Śaṅkara. Anticipating Franz Brentano (1838-1917), Rāmānuja believes that consciousness is always intentional. That is to say, there must always be an object of consciousness. He thus rejects Śaṅkara's claim that consciousness exists in a pure state, without any object of consciousness, in dreamless sleep (*susupti*). While Rāmānuja agrees that Brahman is fully conscious, he denies that the consciousness of Brahman has no object. One consequence of this is that, while Śaṅkara advises devotees to seek to experience Brahman through a state of consciousness which is not conscious of anything, Rāmānuja denies that this is possible and instead urges devotees to experience Brahman as Viṣṇu in worship and devotion (*bhakti*). Another consequence is that Brahman is experienced in *turīya* conceptually, not nonconceptually.

5. ABHINAVAGUPTA: ŚIVA EXPRESSES HIMSELF

I'm going to give you a little advice. There's a force in the universe that makes things happen. And all you have to do is get in touch with it, stop thinking, let things happen, and be the ball. (Ramis 1980)

Abhinavagupta maintains that Brahman (Śiva) necessarily expresses himself as the universe. The power by which Śiva expresses himself, as well as that which is expressed through this power, are regarded as Śakti, Śiva's consort. So important are these that, in some sects who follow Śaktism, Śiva is eclipsed by Śakti, who becomes the primary focus of worship. Nevertheless, the Kaśmiri Śaivism advocated by Abhinavagupta holds, that while the universe is Śiva's expression, liberation consists in experiencing the eternally unmoving Śiva who is beyond his expression.¹¹

Like Śaṅkara, Abhinavagupta holds that Brahman is nonintentional consciousness (*cit*), consciousness without an object of consciousness. After this initial agreement, though, there is a significant parting of the ways. Abhinavagupta rejects a purely negative theology and so he holds that it is accurate to say that Brahman is nonintentional consciousness. He further maintains that the universe is Brahman's expression and so is fully real. Abhinavagupta accepts panpsychism.¹² Whereas other panpsychists maintain only that one of matter's properties is its enmindedness or that matter has a proto-consciousness, for Abhinavagupta, consciousness is matter's essential property. There is no dualism between matter and consciousness to be

from the false belief that the soul has been or could be affected by karma, how is that false belief not itself a form of karma?

¹¹ Śaktism would so emphasize the attributes and modes that substance would effectively play no role, to articulate this in "Spinozese", while Kaśmiri Śaivism underscores substance as that which necessarily expresses itself through, and is expressed by, its attributes and modes.

¹² Compare Skrbina 2005.

overcome or negotiated. Matter is not distinct from consciousness, it *is* consciousness. Everything is a modality of consciousness

The suggestion that mass is consciousness may seem whimsical. Nevertheless, some contemporary theories of consciousness converge on it. Albert Einstein (1879-1955) posits that matter—more precisely, mass—is energy. His celebrated formula is $e = mc^2$ —where e stands for a physical system's total energy, m for that system's relativistic mass, and c^2 the speed of light squared—and so $m = e/c^2$. Information Theory maintains that a change in an energy state, from 0 to 1, may be regarded as a computation. Digital Physics, in cosmology and physics, further suggests that the universe itself can be regarded as a computer. If consciousness is or results from computations, where changes in energy states are information, then matter would be consciousness. Alternatively, proponents of Electromagnetic Theories of Consciousness, such as Johnjoe McFadden and Susan Pockett, maintain that consciousness results when a specific sort of electromagnetic field occurs in the brain (McFadden 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Pockett 2000). Pockett writes that “consciousness is identical with certain spatiotemporal patterns in the electromagnetic field” (Pockett 2000, vi). More radically, she urges that “the universe as a whole is conscious”, and she believes that “this universal consciousness can be thought of as continuously experiencing, in real time, every sensation and perception, every thought, every emotion that is generated by the mind of every conscious being in the universe” (Pockett 2000, 94).

As might be anticipated, Abhinavagupta also accepts the extended mind hypothesis. Andy Clark and David J. Chalmers maintain that the mind can extend beyond an individual's physical brain, body, or skin (Clark and Chalmers 1998). They suggest that the mental state of one individual could be partly constituted by the mental states of other individuals, so that there would be socially extended cognition, and that the extended mind implies an extended self (Clark and Chalmers 1998, 17-18). While Edwin Hutchins, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Lynn Hankinson Nelson do not employ Clark and Chalmers' terminology, they nevertheless argue that individuals can share an extended mind (Hutchins 1995; Knorr Cetina 1999; Hankinson Nelson 1990). Abhinavagupta holds that everything shares an extended mind, a single consciousness, a nonintentional consciousness without an object of consciousness, Brahman. Indeed, everything exists because it is an expression of Brahman.

This includes concepts, of course. Risking anachronistic projection, Abhinavagupta would hold that concepts do not interfere with the apprehension of reality and he would deny that to correctly perceive things involves some sort of nonconceptual apprehension. It is likely, moreover, that he would agree that concepts are in the world. What about the experience of Brahman? This is nonconceptual. Although Brahman expresses itself in concepts, Brahman transcends all concepts as well as the distinction between subject (knower) and object (known).

So, while substance necessarily expresses itself through, and is expressed by, its attributes and modes—to speak Spinozese—nevertheless substance still remains primary and is neither lost nor dissipated in its expression. This might seem a matter of emphasis but, for Abhinavagupta, that emphasis is crucial. It is not that initially

there are chunks of matter which then somehow hook up to form a universal panpsychic extended mind of nonintentional consciousness. Rather, this mind is always already there and chunks of matter exist because they are its expression. This is not quite accurate, however, because the universe goes through pulses, cycles of creation and dissolution, where the dissolution and eventual nonexistence of the universe—followed by its re-creation—are equally expressions of Brahman.

The path between Brahman and the universe is one-way. That is to say, although the universe is Brahman's necessary expression, the general tendency is still to conceptualize Brahman as prior to, independent from, and unaffected by the universe. There is a tension in Kaśmiri Śaivism between conceptualizing Brahman *as* its expression—the pantheism of Somānanda (c. 875-925)—and articulating Brahman as being *more than* its expression—the panentheism of Utpaladeva (c. 900-950) and Abhinavagupta. To turn to Spinoza for a moment, he holds that substance expresses itself in an infinite number of attributes, of which humans experience two. Setting aside recent interpretations holding that Spinoza allows that the actual number of attributes are only two, substance's expression is infinitely more than what could be experienced. Returning to Kaśmiri Śaivism, Abhinavagupta would say that Brahman's expression is infinitely more than the universe. This would not remove the tension just noted, of course. It would allow him to maintain that Brahman is infinitely more than any possible experience or concept of its expression, however, while also holding that individuals can apprehend Brahman.

Abhinavagupta's philosophy, like that of Spinoza, could be described as one encompassing both identity and difference, where Brahman itself is a pure unity with no internal distinctions while Brahman's expression as the universe contains multiple entities. Nevertheless, this is not an identity of identity and difference. Brahman itself contains no internal differentiation and Brahman is wholly unaffected by its expression as the universe.

Whereas Śaṅkara maintains that only Brahman exists and that the universe is not real, Abhinavagupta claims that the universe is real because it is an expression of Brahman. Brahman freely chooses to create the universe, according to Rāmānuja, and the universe is real because it is an aspect of Brahman. Abhinavagupta agrees that the universe is real, but he does not regard it as the creation of Brahman. Instead, the universe is Brahman's necessary expression.

6. SCHELLING: THE IDENTITY OF SUBJECT AND OBJECT

The Force is what gives a Jedi his power. It's an energy field created by all living things. It surrounds us and penetrates us. It binds the galaxy together. (Lucas 1977)

While Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) characterize human subjectivity in terms of freedom and morality, they also believe that subjectivity is opposed to nature and that nature is wholly indifferent to subjectivity's claims. Subjectivity strives against nature, seeking to impose on nature a rational structure foreign to it. By contrast, Spinoza views nature and mind as the

rational expressions of a monistic substance, but this monistic substance lacks subjectivity. Schelling seeks to unify these two strains.

His philosophy is articulated in successive difficult and complex systems.¹³ For the purposes of this article, fortunately, the salient points can be briefly stated. Accepting panpsychism, Schelling maintains that matter is enminded and that there is a continuity from inorganic matter to self-conscious mind. He claims that mind is a more complexly organized development of matter. He further urges that subjectivity and nature are twin expressions of ‘the absolute’, whose analogue in Western religious discourse is God and in Indian philosophy is Brahman. It is absolute in that it is neither constrained nor limited by anything external to it. It is beneath, or beyond, all distinctions—subjectivity and nature, subject and object, knower and known—and so cannot be discursively comprehended or known, although it can be nonconceptually experienced in religion and art. Although Schelling wishes to reject Kant’s thing-in-itself, his absolute is a species of it.

Of the views considered thus far, Schelling’s philosophy is closest to that of Abhinavagupta. There are several important differences, though. First, Abhinavagupta accepts an extended panpsychism and extended mind such that each thing is a modality of consciousness and all of these consciousnesses are linked to constitute a supersized consciousness. Indeed, the entire universe is its expression. Schelling’s absolute is beyond all distinctions, by contrast, and so he would not agree that it should be identified with consciousness, however nonintentional or objectless that consciousness might be. Second, Schelling does not have a notion of a single extended mind in which all things participate, although it would not be incompatible with the tenor of his philosophy. Finally, Abhinavagupta claims that the universe is the expression of Brahman, while Schelling’s principle metaphor is of the universe emanating or emerging from the absolute. It may be that these different metaphors express the same concept. Nevertheless, they suggest different problems. Abhinavagupta has the difficulty of accounting for Brahman that exists prior to or beyond its expression as the universe, so that Brahman is not swallowed up by its expression. Schelling has the challenge of explaining why and how the universe emerges from the absolute.

7. HEGEL: THE ONE THAT’S NEVER ONE

Oh, will you help me? Can you help me?

You don’t need to be helped any longer. You’ve always had the power to go back to Kansas.

I have?

Then why didn’t you tell her before?

Because she wouldn’t have believed me. She had to learn it for herself.

What have you learned, Dorothy?

Well, I—I think that it—it wasn’t enough to just want to see Uncle Henry and Auntie

¹³ For useful discussions, see: Beiser 2002; Friedman 2006; Grant 2007; Richards 2002.

Em—and it's that—if I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own back yard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with! Is that right?

That's all it is!

But that's so easy! I should've thought of it for you—

I should have felt it in my heart—

No, she had to find it out for herself. Now those magic slippers will take you home in two seconds!

Oh! Toto too?

Toto too.

Now?

Whenever you wish.

(Fleming et alii 1939)

Hegel's *Geist*, frequently translated as 'mind' or 'spirit', substantially modifies Schelling's absolute. Like it, *Geist*'s analogue in Western religious discourse is God and in Indian philosophy is Brahman. Rather than subjectivity and nature being distinct expressions of an incompressible and unknowable absolute, though, subjectivity nonreductively emerges from nature. Although he seems to reject panpsychism, Hegel nevertheless maintains that inorganic nature is *Geist* in its nascent state. Inorganic nature produces life and this results in humans. *Geist* has a fundamental drive to comprehend itself. Hegel's *Geist* is an extended mind that potentially includes all of humanity. Since *Geist* emerges from nature, there is an extended sense in which nature too is an aspect of *Geist*. *Geist* is, finally, a cosmic mind or spirit who is embodied in the universe and uses humans as its principle vehicles whereby it comes to know itself through historical development. *Geist* comprehends itself only insofar as humans understand the universe and themselves. *Geist* thinks through humans, and it has no consciousness or thoughts beyond human thoughts. *Geist* discovers the deep blue of Neptune's atmosphere and its great dark spot, for example, when astronomers at NASA first receive the photographs transmitted from *Voyager 2*. Unlike Schelling's absolute, moreover, Hegel's *Geist* has a rational structure, and so it is wholly comprehensible. As a result, philosophy, not religion or art, most fully comprehends *Geist*. What must be added, though, is that philosophy's comprehension of *Geist* is also *Geist*'s own self-comprehension.

For each of the other philosophies, the road from Brahman to Ātman is one-way. That is to say, they claim that Brahman is (somehow) the cause of Ātman but that the former is wholly unaffected by the latter. The exception to this is Śāṅkara, who claims that Ātman is unreal and so has no cause; he would then agree that Ātman cannot affect Brahman.

Ātman not only affects Brahman, for Hegel, but Brahman itself also progressively develops.¹⁴

¹⁴ Hegel's metaphysics touches the Vedānta tradition of natural difference and non-difference (*Svābhāvika Bhedābheda*), which holds that Brahman's essence is both different and non-different from the universe, that the universe is an actual transformation of Brahman, and that the world is real. Unlike Hegel, however, *Svābhāvika Bhedābheda* privileges non-difference over difference.

Hegel's *Geist* is a metaphysical monism. This is not precise, however. Although he rejects dualism and pluralism, Hegel has a metaphysics according to which the one is never fully one. That is to say, there is a constitutive split, or gap, within being or reality itself. This split is simultaneously being's condition of possibility and what prevents it from ever becoming fully whole. Without the gap that forever prevents the one from finally becoming one, there would be only one and so there would not be anything at all. The bare concept of Being is unstable and passes over into Nothing, as Hegel argues in his *Logic*, and so a one that is only one would be none. His philosophy is an identity of identity and difference, where difference is contained in and constitutes identity itself.

Simplifying to the extreme and risking imprecision, it can be said that all of the Indian philosophies discussed in this article, as well as Schelling's, believe that Ātman is Brahman. In each case, however, the *is* coupling Ātman and Brahman is not entirely reciprocal or equivalent. That is, Ātman is finally seen to be part of a larger whole, Brahman. Or, in Śaṅkara's case, Ātman so wholly merges with Brahman as to leave no remainder, not even an account of how Ātman could ever have falsely believed itself to be separate from Brahman. Hegel also believes that Ātman is Brahman, although he would no doubt cringe to see his German transmogrified into Sanskrit, but here the valence is inverted. That is to say, it is not so much that Ātman discovers itself to be a constituent of a whole but instead that Brahman is seen to be Ātman. Whereas Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling, each in his distinct way, seek to discover the Brahman that lies beneath or behind Ātman, Hegel urges that Brahman *is* its appearance as Ātman. There is nothing underlying Ātman, it itself is Brahman. To speak Spinozese, one last time, this is the claim that substance necessarily expresses itself through the attributes and modes because substance *is* that expression. Substance becomes, not something that exists prior to and apart from its expression as attributes and modes, but instead a result of that expression. (It must be noted, parenthetically, that Gilles Deleuze—perhaps the greatest philosopher of the Twentieth Century, great precisely because of his unrelenting opposition to Hegelianism¹⁵—advocated this reading of Spinoza as anti-Hegel; but this anti-Hegelianism is Hegel himself).

At the level of Religion, God incarnates as Jesus Christ. This Christian myth initially seems not so different from tales of Hindu avatars, of Viṣṇu becoming Rāma or Kṛṣṇa. The difference, though, is crucial. When Viṣṇu becomes Kṛṣṇa, Viṣṇu continues to exist as Viṣṇu even while, say, Kṛṣṇa is romancing Rādhā and the gopis in Vrindavan. When God becomes Jesus Christ, on Hegel's interpretation, God's entire being is incarnated, without remainder. When Jesus Christ dies, God dies too. The resurrection is not the reanimation of Jesus but rather the rise of the believing community. God exists again, in a sense, not as the transcendent God of the beyond, the God of traditional theism, but as wholly immanent in that community.

Brahman becomes Ātman, to express Hegel's position in the categories of Indian philosophy, and dies. Full stop. Or almost. This is dialectics, after all. So, Brahman

¹⁵ Compare Foucault 1977, 165: "Perhaps, one day, this century will be known as Deleuzian".

dies and Ātman realizes that it is Brahman. Not because Ātman is part of some larger, all encompassing whole, but because Ātman is Brahman. To tarry at the level of metaphor for a moment—the level where all the work gets done, even for Hegel—it is neither that the drop of water must reunite, somehow, with the ocean from which it has inexplicably become separated and estranged nor that it must realize that it was never separated but has always already been one with the ocean. Rather, the drop itself *is* the ocean. Not ‘you’re it’ but ‘it’s you’.

8. TRUTH LIES IN ERROR

At the end of almost every myth told in the Purāṇas there appears a statement of the advantages that one can hope to gain by listening to the tale: “Whoever hears [or, in later times, reads] this story will be freed from the flames of hell, purified of the stigma of adultery, received into the presence of Śiva....” (Doniger O’Flaherty 1973, 314)

Prior to critically engaging these philosophers, it will be useful to chart the salient features of their accounts.

Spinoza:

- Substance necessarily expresses itself through an infinite number of attribute (specifically, extension and thought) and modes (objects, ideas, and relations)
- Substance has no consciousness, thoughts, or purposes.
- Substance expresses itself dynamically. However, its expression has no reciprocal effect on substance. Substance is itself static.
- Spinoza denies that there is free will.
- He appeals to a priori reason to support his claims.

Śāṅkara:

- Only Brahman is real. The universe is unreal.
- That the universe appears to be separate from Brahman is not explained; any explanation would presuppose that there is something other than Brahman.
- Brahman is said to be nonintentional consciousness but finally nothing can be predicated of Brahman.
- Since the universe is unreal, it cannot have an reciprocal effect on Brahman.
- Brahman is wholly static, it does not change.
- Śāṅkara appeals to personal experience and scripture to support his claims.

Rāmānuja:

- Brahman (Viṣṇu) eternally creates the universe from himself and so the universe is real.
- Brahman has intentional consciousness.
- Brahman is the soul, the universe is Brahman’s body.
- The soul is unaffected by the body and so the universe has no reciprocal effect on Brahman.
- Brahman’s body, the universe, is dynamic. Brahman itself is static.
- Rāmānuja believes that there is free will, but it is conditioned by karma.

- He appeals to personal experience and scripture to support his claims.

Abhinavagupta:

- Brahman (Śiva) necessarily expresses itself as the universe and so the universe is real.
- Brahman is nonintentional consciousness. Everything is consciousness.
- Abhinavagupta accepts panpsychism and the extended mind.
- Brahman expresses itself dynamically as the universe. However, its expression has no reciprocal effect on Brahman. Brahman is itself static.
- Abhinavagupta appeals to personal experience and scripture to support his claims.

Shelling:

- Brahman (the Absolute) is conceptually prior to all distinctions and predications.
- The universe emerges from Brahman.
- Brahman cannot be conceptualized, but it can be nonconceptually experienced through art.
- The universe emerges from Brahman and is dynamic. However, the universe has no reciprocal effect on Brahman. Brahman is itself static.
- Schelling accepts panpsychism but not the extended mind.
- Shelling appeals to a priori reason to support his claims.

Hegel:

- Brahman (*Geist*) is the result of the universe's development. Brahman develops historically.
- Brahman also has a reciprocal effect on the universe.
- Both Brahman and the universe are dynamic.
- In Hegel's monism, the One is never fully one.
- Brahman is fully rational and so is known conceptually through philosophy.
- Hegel accepts the extended mind and probably panpsychism.
- Hegel appeals to a posteriori reason and history to support his claims.

Why should persons accept Śāṅkara's account of Brahman? Personal experience obtained in *turīya* and the testimony of the *Śrutis*—more precisely, the Upaniṣads, *Bhagavadgītā*, and *Brahmasūtra*, texts considered to be sacred and solely of divine origin—he would reply. A vicious circle? No, he would respond, because *turīya* is self-authenticating. Nevertheless, since the experience of Brahman is nonconceptual, it might be asked how individuals could distinguish it from the experience of emptiness (*śūnyatā*). Madhyamaka Buddhists such as Nāgārjuna (c. 150-250) would maintain that no object made of parts is real (*svabhāva*)—to approximate their doctrine of emptiness—rather, it is the constituent parts which are real. The chariot is not real, to cite their example, what is real are its parts. The Mādhyamikas' full doctrine is generated when they further claim that every supposed object has constituent parts, such that everything is 'empty'. They do not assert that nothing exists, exactly, but rather urge that everything is not real and so empty. That is to say,

for something to be real, it must not have constituent parts. However, everything whatsoever has parts. It is not turtles, but parts, all the way down.¹⁶

Śaṅkara believes that Brahman is most fully real—indeed, Brahman alone is real—not empty. Yet, since both Śaṅkara and the Mādhyamikas maintain that the experience of Brahman and emptiness, respectively, is self-authenticating and without an object of consciousness, it is difficult to see how even they would determine whether someone—or even themselves—is experiencing Brahman or emptiness. Those who charge Śaṅkara with being a closet Buddhist (*pracchannabauddha*) have a point. Śaṅkara would respond, presumably, that the *Śrutis* support his claim that what is experienced in the *turīya* state of consciousness is Brahman. The Mādhyamikas could reply, of course, that the early Buddhist scriptures (*āgamas*) support their belief that it is emptiness that is experienced.¹⁷

Unlike Rāmānuja, who believes that those passages in the *Śrutis* which seem counter to his interpretation of Brahman must be read metaphorically, Śaṅkara rejects the passages that contradict his understanding of Brahman.¹⁸ Śaṅkara's difficulty is clear. On the one hand, he would invoke the *Śrutis* to legitimize the claims that the *turīya* state of consciousness nonconceptually experiences Brahman, not Madhyamaka emptiness, and that Brahman alone is real. On the other hand, he would turn to that experience to support his selective reading of the *Śrutis*. It seems that his philosophy is caught in a vicious circle. In response, however, Śaṅkara could urge that this apparent difficulty is only a specific instance of the hermeneutic circle, where interpretation and experience mutually support each other, and so is not vicious. Unlike other supposed instances of the hermeneutic circle, here interpretation and experience can only support—not correct—each other. Śaṅkara could respond that his opponents must themselves agree that this would be true of any completed science where all of its questions have been fully answered. Śaṅkara's opponents would not concede that there could be mutually inconsistent completed sciences, however, and so they would see a relevant disanalogy between a completed science, on the one hand, and the contradictory hermeneutic circles of Śaṅkara and the Mādhyamikas.

There is another pressing difficulty. Since only Brahman without qualities is real, nothing coherent can be said about Brahman. When asked how the universe and its inhabitants could even appear possible, Śaṅkara's response is that this question can

¹⁶ Hawking and Mlodinow 2008, 3: “A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: ‘What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise.’ The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, ‘What is the tortoise standing on?’ ‘You’re very clever, young man, very clever,’ said the old lady. ‘But it’s turtles all the way down!’”

¹⁷ Compare Timalisina 2009.

¹⁸ Rāmānuja believes that the passages of the *Śrutis* that seem to advocate a Śaṅkarian unity of Brahman cannot be simply rejected but must be interpreted as metaphorical. It could be argued that this is preferable because it compels an engagement with the full range of the *Śrutis*, although Śaṅkara would no doubt urge that Rāmānuja's metaphorical interpretations are forced and implausible.

arise only at the level of the mundane world and disappears at the level of absolute reality, where only Brahman is. If critics object that this is not coherent, Śaṅkara would reply that the incoherence also occurs only at the level of the mundane world and urge that, at the level of absolute reality, there is only Brahman and so neither coherence nor incoherence.

Like Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja finally appeals to *turīya* and the *Śrutis* to support his philosophy. Again, this results in a reciprocal process, where each legitimizes the other. That experience has been interpreted properly is determined by appeal to the *Śrutis*, while the correct reading of the *Śrutis* is determined by appeal to experience. Abhinavagupta turns, not primarily to the *Śrutis*, but rather to the *Āgama*, *Spanda*, and *Pratyabhijñā Śāstras* as well as to the *turīya* consciousness. This again results in a reciprocal process, where text and experience mutually legitimize each other.

Despite their many differences, the hermeneutical circles of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Abhinavagupta are each self-validating, provided any has already been accepted. There are no non-question-begging arguments either for any of their philosophies or to establish the superiority of any one over the others. Schelling does not appeal to any text but rather to the experience of an essential oneness of the Absolute, a oneness that precedes any distinctions or conceptualizations. As with Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Abhinavagupta, however, this experience is self-authenticating. Only Hegel departs from appeals to self-authenticating experience, maintaining instead that experience is communicable, public, and fallible.

The philosophies of Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling finally succumb to the same difficulty. Experience of Brahman, or the absolute, is self-authenticating and so excludes the possibility of error. However, there is also no possibility of truth as no criterion obtains to distinguish truth from error when individuals make contradictory claims regarding this experience.¹⁹ There is no non-question-begging criterion to decide whether Brahman alone is real as Śaṅkara asserts, Brahman (Viṣṇu) and the universe are both real with the universe being a created aspect of Brahman as Rāmānuja maintains, Brahman (Śiva) and the universe are both real with the universe being Brahman's expression as Abhinavagupta thinks, or the universe somehow emerges from the absolute as Schelling claims.

There is an additional difficulty that confronts the philosophies of Śaṅkara, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling. These three philosophers believe that the experience of Brahman, or the absolute, is nonconceptual. Hence, it is unique to the individual, at least in a sense, as well as private. Persons who experience this state of consciousness do not need to have their experience recognized as authentic by others. Indeed, it is difficult to see how this could happen. Moreover, the experience of Brahman is private in that it, in principle, can be neither conceptualized nor articulated in language. While an individual may be certain of having experienced Brahman, there can be no such certainty about the claims of others to have also experienced Brahman. Further, for the individual having an experience, there is no criterion, in

¹⁹ The difficulties confronting *turīya* are analogous to those Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) poses for a private language in Wittgenstein 1953.

principle, to identify a supposed experience of Brahman or the Absolute *as* such an experience as opposed, say, to an experience of Madhyamaka emptiness. Even if the nonconceptual content of the experiences were somehow different—although it seems that Śāṅkara, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling are committed to denying that this experience has content—it would still be impossible to specify how the contents differ. Nor is there a criterion, finally, to re-identify a current experience (of Brahman or the absolute) as the same as that of a previous experience.

As discussed in the previous section, Hegel's *Geist* is an extended mind that potentially encompasses the human community. He would agree with Hankinson Nelson when she observes that “communities know, individuals only derivatively so” (Hankinson Nelson 1990, 313). *Geist* develops historically. Experience is conceptual and so persons can specify and communicate their experiences. Also, concepts must be socially recognized to be legitimate. So, whether an individual had a certain experience and interpreted it properly is not wholly a matter of first-person access or reporting. Now, there cannot be an experience of phlogiston or of arthritis in the thigh. Experience is fallible, for Hegel, and better accounts are obtained through mutual criticism. As a result, although disagreement represents an impasse for Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja, Abhinavagupta, and Schelling, it is the road forward for Hegel.

9. AFTERWORD

I think we should shake ourselves up. I'm not suggesting a permanent revolution in which everything must be continually questioned. I'm saying that every time one encounters something really strange, really outrageous, one should stop and think about what we normally do. We shouldn't take the standards by which we understand the rest of the world as always fixed. (Scott 2006, 275)

This article contributes to the development of contemporary philosophy. It does so at the levels of content and method.

In terms of content, this article's conclusion entails that any adequate epistemology must account, not only for the possibility of truth, but as well for the possibility of error. It must not founder when encountering counter-claims. Rather than responding to counter-claims with gainsaying assertions, an adequate epistemology must be able to incorporate those counter-claims, showing that the counter-claims fail according to their own criteria of adequacy.

Also, most of the problems and the proposed solutions discussed in contemporary philosophy were already debated in German Idealism, Indian Vedānta, or Kāśmiri Śāivism. Those who are acquainted with those debates are spared the labor of reinventing the ways in which those problems can be articulated as well as the solutions which were proposed. Knowing the history of those debates in Idealism, Vedānta, or Śāivism suggests the probable trajectory of any other philosophy in which such problems occur.

Some thoughts about method. A philosophy is comprehended more fully, and becomes more articulated, as it is brought into constructive engagements with an increasing number of distinct approaches from different traditions. As a consequence, there is a direct benefit of an exposure to other systems of thought. Deeply held presuppositions are frequently invisible to those who hold them. Encountering divergent assumptions can allow those presuppositions to be recognized.²⁰

By taking philosophies that are initially experienced as strange and then elucidating them so that they become familiar, this article tarries with Geertz, who finds “the argument that the human sciences are most usefully conceived as efforts to render various matters on their face strange and puzzling (religious beliefs, political practices, self-definitions) ‘no longer so, accounted for’, to be altogether persuasive” (Geertz 1994, 83-84). Having seen German Idealism, Indian Vedānta, and Kaśmiri Śaivism elucidated so as to be worthy of serious consideration, readers may hesitate—when encountering other strange traditions—in labeling them as incoherent or too fantastic to be credible. Such elucidations enhance the sensibilities of readers, moreover, creating new areas of constructive engagement. These elucidations also bring previous thinkers into contemporary conversations. This expands the positions and approaches advanced within a conversation. More radically, these new participants may argue that a conversation’s terms have been inadequately framed or that a conversation itself should be dropped.

Finding “too *comforting*” Geertz’s rendering strange concepts familiar, Talal Asad responds that “in translation we ought to be bringing things into our language even though they cause a *scandal*” (Scott 2006, 275). Making the strange become familiar risks overlooking—indeed, making invisible—what is genuinely different in other traditions. Hence, the task cannot be only to make the strange familiar. It is as crucial to recognize the points where the strange seems scandalous, outrageous, or absurd—and then to interrogate the presuppositions which generate these reactions. The aim is not to domesticate the strange, then, but rather to rethink those presuppositions. Thereby, making the familiar strange.

A final point. According to Ronnie Littlejohn, comparative philosophy creates “not a new theory but a different sort of philosopher” (Littlejohn 2005). This is not wholly correct. It is possible that new theories will emerge as the result of constructive engagements with distinct approaches from different traditions. Nevertheless, insofar as comparative philosophy creates a different sort of philosopher, it is protreptic, what Pierre Hadot (1922-2010) refers to as “a way of life” (Hadot 1995). For that exercise, nothing philosophical can remain alien.

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²⁰ Compare Struhl 2010.

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