



# Apophatic Measures: Toward a Theology of Irreducible Particularity

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**Apophatic Measures:  
Toward a Theology of Irreducible Particularity**

A dissertation presented

By

R. Brad Bannon

To

The Faculty of Harvard Divinity School

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of

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Apophatic Measures:

Toward a Theology of Irreducible Particularity

Abstract

*Apophatic Measures: Toward a Theology of Irreducible Particularity* is a work of constructive comparative theology examining select writings of Śaṅkara (Eighth Century, India) and Nicholas of Cusa (Fifteenth Century, Germany). It argues that, for Śaṅkara and Cusa, apophasis does not culminate in what Michael Sells calls a “semantic event,” but instead in a *sensual* event. For each, negation removes intellectual distractions, awakening one to a heightened state of sensual attentiveness. For Śaṅkara, this is observed in the embodied encounter wherein a teacher incarnates Vedānta scripture to reveal “*This Self is Brahman*” (Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 2). For Cusa, the intimate encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4) is paradigmatic of true, attentive sensuality. Employing a heuristic device termed “apophatic measure” in its trifold meanings of method, sensuality, and particularity, this dissertation contributes to contemporary discourses on the ontology of difference, the theo-ethical valuation of diversity, and the singularity of unique bodies. Rather than reducing individuals to ethnic, gendered, or other essentializing measures, persons are regarded as unique disclosures of ultimate reality. Each person is re/cognized as an unprecedented *imago Dei* or particular manifestation of Ātman-Brahman. Through the pedagogy and performance of apophatic theology, one progressively removes epistemic universals and thereby cultivates a phenomenology of irreducible particularity as a vision *of* God. Awakened to an attentive sensuality, one re/cognizes *this Self*, incarnate before one’s very eyes, as an apophatic measure of the immeasurable divine.

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Jointly Dedicated

to

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तदिदं हृदयं मम ॥

and to

my many

outstanding teachers

ॐ सह नावतु सहनौ भुनक्तु सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।

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---

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## Abbreviations

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### Sanskrit Texts

MU	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad
MK	Māṇḍūkya Kārika (Gauḍapāda)
MUBh	Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
MKBh	Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
MUBhT	Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya Tikka (Ānandagiri)
BUBh	Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
CUBh	Chāndogya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
BGBh	Bhagavadgītā Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
Upad	Upadeśasāhasrī (Śaṅkara)
UMS	Uttaramīmāṃsā Sūtra / Brahmasūtra / Vedānta Sūtra (Bādarāyaṇa)
UMSBh	Uttaramīmāṃsā Sūtra Bhāṣya (Śaṅkara)
PMS	Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtra (Jaimini)
PMSBh	Pūrvamīmāṃsā Sūtra Bhāṣya (Śabara)

### Latin Texts (Nicholas of Cusa)

DCC	<i>De concordantia catholica (On Universal Concord, 1433)</i>
DDI	<i>De docta ignorantia (On Learned Ignorance, 1440)</i>
DC	<i>De coniecturis (On Conjectures, 1443)</i>
ADI	<i>Apologia doctae ignorantiae (Defense of Learned Ignorance, 1449)</i>
DQD	<i>De quaerendo Deum (On Seeking God, 1445)</i>
IDM	<i>Idiota de Mente (The Idiot on the Mind, 1450)</i>
IDSE	<i>Idiota de staticis experimentis (The Idiot on Statistical Experiments, 1450)</i>
DPF	<i>De pace fidei (On the Peace of Faiths, 1453)</i>
DVD	<i>De visione Dei / De icona (On the Vision of God / On the Icon, 1453)</i>
DB	<i>De beryllo (On the Beryl Stone, 1453-8)</i>
DP	<i>Dialogus de possest (Dialogue on Actualized-Possibility, 1460)</i>
DAT	<i>De apice theoriae (On the Summit of Contemplation, 1464)</i>

## Introduction

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### Apophatic Measures

*[For the knower of Brahman,] the Self of all beings is seen as one, and all beings [are seen] in the Self. Then alone is the meaning of the Śruti conclusively proved: “One who sees all beings in the Self alone and [sees] the Self in all beings, because of that, harbors no ill will.”<sup>1</sup>*

*For while You, O Jesus, walked amid this sensible world, You used fleshly eyes that were like ours. For with these eyes You perceived in no other way than do we: one thing and then another.<sup>2</sup>*

Diversity and difference are visible and pervasive realities of our cosmopolitan world. Gazing upon the ecologies in which we live, move, and have our being, we observe persons of differing shapes, colors, religions, and cultures. We regard creatures with differing abilities, various orientations, and myriad beliefs. While some in our society increasingly value diversity, difference often evokes anxiety, trepidation, or even disgust and violence. Bodies marked by variations in ethnicity, sexuality, religion, class or a multitude of other forms of other/ness present themselves to our senses, sometimes provoking wonder and curiosity and sometimes conjuring fear and trembling.

How might we account for difference, theologically? What theological value might we attribute to singularity given cosmological diversity? How are we to reconcile our irreducible particularities in the divine economy we call home? How ought we to measure uniqueness in light of immeasurable diversity? What might the multiplicity of individuals, cultures, and landscapes reveal about the divine? Could it be that the uniqueness of creatures is designed (or otherwise intended) to reveal something about God, in whose image we are said to be created?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Śaṅkara, MUBh 3, citing Īśā Upaniṣad 6.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas of Cusa, DVD 22.95, Hopkins 725.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1:26-27.



If the Creator's invisible power (*dynamis*) and divinity are manifestly revealed through creation,<sup>4</sup> what might this visible—and dynamic—multiplicity of natural species, ecologies, and persons suggest about that Creator's creativity (and our own)? If it suggests anything at all, could it be that part of our theological task is to reflect upon human sensuality, the means by which irreducible particulars present themselves to our consciousness?

This dissertation constructively contributes towards a theology of irreducible particularity through comparative theology by means of a heuristic I call the *apophatic measure*. Learning to perceive by means of the apophatic measure, one perceives reality differently. One cultivates a sensuality distinct from everyday seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching, which nevertheless remains embodied, physical. This theological phenomenology of sensuality avoids esotericism. Rather than uncovering something hidden, this apophasis seeks to reveal what is always already revealed. It aspires to accomplish the accomplished.<sup>5</sup>

The phrase “apophatic measure” signals a theological vision whereby one is awakened to see particularity, devoid of essentializing reduction.<sup>6</sup> As a (theological) mode of sensuality, the apophatic measure is inherently embodied, and, therefore, personal and relational. Like other strategies of apophasis, it is inextricably linked to kataphasis, but is critically distinct from many of these in form, method, and sequence. Rather than (or, perhaps, in addition to) unsaying divine names and other positive descriptions of God, the apophatic measure seeks to dis/cover and

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 1:20.

<sup>5</sup> Rambachan, Anantanand. *Accomplishing the Accomplished: The Vedas as a Source of Valid Knowledge in Śaṅkara*. Vol. 10. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991.

<sup>6</sup> Abstraction and reduction, as I employ these terms, signify two orientations of the same epistemic process. Perceiving several individuals, one *abstracts* qualities shared by these individuals, thereby defining a category. Reduction is, more or less, the reverse. Perceiving an individual, one determines that individual to be a “member” of a category, subsequently “reducing” that individual to a preconceived notion, thereby ignoring differences, or what Aristotle calls “accidental properties.” While racism, sexism, ableism, etc., exemplify reductionism, it need not be inherently negative in connotation. For more on Cusa's understanding of abstraction, see page 201ff.

remove layers of cognition and language superimposed upon that which is seen by the eye, heard with the ear, or touched with the hand, etc. The apophatic measure unsays and unknows what is superimposed upon particulars. It does so in order that the divine revelation might be directly perceived as an infinite kataphasis: a boundless revelation of the infinite God in, through, and *as* infinite, irreducible particularity. My thesis rests upon the premise that only an infinite number of unique images of God suffice to reveal a God-who-is-infinitely. In other words, the Infinite God's revelation is unfinished (*infini*).

As modeled throughout this text, there is an intentional equivocation in the phrase *apophatic measure*. The idiom turns upon itself, yielding a triad of meanings. This triad structures the project as a whole. Their interconnection undergirds a theological process.

#### Apophatic Measure<sub>1</sub>: Phenomenological Method

First, the apophatic measure names a theological approach involving the apophasis of kataphatic measures. As a method, the apophatic measure performs the negation of all epistemic measures by unsaying universals, which is to say linguistic categories of knowledge. In this sense, it resembles other forms of negative theology and deconstruction insofar as it calls into question the suitability of language to describe reality, whether transcendent *or* immanent. However, the apophatic measure in this first sense is a method by which one cultivates an attentive sensuality. By removing epistemic measures, it seeks to attend to particular phenomena as they intend to be perceived. As a form of phenomenology, it aspires not simply to bracket or suspend (*epoché*) judgment but to remove all linguistic (pre)conceptions in order to perceive phenomena in their irreducible particularity. It asserts that while ultimate (transcendent) reality cannot be reduced to words or knowledge, neither can the sensual world before our eyes and beneath our toes.

### Apophatic Measure<sub>2</sub>: Attentive Sensuality

Second, the apophatic measure names sensuality: an unspeakable measure. In this sense, apophasis does not unsay kataphasis, but *reveals* it in a manner that is available to sensuality but unapproachable by knowledge or language. While we can speak, for example, of the softness of a child's cheek or the scent of morning's dew, these words fall far short of the touch and smell they aspire to describe. This is all the more true of the gaze shared by lovers, or the sound of a daughter's heartbeat. In this second sense, the apophatic measure steps towards a theology of irreducible particularity, and thus towards the third meaning signified by the phrase.

### Apophatic Measure<sub>3</sub>: Irreducible Particularity

Each and every creature, I argue, presents itself as an unprecedented *imago Dei* (or, perhaps, a unique *vyakti* of Ātman-Brahman) by virtue of its irreducible particularity. Each individual, then, is an apophatic measure in the third sense: an image or kataphatic actualization of divine possibility. Each and every *this* and *that* constitutes an immanent, visible effect ontologically non-different from its transcendental cause. These kataphatic actualizations cannot be unsaid because they are, in their very be-ing, unsayable. In this third sense, the apophatic measure asserts that true singularity (i.e., that which is incomparable to any other entity), *measures* the divine in a manner that cannot be reduced, replicated, or represented by anything other than itself. In short: every other is wholly other.<sup>7</sup> Every other is encountered as an irreducible *thou* to whom one singularly utters *thou art that*. The multiplicity of "All *This*" cannot be reduced to a monistic "All." The unique singularity or *quiddity* of this or that particular gives place to an event which discloses ultimate reality in a manner that is irreducible, irreplaceable, and, thus, unspeakable.

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<sup>7</sup> Derrida, Jacques. "Sauf Le Nom." *On the Name*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995.

This trifold meaning of the phrase “apophatic measure” reveals the theological process which guides this dissertation’s unfolding: by unsaying all names and linguistic categories, one awakens to perceive individuals as unnamable, uncategorical images of God. Through (and *as*) the apophatic measure, difference is re/cognized with theological significance and worth. Just as God remains beyond reductive categorization, so too does each image of God. That which makes one an *imago Dei* is not some quality, ability, or attribute commonly shared by others, but rather one’s very *quiddity*: one’s singularity, difference, and unique way of being, without which the infinite God’s revelation would be deficient. Each person—each *be-ing*—is a fold in the manifold, vocationally addressed in the vocative: *thou art that*.

My notion of the “apophatic measure” emerges through a theological comparison of the writings of the Eighth Century Vedāntin, Śāṅkara, and the Fifteenth Century Christian Mystic, Nicholas of Cusa. Although neither theologian uses any phrase that might be directly translated as “apophatic measure,” each writes extensively about apophasis, measuring, and direct perception. The phrase functions as a heuristic device that finds comparatively similar impulses in each theologian without reducing their differences to identity. To obviate or obscure distinctions between these thinkers would be altogether contrary to my thesis and its purpose.

The phrase “apophatic measure” correlates, but not precisely, with Śāṅkara’s *tattvapratibodha*, an awakening to the truth of Brahman, an enlightened disposition wherein the Highest Self is able to be seen.<sup>8</sup> As indicated in the epigraph above, one who is awakened to nonduality “sees all beings in the Self alone and the Self in all beings.”<sup>9</sup> I argue that this neither erases the distinctions between nor devalues the particularity of individuals, but rather

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<sup>8</sup> MKBh 1.15 and 2.35.

<sup>9</sup> MUBh 3, citing Īśā Upaniṣad 6.

re/cognizes persons as unique, manifest revelations of Brahman. This theological vision is exemplified in an intimate, embodied encounter wherein a spiritual guide gazes upon a faithful disciple and gracefully reveals: *tat tvam asi*, “Thou art that [Brahman].”

The phrase “apophatic measure” also correlates, but not precisely, with Cusa’s “vision of God,” wherein the subjective and objective genitives coincide. Becoming learnedly ignorant, as Cusa guides, one peers through the apophatic measure to both receive and embody God’s vision. From Cusa’s perspective, this theological vision is exemplified in the intimate encounter recounted in John 4. Resting beneath the noonday sun at Jacob’s well, Jesus and a Samaritan woman reciprocally exchange the gifts of seeing and being seen, uniquely.

As I will demonstrate, there are many similarities between Śāṅkara’s and Cusa’s understandings of sensuality *qua* apophatic measure. I argue that these continuities are worthwhile and constructively insightful for us today. Equally instructive, and no less constructive, are their points of divergence and difference from one another. Principal among these are their radically different understandings of language. While it may seem, *prima facie*, counterintuitive, their opposing theologies of language energize the comparison, yielding it all the more fruitful. Here again, the phrase “apophatic measure” finds yet another nuance. While each cultivates sensuality as a non-linguistic attentiveness, which is to say perceiving-without-measure, what each means by “measure” is similar in some respects but polar opposite in other respects. Though I will return to this later (page 47), a preliminary unfolding is warranted.

For Śāṅkara, language (read: Sanskrit) is not a human creation. The transcendental meaning of the Veda is eternal, but so, too, are the words themselves. The relationship between words, the universals they signify, and corresponding particular entities in the world is eternal,

arising coincidentally with the origin of existence.<sup>10</sup> Never was there a time when words were not. While some other classical Indian traditions, such as Nyāya, assert that God is the source of the Veda and its language, Śāṅkara's tradition denies this.<sup>11</sup> As I discuss in chapter two, this deeply held and centrally important theological doctrine results in an understanding of kataphatic and apophatic theology that necessarily differs from most, if not all, traditional Christian understandings. While language, according to Śāṅkara, is unsuitable to describe Brahman, this is *not* due to any insufficiency inherent to language. While language truly and reliably measures Brahman, these measures must be unsaid because Brahman is possessed of infinite measure.<sup>12</sup>

For Cusa, on the other hand, language is certainly a human creation. It neither truly nor reliably measures God. Like many in his theological tradition, Cusa asserts:

[T]he theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshiped as the Infinite God but, rather, as a creature. And such worship is idolatry; it ascribes to the image that which befits only the reality itself.<sup>13</sup>

Cusa, in fact, goes a small step (or giant leap) farther. While human language fails to reliably measure God, it also fails to reliably measure God's creation: the natural world in which we live, move, and have our being. As I discuss in chapter five, however, the fact that language and other technologies, such as mathematics, are human creations is highly significant to Cusa for other theological reasons.<sup>14</sup> To be created in the image of the Creator means, from Cusa's perspective,

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<sup>10</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>11</sup> For a compelling discussion of how rich and fervent this centuries-long debate is, see Diaconescu, Bogdan. *Debating Verbal Cognition: The Theory of the Principal Qualificand (mukhyaviśeṣya) in Classical Indian Thought*. 1st ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> See *Mātrā: Measuring the Infinite*, page 156ff.

<sup>13</sup> DDI I.26.86, Hopkins 45.

<sup>14</sup> See *Creative Measures*, page 259.

to be creative. Just as God creates natural forms and natural entities, humans create artificial forms and technologies, such as houses.<sup>15</sup> For him, language exemplifies human creativity and is thus imbued with divine significance and responsibility. Because language is a humanly created measure of reality, it is insufficient to describe the Infinite God, but *for that very reason*, language measures human creativity, which mimics the Creator’s creativity.

Rather than attempting to reconcile these utterly irreconcilable views, I instead accentuate the difference in chapter four, allowing these opposites to coincide.<sup>16</sup> While their views are markedly different from one another, they are certainly not beyond compare. Coincidence neither flattens difference nor leaves them in simple opposition, but enfolds them such that each unsettles the other. Likewise, Śāṅkara’s ontology of nonduality is clearly distinct from Cusa’s method of the coincidence of opposites, and yet these insights share significant commonalities. They enable us to better understand each on their own terms.<sup>17</sup> As a comparative theologian, I am less interested in tallying similarities and differences and more interested in reading back-and-forth between them, inviting each to challenge how we read the other.

Francis X. Clooney describes one of his comparative theology experiments as “a kind of biblio/biography—of what I came to see through these texts.”<sup>18</sup> His words aptly describe my project, as well: “It is about how one is alive, or enlivened, by reading and seeing.”<sup>19</sup> In this biblio/biography, I read Śāṅkara’s nonduality through the lens of Cusa’s “intellectual beryl

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<sup>15</sup> DB 7. See *Four Premises*, page 255.

<sup>16</sup> See *Conjectural Epistemology, after Vedānta*, page 203.

<sup>17</sup> See *Seeing through Cusa’s Wall and Śāṅkara’s Liminal Darkness*, page 237.

<sup>18</sup> Clooney, Francis Xavier. *Seeing through Texts: Doing Theology among the Śrīvaiṣṇavas of South India*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996. 47.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

stone” and likewise read Cusa’s ontology of enfolding-unfolding (*complicatio-explicatio*) through the lens of Śaṅkara’s “progressive dissolution” (*pūrvapūrvapraivilāpana*).<sup>20</sup> Seeing through these texts, one gains insight into a poetics of perspective wherein the transcendent is *seen* in, through, and *as* immanent particularity. The dualistic dichotomy of “sacred” and “profane” is progressively dissolved. These two do not become one, but cease to be two (*advaita*). Seeing through the apophatic measure, one perceives the sacrality of particulars. Or: the sacred is seen to exist *unfoldedly* (*explicite*) as the profane.

Binding or de-fining the boundless infinite satisfies neither Śaṅkara nor Cusa. We must not divorce our sacred, spiritual, or intellectual vision of reality from our everyday vision of the physical world in which we live. Ultimate Reality *matters*. Awakened to the truth, from Śaṅkara’s perspective, one no longer perceives a duality of sacred-profane but is able to regard another and reveal, “*Thou* art that [Brahman], O dear one.” Gazing upon the face of one’s neighbor (passing by), one sees as Jesus saw with “fleshly eyes.” In this intimate, embodied encounter, sacred coincides with profane and physical vision coincides with spiritual vision. From Cusa’s perspective, one sees (through the coincidence of opposites) one’s neighbor as an irreducibly particular sacred incarnation: an unprecedented *imago Dei*. Hearing one another into speech,<sup>21</sup> seeing one another into living, one’s gaze transubstantiates the profane.

Below, I briefly introduce the notions of *apophasis* and *measuring*. I then introduce Śaṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa, accompanied by a literature review addressing the specific relevance of my study. These introductions are followed by an articulation of my academic

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<sup>20</sup> See Chapter Six, page 303.

<sup>21</sup> Morton, Nelle. 1986. *The Journey Is Home*. Beacon Press. 128.



methods of Comparative Theology and Constructive Comparative Theology. I then conclude the Introduction with a brief outline of the project.

## **Apophasis**

*Apophatic theology has little to (un)say about bodies, whereas it speaks volumes about that which it deems worthy of unsaying.*<sup>22</sup>

### Approximating Apophasis

The adjective *apophatic* in *Apophatic Measures* derives from the Greek word *apophasis*, often translated as “denial,” “negation,” or “unsaying.” It is related to the Sanskrit words *apavāda* and *apoha*, which etymologically mean “saying away” and “to mark away.” Liddell and Scott capture the performative grammar of apophasis, defining the term as, “*a predication of one thing away from another.*”<sup>23</sup>

Often called “negative theology,” it is a method of speaking about the Absolute by means of the negation of attributes. As Catherine Keller’s quotation reflects, the negation or (un)saying performed in apophatic theology says at least as much as it unsays. The attributes which are negated in apophatic theology, as well as those attributes which evade mention altogether, speak volumes about which attributes are considered to be “closer” to divine than others. I argue that while apophatic theology negates and removes *universals* from our understandings of God, it does not negate particularity. As Aristotle asserts (regarding positive speech), particulars are subjects of propositions, of which universals are predicated, but particulars cannot be predicated

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<sup>22</sup> Keller, Catherine. “The Cloud of the Impossible: Embodiment and Apophasis.” *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2010. 25.

<sup>23</sup> “ἀπόφασις.” Henry George Liddell. Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon, Revised and Augmented Throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie*. Oxford: Clarendon Press (1940). Italics are retained from the original and indicate the respective meanings of root and prefix.

of anything other than themselves (p192).<sup>24</sup> Applying Liddell-Scott's definition, I argue that apophatic theology predicates particulars *away* from God, but does not remove particulars from our understanding of God. As we will see (p113), words have different signifying intentions in apophatic speech than do words in kataphatic speech, according to Śāṅkara's tradition.

Apophasis "approximates" by placing things in proximity to God. It draws things close to God (ironically) by distancing them from God. In light of Keller's statement, then, we might say that apophatic theology (in general) has not deemed to "unsay" attributes it has considered to be sufficiently distant from God, including, for example, theological descriptions from other religious traditions. Christians have no need to deny that God is like deep sleep (the *prājña*, p139). Why would we?

#### Negating Universals

Śāṅkara and Cusa enliven and unfold the array of possible meanings born by negative statements and negative nouns. To better understand what negative theology does and does not negate, it is necessary to examine how words, especially nouns, function as vehicles of knowledge and communication. In Śāṅkara's tradition, words simultaneously signify universals and particulars, depending upon the speaker's intention (p110). That is to say that words (1) point towards particular objects that manifestly exist here-and-now in the world, (2) they measure universal attributes, thereby reducing the infinite manifold of particular things to finite, manageable, cognizable bits of knowledge, to which I refer as "measures." Given these two functions of nouns, one must consider whether the negation of a noun negates (1) the first function (i.e., particularity), (2) the second function (i.e., universal "measures"), (3) both, or (4) neither (p101). For Śāṅkara, the second is the case (p108). As we will see, Cusa's position is

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<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* I.27. See Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 37.

similar given that universals (“natural forms”) unfold as particular beings (p212), but the universals we “know” are ones we have created (“artificial forms”), and thus must be “unknown” if we are to perceive particulars attentively.

For Śaṅkara and Cusa alike, apophatic theology unsays universal measures in order that particulars may be perceived in their particularity *as* particular entities. This does not mean that a particular entity can be reduced to its singular *quiddity*, as if every common attribute could be bracketed in a Husserlian *epoche*. Rather, nouns tell us something about particular objects; they enhance our understanding of what we see and actually enable us to see some things more clearly, or even to perceive things that—without these words—we might not have perceived at all.

#### Removing Ignor/ance

For example, a radiologist is able to “see” cancer in images where others cannot. This ability to see has little to do with the quality of her vision, but has everything to do with the fact that she has learned how cancer manifests in these images. Hence, the words and ideas that she has learned *enhance* her ability to see such that she can cognitively perceive things the rest of us cannot, though we do, in fact, see them. What is seen is the same, but the cognitions differ. Just as medical school trains a radiologist to see things (with fleshly eyes no different than ours) that were previously “invisible” (intellectually, not sensually), Śaṅkara and Cusa train us to perceive by removing intellectual obstacles to perception.

While nouns enable us to see more clearly (like the radiologist) by training us regarding “what to look for,” they simultaneously obscure our perception by focusing our attention only (or primarily) on attributes that can be reduced or abstracted. The ideas regulate our attention such that we *ignore* some of what is seen for the sake of seeing more narrowly and pointedly. The

negation of these nouns, then, *does not* negate the particular attribute measured by that noun, but only the measure itself. This negation of the measure is performed for the sake of perceiving the particular entity as itself. One is awakened to what the measure ignores. Learning one's ignor/ance, one sees (both intellectually and sensually), differently. Hence, apophasis is in service to direct perception.

### Sensual Event

In his influential work, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*, Michael Sells avers, “the smallest semantic unit [in negative theology] is not the sentence or proposition, but the double sentence or dual proposition.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, every positive assertion about God should be followed with a negation of that assertion. The method does not end with that negation; rather, it is a continual process of kataphasis and apophasis (saying and unsaying).<sup>26</sup> Sells states the goal of his work clearly and concisely: “The goal [of this study] is to identify the distinctive semantic event within the language of unsaying, what I will be calling the ‘meaning event’.”<sup>27</sup> I argue that, for Śāṅkara and Cusa, apophasis does not culminate in a ‘meaning event’ at all—but, rather, in a *sensual* event: a unique vision of the sacred in and as the particular.

My research findings agree with (and are guided by) Sell's assertion that apophasis is performative, culminating in an event. This is why I focus on each author's “methods.” These are methods that must be performed, not simply discussed or analyzed. Like several of the

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<sup>25</sup> Sells, Michael Anthony. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994. 21.

<sup>26</sup> In his discussion of John the Scot Eriugena, Sells observes features more widely demonstrative of the apophatic method: “Without a final “being” to which it can point, language is placed into perpetual movement... the theophanic and nonsubstantialist view of deity propounded by Eriugena can be glimpsed only momentarily through the interstices of apophatic discourse. That glimpse cannot be maintained. Apophasis is continual movement. When the semantic gaze is fixed, it is confronted with linguistic idols, the temporal and special reifications of a supreme being.” Sells, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Sells, 9

theologians Sells examines, the apophatic performances revealed by Śāṅkara and Cusa culminate in an “event” that occurs in the silent after/math of the process. Rather than an endless progression of assertion and negation, theirs are methods which culminate in their own collapse. Different, though, from the theologians Sells examines, the culminating performative event, for Śāṅkara and Cusa, is not a “meaning event” because the event occurs at the moment when “meaning” is erased. The apophatic measure<sub>1</sub> *qua* method is performed, linguistic measures are removed for the sake of perceiving reality in its infinite particularity. In this poetics of perspective wherein sacred and profane coincide (Cusa) or are progressively dissolved (Śāṅkara), the “meaning event” is actually a *sensual event*: Diverse bodies are regarded... sacredly.

## Measuring

*Mathematicians measure with their minds alone  
the forms of things separated from all matter.  
Since we wish the object to be seen,  
we will use a more sensate wisdom.*<sup>28</sup>

### Measuring the Immeasurable

I investigate the grammar of negation in the writings of Śāṅkara and Cusa in order to reveal the necessity, activity, objective content, and aftermath of theological negation. From their perspectives, all knowledge, which is necessarily mediated through language, *measures* reality, which is infinite. In order to see the infinite *qua* infinite, it is necessary to negate the measure thereof (i.e., knowledge) without negating the truth of that measure (i.e., what is known), and, therefore, without negating the truth of that which is measured (i.e., particularity).<sup>29</sup> What we *see*

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<sup>28</sup> Alberti, Leon Battista. *On Painting*. [First appeared 1435-36] Translated with Introduction and Notes by John R. Spencer. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1970 [First printed 1956].

<sup>29</sup> This process or method, as previously noted, is the first meaning of the phrase “apophatic measure.”

are particulars, what we *know* or *cognize* are measures which simultaneously reveal and conceal the particulars we see.<sup>30</sup>

As indicated by my subtitle, *Towards a Theology of Irreducible Particularity*, negating measures of reality draws our attention, our gaze, towards the reality that is measured, a reality that is irreducibly particular (apophatic measure<sub>3</sub>). Sensuality, then, becomes an apophatic measure<sub>2</sub>: a measuring aware of its measuring and, thus, its perspectival limitations (ignor/ance).

I emphasize the word “measure” because Śaṅkara and Cusa employ various terms that are related to “measuring,” both in etymology and signification. In Sanskrit, key epistemological terms such as *pramāṇa*, *mātra*, *māyā*, and even *mīmāṃsā* all derive from the verbal root  $\sqrt{mā}$  (“to measure”). Likewise, key epistemological terms in Latin, such as *mēns*, *mentis*, *mēnsiō*, and *mēnsūra* derive from verbs such as *mētior* (“to measure”).<sup>31</sup> More than this, though, unlike the word “universal,” the word “measure” (in English) reminds us of the critical distinction between the measure *qua* measure and the measure as a placeholder for that which is measured. The measure tells us something about the measured. It reveals an aspect or attribute of this being’s be-ing without representing, signifying, or replacing the thing itself. The measure simultaneously reveals and conceals the being’s be-ing itself. Nouns organize and measure reality, powerfully, truly and (often) hegemonically, but they *do not* replace or subsume that reality. Neither, then, does their negation negate the unrepresentable reality they intend to re/present. Instead, their negation reminds us that words mediate the immediate; words measure the immeasurable.

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<sup>30</sup> In *Sein und Zeit* and also *Beiträge zum Philosophie (vom Ereignis)*, Heidegger discusses the simultaneity of the revealing and concealing of be-ing (*Seyn* in *Beiträge*) in beings. My claim is closely related, but with a distinction, *viz.*, that particulars manifestly reveal be-ing while the cognition thereof obscures their particularity by reducing them to knowledge, thereby concealing be-ing.

<sup>31</sup> For example, the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad states: “The quarters (i.e., the four states of Reality) are the measures (*mātrā*) and the measures are the quarters.” Also, Cusa’s third premise in *De Beryllo* is “man [*sic*] is the measure (*mensuram*) of things.”

## Measuring Particularity

I use the word “measure” to refer to words and ideas which organize reality such that reality can be cognized. As finite measures of the infinite universe, words and ideas do more than measure reality, so I employ the word “measure” in reference only to their measuring function. Chapters three and five examine this epistemic measuring from the perspectives of Śāṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa, respectively. What is the relationship of these “measures” to actual and potential existence? Do words measure actually existing things or potentially existing things or some combination of these? Śāṅkara and Cusa offer starkly different perspectives on these questions. Beyond the obvious differences between these two thinkers, perhaps the most significant difference between them is their different understandings of the origin of words and the relationship between words, ideas, and material existents.

As Keller has shown, the reluctance to “unsay” material bodies suggests a lack of urgency to do so given the presumed distance of God from particular material bodies. As Keller has argued, this marks a weakness or systematic oversight which stands contrary to the very rationale of apophatic theology. Agreeing with her, I argue that the negation of measures culminates in the direct *perception* of unique material bodies, which are seen to be revelations of the Ultimate. Stated otherwise, I seek to unsay sacrality. As the genealogy and etymology of the word “sacred” suggests, the divine is thought to be set apart from, distanced, or at least hidden within materiality. From this perspective (which is a *pūrvapakṣin* I seek to refute), apophatic theology would unsay particularity through a panoply of negations, including and especially the particularity of material bodies. Through the negation of material bodies, the sacred (which is thought to be hidden within, like a pious interiority of a sacred castle) is dis/closed.

I challenge this view by examining the role of particularity, sensuality, and sensible bodies in the apophatic theologies of Śāṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa. For these theologians,

language mediates knowledge, which measures particularity. Apophasis unsays the measuring of particularity, thereby constituting a pedagogical method of religious praxis for the sake of sensuality. Apophasis, for these theologians, does not un/cover a “pious interiority,” imprisoned by a material body, garrisoned in a sacred castle. It does not subtract materiality, progressively chipping it away, like a marble sculptor, through an anamnesis of a reified form.

### Unity fulfilled in Diversity

Rather, apophasis unsays sacrality by denying the distance measured (read: superimposed) by the word “sacred.” That which *sets some-thing apart* from all other entities, which is to say its uniqueness, makes it sacred. I focus, therefore, on the theological method of each author and the function of particularity within those methods. Having negated all reductive measures (i.e., all universals), sensuality emerges as an apophatic measure whereby one perceives the unique particularity of particulars. Their methods highlight the irreducibility—and inherent sacrality—of particularity. Their methods dis/close the en/closure of the sacred, so that the sacred might be seen super/ficially, which is to say *on the face* of one’s neighbor. Interpreting Paul, Cusa reasons that there must be an inherent theological value to uniqueness and diversity, since the Creator’s power and divinity are manifestly revealed in creation (Rom 1:20). In other words, if God creates freely, willfully, and purposefully, then diverse particulars must have some free, willful, purpose. The infinite *unity* of ultimate reality is fulfilled and manifestly revealed only through the infinite *diversity* of creatures, which cannot, therefore, be set apart from (or ontologically other than) sacrality. By negating all universals, one arrives, finally, at a hyper-linguistic or non-verbal perception of the irreducible uniqueness of each and every creature as an indispensable disclosure of the infinite Divine.



Several implications follow from this. First, diversity and difference are imbued with divine significance. Second, classical theistic articulations of the *imago Dei* doctrine become inadequate. Third, creativity and *theosis* take on new meaning. Fourth, comparative theology emerges as an inherently necessary aspect of apophatic theology. Analyzing these and other implications, I argue that a creature's unique *quiddity* (or irreducible particularity) manifestly reveals Ultimate Reality in an unprecedented manner. Unity is fulfilled in—and *measured by*—diversity. Unsayings oppositional distinctions between “sacred” and “profane”—either by dissolving duality (Śaṅkara) or gazing upon creation through the coincidence of opposites (Cusa)—one is awakened to perceive. While no fewer than infinite sacred images reveal the infinite, sensuality must be aroused—beyond measure—if any one image, in particular, is to be perceived.

### **The Cardinal Teacher: Ādi Śaṅkara Ācārya**

#### Historical and Methodological Background

Unfortunately, we know very little about the historical person known to us as Śaṅkara. Although there are numerous traditions and hagiographical stories about this great thinker, their historical veracity is dubious. What we know of him is gleaned from his writings, which are anything but autobiographical in nature.

According to tradition, Śaṅkara travelled all over India engaging in theological debate and, while doing so, founded four schools, one in each of the four corners of India. These schools remain active today and are headed by teachers who assume the name *Śaṅkarācārya*. Understandably, this tradition has led to academic confusion and debate concerning the authorship of some texts which are attributed to Śaṅkarācārya but may not have been written by “Ādi Śaṅkarācārya” or “the *first* revered teacher named Śaṅkara.”

What we can say for certain is that the teacher known to us as Ādi Śaṅkarācārya (henceforth simply “Śaṅkara”) is defined by scholars as the author of the *Uttaramīmāṃsāsūtra Bhāṣya* (UMSBh), which is a commentary on a laconic text consisting of four books about Brahman, or Ultimate Reality. This commentary was written probably in the early half of the eighth century.<sup>32</sup> Tradition places him in Southern India, especially in Kaladi, Kerala. Strictly speaking, the *Uttaramīmāṃsāsūtra* (UMS) is not a revealed scriptural text, but is an integral text in the Vedānta tradition which organizes the Upaniṣads and serves as an exegetical guide, of sorts.

The UMS is attributed to Bādarāyaṇa, and is considered to be related to the *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra* (PMS), attributed to Jaimini. The nature of this relationship is contested. Some argue that the two texts were originally portions of one single text.<sup>33</sup> Jaimini cites Bādarāyaṇa in the PMS and Bādarāyaṇa cites Jaimini in the UMS.<sup>34</sup> Regardless of the precise historical relationship, it is clear that the Pūrvamīmāṃsā schools of thought and the Uttaramīmāṃsā schools of thought are closely related and share much in common. While the differences between the two schools of thought should not be overlooked, they should be kept in perspective.

Given the indisputable fact that there is a wide range of theological perspectives that rightly fall under the heading “(Pūrva)Mīmāṃsā” and an equally wide range that rightly falls

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<sup>32</sup> The oldest extant subcommentary on the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* is Vācaspati-Miśra’s *Bhāmātī*, dated to the early half of the ninth century. The *Bhāmātī* refers to other subcommentaries on the BSBh, including Padmapāda’s *Pañcapādikā*, which suggests that Padmapāda’s teacher, Śaṅkara, was active no later than the mid-eighth century. See Nakamura, Hajime, and Trevor Leggett. *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*. Vol. 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.

<sup>33</sup> For a thorough treatment of the debate, see Aklujkar, Ashok. 2011. “Unity of the Mīmāṃsās: How Historiography Hides History.” In *Vacaspativaibhavam: A Volume in Felicitation of Professor Vachaspati Upadhyaya*, edited by Shashiprabha Kumar, 821–900. Delhi: D. K. Printworld. See also footnote 43, below.

<sup>34</sup> For example, PMS I.1.5 is attributed to Bādarāyaṇa.

under the heading “Uttaramīmāṃsā” or “Vedānta,” the significance of the historical question and specific taxonomy is not altogether clear. Although Śāṅkara argues against other Mīmāṃsakas in some of his commentaries, this does not even distinguish him from other Mīmāṃsakas who argue amongst themselves. Jaimini, Śabara, Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa, and Prabhākara Mīśra disagree on a number of significant theological and exegetical points regarding the PMS. Likewise, Śāṅkara, Rāmānuja, and Mādhva disagree on a number of significant theological and exegetical points regarding the UMS. The fact that Śāṅkara may disagree with other Mīmāṃsakas on certain significant doctrinal points should not obviate the fact that these theologians have a great deal more in common than has usually been represented in academic literature on Śāṅkara. Moreover, I argue that Śāṅkara’s apophatic theology is best understood in light of the kataphatic theology of the earlier pūrvamīmāṃsā schools. This does not require, however, that we regard the uttaramīmāṃsā schools as supersessionist relative to the pūrvamīmāṃsā schools any more than one would regard calculus as superseding arithmetic.

Both schools regard the Veda as authoritative scripture. There are four different branches of the Veda: *Ṛg*, *Yajur*, *Sāma*, and *Atharva*. Each of the four, in turn, contain four portions: the *Samhitā* portion, or hymn section which date at least to 1000 BCE and perhaps millennia older, the *Brāhmaṇa* portion, which describe ritual, sacrificial activities to be performed (*yajña*-s), the *Āraṇyaka* portion, which include philosophical reflections on the rituals, and the *Upaniṣad* portion, which include theological teachings and stories describing the nature of the Self (Ātman) and the nature of Ultimate Reality (Brahman). The PMS is concerned with the proper exegesis of the *Brāhmaṇa* portion of the Veda and, thus, the Pūrvamīmāṃsā schools of thought are ritualistically oriented. The UMS applies similar exegetical methods to the *Upaniṣads*, so the

Uttaramīmāṃsā schools of thought are regarded as “more” theologically oriented.<sup>35</sup> Since the Upaniṣads are considered to be the final portion of the Veda, they are also referred to as Vedānta, which literally means the “end of the Veda.”

Śaṅkara’s commentary on the UMS is the oldest extant commentary thereupon. Although there are many texts attributed to this Śaṅkara, consensus among academics has limited the list of authentic compositions. This list includes commentaries on the oldest and most influential Upaniṣads, including the Bṛhadāraṇyaka, Chāndogya, and Taittirīya Upaniṣads, a commentary on the Bhagavadgītā and an independent pedagogical text known as the *Upadeśasāhasrī* (Thousand Teachings). Although many scholars include the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya (MKBh) among Śaṅkara’s authentic works, there are those who argue against it.<sup>36</sup>

The primary argument against Śaṅkaran authorship seems to be that the author of the MKBh exhibits a less sophisticated understanding of Buddhist schools of thought than does the author of the UMSBh. As Wilhelm Halbfass points out, however, this may merely suggest that the MKBh is an early work by Śaṅkara relative to the UMSBh. I have found no convincing evidence against Śaṅkaran authorship of the MKBh.<sup>37</sup>

Śaṅkara was trained as a Mīmāṃsaka and applies Mīmāṃsā hermeneutics to Vedānta. As noted, the diversity between Mīmāṃsakas, even on doctrines that are considered to be central, is too often overlooked when taking into account Śaṅkara’s relationship to the pūrvamīmāṃsā

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<sup>35</sup> I place the word “more” in scare quotes for the following reason. If one attempts to define the word “theological” regarding the Uttaramīmāṃsā schools, one will be hard pressed to find a way to do so that would not always already include the Pūrvamīmāṃsā schools. At the risk of introducing an orientalist analogy, one could say that the Hebrew scriptures are legalistically and ritualistically oriented in a way that the Greek scriptures are not, but it would be quite wrong to say that they latter are “more” theologically oriented than the former.

<sup>36</sup> Mayeda, Suthren Hirst, Halbfass, Hacker, Rambachan, and Fort all argue that it is the same Śaṅkara. Nakamura and Wood argue against it. Richard King declines to argue the point, but does not suggest that there is any reason to doubt the authenticity.

<sup>37</sup> Hajime Nakamura argues at some length against Śaṅkaran authorship. I critically examine his argument briefly in Chapter One.

tradition. This should not be surprising in the least, given that Mīmāṃsakas such as Jaimini, Śabara, Kumāriḷa, and Prabhākara lived in different centuries, different contexts, and brought to their discipline different questions, concerns, and historical realities. Even in its earliest stages of development, Francis X. Clooney has argued, Śabara departs from Jaimini on a number of teachings, such as their differing notions of *apūrvā*.<sup>38</sup> On numerous points, the doctrinal differences between the Prabhākara school and the Bhaṭṭa school are sharper and more significant than doctrinal differences between Śāṅkara and either Prabhākara or Kumāriḷa.

Regarding their epistemologies, I argue that Śāṅkara's understanding of perception does not significantly differ from Śabara's position. As I discuss (p103), Śabara distinguishes between two moments of perceptual cognition, which later Mīmāṃsakas refer to as conceptual perception (*savikalpa pratyakṣa*) and non-conceptual perception (*nirvikalpa pratyakṣa*). Ganganatha Jha has shown that Kumāriḷa and Prabhākara develop this doctrine in more or less opposite directions.<sup>39</sup> Kumāriḷa, for example, compares non-conceptual perception to that of a new-born infant, privileging conceptual cognition.<sup>40</sup> For Prabhākara, on the other hand, only non-conceptual perception yields valid perceptual cognition since conceptually differentiating one thing from another requires recollection (memory), which is not a valid means of knowledge.<sup>41</sup> As John Taber has shown, the later advaitin Maṇḍana Miśra develops the *nirvikalpa* doctrine in an even more extreme manner, suggesting that "there is no difference in the nonconceptualized

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<sup>38</sup> Clooney, Francis Xavier. *Thinking Ritually: Rediscovering the Pūrvā Mīmāṃsā of Jaimini*. Vol. 17. Vienna: Sammlung De Nobili Institut für Indologie der Universität Wien, 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Jha, Ganganatha. *The Prābhākara School of Pūrvā Mīmāṃsā*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1978, 37ff.

<sup>40</sup> Kumāriḷa, *Ślokavārttika* 4.112, Jha *Prabhākara School*, 37.

<sup>41</sup> Jha (1978), 39.

perceptions of a cow and a horse!”<sup>42</sup> Unlike Kumāṛila, Prabhākara, and Maṇḍana Mīśra, there is no evidence to suggest that Śaṅkara’s position differs substantially from Śabara’s. Like Śabara, Śaṅkara refuses to privilege either conceptual perception or non-conceptual perception, all the while acknowledging (again like Śabara) the doctrinal necessity of distinguishing between these two epistemological moments. The reason, simply stated, is this: when error occurs (such as mistaking a rope for a snake), the error arises at the moment of cognition (*pratyayaḥ*), which is simultaneous with conceptual/linguistic perception; the infallibility of perception is thereby preserved while explaining the origin of error. Linked to this, and following the same logic, is the concern over the infallibility of Vedic scripture.

Without accepting or denying the entirety of the theory proposed by Herman Jacobi, Asko Parpola, and Ashok Aklujkar concerning the original unity of the two Mīmāṃsā schools and texts, my research stipulates, as a working hypothesis, the idea that the *Pūrva-Mīmāṃsāsūtra* (attributed to Jaimini) and the *Uttara-Mīmāṃsāsūtra* (attributed to Bādarāyaṇa) are well understood as “two portions of one single work called Mīmāṃsāsūtra.”<sup>43</sup> As Parpola points out, “There are references to *Bādarāyaṇa* in the MS [*Pūrva-Mīmāṃsāsūtra*], and there are references to Jaimini in the BS [*Uttara-Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, aka *Brahmasūtra*].”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, as P.M. Modi has emphasized, Śaṅkara interprets four *tad uktam* (“it has been stated”) *sūtras* in the *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya* as references to the *Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra*, thereby treating the four *adhyāyas*

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<sup>42</sup> Taber, John A. *A Hindu Critique of Buddhist Epistemology: Kumāṛila on Perception: The “Determinatin of Perception” Chapter of Kumāṛila Bhaṭṭa’s Ślokaṁvārttika*. RoutledgeCurzon Hindu Studies Series. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Parpola, Asko. “On the Formation of the Mīmāṃsā and the Problems Concerning Jaimini, with Particular Reference to the Teacher Quotations and the Vedic Schools.” *Wiener Zeitschrift Für Die Kunde Südasiens Und Archiv Für Indische Philosophie* 25 (1981): 145–77. 147. See also Clooney (1990), 26.

<sup>44</sup> Aklujkar (2011), 842.

of the *UMS* as if they are joined to the twelve *adhyāyas* of the *PMS*.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Śaṅkara refers to Śabarāsvāmī as *ācārya*.<sup>46</sup>

In the course of my research, this hypothesis has held up well. While I do not seek to confirm the theory, the textual evidence strongly suggests that the relationship of each school to the other is multifaceted, to say the least. Not only does Jaimini cite Bādarāyaṇa in *PMS* I.1.5, but Śabara's commentary thereupon draws upon the apophatic tradition received from the ancient Yājñavalkya dialogues with Maitreyī and others, which are recorded in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. Rather than distinguishing between the two schools on historical grounds, it is sufficient to note that they exegete two different sets of scripture (*Brāhmaṇas* and *Upaniṣads*). Without speculating further, on theoretical/historical grounds, regarding the relationship of these scriptures and schools, my research methodology proceeds under the assumption that Śaṅkara's apophasis is best understood in the context of Mīmāṃsā's kataphasis, especially in light of the distinct authoritative spheres of perception and scripture.

#### Review of Secondary Literature

This study adds to the list of comparative studies on Śaṅkara. Francis Clooney's *Theology After Vedānta* is, arguably, the theoretical model for the theological method now referred to as the "new comparative theology" and in that text, Clooney has selected Śaṅkara and Thomas Aquinas as interlocutors.<sup>47</sup> A decade earlier, John Taber published his comparative

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<sup>45</sup> *UMS* III.3.26 refers to *PMS* X.8.15, *UMS* III.3.33 refers to *PMS* III.3.8, *UMS* III.3.50 refers to *PMS* XI.4.7, and *UMS* III.4.42 refers to *PMS* I.3.8-9. Parpola reproduces a chart assembled by Modi (1937, p515) which was republished in Modi (1956) p295. As Parpola does acknowledge, however, Modi's purpose is to argue against Śaṅkara.

<sup>46</sup> *UMSBh* III.3.53, Ghambirananda, 740.

<sup>47</sup> Clooney, Francis Xavier. *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

philosophical examination of Śaṅkara, Fichte, and Heidegger.<sup>48</sup> More recently, John Thatamanil has examined Śaṅkara's writings in dialogue with Paul Tillich.<sup>49</sup> While there may be nothing intrinsic to Śaṅkara's theology that lends itself to comparative theology any more than other paragons of Hindu thought, his is an important voice of the tradition, rich with ideas that challenge western philosophical and theological presuppositions, which is an important goal of comparative study. Unlike previous comparative studies, the current work does not focus primarily on Śaṅkara's UMSBh, but instead on his commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Kārika. This study constructively contributes to the field of Indological studies on Śaṅkara in several ways.

As Jacqueline Suthren Hirst has shown in her *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching*, Śaṅkara's writings are valuable not only because of what he has to teach us, but also because of the manner in which he teaches. My work is indebted to Suthren Hirst's important research, and seeks to build upon it through a close examination of one small but significant aspect of his pedagogical method which Suthren Hirst has not examined in her publications. His linguistic philosophy exploits the grammar of negation culminating in the embodied encounter of teacher and student. Seeking to better understand the pedagogical emphasis he places on this intimate encounter, I analyze the quality of the relationship between teacher and student, including his assertion that the *guru* should literally gesture to the student's body, emphasizing the indexical signification of the word "this" in "*this* Self is Brahman."<sup>50</sup> This embodied context is indispensable because the grammatical signification of the indexical, "this," only signifies its

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<sup>48</sup> Taber, John A.. *Transformative Philosophy: A Study of Śaṅkara, Fichte, and Heidegger*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983.

<sup>49</sup> Thatamanil, John J. *The Immanent Divine: God, Creation, and the Human Predicament*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.

<sup>50</sup> MUBh 2. See also Bannon, Brad, "Thou, That, and An/Other: Hearing Śaṅkara's Indexicals and Finding Cusa's Seeking God," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*: Vol. 27, Article 6 (2014).



particular referent when uttered by a teacher directly to a student, especially when accompanied by a physical gesture, such as pointing to the student's heart.

Similarly, Haesook Ra has shown that Śāṅkara carefully composed his Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya with a view to cultivating in the reader a particular method and hermeneutical skill. His writing style trains his reader in exegetical methods which enable one to read the scriptural texts upon which he comments such that the scripture (not his commentary) remains central and uniquely revelatory. As Ra shows, Śāṅkara nurtures within the reader a power of discernment which equips his reader with the necessary tools to cosmologically orient oneself within the world through the praxis of reading. Building upon Ra's work, the current study examines Śāṅkara's hermeneutic strategy of coordination (*upasaṃhāra*), noting especially how the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad coordinates teachings on Brahman drawn from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads.

While there have been numerous important contributions to Śāṅkaran scholarship, many of these have attempted to extricate Śāṅkara's teaching from his context and method. In his important corrective to this tendency, Swami Satchidānandendra has argued that Śāṅkara's theological method is a two-part method of *adhyāropa* and *apavāda*, superimposition and apophasis. In his *Method of the Vedānta*, Satchidānandendra demonstrates that this method of kataphasis and apophasis is modeled in the Upaniṣads and adopted by Śāṅkara and many theologians in the tradition after him.<sup>51</sup> However, Satchidānandendra's important work does not link Śāṅkara's methods to the earlier Mīmāṃsā traditions as fully as one might, instead focusing on consistencies with and divergences from Śāṅkara's work in the later tradition. I demonstrate

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<sup>51</sup> Satchidānandendra Saraswati, Swami. *The Method of the Vedānta: A Critical Account of the Advaita Tradition*. Trans. A. J. Alston. London: K. Paul International, 1989.

that Śāṅkara's two-part method of *adhyāropa-apavāda* is well understood in relation to the earlier Mīmāṃsā tradition, as well.

Likewise, Richard De Smet has rightly observed that for most of India's pre-colonial history, "nobody would [have] even dream[ed] of pretending that Śāṅkara's *advaita*... was a purely rational philosophy."<sup>52</sup> And yet, "in spite of [Śāṅkara's] assertion that his teaching is beyond the reach of reason and entirely based upon the testimony of that revelation which he believes to be infallible,"<sup>53</sup> many modern scholars present his thought as philosophy rather than as scriptural theology. As De Smet has shown, only once the theological character of Śāṅkara's teaching is acknowledged does it become "possible to explain and interpret [his teachings] in their right perspective."<sup>54</sup> Agreeing with De Smet's emphasis on theological method, I assert, moreover, that Śāṅkara's teachings (and methods) are best understood within his particular theological tradition without presuming, *a priori*, that Śāṅkara significantly or substantially diverges from that theological tradition.

The current project also builds upon important insights raised by John Thatamanil in his various publications emphasizing Śāṅkara's apophatic methods. As he notes:

Ultimately, the Upanishads as read by Śāṅkara contend that Brahman is ineffable and beyond language and thought. It is immanent as ground but transcendent as mystery. One can know that one is Brahman but Brahman itself cannot be known.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> De Smet, Richard. "The Theological Method of Śāṅkara." Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1953. 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Thatamanil, John, and Laurel C. Schneider. "God as Ground, Contingency, and Relation: Trinitarian Polydoxy and Religious Diversity." In *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*, edited by Catherine Keller, 238–257. Drew Transdisciplinary Theology Colloquium. New York: Routledge, 2011. 248.

Śaṅkara's apophasis asserts "the unchangeable immutability of Brahman as world-ground."<sup>56</sup> According to Thatamanil, Brahman, as the infinite ground of being, "upholds but is not equivalent to those particulars."<sup>57</sup> As such, "what draws the Advaitin's attention is not the particular being of things *qua* particular."<sup>58</sup> Thatamanil criticizes this view, arguing that it devalues particularity, individuality, and the unique contingency of Being.

I share Thatamanil's concerns and his critique of this perspective. While the ultimacy of Brahman as world ground promises to foster an understanding of interconnection and mutual dependency, it comes at an unnecessarily high price if it forsakes particularity and contingency in the process. As a corrective, Thatamanil turns to the Christian understandings of the contingency of being and Mādhyamaka Buddhist of *pratītyasamutpāda* or "dependent co-arising."<sup>59</sup>

However, the current work argues that if we understand Śaṅkara's apophasis within the context of Mīmāṃsā kataphasis, then it becomes clear that Śaṅkara's nondualism is not monism. As Anantanand Rambachan avers, "not-two is not one... It is not necessary, I contend, to deny the reality and value of the many to affirm the infinity of the one."<sup>60</sup> Thatamanil rightly emphasizes that Brahman, from Śaṅkara's perspective, is the ground of being. However, there is little textual evidence suggesting that Śaṅkara devalues particularity. To the contrary, the particular *qua* particular, for Śaṅkara and Śabara alike, is every bit as unnamable as Brahman

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 249-251.

<sup>60</sup> Rambachan, Anantanand. *A Hindu Theology of Liberation: Not-two Is Not One*. SUNY Series in Religious Studies. 2015. 6-8.

because names and forms are not suited to name particulars. The seer of sight can neither be seen nor named, but the seer's sight is never lost. As the seer of sight, Ātman necessarily sees an/other, since relationality is epistemologically inherent to perception, but the enlightened soul recognizes the "other" as not-other than Brahman. One sees one's neighbor as the *tvam* in *tat tvam asi*. As a particular manifestation of Brahman, the other before my eyes cannot be reduced to name and form, which are understood in the Mīmāṃsā worldview as universals qualifying particulars. Particulars, Śābara insists, are the *āśraya* or ground of universals, not the reverse.<sup>61</sup> Brahman is not, for Śāṅkara, the universal of universals, but the particular of particulars. The knower of Brahman is one by whom the highest Self is able to be seen.<sup>62</sup> It is for this reason that a *guru* is able to physically gesture to a student and utter "This Self is Brahman." I argue that Śāṅkara's discourse on Brahman does not devalue particularity, but instead draws our attention to particularity as the manifold manifestation of the unmanifest.<sup>63</sup>

The degree to which my work and reading of Śāṅkara has been influenced and shaped by Anantanand Rambachan's various publications is difficult to overstate. In *Accomplishing the Accomplished*, Rambachan underscores the necessity of understanding Śāṅkara's theological method if one hopes to grasp his meaning. Rambachan offers a critique of nineteenth and twentieth century Neo-Vedānta, which tend to emphasize either mystic experience or philosophical reflection (or both in tandem) instead of scriptural revelation. As Rambachan shows time and again in his publications, Śāṅkara regards the Veda to be the *only* source of liberating knowledge.<sup>64</sup> Like De Smet and others, Rambachan insists that Śāṅkara is best understood and

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<sup>61</sup> PMSBh I.3.33.

<sup>62</sup> MKBh 2.35.

<sup>63</sup> BUBh I.4.7-10.

<sup>64</sup> Most recently, for example, see Rambachan (2015), 4. See also MKBh 4.99, cited below on page 68.

described as a theologian rather than a philosopher. In *A Hindu Theology of Liberation*,

Rambachan explains:

One of the central purposes of theology and the theological method, traditionally understood, is the ascertainment and defense of the meaning of revelation. Theology aimed to resolve internal inconsistencies in the revealed source of knowledge and to demonstrate that it does not contradict knowledge derived from other *pramāṇas*. If at the heart of the theological method is a rational understanding and exposition of the meaning of revelation (*pramāṇa vicāra*), then Śaṅkara stands solidly in this tradition, and his work is theological.<sup>65</sup>

In his *Advaita Worldview* and other publications, he argues that “too much energy has been expended in Hinduism in establishing the so-called unreality of the world and too little on seeing the world as a celebrative expression of *brahman*’s fullness.”<sup>66</sup> By returning to the texts, which is to say not *only* Śaṅkara’s commentaries but also the sacred revelations upon which he comments, one begins to see the world “positively as the outcome of the intentional creativity of *brahman*, expressing and sharing *brahman*’s nature.”<sup>67</sup> Like Rambachan (and in no small part because of his writing), my work emphasizes the profound importance of the human relationship between *guru* and disciple, which Śaṅkara underscores repeatedly, as well. My work seeks to resound, in its own way, Rambachan’s assertion that:

Advaita... offers a wisdom about human beings and the world that requires and enables us to affirm the equal work and dignity of every human being and inspires the work of justice and the overcoming of suffering.<sup>68</sup>

The current study is also informed by Andrew Fort’s *The Self and Its States*, which examines Śaṅkara’s commentary on the *āgama prakaraṇa* of Śaṅkara’s *Māṇḍūkya Kārika*

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<sup>65</sup> Rambachan (2015), 4.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

*Bhāṣya* in light of transpersonal psychology.<sup>69</sup> While Fort’s work has been an exceptionally rich resource for the current study, my aim and approach to the text are substantially different.

Nevertheless, Fort’s careful reading of Śaṅkara’s commentary on the first *prakaraṇa* and his excellent translation of that portion of the text have informed my own reading implicitly.

Finally, the current project is significantly informed by the work of Francis X. Clooney. While this is certainly the case in terms of the methods of comparative theology, it is no less true with respect to my approach to Śaṅkara’s writings. As Clooney has emphasized, “Advaita has suffered at the hands of readers who have discussed its themes without sufficient attention to the manner in which these are inscribed in the Text.”<sup>70</sup> Michael Sells has noted a similar concern in academic treatments of other apophatic theologies. Sells distinguishes between apophatic theory and apophatic discourse and emphasizes that the latter is, first and foremost, a performance. It “risks being trivialized when its meaning is defined and paraphrased discursively... apophatic texts have suffered in a particularly acute manner from the urge to paraphrase the meaning in non-apophatic language...”<sup>71</sup> Likewise, Śaṅkara’s non-dualism (*advaita*) suffers when paraphrased as “monism” (*ekatva*).<sup>72</sup> My phrase “apophatic theological method,” employed throughout this dissertation, intends to capture something of what Sells describes as the apophatic “performance.”

Similarly, as Clooney has shown, “the literary and rhetorical characteristics of the Advaita texts make them by design unsuitable for replacement by a summation of their main

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<sup>69</sup> Fort, Andrew O. *The Self and Its States: A States of Consciousness Doctrine in Advaita Vedānta*. Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1990.

<sup>70</sup> Clooney (1993), 38.

<sup>71</sup> Sells (1994), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Of course, Śaṅkara does frequently use the term *ekatva*, but we do well to recognize that the term means “unity” as well as “oneness” and is perhaps best read as “simple” or “simplex,” i.e., “one-fold.”

ideas or the abstraction of their main themes.”<sup>73</sup> While this, to some extent, echoes what De Smet has said about the importance of reading Śaṅkara as a theologian, Clooney’s point is somewhat different and, to some extent, earned only through his extensive study of both *purva-* and *uttara- mīmāṃsā*. As he explains, there is a “tension between knowledge as skill and knowledge as insight [which] grows throughout the Text.”<sup>74</sup> That is to say that the entire corpus of Vedānta, from Bādarāyaṇa’s *sūtras* to Śaṅkara’s commentaries and subsequent subcommentaries, are ultimately oriented towards cultivating exegetical skills so that one might grasp the meaning of the Upaniṣads. Śaṅkara, like those before and after him, does not aspire to extract, summarize, distill, or even explain the scriptures, thereby replacing the texts with their abstracted content and obviating the need to actually read those sacred texts.<sup>75</sup> As Clooney explains, the UMS, UMSBh, and other commentaries cultivate a skill of reading that prepares (and requires) one to (re)read the sacred texts, but, in doing so, also trains one to read oneself and the world differently. Beautifully capturing the apophatic impulse, Clooney writes:

For Śaṅkara, the upaniṣads cannot tell us about Brahman, but they fail in so rich, engaging and persuasive a way that we alter our way of living and realize Brahman in a radical revision of our own identities.<sup>76</sup>

Underscoring the significance of these insights, Clooney cultivates and applies the theological methods learned from Vedānta and demonstrates how they might be used to read across religious boundaries. In many ways, the central methods of what is now called the “new comparative theology” are not other than the central methods of Vedānta theology. Clooney explains

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<sup>73</sup> Clooney (1993), 29.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Śāṅkara's method of *adhyāsa*, whereupon (1) one superimposes one reality upon another, (2) without forgetting the distinct particularity of either reality, (3) temporarily and for a set purpose. Applying this method to texts from different religious traditions, Clooney explains that "the familiar is seen anew, read differently because there is superimposed upon it something significantly different."<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, by superimposing Śāṅkara's teachings upon Cusa's and Cusa's upon Śāṅkara's, my goal is neither to synthesize nor reconcile them, forgetting (even temporarily) the distinct particularity of either reality. Rather, the superimposition of one text upon another compels us to see each one anew. Here, too, though, there exists a "tension between knowledge as skill and knowledge as insight"<sup>78</sup> which never intends to replace the practice of actually reading either theologian, and always, moreover, constitutes a skill (a Socratic *arête*) which bears the possibility of altering our way of living through a radical re/cognition of our own identities.<sup>79</sup>

## **The German Cardinal: Nicholas of Cusa**

### Historical and Methodological Background

In sharp contrast to Śāṅkara, about whom we know remarkably little, Nicholas of Cusa's life is exceedingly well documented, catalogued, and studied. The former president of the American Cusanus Society, Morimichi Watanabe, has well stated, "It is perhaps accurate to say that no other medieval writer's life has been so carefully and minutely examined as Cusanus'."<sup>80</sup> For example, Erich Meuthen and others began cataloging and organizing documents related to

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 78. Cf. Plato's *Meno*.

<sup>80</sup> Christianson, Gerald, Thomas M Izbicki, and Morimichi Watanabe. 2011. *Nicholas of Cusa: A Companion to His Life and His Times*. Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Pub. Esp. 156-166. 5.



Cusa's life and activities in 1976 for a publication entitled *Acta Cusana*. While still incomplete, five volumes have been published thus far, exceeding 2,500 pages, often detailing Cusa's activities by time of day, location, and persons in the room with him at the time. The sheer volume of primary literature overwhelms, as does the steady stream of research and publications about Cusa and his influence. I will introduce his life and writings only briefly here along with a select review of secondary literature. Since much is lost when his writings are divorced from their historical context, it is fitting to give a more complete biography in the chapters on his writings.

Known to us today as Nicholas of Cusa (or Cusanus), Nicholas Cryfftz or Krebs<sup>81</sup> was born in 1401 in the small village of Kues on the Moselle River in Germany. After studying canon law at Padua (*decretorum doctor*, 1423), he studied philosophy and theology at the University of Cologne (1428). He became an active participant in the Council of Basel in 1430, composing a pivotally important document of the conciliar movement, *De concordantia catholica* (*On Universal Concord*, 1433, henceforth DCC).

Having lost faith in the increasingly contentious council, Cusa traveled to Constantinople in 1437 at the request of Pope Eugenius IV. He returned with the Byzantine emperor, Patriarch, and Greek bishops to meet with Eugenius at the Union Council of Ferrara-Florence.<sup>82</sup> On his return voyage, Cusa experienced a profound epiphany, which inspired his *De docta ignorantia* (*On Learned Ignorance*, 1440, henceforth DDI). Therein, he articulates some of his best known

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<sup>81</sup> Krebs means "crab" or "crayfish" and so Nicholas was also referred to in his time as Nicholas Cancer. His cardinal seal notably features a crab, or crayfish, with a cardinal's hat.

<sup>82</sup> His lifelong friend and fellow conciliarist-turned-papist, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II, r. 1458-64) called Cusa the "Hercules of all the followers of [Pope] Eugenius" because of his pro-Papal activities after leaving the Council of Basel in 1437. Watanabe, Morimichi. *Concord and Reform: Nicholas of Cusa and Legal and Political Thought in the Fifteenth Century*. Edited by Thomas M. Izbicki and Gerald Christianson. Vol. CS709. Variorum Collected Studies Series; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate/Variorum, 2001. 63.

ideas, including his notion of the *coincidentia oppositorum*, his observation that there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite, his assertion that the earth is not the center of the universe but is in perpetual motion in an infinite universe, and his theological cosmology of *complicatio-explicatio*, i.e., the universe as a divine unfolding. In a companion to this treatise, Cusa outlines his epistemology in *De coniecturis* (*On Conjectures*, 1443). Therein he argues that what is commonly referred to as human “knowledge” is simply conjecture, mediated through language and perspective. His analysis of perception and cognition is informed especially by Protagoras’ assertion that the human mind (*mens*) is the measure (*mensurare*) of things.

Elevated to cardinal by Pope Nicholas V in 1448 and subsequently appointed papal legate to Germany, Cusa’s writing shifts primarily to dialogues in Platonic form. The devastating impact of the destruction of Constantinople in 1453, on Cusa personally as well as to the Empire as a whole, can hardly be overstated. Immediately after learning of the news, he composes an imaginative dialogue of a divine ecclesiastical council. Writing in the voice of representatives from world religions, *De pace fidei* (*On the Peace of Faith*, 1453) applies to the diversity of world religions his earlier assertion that “all being and living is constituted by *concordantia*, but all concordance is a concordance of differences.”<sup>83</sup>

Just weeks later, Cusa completes his celebrated masterpiece, *De visione Dei* (*On the Vision of God*, 1453, henceforth DVD) and begins its companion piece, *De beryllo* (*On the Beryl Stone*, 1458, henceforth DB), both addressed to the Benedictine monks at Tegernsee Abbey. As explained in the opening pages of DVD, Cusa sends the text to Tegernsee accompanied by a painting, which he instructs the monks to hang on the north wall of the Abbey. While the content

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<sup>83</sup> DCC I.8, Weiler, Anton G. “Nicholas of Cusa on harmony, concordance, consensus and acceptance as categories of reform in the church, in *De concordantia catholica*,” in *Conflict and Reconciliation: Perspectives on Nicholas of Cusa*. Vol. v. 126. Brill’s Studies in Intellectual History, Boston: Brill, 2004. 77-90, p79.

of the painting seems to be inconsequential, it contains a “most peculiar feature.” From whichever vantage one views the painting, its eye seems to gaze directly at the viewer. DVD choreographs a dialogical exercise whereby the monks are instructed in a method to see the invisible God, first in the painting, then in the “visible” person of Jesus (Col 1:15) who “sees with fleshly eyes not unlike our own,”<sup>84</sup> and finally in one another. What begins, then, as an effort to have a vision of God becomes, through the coincidence of the subjective and objective genitives, an experience of God’s vision in and through one’s seeing and being seen by one’s neighbor.

In a strikingly different tone and approach, *De beryllo* strives to see the Creator’s invisible power and divinity as it is manifestly revealed in natural creation (Rom 1:20). With the imaginative use of an intellectual beryl stone (a lens that magnifies and minimizes) DB further develops Cusa’s cosmology of unfolding (*explicatio*) and epistemology of enfolding (*complicatio*) while simultaneously articulating a theological humanism of creativity as the unfolding of human will and purpose in the technologies of language, mathematics, and craftsmanship.

In addition to his theological texts, too numerous to introduce here, Cusa also composed at least fifteen texts on mathematics. He was the first to conceive of the notion of the infinitesimal and was captivated by the problem of “squaring a circle,” i.e., an attempt to reconcile the circumference of a circle with the perimeter of a comparably sized square. Since his mathematics are utterly inseparable from his theology and epistemology, I discuss his approach to the quadrature of the circle beginning on page 268.

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<sup>84</sup> DVD 20.95, Hopkins trans, 725.

Cusa completed *De beryllo* while effectively imprisoned, having taken refuge in Castle Andraz after one of several assassination attempts by Archduke Sigismund and various German nationalist factions who sought independence from the Holy Roman Empire. Just two weeks after he completed DB, he left Germany for Rome.

Although it is outside of the scope of my research, the texts that Cusa composed during his time in Rome are some of his most remarkable. His longtime friend, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, now reigning as Pope Pius II, appointed him as vicar general in temporal affairs over the papal territories. While his attempts to reform the Roman curia were frustrated at every turn, his theology reaches a maturation and convergence that struggles to take shape in DVD and DB. Attempting to rethink the ontological relationship between actuality and possibility, he composes *Triologus de possest* (*Triologue on Actualized-Possibility*, 1460) and *De non aliud* (*On the Not-Other*, 1462). In light of newly translated works of Diogenes Laërtius, he composed *De venatione sapientiae* (*On the Pursuit of Wisdom*, 1463).

In the final months before his death in 1464, he penned one of his most striking and provocative texts, subtly but significantly shifting many of his earlier ideas. Turning away somewhat from his 1460 triologue on actualized-possibility (*possest*), and deepening his apophasis by again rethinking the ontology of actuality and possibility, Cusa now contemplates God as *posse ipsum*, Possibility Itself, in the fittingly entitled *De apice theoriae* (*On the Summit of Contemplation*, DAT). Cusa does not distance himself from his earlier works, but instead encourages his reader to return to them, informed by his later works. He insists that the ideas coalescing in DAT were already at play in his earlier texts, most notably his *De quaerendo Deum*

(*On Seeking God*, 1445, DQD).<sup>85</sup> In chapter four, I analyze DQD through the hermeneutic lens of DAT.

#### Review of Secondary Literature

In *The Individual and the Cosmos in the Philosophy of the Renaissance*, Ernst Cassirer effectively initiates a wave of twentieth century scholarship on Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>86</sup> He argues:

Any study that seeks to view the philosophy of the renaissance as a systematic unity must take as its point of departure the doctrines of Nicholas Cusanus... only they represent a 'single focal point' in which the most diverse rays are gathered.<sup>87</sup>

Emphasizing Cusa's theological humanism and irreducible particularity, Cassirer notes that each unique fold in the manifold universe is indispensable, with its "own special kind of activity and, correspondingly, its own incomparable value."<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in a passage that exemplifies the title and central argument of Cassirer's influential book, and in many ways articulates the central thesis of this dissertation, he explains that, for Cusa:

Individuality is not simply a *limitation*; rather, it represents a particular value that may not be eliminated or extinguished. The One that is 'beyond being' can only be grasped through this value... only by virtue of this thought do the multiplicity, the difference, and the heterogeneity of these forms cease to appear to be a contradiction of the unity and universality of religion and become instead a necessary expression of that universality itself.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> DAT, 16, Hopkins trans., 1430. Cusa also mentions here *De Dato Patris Luminum* (*On the Gift of the Father of Lights*, 1445) and *De visione Dei*, 1453.

<sup>86</sup> Cassirer, Ernst. *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*. Translated by Mario Domandi. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. (Originally published in 1927).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.* 27, citing DDI II.12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* 28-29.

Hence, rather than regarding the one and the many as a philosophical problem requiring resolution or reconciliation, Cassirer regard's Cusa's work as one in which oneness can only find existential expression in multiplicity. The individual cannot understand herself through any "quantitative expression" of part and whole, but only as a unique and irreducible particular, the site of infinite being's becoming. In Cusa's *De visione Dei*, Cassirer sees a "pure *interpenetration*" in which and through which one sees God in oneself and oneself in God.<sup>90</sup> The current study expands and develops Cassirer's important insights regarding this "interpenetration." Plainly stated, I articulate Cusa's doctrine of *imago Dei* in terms more or less identical with Cassirer's view represented in the passage cited above.

In the published version of her dissertation on Cusa's anthropology, Pauline M. Watts emphasizes the "active and creative role that man [*sic.*] plays in the formation of his own history and culture."<sup>91</sup> As she explains, the human mind:

... unfolds from itself 'rational things' (*rationalia*) rather than 'real things' (*entia realia*). It does not know 'real things' but only 'rational things,' the unfoldings or *explicationes* of its own creative core or *complicatio*. The human mind both unfolds rational things from itself and assimilates the rational things of its own creation. In the process, it gives them meaning.<sup>92</sup>

Building upon Watt's work, I examine the role of perception in the meaning-giving process she describes above. For Cusa, this meaning-giving occurs in a variety of ways and always poses a kind of double-edged sword. Meaning-giving is an act of creativity and is, to that extent, exemplary of Cusa's understanding of *imago Dei*. Giving meaning to the world is a creative act which brings us closer to the Creator. However, this same meaning-giving creativity obscures

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, Cf. DVD 6.

<sup>91</sup> Watts, Pauline Moffitt. *Nicolaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-century Vision of Man*. Vol. v. 30. Leiden: Brill, 1982. 31.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

God's revelation, especially the natural world. By more closely examining Cusa's method, I build upon Watt's research by clarifying how apophasis constitutes a coincidence of opposites which simultaneously reveals human creativity as a meaning-giving act while also negating that creative meaning-giving for the sake of revealing the natural world from a new perspective. While Watt's work certainly addresses Cusa's perspectivalism, it is underdeveloped in this regard. The current study revises this underdevelopment, especially in light of Karsten Harries' important contributions in this area, which are discussed below.

Watts also argues:

Increasingly, Cusanus leaves behind the attempt to explain doctrinally or systematically the way in which man [*sic.*] is the image and likeness of God and instead comes to see that the endless variety and originality of human activity is itself the source of man's godlike nature.<sup>93</sup>

While agreeing with the spirit and intention of Watt's statement, I argue that Cusa does not leave behind doctrinal or systematic explanations of the *imago Dei*. While I certainly agree that "the endless variety and originality of human activity is itself the source of [the human person's] godlike nature," I argue that this is *rooted in* Cusa's doctrinal and systematic theology. As he emphasizes throughout *De Beryllo*, God does not create accidentally or arbitrarily, but only willfully, freely, and intentionally. Moreover, God's entire creation reveals a natural harmony or concordance: an ecological image of the Creator. As I argue beginning on page 288, Cusa understands the *imago Dei* in Trinitarian terms as creation, Christ, and creativity. Thus, human creativity is only divine when it is creative *in the Spirit* of individual and ecological concordance.

Moreover, Watts demonstrates the importance of reading DVD and DB together, in light of one another. She argues that these two texts, each dedicated to the monks at Tegernsee Abbey, were intended to be read together and:

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<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

... represent a kind of syncretic vision, in which man's [*sic.*] contemplation of the divine results not in de-personalization but in self-realization and from which emerges a compelling statement of both divine and human power.<sup>94</sup>

Watts concludes that Cusa “explores human creativity in relation to theology in the *De visione dei* and in relation to epistemology in the *De Beryllo*.”<sup>95</sup> While Watts’ scholarship on Cusa is rich with insights that inform my own reading of his work, I find her distinction between theology and epistemology to be overstated. All of Cusa’s work, including even his mathematical treatises, are saturated as much with his theology as his epistemology. As I demonstrate, Cusa faithfully seeks to understand the Creator’s will and purpose through our creative measure of the natural world (DB) in a manner consistent with and informed by Jesus’s vision (DVD). In other words, by learning to see like Jesus sees, we learn to see the sacrality of our ecology. While my specific analysis of DB and DVD differs subtly but significantly from Watts’, it remains consistent with the conclusion that she draws, namely, that Cusa “has sacralized the secular. In doing so, he has assigned a new and crucial role to *will* in both divine and human action.”<sup>96</sup>

My research is also influenced by the writings and thought of H. Lawrence Bond. In the medieval mindset, Bond explains, religious icons were regarded as a kind of “text.” Since few laypersons of the age were literate (and fewer still in Latin), religious icons were an important means of communicating the Christian story. Bond suggests that the very text of DVD itself, which begins with a meditation on an icon, was intended to:

... serve as a kind of icon, ministering to the reader in the manner of an icon, picturing by its own form, with words or other symbols, so as to signify,

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 187

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.



convey, and transpose the reader from one state of awareness or experience to another.<sup>97</sup>

When one regards an icon of a face with devotion and sincerity, at a certain point the gaze reverses. Instead of seeing the icon, one becomes seen by it. As Bond notes, the same phenomenon is masterfully crafted by Cusa in his DVD. Striving to have a vision of God, we first see the image, then “we see ourselves in God” and in the final stage, “we are not the seers, we are the seen.”<sup>98</sup> Bond concludes, “God is the eternal subject of seeing.”<sup>99</sup>

Bond is certainly not the only scholar to draw attention to this reversal of the gaze in Cusa’s DVD. Unlike others, though, he argues that the text is not merely *about* an icon but *performs* the way a medieval icon performs. Bond offers a unique and insightful approach to textual engagement. Cusa’s words do more than communicate ideas, they evoke the reader’s imagination, quite literally. Unlike a painted icon, the mental image conveyed by the text is far from static; this image of God can see and speak to the reader, who is seen and addressed by God through the imaginative reversal of the iconic text. This *imago Dei* is *dynamic* (Rom 1:20).

The heuristic device I have termed the “apophatic measure” will be deployed to develop Bond’s articulation of the text as icon in a new, but similar, direction. Because “God is the eternal subject of seeing,”<sup>100</sup> as Bond has stated, then one departs from the iconic text with a changed sense of perception. In other words, one learns to see differently by means of the apophatic measure, which is learned from the iconic text. Building upon Bond’s contribution, I

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<sup>97</sup> Bond, H. Lawrence. “The “Icon” and the “Iconic Text” in Nicholas of Cusa’s *De Visione Dei*.”

*Nicholas of Cusa and His Age: Intellect and Spirituality*. Ed. by Izbicki, Thomas M. and Bellitto, Christopher M. Boston: Brill, 2002. 184.

<sup>98</sup> Bond (2002), 192.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

consider how Cusa's method edifies his reader such that one learns to see the natural world and other creatures *after* the text, in a manner similar to the iconic vision conveyed in and through the text itself. As discussed above (page 32), Clooney redeploys Śāṅkara's method of *adhyāsa* as a comparative, textual hermeneutic whereby "the familiar is seen anew, read differently because there is superimposed upon it something significantly different."<sup>101</sup> Similarly, I redeploy Bond's "iconic text" as a sensual apophatic measure whereby one learns to see the world differently because one finds oneself to be seen (by God through the iconic text).

In a challenging but remarkable essay that continues to receive increased academic attention, Michel de Certeau analyzes "The Gaze of Nicholas of Cusa" in his posthumously published article in *Diacritics*.<sup>102</sup> Taking into account the socio-political environment of its writing, de Certeau highlights Cusa's use of voice and perspective in DVD. The nouns subtly but significantly shift. In chapter one, Cusa's "I" indexes Cusa himself and the "you" indexes the monks at Tegernsee, the intended readers of the text. In chapter three, Cusa shifts first to "we," indexing both teacher and student. In chapter four, however, Cusa begins to speak from the vantage of the Benedictine brothers. The "I" indexes the reader and the "you" indexes God. De Certeau imbues the nominal shift in perspective with profound meaning. Though the "you" indexes God, it bears an important trace of the brothers themselves as images of God. Moreover, Cusa's attention to "the brother in the East" maps not too subtly onto the Ottomans who now occupy what was recently Eastern Christendom. What Cusa makes imaginatively explicit in his *De pace fidei* is creatively performed in his *De visione Dei*, completed just weeks later.

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<sup>101</sup> Clooney (1993), 169-170.

<sup>102</sup> de Certeau, Michel. "The Gaze of Nicholas of Cusa." *Diacritics*, 17:3 (1987) 2-38.

While a great deal of academic attention has been rightly given to Cusa's DVD, far less has been given to its companion piece, *De beryllo*. Karsten Harries is one of very few scholars who devote considerable attention to this text.<sup>103</sup> Harries draws numerous connections between Leon Battista Alberti, Cusa's younger contemporary, and the rediscovery of Protagoras by each. Harries is also one of few scholars to give detailed attention to Cusa's architectural metaphors, especially his notion that an actual house, while a mere image of the architect's vision, exists more truly in the image than in the archetype because only the former provides shelter. Harries' work shapes my reading of Cusa's DB in ways too numerous to articulate here, and my own work is deeply indebted to his. However, Harries tends to read Cusa as a philosopher rather than as a theologian and, as a result, often overlooks the role of scripture, such as Romans 1:20 in DB and Colossians 1:15 in DVD. Moreover, Harries does not read DB and DVD in light of one another, as a coincidence of opposite perspectives on the notions of seeing, being seen, and the *imago Dei*. Thus, the current study synthesizes, to some extent, the views held by Watts, Bond, de Certeau, and Harries.

Finally, and most importantly, this study is profoundly indebted to the work of Catherine Keller. Without drawing any specific historical connection to Cusa, Keller's discussion of the Iberian *Convivencia*, which is to say the idea of Christians, Muslims, and Jews peacefully "living together" on the Iberian peninsula, shapes her reading of Cusa's *De pace fidei* in particular, and her understanding of Cusa's pneumatology of concord. The idea of *Convivencia*, though perhaps not the word itself, arises in Cusa's theology through the influential writings of the thirteenth century Catalan theologian Ramon Lull.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Harries, Karsten. *Infinity and Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001.

<sup>104</sup> There are numerous studies of Lull's influence on Cusa, which are beyond the scope of this dissertation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Lull, like Cusa, has applied apophatic theology to his understanding of what

Through her constructive reading of Cusa’s entrance “into the cloud” of ignorance, where opposites coincide,<sup>105</sup> Keller explores the possibility of a “just and sustainable conviviality, for life-together beyond tribal origins and between empires.”<sup>106</sup> As she emphasizes, Cusa’s anthropology of *imago Dei* is rooted in his cosmology such that each and every creature is a “finite infinity,” a fold in the divine unfolding. In other words, Cusa’s emphasis on creativity, freedom, and concord applies equally to all creatures; his *imago Dei* is not anthropocentric, but cosmic. Whereas Keller’s work draws primarily from Cusa’s *De docta ignorantia* (DDI) and DVD, the current study finds additional grounding for her constructive theology in Cusa’s DB. As already noted, Cusa’s DB is inspired and supported by Romans 1:20: “Ever since the creation of the world, God’s eternal power and divinity, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through created things.” Cusa’s pneumatology (and ecclesiology) of *concordance* is founded in the notion that nature’s harmonious concord reveals God’s creative intention for concordant living-together (*Convivencia*). Hegemony, dominion, discord, and “tribal origins” are counter to the Spirit of God’s creativity, as Keller shows.

Furthermore, Keller has emphasized that, for Cusa, the coincidence of contradictories is simultaneously “both the impassable wall and the passage through it.”<sup>107</sup> The coincidence of

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might be called a theology of religions, and has also employed Augustine’s notion of the coincidence of opposites to similar effect. On the relationship between Lull and Cusa, see: Lohr, Charles H. 2004. “Nicolaus Cusanus and Ramon Lull: A Comparison of Three Texts on Human Knowledge.” *Traditio* 59 (January): 229–315; and also Pindl-Büchel, Theodor. 1990. “The Relationship Between the Epistemologies of Ramon Lull and Nicholas of Cusa.” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly: Journal of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 64 (1): 73–87. As Morimichi Watanabe notes, Cusa’s personal library includes 68 manuscripts containing 39 works by Lull. See Christianson (2011), 156-166.

<sup>105</sup> DVD, 9.38.

<sup>106</sup> Keller, Catherine. *Cloud of the Impossible: Negative Theology and Planetary Entanglement*. Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Keller, Catherine, “The Cloud of the Impossible: Embodiment and Apophasis” in *Apophatic Bodies*. Routledge, 2010, 25-44. 28.

contradictories is a device, central to Cusa's methodology, which is not merely an epistemic limit, but also an apophysis of that very limit. Following Keller's lead, the current project develops her emphasis on material bodies by turning to sensuality and perception. She notes:

The concurrence of apophysis and embodiment might then turn out to be no accident but a coincidence indeed: not an inevitability, not an impossibility, but an aporia turned porous. Like a cloud.<sup>108</sup>

Keller's insight in this regard influences my reading of Cusa, but *also* my reading of Śaṅkara. Each of them emphasize aporia—pushing it to the breaking point. They stretch aporia to porosity (p203). For each, as for Keller, apophysis reveals that embodiment is no accident. In the aftermath of unsaying, one learns to see bodies.

In her essay, "Is That All?," Keller examines the sensual encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well in John 4. Analyzing the economy of gift in this evangelical scene, Keller gives attention to the reciprocity of the verbal exchange between Jesus and this unnamed woman. In the same essay, Keller also draws upon Cusa's cosmological assertion in DDI that "through all things God is in all things" and "through all things all are in God."<sup>109</sup> Since her purpose is to offer a response to John Milbank's *Radical Orthodoxy*, it is beyond the scope of her essay to discuss Cusa's own reading of John 4. The current study (p329) extends Keller's reading of the verbal reciprocity of John 4 by incorporating Cusa's sermon on the text, which emphasizes a reciprocity of gazes (found also in DVD), as well as a reciprocal openness akin to hospitality. The embodied encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, in other words,

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<sup>108</sup> Keller (2010), 28-29.

<sup>109</sup> Keller, Catherine. 2006. "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's Being Reconciled." In *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"*, edited by Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau, 18-35. New York: T&T Clark. 32.

models what I am calling the “apophatic measure,” which is rooted in sensual reciprocity enabled by a *kenosis* of expectation whereby one is able to see and be seen by the other.

### **Comparative Theology: Three Contexts**

*“It is always necessary to be more than one in order to speak,  
several voices are necessary...”<sup>110</sup>*

As a work of Comparative Theology, this dissertation examines the apophatic theological methods of two exceptional and unique theologians. Not surprisingly, the comparison is not premised on any historical connection between the two. In *De coniecturis*, Cusa states that “intellectual religion and the abstract mathematical arts prevail” in India, though he seems to have little actual exposure to Indian thought, whether directly or indirectly.<sup>111</sup> In *De pace fidei*, he seems only vaguely familiar with Indian thought or theology, and even this vague familiarity is entirely tangential to the current study.

As is already clear, Śaṅkara and Cusa write out of and to strikingly different worlds. They bring to our comparative table radically different commitments, convictions, and concerns. The religious teachings (i.e., doctrines) they receive, hold, and convey differ considerably. My intention is neither to compare nor contrast their doctrines, with one notable exception. As mentioned earlier, Śaṅkara and his Mīmāṃsā predecessors insist on the unauthored, eternal relationship between word, universal meaning, and particular entities. As Bogdan Diaconescu demonstrates, this commitment distinguishes the school from others and places it at odds with other orthodox schools of classical Indian thought.<sup>112</sup> That is to say that language, according to Mīmāṃsā, is neither a human creation nor is it created by god; language exists eternally, without

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<sup>110</sup> Derrida (1995).

<sup>111</sup> DC II.15.150, Hopkins 240.

<sup>112</sup> Diaconescu (2012).

beginning. For Cusa, however, language is a human technology which exemplifies, *par excellence*, human creativity and meaning-making. In the absence of any historical basis for comparison and in the face of such a striking doctrinal contradiction, it becomes necessary to identify the motivation and basis for this comparison.

Stated (too) simply, the basis for comparing these two very different theologians lies in their apophatic theological methods, which underscore the onto-cosmological nonduality of the one and the many. Their apophatic methods culminate in direct perception, especially vision. Their verbal/conceptual negations become a means for seeing more clearly. In large part, the historical and doctrinal differences between them become a means by which to focus attention on their methods. This is not to say that doctrinal differences and historical context become irrelevant, but rather to argue quite the opposite. This requires elaboration.

First, the absence of any historical connection is, itself, a motivation for comparison. Because Śaṅkara's context is arrestingly different from Cusa's context, it is hardly surprising that the questions and concerns confronting each theologian are sharply distinct. Confronted by Mahāyāna Buddhism, Śaṅkara faced the challenge of explaining how negative theology is distinct from nihilism. Having stated, for example, that Brahman is unnamable because Brahman is devoid (*śūnyam*) of any cause governing the introduction of words, a *pūrvapakṣin* concludes that Brahman is simply an empty void (*śūnyam*). Hence, Śaṅkara's context requires him to explain why apophasis does not lead to nihilism (p150).

Cusa, on the other hand, writes from a context bounded by two empires: his own Holy Roman Empire and the surging Ottoman Empire (p253). He writes, in the context of Renaissance humanism, conscious of the imperialistic dangers implicit in a burgeoning modernism that emphasized objective knowledge as a source of human hegemony. His apophasis is guided by

humility, rooted in the limits of human epistemology. Like theologians before him, Cusa acknowledges that we do not know God. He adds, though: We also do not know the world in which we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). In other words, he writes *against his context*, turning to apophasis as a means to undermine the arrogance of imperialism, even as he (ironically?) serves as a Cardinal within that imperialistic hierarchy. (As de Certeau observes, Cusa's words and actions sometimes reflect a coincidence of opposites.) However, he also writes from a context wherein the uniqueness of Jesus is challenged by Islam. Thus, he advocates apophasis in order to emphasize the limits of human knowledge while simultaneously asserting explicitly kataphatic doctrines of Christology.

Because Cusa and Śāṅkara employ similar apophatic theological methods, but do so in strikingly different historical contexts with differing concerns and motivations, the comparison enables us to examine similar methods in differing contexts. To a limited extent, then, the comparison enables us to distinguish between the method and the contextual concerns without obviating or dismissing those contextual concerns. Moreover, the comparison enables us to pose questions raised in one context to the other.

While my research finds their methods to be more similar than different, this renders differences all the more instructive and insightful. Due to the encounter (imagined or real) with nihilism, Śāṅkara emphasizes that apophasis is a method: a means to *see*. The specter of nihilism shifts Śāṅkara's discussion to epistemology and language. It occasions an emphasis on perception, the reality of external objects, and an account of particularity. Cusa, on the other hand, is not troubled by nihilism, but with a humanistic arrogance born from an illusion of epistemic certainty. For reasons different from Śāṅkara's, he also turns to a discussion of epistemology and language. While his context does not require that he distinguish apophasis



from nihilism, his context does compel him to account for particularity, especially the unique particularity of Jesus in light of the challenges occasioned by Islam. Motivated by very different impulses, then, each defends his apophatic theological method on the grounds of epistemology, language, and the direct perception of particularity. In other words, it is precisely *because* their contexts are so different that the comparison bears fruit.

Second, the comparison highlights a profound doctrinal difference with respect to language and its origins. As noted, Śāṅkara adheres to the Mīmāṃsā doctrine regarding the eternal, unauthored connection between word and meaning. Cusa, in contrast, does not merely take it for granted that language is a human creation, but regards this as exemplary of human creativity and inherent divinity. The two doctrines are not merely different, they are, arguably, polar opposites.

Were one to examine either Śāṅkara's method or Cusa's method in isolation, the importance of their respective doctrines of language might be overlooked. In the context of comparison, however, this difference is seen to be crucial. The comparison in no way obviates the distinction, but marks it all the more clearly. Hence, what otherwise might be regarded as a doctrinal difference of marginal importance is revealed to be a doctrine marking a fundamental difference between Śāṅkara's Vedānta and Cusa's Christian humanism.

This dissertation, then, is an encounter of three contexts. The first context is Śāṅkara's Vedānta and the perceived threat of nihilism. The second context is Cusa's Christian mysticism colored by his anti-imperialist humanism on one side and religious conflict on the other. The third context is the comparative encounter of these theologians and their writings. In this context (and only in this context), nihilism becomes a challenge for Cusa's apophasis and humanism becomes a challenge for Śāṅkara's apophasis. Delving deeply into the thought and method of

one of these thinkers raises issues and concerns when we read the other that might not otherwise arise. Reading the two together in this third, academic context bears the potential to lead us into a deeper appreciation of each.

Francis Clooney describes comparative theology as a praxis through which “the engaged reader is ‘inscribed’ into an ever more complexly composed context, in order to write after and out of it.”<sup>113</sup> As Clooney has shown, comparative theology is a misnomer if one understands “comparison” to be a purely objective and calculative evaluation of the similarities and differences of two juxtaposed texts. Rather, comparative theology indicates a constructed context; it is a context that is constructed by the texts themselves and into which the reader involves herself by doing nothing more—and nothing less—than taking the texts seriously, theologically.

### **Constructive Comparative Theology**

As stated above, Comparative Theology occurs at the intersection of three contexts. Constructive Theology is a theological engagement with the pressing issues of today which nevertheless remains rooted in the theological tradition and heritage which it receives. In the same way that a scholar cannot adequately exegete a text without considering the context of its author, neither can a scholar adequately *write*, in this third context, without taking into account contemporary concerns. Just as the space of comparison enables us to pose Śāṅkara’s questions to Cusa and vice versa, it also requires that we acknowledge our own questions, allowing Śāṅkara and Cusa to speak to our contemporary theological issues. As “the engaged reader is ‘inscribed’ into an ever more complexly composed context,”<sup>114</sup> so too are his/her questions and

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<sup>113</sup> Clooney (1993), 7.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

theological concerns, thereby enabling (if not demanding) the comparative theologian to constructively contribute to contemporary theology. While I must write in a voice that is faithful to both Śāṅkara and Cusa, I must also write in a voice that speaks to contemporary theologians, especially theologians in my own Reformed Protestant (Congregationalist) tradition.

It is necessary to emphasize, then, that this dissertation is a work of theology in addition to being a comparison of theologies. It is, to borrow Anselm's oft-quoted aphorism, an exercise in *faith seeking understanding*. While concerned with two historical figures and their historical contexts, it is not, strictly speaking, a historical examination. Although concerned with doctrinal similarities and differences, it is not, strictly speaking, a doctrinal comparison. To the extent that Śāṅkara and Cusa are theologians, each writes from a position of faith while seeking to render that faith understandable and communicable. Likewise, as a comparative theologian writing in this third, academic context, my own writing is an exercise of faith seeking understanding. Thoroughly mindful of the fact that not all readers will be equally interested in the details of Śāṅkara's method and Cusa's method, I nevertheless write from and to this third, academic context motivated by the firm conviction that Śāṅkara and Cusa, alike, are able to speak to contemporary concerns, especially issues of ultimate concern shared by contemporary Protestant theologians.

Most importantly, this work of comparative theology seeks to offer constructive contributions to the notions of particularity and diversity. While our society increasingly tends to value diversity and difference, it is often difficult to articulate, on theological grounds, the inherent value of difference. While it may (or may not) be taken for granted that diversity is to be celebrated, it is challenging to defend the appreciation of diversity without resorting to

relativism. It is all the more challenging to articulate the inherent value of diversity and difference in terms of theological doctrines that imply exclusion of religious others.<sup>115</sup>

While it is beyond the scope or even aspiration of this dissertation to formulate a systematic theology conducive to an appreciation of the inherent value of difference/diversity, I nevertheless intend it to contribute towards such an appreciation. Through a comparative theological analysis of the apophatic methods of Śāṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa, this study signals towards a theology of irreducible particularity. I argue that, for each, apophasis negates universals. For each, universals are understood to be measures of particularity. Universals, which are necessarily linguistic in nature according to both Śāṅkara and Cusa, constitute a means by which we come to know one another, the natural world in which we live, and even the transcendent. Thus, universals are indispensable because they constitute the very means by which we come to know and understand our world. For Śāṅkara, these universals are eternal and unauthored. For Cusa, universals exemplify the pinnacle of human creativity and meaning-making. However, for each, universals also reduce and essentialize difference and diversity. For Cusa, universals simultaneously represent the creation of meaning, but also the obfuscation of God's creation. For Śāṅkara, universals constitute a valid means of knowledge, but simultaneously constitute ignor/ance insofar as they measure the immeasurable (cleaving the non-dual). For both, the negation of universals, which measure particularity, cultivate a means by which to directly perceive reality. Although this reality is infinite and thus imperceptible *qua* infinity, this infinite reality is, nevertheless, manifest before our very eyes *qua* particularity (Rom

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<sup>115</sup> The field of research often labeled the “theology of religion(s),” for example, tends to categorize theological diversity and difference in terms of inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism, which might be classified as alternatives between absolutism and relativism. Even relativism, however, while purporting to value difference and diversity, tends to do so by relativizing difference, thereby subordinating difference to this or that commonality. Each of these (inclusivism, exclusivism, and pluralism), however, merely offers an *explanation* of diversity while failing to attribute any theological *value* to difference.

1:20, p256). Without *this* or *that* particular, infinite reality would be incomplete. Brahman is “All *This*” (each *this* and every *that*, nondually, p165) The infinite would fail to be truly boundless if it did not include “you,” in particular.

What I have termed the “apophatic measure” is nothing other than a direct perception of the infinite *qua* particularity. This perception is not attained, however, by dispensing with universals (since these constitute the very epistemic means of knowing), but rather by coming to understand universals *qua* measures, which obscure infinite reality by reducing particulars to essentials, even as they make those very particulars knowable and distinguishable from one another. Becoming attentive to the fact that one measures, one begins to measure differently. These apophatic theological methods (*apophatic measure*<sub>1</sub>) culminate in a direct perception (*apophatic measure*<sub>2</sub>) of irreducible particularity (*apophatic measure*<sub>3</sub>) for the very reason that difference and diversity bear an inherent—and absolute—value. They neither decry nor dispense with universals. One still *measures*, but does so with humility, awe, and wonder (p341). Hence, from two very different doctrinal perspectives (each faithfully rooted in those doctrines), Śāṅkara and Cusa offer methods (irreducible to any postulate) by which the difference and diversity of particulars (be they other persons, cultures, animals, ecologies, or even ideas) are inherently valued as unique manifestations of infinite reality (without which, reality would be incomplete), and yet their theologies avoid relativism by also insisting on the indispensable value of universal measures, which are eternal for Śāṅkara and exemplary of the *imago Dei* for Cusa.

## **Chapter Outline**

In light of the three contexts of comparative theology described above, this dissertation is divided into three parts, oriented around its seemingly simple two-word title: *Apophatic Measures*. Without feigning an objective view from nowhere, the first two parts are primarily

descriptive. In Part One, I examine Śaṅkara's apophatic theological method in light of his theological tradition and the text upon which he is commenting. In Part Two, I examine Cusa's apophatic theological method in his context. Since Comparative Theology is a praxis of reading, back-and-forth, from one tradition to the other, it makes little sense to postpone comparison once each theologian has been introduced. Hence, while I focus on Cusa in Part Two, I do so comparatively for the sake of elucidating both Śaṅkara and Cusa, building upon Part One. Part Three is more explicitly and directly comparative. While remaining faithful to each tradition, this comparison occurs in the third context of contemporary academic theology. Hence, Part Three bears the fruit of the project in the form of constructive comparative theology,<sup>116</sup> with an eye towards a theology of irreducible particularity wherein difference and diversity are regarded for their inherent theological value and import. Therein, I consider the constructive implications of this experiment with respect to apophatic theology and comparative theology, more broadly, and also to Christian doctrines of *theosis* and *imago Dei*.

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<sup>116</sup> That is *not* to say that constructive theology is the only fruit born by comparative theology. Comparative reading is fecund in and of itself, inscribing the comparative theologian into an ever more complex context that is, in and of itself, worthy of the effort. However, many of these benefits are reaped only by the comparative scholar and remain inaccessible to those who do not perform the academic work and reading themselves. On this, see especially Clooney (1993), 223. Constructive theology, on the other hand, compels the theologian (comparative or otherwise) to translate what has been learned in and through one's research such that it directly contributes to contemporary theological concerns.

## Part One: Apophatic Measures in Śaṅkara

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*Śruti is an authority only in matters not perceived by means of ordinary instruments of knowledge such as perception—i.e., it is an authority as to the mutual relation of things as means to ends, but not in matters lying within the range of perception...*<sup>117</sup>

“*Śruti* literally means ‘that which is heard’ and designates those scriptures that are considered to be revealed and that enjoy supreme authority.”<sup>118</sup> Strictly speaking, the term “scripture” (literally, “writing”) is a misnomer, despite the fact that I and others employ that term to refer to the Veda.<sup>119</sup> While I (and most of “us” who stand “outside” the tradition) receive these revelations primarily in the form of texts, one gradually learns to “hear” the *śruti*, aided especially by sage commentators and patient teachers. Drawing from the advaitin commentator, Amalānanda, Francis Clooney likens the *śruti* to a spiritual score: “the musical notes are already being played distinctly even when one still lacks the capacity to distinguish them.”<sup>120</sup> Just as one gradually cultivates a “refined ear for music,” one learns to read the texts and “notices what was previously unheard.”<sup>121</sup>

As Śaṅkara explains in the epigraph above, *śruti* and perception (*pratyakṣa*) have differing purposes and differing scopes of authority. As Anantanand Rambachan notes, this, “has helped the tradition avoid some of the conflicts between religion and the empirical sciences that

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<sup>117</sup> BGBh 18:66, Rambachan’s translation. Rambachan (2015), 50.

<sup>118</sup> Rambachan (2015), 110.

<sup>119</sup> “Scripture” is an English cognate of the Latin *scrīptūra*, from *scrībō*, “to engrave; to draw; to write.” There is ample justification for continuing to refer to the Veda as “scripture.” Two should suffice: (1) We typically receive the Veda as a sacred *text*, (2) the term “scripture” implies far more than “writing” just as the word *śruti* implies far more than “that which is heard.”

<sup>120</sup> Clooney (1993), 127.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

often stand in the way of constructive dialogue between these disciplines.”<sup>122</sup> Clearly distinguishing between the purposes and authoritative scopes of *śruti* and perception is one critically important goal of Part One of this dissertation. My argument, in brief, is this: By learning to read the texts in the way that Śaṅkara teaches us to read them, we gradually learn to hear the *śruti*. By learning to hear the *śruti*, we also learn to perceive differently.

In chapter one, I introduce the method and structure of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (MU) and Gauḍapāda’s Kārika (GK). While the Vedānta tradition has come to regard some or all of the text as *śruti*, I aver that Śaṅkara did not consider any part of the text to be revealed. This is significant because the text has a different purpose, from Śaṅkara’s perspective: it models theological methods whereby one learns to *hear* the *śruti* properly. The organizational structure of the twelve prose verses (now referred to as the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad<sup>123</sup>) is nearly as important as the theological content of those verses. The content is drawn from various scriptural teachings, *not* in order to abridge and replace those teachings, but to harmonize them. In it, the Vedānta scriptures are grasped together (*saṅgraha*) so that they might be seen, synoptically. The text paradigmatically exemplifies two hermeneutic methods: coordination (*upasaṃhāra*) and harmonization (*samanvaya*). By orchestrating particular scriptural passages in this way, the text teaches us how to hear the *śruti*, coordinately and harmoniously. Echoing Clooney’s (and Amalānanda’s) analogy: If the *śruti* is a graceful revelation which is to be heard, then the Māṇḍūkya, together with its Kārika and Bhāṣya, might be described as ear training. It cultivates an aesthetic sensuality—beyond measure.

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<sup>122</sup> Rambachan (2015), 50-1.

<sup>123</sup> For convenience and out of respect for the later Vedānta tradition, I consistently refer to the Māṇḍūkya’s 12 prose verses as an Upaniṣad. The meaning of the word *upaniṣad* further justifies this decision. See note 234 on p89, below. See also Rambachan (2015), 200 n.2.



Chapter two extends and deepens this analysis by shifting focus to Śaṅkara's commentary on the texts introduced in chapter one. As both commentator and preceptor, this *ācārya* teaches us how to read the MU and GK. By teaching us to read these texts, I argue, he prepares us for the event (*prayoga*) of hearing the *śruti*. He does this, in part, by examining the relationship between words, universals, and particular entities in the world. This arises through a discussion of the relationship between AUM and all speech (MU 1). Only after one has properly understood scriptural kataphasis can one then begin to understand scriptural apophasis. Words positively measure Brahman, possessed of infinite measure (kataphasis). Negation removes these measures, enabling one to realize Brahman, without measure (apophasis). This arises through a discussion of the four “measures” of Brahman disclosed in MU 2-7.

It is one thing to suggest that the MU coordinates and harmonizes various *śruti* teachings, but quite another to unfold this in practice. Only through the latter does one begin to hear. Having outlined Śaṅkara's theological method in a somewhat abstract way in chapter two, chapter three examines this method in its practical application. By learning to *read* the Māṇḍūkya, one learns to *hear* the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads harmoniously. By learning to hear the *śruti*, one then begins to perceive the world differently, in light of *śruti*'s truth. Following Śaṅkara's lead, I first distinguish between sensuality in the state of deep sleep and the awakened state (the third and fourth “measures”), and only then examine how sensuality in the awakened state differs from sensuality in everyday wakefulness (the first “measure”).

We will return to these themes and insights in chapter six, where learning to hear the *śruti* coincides with being seen differently. The methods examined in Part One fold back on themselves. Given that one perceives the world differently (*apophatic measure*<sub>2</sub>) after one has learned to hear the *śruti* (*apophatic measure*<sub>1</sub>), it logically follows that a spiritual teacher

(*śrotriya*) perceives his/her student differently (*apophatic measure<sub>3</sub>*) than the student perceives himself/herself. Perceiving an/other as *this Self* (MU 2), the *guru* incarnates the Word (*śabda*), giving voice to the text, so that it may be heard (*śruti*).

## One: Learning to Hear Harmoniously: Method and Structure of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika

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“AUM”—that sacred syllable is all this. (MU 1)

The Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya teaches its reader how to read the Vedānta scriptures. It does so by arranging scriptural teachings, coordinating them with one another. Observing its structure and organization, one attends to its intentions. It models a way of reading scripture, coordinately, so that *śruti* might be heard, harmoniously.

This chapter introduces the text of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya, especially its organizational structure. It is a complex text consisting of four divisions. The first division includes twelve prose verses, which are widely considered to be revealed scripture (referred to as the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad). Interspersed between these twelve verses are metered verses, attributed to Gauḍapāda. While the three subsequent divisions are also attributed to Gauḍapāda (collectively referred to as the Gauḍapāda Kārika), significant theological discrepancies suggest that they were composed by different authors. Śaṅkara’s commentary, however, treats the entire text as one composition (collectively referred to as the Māṇḍūkya Kārika).

The twelve verses of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (MU) teach about the non-dual Brahman by modeling an apophatic theological method, which Śaṅkara mimics. In the first section below, I introduce the MU, including an original translation. An analysis of its structure follows. The twelve verses are organized into three divisions (MU 1, MU 2-7, and MU 8-12). Without overlooking the obvious import of their content, my focus is limited to the organizational structure insofar as this arrangement represents a hermeneutical key which unlocks the meaning of the text as a whole.

The second section introduces Gauḍapāda’s Kārika. The latter portions of the text contain views opposed by Śaṅkara in his commentary. In short, the later *prakaraṇas* suggest that there is

no distinction between the ordinary waking state and the dream state, arguing that what is seen in the waking state is merely an illusion, analogous to dream. Śaṅkara opposes this view. Thus, while his commentary on the first *prakaraṇa* is primarily concerned with distinguishing between the state of deep sleep and the enlightened state of *Turīya*, his disagreement with the perspective represented in *prakaraṇas* two through four require him to clearly distinguish between “perception” in the *turīya* and “seeing” in the quotidian waking state.

The final section turns to Śaṅkara’s analysis of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika (MK) as a whole. While later Vedāntins consider the twelve prose verses of the Māṇḍūkya to be an Upaniṣad, I argue that Śaṅkara does not. He simply treats the entire text as a single composition. The MK it is highly significant to him because it models the Vedānta methods of coordination and harmonization. In other words, Śaṅkara chooses to compose a commentary on the MK because it models the proper method by which to read scriptural texts. It epitomizes a spiritual practice which compels its reader to perform that practice for himself/herself by (re)reading the Vedānta scriptures. By learning to read, coordinately, one learns to hear the *śruti*, harmoniously.

### **The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad**

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (MU) is the shortest of all the Upaniṣads, consisting of just twelve prose verses. The full text is translated below. The Sanskrit text is reproduced in the Appendix (p344). It begins and ends with a reflection on the sacred syllable AUM (ॐ). Between these is a meditation on Brahman, or ultimate reality, which is said to be the Self (*Ātman*) possessed of four quarters, which are also called measures (MU8). The ideas presented in the MU, especially the middle section on the four quarters, suggest that the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad constitutes a substantial influence upon it, as I show later (p139). The two reflections on AUM

suggest the influence of the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. Like the MU, the Chāndogya Upaniṣad begins with a veneration of AUM and a tripartite reflection upon it.

Hajime Namakura dates the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad to the first two centuries CE, in contrast to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads, which predate the Buddha.<sup>124</sup> Richard King narrows the range of the MU to the second century CE.<sup>125</sup> According to Nakamura, there is no evidence prior to the eighth century to suggest that the twelve prose verses of the Māṇḍūkya were considered to be an Upaniṣad, even though the text itself had been a part of the tradition well before that time.<sup>126</sup> The first to do so seems to be Śaṅkara's student, Sureśvara.<sup>127</sup> Centuries later, Vedāntins such as Rāmānuja considered the entire first *prakaraṇa* of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika to be *śruti*.<sup>128</sup>

## The Text

<sup>1</sup> “AUM”—that sacred syllable is all this. Its explanation is: All that was, is, and shall be is simply AUM. And, moreover, that which transcends the three periods of time, that, too, is simply AUM.

<sup>2</sup> All this is certainly Brahman. This Self is Brahman. That [Brahman] is this Self, possessed of four quarters. <sup>3</sup> *Vaiśvānara* (the Universal One), who is fixed in the waking state, who is conscious of the external, who possesses seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys material things, is the first quarter. <sup>4</sup> *Taijasa* (the Luminous One), who is fixed in the dream state, who is conscious of the thing, who possesses seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys subtle things, is the second quarter. <sup>5</sup> Where the sleeper does not desire any desirable thing [and] does not see any dream, that is deep sleep. *Prājña* (The Wise One), who is fixed in the state of deep sleep, who is unified, who is a mass of consciousness, who consists of bliss, who is

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<sup>124</sup> Nakamura (1983), 42.

<sup>125</sup> King, Richard. *Early Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism: The Mahāyāna Context of the Gauḍapādīya-Kārika*. Suny Series in Religious Studies. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

<sup>126</sup> Nakamura, *A History of Early Vedānta Philosophy*. Vol. 2, 267-271.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

certainly an enjoyer of bliss, [and] who is the entrance to the mind, is the third quarter. <sup>6</sup> This is the Lord of all. This is the knower of all. This is the inner controller. This is the womb of all, indeed the origin and dissolution of beings. <sup>7</sup> They consider the fourth [to be]: Not conscious of internal things, not conscious of external things, not conscious of both (internal and external things), not a mass of consciousness, not conscious, not unconscious. Unseen, beyond the ordinary, ungrasped, undefined, unthought, not to be defined, whose essence is certainty of the one Self, tranquility of the manifold, pacified, auspicious, [and] non-dual. That is the Self; that is to be known.

<sup>8</sup> With respect to the syllables, AUM is this Self. With respect to the measures, the quarters are the measures and the measures are the quarters: “A”, “U”, [and] “M”. <sup>9</sup> *Vaiśvānara*, whose place is the waking state, is the first measure, “a”, [so named] because of obtaining (*āpti*) or because of being first (*ādimattva*). One who knows this certainly obtains all that is desired and becomes first. <sup>10</sup> *Taijasa*, whose place is the dream state, is the second measure, “u”, [so named] because of raising upwards (*utkarṣa*) or from equanimity (*ubhayatva*). One who knows this certainly elevates the expanse of knowledge, becomes equal, and no one in his/her lineage will be ignorant of Brahman. <sup>11</sup> *Prājña*, whose place is the state of deep sleep, is the third measure, “m”, [so named] because of measuring (*miti*) or merging (*apīti*). One who knows this verily measures all this and becomes its mergence.

<sup>12</sup> The Fourth is without measure, beyond the ordinary, the tranquility of the manifold, auspicious, [and] non-dual. Thus, AUM is indeed the Self. One who knows this enters the Self by the Self.

## The Score

Attending carefully to the text, one observes a certain rhythm and cadence within the MU. Like a musical score, its twelve verses contain patterns and tropes in variation. Śaṅkara’s commentary echoes these patterns, in somewhat of a spiritual call and response. Continuing the musical analogy, one might divide the opus into three movements: verse 1, vv.2-7, and vv.8-12. Each movement includes an overture, three positive descriptions, and a negative description. Like a fugue, there are thematic parallels between 2-7 and 8-12, interrupted by verse 6 which presents an exception to the symmetry. As a means of analyzing the structure of the MU, I begin with a preliminary look at verse 1, then 8-12, and finally 2-7. The full text is presented again on the next page, arranged in a score to emphasize its rhythmic symmetry.

	Section One	Section Two	Section Three
Preface	<sup>1</sup> “AUM”— that sacred syllable is all this. Its explanation is:	<sup>2</sup> All this is certainly Brahman. This Self is Brahman. That [Brahman] is this Self, possessed of four quarters.	<sup>8</sup> With respect to the syllables, AUM is this self. With respect to the measures, the quarters are the measures and the measures are the quarters: “A”, “U”, [and] “M”.
Positive description	<sup>1</sup> All that is ( <i>bhavat</i> )...	<sup>3</sup> <i>Vaiśvānara</i> (the Universal One/common to all), who is fixed in the waking state, who is conscious of the external, who possesses seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys material things, is the first quarter.	<sup>9</sup> <i>Vaiśvānara</i> , whose place is the waking state, is the first measure, “A”, [so named] because of obtaining ( <i>āpti</i> ) or because of being first ( <i>ādimattva</i> ). One who knows this certainly obtains all that is desired and becomes first.
Positive description	... was ( <i>bhūtam</i> ) ...	<sup>4</sup> <i>Taijasa</i> (the Luminous One), who is fixed in the dream state, who is conscious of the internal, who possesses seven limbs and nineteen mouths, and who enjoys subtle things, is the second quarter.	<sup>10</sup> <i>Taijasa</i> , whose place is the dream state, is the second measure, “U”, [so named] because of raising upwards ( <i>utkarṣa</i> ) or from equanimity ( <i>ubhayatva</i> , lit. “bothness”). One who knows this certainly elevates the expanse of knowledge, becomes equal, and no one in his/her lineage will be ignorant of Brahman.
Positive description	... and shall be ( <i>bhaviṣyat</i> ) is simply AUM ...	<sup>5</sup> Where the sleeper does not desire any desirable thing [and] does not see any dream, that is deep sleep. <i>Prājña</i> (The Wise One), who is fixed in the state of deep sleep, who is unified, who is a mass of consciousness, who consists of bliss, who is certainly an enjoyer of bliss, [and] who is the entrance to the mind, is the third quarter.	<sup>11</sup> <i>Prājña</i> , whose place is the state of deep sleep, is the third measure, “M”, [so named] because of measuring ( <i>miti</i> ) or merging ( <i>apīti</i> ). One who knows this verily measures all this and becomes its mergence.
[Exception]		<sup>6</sup> This is the Lord of all. This is the knower of all. This is the inner controller. This is the womb of all, indeed the origin and dissolution of beings.	
Negative description	And, moreover, that which transcends ( <i>atīta</i> ) the three periods of time, that, too, is simply AUM	<sup>7</sup> They consider the fourth [to be]: Not conscious of internal things, not conscious of external things, not conscious of both (internal and external things), not a mass of consciousness, not conscious, not unconscious. Unseen, beyond the ordinary, ungrasped, undefined, unthought, not to be defined, whose essence is certainty of the one Self, tranquility of the manifold, pacified, auspicious, [and] non-dual. That is the Self; that is to be known.	<sup>12</sup> The Fourth is without measure, beyond the ordinary, the tranquility of the manifold, auspicious, [and] non-dual. Thus, AUM is indeed the Self. One who knows this enters the Self by the Self.

The first verse of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad gives us our first impression of the importance of the number four in the text. AUM, we hear, is all that was, is, and shall be, but AUM is also that which transcends these. Hence, AUM is thrice defined positively (all that was, is, and shall be), and once negatively (something that is other than all that was, is, and shall be). It is described spatially (“all this”) as well as temporally. Like verse one, the second and third movements follow the pattern of three kataphatic descriptions followed by apophasis.

Skipping for the moment to the third section (vv.8-12), perhaps the first, most obvious thing we notice is that although AUM is said to have four quarters, AUM only has three letters. “A” is positively described in verse 9, “U” in verse 10, and “M” in verse 11. While we might expect verse 12 to tell us that the fourth quarter is the whole, “AUM,”<sup>129</sup> instead we are told what it is not. AUM is without measure (*amātra*), the stilling of the multiplicity, and is not-two (*advaita*). AUM is also positively described here as “auspicious” and as the Self.

Turning back to the second movement, one notices a parallel between verses 8-12 and verses 2-7. In verse two, we are told that the Self is fourfold. Verses 3, 4, and 5 describe this fourfold Self in positive terms while verse 7 describes the Self in wholly negative terms. Verse 6 enigmatically punctuates the score, disrupting the rhythm in mystic cadenza on Īśvara, the Lord of all and the womb of all. This divine syncopation presents itself as an exegetical challenge about which there is no shortage of debate.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> That is to say, one might expect here a discussion of the relationship between the letters of AUM discussed in verses 9-11 and the syllable AUM. In Śabara’s Bhāṣya on Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra I.1.5, for example, after asserting the eternal connection between word and meaning, the question is asked, “what is it that is called the ‘word’?” (Jha, I, 19). Śabara reasons that a word must be something more than sum of its letters. Although “cow” signifies an animal, the letters “c,” “o,” and “w” bear no relation to the signified animal. Śabara concludes that a “word” is the constituent letters together with hearer’s ‘impressions’ (*samskāras*) of the letters (Jha, I, 20). Therefore, since MU 9-11 tells us something about the constituent letters of AUM, one would expect verse 12 to tell us something about the relation of these letters to the syllable AUM.

<sup>130</sup> See King (1995), 10-11 and 24-27.



## Spiritual Practice

The organization of the text functions as a kind of hermeneutical key to unlock its meaning. The author or redactor of the text, in effect, organizes and refines specific teachings from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Chāndogya Upaniṣads. Even the individual verses coordinate multiple teachings from these Upaniṣads (p157). Thus, the text organizes and coordinates teachings at the macro level, drawing from multiple Upaniṣads, but also at the micro-level, drawing together diverse teachings contained within these Upaniṣads. The methodological form and structure of the text, therefore, is every bit as rich with meaning as the content presented through the words of the text.

The MU is well understood as a spiritual exercise: a pedagogy of apophatic theological practice and performance. If not scripture, it is certainly scriptural. Like a symphonic score, it unfolds various scriptural voices, coordinating them with one another in a harmonious concord. Like measures of a musical composition, its four measures beckon us to not simply *read* it, but to perform it.<sup>131</sup> Just as a musician must rehearse, an advaitin must practice this etude to perform its spiritual praxis. Its four quarters measure diverse teachings, notating them in a score waiting to be performed so that these voices might be heard, concordantly.

## The Gauḍapāda Kārika and its Complications

### The Four Prakaraṇas

At least since the time of Śaṅkara and likely well before, the twelve prose verses of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad have been connected with a collection of memorial metered verses (*Kārika*-s) organized into four topical sections or *prakaraṇas*. In most cases, as in Śaṅkara's commentary, the twelve prose verses are interspersed within the twenty-nine verses of the first

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<sup>131</sup> I am indebted to Francis Clooney who drew my attention to this analogy between “measures” in the MU and “measures” in a musical score.

section, usually referred to as the *Āgama-prakaraṇa*. The term *āgama* is sometimes used to refer to scripture itself, and other times used to refer to the traditional study of scripture. Hence, the title *Āgama-prakaraṇa* can be understood as either “the topical section about scripture,” or “the topical section about the traditional study of scripture.”

Traditionally, all four *prakaraṇas* have been attributed to Gauḍapāda, who is traditionally identified as Śaṅkara’s *parama-guru*, which is to say that he was the teacher of Govindapādācārya, who in turn was Śaṅkara’s *guru*.<sup>132</sup> Beyond the traditional attribution, little is known about the historical author or authors. As King notes, it is possible that “Gauḍapāda” is not a name at all. It could be an honorific title given to a teacher or teachers from the Gauḍa region (Bengal).<sup>133</sup>

There is wide scholarly consensus, however, that the four *prakaraṇas* were most likely not composed by the same person.<sup>134</sup> Based simply upon the styles and content of the *prakaraṇas*, it is more likely to be the work of three authors, composing *prakaraṇas* 1, 2-3, and 4, respectively. As King notes, it is not necessary to presume that the four *prakaraṇas* were composed in the chronological order in which they are traditionally arranged.<sup>135</sup> While the second and third *prakaraṇas* seem to be in full agreement with one another, significant differences in thought are observed when compared to the first *prakaraṇa*. The fourth is markedly different from the other three. It begins, for example, with a reverential homage to the

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<sup>132</sup> Wood, Thomas E. *The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad and the Āgama Śāstra: An Investigation into the Meaning of the Vedānta*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1990. Xiii.

<sup>133</sup> King (1995), 17.

<sup>134</sup> King, Nakamura, Dasgupta, Wood, Mayeda, and Fort hold this view.

<sup>135</sup> King (1995), 32.

Buddha and concludes with a second reference to the Buddha.<sup>136</sup> Unlike the other *prakaraṇas*, the fourth section lacks any explicit reference to the Upaniṣads.<sup>137</sup>

The first *prakaraṇa* closely adheres to the verses of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. It reflects upon each of the four states of consciousness described in MU 2-7: The *vaiśvānara* (the waking state), the *taijasa* (the dream state), the *prājñā* (the state of deep, dreamless sleep), and what is simply called the *turīya* (“the Fourth”). Śaṅkara comments upon each of these four states in the first *prakaraṇa*, as we would expect, and devotes most of his attention to the *turīya* and its apophatic language, also as we would expect.

The second and third *prakaraṇas*, however, devote much attention to the first two states, the *vaiśvānara* and the *taijasa*. The straightforward meaning of these verses suggests that there is ultimately no difference between the waking state and the dream state.<sup>138</sup> If this is true, however, then Śaṅkara’s commentary reverses the original author’s meaning.<sup>139</sup> In these *prakaraṇas*, he clarifies and emphasizes the distinction between the *vaiśvānara* and the *taijasa*. In effect, the flow of his commentary proceeds from a discussion of apophatic theology (i.e., the important but subtle distinctions between various meanings of negative speech) to a discussion of epistemology

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<sup>136</sup> MK 4.1 and 4.99.

<sup>137</sup> Śaṅkara emphasizes this point in his introduction to the MKBh and again in his introduction to the fourth *prakaraṇa*.

<sup>138</sup> E.g., “The wise say that the states of waking and dream are same, in view of the similarity of the objects (seen in both the states) and in view of the well-known ground of inference.” MK 2.5, Panoli 361.

<sup>139</sup> In the introduction to his *Critique of the Brahma Sūtras*, P.M. Modi makes the important distinction between a *bhāṣyakāra* (i.e., a commentator), a *guru* (teacher), and an *ācārya* (i.e., an authoritative doctor of a tradition). While Modi’s stated intention in that work is to critique Śaṅkara’s commentary in order to retrieve what he considers to be Bādarāyaṇa’s intended meaning, he is careful also to add that Śaṅkara is not simply a commentator but is an authoritative doctor. It is fitting to make this distinction here, also. Subsequent adherents of the advaita Vedānta tradition regarded Śaṅkara to be more than a commentator. It should not trouble us, then, that his commentary seems to reverse the straightforward meaning of the Kārika, especially taking into account that Śaṅkara does not consider any portion of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad or Kārika to be revealed scripture. See Modi, P. M. *A Critique of the Brahma Sūtra* (3.2.11-4). Bhavnagar: Modi, 1943, especially vol. I, xvi-xvii.

and “measures,” before turning to a defense of direct perception of actual particulars in opposition to subjective idealist and nihilist opponents. Like Śaṅkara’s commentary, therefore, chapter three of this dissertation proceeds from discussions of apophysis to epistemology to direct perception of particulars.

The fourth *prakaraṇa*, considerably longer than the other three, makes only tangential, if any, reference to the Māṇḍūkya Text. The Mahāyāna Buddhist influence upon the text is considerable, as Richard King demonstrates.<sup>140</sup> Śaṅkara explains that the purpose of the fourth *prakaraṇa* is to present logical, non-Vedic arguments in order to refute non-Vedic reasoning that runs counter to non-duality.<sup>141</sup> In his commentary on the penultimate verse of the text, Śaṅkara states that while what was taught by the Buddha comes very near to non-dualism, “this Supreme Reality, which is non-dual, is to be experientially known only in the Vedānta texts.”<sup>142</sup>

#### Gauḍapāda as Teacher (Ācārya)

Despite ample evidence suggesting that the four *prakaraṇas* of the MK were composed by three different authors, it is nevertheless clear from Śaṅkara’s commentary that he inherited the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad embedded within the *Āgama-prakaraṇa* and he treats it, together with the other three *prakaraṇas* as a single text with four chapters. It is far from clear, however, that he regarded the twelve prose verses of the Māṇḍūkya as *śruti*, as I argue below (p71). Though he never cites the MU in his Upaniṣadic commentaries,<sup>143</sup> he does quote from Gauḍapāda’s Kārika at least twice.<sup>144</sup> In his commentary on Brahmasūtra I.4.14, he quotes the entirety of MK III.15:

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<sup>140</sup> King (1995).

<sup>141</sup> MKBh Intro, Panoli 301-302.

<sup>142</sup> MKBh 4.99.

<sup>143</sup> The same is true of the *Maitrāyaṇī Upaniṣad*. One might expect some reference to the *catuspāt* in BUBh II.1 on the discourse between Gārgya and Ajātaśatru regarding the sleeping man in or in BUBh IV.3 on the same topic. Likewise, one might expect some reference to it in BUBh V.14. Since Śaṅkara tends to quote primarily from *śruti*

And thus, those who know the tradition say: “A Creation [theory] which is put forth by one or another [example] such as clay, iron, spark of fire, etc., that is a means of introduction. Difference does not exist on any account.”<sup>145</sup>

In his commentary on Brahmasūtra II.1.9, he quotes the entirety of MK I.16:

With respect to this,<sup>146</sup> it is said by the teachers who know the tradition of the meaning of Vedānta: “When the individual self, asleep due to beginningless *māyā* is awakened, then he perceives the unborn, sleepless, dreamless nonduality.”<sup>147</sup>

Based on these two passages, it is evident that Śaṅkara considered the Māṇḍūkya Kārika to be a humanly composed work. Although he does not use the name *Gauḍapāda*, he refers to the author as an *ācārya* (an expert teacher),<sup>148</sup> and as a knower of the Advaita Vedānta tradition. His use of the plural form, *ācāryaiḥ* (“by the teachers”), could indicate that he recognized the composite nature of the Kārika. More likely, though, the plural form is simply honorific. Regardless, it is clear that if one desires to know the tradition, the Māṇḍūkya Kārika provides a reliable source, according to Śaṅkara. It teaches us how to read, so that we might hear.

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sources the fact that he does not cite the Māṇḍūkya prose provides compelling (but inconclusive) evidence that he does not consider the text to be *śruti*.

<sup>144</sup> Andrew Fort identifies the Bhāṣya on Chāndogya Upaniṣad VII.12.1 as a third reference to the Māṇḍūkya Kārika. Here, Śaṅkara praises what is discussed by the four chapters by those who are followers of the tradition (सम्प्रदायमनुसरद्विरूपनिबद्धं प्रकरणचतुष्टयेन, Panoli, v4, 900). Fort takes this as a reference to the four *prakaraṇas* of the Gauḍapādīya Kārika. See Fort, 46. However, while Fort may certainly be correct, it is difficult to be certain that *prakaraṇa-catustayena* in this instance refers to the Māṇḍūkya Kārika.

<sup>145</sup> BUBh I.4.14.

<sup>146</sup> The topic of the section is the *satkāryavāda* doctrine in light of the relationship between the Self and the three states (waking, dream, and deep sleep). The thought of the *Agama Prakaraṇa* can be seen throughout the Bhāṣya on this verse.

<sup>147</sup> BUBh II.1.9

<sup>148</sup> See note 139.

The entire text, Śāṅkara explains, explicates the first sentence: “All this is the letter AUM.” It enfolds what the rest of the text unfolds. He makes no distinction between the prose portions and the verse portions, noting simply that the text consists of four chapters beginning with “the letter AUM”. He refers to the text neither as *śruti* nor as an *upaniṣad*.

According to Wilhelm Halbfass, “Śāṅkara considers neither Gauḍapāda’s verses nor the prose of the Māṇḍūkya “Upaniṣad” to be *śruti*.”<sup>149</sup> As he explains, Śāṅkara’s comments on the structure and method of Gauḍapāda’s text are “very significant insofar as the relationship between reason and revelation are concerned.”<sup>150</sup> Halbfass’ conclusion begs the question: Why has Śāṅkara chosen to comment on the text? Why is this text significant to him?<sup>151</sup>

Śāṅkara describes the text as “a synopsis of the essence of the meaning of Vedānta...”<sup>152</sup> He describes the Bhagavad Gītā in a strikingly similar manner: “This Gītā-Śāstra, being a synopsis of the essence of the meaning of the Veda in concise form...”<sup>153</sup> It is reasonable to conclude that, like the Gītā, Śāṅkara does not regard the Māṇḍūkya Kārika as *śruti*, but does

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<sup>149</sup> Halbfass, Wilhelm. *Studies in Kumārila and Śāṅkara*. Reinbek: Verlag für Orientalistische Fachpublikationen, 1983, 36.

<sup>150</sup> Halbfass (1983), 35.

<sup>151</sup> Hajime Nakamura, in contrast, argues that Śāṅkara does consider the text to be *śruti*, but that the commentary on the text was not written by Śāṅkara. He reasons that if Śāṅkara considered the text to be important enough to write a commentary thereupon, then he would have cited it in his commentaries, which he does not. While disagreeing with Nakamura’s analysis of the evidence, he nevertheless raises an important point: If Śāṅkara does not consider the MU to be *śruti*, then why would he write a commentary on it? Nakamura (1983), 42ff.

<sup>152</sup> MUBh Introduction. The word “synopsis” does not quite capture the sense of *saṅgraha*, which derives from the root  $\sqrt{\text{grah}}$ , meaning ‘to seize, to grasp’. When Śāṅkara uses the term *Vedānta*, it typically refers to the upaniṣads themselves. The description used here is not one that we would expect to see if Śāṅkara considered the text to be revealed scripture. It is what we might expect to see, though, if Śāṅkara considered the text to be a pedagogical work by a human *ācārya* teaching the essence of Vedāntic thought.

<sup>153</sup> BGBh Intro. It is surprising that Śāṅkara describes the Gītā as *śāstra*, which is more commonly used by him to designate scripture. Śāṅkara does not seem, though, consider the Gītā to be a revealed text, and is likely using the word in a broader sense, and certainly as an honorific.

consider it to be an important text, authored by an *ācārya* who knows the tradition.<sup>154</sup> It is a pedagogical text, teaching readers traditional methods of scriptural interpretation. While teaching us to read, it trains us to hear. As Halbfass suggests, Gauḍapāda’s didactic methods were “subsequently included in and adapted to [Śaṅkara’s] understanding of *śruti* itself.”<sup>155</sup> The import of the text, therefore, lies in the apophatic method it models. Hence, I focus on the pedagogical method disclosed in the text, especially the role of sense perception therein.

### **Harmoniously Coordinating Particulars**

Coordination (*Upasamhāra*) and Harmonization (*Samanvaya*)

*Upasamhāra* is a theological practice whereby one coordinates two or more particular scriptural teachings on Brahman. Bādarāyaṇa describes this practice in section III.3 of his Brahmasūtra, which P.M. Modi describes as “the most important portion of the entire Brahmasūtra.”<sup>156</sup> Śaṅkara’s Uttaramīmāṃsā tradition insists that diverse teachings on Brahman must be coordinated with one another. By grasping the harmony between these teachings, one grasps the proper meaning of *śruti*. This method of coordination is only properly learned from within the tradition, from a qualified teacher who passes down these hermeneutic methods through the succession of teachers. Due to the nature of Brahman, Anantanand Rambachan explains, “unusual [pedagogical] methods, with which a teacher must be familiar, are a necessity, and these are received through immersion in a tradition.”<sup>157</sup> Even the Upaniṣads themselves,

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<sup>154</sup> Sureśvara refers to MU 6 as *śruti*. Sureśvara does, however, make a distinction between the prose portion of the text and the verse section; we find no such distinction in any of Śaṅkara’s works.

<sup>155</sup> Halbfass (1983), 36.

<sup>156</sup> Modi, (1943). I, xiii.

<sup>157</sup> Rambachan (2015), 47.

Rambachan notes, “are structured in the form of dialogues between students and their teachers.”<sup>158</sup>

Building upon Modi’s *Critique*, Francis Clooney has shown that Vedānta’s emphasis on coordination (*upasamhāra*) and harmonization (*samanvaya*) establishes a “tension between knowledge as skill and knowledge as insight.”<sup>159</sup> For the comparative theologian, acquiring this skill is necessarily but fruitfully difficult. It requires attentiveness to the methods of Vedānta and its modes of organization. One cannot simply read the texts, extract doctrines or ideas, and translate or transport these to a different context. At the same time, though, it indicates a more profound value of comparative theology. One learns new theological methods, new skills, and new ways to approach texts other-wise, having acquired not simply the other’s knowledge, but the other’s wisdom regarding the skillful arrangement of texts and the paths they lay for us.

By learning the skill of *upasamhāra*, one learns how to read the Upaniṣads. Having learned this method, one can then read other texts, too. Having learned to hear *sruti*, harmoniously, one can then train that refined ear elsewhere, coordinating other polyphonic voices. Clooney states: “To do/know Advaita entails becoming—or being made into—a certain kind of person who makes distinctions in certain ways, thereby transforming all of her or his relations.”<sup>160</sup> The methods of *upasamhāra* and *samanvaya* change how we read and hear—all texts and voices.

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* 38. There are, of course, numerous exceptions.

<sup>159</sup> Clooney (1993), 73.

<sup>160</sup> Clooney (1993), 11.



## Seeing and Grasping Together, Concordantly

Given the importance Modi and Clooney attribute to *upasamhāra*, I argue that the MK is a significant text for Śaṅkara because of the apophatic theological method it models and teaches. The twelve verses of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad coordinate particular meditations on AUM from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad with the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad’s meditations on consciousness in waking, dream, and deep sleep. It does so not to merge them together, as if their meaning was identical. Rather, it harmonizes them, thereby cultivating a particular religious praxis of theological listening. I suggest that this is why Śaṅkara describes the MK as *vedānta-artha-sāra-saṅgraha*. Aided by its teachings, one “grasps together” (*saṅgraha*) *śruti*’s diverse teachings on Brahman. Drawing them into one text, it offers a *synopsis*—not a *synthesis*—whereby various teachings might be seen with the same eye.

For example, in his commentary on MU 1, Śaṅkara provides a litany of aphoristic scriptural quotations, including Taittirīya Upaniṣad I.8.1, “AUM is Brahman,” and Chāndogya Upaniṣad II.2.23, “All this is but AUM.” He does so in order to model the skill of coordination, not simply because they mention AUM. His intention is certainly not to supplant these teachings with an abridged synthesis, but to draw them together so they might be seen together, synoptically, and thus heard, harmoniously. He does not claim that these passages have the same meaning, as if one could simply read *one*, disregarding the others. Each particular teaching on Brahman is unique and, thus, indispensable.

While the coordination of various texts assert the underlying identity of that which is signified by the names “Brahman,” “AUM,” and “Ātman,” it does not follow that the names are synonymous with one another. In one context, for example, I am called by the name “Brad.” In another, I am called “father” and in another, “son.” If one is to grasp who I am, these names must be understood coordinately, without losing sight of the particular distinctions between these

names, which are certainly not synonymous. The differences are retained, but are heard, concordantly. Likewise, each particular passage coordinated by the MU must be understood in its own right, in its own context. And yet, each text must also be heard in coordinated harmony with the others: a symphony of distinct voices that are heard (*śruti*) concordantly.

### Learning to Hear, Harmoniously

In effect, our understanding of any one particular passage remains provisional. Upasaṃhāra is a practice of back-and-forth reading, a kind of apophysis by means of kataphasis.<sup>161</sup> Following a litany of scriptural references and brief explanation, Śaṅkara cites Chāndogya VI.1.4: “The transformation is a verbal handle, a name.”<sup>162</sup> Unlike the other passages cited, CU VI.1 makes no mention of AUM. In an intimate pedagogical discourse between father and son, Uddālaka explains to Śvetaketu that by perceiving a lump of clay, one is able to perceive every modification of that clay, such as a bowl or statue, etc. These modifications of clay have distinct forms and distinct names, but are clay, nevertheless. Realizing that they are clay does *not* mean, of course, that the distinct forms cease to be distinct. Rather, the point is that these distinct forms derive from the same source (clay) and do not cease to be clay even in their particular forms of lump, bowl, statue, etc.

By coordinating the scriptures in this way, Śaṅkara effectively compels us to go back and *hear* the passages about AUM in light of the teaching between Uddālaka and his son, even though the latter passage makes no mention of AUM. Likewise, coordinating these passages with MU 1 shapes how we hear CU VI.1. It should be heard in its own right, and in its particular

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<sup>161</sup> See Suthren Hirst, Jacqueline. 2005. *Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 145-151.

<sup>162</sup> Olivelle, Patrick. 1998. *The Early Upaniṣads: Annotated Text and Translation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 247.

context, just as a bowl is a bowl, a lump is a lump, a statue is a statue, etc. But the particular meaning also contributes to a larger meaning, from a different perspective, just as a bowl is clay, a lump is clay, and a statue is clay. The point is not to abstract a universal meaning from particular texts. Rather, the point is that one grasps the meaning of each particular teaching *only* when the teachings are heard, concordantly. Their particularity is neither discarded nor synthesized into a unison. Rather, the multiplicity of different *śruti* voices are heard (*śravaṇa*) in harmony.

Each of the three movements of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad models *upasamhāra*. The first section coordinates a litany of teachings on AUM, which Śaṅkara has, in turn, coordinated with the pedagogical encounter of Uddālaka and Śvetaketu in CU VI. The second section coordinates various teachings on the states of waking, sleep, and deep sleep drawn from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. The third section then coordinates the first two sections. Therefore, the Māṇḍūkya models and performs the skill of *upasamhāra*, which Śaṅkara likewise models.

In her dissertation on Śaṅkara's Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya, Haesook Ra closely examines how the teacher's use of scriptural citations changes over the course of the text. As Ra shows, Śaṅkara's citations early in the text are typically fewer in number, are more closely and obviously associated with the root text (such as the litany of citations on AUM discussed above), and are accompanied by relatively lengthy explanations. Later in the text, his citations tend to be accompanied by brief explanations, or none at all; they begin to draw from passages that are more subtly connected to the root text (such as the citation to CU VI.1 discussed above).<sup>163</sup> By doing so, Śaṅkara is not simply explicating the meaning of the root text through his commentary;

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<sup>163</sup> Ra, Haesook. *Sankara as Writer: Method and Style in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya*. 2011. Collections of the Harvard University Archives. Dissertations.

he models, performs, and teaches the skill of *upasamhāra*, cumulatively over time. Learning to read in this way, one cultivates a refined ear. Through *upasamhāra*, one learns to hear.<sup>164</sup>

If my own emphasis at times seems to overstress the structure and method of the texts, it is because these are too often underemphasized and appreciated in studies on Śaṅkara. As highlighted in my review of the literature on Śaṅkara in the Introduction, a growing number of scholars, such as Swami Satchidānandendra, Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, Haesook Ra, and Francis Clooney recognize that Śaṅkara does not (primarily) write commentaries in order to explain the meaning of those texts, thereby replacing scriptural texts with his own; instead, he writes, as a teacher, in order to teach the reader how to prepare to hear those texts. He teaches us a theological method for the sake of theo→logy, which is to say, hearing and receiving the graceful revelation of those texts. The method he teaches is not his own creation, but one which he has received from his *sampradāya* (succession of teachers). Because the Māṇḍūkya teaches this method as well, coordinating and harmonizing a multiplicity of particular *śruti* teachings, Śaṅkara describes it as *vedānta-artha-sāra-saṅgraha*, “a synopsis of the essence of the meaning of Vedānta.” Learning to grasp these teachings together, we learn to hear.

## Conclusions

As this chapter has shown, the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya is a highly complex text. Interspersed in the twelve verses of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, we find the first of four *prakaraṇas* traditionally attributed to Gauḍapāda. Following this are two *prakaraṇas*, likely composed by a

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<sup>164</sup> Hajime Nakamura’s interpretation of the evidence is quite the reverse of my own. He argues that Śaṅkara considers the MU to be a “relatively unimportant” Upaniṣad, which is why, Nakamura reasons, Śaṅkara never cites the MU in his other commentaries. I argue, though, that he does not cite the text because he does not consider it to be *śruti*. He writes a commentary on the text, however, because he considers it to be an important methodological text. It models and performs the skill of *upasamhāra* which is central to Vedānta as Uttaramīmāṃsā. He does not cite the text in his other commentaries because it is not a text that should be coordinated with scriptural texts. Rather, it is a text that coordinates scriptural texts.

different author than the first, which is in turn followed by another *prakaraṇa* which is most likely the composition of yet another author. Śaṅkara, however, treats all four *prakaraṇas* together with the Māṇḍūkya prose verses as one single text, even as he subtly argues against the views in *prakaraṇas* 2-4.

Unlike the first *prakaraṇa*, the latter three suggest that there is no real distinction between objects seen in the waking state and objects seen during dreams, since both are illusory. Śaṅkara opposes this view. While his primary objective in the first *prakaraṇa* is to distinguish between the states of deep sleep and the *turīya*, his disagreement with the later *prakaraṇas* compel him to emphasize the veracity of perception and the reality of particular external objects. Hence, his method in this text proceeds from a discussion of apophysis to a discussion of epistemology and the perception of particular entities. In Chapter Three, I model this process in my own analysis of Śaṅkara's commentary.

By examining the structure of the MU text, it becomes clear that the twelve verses may be divided into three units which feature a pattern of three positive descriptions followed by a negative description. The first unit orients the text through various teachings on AUM, drawn primarily from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, which are coordinated into a single verse (MU 1). The second unit (MU 2-7) draw from a range of teachings found in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, coordinating these into a concise meditation. The third unit (MU 8-12) models the Vedānta practice of coordination. Rather than simply combining or summarizing these teachings, the very structure of the text reveals a method by which one can understand these diverse teachings in light of one another.

The import of the text, from Śaṅkara's perspective, is primarily in the method that it models. While he does not consider the text to be *śruti*, he nevertheless considers it to be a text

which is important for the tradition because it teaches readers how to coordinate various scriptural teachings with one another. In other words, the purpose of the text is not to teach about Brahman. Rather, it exemplifies a method by which to know Brahman, which can be known *only* from the scriptures of Vedānta when properly heard, coordinately and harmoniously.<sup>165</sup>

For these reasons, my focus remains primarily fixed on the method of the text, especially the centrally important role played by sense perception in that method. Rather than extracting and decontextualizing Śaṅkara's theology, I emphasize that his teaching is inextricable from his method. To that end, the next chapter narrows focus to Śaṅkara's method in the context of his theological tradition. Chapter three then examines this method in practice, coordinating passages from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad so that they may be heard, harmoniously.

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<sup>165</sup> MKBh 4.99.

## Two: Śaṅkara's Apophatic Theological Method

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*The 'system' of Advaita is a well-planned event, not a theory.*<sup>166</sup>

As we have seen, the twelve verses of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad can be divided into three units. The first draws together teachings on AUM from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, the second unit coordinates various passages from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad on the *catuspāt* doctrine, and the third harmonizes these two meditations. Here, my focus narrows to Śaṅkara's apophatic theological method through a close, analytical reading of his commentary on the first of these three units, including his introduction to the text as a whole. My intention is neither to explicate the Māṇḍūkya text by examining, for example, its indebtedness to the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, nor is my intention to explicate Śaṅkara's commentary thereupon. Rather, my intention is to expound Śaṅkara's methodology, *viz.*: What does he consider to be the goal and subject matter of the text? What is his philosophy of language and why does he discuss the relationship between signifiers and signified given that the root text does not seem to introduce this topic? What is his method of teaching the text? Prior to this, I begin with a more methodological discussion regarding my approach to Śaṅkara's writings in light of other scholars, most notably Francis X. Clooney, SJ.

The first section builds upon my assertion (p13) that Śaṅkara's apophasis culminates in a *sensual* event rather than a *meaning* event. Thus, it reflects the first meaning of "apophatic measure" (i.e., method, p3). The second section examines Śaṅkara's commentary on AUM (MU 1). Here, I reflect upon AUM as an apophatic measure primarily in the first sense but folding into the second (i.e., sensuality). The final section examines Śaṅkara's method of "progressive dissolution" (apophatic measure<sub>1</sub>), by which one both measures and unmeasures Brahman, gradually awakening to attentive sensuality (apophatic measure<sub>2</sub>).

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<sup>166</sup> Clooney (1993), 102.

## Sensual Event: From Reading to Hearing

### Textual Knowledge as Event

Contrary to what we might assume, Śaṅkara's intention as a commentator is not primarily to explain what the text means. To do so would imply that he is able to articulate the meaning of *śruti* more truly or more clearly than the eternal words of the Veda are able to do. His commentaries do not seek to add anything to the text, but rather to equip the *bhāṣya* reader with the tools necessary to read the root text so that the *śruti* might be heard.<sup>167</sup> Naturally, though, he also seeks to dispel wrong readings along the way. His scholastic methods teach readers how to read and think in accordance with his Mīmāṃsā tradition.<sup>168</sup> Śaṅkara's commentaries prepare his readers to hear scripture's revelation; he allows the text to speak for itself.<sup>169</sup>

This is certainly true with the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya. Neither the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad nor the Gauḍapāda Kārika purports to give a philosophy of language, and yet Śaṅkara's commentary unfolds a philosophy of language insofar as this is propaedeutic to reading the text properly. The MK's apophatic discourse presumes that its reader will understand the operative relations between signifier and signified, particularly when the former is negated. Moreover, the philosophical topics that he does take up for discussion are discussed only insofar as they are necessary to understand how to read the negative speech found in the text itself. The

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<sup>167</sup> As Ra has shown, Śaṅkara often has very little to say about passages that are of central importance to his theological perspectives, choosing instead to prepare the reader in advance. Śaṅkara's expertise as a commentator shines in his ability to allow the text to speak for itself. Ra (2011)

<sup>168</sup> On this topic, see Clooney, Francis X. 1998. "Scholasticisms in Encounter: Working through a Hindu Example." In *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón, 177–200. Albany: State University of New York Press.

<sup>169</sup> Naturally, Śaṅkara's method is different with the Brahmasūtra Bhāṣya, in which he *does* interpret and explain the text. Sūtra texts, though, are starkly different kinds of texts than Śruti and Smṛti texts.



philosophical portions are strictly pragmatic. They equip one to read the MK, which trains one's ear to hear the *śruti*.

As I have discussed elsewhere, Śāṅkara does not consider scriptural contemplation to be an effective method of realizing *brahmanjñāna* because realization requires one to cede all agency, action, and effort to the *śruti*, whereas contemplation requires agency and effort.<sup>170</sup> For Śāṅkara and his theological tradition, scripture is an authoritative means of knowledge because it is eternal, and because of its independence from other means of knowledge.<sup>171</sup> It instructs us with respect to things that cannot be perceived (p56).<sup>172</sup> If one does not grasp the scripture's meaning, contemplation or meditation may be beneficial, but these must be followed by direct perception (*śravaṇa*) of *śruti*.<sup>173</sup> For one who is properly prepared to hear the *śruti* from a teacher who is a knower of Brahman, the meaning will be clear and direct. If one does not grasp the meaning upon the first hearing, then there is no reason why multiple hearings *alone* will help.<sup>174</sup> While considerable effort and learning may be required to train one's ear to hear the *śruti*, final realization only dawns in a moment of grace, devoid of all effort, agency, and action.<sup>175</sup>

In his *Theology After Vedānta*, Francis Clooney explains:

... the final resolution of the tension between the Text and its truth, between reading and the products of reading, cannot be expressed as the content of a text; the truth remains a well-guarded and exhaustingly prepared-for event

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<sup>170</sup> Bannon (2014).

<sup>171</sup> Jaimini, PMS I.1.5.

<sup>172</sup> BGBh 18:66; Cf. Śābara, PMSBh I.1.4 and 5.

<sup>173</sup> Upad I.18.

<sup>174</sup> UMSBh IV.1.1-2.

<sup>175</sup> Bannon (2014), 53-56.

which can occur only in the practiced, educated reader. The ‘system’ of Advaita is a well-planned event, not a theory.<sup>176</sup>

As previously mentioned (p56), Clooney draws an analogy from the later commentator Amalānanda, who compares the cultivation of a refined musical ear to gradually becoming “skilled in hearing the upaniṣads.”<sup>177</sup> Even highly skilled commentators, like Śaṅkara and Amalānanda, cannot substitute for the event of hearing *śruti*. Their intention is to prepare us to pay attention, in order that we might hear what *śruti* intends.<sup>178</sup>

### *Prayoga* and Apophatic Performance

To understand Advaita Vedānta as Uttara Mīmāṃsā is to understand the event of reading the text in a unique way. In *Thinking Ritually*, Clooney has underscored the centrality of the event of the sacrifice for Jaimini and the later Prābhākara school. He summarizes:

*Prayoga* is an event: a particular happening in a particular time and place, done by a particular person. It is where the many ritual connections are realized and actualized. There is no abstract *prayoga* because *prayoga* is by definition an occurrence in time and space.<sup>179</sup>

The importance of carefully preparing for and structuring this event cannot be overstated and is precisely the *raison d’être* of Mīmāṃsā. This inquiry into *dharma* is an inquiry into the proper arrangement of word, purpose and action.<sup>180</sup> And yet, all of this remains propaedeutic and subservient to the actual performance of the sacrificial event.

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<sup>176</sup> Clooney (1993), 102.

<sup>177</sup> Clooney (1993), 127.

<sup>178</sup> On the interpenetration of attention and intention, see p223 below.

<sup>179</sup> Clooney (1990), 117 (Cf. PMS IV.2.23).

<sup>180</sup> PMS I.1.1-2.

Similarly, I argue, Uttara Mīmāṃsā prepares readers for the event of hearing Vedānta scriptures. Just as “there is no abstract *prayoga*” in Pūrva Mīmāṃsā, there is no abstract *prayoga* in Uttara Mīmāṃsā. The event of *hearing*<sup>181</sup> the *śruti* is an occurrence in time and space. As such, it requires an enlightened teacher who embodies the scripture, giving it voice so that it may be heard, directly and particularly.<sup>182</sup>

Like the event of sacrificial performance, Vedānta’s *prayoga* is an event that requires much preparation, acquiring and developing the skills necessary to hear the scripture.<sup>183</sup> As Wilhelm Halbfass explains, reasoning and scriptural exegesis are essential prerequisites which bring about receptivity for meaning, but neither anticipate nor replace “that insight which can only result from the ‘hearing’ of the Upaniṣadic statements.”<sup>184</sup> In other words, just as Pūrva Mīmāṃsā prepares one for the event of sacrificial performance, Uttara Mīmāṃsā prepares one for the event of hearing the Upaniṣads.<sup>185</sup>

For Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa, an earlier contemporary of Śaṅkara in the Pūrva Mīmāṃsā tradition, the event of reading the Veda itself becomes a ritualized action. As he explains, a verbal injunction must indicate three factors which are actually to be brought into being (*arthi bhāvanā*): (1) what is to be done, (2) the instrumental means for that, and (3) the method or

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<sup>181</sup> On the significance of *śravaṇa* and its prioritization over *manana* and *nididhyāsana*, see Suthren Hirst, Jacqueline. 1996. “Strategies of Interpretation: Śaṅkara’s Commentary on Bṛhadāraṇyakopaniṣad.” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116 (1): 58–75.

<sup>182</sup> Bannon (2014), 53-56.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. UMSBh IV.1.1-2.

<sup>184</sup> Halbfass (1983), 58.

<sup>185</sup> Hearing is a *pramāṇa*. *Śruti* is a *pramāṇa*. Reading and exegesis prepare us to hear the *śruti*, but they are not *pramāṇa*-s.

process by which it is to be accomplished.<sup>186</sup> For example, (1) rice is brought into being (2) by cooking, which is accomplished (3) by burning fuel for the fire.<sup>187</sup> In order for the event of the sacrifice to actually take place, however, the scripture must bring into being an agent who will perform the sacrifice. Hence, the verbal injunction itself brings three factors into being (*śābdī bhāvanā*): (1) a motivation to perform the sacrifice (2) through knowledge that one is enjoined to perform it (3) by *arthavāda*-s which extol the excellence of performing the sacrifice.<sup>188</sup> In other words, the *ārambhaḥ* or commencement of the sacrifice is extended back to the origination of the desire to perform the sacrifice, which itself is a result of the event of reading.<sup>189</sup>

Among other reasons, this is significant because it reduces the human agent to a means while privileging the *śruti* itself as the true agent, since the word itself brings into being the motivation to sacrifice.<sup>190</sup> Ritualization, then, is theorized at the level of word and meaning. The words themselves bring into being an inclination to perform the ritual, just as the proper performance of the ritual brings-into-being the results of the sacrifice.<sup>191</sup> Hence, the scripture is the true agent of the sacrifice, not the human sacrificer, despite the fact that the latter is necessary to bring the sacrifice (and, thus, *dharma*) into being. Likewise, the scripture is the agent of

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<sup>186</sup> Kumārila Bhaṭṭa, *Ślokavārtika*. Translated by Sir Ganganatha Jha. Bibliotheca Indica; No. 146. Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal. Aphorisms 24-26.251-252, page 532.

<sup>187</sup> Kumārila, Aphorisms 24-26.288-90, pages 537-538. I have chosen the simplest of several examples Kumārila provides, including *vaidika* and *vyāvahārika* examples. The factors function on numerous levels, such as: (1) heaven is to be brought about (2) by means of a particular sacrifice (*Jyotiṣṭoma*) (3) through procedures (*itikartavyatā*) indicated in the Brāhmaṇas. I am indebted to Francis Clooney and Larry McCrae for these insights.

<sup>188</sup> Kṛṣṇayajvan, *Mīmāṃsā-Paribhāṣā of Kṛṣṇa Yajvan*. Translated by Bhabani Prasad Bhattacharya. Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1998, 43.

<sup>189</sup> Francis Clooney comments: “That desire to perform the sacrifice is one of the conditions needing to be fulfilled if the ‘beginning’ is to occur.” For Kumārila, the significance of the discussion seems to be a need to link *arthavādas* with injunctions.

<sup>190</sup> Kṛṣṇayajvan (1998), 42-44.

<sup>191</sup> See also Kumārila’s *Tantravārttika* I.2.1-7.

revelation of Brahman, not the human *ācārya* or *guru*, despite the fact that the latter is necessary to utter the words of scripture directly and particularly to a student.<sup>192</sup>

Although Śāṅkara explicitly rejects an understanding of scriptural study as a practice akin to Brāhmaṇical sacrifices, he consistently does so for one and only one reason: because *brahmanjñāna* cannot be the result of any cause.<sup>193</sup> He avers that if *brahmanjñāna* were the result of some cause, then it would be something that could be brought into being and would, consequently, be something that could cease to be.<sup>194</sup> What gives the *karma kāṇḍa* (sacrificial portion) of the scripture its authority is the fact that it reveals *dharma*, which is imperceptible, and it is imperceptible because it is something which is to be brought into being and, thus, does not exist at the time it is to be known.<sup>195</sup> *Dharma*, though, is not an effect; it is the enactment of the relationship of word, referents, and acts.<sup>196</sup>

The Upaniṣads, however, do not enjoin actions and therefore do not tell us about something to-be-done.<sup>197</sup> Scripture has no authority, however, to tell us anything about the way

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<sup>192</sup> Bannon (2014), 53-55.

<sup>193</sup> *Upadeśasāhasrī* I.18.19. See also Rambachan (1991). Clooney comments that “Interestingly, one might argue that the Prabhākara view of sacrifice likewise resists seeing the performance as primarily the cause of an effect; it is, in itself, its own accomplishments, effects being secondary.”

<sup>194</sup> MKBh 1.2. See also Clooney, Francis X. “Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedānta's Theology of Karma” in the *Journal of Religion*, 1989. As Clooney shows, if *brahmanjñāna* could cease, this would introduce the possibility of rebirth into *saṃsāra* even after liberation, which would pose for Vedāntins, Clooney argues, a problem of theodicy. Furthermore, see Modi (1943). Modi's core argument is that Bādarāyaṇa understands Brahmanjñāna to be the result of scripturally rooted meditation on Brahman whereas Śāṅkara's commentary thereupon intentionally obscures Bādarāyaṇa's meaning.

<sup>195</sup> Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>196</sup> Thanks to Francis Clooney for pointing this out to me. For more on Jaimini's understanding of *dharma*, see Clooney (1990).

<sup>197</sup> See also Ra (2011). As Ra emphasizes through her analysis of Śāṅkara's commentary on Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad I.4.7-10, the phrase “One should meditate on the ‘Self’” does not constitute an injunctive sentence because knowledge of the Self cannot be the result of any cause.

things are in the world, because this is the within the scope of perception.<sup>198</sup> In the same way that perception has no authority to convey knowledge about imperceptible things, scripture has no authority to convey knowledge about perceptible things.<sup>199</sup> As Anantanand Rambachan emphasizes, perception and scripture have distinct purposes and correspondingly distinct scopes.<sup>200</sup>

For Śaṅkara, this is both a doctrinal and methodological point. He is not willy-nilly extending the canon, so-to-speak, from the *brāhmaṇas* to the *upaniṣads*. *Śruti* is only authoritative with respect to things that are imperceptible.<sup>201</sup> But the Self is not imperceptible. As his *pūrvamīmāṃsā* predecessor, Śabara, explains, despite the fact that it is unseen (*adr̥ṣṭam*) as an object, the Self is self-perceived.<sup>202</sup> It is unseen, says Śabara, because it is not possible to see this one by another.<sup>203</sup> Unlike *dharma*, which must be brought into being, Śaṅkara explains that the Self is a settled fact; it is cognized in the form of a noun and therefore is not something to be accomplished by means of scripture.<sup>204</sup> In other words, because the Self is self-perceived, it is not within the scope of *śruti* to reveal the Self to us. And yet, the Self cannot be realized without *śruti*.<sup>205</sup> As he explains, scripture is a valid means of knowledge because it accomplishes what

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<sup>198</sup> MKBh 2.32, Panoli 386. See also Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>199</sup> MKBh 2.32-35 and BUBh II.1.20.

<sup>200</sup> Rambachan, Anantanand. 1986. "Śaṅkara's Rationale for Śruti as the Definitive Source of Brahmajñāna: A Refutation of Some Contemporary Views." *Philosophy East and West* 36 (1): 25–40.

<sup>201</sup> Jaimini, PMS I.1.4.

<sup>202</sup> Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>203</sup> Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>204</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>205</sup> MKBh 4.99.

cannot be accomplished by other means; it would not be a valid means of knowledge if it merely imitated what is known by other means.<sup>206</sup>

### Learning Ignorance

How do we make sense of this? How can it be that scripture does not reveal the Self, since the Self is self-perceived and not imperceptible, and yet the Self cannot be self-perceived without scriptural revelation? Is this not a contradiction?

There is something imperceptible which cannot be known by any other means and which is revealed by the *jñāna kāṇḍa* scriptures. These scriptures reveal what the Self *is not*, thereby removing cognitions superimposed on the Self through teachings such as “not this, not that” (*neti, neti*).<sup>207</sup> Thus, they reveal a method by which one becomes a knower of Brahman when one perceives the highest Reality (*paramārthadarśī*) and “enters” one’s own Self, which belongs to the highest reality, by means of one’s very own Self.<sup>208</sup> Having attained nonduality, one knows “I am the supreme Brahman,” which is the unborn Self that is perceptible and before one’s very eyes.<sup>209</sup> Unlike the Brāhmaṇas, therefore, the Vedānta scriptures do not enjoin actions through verbal commands<sup>210</sup> since the Self is cognized in the form of a noun.<sup>211</sup> The Vedānta scriptures do not bring-into-being something unprecedented akin to a ritual or its result, since the Self is a settled fact.<sup>212</sup> They do not bring-into-being a psychological orientation,<sup>213</sup> and they do

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<sup>206</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>207</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>208</sup> MUBh 12.

<sup>209</sup> MKBh 2.36.

<sup>210</sup> Jaimini, PMS I.1.2.

<sup>211</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

not even inculcate in us knowledge or awareness that we did not previously have since the inherent nature of the Self is such that it is eternally attained.<sup>214</sup> Rather, Vedānta scriptures indicate the Brahman that is immediate and direct, which is our very Self. They do so by instructing us about the unreality/nonexistence of duality which we could not know by any other means.<sup>215</sup> Scriptural *apavāda* reveals—and removes—our ignorance of Brahman... and of ourselves.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn based on this approach to Śāṅkara as an *uttaramīmāṃsaka*. His commentaries merely prepare his reader for the event of hearing the *śruti*. In the same way that *pūrvamīmāṃsaka* commentators are less concerned with explicating the meaning of Saṃhitā hymns, for example, and only interested in explaining the hymns to the extent that this might be necessary to prepare one for the performance of a ritual,<sup>216</sup> Śāṅkara, as an *uttaramīmāṃsaka*, is less concerned with explicating the text upon which he is commenting and more concerned with preparing the *bhāṣya* reader for the event of hearing the *śruti* itself.<sup>217</sup> In the case of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya, he offers a philosophy of language, but only to the extent that he regards it to be necessary to understand the text itself. Furthermore, his

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<sup>213</sup> To be clear, the authority of the *karma kāṇḍa* lies in 3<sup>rd</sup> person optative verb endings insofar as these instruct us about something which is not perceived and therefore could not be known by means of perception. The *jñāna kāṇḍa* also instructs us about something which cannot be perceived and which could not be known by means of perception. Strictly speaking, they do not tell us about Brahman or Ātman, except indirectly. Rather, they tell us what Brahman-Ātman is *not*. Hence, they instruct us about something that is not perceived and are authoritative in that regard. I am *not* claiming that Śāṅkara rejects the notion of *śābdī bhāvanā*, but merely that *śābdī bhāvanā* pertains to 3<sup>rd</sup> person optative verb endings, which is not the direct concern of Uttaramīmāṃsā.

<sup>214</sup> BUBh I.4.7, Panoli 207. See also Rambachan (1991), 120.

<sup>215</sup> MKBh II.32 and MKBh 4.99.

<sup>216</sup> Clooney offers this elucidating addendum: “That is, they are interested in clarifying right practice, which entails a right understanding of the text/s involved.”

<sup>217</sup> Naturally, to say that he is “less concerned” is not to say “unconcerned.” Regarding the distinction between “reading” and “hearing,” see Bannon (2014).



understanding of scriptural authority and scope is consistent with his Mīmāṃsaka predecessors and this is reflected in his methodology.<sup>218</sup> Just as the *karma kāṇḍa* portion of the Veda prepares one for the event of the sacrificial ritual, the *jñāna kāṇḍa* portion prepares one for the realization of Brahman. In the same way that studying the Brāhmaṇas is no substitute for the performative event of the *yajña*, neither is the study of the Upaniṣads a substitute for the experiential realization (*vijñāna, anubhāva*) of Brahman. And yet, the Upaniṣads remain utterly indispensable for this realization. In the same way one could not possibly know how to perform sacrifices (or even that they are to be done) without the Brāhmaṇa portion of the Veda, neither can one realize the truth of Brahman without the Vedānta portion of the Veda.<sup>219</sup> Only by hearing the *śruti* can one's ignorance be learned.

#### Removing Ailments (MKBh Introduction)

As I have argued, Śaṅkara's apophatic theological method is best understood in light of the methods and doctrines of his theological tradition, *viz.* Mīmāṃsā. As a commentator, however, it must also be recognized that his careful pedagogical style models the very methods of the text upon which he is commenting. While there may be broad consistencies in his methods from one text to another, he tailors his method to best suit the text upon which he comments. In the previous chapter, I examined the methods, structure, and patterns of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika. As discussed below, Śaṅkara mimics and models these patterns, especially those of the *Āgama prakaraṇa* (i.e., the first of the GK's four chapters).<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Of course, his Pūrva Mīmāṃsaka predecessors and contemporaries did not agree with one another on every doctrinal point and sometimes disagree more profoundly with one another than with Śaṅkara, challenging what is too often perceived as a sharp taxonomic divide between these traditions, but which is continually challenged by Parpola, Clooney, Slaje, Taber, and others.

<sup>219</sup> MKBh 4.99.

<sup>220</sup> See also Ra (2011) Suthren Hirst (2005) with respect to Śaṅkara's mimicking of the styles of the Bṛhadāraṇyaka and Taittirīya Upaniṣads.

Traditionally, philosophical treatises and commentaries in Vedānta begin with a treatment of the purpose, subject-matter, connection, and a description of one who is qualified to read the text.<sup>221</sup> These four prerequisites are often referred to as *anubandha-catuṣṭaya*. Śaṅkara states that since the Māṇḍūkya Kārika is a synopsis of the essence of the meaning of Vedānta, then the purpose, subject-matter, and connection are the same as they are with the Vedānta texts.<sup>222</sup> The purpose of the text, he explains, is the non-dual state and the subject matter is the means to accomplish that purpose. In other words, the text reveals a method, *viz.*, apophasis. The non-dual state is attained by the negation of duality. Since the universe of duality is the result of ignorance, it is destroyed by knowledge.<sup>223</sup> Hence, the subject-matter of the text is a method by which ignorance and duality are removed.<sup>224</sup>

The negative aspect of this theological method is worth emphasizing. As I argued in the previous chapter, the MK prepares its reader for the sensual event of hearing the *śruti*, harmoniously, by coordinating particular teachings from diverse scriptural passages. I now add that this method prepares its reader by removing obstacles that prevent one from hearing the *śruti*. The “knowledge” given in the text is not an end unto itself. Rather, this knowledge is the means for removing ignorance. Even the word *māyā* indicates knowledge;<sup>225</sup> it is for the sake of

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<sup>221</sup> *Prayojanam, abhidheya, sambandhaḥ, and adhikārīn*, respectfully.

<sup>222</sup> See p67, above. Śaṅkara does not use the term *adhikārīn* here. However, as will be addressed below, he discusses the topic implicitly.

<sup>223</sup> MKBh, Intro.

<sup>224</sup> Clooney points out another possible reading: The subject-matter of the text is the occasion or site of the use of a method by which ignorance and duality are removed.

<sup>225</sup> MKBh 3.24, discussed on p173, below.

instruction<sup>226</sup> and does not exist for another moment after the cessation of duality<sup>227</sup> because the means does not possess the same reality as the end itself.<sup>228</sup>

Śāṅkara offers a helpful analogy in his introductory comments to the MK. One who suffers from a disease becomes well when the disease is removed. The medicine or other treatment is not an end unto itself, it is a means of removing the cause of the ailment. The medicine makes one well only indirectly—by removing the illness.<sup>229</sup> The purpose of the text is the non-dual state, but this is accomplished only indirectly—by negating duality. Hence, “knowledge” in this case is entirely negative; knowledge is the removal/negation of duality and thus does not exist after duality is removed since the cessation of duality “brings about simultaneously the cessation of the distinction between the knower, known, and knowledge.”<sup>230</sup>

Analogously, antibiotics do not, strictly speaking, make one well; antibiotics remove the bacteria that cause disease. Having removed that which causes dis/ease, one is at ease.<sup>231</sup> While this may be easy to understand in the case of antibiotics, note that it represents a radically different understanding of “knowledge” than that to which we are generally accustomed. “Knowledge” is not something positive that we acquire, learn, store in the mind, and recall. “Knowledge” here, for example, is nothing like learning the names of the fifty state capitals and reciting them alphabetically. Rather, “knowledge” is the negation (apophasis) of ignorance.

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<sup>226</sup> MKBh 1.18.

<sup>227</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>228</sup> MKBh 3.26.

<sup>229</sup> For an excellent development of this analogy (which Śāṅkara also uses elsewhere), and its implications for the study of religion, writ large, see Thatamanil (2006).

<sup>230</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>231</sup> Credit goes to Richard Bannon, MD, for pointing out this insightfully apophatic etymology.

Ignorance, then, must be something positive (kataphatic). Śaṅkara variously describes it as darkness, as conception, and as a veil.<sup>232</sup> Ignorance impedes direct perception; knowledge removes the impediment, enabling direct perception. Śaṅkara effectively reverses the ordinary meaning of the terms “knowledge” and “ignorance.” By learning one’s ignorance, the dark, conceptual veil is removed, preparing one to hear the *śruti*.

This point is emphasized throughout the MKBh (and, in fact, throughout Śaṅkara’s other writings), but it is quite often overlooked or forgotten in contemporary treatments of Śaṅkara’s thought.<sup>233</sup> While the purpose of the text is the non-dual state, the subject-matter, according to Śaṅkara, is a method. The “means” revealed by the text is knowledge that removes ignorance. The purpose of the text is not to “learn” something; the purpose of going to the doctor is not to acquire antibiotics. We come to the text as a means to remove ignorance; we come to the doctor as a means to remove illness.<sup>234</sup> Hence, “knowledge” is functionally negative, and does not exist for another moment after it has fulfilled its purpose.<sup>235</sup> Like any tool, knowledge is not, in and of

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<sup>232</sup> Respectively: MKBh 1.14, et. al.; MUBh 7, MKBh 2.32, 3.5, and 3.7; BUBh I.4.7, Panoli 208.

<sup>233</sup> Jacqueline Suthren Hirst and Francis Clooney consistently emphasize that Śaṅkara is an apophatic theologian. Suthren Hirst has shown that Śaṅkara even combines positive descriptions and analogies to apophatic effect. See, for example, Suthren Hirst, Jacqueline. “Images of Śaṅkara: Understanding the Other.” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 8.1 (2004): 157–181. As far as I am aware, however, no contemporary scholar has discussed the specific point made here regarding the functionally negative definition of “knowledge” in Śaṅkara’s works. Numerous authors have emphasized the positive aspect of Śaṅkara’s use of the term ignorance (*avidyā*). Examples include Ingalls, “Śaṅkara on the Question: Whose Is Avidyā?” *Philosophy East and West* 3.1 (1953): 69–72, and Thatamanil (2006).

<sup>234</sup> We see this elsewhere in Śaṅkara’s writings, as well. In the introduction to his commentary on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, Śaṅkara emphasizes that the text itself is not *upaniṣad*. The text is merely a means, a tool, for *upaniṣad* and thus it is called by that name. In his introduction to the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, Śaṅkara states that the word *upaniṣad* derives from the root *sad*, meaning “to destroy.” He further explains that, “‘knowledge’ is called *upaniṣad* because it is a destroyer of ignorance, etc., the seed of *samsāra* (KaUBh, Intro). Moreover, Śaṅkara explains that it is impossible for a “mere book” to destroy ignorance: “Therefore, the primary signifying force of the word *upaniṣad* is knowledge, but it is used reverently to denote the book” (KaUBh, Intro).

<sup>235</sup> MUBh 7.

itself, good or bad. Its function is the removal of ignorance, which is invariably defined positively as the cause of duality.<sup>236</sup> Removing ailments, *śruti* heals our dis/ease.

It is for this reason that this dissertation is focusing on Śāṅkara's apophatic theological method, rather than attempting to explicate his teachings on Brahman. He does not teach about Brahman. That is neither the purpose nor subject-matter of his commentary. Instead, his purpose is to provide his reader with the tools and methods needed to realize the truth of Brahman, which can only arise from the direct perception (*śravaṇa*) of *śruti*, uttered by a teacher directly to a student. Hence, I focus on Śāṅkara's theological method, because teaching this method is precisely his purpose and subject-matter. When practiced and performed, his method prepares readers for the sensual event of hearing *śruti*, concordantly.

### **Measuring AUM (MUBh 1)**

Thus far, I have examined Śāṅkara's theological method from a broad perspective, attending especially to an understanding of textual knowledge as an event. When a properly prepared student hears the Vedānta scripture uttered directly and particularly by a teacher, the resulting knowledge removes ignorance. Ignorance is not a lack, absence, or deficiency of knowledge, but has been described in positive terms, akin to an illness, infection, or obstruction. It is removed by knowledge as one might remove an infection by administering antibiotics. Learning one's ignorance, together with its cause, one prepares to perceive.

In this section, the focus is further refined, turning attention to Śāṅkara's commentary on the opening verse of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad. This brief verse constitutes the first of three movements of the Upaniṣad. Subsequent movements unfold its rhythmic themes in variation, as

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<sup>236</sup> Others have also emphasized this positive aspect of "ignorance" in Śāṅkara's thought. See Thatamanil, (2006), and Ingalls, Daniel H. H. "Śāṅkara on the Question: Whose Is Avidyā?" *Philosophy East and West* 3.1 (1953): 69–72. Only Satchidānandendra, however, also highlights the negative aspect of knowledge: See Satchidānandendra (1989).

discussed earlier (p63). In MUBh 1, Śāṅkara builds the reader's confidence in the ability of the MU text to *indicate* Brahman while simultaneously undermining the competency of the words of the text to *signify* Brahman. While Brahman cannot be *expressed* by words (*anabhidheyatvaṃ*), the words of the text reliably *indicate* Brahman<sup>237</sup> provided that the reader understands the power and limitation of words as well as their function within the structure of the text. One must understand how language *measures* meaning in order to understand how negation indicates Brahman.

Francis Clooney observes a similar method in the Upaniṣadic corpus more broadly:

They thereby maintain a certain ironic detachment from their own formalizing activity, assuring textually that knowledge can never be adequately communicated by its texts: Texts serve their proper function when they call into question their own reliability and adequacy.<sup>238</sup>

As demonstrated below, Śāṅkara draws our attention away from ontology to epistemology by drawing our attention to the relationship between words and meanings as a means to an end. By focusing on the relationship between signifiers and signified, he affirms the reliability and adequacy of the text to *indicate* Brahman while simultaneously calling into question the adequacy of the words of the text to *describe* Brahman.<sup>239</sup> It is critical to distinguish between indicating (i.e., “pointing out”) and describing (i.e., “naming”). In chapter three, I revisit this relationship to show that the universals signified by signifiers are *measures* of particulars.

### Signifying Relations

*“AUM”—that sacred syllable is all this. Its explanation is: All that was, is, and shall be is simply AUM. And, moreover, that which transcends the*

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<sup>237</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>238</sup> Clooney (1993), 44.

<sup>239</sup> MUBh 7.

*three periods of time, that, too, is simply AUM.*  
—*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 1*

Even though the root text of MU 1 would not seem to occasion it, Śaṅkara immediately shifts the discourse to a philosophy of language based in scriptural revelation and tradition. He frames this shift in focus in the form of a question: “How does arriving at a complete understanding of AUM serve as a means for the ascertainment of the true Self?”<sup>240</sup> As Jacqueline Suthren Hirst has shown, Śaṅkara employs questions such as these, not only “to help the pupil confront his [or her] doubts honestly,”<sup>241</sup> but also, “to lead pupils out (the literal meaning of ‘educate’) from their present learning to new perceptions, so that they make the changed understanding their own.”<sup>242</sup> Moreover, Śaṅkara’s question compels the reader (or pupil) to slow down and consider the Māṇḍūkya’s own methodology. The reader must pause to consider why the topic of AUM is discussed at all in this context. Why does the text begin the way it does? How does a complete understanding of AUM relate to the subsequent discussion of the *catuspāt*? If the reader leaps to a discussion of the *catuspāt* (MU 2-7), s/he may overlook the fact that the Māṇḍūkya text frames the *catuspāt* doctrine between two discourses on AUM (MU 1 and MU 8-12). Śaṅkara’s question compels the reader to consider the methods of the text in addition to the content of the text.

Having posed the question above, Śaṅkara then models *upasamhāra*. He coordinates the teachings on AUM (MU 1) with teachings on the four states of consciousness (MU 2-7). He provides a litany of quotations from the Upaniṣads that identify AUM as the basis, as higher and

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<sup>240</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>241</sup> Suthren Hirst (2005), 72.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

lower Brahman, as the Self, and as “all this.”<sup>243</sup> While AUM is regarded as the name (*abhidhāna*) of Ātman-Brahman, it is not a “mere name,” but is “all this” and that which transcends “all this” (MU 1). This begs the question, though, “how does understanding a name serve as the means for understanding what is named?” To this, Śaṅkara responds:

Since this collection of things, being a signified thing, is not other than its signifier, and since AUM is not other than a signifier, all this is simply AUM. And [since] the Supreme Brahman is known only [through] the antecedent means—signifier and signified—then that, too, is but AUM.<sup>244</sup>

Śaṅkara is drawing upon Pūrvamīmāṃsāsūtra I.1.5 wherein Jaimini asserts that the relationship between a word and its meaning is “original” (*autpattika*, i.e., “from the origin”),<sup>245</sup> which Śabara glosses as *nitya*, “eternal.”<sup>246</sup> That is to say that a word does not come to be associated with a meaning through convention or other human means. As Ānandagiri explains in his 13<sup>th</sup> century subcommentary on Śaṅkara’s *bhāṣya*, “The meaning of a name is fixed by that which is to be named; here, the cause is said to be just AUM.”<sup>247</sup> The relationship between a word and its *artha* is eternal; it is not a human creation (*apauruṣeya*). Rather, words, universals, and particulars are eternally connected to one another, as diagrammed in Figure 1. In addition to names (*nāma*), Śaṅkara mentioned five other reasons for using words, to which he refers, collectively,

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<sup>243</sup> Kaṭha II.17, Praśna V.2, Maitri VI.3, and Chāndogya II.2.33, respectively.

<sup>244</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>245</sup> PMSBh I.1.5. In other words, the relationship between a word and its meaning exists *from the origin* and is, therefore, both “original” and “eternal.”

<sup>246</sup> PMS I.1.5.

<sup>247</sup> MUBhT 1, 25.



as *śabdapravṛtīhetu*: Class (*jāti*), Quality (*guṇa*), Relation (*sambandhaḥ*), Action (*kriyā*), and Form (*rūpa*).<sup>248</sup> We will return to these later (p177).

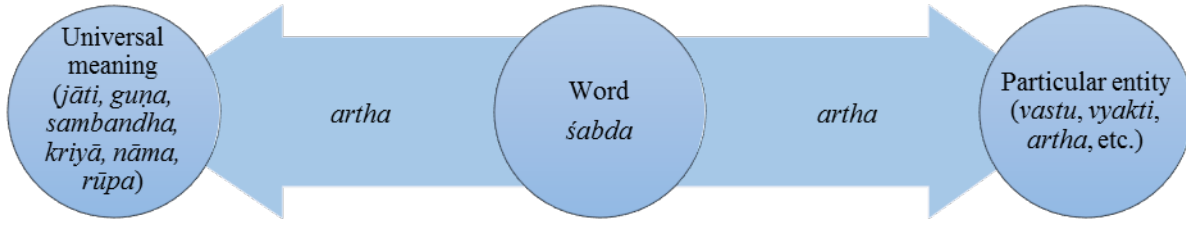


Figure 1: Eternal connection between word, universal, and particular

From the very first verse of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, Śāṅkara’s commentary demonstrates how the text reflects Mīmāṃsaka doctrines and he explains the text in accordance with this exegetical tradition. Before one can grasp the meaning of the Māṇḍūkya’s apophysis, one must first have a firm grasp on Vedic kataphasis, which is properly understood, according to Śāṅkara, through the doctrines of Mīmāṃsā. The answer to Śāṅkara’s question,<sup>249</sup> then, is that arriving at a complete understanding of AUM serves as a means for the ascertainment of the true Self because AUM is a signifier of the Supreme Brahman and the relationship between that signifier and signified is eternal. When one grasps the relationship between signifiers and signified together with the relationship of these to AUM, then one grasps the means by which the Supreme Brahman can be known.

<sup>248</sup> MUBh 7. Śāṅkara does not enumerate these reasons in MUBh 7, but does so elsewhere. His terminology varies slightly from text to text. See GBh XIII.12, TUBh II.1, BUBh II.3.6, and Upad I.18. Mayeda summarizes these; see: Śāṅkarācārya. 1979. *A Thousand Teachings: The Upadeśasāhasrī of Śāṅkara*. Translated by Sengaku Mayeda. 197, note 20.

<sup>249</sup> I.e., “How does arriving at a complete understanding of AUM serve as a means for the ascertainment of the true Self?” MUBh 1.

## Signifying Intentions

Only by understanding the specific relationship between signifiers and that which they signify can one come to grasp what the text intends to indicate by negating signifiers.<sup>250</sup>

According to Śabara, signifiers simultaneously signify universals (*jāti*, *ākṛti*, etc.) and particulars (*vyakti*, *vastu*, etc.),<sup>251</sup> only one of which is primary in any given sentence, according to the speaker's intention, as diagrammed in Figure 2.<sup>252</sup>

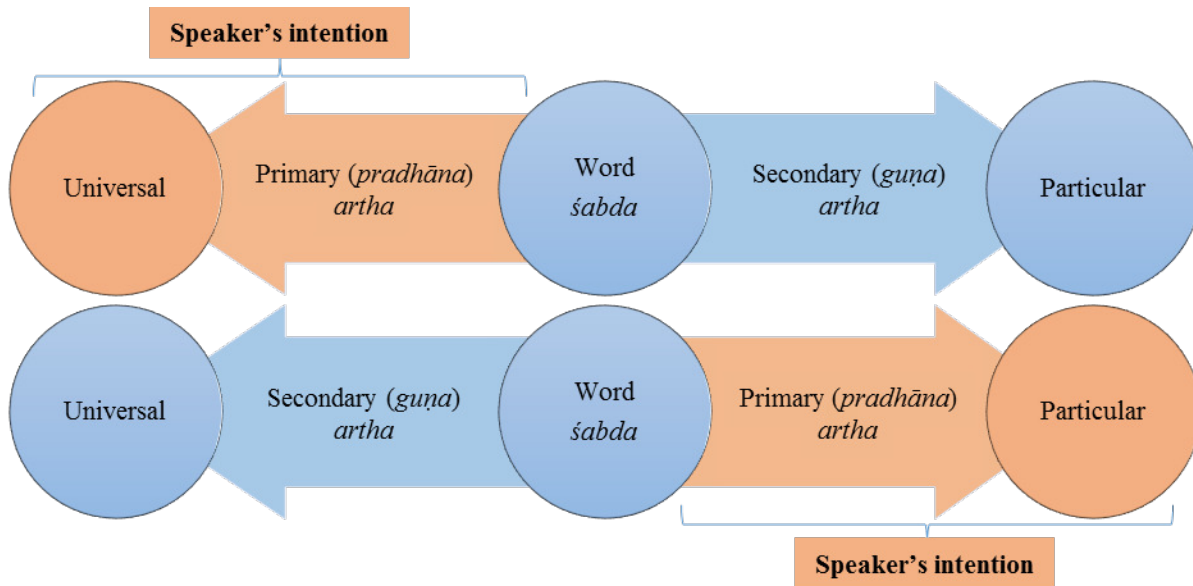


Figure 2: Double signification of words (Śabara, PMSBh I.3.33)

While the import of this double signification of words will become clearer later, at issue here is whether the negation of signifiers intends to negate universals, particulars, or both universals and particulars. That is to say: Does the negation of a word negate only the primary signification, or both the primary and secondary signification? If the former is the case, then it

<sup>250</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>251</sup> I do not intend to suggest that Śabara employs the terms *jāti* and *ākṛti* synonymously, nor that his use of *vyakti* and *vastu* are synonymous. While they seem to serve the similar purpose of distinguishing between universals and particulars, a detailed philological analysis of Śabara's use of these terms is outside the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>252</sup> PMSBh I.3.33.

becomes necessary to determine which signification is primary in apophatic speech. Does the *śruti* intend to negate universals or particulars?

### Wakeful Attentiveness

In his commentary on Uttaramīmāṃsāsūtra III.2.21, Śaṅkara poses this very question.<sup>253</sup> He insists that the negation of signifiers intends to negate universals, not particulars. He rejects a *pūrvapakṣin*'s suggestion that the repetition of *neti, neti* is intended to negate both universals and particulars. It is helpful to examine his explanation in context. He begins with an analogy, used several times in the MKBh, to which we will return (p146):

Darkness is surely dissolved by one who desires to perceive (*avabubhutsamānena*), for example, the truth of a pot fixed in darkness [since darkness] is an obstacle to [perceiving] that. In the same way, plurality is to be dissolved by one who desires to perceive (*avabubhutsamānena*) the truth of Brahman, [since plurality] is opposed to [perceiving] that. Indeed, the inherent nature of plurality is Brahman, [but] the inherent nature of Brahman is not plurality. By the dissolution of the plurality of names and forms, there is wakefulness (*avabodha*) to the truth of Brahman.<sup>254</sup>

Here again, textual knowledge is functionally negative insofar as it removes obstacles to directly perceiving Brahman. The verb  $\sqrt{avabudh}$ <sup>255</sup> in the passage above requires attention. Apte provides the following definitions: “(1) to awake, to recognize; (2) To become sensible or aware of, feel, perceive, know, understand.” Hence, it indicates an awareness of the true reality resulting from perception characterized by attentiveness or wakefulness. In the passage above, I

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<sup>253</sup> UMSBh III.2.21. Shastri, 712-3. This is discussed further below.

<sup>254</sup> UMSBh III.2.21: यथाच तमसि व्यवस्थितं घटादितत्त्वमवबुभुत्समानेन तत्प्रत्यनीकभूतं तमः प्रविलाप्यत एवं ब्रह्मतत्त्वमवबुभुत्समानेन तत्प्रत्यनीकभूतः प्रपञ्चः प्रविलापयितव्यः । ब्रह्मस्वभावो हि प्रपञ्चो न प्रपञ्चस्वभावं ब्रह्म, तेन नामरूपप्रपञ्चप्रविलापनेन ब्रह्मतत्त्वावबोधो भवतीति । Shastri, 712.

<sup>255</sup> *Avabubhutsamānena* is the present middle participle of the desiderative form of the verb  $\sqrt{avabudh}$  in singular instrumental declension. The first syllable of the verbal root (*budh*) following the prefix (*ava-*) reduplicates as *bubhutsa* per Macdonell and Whitney, from which the present middle participle (*avabubhutsamāna*) is formed and subsequently declined.

have translated *avabubhutsamānena* as “by one who desires to perceive” and *avabodha* as “wakefulness” in order to emphasize that this awakening is not a *physical* awakening, but a mental, sensual awakening. It signifies wakeful attentiveness. Perception, according to Śāṅkara’s tradition, requires not simply contact between the eye and a perceptible object, but also requires a fully alert, fully awake mind, which is the internal organ of perception (*antaḥkaraṇa*), as Anantanand Rambachan explains.<sup>256</sup>

In all of his many analogies involving “darkness,” Śāṅkara understands darkness as an impediment, obstacle, or veil; darkness does not mean a simple absence of light. In the same way that darkness impedes the eye, preventing the eye from seeing a pot, the plurality of names and forms impede the internal organ from perceiving the Brahman which is perceptible and before one’s very eyes. In the same way that darkness must be removed so that one can see the pot, the plurality of names and forms must be removed so that one can see Brahman.

This nuance is critically important. Although we tend to think of light as something enabling perception, this is not the case for Śāṅkara and his tradition. Because the seer’s sight is never lost, one is always already able to see, but one does not see due to an impediment, *viz.*, darkness or plurality. By removing these impediments, there is wakefulness (*avabodha*). One becomes perceptually attentive. While the next chapter will examine what it means to see Brahman, at issue here is the impediment that is to be removed through apophatic discourse.

Negating Universal Measures

Śāṅkara continues:

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<sup>256</sup> Rambachan (1991), 23-25.

Here, we ask ourselves:  
What is meant by “the dissolution of plurality”?<sup>257</sup>

In his response to this question, Śāṅkara explains that the dissolution of plurality cannot possibly mean the destruction of presently existing particular entities in the world. Were that the case, the instruction would be meaningless since it is impossible for any person to destroy the universe of manifestations characterized by one’s own body and the earth.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, even if that was the case, then the world would be devoid (*śūnyam*) of the earth, etc., having been already destroyed by the first person to attain liberation.<sup>259</sup>

The dissolution of plurality, Śāṅkara explains, is simply the removal of misconceptions regarding what is actually seen. According to Richard King’s analysis of Gauḍapāda’s Kārika, “*prapañca* primarily denotes the idea of plurality (literally, “fiveness” or *pañca*)” and “is a common Buddhist technical term.”<sup>260</sup> While it is an important term for both Gauḍapāda and Śāṅkara, it is understood rather differently by each. As King explains, Gauḍapāda uses the term to mean “the empty ‘conceptual proliferation’ characteristic of all (false) views.”<sup>261</sup> While also a technical term for Śāṅkara, he consistently employs it to mean the conceptualization of what is seen by the five senses *prior* to realization of the non-dual Self. Although the world is seen, heard, smelled, touched, or tasted by the five senses, *prapañca* is not characterized as perception insofar as it does not involve a fully awake (*prabuddha*) internal organ of perception (*antaḥkaraṇa*, *manas*). *Prapañca*, for Śāṅkara, is neither the external object nor the subjective

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<sup>257</sup> UMSBh III.2.21. Shastri, 712-3.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>259</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 713.

<sup>260</sup> King, 29.

<sup>261</sup> King, 30. King also examines this technical term in Nāgārjuna and other Buddhist writers and Gauḍapāda’s relationship to those. See King, 133ff.

perception of that object, but rather the phenomenal appearance of external objects to a mind that is not fully awakened. It signals a deficient orientation of the mind towards (*pra-*) what is “seen” by the five senses (*pañca*). His complicated epistemology requires clarification, especially the relationship between words, meanings, and sense perception.

*Perception and Cognitive Error (Śabara)*

In his commentary on PMS I.1.5, Śabara identifies four elements required for perception to occur: an external object to be perceived, a healthy sense organ, an alert mind, and an unobstructed connection of these three.<sup>262</sup> He further distinguishes between two moments of mental cognition involved in perception (Figure 3). He refers to the first moment as *buddhi*, which is formless and takes the form of the external object which is its basis.<sup>263</sup> However, this mental image (*buddhi*) does not constitute knowledge until it is grasped in a second moment of cognition, which is verbal.<sup>264</sup> When the mental image is grasped by means of the correct word (i.e., a word that is eternally connected to that particular object), then and only then does true knowledge arise. Only in that case, and none other, does perception occur.

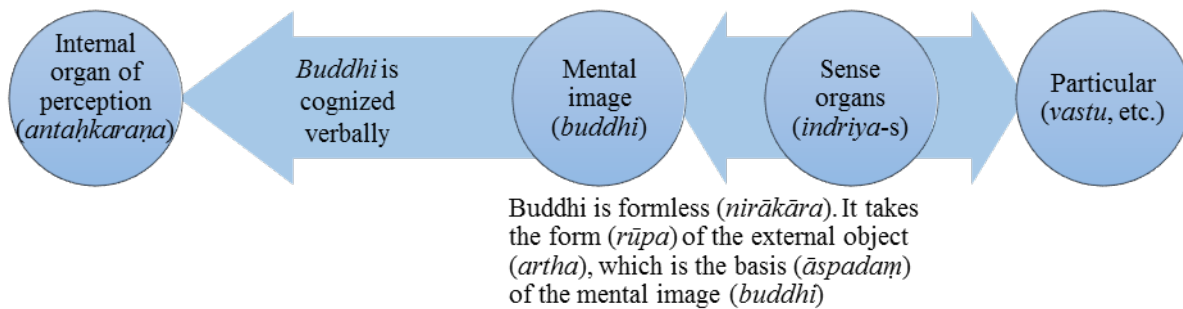


Figure 3: Two moments of cognition in perception (Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5)

<sup>262</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>263</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>264</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

Śabara’s purpose for distinguishing between *buddhi* and *antaḥkaraṇa* is to explain how cognitive errors arise, such as mistaking a shell for silver, while preserving the infallibility of perception. “That which is [called] *perception*,” Śabara states, “is never wrong. That which is wrong is not *perception*.”<sup>265</sup> When one mistakes a shell for silver, then, the error is not the result of perception, but due to some problem in the process of perception. Assuming there is no defect in the physical eye, the *buddhi* takes the form of the shell when the eye comes in “contact” with the particular shell. The internal organ of perception then cognizes this mental image verbally, as diagrammed in Figure 4. *Pratyakṣa pramāṇa* entails linguistic cognition:

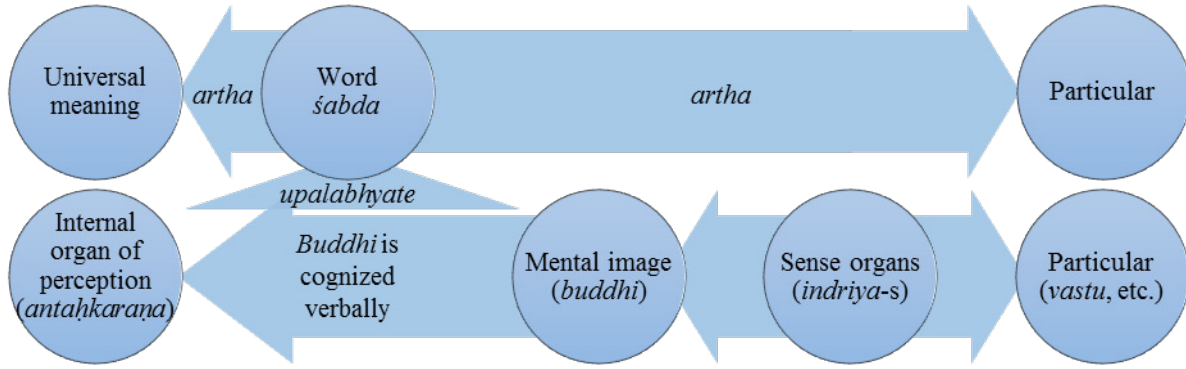


Figure 4: Perceptual cognition for Śabara (PMSBh I.1.5)

Śabara uses the term *pratyaya* in a generic manner, signifying cognitions which may be either correct or incorrect, but uses forms of the verb *upa√labh* exclusively to refer to the correct verbal grasping of the *buddhi*. Just as one may possibly have a defect with the physical eye, Śabara explains, one may have a defect in the internal organ of perception, such as sleepiness or inattentiveness. If the mind is sleepy, one may cognize the mental image of the shell by grasping the word “silver,” which is not eternally connected to that particular object. In that case, Śabara asserts that perception has not taken place. Erroneous cognition is diagrammed in Figure 5:

<sup>265</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: यत्प्रत्यक्षम् न तद्भ्रमिचरति । यद्भ्रमिचरति न तद्प्रत्यक्षम् । More literally: “That which is *perception* does not go astray. That which goes astray is not *perception*.” Ganganatha Jha translates: “What is real sense-perception is never wrong; what is wrong is not sense-perception.” Śabarāsvāmi. *Śabara-bhāṣya*. Translated by Ganganatha Jha. Vol 1. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1933. 10.

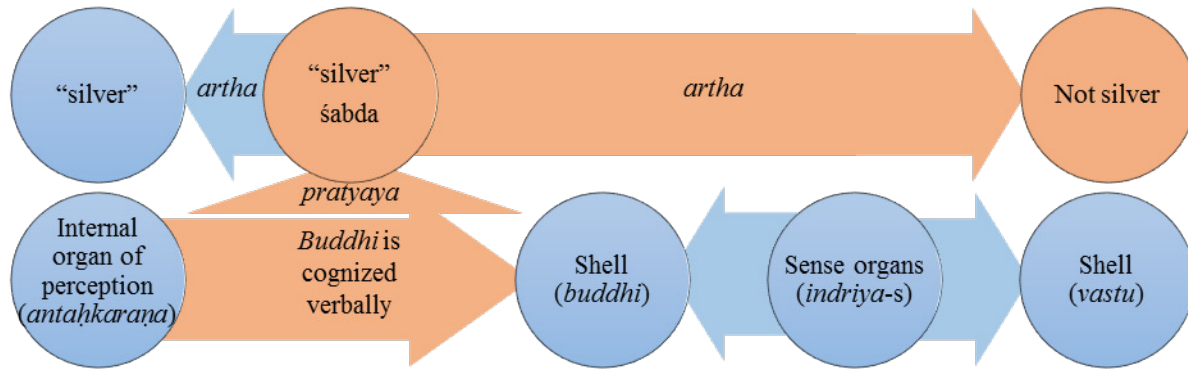


Figure 5: Cognitive error in perceptual process (Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5)

When the sleepiness is removed, the shell will be grasped as shell, and the idea of “silver” will be sublated. Only perception can sublimate the false cognition, and perception will only occur when the sleepiness is removed, which is to say, when the mind is fully alert.<sup>266</sup>

In Western thought, and in other schools of Indian thought, one might say that the shell is perceived but wrongly interpreted, or perhaps “mis-perceived.” This will not suffice for Pūrva- and Uttara Mīmāṃsā, however, since sense-perception is never wrong (p104). Hence, Mīmāṃsakas explain error in terms of an intervention/obstruction that impedes direct perception.

### *Dissolving Superimposition*

Like Śabara, Śaṅkara uses the term *upa<sup>l</sup>labh* to refer to correct cognitions of the *buddhi*. By using the word *prapañca*, though, he has given greater specificity to this second moment of perceptual cognition. *Prapañca* refers to cognitions of the *buddhi* which are superimposed by the mind on the *buddhi* and are sublated when the mind is fully awakened. It signals a deficient orientation of the mind towards (*pra-*) what is “seen” by the five senses (*pañca*). Rather than “seeing” the *buddhi* with the internal organ of perception, an inattentive, sleepy mind superimposes a universal upon the *buddhi*:

<sup>266</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.



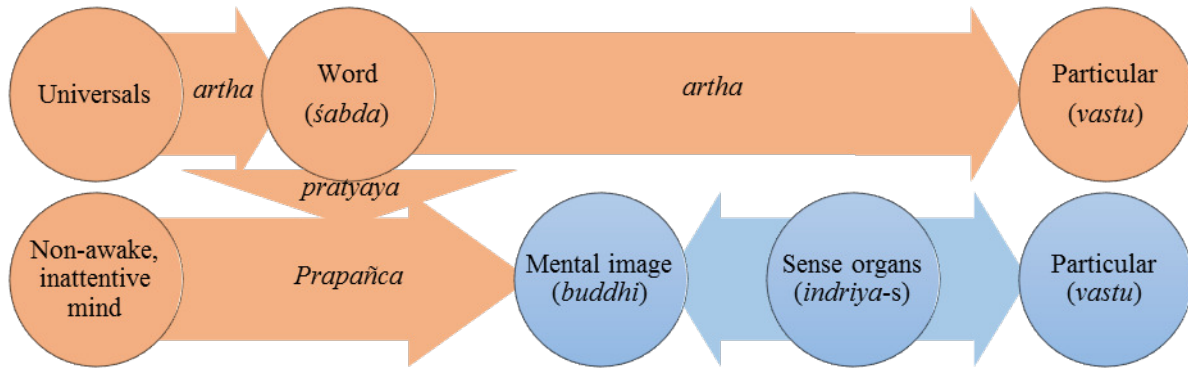


Figure 6: *Prapañca as superimposition upon the buddhi (Śaṅkara, UMSBh III.2.21)*

By building upon Śābara’s epistemology of perception in this way, Śaṅkara thus explains how plurality is cognized even though non-dual reality is seen. Instead of *perceiving* a particular, one cognizes or “sees” *prapañca*, which impedes the connection between mind, sense organs, and sense object. To be clear, the point of the example is not, strictly speaking, to distinguish between an incorrect cognition (e.g., “silver”) and a correct cognition (e.g., “shell”), but to explain how signifiers and universals are superimposed upon the *buddhi*, which takes the form of particular objects sensed by the sense organs.

### *Seeing and Perceiving*

To demonstrate the distinction between perception and mere sight, etc., Śaṅkara offers as an analogy a person with an eye disease who sees many moons rather than one. This misconception is destroyed when knowledge of the one moon arises.<sup>267</sup> As he explains, however, even though the misconception has been destroyed, knowledge of the one moon can only arise in accordance with a valid means of knowledge suitable to that purpose. If one is told that there is only one moon, this will not remove the impediment since verbal teaching is not suitable to correct the vision problem. The reason for this becomes obvious when we map the problem onto the process of perception:

<sup>267</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 713.

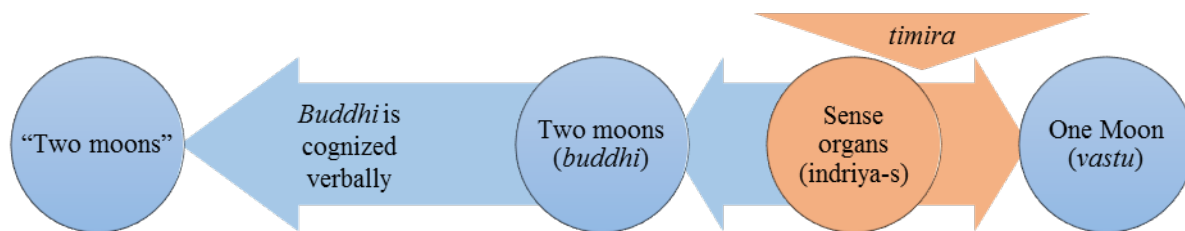


Figure 7: Error in "two moons" analogy (Śaṅkara, UMSBh III.2.21)

Even after *hearing* a trusted *guru* explain, “there is only one moon,” the student will still *see* many moons until the impediment is removed. Analogously, if a doctor tells a patient, “you have an eye disease,” this diagnosis does not heal the patient’s vision. As Śaṅkara explains, even when guided by a teacher, knowledge of something unknown cannot arise without a valid means of knowledge suitable to that object, especially if it seems to contradict everyday experience.<sup>268</sup> In other words, if one *sees* many moons, *hearing* that there is only one moon will not directly result in true knowledge since hearing is not a means to know an object that is visible. Having been guided by a teacher, however, one identifies the impediment, removes it, and becomes able to perceive on one’s own. Continuing the analogy, a doctor does not “see” for the patient. Having removed the eye disease, the doctor enables the patient to perceive for himself/herself. After a teacher has indicated the object to be known, knowledge then arises in accordance with the valid means of knowledge and the object to be known.<sup>269</sup>

#### Attending to the Teacher’s Intention

Therefore, even a wise teacher can do no more than guide the disciple towards what is to be perceived. This is true for knowledge of Brahman just as it is true for everyday speech. As Śaṅkara explains, when someone utters an instruction to “look at this” or “listen to that,” this is

<sup>268</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 714-5.

<sup>269</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 714.

done “merely to fix one’s attention to that,” it is not done to cause direct knowledge.<sup>270</sup> A teacher or a text can only do so much. Even if a *guru* points directly at something, there is no guarantee that the student will perceive what the teacher intends. As Śāṅkara explains, even though a person’s face may be turned directly toward a thing to be known, knowledge may arise at one time and not at another. Therefore, a teacher can only guide someone’s gaze towards what is to be shown.<sup>271</sup> In order to perceive, the student must attend to what the teacher intends.

Although Brahman is perceptible and before one’s very eyes, Brahman is not perceived unless and until the cognitive impediments which are opposed to that perception are removed. Therefore, negation such as the dissolution of plurality (*prapañcapravilayaḥ*) does not remove the particulars which are intended to be signified through kataphatic description; rather, it negates universals which have been cognitively superimposed upon those particulars. Although particulars have been “seen” by the eye, they are not perceived by the mind (the internal organ of perception) due to sleepiness or inattention. Instead, the mind “sees” universals, which are linguistic measures of particulars. As emphasized above, perception of the object only arises when the mental image of that object is grasped by means of the correct word (i.e., a word that is eternally connected to that particular object).

When one’s face is turned toward a thing that is to be known (*jñeya-adhimukhya*), the eye (and *buddhi*) sees the object even if there is no *perception* of the object.<sup>272</sup> The internal organ imagines (i.e., sees with the mind)<sup>273</sup> many moons prior to the perception of the one moon,

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<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>273</sup> I use the verb “imagine” in a technical, epistemological sense. To “imagine” is to “see an image in the mind.” What is imagined may be true or false insofar as it correlates truly or falsely to what is seen by the eye. For example, one may see a shell and imagine silver, or one may see a shell and imagine a shell. The former imagination is false

which arises only when the impediment is removed. In the same way, the internal organ of perception “sees” (i.e., cognitively imagines or superimposes) plurality prior to becoming wakefully attentive to the truth of Brahman. By removing conceptual measures superimposed upon particulars, one becomes attentive. To be clear, the particular object seen continues to be seen; the negation negates neither the particular entity nor its being seen (p 102). Rather, the negation dissolves the conceptual cognition (*vikalpa*) of that particular entity.<sup>274</sup> When this phenomenal measure, which has been imagined/superimposed on the *buddhi*, has been dissolved, the thing itself is perceived. Apophasis is the negation of the measure, not of the measured.<sup>275</sup>

### Unfolding AUM

As noted above (p94), Śaṅkara explains that Brahman becomes known through the negation of signifiers and signified. Having turned to his UMSBh in order to provisionally clarify what is meant by the negation of what is signified by signifiers, we return now to MUBh 1 to clarify what is meant by the negation of signifiers themselves. Having understood the eternal relationship between words, signified universals, and signified particulars, it next becomes necessary to grasp the relationship between AUM and all (other) signifiers.

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whereas the latter imagination is true. Nevertheless, both are imaginations insofar as they are images seen with the internal organ of perception. Cf. MKBh II.32.

<sup>274</sup> As stated above (p105), words simultaneously signify particulars and universals, only one of which is primary in any given sentence. While the primary (*pradhāna*) signification of words in kataphatic speech are particulars, these same words also signify universals, which is their secondary (*guṇa*) signification. The primary signification of words in apophatic speech serves the purpose of negating the secondary signification of words in kataphatic speech. Though the secondary signification of words in apophatic speech negates particulars, this is no fault since Brahman both *is* and *is not* any given particular.

<sup>275</sup> Though all measures have been dissolved, one still perceives particulars and discriminates between them, according to Śaṅkara. If this were not the case, nothing would distinguish the *prājña* from the *turīya*. See p137 and p153 below.

A name (*abhidhāna*) is a means to express what one intends to name (*abhidheya*).<sup>276</sup> As Śabara explains, nouns simultaneously signify universals and particulars, but the primary signification changes according to the intention of the speaker.<sup>277</sup> For example, in the sentence, “bring me that cow right there,” the word “cow” names a particular animal, since that is clearly the speaker’s intention. In the sentence, “a cow is different than a horse,” however, the word “cow” names an idea, i.e., a class of animals to which many particular animals belong. In both cases, however, the noun is a means to express the speaker’s intention.<sup>278</sup>

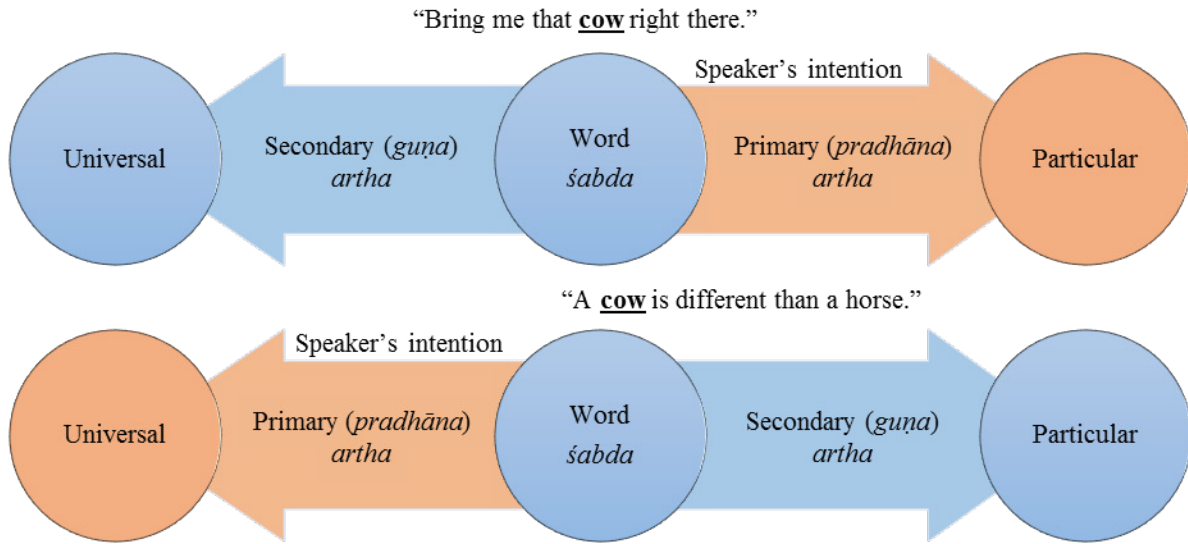


Figure 8: Primary signification of nouns (Śabara, PMSBh I.3.33)

<sup>276</sup> In fact, the word *abhidheya* is poorly translated by either the term “signified” or “named.” Grammatically, *abhidheya* is a gerundive formed from the root √*abhidhā*, “to say; to denote; to name” (Apte, Vaman Shivaram. *Revised and Enlarged Edition of Prin. V. S. Apte’s The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Poona: Prasad Prakashan, 1957.) A more literal translation, then, is “what is to be said, denoted, or named.” Etymologically, therefore, the terms *abhidhāna* and *abhidheya* literally represent the means and purpose of denoting, respectively.

<sup>277</sup> PMSBh I.3.33, discussed below.

<sup>278</sup> Ānandagiri accentuates this distinction in his subcommentary by glossing the words *abhidheya* and *abhidhāna* with the words *vācya* and *vācaka*, i.e., “what is to be said” and “speaking.” Clearly, speaking is a means to express what is to be said and what is to be said is only said in the speaking thereof. Thus, ascertaining the meaning of AUM is a means to realize Brahman because AUM is a name for Brahman. This method is reliable only because (1) *śruti* tells us that AUM signifies Brahman and (2) tradition asserts that there is an eternal connection between signifier and signified.

In keeping with the Māṇḍūkya, Śāṅkara goes a step farther in his explanation of nouns than does Śābara. Since AUM signifies the Self, he explains, then AUM is of the “same nature” as the Self.<sup>279</sup> AUM, like *Ātman*, is the non-dual ground (*āspadam*) for *all* conceptions (*vikalpa*).<sup>280</sup> The word *vikalpa* is a critically important term in the Māṇḍūkya Kārika and is key for understanding Śāṅkara’s philosophy of language and apophatic method. If we are to understand how the negation of nouns serves as a means to indicate Brahman, we must first have a clear understanding of the relationship between nouns and ultimate reality. As mentioned earlier (p74), Śāṅkara coordinates this teaching on AUM to Uddālaka’s pedagogical discourse with his son, Śvetaketu, in CU VI.1, thereby compelling us to reread one in light of the other. Reading these together, comparatively, we develop a clearer picture of Śāṅkara’s understanding of *vikalpa* which, in turn, deepens our understanding of kataphatic and apophatic speech.

In light of CU VI.1, it is clear that a clay pot and a lump of clay are distinct, particular *vyakti*-s or manifestations of clay; and yet the pot and the lump are of the same nature (i.e., clay). Likewise, nouns are distinct from one another (e.g., “pot” ≠ “lump”), and yet, Śāṅkara explains, all nouns are of the same nature (i.e., AUM). All speech, in other words, is a modification (*vikalpa*) of AUM in the same way that a clay pot is a modification (*vikalpa*) of clay. While each word remains distinct from every other word (e.g., “pot” is distinct from “lump”), just as a clay pot is distinct from a lump of clay, these words have AUM as their basis, just as the pot and lump have clay as their basis. Confusion arises, however, if the modification itself is mistakenly taken to be the basis. Śāṅkara explains this through a familiar example:

In the same way that a rope is the basis for a concept like a snake, the non-dual Self, being the highest reality, is the basis for a concept like *prāṇa*

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<sup>279</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>280</sup> MUBh 1, cited below.

(breath); **in the very same way**, the entire manifold of speech is just AUM, which is the field for conceptions of the self like *prāṇa*.<sup>281</sup>

While a clay pot is ontically distinct from a lump of clay, their material cause or basis is not distinct. Similarly, while the word “cow” is ontically distinct from the word “horse,” their basis is simply AUM. They are distinct conceptual manifestations of AUM. If one mistakes the concept (*vikalpa*) for the basis (*āspadam*), this does not change the fact that AUM is the basis, but merely constitutes a superimposition of the concept on the basis, just as the concept of a snake is superimposed on a rope, which is the basis for that conception.

Reading these passages coordinately, we see that the word *vikalpa*, at least in this case, does not signify something false, illusory, or untrue. It simply means a modification, or a finite measure of something else. Nouns are modifications of AUM and, as such, are limited measures of that which is beyond measure. It would be a mistake, however, to attribute any value judgment here whatsoever. To say that a noun is a limited, measured, modification of AUM is not to suggest that a noun is somehow deficient, illusory, or unreal. Śāṅkara’s meaning is far simpler and straightforward: Nouns are limited, measured modifications of AUM. By negating those nouns, one does not negate AUM, which is the basis (*āspadam*) of all speech, but simply removes the limitation. Just as was concluded in the previous section on UMS III.2.21: Apophasis is the negation of the measure, not of the measured.

As Jacqueline Suthren Hirst has shown, Śāṅkara often coordinates the clay-pot example with the rope-snake analogy, as is observed here. She explains:

[The examples] complement each other, at times reinforcing similar points, but, more importantly, helping to eliminate from one another the wrong inferences that might be made, were each example allowed to stand alone.

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<sup>281</sup> MUBh 1 (emphasis added): रज्जुरादिरिव सर्पादिविकल्पस्यास्पदोऽद्वय आत्मा परमार्थः सन्प्राणादिविकल्पस्यास्पदो यथा तथा सर्वोऽपि वाक्प्रपञ्चः प्राणाद्यात्मविकल्पविषय ॐकार एव । Shastri, 215, lines 1-3.

Each one functions properly, not merely by offering its own insights, but by excluding irrelevant features from the others.<sup>282</sup>

In MUBh 1, Śaṅkara employs each of the two examples for different purposes, but by using the two together, he also eliminates wrong inferences that might be drawn from either in isolation. The rope-snake analogy is employed to highlight the error of superimposing an idea or concept upon a particular entity. The point here is not that a universal signified by a signifier is unreal or illusory in the way that the snake is illusory. Rather, the point is that the superimposition of a concept (*vikalpa*) upon a particular obscures and veils the object to be seen, just as the idea of the snake obscures and veils the perception of the rope. Unlike the snake, however, the concept (*vikalpa*) signified by the signifier is real; it is a modification (*vikalpa*) of AUM in the same way that a pot is a modification (*vikalpa*) of clay.

Śaṅkara explains Uddālaka's lesson to Śvetaketu in Chāndogya VI.1.4 as follows: “[B]y knowing the clay which is the material cause of the bowl, jar, etc., all else which is but a modification of clay shall become known.”<sup>283</sup> Similarly, by knowing that the concepts (*vikalpa*-s) signified by signifiers are but modifications (*vikalpa*-s) of AUM, all other concepts become known as modifications of AUM, which is of the same nature as the Self.<sup>284</sup> Stated plainly, the relationship between any given word and AUM is analogous to the relationship between any clay object and clay. Hence, kataphatic descriptions of Brahman are reliable and adequate since the concepts signified by these signifiers are modifications of AUM, like the clay-pot example. These same positive descriptions of Brahman are unreliable and inadequate if the concepts signified by these signifiers are superimposed upon particulars, like the rope-snake

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<sup>282</sup> Suthren Hirst (2005), 113.

<sup>283</sup> CUBh VI.1.4, Panoli trans., 556.

<sup>284</sup> MUBh 1: स चात्मस्वरूपं एव तदभिधायकत्वात् । Shastri, 215, line 3.



analogy. As previously cited, Clooney observes that “[Advaita] Texts serve their proper function when they call into question their own reliability and adequacy.”<sup>285</sup> Hence, positive descriptions of Brahman are reliable, but only if the resulting conceptions of Brahman are not reified and superimposed on Brahman.

Analogously, suppose a teacher wanted to teach a student what “clay” is. To do so, the teacher may point to a clay pot and say “clay.” The teacher may then point to a lump of clay and say “clay.” In doing so, the teacher negates the concepts of “pot” and “lump.” The particular entities, which constitute the basis (*āspadam*) of each concept, remain distinct and unchanged. The concepts of “pot” and “lump” also remain distinct and unchanged with respect to each other, even as the conception of each is dissolved by means of the teaching.

As noted above (p110), signifiers always and simultaneously signify both universals and particulars, but only one of the two is primary, depending upon the speaker’s intention.<sup>286</sup> In the statement, “this pot is clay,” the primary signification of the word “clay” is a particular (*i.e.*, “this pot”). The statement is true because the word “clay” is a signifier that signifies each and every particular entity made of clay. (To be clear, there is no intermediate step. The word “clay” *directly* signifies that particular pot, which is the primary meaning of the word in that sentence. That is *not* to say that the word “clay” signifies a set, collection, or class of particulars, of which the pot is one, thereby *indirectly* signifying the particular pot.)<sup>287</sup> However, the statement “clay is *not* this pot” is simultaneously true because the primary signification of the word “clay” in this

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<sup>285</sup> Clooney (1993), 44.

<sup>286</sup> PMSBh I.3.33: सर्वथा तावत्प्रतीयते । अर्थाद्गुणभावः प्रधानभावो वा । स्वार्थचेदुच्चार्यते, [आकृतिः] प्रधानभूता । अथ न स्वार्थम्परार्थमेव ततो [आकृतिः] गुणभूता ।

<sup>287</sup> This point is debated in Śabara’s *bhāṣya* on PMS I.3.33. The view presented here is the *siddhānta*.

sentence is a universal.<sup>288</sup> The negation in the latter statement (“clay is *not* this pot”) does not negate the fact that this particular pot is clay, but merely negates the limitation (or measure) since the concept of clay is neither limited to that particular pot nor to the universal class/idea of “pot.” This shows, once again, that apophasis intends to negate the measure, not the measured.

While the student may possibly grasp the meaning of the word “clay” merely from one hearing and example, it is more likely that multiple positive examples will be necessary. On the other hand, it is unlikely that a student will only grasp the meaning of the word “clay” after every particular instance of clay has been pointed out (were such a thing even possible!). The point is that once a student grasps the idea of “clay,” the student will be able to *see* other particular bodies and *perceive* them as clay. Hence, the *buddhi*, which has its basis in the particular external object, is grasped by means of the word “clay,” which is eternally connected to that particular object as well as to a transcendental meaning eternally connected to that word.<sup>289</sup>

The pedagogical method demonstrated here is pertinent: various positive descriptions are followed by the negation thereof for the sake of removing the limitations imposed by the positive descriptions. The positive descriptions are measures of that which is to be shown, just as a clay pot and lump are measures of clay. To that extent, these measures are reliable and instructive. However, the extent to which they measure poses a limitation which must be dissolved.

Like any analogy, the foregoing has limitations. Instructing a student as to the meaning of the word “clay” is not directly analogous to instructing a student as to the meaning of “AUM” because “clay” is a limited concept whereas AUM is not. AUM is of the same nature as the Self

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<sup>288</sup> Likewise, the word “pot” signifies particulars and universals, depending upon the speaker’s intention. Regarding the six types of universals, see p93 and p185.

<sup>289</sup> PMSBh I.1.5, previously discussed.

because AUM signifies the Self.<sup>290</sup> Any word that is not synonymous with AUM is only a partial measure of AUM, which is an infinite signifier of an infinite signified.<sup>291</sup> Śaṅkara explains that since all words are concepts that only partially represent AUM, which is “all this,” then they have no existence apart from their names.<sup>292</sup> In other words, according to Śaṅkara, signifiers exist only insofar as they measure AUM. Because AUM signifies “all that was, is, and shall be,”<sup>293</sup> and because there is an eternal connection between signifier and signified,<sup>294</sup> then whatever signifies something less than “all that was, is, and shall be” exists only as a name that measures AUM (or appropriate synonyms for AUM such as *ātman*, *brahman*, etc.). “The entire manifold of speech is just AUM,”<sup>295</sup> Śaṅkara explicates. All speech unfolds AUM.

#### AUM as Apophatic Measure

By tracing the foregoing, we are able to regard AUM as an apophatic measure. AUM disrupts attempts to posit binary opposition between the one and the many. Because “the entire manifold of speech is just AUM,” all words are measures of AUM. To de/define any word is to measure its semantic limit,<sup>296</sup> thereby measuring a finite portion of infinite AUM. Through an

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<sup>290</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>291</sup> MU 12.

<sup>292</sup> MUBh 1: ॐकारविकारशब्दाभिधेयश्च सर्वः प्राणादिरात्मविकल्पोऽभिधानव्यतिरेकेण नास्ति । Shastri, 215-216. A more literal translation: “And everything that is signified by words that are a modification/deviation (*vikāra*) of AUM does not exist separate from names which are conceptions of the Self, like *prāṇa*.” Immediately following this, Śaṅkara quotes Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.1.4: “Modification (*vikārah*) is simply a name arising from speech.”

<sup>293</sup> MU 1.

<sup>294</sup> PMS I.1.5, discussed above.

<sup>295</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>296</sup> MKBh 1.29. See p169.

apophasis of all linguistic-conceptual measures (mere modifications), one is prepared to hear AUM, which all speech unfolds.<sup>297</sup>

If one is to hear the *śruti*, coordinately and harmoniously, one must first grasp the eternal signifying relationship between words, universals, and particulars (p97). Words simultaneously signify universals and particulars (p99). Only one of these significations is primary in any given sentence, based upon the speaker's intention (p110). In kataphatic descriptions of AUM, words have different signifying intentions than do words in apophatic descriptions (p113).

Kataphatic descriptions of AUM intend to signify particulars. As we will see later (p164), kataphatic descriptions truly and reliably measure AUM, which is the infinite measure beyond measure.<sup>298</sup> If this were not the case—if kataphatic descriptions failed to truly and reliably measure ultimate reality—then one would have no means whatsoever by which to know ultimate reality (p348).<sup>299</sup>

Apophatic descriptions of AUM, however, intend to signify universals. Apophasis negates universals which have been cognitively superimposed upon particulars (p108). These two moments (kataphasis and apophasis) are inextricably linked and do not contradict one another, provided one understands their differing intentions. When awakened, one attends to these intentions and is thusly prepared to hear the *śruti*, coordinately and harmoniously.

Through Śaṅkara's discussion of AUM, we begin to see that the methods of *upasaṃhāra* and *samanvaya* are more than exegetical strategies. Having cultivated these skills, one begins to hear the multiplicity of different *śruti* voices in harmony (p76). Similarly, when one grasps that

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<sup>297</sup> In the opening two sentences of his *bhāṣya*, Śaṅkara states that the entire MK explicates AUM.

<sup>298</sup> GK 1.29.

<sup>299</sup> MU 7.

all words—and the universals they signify—are modifications of AUM, one begins to coordinate words. The one (AUM) is not opposed to the many; it unfolds as the manifold of speech in fugal variation. One learns to hear the multiplicity of words, harmoniously.

Harmony is not unison. The particularity of distinct teachings matter. Echoing UMS III.3.58, Clooney explains that “the various texts really do count, and one cannot conflate them into a single theoretical account: one cannot simply compile all the qualities of Brahman, wherever mentioned, into a single whole.”<sup>300</sup> Likewise, I argue, one cannot conflate all words, compiling them without distinction, in hope of amalgamating AUM. Harmonization (*samanvaya*) requires a diversity of voices.<sup>301</sup> Realizing that a clay pot and a clay lump are both “clay” neither obviates the particular distinctions between the words “pot” and “lump,” nor does it obviate distinctions between the particular pot and the particular lump. Analogously, realizing that “the entire manifold of speech is just AUM,”<sup>302</sup> does not obviate distinctions between words. Apophasis is the negation of the measure, not of the measured. Words are ontically distinct—as are the universals and particulars they signify—but are not ontologically distinct, since the entire manifold of speech is just AUM. Words are AUM just as a clay pot is clay, but (unlike words) AUM is of the “same nature” as the Self; it is the non-dual ground for all dualistic conceptions (p111). By negating words (conceptual modifications of AUM), one negates neither their particularity nor multiplicity. Rather, one learns to hear the entire manifold of speech, harmoniously.

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<sup>300</sup> Clooney (1993), 65. See also Śāṅkara’s UMSBh III.3.58 and his reliance upon Mīmāṃsā therein.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Cusa’s DCC I.8: “all being and living is constituted by *concordantia*, but all concordance is a concordance of differences.” Cited on p34, above.

<sup>302</sup> MUBh 1.

In this sense, AUM is an apophatic measure: AUM is devoid of all linguistic measures precisely because it unfolds all linguistic measures. One cannot come to know AUM without words. One learns to hear AUM kataphatically: word-by-word, measure-by-measure. This is possible because words (in *śruti*'s kataphatic speech) intend to signify particulars and AUM is all particulars ("all this"). And yet, precisely because words measure AUM, which is beyond measure, they must be negated. One learns to hear AUM apophatically. This is possible because words (in *śruti*'s apophatic speech) intend to signify—and thus negate—universals. Grasping the signifying relations and intentions as these are understood in Mīmāṃsā, one becomes prepared to hear Vedānta. As an apophatic measure, AUM unfolds all speech, negates all measures, and harmonizes all particulars *without* reducing them to unison.

AUM is a (non)measure beyond cognitive grasp which cannot be *known* (since cognition requires language, p104), but can be *heard*. Just as *upasamhāra* enables us to hear diverse *śruti* teachings harmoniously without resolving difference to unison, Śaṅkara's reflection on AUM enables us to hear words—the entire manifold of speech—concordantly without obviating their irreducible particularity. One learns to hear in this way through a wakeful attentiveness to *śruti*'s differing intentions. Attentive to these differing intentions, one hears:

“AUM”—that sacred syllable is all this. Its explanation is: All that was, is, and shall be is simply AUM. And, moreover, that which transcends the three periods of time, that, too, is simply AUM.<sup>303</sup>

### **Dissolving Measures (MUBh 2-7)**

Having examined the first of the MU's three movements, my attention now turns to the second.<sup>304</sup> Here, Śaṅkara develops and applies the philosophy of language sketched in MUBh 1.

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<sup>303</sup> MU 1.

<sup>304</sup> See p60 above.

He prompts the reader to consider the MU’s intention: How does the discussion of AUM shape how we read the text as a whole? He coordinates the teaching about AUM with subsequent divisions of the text, thereby modeling Vedānta’s tradition of *upasamhāra* (p72). Consistent with the conclusions drawn above, the first three *pādas* (MU 3-5) are kataphatic descriptions of the Self, and thus intend to signify particular states of consciousness. The fourth *pāda* describes the Self apophatically, and thus intends to negate the universals measured by the previous three.

Here again, apophasis negates the measures, not that which they measure. The four states depict four levels of attentiveness. Through negation, distractions are progressively dissolved, culminating in direct perception, beyond measure. The four states of attentiveness are ontically distinct, since one’s perceptual attention differs in each, but are not ontologically different from one another, since the perceiving witness (the seer of sight) is the same throughout. The Self is devoid of all measure precisely because the Self measures all measures. I begin with Śaṅkara’s analysis of the word *pāda* in light of the foregoing philosophy of language, aided by Ānandagiri’s subcommentary. I then turn to Śaṅkara’s method of progressive dissolution.

#### Quarter Measures

*All this is certainly Brahman. This Self is Brahman.  
That [Brahman] is this Self, possessed of four quarters (catuṣpāt).  
—Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 2*

The second verse of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad initiates the second division of the text. Echoing MU 1, which states that AUM is “all this,” MU 2 states that Brahman is “all this,” adding that the Self is Brahman. This is regarded as one of four *mahāvākyas* (great sentences) in Vedānta.<sup>305</sup> Although it describes the Self as possessing four quarters, subsequently called

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<sup>305</sup> The other three are “Thou art that” (CU VI.8.7), “Awareness is Brahman” (Aitareya Upaniṣad V.3), and “I am Brahman” (BU I.4.10). Rambachan (2015), 65 and 201.

“measures” (MU 8), Śāṅkara immediately problematizes this. It is no simple matter to understand how the Self is—and is not—possessed of four quarters.

The first three quarters (MU 3, 4, 5) are described positively and the fourth (MU 7) is described negatively. In Śāṅkara’s commentary on the latter, a *pūrvapakṣin* objects to this method: by indicating that the Self is possessed of four quarters and subsequently describing the first three quarters, it logically follows that the fourth is different from these three. By simply negating these descriptions, the text accomplishes nothing, since it is obvious that the fourth must be different from these three if it is said to be the fourth.<sup>306</sup> In other words: In what sense is the fourth the fourth? If the fourth is actually different from the previous three, then negating the attributes of the previous three is merely repetitive. Alternatively, if the fourth is *not* actually different from these, then in what sense is it a quarter at all? Perhaps it is a mere void (*śūnyam eva*).<sup>307</sup>

Though posed in MUBh 7, Śāṅkara has already addressed the question in MUBh 2 through his analysis of the word *pāda*. He tells us that “The Self... is possessed of four quarters like a Kārṣāpaṇa<sup>308</sup> coin, but not like a cow.”<sup>309</sup> Since the word *pāda* can mean either “quarter” or “foot,” then Śāṅkara’s meaning here would seem somewhat straightforward: The MU is not claiming that the Self has four feet in the same way that a cow has four feet.

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<sup>306</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>308</sup> The meaning of the *kārṣāpaṇa* analogy is unclear. Ānandagiri explains that the word *kārṣāpaṇa* means various things in various places. Therefore, he reasons, we cannot know what Śāṅkara meant by this example. MUBhT 2, Shastri, 218, lines 29-33.

<sup>309</sup> MUBh 2. Shastri, 218, line 7.



Ānandagiri's gloss on this, however, reveals a more profound theological significance.<sup>310</sup> As he explains, the purpose of a cow's four feet is walking. In order to walk, the cow successively shifts its weight from one foot to the other. With each step, the cow's foundation (*āśraya*) changes. With one step, this foot is the cow's foundation; with another step, that foot is the cow's foundation. The Self, however, is the foundation of all. It is unchanging and steadfast whereas a cow's foundation shifts in order to walk.<sup>311</sup>

Nevertheless, granting that the Self does not have four *pādas* in the way that a cow has four feet, the *pūrvapakṣin*'s objection stands: Is the fourth *pāda* actually different from the other three or not? If it is different, then the text should describe it. If it is not different, or is a mere void, then the Self is not possessed of four *pādas*, but only three.<sup>312</sup>

Śaṅkara's explanation mimics the structure and patterns of the MU itself, consistent with the conclusions drawn in the previous section. Words in kataphatic descriptions have different signifying intentions than do words in apophatic descriptions (p113). Accordingly, the word *pāda* signifies something qualitatively different with respect to the first three quarters (positively described) than it does with respect to the fourth (negatively described). It denotes an “instrumental means” with respect to the first three quarters, but denotes “the thing attained” with respect to the fourth.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> See note 308 above.

<sup>311</sup> ṚgVeda X.90 describes the primordial *Puruṣa* as possessed of four *pāda*-s with one quarter “below” and three quarters “above.” While there may be a correlation between these teachings, it is not easily discernable since the first three quarters in the MU would seem to correspond to the one quarter below rather than the three quarters above. Śaṅkara does not make any reference to the hymn and thus further consideration is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>312</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>313</sup> MUBh 2: त्रयाणां विश्वादीनां... करणसाधनः पादशब्दः । तुरीयस्य पद्यत इति कर्मसाधनः पादशब्दः । Shastri 218, line 8. While this may seem to violate Mīmāṃsā exegetical rules, it may not be the case. For example, one might look to Śabara's Bhāṣya on PMS I.4.10-12 for cases where exceptional meanings of everyday words are allowed. I am indebted to Francis Clooney for pointing this out to me. Also, see Madhusūdana Sarasvatī's subcommentary on

Śaṅkara's analysis of the word *pāda* calls into question the very means by which words signify meanings.<sup>314</sup> By insisting that the fourth "quarter" is qualitatively but not *quantitatively* distinct from the first three "quarters," he problematizes the word "quarter."<sup>315</sup> He compels his reader to consider how the four "quarters" are related while resisting facile interpretations that would apply the word to the fourth in the same respect as to the other three.

Moreover, the *pūrvapakṣin*'s objection leads us to consider that the apophatic speech in MU 7 tells us something new, rather than simply negating the qualities positively described in the first three *pādas*. Having asserted that the Self is possessed of four quarters (MU 2), it logically follows that the fourth is different from the other three. What is negated in MU 7, therefore, must be different from what is posited in MU 3, 4, and 5. As we saw above with AUM (p117), words in kataphatic speech intend to signify particulars whereas words in apophatic speech intend to signify (and negate) universals. While the words posited in MU 3, 4, and 5 may be largely the same as the words negated in MU 7, the signifying intentions differ. Only by attending to these differing intentions does one grasp the text's meaning.

As concluded above (p118), words are ontically distinct but are not ontologically distinct since the entire manifold of speech is just AUM. Likewise, the four *pādas* are ontically distinct

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Śaṅkara's BGBh VIII.3 for a similar explanation. Ānandagiri explains that if the word *pāda* in all four cases were to indicate a means to accomplish something, then what is to be learned would not be accomplished since the process would terminate with a means, not an end. Likewise, if the word *pāda* in every case were to signify what is to be accomplished, then a doubt would be raised as to the means to accomplish it. Therefore, Ānandagiri reasons, it is shown that by dividing (*vibhajya*) the signification of the word *pāda*, there is both the means to know what is to be known and a statement of what is to be known. MUBhT 2, Shastri, 218, lines 33-35. Francis Clooney also drew my attention to a parallel with TUBh 2, wherein Śaṅkara comments that *maya* ("made of") has one meaning four times over, but a different meaning on the fifth (*ānanda-maya*) usage.

<sup>314</sup> See above (p109) and Clooney (1993), 44.

<sup>315</sup> That is to say that if the fourth "quarter" is not a "quarter" at all, then neither can the first three "quarters," since *pāda* implies four quarters.

but are not ontologically distinct since the Self is possessed of four quarters.<sup>316</sup> In the same way that words measure AUM, which is “all this,” but must be negated insofar as they measure, the three *pādas* measure the Self, but must be negated insofar as they measure.<sup>317</sup> Accordingly, Ānandagiri emphasizes that the highest reality is only provisionally described as possessing four quarters, for the sake of instruction.<sup>318</sup>

The *pādas* remain ontically distinct from one another in the same way that a clay pot is ontically distinct from a lump of clay. Just as a teacher may provisionally indicate a pot and a lump in order to teach a student about clay, the first three *pādas* are described and distinguished provisionally as a means to disclose that which persists in all three: the Self, or Seer, who sees external things in the waking state, internal things in the dream state, and no thing at all in the dreamless state.<sup>319</sup> Even when the three states described in MU 3-5 are realized to be ontologically non-different from one another, ontic distinctions persist. One who is fully awakened in the *turīya* state continues to perceive and discriminate one thing from another.<sup>320</sup> Particular distinctions remain distinct. As stated earlier with respect to *upasamhāra* (p118), the kataphatic descriptions in the first three *pādas* cannot simply be compiled or conflated into a single whole, as if the distinctions cease to matter, nor can their particular differences be dissolved, reduced to monotonous unison.<sup>321</sup> Rather, by coordinating that which they measure,

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<sup>316</sup> MU 2.

<sup>317</sup> Cf. MU 8: “AUM is the Self. With respect to the measures, the quarters are the measures and the measures are the quarters.”

<sup>318</sup> MUBhT 2. Shastri, 218, line 36-219, line11. His comment foreshadows MK 1.18.

<sup>319</sup> MU 3-5.

<sup>320</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>321</sup> Cf. Clooney (1993), 65, cited on p112.

progressively dissolving superimposed conceptions, the particular descriptions described in the first three *pādas* are heard, harmoniously, in the fourth.

#### Progressive Dissolution (*pūrvapūrvapṛavilāpana*)

At the conclusion of his commentary on MU2, Śāṅkara states:

Since the *turīya* is attained by dissolving (*pṛavilāpana*) the first three beginning with *Viśva* in due succession (*pūrvapūrvā*), the term *pāda* is used here as ‘instrumental means.’ In the case of the *turīya*, the word *pāda* is used as ‘the thing attained.’<sup>322</sup>

The term *pṛavilāpana* deserves careful consideration since it might easily be misconstrued.

Although Panoli and Nikhilananda each translate it as “merging,” this should not suggest that the *turīya* is an amalgamation of the first three.<sup>323</sup> Andrew Fort translates it as “absorbing,” but here again the term should be understood in an epistemological sense, not in an ontological sense.

Śāṅkara uses the same term regarding the dissolution of signifier-and-signified (p126), and also in UMSBh III.2.21 (p108). In each case, the term *pṛavilāpana* must refer to signified universals, not to signified particulars, since the latter would entail the destruction of the universe at the moment the first person realizes Brahman (p101). Apophasis is the negation of universal measures, not the particulars measured.

The word derives from the verbal root  $\sqrt{li}$ , meaning “to melt, dissolve, absorb, etc.,”<sup>324</sup> and the prefixes *pra-* and *vi-*, meaning “progressively” and “completely.” The term certainly has cosmological implications, which are pertinent here. In MK 2.32, Śāṅkara uses a variant of the word (*pralaya*) to mean “death,” or dissolution of the individual ego at the end of the cycle of

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<sup>322</sup> MUBh 2, Shastri, 218, lines 7-8.

<sup>323</sup> In MUBh 1, Panoli translates the same term as “eliminate,” which significantly diverges from Śāṅkara’s meaning. Panoli, 305.

<sup>324</sup> Apte (1957).

birth and death, and the same term in opposition to *utpatti* (cosmological origin), all of which are said to be nonexistent from the perspective of the highest truth.<sup>325</sup> Similarly, in Bhagavadgītā VII.6, the Omniscient Lord is identified as the source and dissolution (*prabhavaḥ pralayaḥ*) of the universe, which Śāṅkara glosses as “origin” and “destruction.”<sup>326</sup> In MKBh 3.19, the Supreme Non-dual Reality is said to be “cleaved” only by measuring, because it is, in fact, partless.<sup>327</sup> In this sense, then, the origin of duality is the cleaving of the non-dual Self and *pralaya* is the reversal thereof. Although the parts themselves are not destroyed by virtue of the fact that they are unborn (*ajāti*), the fourth state is attained by progressively and completely dissolving (*pra-vi-lāpana*) the measures that partition the non-dual Self.

In his discussion of AUM in MUBh 1, Śāṅkara states:

The purpose of apprehending the unity of signifier and signified is the attainment of the Brahman by dissolving distinctions simultaneously by means of just a single effort.<sup>328</sup>

Signifiers simultaneously signify universals and particulars (p110), but *pravi-lāpana* cannot possibly entail dissolving particulars, since this is empirically and logically absurd (p101). Hence, the negation of nouns simultaneously dissolves signified universals. Unlike particulars, universals are conceptual modifications of AUM; they do not exist apart from their names (p113).<sup>329</sup> Ontic distinctions persist. Words remain useful and necessary for cognition (p104),

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<sup>325</sup> MKBh 2.32, Panoli 383.

<sup>326</sup> BGBh VII.6, Panoli 383. In light of the foregoing, it should be noted that two verses later (BG VII.8), the Lord is identified with AUM.

<sup>327</sup> MKBh 3.19, Panoli 425.

<sup>328</sup> MUBh 1. Shastri, 218, lines 3-4.

<sup>329</sup> MUBh 1. Shastri, 215-216.

even for one who is wakefully attentive to the truth of Brahman.<sup>330</sup> Having dissolved signifiers and universals, however, one no longer superimposes conceptions upon particulars (p106). One perceives particulars as they show themselves to be, without reducing particulars to verbal conception.

The method of progressive dissolution is a theological apophasis inextricably linked to kataphasis. Signifiers simultaneously signify universals and particulars (p110). Since words in kataphatic speech intend to signify particulars (p117), the first three states signify the Self as the Seer who sees in the waking state, in the dream state, and in the state of deep sleep. In this way, the three states measure the Self, reliably and truly. One must first come to understand the measuring (*māyā*) of the infinite Self *qua* measures. Only thereafter is one able to progressively dissolve these measures, thereby removing all measuring to reveal the Self beyond measure, which measures “all this.”<sup>331</sup> Progressive dissolution is an epistemic unseeing, or unknowing, of the three states *qua* measures. Realizing the Self is, as Anantanand Rambachan puts it, “accomplishing the accomplished.”<sup>332</sup> It is not the result of any cause. Progressive dissolution is not a method by which to know something unknown. It is a method by which one unknows that which obstructs the direct perception of the Brahman that is before one’s very eyes and perceptible. One always already sees Brahman, but fails to perceive Brahman due to a superimposition of signified concepts upon signified particulars. Progressive dissolution is a theological method whereby ignorance of Brahman is removed by negating nouns and the universals they signify *without* negating the ontic distinctions between corresponding

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<sup>330</sup> If this were not so, Śaṅkara would not be able to write commentaries.

<sup>331</sup> MU 11-12.

<sup>332</sup> Rambachan (1991).

particulars.<sup>333</sup> It does not negate, sublimate, or subvert particularity. To the contrary, it is an apophasis of all measuring (*māyā*) which enables the direct perception of particulars. One sees particulars, distinctly and discriminately (p124), and one cognizes particulars by means of words which are eternally connected to universals (p104), but one no longer superimposes universals upon particulars, reducing particulars to cognitive measures (p106).

#### Learning to See beyond Measure

As the foregoing demonstrates, apophasis, for Śāṅkara, is the negation of measures, not of the measured. There are no shortcuts to this method, as emphasized below. Śāṅkara's teaching cannot be abstracted from its textual context. To know Brahman, which is measured by the three *pādas*, one must understand each of the measures, *pāda-by-pāda*, before progressively dissolving these measures. In so doing, one observes that the method of progressive dissolution leads to direct perception. It is a method by which one learns to see, without reducing particulars to cognitive measures.

Near the end of the MKBh, Śāṅkara succinctly describes the method again, step-by-step. In his commentary on MK IV.89, he explains that one must first know the sphere of ordinary material experience, which is to say Brahman in its ordinary gross form, and then subsequently know the simple world by the absence of the material world, and successively know only the extraordinary by the absence of that. Finally, one realizes the highest truth, the *turīya*, by the absence of the three states.<sup>334</sup> Employing words such as “subsequently” and “by step,” he emphasizes procedural chronology. Subsequent states are distinguished by an absence of something found in the previous state. Though he does not use the word *pratilāpana* in this

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<sup>333</sup> Analogously, realizing clay as the material cause of clay pot and clay lump does not negate the ontic distinctions between “pot” and “lump.”

<sup>334</sup> MKBh 4.89.

passage, he depicts each stage as a removal. What is important, according to Śāṅkara, is not simply the positive differences between the states, but what is absent (*abhāva*) in a later state in juxtaposition to an earlier state. Through progressive apophasis of all measures, the method culminates in direct perception of particularity.

As previously discussed (p63), MU 1 is paradigmatic in form: three positive descriptions followed by a negative description. Its description of AUM as “All that was, is, and shall be” easily maps to the first three states: present (MU 3, perception of what is presently seen in the waking state), past (MU 4, perception of memories/impressions that were seen in the waking state), and potency (MU 5, potential perception). Subsequent states are distinguished by what they lack in comparison to the preceding state. Thus, the *vaiśvānara* state includes cognition of both material and immaterial things (i.e., particulars and universals); the *taijasa* state lacks cognition of material things (i.e., particulars); the *prājñā* state lacks cognition of material things and immaterial things.

The verses indicate a progressive removal of *what is seen* in order to indicate the non-dual seer, whose sight is never lost.<sup>335</sup> In MU 1, AUM is described as what is, what was but is no more, and what neither is nor was but has the potential to be; likewise, Brahman is described in MU 3-5 as cognition of what is, cognition of what was but is no more,<sup>336</sup> and cognition of nothing. The method, however, compels the attentive reader to ponder how the *prājñā* state differs from the *turīya*.

Each state lacks an attribute of the previous state. In MKBh 1.2, Śāṅkara describes the three states in terms of what the active mind sees with open eyes, what the active mind sees with

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<sup>335</sup> MUBh7: न हि द्रष्टृदृष्टेर्विपरिलोपो विद्यते । Panoli 335 (Śāṅkara is quoting BU 4.3.23).

<sup>336</sup> That is to say, what is no longer directly perceived.



closed eyes, and the inactivity of the mind. Here again, there is a progressive removal: active mind and active sense organs (MU 3), active mind and inactive sense organs (MU 4), and inactive mind and inactive sense organs (MU 5). Due to this inactivity of the mind and sense organs, however, the *prājñā* is characterized by darkness, which is absent in the *turīya*, which is ever the all seer (*sarvadṛksadā*).<sup>337</sup> This, however, begs the question as to the distinction between the *turīya* and the waking state, where mind and sense organs are active. Only by carefully adhering to Śaṅkara's method does one arrive at a realization of how the *turīya* is distinct from both the *vaiśvānara* and the *prājñā*.

As shown above, progressive dissolution is epistemological, not ontological. What is progressively dissolved is the conceptual content of perception, not the objects of perception. If this were not the case, then one would awaken from deep sleep to discover that the world was no longer there! The cognition of what is seen in the waking state is cognition of actually existing particulars in the world. Cognition, though, is not perception, which is a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) because it measures (*pramīyate*) truly.<sup>338</sup> In the waking state, the seer cognitively measures an object that is actually seen. In the dream state, the seer cognitively measures an object that is not actually seen at present. In the state of deep sleep, the seer has no cognition at all. Hence, what is progressively dissolved is cognition in order to reveal the seer. It is an apophasis that leads to seeing, as it were, the seer. Subsequent to this realization, one has a strikingly different apprehension of reality.

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<sup>337</sup> MK 1.12.

<sup>338</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: येन येन हि प्रमीयते, तत् तत् प्रमाणम् ।

For Śāṅkara and Gauḍapāda alike, the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep occur in the waking state itself (p155).<sup>339</sup> The *taijasa* and the *prājñā* are not descriptions of actual dreaming and dreamless sleep, but signify degrees of cognitive attentiveness or awakening. As mentioned earlier (p104), Śābara has used the same trifold analogy in his explanation of cognitive error associated with the process of sense perception. While a detailed examination of Śābara's discussion of perception is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is nevertheless helpful to return to it briefly as a means to clarify Śāṅkara's method.

Perception, according to Śābara, requires four elements: an external object to be perceived, a healthy sense organ, an alert mind, and an unobstructed connection of these three (Figure 4, p104).<sup>340</sup> In order to explain the occurrence of cognitive error, such as cognizing silver when one sees a shell, he turns to analogies of waking, dream, and deep sleep. *Actual* dream and *actual* deep sleep are irrelevant to a discussion of perceptual error, he explains, because they arise in the absence of the elements necessary for perception, such as active sense organs and an alert mind. In fact, Śābara argues that visions seen in a dream are not sublated by perception, but by inference. Upon waking, he explains, the unreality of dream is inferred simply because one becomes aware that one was sleeping and, therefore, not perceiving.<sup>341</sup> Cognitive errors which are sublated by perception occur only in the waking state, when there is a union of sense object, sense organs, and the mind. If there is a defect in any of these four elements, cognitive error

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<sup>339</sup> MK and MKBh 1.1-2.

<sup>340</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: इन्द्रियमनोर्थसंनिकर्षो हि ज्ञानस्य हेतुः । असति तस्मिन् अज्ञानात् ।

<sup>341</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

results. For example, if the mind is sleepy, it is inattentive, resulting in a deficient union between mind and sense organs, which further results in cognitive error (p104).<sup>342</sup>

Śabara emphasizes that the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep are to be understood as useful analogies, signifying degrees of attentiveness. Perception only occurs when the mind, which is the internal organ of perception, is *fully* awake and alert, whereas errors arise when the mind is not fully awake. One who is awake but whose mind is sleepy is prone to cognize erroneously because the mind is weak.<sup>343</sup> Moreover, even though one may be awake and one's eyes may be in contact with a sensible object, that object is not cognized at all when the mind is distracted or absent, as if in a daze, analogous to deep sleep.

Like Śabara, Śāṅkara and Gauḍapāda interpret the states of dream and deep sleep analogously to explain cognitive error in the waking state itself (p155). The four *pādas* described in MU 2-7 can be distinguished from one another based on the presence/absence of the four elements of perception discussed above.<sup>344</sup> The *prājñā* state lacks all four. The *taijasa* state is characterized by an active mind, but an absence of functioning sense organs.<sup>345</sup> In the *vaiśvānara* state, all three elements are present, but the connection between these three is obstructed, according to Śāṅkara, by a veil which is superimposed by the mind onto the *buddhi*, just as darkness enshrouds a pot, preventing it from being perceived. In the *turīya*, this veil is removed

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<sup>342</sup> Similarly, if the eye is afflicted with a disease, such as *timira*, there is a deficient union of the sense organ with the sense object, resulting in cognitive errors such as cognizing two moons.

<sup>343</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>344</sup> Namely: (1) An external object to be perceived, (2) A healthy sense organ, (3) An alert mind, and (4) an unobstructed connection of these three (Figure 4, p99).

<sup>345</sup> Or, more accurately, the absence of an unimpeded connection between the *antaḥkaraṇa* and the *buddhi*. See Figure 5 (p100).

by one who knows the meaning of the Vedānta scriptures, hence, the highest Self is able to be seen (p171).<sup>346</sup>

Only by analyzing the four states in terms of perception is one able to clearly distinguish between the *turīya* and the *prājñā* states and between the *turīya* and the *vaiśvānara* states. While both the *prājñā* and the *turīya* states are characterized by the non-cognition of duality,<sup>347</sup> only the *prājñā* is characterized by the non-perception of true reality.<sup>348</sup> In other words, although the obstacle preventing one from perceiving Brahman is not present in the *prājñā*, Brahman is still not perceived in this state due to the absence of perception. Similarly, even though the three elements of perception are present in the *vaiśvānara*, the Brahman that is before one's very eyes and perceptible is not perceived due to superimposition of signified concepts which obstruct the connection between mind, sense organs, and object. Perception only occurs when all four elements are present (p104, p131). Even though the *śruti* and a qualified teacher may turn a student's face towards what is to be known, knowledge of what is to be shown cannot arise without a valid means of knowledge suitable to that object, *viz.*, perception (p107).<sup>349</sup> Knowing Brahman, *pāda-by-pāda* and measure-by-measure, and progressively dissolving these measures, one removes conceptual impediments, and thus becomes wakefully attentive: able to perceive what the *śruti* intends.

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<sup>346</sup> MKBh 2.35.

<sup>347</sup> MK 1.13: द्वैतस्याग्रहणं तुल्यं उभयोः प्राज्ञतुर्ययोः । बीजनिद्रायुतः प्राज्ञः सा च तुर्ये न विद्यते ॥

<sup>348</sup> MKBh 1.13. तत्त्वाप्रतिबोध might also be translated "not being awake to/by the truth."

<sup>349</sup> UMSBh III.2.21. Shastri, 714-5. See p103 above.

## Conclusions

“The ‘system’ of Advaita is a well-planned event, not a theory.”<sup>350</sup> Despite (or perhaps because of) the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad’s brevity, it demands much planning, copious preparation, and coordinated readings and re-readings by those who wish to hear its harmony. Its rhythmic patterns unfold AUM in three movements (p63) which individually and collectively coordinate diverse *śruti* teachings with one another. When one is adequately prepared to hear its apophatic performance (p83), the MU removes our ignorance of Brahman, which is variously and metaphorically described as darkness, conception, or a veil (p93). By reading and rereading, all the while cultivating the skill of *upasaṃhāra*, one learns to hear multiple *śruti* teachings concordantly, without reducing their particular voices to unison (p118).

Śaṅkara equips his reader with the linguistic tools necessary to hear the MU’s teaching on AUM, which constitutes the first of its three movements. To grasp the intentions behind its three positive descriptions and subsequent negation, one must understand the relationship between signifiers and signified (p97). Because his linguistic philosophy is consistent with his Mīmāṃsaka predecessors, I have drawn upon Śabara’s articulations of how the language of *śruti* conveys meaning. Words are eternally connected with and simultaneously signify universals and particulars. Since Vedic sentences do not equivocate, only one of these two significations can be primary in any given sentence, according to the speaker’s intention (p110). In kataphatic descriptions, words intend to signify particulars; in apophatic descriptions, words intend to signify (and negate) universals (p113). Through wakeful attention to these differing intentions (p100), one becomes prepared to hear the *śruti*, concordantly. As an apophatic measure, AUM

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<sup>350</sup> Clooney (1993), 102.

unfolds all speech, negates all measures, and harmonizes all particulars *without* reducing them to unison (p119).

Turning to the second movement (MU 2-7), Śāṅkara prepares his reader to hear the MU's teaching on the fourfold Self. He coordinates the *catuṣpāt* teaching with the teaching on AUM, harmonizing them without obviating their distinct particularity. As above, his analysis of the word *pāda* demonstrates that words have different signifying intentions in kataphatic and apophatic speech.<sup>351</sup> While the words found in MU 3-5 are negated in MU 7, these descriptions are neither contradictory nor superfluous, provided that one attends to their differing intentions (p123). The positive descriptions in MU 3-5 signify (and thus *measure*) particular states of attentiveness. Though ontically distinct, these are not ontologically other than the Self, which is the Seer in each of these states of attentiveness (p126). Though the fourth *pāda* progressively dissolves signifiers together with signified universals in a single effort (p126), words and ideas nevertheless remain useful and necessary for perceptual cognition (p104).<sup>352</sup> Even after *śruti* has dissolved signifiers and the universals they measure, one continues to verbally grasp what is perceived, but one ceases to superimpose conceptions upon particulars (p106). One learns to perceive, beyond measure.

Treading the path of progressive dissolution, *pāda-by-pāda*, measure-by-measure, one takes notice of what is absent in each of the *pādas*. The verses indicate a progressive removal of *what is seen* in order to indicate the non-dual seer, whose sight is never lost (p129). For Śābara, Śāṅkara, and Gauḍapāda alike, the states of waking, dream, and deep sleep are to be understood

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<sup>351</sup> See also footnote 274 (p104).

<sup>352</sup> If this were not the case, then *pratyakṣa* would cease to be a *pramāṇa* when one realizes nonduality, since *pratyakṣa* entails cognizing particulars by means of words that are eternally connected with those particulars. The same is not necessarily true for *śruti*, however, since it ceases to be a valid means of knowledge once the knowledge for which it is a means has been realized. See MKBh 2.32 and BUBh II.1.20.

as useful analogies, signifying degrees of attentiveness (p132). The four *pādas* described in MU 2-7 can be distinguished from one another based on the presence/absence of four necessary elements of perception (p132). Only the *turīya* state includes all four. By progressively dissolving conceptual measures superimposed upon the *buddhi* by the internal organ of perception, one becomes wakefully attentive: able to perceive.

Both AUM and the *turīya* state are apophatic measures, but in distinct ways. AUM is “the entire manifold of speech.” While words are ontically distinct from one another, they are not ontologically different than AUM. By learning to hear AUM, one learns to hear words harmoniously, without reducing their particularity to unison. The *turīya* indicates the Self who is the seer in the four states of attentiveness. While these states are ontically distinct from one another, they are not ontologically other than the Self, possessed of four quarters. By attending to what is absent in the three states, one traces the path of perception, from particulars to the non-dual Seer of sight. Without compiling or conflating these distinct teachings on AUM and the *catuspāt*, Śaṅkara prepares his reader to hear them, coordinately and harmoniously. As an apophatic measure, AUM leads us to an awakened, attentive sensuality: diverse words are heard concordantly without resolving to unison. Words unfold AUM (“the entire manifold of speech”), retaining ontic distinction while negating ontological alterity. As an apophatic measure, the *turīya* also leads us to an awakened, attentive sensuality: diverse particulars are perceived in fractal variation, retaining ontic distinction while asserting ontological nonduality. Resisting dualistic conceptions that would oppose the one and the many, these apophatic measures cultivate a sensuality beyond measure, where the manifold is seen/heard simply and the simple is seen/heard multiply.

### Three: Apophatic Measures in Śaṅkara

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The trifold structure of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad was introduced in chapter one (p63). Like three movements in a symphony, its divisions call and respond to one another in fugal and rhythmic variation. By teaching us to read its three portions, coordinately, Śaṅkara prepares us for the event of hearing them, harmoniously. As I have argued (p71), Śaṅkara does not consider any part of the MK to be *śruti*. Its import is that it models the scriptural-spiritual methods of coordination and harmonization, which are hermeneutical strategies important to his theological tradition. By coordinating particular scriptural teachings, one learns to hear the *śruti* harmoniously, without reducing diverse scriptural teachings to unison.

Śaṅkara's commentary prepares us to read by equipping us with the tools necessary to understand the text, on its own terms, as demonstrated in chapter two. By sketching a philosophy of language, he draws from the resources of his theological tradition. Only after grasping Mīmāṃsā's understanding of kataphasis is one prepared to hear Vedānta's apophasis (p116). Thus prepared, one begins to hear all words—the entire manifold of speech—as AUM, without reducing harmony to unison. Likewise, by grasping Mīmāṃsā's understanding of perception and its analogies to sleep as states of attentiveness, one becomes prepared to see the *turīya* as a state of wakeful attentiveness (p134). When adequately prepared, the MU enables us to hear and see differently such that the many are not conflated, reduced to a homogenous monism, even as their ontological nonduality is affirmed. In the succinct words of Anantanand Rambachan: *Not-two is not one.*<sup>353</sup>

Much of my analysis in the previous two chapters has remained necessarily theoretical and abstract. In this chapter, the methods described above are examined in their practical

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<sup>353</sup> Rambachan (2015).



application. It is one thing to assert, as I have, that the MU exemplifies the praxis of *upasamhāra*, but quite another to demonstrate this to be the case. Likewise, having asserted that the four *pādas* can be distinguished from one another based on the presence/absence of four necessary elements of perception (p132), I model this below.

The chapter is divided into three sections, clarifying the terms “apophasis,” “measuring,” and the “apophatic measure,” thus adhering to the heuristic outlined in my introduction (p3). The first section examines the methods of progressive dissolution and *upasamhāra* as these are practically applied by Śaṅkara in the second portion of the MU. These methods enable his reader to distinguish between the *prājñā* and the *turīya*. In order to grasp the significance of coordination, it is necessary to understand each of these teachings in their original context. Accordingly, I first turn my attention to the text of MU 2-7 itself in light of its scriptural source, the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. As I demonstrate, even this portion models scriptural coordination and harmonization.<sup>354</sup> I then turn my attention to Śaṅkara’s commentary on these verses. As we will see, Śaṅkara is not only concerned with distinguishing the *turīya* from the *prājñā*, but also in distinguishing the *turīya* from *śūnyam*, or ‘the void’. I conclude this section by reflecting on *śruti* as an apophatic measure<sub>1</sub> (p3).

In the second section, I focus on the third unit of the MU for the purpose of clarifying what is meant by the term “measure.” I begin with an examination of the MU verses in light of Gauḍapāda’s Kārika and Śaṅkara’s commentary with particular focus on the terms *mātra*, *amātra* and *anantamātra*.<sup>355</sup> I draw primarily from the later *prakaraṇas* of the Māṇḍūkya Kārika

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<sup>354</sup> Cf. Clooney (1993), 73.

<sup>355</sup> Additionally, I analyze Śaṅkara’s use of the term *māyā* in the Appendix (p335)

for reasons discussed earlier (p68). I conclude this section by reflecting on Brahman as an apophatic measure<sub>2</sub> (p4).

In the third section, I examine the role of perception in light of the apophasis and measuring discussed in the first two sections. Employing the heuristic of the *apophatic measure*, introduced at the start of this thesis (p3), I draw together Śāṅkara's comments on apophasis in MUBh 7 and embodied particularity in MU 2 especially in light of his teachings on the great saying "Thou art That," from Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI. I reflect on Śāṅkara's responses to three objections raised by his *pūrvapakṣin* in MUBh 7 in terms of the trifold meanings of the phrase "apophatic measure." I return to this again in chapter six (p319) to consider the significance of the sensual, embodied encounter between student and a teacher who gives voice to the *śruti*, so that it may be heard, particularly and harmoniously.

### **Apophasis in the *Prājñā* and the *Turīya***

Negation in the *Prājñā*

*Prajñānaghana* in MU 5

*Where the sleeper does not desire any desirable thing [and] does not see any dream, that is deep sleep. Prājñā (The Wise One), who is fixed in the state of deep sleep, who is unified, who is a mass of consciousness, who consists of bliss, who is certainly an enjoyer of bliss, [and] who is the entrance to the mind, is the third quarter.*

—*Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad* 5

*Prajñānaghana* is a centrally important term in Śāṅkara's commentary on the MU. As Haesook Ra shows, it is highly significant in his commentary on the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, as well.<sup>356</sup> From Śāṅkara's perspective, *prajñānaghana* signifies a causal state; it is the source of darkness and duality and is absent in the *turīya*. Hence, one must clearly grasp the meaning of the term in order to distinguish between the *prājñā*, where this cause is present, and the *turīya*,

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<sup>356</sup> Ra (2011), 220ff.

where this cause is absent. Intending to clarify this term, I argue the following points: First, MU 5 coordinates two important teachings on *prajñānaghana* from the BU, which should be understood in light of one another. Second, *prajñānaghana* constitutes a negation, despite the fact that the word itself is not privative in form. Third, *prajñānaghana* negates cognition, but does so in a very particular way. Fourth, *prajñānaghana* negates all effects of duality by absorbing them into itself as a potency. It is the cause of ignorance and duality, analogous to a spider absorbing its web.<sup>357</sup>

According to MU 5, one is not conscious of anything at all in the *prājñā*, which is described simply as a mass or lump (*ghana*) of consciousness (*prajñāna*). The etymological word-play between “*prājñā*” and “*prajñāna*” is insightful. *Prājñāḥ*,<sup>358</sup> the one who is wise, is described as a lump of *prajñāna*. The word *prajñāna* derives from the root √*jñā* (“to know”) prefixed with the *upasarga pra-*, which generally connotes “towards, before, commencement.” Etymologically, the compound word *prajñānaghana* suggests a mass of potential knowledge. In the *prājñā*, one does not know any thing, but one has the potential to know. The *prājñā* state, wherein there is a mass of consciousness, stands in contrast to the *vaiśvānara* state, wherein there is a consciousness of external things, and the *taijasa* state, wherein there is a consciousness of internal things. Each of these is specifically negated in MU 7.

#### *Prajñānaghana in the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*

The term *prajñānaghana* in MU 5 (and negated in MU 7) is unique. It occurs only one other time in the principal upaniṣads (BU IV.5.13), wherein it occurs in the context of a discussion between Yājñavalkya and his wife Maitreyī. Yājñavalkya is about to renounce the

<sup>357</sup> MKBh I.6. Śaṅkara is referencing Muṇḍaka Upaniṣad I.1.7.

<sup>358</sup> Although *prājñā* is an adjective, MU 5 uses a nominal form (*prājñāḥ*).

world and depart for mendicancy. Before he leaves, Maitreyī asks him to tell her the secret of immortality.<sup>359</sup> He offers several analogies to explain. Among these, he says that the Self is comparable to a lump of salt which is a whole without inside or outside, a single lump of flavor.<sup>360</sup> “Even so,” he continues, “this Self is a whole without inside or outside, just a mass of consciousness.”<sup>361</sup> In this context, the term *ghana* indicates a negation: something lacking externality and internality. MU 3 and MU 4 echo these terms, suggesting that MU 5 employs the term *prajñānaghana* in a manner closely related to its explanation in BU IV.5.13.

BU IV.5 is a near-verbatim repetition of BU II.4. In the earlier account, we find a similar analogy. Olivelle translates BU II.4.12 as follows:

It is like this. When a chunk of salt is thrown into water, it dissolves into that very water, and it cannot be picked up in any way. Yet, from whichever place one may take a sip, the salt is there! In the same way, this Immense Being has no limit or boundary and is a single mass of perception (*vijñāna-ghana*). It arises out of and together with these beings and disappears after them—so I say, after death there is no awareness.<sup>362</sup>

Though there are several pertinent differences between BU II.4 and BU IV.5, two are especially noteworthy here. First, in place of the term *prajñānaghana* (BU IV.5.13), we find the term *vijñānaghana*. Second, the lump of salt in BU II.4.12 is dissolved into water, unlike the later passage. Śaṅkara coordinates and harmonizes these differences.

### *Cosmological Coordination and Harmonization*

In his commentary on BU II.4.12, Śaṅkara glosses *vijñānaghana* as *prajñānaghana*. As Haesook Ra explains, Śaṅkara gradually shifts the meaning of *prajñānaghana* over the course of

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<sup>359</sup> BU IV.5.4.

<sup>360</sup> BU IV.5.13. Cf. Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.13.3.

<sup>361</sup> BU IV.5.13.Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, 129-130.

<sup>362</sup> BU II.4.12, Olivelle, *The Early Upaniṣads*, 68-69.

his commentary from a more metaphysical sense to a “more psychological and epistemological sense.”<sup>363</sup> In the earlier passage, wherein salt is dissolved in water, Śaṅkara interprets *prajñānaghana* as the return of an effect to its cause in the same way that a river is absorbed into the ocean.<sup>364</sup> In the later passage, wherein “the one Self remains as a lump of salt,” the knowledge of difference born from worldly experience is dissolved by knowledge of the Self.<sup>365</sup>

Rather than privilege the psychological/epistemological example over the metaphysical example, I argue that one does well to apply the method of *upasamhāra*. The two examples should be coordinated and thus heard harmoniously, without reducing particularity to unison.<sup>366</sup> *Prajñānaghana*, then, is a return of an effect to its cause, like a river absorbed (*pravilāpita*) into the ocean, but this return should be understood in an epistemological sense, like dissolving (*pravilāpita*) the dualistic distinction of Self and non-Self by knowledge. As we have seen (p125), the term *pravilaya* (in its various forms) has cosmological implications. Śaṅkara gradually translates cosmological issues into epistemic terms.

### *Sensual Potential*

Similarly, Śaṅkara’s epistemology should be understood in relation to scripture and perception, insofar as these are valid means of knowing Brahman. In the passage above, Olivelle has translated the term *vijñānaghana* as a “mass of perception,” which seems to be consistent with Śaṅkara’s interpretation of the term. Although he simply glosses *vijñānaghana* as *prajñānaghana* in this context, some understanding of the former can be gleaned from his

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<sup>363</sup> Ra (2011), 220-221.

<sup>364</sup> BUBh II.1.12, Panoli 543.

<sup>365</sup> BUBh IV.5.13, Panoli translation, 1111.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. Suthren Hirst, 113. See p108 above.

commentary on Bhagavadgītā VI.8. Therein, he distinguishes between *jñāna*, which he glosses as “knowledge of the meanings of the words uttered in the scripture” and *viññāna*, which he glosses as “complete knowledge acquired by means of one’s own direct perception of what is learned from the scripture.”<sup>367</sup>

Practically applying the method discussed earlier (p107), “knowledge of the meanings of the words uttered in the scripture,”<sup>368</sup> even when aided by a qualified teacher, merely serves to fix one’s attention on what is to be shown; it does not cause direct knowledge since knowledge can only arise in accordance with a valid means of knowledge suitable to that purpose.<sup>369</sup> By knowing the meanings of *śruti*’s words, one has the *potential* to perceive, but may fail to perceive due to inattention. Truly hearing (*śravaṇa*) *śruti* requires wakeful attention.

Therefore, “the Wise One” in the *prājñā* state has sensual potential, yet fails to perceive the truth of Brahman due to inattentiveness. Such a person is like a lump of potential consciousness (*prajñānaghana*) and a lump of potential perception (*viññānaghana*) because all obstacles preventing one from realizing Brahman have been dissolved. And yet, one fails to perceive due to inattention. The sensual potential of the *prājñā* state is only actualized in the *turīya* state, wherein one is wakefully attentive and thus able to perceive *śruti*’s intention.<sup>370</sup>

### *Liminal Door*

While one does not perceive anything in the *prājñā* state, one has sensual potential. As Śaṅkara explains, however, this means that one has *both* the sensual potential to awaken to the

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<sup>367</sup> BGBh VI.8: ज्ञानं शास्त्रौक्तपदार्थानां परिज्ञानं विज्ञानं तु शास्त्रतो ज्ञातानां तथा एव स्वानुभवकरणं... । Panoli 343.

<sup>368</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>369</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 714-5.

<sup>370</sup> MK 1.12 and BU 4.3.23, discussed below.

truth of nonduality *and* the sensual potential to “awaken” to duality. Hence, it represents a liminal state, a turning point, or a “door” through which one can metaphorically “enter” the Self or “enter” the world of duality.<sup>371</sup> Because all unreal effects are absorbed into it, it constitutes the cause or “seed” of ignorance.<sup>372</sup> And yet, because it is dense with consciousness and identified with the sole witness (*adhyakṣa*) in the three states, it is also characterized as the seed that is the source of beings.<sup>373</sup> Hence, it is the source of unreal effects, like the superimposition of a snake on a rope, but also the source of real effects, just as clay is the material cause of a clay pot or lump of clay. From this liminal state, one can either proceed back to the world of ignorance and duality or proceed to realize non-dual Brahman.

The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad describes the *prājñā* as *cetomukha*, the “entrance to the mind,” which Śāṅkara glosses “door” and explains in two different ways. Plainly stated, a door is a passageway through which one can walk in either direction. Or, to preserve the spatial analogy, we might imagine two doors: a door to the mind from duality, or a door to the mind from the Self, as depicted below:

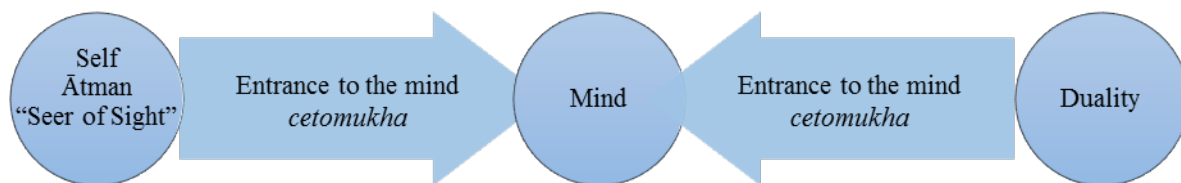


Figure 9: Liminality of *prajñānaghana* as *cetomukha*

From one vantage point, the *prājñā* is the “entrance to the mind” from states of ignorance and duality. From another vantage point, it is also the entrance to the mind from the perspective of the sole Witness; it is the epistemic door by means of which the seer of sight has “entered” into

<sup>371</sup> MU 5 and MUBh 5, respectively.

<sup>372</sup> MKBh I.2, Panoli 319-320.

<sup>373</sup> MKBh I.2, Panoli 320.

the body up to the tip of the fingernail.<sup>374</sup> Due to the perception of the Self in the effect (i.e., the manifest world), it is said to have “entered.”<sup>375</sup> Therefore, the *prājñā* state is the liminal state between dualistic discrimination and non-dual realization. It is a crossroads, devoid of duality, from which one either returns to duality or proceeds to realize nonduality.

*Aviveka: Failure to discriminate between particulars*

The liminality and sensual potential that characterize the *prājñā* state are highly pertinent to my thesis. The *prājñā* state lacks perception and discrimination. It neither sees particulars nor distinguishes between them. One does not see duality in the *prājñā*, yet fails to perceive the non-dual Brahman.

To illustrate this, Śaṅkara analogously compares the *prājñā* to the darkness of night. In this congealed state,<sup>376</sup> everything becomes indistinguishable. Similarly, material things become indistinguishable when the earth is swallowed by the darkness of night, even though the earth does not lose its form during the night. The *prājñā* is called *prajñānaghana*, he explains, because it is characterized by an absence of discrimination (*aviveka*).<sup>377</sup> While dense with consciousness, as the night is dense with darkness, it lacks discrimination. Its sensual potential neither perceives particulars nor discriminates between them. Just as the earth does not abandon its form at night, neither does consciousness abandon its capacity for discrimination. Though *able* to perceive, one

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<sup>374</sup> BU I.4.7.

<sup>375</sup> BUBh I.4.7: तस्मात्कार्यस्थस्य उपलभ्यत्वमेव प्रवेश इत्युपचर्यते । Panoli 181.

<sup>376</sup> Śaṅkara explains that in the *vaiśvānara* and *taijasa*, duality is observed in the form of mental vibrations which discriminate between one thing and another. In the *prājñā*, however, these mental vibrations become “congealed,” as it were, without abandoning their form. MUBh5: अत एव स्वप्नजाग्रन्मनःस्पन्दनानि प्रज्ञानानि घनीभूतानीव सेयमवस्थाविवेकरूपत्वात्प्रज्ञानघनोच्यते । Panoli 312.

<sup>377</sup> MUBh5.



fails to perceive due to the absence of discrimination, as if the internal organ of perception were enshrouded in darkness.

### *Removing Darkness*

The illustration above is striking when juxtaposed to the analogy of a pot enshrouded in darkness, discussed earlier (p100). Śāṅkara employs this example often, such as in UMSBh III.2.21, MUBh 7, and MKBh 2.32 (p171), to illustrate the distinct authoritative domains of direct sense perception (*pratyakṣa pramāṇa*) and scripture (*śabda pramāṇa*). Scripture removes false notions superimposed on the Self in the same way that darkness is removed in order to perceive a pot enshrouded in darkness. As he explains, the experiential knowledge of the pot is *not* the result of the *pramāṇa* that removes darkness.<sup>378</sup> Removing obstacles that impede perception prepare one to perceive.<sup>379</sup> Apophasis does not yield knowledge of what is before one's very eyes since knowledge only arises in accordance with a valid means of knowledge suitable to that purpose (p107).<sup>380</sup> This experiential knowledge is subsequent to the removal of the obstacle, but is not a result of it. *Śruti* does not reveal knowledge of Brahman because Brahman is unable to be described with words.<sup>381</sup> Rather, *śruti* removes ignorance, thereby preparing one for "complete knowledge acquired by means of one's own direct perception of what is learned from the scripture."<sup>382</sup> Like removing darkness enshrouding a pot so that it may

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<sup>378</sup> MUBh 7, Panoli 331-332: यदा पुनर्घटतमसो विवेककरणे प्रवृत्तं प्रमाणमनुपादित्सिततमोनिवृत्तिफलावसानं छिदिरिवच्छेद्यावयवसंबन्धविवेककरणे प्रवृत्ता तदवयवद्वैधीभावफलावसाना तथा नान्तरीयकं घटविज्ञानं न तत्प्रमाणफलं।

<sup>379</sup> Although the Self is eternally obtained, it is not realized due to the intervention of false knowledge. BUBh I.4.7, Panoli 207-208.

<sup>380</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 714-5.

<sup>381</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>382</sup> BGBh VI.8, Panoli 343.

be perceived, *Śruti* removes the veil of ignorance such that the Self is able to be seen.<sup>383</sup> This final step is absent from the *prājñā*, thereby distinguishing it from the *turīya*.

Juxtaposing the two analogies, it becomes clear that even when all false notions superimposed on the Self are removed, this does not ensure that the Self will be realized. Like the shell-silver (Figure 5, p105) and two moons (Figure 7, p107) examples, the two darkness analogies highlight two distinct sources of error in the process of perception, as diagrammed below. In the earth-darkness analogy, perception does not occur because the internal organ of perception is inactive or “congealed” as a “lump of consciousness.”

As previously explained (p103), the *buddhi* is formless and takes the form of the external object which is its basis. It is only truly grasped by the internal organ of perception when the mind is wakefully attentive (p104). In the pot-darkness example, perception does not occur because the internal organ of perception is not fully “awake,” resulting in the superimposition of concepts upon the *buddhi*. In Figure 10, the “arrow,” so to speak, is pointing in the wrong direction; the mental image (*buddhi*) of the pot is not seen by the internal organ of perception because the latter “enshrouds” the former in a concept, super/imposing a universal upon what is to be seen.

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<sup>383</sup> BUBh I.4.7; MKBh 2.35.

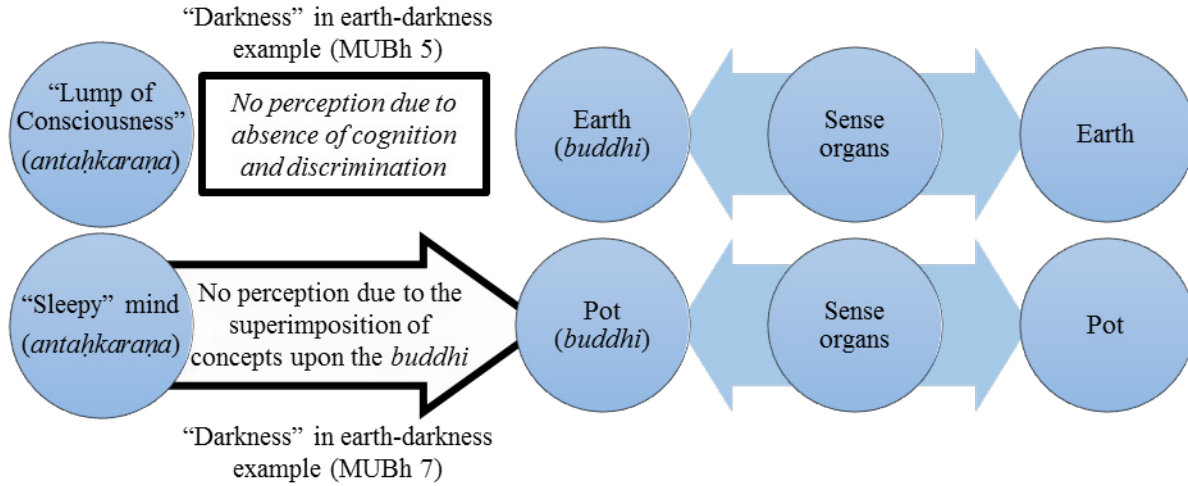


Figure 10: Epistemic darkness in MUBh 5 and MUBh 7

In the pot-darkness illustration, the pot is not seen, as if enshrouded in darkness. In the *prājñā*, the world is not seen, as if devoured by the darkness of the night. Though the *buddhi* takes the form of what is seen with the eye, the internal organ of perception sees nothing whatsoever because it is inattentive, as if in deep sleep.<sup>384</sup> Śaṅkara employs the pot-darkness analogy to make the point that scripture removes conceptual measures (whether true or false) superimposed on the Self. *Śruti* removes ignorance so that the Self can be seen just as one removes darkness so that the pot may be seen. In the earth-darkness analogy, however, there are no false notions, no superimposition, and no cognition of duality.<sup>385</sup> When darkness is removed in the pot-darkness analogy, realization of the Self follows. When darkness is removed in the earth-darkness analogy, however, one enters the states of *vaiśvānara* and *taijasa*, where duality emerges once again. As we saw earlier with the two moons analogy, knowledge of the one moon does not remove the error, which is caused by an impediment on the physical eye (*timira*).

<sup>384</sup> As explained in detail above (p125) and below (p149), the three states of waking, dream, and deep sleep occur in the waking state itself and are understood to be analogies by Śabara, Gauḍapāda, and Śaṅkara alike. MK and MKBh 1.1-2.

<sup>385</sup> MKBh 1.13, discussed below.

Similarly, when the “lump of consciousness” arouses, the problem of superimposition arises again since *prajñānaghana* is the cause of ignorance. Hence, even though the non-cognition of duality is common to both *prājñā* and *turīya*, only *prājñā* is considered to be the “seed” of ignorance and the cause of the superimposition of duality, whereas *turīya* is neither of these.<sup>386</sup>

### *Śruti as Apophatic Measure*

Several conclusions can be drawn from this juxtaposition. First, it is clear that the realization of nonduality depends upon more than simply the absence of duality. The removal of duality *prepares* one to perceive. Apophasis cultivates sensuality. Second, duality is an epistemic condition, since duality is absent when the mind is inattentive. Apophasis removes epistemic measures. Third, realization of nonduality must also be something epistemic, since nonduality is not realized when the mind is inattentive. Apophasis results in wakeful attentiveness. Fourth, one cannot realize Brahman without *śruti*. To insist, as Śaṅkara does, that Vedānta scriptures accomplish nothing more removing dualistic notions superimposed on the Self is *not* to say that the Self can be realized *merely* by removing dualistic notions.<sup>387</sup> The “truth” of Śaṅkara’s advaita cannot be grasped without *śruti*. Śaṅkara’s commentaries do not seek to replace the texts upon which he comments, but rather to prepare his reader for the event of hearing the *śruti*.

As framed in the opening pages of this thesis, the phrase “apophatic measure” is an idiom that turns upon itself, yielding a triad of meanings. *Śruti* is an apophatic measure primarily in the first sense (p3).<sup>388</sup> As a *pramāṇa*, it is a valid means of measuring by which measures are

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<sup>386</sup> MKBh 1.11-13.

<sup>387</sup> Śaṅkara states that the Buddha’s teachings come “very near” to non-dualism, but “this Supreme non-dual Reality is to be experientially known (*vijñeyam*) only in the Vedānta texts.” MKBh 4.99.

<sup>388</sup> However, since *śruti* is a *pramāṇa* that must be “heard,” it is also an apophatic measure in the second sense. To properly *hear śruti*, one must remove preconceived ideas regarding oneself and the world. The trifold meanings of “apophatic measure” turn back on themselves, deconstructing my own attempts to structure the heuristic.

removed. It cultivates an attentive sensuality in order that one might perceive. Hearing *śruti*, superimposed measures are removed; the internal organ of perception awakens. Wakefully attending to *śruti*'s intentions, one begins to perceive.

### Double Negation in *Turīya*

*They consider the fourth [to be]: Not conscious of internal things, not conscious of external things, not conscious of both (internal and external things), not a mass of consciousness, not conscious, not unconscious. Unseen, beyond the ordinary, ungrasped, undefined, unthought, not to be defined, whose essence is certainty of the one Self, tranquility of the manifold, pacified, auspicious, [and] non-dual. That is the Self; that is to be known. –Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 7*

The seventh verse of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad employs overwhelmingly negative language. With the exception of three words,<sup>389</sup> the entire verse describes the *turīya* apophatically. As previously discussed (p113), words in kataphatic speech have different signifying intentions than do words in apophatic speech. To hear the text coordinately and harmoniously, without unison, dissonance, or contradiction, one must be wakefully attentive to these differing intentions. To demonstrate this, I focus on the word *prajñānaghana* which, I argue, has a different signifying intention in MU 7 than it does in MU 5, discussed above.

### *Devoid but not a Void*

*Prima facie*, *na prajñānaghana* in MU 7 appears to simply negate the description of *prājñā* in MU 5. However, *prajñānaghana* itself is a negation, as discussed above (p141). *Na prajñānaghana*, therefore, is a negation of a negation. Understood as such, the pattern of the first sentence of MU 7 becomes clear: every possibility is negated. The *turīya* is not conscious of the external world, not conscious of the internal world, not conscious of both the external world and the internal world, not conscious of neither the external world nor the internal world, not

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<sup>389</sup> Ekātmapratyayasāraṃ, śāntaṃ, and śivaṃ.

consciousness itself, and not not consciousness itself. Whereas *prājñā* is described through simple negation, the most distinguishing aspect of *Turīya* is double negation.

Śaṅkara introduces MU 7 as follows:

Because it is devoid (*śūnyatvāt*) of (any) cause (governing) the introduction of any word, it cannot be signified by words. The *turīya* desires to indicate it exclusively by means of the negation of distinctions.<sup>390</sup>

This statement is immediately followed by a *pūrvapakṣa*, playing on the word *śūnya*: If it is devoid (*śūnyam*) of any cause governing the use of words, then it is merely a void (*śūnyam*).<sup>391</sup> It cannot be named, suggests the *pūrvapakṣin*, because it does not exist; it is an emptiness, an absence, a nil. If every possibility is negated, then “nothing” is left.

It is tempting to turn directly to Śaṅkara’s response to this *pūrvapakṣin*. To do so now, however, would risk missing the point altogether by allowing Śaṅkara’s commentary to eclipse the Māṇḍūkya text itself. Though I will return to his response later (p175), it is nevertheless important to introduce the *pūrvapakṣin* here.<sup>392</sup> Śaṅkara wants his reader to reflect on the question. If all possibilities are negated in MU 7, with what is one left? Why is the *turīya* not simply a nihilistic void?

### *Not-Three Measures*

As we have seen (p140), there are considerable philological and conceptual similarities between MU 5 and BU 4.5. Likewise, there are also important parallels between MU 7 and BU

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<sup>390</sup> MUBh 7: सर्वशब्दप्रवृत्तिनिमित्तशून्यत्वात्तस्य शब्दानभिधेयत्वं इति विशेषप्रतिषेधेन एव च तुरीयं निर्दिदिक्षति । Panoli, 327.

<sup>391</sup> MUBh 7: शून्यमेव तर्हि तत् । Panoli, 327.

<sup>392</sup> Like others in his tradition, Śaṅkara primarily employs the *pūrvapakṣa* as a device to teach the reader how to think through hermeneutic issues. As is nearly always the case in Śaṅkara’s writing, the *pūrvapakṣa*, which might be translated “preliminary thesis,” is the superficial or *prima facie* viewpoint. Only very rarely does Śaṅkara’s *pūrvapakṣin* represent a real or imagined opponent. Far more often, the *pūrvapakṣin* stands in place of Śaṅkara’s reader, or perhaps in place of his student.

4.3. Taken together, I argue, the MU models the Vedānta practice of coordination. As such, each of the teachings must be understood in its original context. By coordinating these teachings, however, one removes misunderstandings, learning to hear the *śruti* teachings concordantly.

In BU 4.3, King Janaka asks Yājñavalkya about the Self. Yājñavalkya explains that this person has just two states, plus a third, the state of sleep, which is a point of junction.<sup>393</sup> His analogies portray the states as a steady continuum with two poles, rather than ontologically distinct states. For example, he likens the Self in its three states to a fish in a river:

It is like this. As a large fish moves between both banks, the nearer and the farther, so this person moves between both realms, the realm of dream and the realm where one is awake.<sup>394</sup>

One moves back and forth between the waking and dream states just as a fish moves from one bank of a river to the other. The third state is not so much a state at all as it is a liminal boundary that measures dream and waking; it is a “place” (*sthānam*) that is neither this bank of the river nor that bank of the river.<sup>395</sup> In isolation, MU 3-5 would appear to describe the *vaiśvānara*, *taijasa*, and the *prājña* as if they were three distinct states, the example of a fish in a river removes this misconception. Although they are distinct from one another from one perspective, the distinctions are merely provisional, for the sake of instruction.<sup>396</sup>

The *prājña* is a non-state distinguished from the waking and dream states by its very liminality. It is an in-between state, like a fish between two banks. Defined by simple negation, it is neither pole: neither the waking nor the dream state. It is the fine line that delimits one pole

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<sup>393</sup> BU 4.3.9. The term used here is स्वप्न, but Śaṅkara interprets it as सुषुप्त.

<sup>394</sup> BU 4.3.18, Olivelle trans. 115.

<sup>395</sup> There is some ambiguity as to how to map the states of dream and deep sleep to the analogy. According to Śaṅkara’s interpretation, the *prājña* is “the intermediate state between waking and dreaming.” MUBh I.7, Panoli, 333.

<sup>396</sup> Cf. MK 1.18.

from the other, measuring both. By asserting the liminality of the *prājñā* as a fluid boundary which is neither pole, it becomes clear that the three states constitute three possible modes of being. By its very nature, the fish must be in one of the three places: near this bank, near that bank, or in the liminal middle. The analogy effectively shifts the focus away from the states themselves (which are now described as a single continuum) to the river, which represents the underlying unity and unchanging basis. Insofar as one exists as a fish in water, so-to-speak, one necessarily exists in one of these three states while nevertheless remaining distinct from those states.

The analogy underscores my assertion that apophasis negates measures, not the measured (p118). *Brahman-ātman* is “all this” (MU 1): not this bank, not that bank, and not the liminal middle that divides these two. While any given part of the river must fall under one of the three descriptions, the river itself is not any one of these three and, arguably, more than the sum of these taken together. By negating all three, one negates only the measures of the river, leaving one with an understanding of the river itself, distinct from these measures. Hence, the negation of the three measures does not leave one with a void.

“*I am that*”

Śāṅkara draws upon this passage in his commentary on the first verse of Gauḍapāda’s Kārika. Gauḍapāda states:

*Viśva*, who is conscious of external things, is all pervading.  
But *Taijasa* is conscious (only) of internal things,  
and *Prājñā*, likewise, is dense with consciousness.  
The One, alone, is remembered in (these) three ways.<sup>397</sup>

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<sup>397</sup> MK 1.1.



Śaṅkara explains that since the One Self dwells in succession in the three states, then its unity is distinguished from these states by remembering it as “I am that.”<sup>398</sup> In other words, when a person is awake, he/she recognizes that the one who was dreaming, the one who was in deep sleep, and the one who is now awake is one and the same person. By remembering “I am that one” who was awake, dreaming, and sleeping, the unity of these three states is recognized.

“This is seen in the *śruti*,” Śaṅkara continues, “by the example of the great fish.”<sup>399</sup> Obviously, this is a reference to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka passage discussed above. Hence, the negation of the three states in MU 7 serves the purpose of indicating that which is distinct from these states. The negation draws our attention to the fish in Yājñavalkya’s example. The negation of all three possible states does not leave us with a void, but instead draws our attention to something that is distinct from these.

As above (p107), the *śruti* and *guru* can do nothing more than draw one’s attention towards what is to be seen. By negating the three states, one’s attention is drawn to the unity, distinct from those states, which is only realized when one remembers “I am that.” The objective knowledge, which can only be acquired by *śruti*, must be subjectively intuited (p143).<sup>400</sup> It arises when the student hears the *śruti* uttered by a teacher directly and particularly: “Thou art that” (p326).

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<sup>398</sup> MKBh 1.1.

<sup>399</sup> MKBh 1.1.

<sup>400</sup> BGBh VI.8, discussed on p137.

## *Incarnate Witness*

Śaṅkara, following Gauḍapāda, emphasizes that all three states of consciousness are actually experienced in the waking state itself.<sup>401</sup> Instead of the word “*vaiśvānara*,” Śaṅkara uses the word “*jāgarita*,” implying one who is not only awake, but is especially attentive and watchful. Moreover, the One Self is experienced by one who is fully awake because the Self dwells in these three ways in the body:

*Viśva* is in the opening of the right eye,  
but *Taijasa* is inside the mind,  
and *Prājñā* is in the cave of the heart.  
He dwells in the body in these three ways.<sup>402</sup>

In his lengthy commentary on this verse, Śaṅkara draws from a wide range of scriptural sources, including Gītā XIII.2 (“And know Me as the Kṣetrajña in all bodies”), Gītā XIII.16 (“Undivided, yet remaining as though divided among beings”), and Chāndogya IV.3.3 (“Breath indeed absorbs all these.”) Gauḍapāda’s text becomes a model of *upasaṃhāra*. The four *pādas* of the *śloka* concisely map the four *pādas* of the Self described in Māṇḍūkya 2-7. Each of the four quarters of the verse carries with it a wide range of scriptural teachings, coordinating them in a new context. It does not synthesize them or reduce them to a unison; it enfolds diverse teachings, coordinately, so that they might be heard, concordantly.

Likewise, because Śaṅkara introduces this *śloka* by drawing from Yājñavalkya’s analogy of the river, we gain another insight into the methods and purpose of negation. In BU 4.3.18, the Self is compared to a fish swimming across three portions of a river. Here, too, the Self is said to dwell in three locations in the body. Negating the three portions of a river does not negate the river but instead draws our attention to the river as a whole. In the same way, negating the three

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<sup>401</sup> MKBh 1.1: जागरितावस्थायां एव विश्वादीनां त्रयाणां अनुभवप्रदर्शनार्थोऽयं श्लोकः । Panoli, 316.

<sup>402</sup> MK 1.2.

locations in the body does not negate the body, but instead draws our attention to the body as a whole—which is more than the sum of its parts. The fish can live in any of the three portions of the river or can swim back and forth across them, but the inherent nature of the fish is such that it *must* live in the river. Likewise, the Seer of Sight can see with the eye, see with the mind, or withdraw into the breath without sight, but the very nature of the Self is such that it *dwells in the body* in these three ways.

The negation of the three states leads one to see that the Self is *distinct* from these, but it does so in a manner that does not negate the necessary *conditions* for the manifestation of the Self. Just as the fish is distinct from the river, the Self is distinct from the body. And yet, in order to know the Self, one must become a knower of the field (*kṣetrajñā*) by which the Self is conditioned. Thus, Śāṅkara quotes Lord Kṛṣṇa: “Know Me as the “field-knower” in all bodies.”<sup>403</sup>

Not-two is not one.<sup>404</sup> The fish and river are distinct from one another; they are not one. But due to the inherent nature of the fish with respect to the river, neither are they two. Likewise, the Witness is not the body; the *sākṣin* and the body are not one. However, due to the inherent nature of the Self which is “the field-knower in all bodies” and is “Undivided, yet remaining as though divided among beings,” neither are they two.<sup>405</sup> Therefore, the negations in MU 7 do not leave one with a void, nor do they leave one with a monistic, disembodied, idealistic “self.” Rather, the negations intend to indicate that which is non-dual: the incarnate Witness, the enfleshed Self.

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<sup>403</sup> MUBh 1.2, Panoli 317, quoting BG XIII.2.

<sup>404</sup> Rambachan (2015).

<sup>405</sup> MKBh 1.2, Panoli 317, quoting BG XIII.2 and BG XIII.16, respectively.

## *Ecstatic Bodies*

Similarly, by applying the method of coordination, we arrive at a different understanding of *na prajñānaghana*. Earlier (p140), the notion of *prajñānaghana* in MU 5 was coordinated with BU IV.5.13 and BU II.4.12. Here, however, *na prajñānaghana* in MU 7 is coordinated with Yājñavalkya’s teachings in BU IV.3.21, leading to a very different interpretation of the description “not conscious of inside or outside.”<sup>406</sup> *Prima facie*, the phrase stands in opposition to the *vaiśvānara*, which is conscious of external things and the *taijasa*, which is conscious of internal things. However, words in kataphatic speech have different signifying intentions than do words in apophatic speech, as we have seen (p113).<sup>407</sup>

In fact, the same negation implies something quite different in the context of BU IV.3.21 than it does in either BU IV.5.13 or BU II.4.12. In BU IV.5.13, for example, it referred to a lump of salt as a lump of flavor “without inside or outside” (p141). Here, however, Yājñavalkya compares the Self to a man embraced by a woman he loves such that “he knows neither inside nor outside.”<sup>408</sup> Rather than a cognitive negation prompted by an inattentive mind, as in the *prājñā*, the absence of particularized cognition in this case is due to ecstasy.

*Na prajñānaghana* in MU 7 constitutes a negation of negation. It does not simply “undo” the previous negation; it points to something *beyond* the simple negation. In the *prājñā* and *turīya* states alike, one knows “neither inside nor outside,” and yet these words intend a very different meaning in the *turīya*. One is not merely a “lump of consciousness.” One is in ecstasy.

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<sup>406</sup> MU 7.

<sup>407</sup> If this were not the case, then the initial *pūrvapakṣa* in MUBh 7 would be upheld. As previously discussed (p115), if the negation in MU 7 merely differentiates it from the other three *pādas*, then the negation would be pointless, since the *fourth* would be deemed different than the other three simply by virtue of being the fourth.

<sup>408</sup> BU IV.3.21: तद्यथा प्रियया स्त्रिया संपरिष्वक्तो न बाह्यं किञ्चन वेद नान्तरम् । Olivelle, 114.

## *The Turīya as Apophatic Measure*

For the man embraced by the woman he loves, “inside” and “outside” have not been dissolved (*pravilaya*). Rather, the distinctions *between* inside and outside have been dissolved. The signified referents remain, but the *measures* no longer entail. In this powerfully embodied and even erotic analogy, the man and the woman do not become “one,” but they cease to be “two.” They are experienced as not-two (*advaita*). Hence, as a double negation, *na prajñānaghana* does not result in a nihilistic void, but points towards a new and different experience which, insofar as it is ecstatic, cannot be expressed by words.

*Śruti* is an apophatic measure primarily in the first sense intended by that phrase, as discussed above (p149). *Śruti* is a measure by which cognitive/linguistic measures are removed, thereby enabling one to perceive. The *turīya* is an apophatic measure primarily in the second sense (p4). It is, as Śaṅkara describes it (p122), “the thing attained” rather than an “instrumental means.”<sup>409</sup> It is an attentive—or even ecstatic—sensuality that cannot be expressed by words. To perceive Brahman is not to perceive something “other worldly,” but rather to perceive “all this,” coordinately and concordantly, beyond linguistic measure: an inexpressible sensuality.

## **Measuring Brahman**

### Apophasis and Sensuality: Vision of Brahman

The *prājñā* state lacks perception and thus lacks discernment (*aviveka*) between particular phenomena, as the previous section has demonstrated (p145). The *turīya*, however, is “always the all-seer” (*sarvadṛksadā*),<sup>410</sup> the incarnate Witness who is fully awake, watchful, and

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<sup>409</sup> MUBh 2.

<sup>410</sup> MKBh 1.12: “Because of the nonexistence of that which is other than *Turīya*, *Turīya* is always the seer of all that which exists eternally. “All-seer” means seer of that which is everything (that exists eternally). For that very reason, the seed characterized by the non-apprehension of truth is not there (in *Turīya*). Also, for this very reason, there is the nonexistence of apprehending wrongly which is born from that [i.e., nonapprehension of the truth]; [similarly,]

attentive (p155). If the *turīya* is a state of awakened and attentive sensuality, how does it differ from everyday perception? How does vision in the *turīya* differ from vision in the *vaiśvānara*? If it is a vision devoid of particularity and distinction, wherein everything is seen to be Brahman but no-thing is seen in particular, then the foregoing conclusions regarding the difference between *prājñā* and *turīya* crumble. If it is a vision of particular entities characterized by discrimination (*viveka*) of one thing from another, then the differences between *prājñā* and *turīya* are maintained, but the differences between *turīya* and *vaiśvānara* require clarification.

In fact, Śaṅkara devotes most of his commentary on the latter three *prakaraṇas* of the Kārika to the distinctions between the *turīya* and the *vaiśvānara* states, whereas the first *prakaraṇa* is primarily devoted to distinguishing the *turīya* from the *prājñā* states (p77). If the “vision of Brahman” (subjective genitive) is characterized by discrimination (*viveka*) and perception of particular phenomena, then the negation of measures must also culminate in a “vision of Brahman” (objective genitive). As discussed later (p171), the highest Self is able to be seen by one who has heard the meaning of Vedānta *śruti*; only such a *śrotriya* can truly give voice to the *śruti* and utter to a student, *tattvamasi*, “Thou art that.”<sup>411</sup> That is not to say, of course, that one sees Brahman in the way that one sees things in *vaiśvānara*. If that were the case, then Advaita Vedānta would lose all purpose. Nevertheless, even in everyday speech, one is able to say, for example, “I have seen the Periyar River,” even without having seen every inch and every drop of it in all of its various states of change. One who has seen a small measure of its multiplicity at one moment in time is able to say, “I have seen something, and what I have seen is the Periyar.” With the aim of distinguishing “vision” in the *vaiśvānara* from “vision” in the

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the sun, which is ever luminous by nature, certainly does not become nonluminous or luminous in some other way which is contrary to that (nature). Thus it is said in the *śruti*: “The seer’s sight is never lost.”

<sup>411</sup> MKBh 2.35.

*turīya*, the next section clarifies the notion of “measuring” in the MKBh, focused especially on the third unit of the MU (MU 8-12).

Mātrā: Measuring the Infinite Cosmos (MUBh 8-12)

### *Coordinating Measures*

*With respect to the syllables, AUM is this Self. With respect to the  
measures, the quarters are the measures and the measures are the quarters:  
“A”, “U”, [and] “M”.  
–Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad 8*

As discussed earlier (p63), the MU’s three movements model *upasamhāra* on both the micro and macro levels. The first movement coordinates teachings on AUM, drawn especially from the Chāndogya Upaniṣad. The second movement coordinates teachings on the Self, draws from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad. As evident in the epigraph above, the third movement coordinates the first two, enabling one to hear diverse *śruti* teachings harmoniously, without reducing particularity to unison.<sup>412</sup>

The subsequent three verses model *upasamhāra* by mapping the letters “A”, “U”, and “M” to the three states of experience, the *Vaiśvānara*, the *Taijasa*, and the *Prājña*.<sup>413</sup> Through coordination, the *catuspāt* teachings are (re)interpreted cosmologically. Recall that MU 1 describes AUM cosmologically as “all that was, is, and shall be.”<sup>414</sup> The creation of the universe is associated with “A” and the *vaiśvānara* (MU 9) and the destruction or absorption of the universe is associated with “M” and the *prājña* (MU 11).<sup>415</sup>

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<sup>412</sup> Cf. Clooney (1993), 65, previously cited (p113): “[T]he various texts really do count, and one cannot conflate them into a single theoretical account: one cannot simply compile all the qualities of Brahman, wherever mentioned, into a single whole.”

<sup>413</sup> See the full text on p59.

<sup>414</sup> See the full text on p59.

<sup>415</sup> This reading is consistent with Śaṅkara’s comments in MUBh 11.

Here again, by associating these with measures and measuring, the MU interprets cosmology epistemologically. While the measures remain *ontically* distinct from one another, their *ontological* alterity is reduced to epistemic measures. As we have seen with *pūrvapūrvapṛavilāpana* (p125) and also with *prajñānaghana* (p141), cosmological multiplicity is translated into epistemic terms. The universe is not an infinite plurality of ontologically distinct entities or atoms, but only appears as such to one who has not heard the *śruti*. For one who is wakefully attentive, pluralistic measures are dissolved (*prapañcapravilaya*, p107), but not that which they measure. Ontic distinctions are perceived as cosmic multiplicity: the unfolding of AUM (p109) is heard, harmoniously, by the incarnate Witness (p155).

#### *Apophatic Measurer*

According to MU 11, the one who knows the *prājñā* “truly measures all this.”

*Prājñā*, whose place is the state of deep sleep, is the third measure, “m”, [so named] because of measuring (*miti*) or merging (*apīti*). One who knows this verily measures (*minoti*) all this and becomes its mergence. (MU 11)

As Śaṅkara explains, the cosmological cycle of origin and destruction begins and ends in *prājñā*.<sup>416</sup> Since one who knows the *prājñā* is simultaneously the “mergence” and the “one who measures,” then it is understood to be both the seed of all ignorance and the liminal “door” to realizing the Self, as discussed earlier (p143). The illusion of cosmological *plurality* is interpreted epistemologically in terms of measuring. Ignorance is the superimposition of measures upon the measured (p105). By removing the veil of ignorance, what was seen as *plurality* is perceived as non-dual multiplicity.

By removing this veil of ignorance, the cosmo-epistemological cycles of creation and dissolution, of birth and death, and of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep are broken. Removing

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<sup>416</sup> MUBh 11.



all superimposed measures, one realizes oneself to be the “one who truly measures all this.”

Hearing *śruti* as an apophatic measure, one awakens to “the Fourth” and realizes oneself to be the measurer without measure:

The Fourth is without measure, beyond the ordinary, the tranquility of the manifold, auspicious, [and] non-dual. Thus, AUM is indeed the Self. One who knows this enters the Self by the Self. (MU 12)

In MU 9-11, the three periods of time are described as measures. In MU 12 that which transcends these three periods of time is said to be devoid of measure (*amātra*). The non-dual Self is devoid of measure because it is the Measurer, but is known by its measures for that very reason. To realize one’s very Self as the Measurer, one must first understand each of the measures in their own right. One must know the measures kataphatically, distinguishing one measure from another, one quarter from another. Each quarter marks a limitation or delineation of the non-dual Self. Having understood these delineations, one is gradually able to understand that which they delineate *without* obviating their particular distinctions. Harmony is not unison (p118). One learns to hear, concordantly, without reducing multiplicity to oneness. Analogously, one learns “clay” to be distinct from its measures (pot, lump, etc.) by negating its measures (not a pot, not a lump, etc.) without obviating those distinctions (e.g., a pot is not a lump, a lump is not a pot). One hears AUM unfold as “the entire manifold of speech” (p109). “AUM is indeed the Self” (MU 12).

Through progressive dissolution, one becomes wakefully attentive to the non-dual Self which is the foundation of all measures. The non-dual Self is that which is measured by these measures because, explains Śaṅkara, the non-dual Self is the knower who measures all that is known and, thus, measures the true nature of all things in the world.<sup>417</sup> Hence, the cosmological

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<sup>417</sup> MUBh 11: मिनोति ह वेदं सर्वं जगद्वाथात्म्यं जानातीत्यर्थः ।

cycle is broken when one realizes that the true nature of the non-dual Self is *measured* by the three states because it is the *Measurer* thereof. The non-dual Fourth, the “tranquility of the manifold,” is without measure (*amātra*) because it *exists nondually* as both the Measurer and the measured. Thus, the MU concludes: “One who knows this enters the Self *by* the Self.”

### *Infinite Measure without Measure*

What does it mean to “enter the Self *by* the Self”? If the Self is the Measurer devoid of measure, then in what sense are the measures “its” measures?<sup>418</sup> Unlike the MU, both Śāṅkara and Gauḍapāda distinguish between the “Higher Brahman” and the “Lower Brahman.” In doing so, they assert that from one perspective, Brahman is beyond measure (*amātra*), but from another perspective Brahman is possessed of infinite measure (*ananta mātra*). Reflecting upon MU 12, Gauḍapāda explains:

AUM is to be known quarter-by-quarter. The quarters are the measures, no doubt. Knowing AUM quarter-by-quarter, one should not think of anything else.<sup>419</sup>

Gauḍapāda explains that AUM is regarded/remembered (*smṛtaḥ*) as both the higher Brahman and the lower Brahman, the beginning, middle, and end of everything that exists, and the Lord established in hearts of all.<sup>420</sup> According to Richard King, Gauḍapāda only considers something to be “real” if it exists in the beginning, middle, and end. Anything transitory is considered to be unreal or “false.”<sup>421</sup> While this is clearly the case for the author of *prakaraṇas* 2-4, I argue that it is not the case for the author of the first *prakaraṇa*. Regardless, it is certainly not true for

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<sup>418</sup> Credit goes to Francis Clooney for posing this *pūrvapakṣin*.

<sup>419</sup> MK 1.24: ॐकारं पादशो विद्यात्पादा मात्रा न संशयः । ॐकारं पादशो ज्ञात्वा न किञ्चिदपि चिन्तयेत् ॥

<sup>420</sup> MK 1.26-28.

<sup>421</sup> King, 147. Citing MK 2.6: “That which does not exist in the beginning and end is also likewise in the present. Being accompanied by false things, they are regarding as if not-false.”

Śaṅkara, as discussed below. Having distinguished between the higher and lower Brahman, the author of the first *prakaraṇa* explains that one comes to know the transcendent by knowing the immanent or “non-transcendent” quarter-by-quarter, measure-by-measure.

Gauḍapāda then concludes the first *prakaraṇa*:

Only that person is a sage by whom AUM is known as auspicious, the quelling of duality, and the *infinite measure without measure*.<sup>422</sup>

AUM, having been known by its measures of “A”, “U”, and “M”, is heard as both the infinite or endless measure (*ananta mātra*) and that without measure (*amātra*). Gauḍapāda thus equates the transcendent Brahman with the measureless AUM/Ātman; conversely, he equates the immanent Brahman with AUM/Ātman possessing infinite measure. The kataphatic descriptions in MU 3-5 and MU 9-11 apply to the immanent Brahman. These words intend to signify the immanent Brahman in its infinite particularity. Brahman is “all this” (MU 2), all particulars.

This is possible because words are not “made up.” Language is not a human technology (*apauruṣeya*). Words are eternally connected to universals *and* particulars. They simultaneously signify both universals *and* particulars, according to the speaker’s intention (p110). Hence, Vedic words truly and reliably *measure* Brahman through kataphatic speech because words signify (i.e., are *eternally connected with*) particular phenomena and Brahman is “all this.”

The words of apophatic speech, however, have different signifying intentions, as we have seen (p113). When these measures are negated, one comes to understand the immanent Brahman as *that which is measured by* these measures because Brahman is possessed of infinite measure. Likewise, a river is known by its measures and their subsequent negation (p151). Apophasis negates measures, not that which is measured (p118). Measure-by-measure, one comes to know

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<sup>422</sup> MK 1.29, emphasis added: अमात्रोऽनन्तमात्रश्च द्वैतस्योपशमः शिवः । ॐकारो विदितो येन स मुनिर्नेतारो जनः ॥

the immanent Brahman, “all this,” possessed of infinite measure (*ananta mātra*). Subsequently, one comes to know the transcendent Brahman, the highest Self that is beyond measure (*amātra*) because it measures “all this.” The transcendent Brahman is devoid of measure simply because this one is the non-dual knower who measures (*minoti*) all measures—which measure Brahman as “all this,” the multiplicity of particular phenomena sensually perceived.

### Brahman as Apophatic Measure

Brahman is an apophatic measure. This idiom, as I have introduced it (p3), yields a triad of meanings which fold into and out of one another. As an “infinite measure without measure” that is known “measure-by-measure,” Brahman—as signifier and signified—performs this triadic unfolding. Because Brahman is known kataphatically (measure-by-measure) and apophatically (through progressive dissolution), it is an apophatic measure in the first sense that I have used this phrase. It is a theological method of inquiry which must be practiced. One must prepare for the event of hearing Brahman, harmoniously, by first learning how to read, coordinately. Brahman *qua* word has different signifying intentions in kataphatic speech than in apophatic speech (p113). Practicing *upasaṃhāra*, one gradually awakens, growing ever attentive to Brahman’s signifying intentions. One thus measures the immanent Brahman, possessed of infinite measure.

The great saying (*mahāvākya*) in MU 2 is not tautological: “This Self is Brahman.” Learning Brahman, (measure-by-measure and through progressive dissolution), one awakens to realize “I am that” (p153), the incarnate Witness (p155) who “measures all this” (MU 11). One awakens to a sensuality that is beyond measure precisely because it is a sensuality that measures. Realizing “I am that,” one awakens to sensuality as an apophatic measure in the second sense of the phrase: an unspeakable measure. Like a man embraced by the woman he loves, ecstatic

bodies experience a sensuality that knows neither inside nor outside (p157). In this sensual ecstasy beyond words, two persons do not become one, but neither are they two. They are not-two (*advaita*).

In this sensuality, which should not be reduced to “only” ecstatic experience, one perceives particular phenomena and discriminates one thing from another (*viveka*). “All this” does not become “one.” *Pratyakṣa pramāṇa* requires words for linguistic cognition (p104). This must be true for the true Self (the incarnate Witness, the Seer of sight), just as it is for everyday perception in the *vaiśvānara* state. And yet, there is certainly a difference between these modes of *being sensually*. One ceases to superimpose universals (mere conceptual modifications of AUM, p113) upon particulars (p105). Learning that one is the Measure who measures Brahman measure-by-measure, one does not cease to perceive. If one ceased measuring upon learning that one is the Measurer, then one would, obviously, no longer *be* the Measurer. The difference in this awakened, attentive sensuality, therefore, is this: While measuring (sensually, perceptually), one is attentive to the fact that *what* one measures is *Brahman*. One still cognizes particulars linguistically and conceptually, but one ceases to superimpose mere concepts upon the multiplicity of particulars. To do so would reduce the irreducible particularity of “All *This*” to a mere “All.”

This mode of *being sensually* leads us, then, to the third interconnected meaning of the phrase “apophatic measure.” Brahman is not merely “All.” Like AUM, Brahman is “All *This*” (*sarvam idam*). The twelve verses of the MU see fit to repeat the phrase thrice: “AUM is all this” (MU 1), “All this is certainly Brahman” (MU 2), “One who knows this verily measures all this” (MU 11). Awakening to this attentive sensuality leads us, finally, to an indexical that points, inexorably, towards particularity: *this*. Attending to the indexical intentions of this “this” (which,

for Śaṅkara, points to a *thou* and should be accompanied by a gesture), we turn next to perceive through the apophatic measure, towards *this* theology of irreducible particularity.

### **Apophatic Measure**

The previous sections of this chapter have examined the relationship between perception and scriptural apophasis and the relationship between perception and measuring. As I have shown, even though the *prājña* knows all and is characterized by an absence of duality, it is distinguished from the *turīya* on the grounds that it lacks perception and lacks discrimination between particulars (*aviveka*, p145). However, one certainly sees, hears, tastes, smells, and touches in the *vaiśvānara* state, and one discriminates between particulars and, thus, is skilled in discrimination (*viveka*). If sense-perception is never wrong (p104), then how ought one to distinguish between sensuality in the *vaiśvānara* state and sensuality in the *turīya* state? What might it mean to perceive particulars and discriminate between them in a manner that neither measures nor conceptualizes? In other words, what is the nature of perceiving by means of the apophatic measure? What does one perceive and how?

I examine these questions below in light of Śaṅkara's commentary on the MKBh. I begin with his assertion that the highest Self is able to be seen by one who has grasped the supreme meaning of the Vedānta scriptures. *Śruti* enables perception. One "measures" (linguistically and cognitively) in *both* the *vaiśvānara* state and the *turīya* state, but in the latter, one is *aware* that one is measuring and thus does not superimpose cognitive-linguistic measures upon the measured. One perceives particular phenomena as ontically distinct visible effects of the Self, which is the unseen, transcendental cause, ontologically non-different than those effects. In light of this, I then return to Śaṅkara's statement that the *turīya* is devoid of any basis governing the usage of any word, introduced earlier (p150).

Concluding Part One of the dissertation, I then contextualize these assertions, situating them within the conclusions established earlier. By learning to read the MU coordinately, one hears the *śruti* harmoniously (p75): In the wakeful attentiveness of the *turīya* state, one realizes “I am that” Self (the Measurer, p161) who perceives particular phenomena as unique measures of Brahman (Infinite Measure, p163), linguistically cognizing these with words that are understood to be measures of AUM (the entire manifold of speech, p116). Hearing the three movements of the MU, concordantly, one grasps the apophatic measure in its trifold meaning: It is (1) a method of progressively dissolving universal measures in order to (2) perceive particular phenomena as (3) distinct, immanent manifestations of ultimate, transcendent reality. One perceives Brahman, indexically, as “All *This*.” In the last chapter (p321), I return to this topic, comparatively, to illustrate the embodied, pedagogical significance of perception in Śaṅkara’s apophatic theological method.

### *Śruti* enables Perception

Gauḍapāda states:

There is no cessation and no beginning,  
 none bound and no means [to unbind],  
 none desirous of liberation and certainly none liberated.  
 This is the ultimate truth.<sup>423</sup>

In his commentary on this striking verse, Śaṅkara states that duality is nothing more than a mental conception and is, therefore, nonexistent.<sup>424</sup> A *pūrvapakṣin* then objects: if duality is nonexistent, then the scriptures must also be nonexistent since the “operations of scripture”

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<sup>423</sup> MK 2.32.

<sup>424</sup> MKBh 2.32.

belong to the sphere of duality and not to nonduality.<sup>425</sup> Furthermore, the *pūrvapakṣin* continues, if the scriptures are nonexistent, then there are no valid means by which to know the quiddity of nonduality. If that is the case, then the nihilist position is proven.<sup>426</sup>

Śaṅkara responds at length to this important objection. He begins by repeating an argument employed several times in the *bhāṣya*.<sup>427</sup> Even though a snake, which does not exist, may be superimposed upon a rope, this is only possible because the rope actually exists:

... as an unimagined thing, even before the dawn of knowledge of the non-existence of the snake... Further, the existence of the agent of imagination should be admitted to be antecedent to the imagination. Hence, it is unreasonable to hold that the agent (of imagination) is unreal.<sup>428</sup>

Śaṅkara explains duality by drawing upon Śabara's epistemology of perception. Since the *buddhi* takes the form the external object, which is its basis (p103), then the even the mistaken cognition of a snake has a real object as its substratum. Neither the reality of perceived particulars, nor the reality of the perceiver is to be doubted. Rather, the *obstruction* of the perceiver's perception due to linguistic conceptualization is to be removed (p105). When the dualistic conception of the rope is removed, that does not mean that the rope itself, which is the very basis of the false cognition ceases to exist. If it did not ontically exist, then perception itself would cease to be a *pramāṇa*. Perception, however, is never wrong (p104). This point is not even open for debate, as far as Śaṅkara is concerned. At issue is the second moment of perception: the manner in which the *buddhi* is grasped by the internal organ of perception (p103). When the idea of the snake,

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<sup>425</sup> MKBh 2.32: यच्चेवं द्वैताभावे शास्त्रव्यापारो नाद्वैते विरोधात् । Panoli, 384. Interestingly, Rāmānuja raises precisely this objection against Śaṅkara's advaita in his Bhagavadgītā Bhāṣya. See also BUBh II.1.20.

<sup>426</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>427</sup> E.g., MUBh 7, MKBh 4.87, et. al.

<sup>428</sup> MKBh 2.32, Panoli's translation, 385.



which is superimposed upon the *buddhi*, is removed, the *buddhi*, which has taken the form of the rope, is truly grasped (p106). Although the rope was “seen” by the eye, it was not perceived until the superimposition of the “snake” upon the *buddhi* was removed.

Hence, the rope actually exists and is never sublated. The perceiver exists and is never disproven. Only the cognition of the nonexistent snake is sublated. The technical mechanics of the analogy are highly pertinent: Knowledge of the non-existence of the snake *dissolves* the conception of the snake, thereby *enabling* the perception of the rope. Hence, knowledge functions apophatically, enabling perception.

As we saw earlier with the pot-darkness analogy (p146), knowledge of the pot is *not* the result of the *pramāṇa* that removes darkness. It is critical to distinguish between knowledge from two different valid sources. *Śruti* is an apophatic measure: scriptural knowledge removes ignorance, thereby enabling perception. Both *śruti* and *pratyakṣa* yield true and reliable knowledge, but they having different roles and yield different kinds of knowledge.

The role of scripture, Śaṅkara explains, is *not* to reveal the Self because the Self is self-evident. *Śruti* enlightens us as to what is not already known and cannot be known by any other means of knowledge.<sup>429</sup> Although the Self is *seen*, it is not *perceived* due to conceptions which are superimposed upon it.<sup>430</sup> Since the goal of scripture is the realization of the non-dual Self, then it serves its purpose by removing conceptions superimposed on the Self.<sup>431</sup> Although these conceptions are unreal, the non-dual Self is the substratum of those conceptions.<sup>432</sup> Even though the rope has been *seen* all along by the eye and *buddhi*, it is not *perceived* by the *antaḥkaraṇa*

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<sup>429</sup> MKBh 2.32. Panoli, 385. See also the introduction to the KUBh, Panoli 81.

<sup>430</sup> And, thus, always already *seen*. On the distinction between seeing and perceiving, see p102.

<sup>431</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>432</sup> MKBh 2.33.

due to superimposition of the snake upon the *buddhi*. When this erroneous cognition is removed, the rope is *perceived*. Analogously, even though the non-dual Self is *seen* all along, universals are superimposed upon the *buddhi* which takes the form of particulars. When this erroneous cognition is removed, the non-dual Self is *perceived*.

### Self is Able to be Perceived

A few verses later, Gauḍapāda states:

By the wise ones who know the Veda thoroughly, who are free from desire, fear, and anger, this one which is non-dual is perceived, devoid of all conception (*nirvikalpa*), having quelled all plurality.<sup>433</sup>

Śaṅkara comments that the Supreme Self is *able to be perceived* only by those wise renunciates who are completely devoted to the meaning of Vedānta, not by logicians or others.<sup>434</sup> The transcendent Brahman, he explains, is the non-dual Self that is unborn, perceptible, and before one's very eyes.<sup>435</sup> When one is completely devoted to the Vedānta scriptures, having heard the *śruti* harmoniously, then all obstacles impeding perception of the Self will be progressively dissolved. Only from scripture does one learn the measures of Brahman (kataphasis) and only through scripture are these measures removed (apophasis), provided one attends to *śruti*'s differing intentions in kataphatic and apophatic speech (p113). When these measures have been known and dissolved, scripture has fulfilled its purpose. The highest Self, which is non-dual, unborn, perceptible, and before one's very eyes is able to be perceived.

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<sup>433</sup> MK 2.35: वीतरागभयक्रोधैर्मुनिभिर्वेदपारगैः । निर्विकल्पो ह्ययं दृष्टः प्रपञ्चोपशमोऽद्वयः ॥ Panoli, 390.

<sup>434</sup> MKBh 2.35: ... वेदान्तार्थतत्परैः संन्यसिभिः परमात्मा द्रष्टुं शक्यः, नान्यै रागादिकलुषितचेतोभिः स्वपक्षपातिदर्शनैस्तार्किकादिभिरित्याभिप्रायः । Panoli, 390. Also, Brahman is “the object of vision to the wise who perceive the supreme reality.” MKBh 4.80.

<sup>435</sup> MKBh 2.36: तच्चाद्वैतमवगम्याहमस्मि परं ब्रह्मेति विदित्वाशनायाद्यतीतं साक्षादपरोक्षादजमात्मानं सर्वलोकव्यवहारातीतं जडवल्लोकमाचरेत् । अप्रख्यापयन्नात्मानमहमेवंविध इत्यभिप्रायः ॥ Panoli, 391.

By responding in this way to the *pūrvapakṣin*'s objection that the “operations of scripture” belong to the sphere of duality and not to nonduality, Śaṅkara demonstrates what he later states directly: The means do not have the same reality as the end itself.<sup>436</sup> While the scripture is utterly indispensable, it remains, nevertheless, a means to an end. Scripture removes *all conceptions* superimposed on the Self, but the reality of the Self shows itself by itself.<sup>437</sup> As Gauḍapāda states in the passage above: “this one which is non-dual is seen, devoid of all conception (*nirvikalpa*).”<sup>438</sup> As Richard King explains well:

*All conceptions* of reality are approximations in that they attempt to define the infinite in terms of finite categories. For the advaitin, then, all views are partial apprehensions of Brahman... Dualistic experience is an inevitable result of any attempt to conceptualize (*vikalpa*) reality.<sup>439</sup>

The means and the end do not have the same reality.<sup>440</sup> Apophasis negates all measures (all conceptions), not that which they measured, *in order that* the measured can be perceived as it is. “All *this* is certainly Brahman” (MU 2). By one who has heard the *śruti*, coordinately and harmoniously, “the Supreme Self is *able to be seen*.”<sup>441</sup>

### Phenomenology of Cause and Effect

*Śruti* enables us to perceive that “all *this*” is Brahman. But what does it mean to perceive “this” or “that” particular phenomena as Brahman? In the third *prakaraṇa*, Śaṅkara distinguishes

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<sup>436</sup> MKBh 3.26. See also BUBh II.1.20.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.* See also MU 12, “one enters the Self *by* the Self” (p156). Likewise, this might be compared to Heidegger’s definition of phenomenology. See p266 below.

<sup>438</sup> MK 2.35.

<sup>439</sup> King, 300, note 140.

<sup>440</sup> As John Taber explains: “It is a basic tenet of Mīmāṃsā (and all other realist schools of Indian philosophy) that means and end must always be distinct—an axe used to fell a tree is one thing, the felling of the tree another; to suggest that they could be identical [as Dignāga and other Mādhyamaka Buddhists do] is absurd.” Taber (2005), 79.

<sup>441</sup> MKBh 2.35.

between the Self as cause and the Self as effect. Even though the Self *qua* cause is not perceived, it is perceived *qua* effect.<sup>442</sup> While his argument is lengthy and technical, it is consistent with views held by others in the Mīmāṃsā tradition. To understanding the important relationship between cause and effect as these directly relate to the *pramāṇa* of perception, it is helpful to consider a far simpler analogy offered by Kumāriḷa Bhaṭṭa in his *Ślokavārttika*<sup>443</sup> His argument is thoroughly and compellingly phenomenological.<sup>444</sup>

How does one know that milk is the cause of curd? Kumāriḷa explains that when one perceives milk, one does not perceive curd. Later, one perceives curd and perceives the nonexistence of the milk, concluding that milk is the material cause of curd. Especially pertinent to my argument is the epistemic basis for this conclusion which, Kumāriḷa insists, is not rooted in inductive reasoning but in *perception* itself. At the time milk is perceived, it is *not* the cause of curd, since the curd does not exist at that time. The milk only *becomes* the cause of the curd at the time that the milk ceases to ontically exist *qua* milk. However, Kumāriḷa reasons, even though the milk is *perceived* to be “nonexistent” when the curd is perceived, it would be absurd to consider the milk to be a nonentity since something existent cannot be caused by something nonexistent. Something cannot emerge from nothing.<sup>445</sup> And yet, in order for the effect to ontically come into being, the material cause must ontically cease to be. Hence, the milk *ontologically* exists as “cause” only at that time when it is *ontically nonexistent*. Kumāriḷa

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<sup>442</sup> MKBh 3.27.

<sup>443</sup> Kumāriḷa, *Ślokavārttika*, 243-244.

<sup>444</sup> Regarding my use of the term “phenomenology,” see p259.

<sup>445</sup> This is precisely the topic of MK 3.26-28.

concludes, “Therefore Negation must be an entity. For what is the negation of an effect, other than the existence (continuance) of the cause?”<sup>446</sup>

### Self as Apophatic Measure

Similarly, Śaṅkara insists that particular phenomena are grasped as effects of the Self. In doing so, he underscores the ontological nonduality of all particulars (“All *This*”) without undermining, in any way, the ontic distinctions between particulars. In fact, by emphasizing that the *turīya* perceives and discriminates between particular phenomena whereas the *prājñā* does not, he accentuates the fact that perceiving irreducible particularity is intrinsic to perceiving “all *this*” as effects of the Self. Because we see that milk and curd are ontically distinct from one another, we *perceive* curd to be an ontologically non-different effect of milk *at the very moment* that we perceive milk to be ontically nonexistent. Moreover, by emphasizing that one fails to perceive particulars in the *vaiśvānara* (due to the superimposition of universals) but one perceives particular phenomena discriminately in the *turīya* state (due to apophasis), Śaṅkara demonstrates that an awakened soul is one who perceives particular entities *just as they are*, without reducing phenomena to any of the six universals signified by words (p98, p177).<sup>447</sup> By negating all measures, *śruti* awakens its hearer to perceive each and every particular as a real effect of the Self, ontologically nondifferent from their transcendental, but *unseen*, cause. Therefore, “by the wise ones who know the Veda thoroughly,” having progressively dissolved all taxonomic measures, the highest Self is able to be seen *qua* cause manifested in and as effect.<sup>448</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Kumāriḷa, *Ślokavārtika*, 244.

<sup>447</sup> Name (*nāma*), form (*rūpa*), class (*jāti*), quality (*guṇa*), relation (*sambandhaḥ*), and action (*kriyā*).

<sup>448</sup> MK and MKBh 2.35.

Therefore, the Self is an apophatic measure in the third sense of this phrase (p4). The Self is not simply “*all this*” but also *every* “*this*.” Like Kumāriḷa’s milk-curd analogy, the Self ontologically exists as transcendental cause only and precisely because it ontically exists as particular phenomena, each of which is its effect. The Self *qua* cause is perceptibly manifest as each and every phenomena (each and every “*this*”), which are *ontically* distinct effects *ontologically* indistinct from their transcendent cause.

Unable to be named (*anabhidheyatvaṃ*)

If the highest Self is able to be seen, why is it that it cannot be named? As cited earlier (p150), Śaṅkara introduces MU 7 as follows:

Because it is devoid (*śūnyatvāt*) of (any) cause (governing) the introduction of any word, it cannot be signified by words (*śabdānabhidheyatvaṃ*). The *turīya* desires to indicate it exclusively by means of the negation of distinctions.<sup>449</sup>

As also noted, this statement is immediately followed by a *pūrvapakṣa*, playing on the word *śūnya*: If it is devoid (*śūnyam*) of any cause/basis governing the use of words, then it is merely a void (*śūnyam*).<sup>450</sup> I cited this passage earlier to distinguish, as Śaṅkara does, between nihilism and apophasis. I did not, at that time, discuss his response to the *pūrvapakṣa*. I do so now in order to clarify, from Śaṅkara’s perspective, how it can be that the highest Self is able to be seen, and yet unable to be named. This is pertinent to my thesis for two interrelated reasons. First, it enables us to clearly distinguish between everyday sensuality in the *vaisavanara* state and wakeful, attentive sensuality in the *turīya*. Second, it explains why I refer to irreducibly particular phenomena with the phrase “apophatic measures.” Brahman—“*all this*”—is not the

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<sup>449</sup> MUBh 7. See footnote 390.

<sup>450</sup> MUBh 7.

universal of all universals, but the particularity of all particulars. For that very reason, each and every “this” measures Brahman in such a way that is inexpressible by linguistic measures.

Analyzing Śāṅkara’s discourse closely, one notices a more subtle and meaningful back-and-forth exchange between the *pūrvapakṣa* and *samādhāna*, organized around the compound: *śabda-pravṛtti-nimitta-sūnya* (“devoid of any basis for introducing any word”). The first objection pertains to the word *sūnya* (“devoid”), the second objection pertains to the word *nimitta* (“basis”), and the third pertains to the word *pravṛtti* (“introduction”). The responses to these three objections unfold the trifold meanings of what I am calling the “apophatic measure.”

### *Apophatic Measure as Sensuality*

The objector reasons that if the *turīya* is devoid of any basis for the introduction of any word, then it is a mere void (*sūnya*). Śāṅkara first responds by clarifying the negation. The *turīya* lacks a basis *for introducing words*, but that does not mean that it lacks a basis *altogether*. It is not possible, he explains, to conceive a conception of which the basis is nonexistent. The false cognitions of “silver” or “snake” cannot be thought to exist without actually existing substrata such as shell and rope, for example. Hence, “empty basis” does not imply “baseless.”<sup>451</sup>

Śāṅkara’s argument is nearly identical to one made by Śabara 500 years earlier, employing similar terminology.<sup>452</sup> Śabara’s *pūrvapakṣin* argues that perceptual cognition is “empty” (*sūnya*) because there is no difference between cognitive knowledge, which is transient, and the external object. Śabara responds that the *buddhi* (mental image) is not empty, but is formless. As we have seen (p103), the *buddhi* takes the form of the particular external object,

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<sup>451</sup> MUBh 7: शून्यं एव तर्हि तत् । न मिथ्याविकल्पस्य निर्निमित्तत्वानुपपत्तेर्न हि रजतसर्पपुरुषमृगतृष्णिकादिविकल्पाः शुक्तिकारज्जुस्थानुरूपरादि व्यतिरेकेणावस्त्वास्पदाः शक्याः कल्पयितुं ।

<sup>452</sup> PMSBh I.1.5, Jha 13-16.

which is its basis, and which is actually apprehended in external space. Like Śāṅkara, Śābara points out that there is no cognition whatsoever in the absence of a real, external particular. This is the case in both true cognitions (like the rope) and false cognitions (like the rope-snake). Verbal cognition does not occur without representation of the object in the *buddhi*.<sup>453</sup> The *buddhi* is verbally cognized by a word that is eternally connected to *that particular entity* and a corresponding universal (p104). “Therefore,” Śābara concludes, “*buddhi* is not unable to be named, and, for us, perception is unable to be named. Therefore, *buddhi* is not perception.”<sup>454</sup>

Sensuality is an apophatic measure: perception is indescribable (*avyapadeśyam*). Means do not have the same reality as the end (p172). Knowledge resulting from perception is verbal, but perception, which is the *means* thereof, is not verbal. Hence, there is no contradiction whatsoever in suggesting that the highest Self is *able to be seen* and yet also *unable to be named*. The *turīya* is unable to be named because it is devoid of any basis for employing words, but it is neither baseless nor imperceptible. It is an apophatic measure: wakefully attentive sensuality.

#### *Apophatic Measure as Particularity*

The objector then argues that if *turīya* is not baseless, it should be describable by words and not merely by negation, since it must be the basis for all conceptions, whether true or false.<sup>455</sup> Śāṅkara responds by listing various bases for signification. There are typically six justifications (relation, name, form, category, action, and quality; see Figure 1, p98), but here Śāṅkara combines name and form under the category “limiting attribute.” He rejects each in turn. There can be no *relation* between what exists and what does not exist, such as an existent shell

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<sup>453</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: न चार्थव्यपदेशमन्तरेण बुद्धेः रूपोपलम्भनम् ।

<sup>454</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: तस्मान्नाव्यपदेश्या बुद्धिरव्यपदेश्यं च नः प्रत्यक्षम् । तस्मादप्रत्यक्षा बुद्धिः ।

<sup>455</sup> MUBh 7.



and nonexistent silver. The *turīya* cannot be set apart in terms of *name* and *form* as one would designate a cow, as distinct from a horse, etc. Since it is one without a second, it cannot belong to any class or *category*. It cannot be distinguished by any particular *activity*, such as cooking. It is not limited to any particular *quality*, such as blueness. Since words are only suitable to signify one of these six universals, and since the *turīya* cannot be described in any of these six ways, then it is devoid of any basis for employing words.

Taken on its own, this passage does not show definitively that the *turīya* is the particularity of all particulars. The apophatic measure as irreducible particularity is more clearly seen in Śaṅkara's discussion of the Self as both cause-and-effect, discussed above (p174), and his commentary "This Self is Brahman," discussed in chapter six (p326). Nevertheless, when the passage is understood in a manner consistent with its Mīmāṃsā tradition, it certainly moves towards a theology of irreducible particularity. Since the *prājñā* lacks discrimination (*a-viveka*) between particular phenomena (p145) whereas the *turīya* does not (p158), and since no universal is suitable to signify the *turīya*, it follows that one who is wakefully attentive perceives "all this" in and as each and every particular "this."

#### *Apophatic Measure as Method*

The *pūrvapakṣin* then objects a third time, now to the word *pravṛtti* in the compound *sarvaśabdapravṛttinimitta*. Conceding that *turīya* is not baseless and is not describable by words, the *pūrvapakṣin* argues that all words become pointless. If Brahman exists but cannot be described through words, reasons the objector, then discussion of Brahman is useless.<sup>456</sup>

The *samādhāna* responds, insisting that the Vedānta scriptures indicate Brahman through negation, thereby removing all ignorance. Though indescribable, Brahman can be known through

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<sup>456</sup> MUBh 7.

scriptural teachings, such as “Thou art that,” “This Self is Brahman,” “Brahman that is perceptible and before one’s very eyes,” and other such teachings.<sup>457</sup> Though indescribable, Brahman can be known through the words of scripture.

*Śruti* is an apophatic measure. Learning to read, concordantly, one learns to hear, harmoniously, without reducing multiplicity to unison (p75). Words in kataphatic speech intend to signify particulars whereas words in apophatic speech intend to signify (and negate) universals (p117). Wakefully attending to these differing intentions, one practices a theological method whereby one learns to perceive the indescribable Brahman through words: measure-by-measure and through progressive dissolution (p128). Hence, the trifold meaning of the phrase “apophatic measure” is unfolded: It is a method by which one cultivates an attentive sensuality which perceives irreducibly particular phenomena as the manifestation of ultimate reality. One learns to perceive “*All this*” in and as *each and every* “*this*.” Advaita is not-two, not one.<sup>458</sup>

#### Perceiving through the Apophatic Measure

In the *turīya* state, sensuality ceases to be a means of consumption. When one awakens to the attentive sensuality of the *turīya*, perception persists, but it ceases to be a means to some other end. When subject-object duality have been dissolved, one realizes “I am *that*” (p153). One realizes oneself to be Ātman, the non-dual seer (*draṣṭādvaitaḥ*),<sup>459</sup> the Seer of sight (*dr̥ṣṭer draṣṭā*).<sup>460</sup> In this wakeful attentiveness, one becomes the Apophatic Measurer of Brahman, possessed of infinite measure (p161). The Self measures Brahman in and as *all this*. When read

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<sup>457</sup> MUBh 7, citing CU VI.12.3, MU 2 (or BU II.5.19), and BU III.4.1. Panoli, 329.

<sup>458</sup> Rambachan (2015).

<sup>459</sup> BU 4.3.32.

<sup>460</sup> BUBh I.4.10, Panoli 235.

coordinately and heard harmoniously, the great saying in MU 2 is not tautological. Self and Brahman, *this* and *that*, are not reduced to monism or unison, but are heard concordantly:

All *this* is certainly Brahman. *This* Self is Brahman. *That* [Brahman] is *this* Self, possessed of four quarters. *This* Self is Brahman. (MU 2)

One perceives (distinctly) and measures (verbally), but one no longer consumes sense objects, reducing particular phenomena to abstract universals. One perceives each and every *this* as a measure beyond measure. As an apophatic measure, sense-perception becomes an end unto itself.

Śaṅkara explains that the Seer has two kinds of sight: one transitory and invisible and the other transitory and visible.<sup>461</sup> These two kinds of sight correspond to the distinctions I have made between “seeing” and “perceiving” (p106), and correspond also to the differing modes of sensuality in the *vaiśvānara* state and the *turīya* state. Satchidānandendra distinguishes between these two kinds of sight in terms of “act” and “nature.”<sup>462</sup> By differentiating between these, we likewise discern the relationship between the apophatic measure as attentive sensuality and the apophatic measure as irreducible particularity.

*Seeing as Act of Consumption (the vaiśvānara)*

In the *vaiśvānara* state, seeing is means which yields a result. Seeing is an act of consumption. As Satchidānandendra explains, this seeing is a “function of the inner organ [*antahkaraṇa*]... It is an act, and hence it begins and ends.”<sup>463</sup> Both the act and the resulting knowledge are transient.

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<sup>461</sup> BUBh I.4.10, Panoli 234.

<sup>462</sup> Satchidānandendra, 91.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid.*

As we have seen (p104), perceptual cognition occurs when the *buddhi* is grasped by the internal organ of perception by means of words. These verbal cognitions measure the *buddhi*, which takes the form of real, external particulars sensed by the physical sense organs. Hence, the knowledge derived from perception measures particulars, consuming phenomena by reducing particulars to any of the six universal measures (Figure 11).

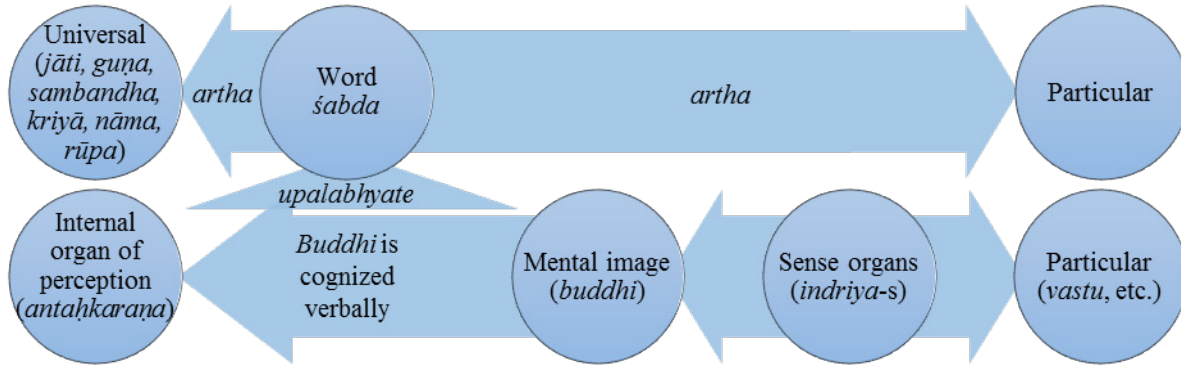


Figure 11: Perception as a valid means of knowledge

### Perception as Nature (the Turīya)

Satchidānandendra explains that the second kind of seeing (corresponding to the *turīya* state of wakeful attentiveness) “is (not an act but) the very nature of the Seer.”<sup>464</sup> End and means do not have the same reality (p172). For non-dual Seer (*draṣṭādvaitaḥ*),<sup>465</sup> seeing is not a means of consumption but an end unto itself. One no longer sees and cognizes *objects*, but rather perceives *this* and *that* particular phenomena in and as Brahman. Discrimination (*viveka*) between *this* and *that* persists in the *turīya*, since this is the very nature of perception, which is absent in the *prājñā* (p145). One measures particular phenomena linguistically (p104), but no longer superimposes measures on the measured (p 106); one no longer reduces particulars to

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid.* Parenthetical retained.

<sup>465</sup> BU 4.3.32.

signified universals, which are mere modifications of AUM (p112). One perceives the irreducible particularity of *this* and *that*.

As in everyday sight (the *vaiśvānara*), one sees and discerns particulars in the *turīya* state of wakeful attention. As in the *vaiśvānara*, the *buddhi* is grasped by a verbal measure. However, one who is fully awakened understands this cognition to be *merely* a verbal measure. One knows that one is measuring, and thus does not reduce the measured to that measure. One attends to measuring's intention. Knowledge is known to be transient. It does not exist for another moment after the cessation of duality.<sup>466</sup> While end and means do not have the same reality (p172), our understanding of this suddenly reverses when contrasted to the *vaiśvānara* state. Cognitive knowledge is merely transient whereas perception itself is not. In the *vaiśvānara*, therefore, perception is a means of valid knowledge, which is the fruit of perception. In *turīya*, however, since the fruit of perception is realized to be transient, whereas perception persists, then perception is recognized to be an end unto itself, and not merely a means. This brings us, therefore, back to the assertion made earlier (p93): Knowledge is functionally negative. Knowledge is not an end unto itself, but is a *means* by which to remove *all* conceptions (whether true or false). The knowledge acquired by *śruti* is a means to an end: Wakefully attentive sense perception. By bracketing or removing all verbal (pre)conceptions, the internal organ of perception apprehends the *buddhi*, which takes the form of particular phenomena, and therefore wakefully *attends* to what this or that particular *intends*. Since perception entails verbally grasping the *buddhi* by means of words eternally connected to universals and *all* particulars (p104), one still discriminates between this and that, verbally, but no longer reduces particular

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<sup>466</sup> MUBh 7: ज्ञानस्य द्वैतनिवृत्तिक्षणव्यतिरेकेण क्षणान्तरानवस्थानात् । Panoli, 332. Cf. Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5: अर्थविशया हि प्रत्यक्षबुद्धिर्न बुद्ध्यन्तरविशया । क्षणिका हि सा न बुद्ध्यन्तरकालमवस्तास्यतैति । क्षणिका हि सा न बुद्ध्यन्तरकालमवस्थास्यत इति । End and means do not have the same reality (p166).

phenomena to universals by superimposing the latter on the former (p 106). Juxtaposed with seeing as an act of consumption in the *vaiśvānara* state (Figure 11), the “arrows,” so to speak, are reversed (Figure 12). The non-dual Seer of sight wakefully attends to the *buddhi* whereas particulars intend to the *buddhi*.

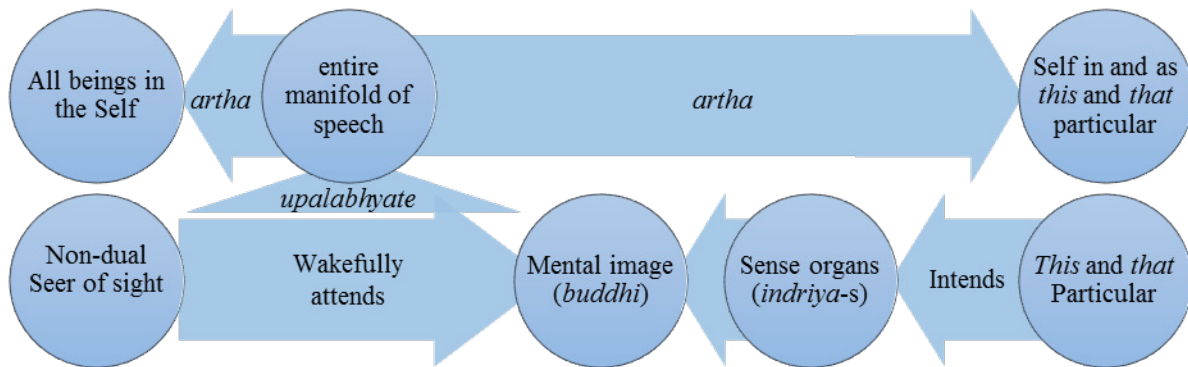


Figure 12: Perception as an end unto itself

Though verbally grasped (*upalabhyate*) as *this* and *that*, verbal cognition is no longer an end, but a means to perceive irreducible particularity. As the apophatic Measurer, one perceives *this* and *that* in and as measures of Brahman, which is “All *This*.” As cited in the epigraph on the first page of this thesis:

The Self of all beings is seen as one, and all beings [are seen] in the Self.  
Then alone is the meaning of the Śruti conclusively proved: “One who sees all beings in the Self alone and [sees] the Self in all beings, because of that, harbors no ill will.”<sup>467</sup>

Attentive sensuality, as an apophatic measure, sees the Self in and as each and every being. *This* and *that* particular being are perceived as apophatic measures of Brahman, coordinately and harmoniously, without reducing the multiplicity of “All *This*” to a mere monistic “All.” Perceiving particulars by means of the apophatic measure, one perceives each and every individual as an utterly unique, irreducibly particular revelation of Brahman.

<sup>467</sup> Śaṅkara, MUBh 3, citing Īśā Upaniṣad 6.

## Conclusions

Śaṅkara's apophatic theological method, as observed in the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya, entails progressively dissolving signifiers corresponding to the three states of consciousness: the waking state, the dream state, and the state of deep, dreamless sleep. Like Śabara and Gauḍapāda before him, Śaṅkara interprets these states analogously. They do not refer to actually dreaming or sleeping, but indicate varying degrees of attentiveness (p132). All three states are experienced in the waking state itself, by an Incarnate Witness, the non-dual Seer of sight (p155).

In Śaṅkara's theological tradition, perception is held to be infallible. As Śabara puts it, "sense-perception is never wrong" (p104). Direct perception and scriptural revelation are each valid means of knowledge, but they have different purposes and differing spheres of authority (p56). Perception is authoritative with respect to all presently existing perceptible entities whereas scripture reveals that which does not exist at the time it is to be known.<sup>468</sup> Since Brahman presently exists and is perceptible and before one's very eyes, then knowledge of Brahman is within the authoritative domain of perception, not scripture.<sup>469</sup> However, the non-dual truth of Brahman cannot be known without the Vedānta scriptures (p69) because *śruti* enables perception (p168).

Two significant problems arise in light of these doctrines. First, since we experience reality as if it were ontologically dual (i.e., Self and non-self, subject and object, perceiver and perceived), then it becomes necessary to explain this experience without contradicting the assertion that perception is never wrong (p104). Second, since scripture is not needed to tell us about things which are presently existing and perceptible, then it becomes necessary to explain

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<sup>468</sup> PMS and PMSBh I.1.4.

<sup>469</sup> MKBh 2.36, 3.26-27, et. al.; MKBh 2.32, 4.80, 4.88, et. al. See also BUBh II.1.30.

the specific role of scripture as a means to realize Brahman. As the foregoing has shown, these two problems are, so-to-speak, two sides of the same coin. Scripture does not reveal to us what Brahman is, since Brahman is self-evident, presently existing, and perceptible.<sup>470</sup> Rather, scripture reveals to us what Brahman is not. Through apophasis, scripture removes conceptions, which are superimposed upon Brahman through the everyday process of perception. Hence, by coming to a clearer understanding of the process of perception, one comes to realize what, precisely, is being negated in scriptural apophasis. Śāṅkara's Uttara Mīmāṃsā prepares one for the event of hearing scriptural apophasis, whereupon the highest Self is able to be seen.

In Śāṅkara's tradition, perception entails verbal cognition of a mental image which takes the form of particulars to be seen. Knowledge results when the internal organ of perception grasps the mental image by means of a word which is eternally connected with that particular entity and a universal. Error arises when the internal organ grasps the mental image by means of a word that is not connected to that particular entity, such as cognizing a snake even though a rope is seen by the eye with the form of the rope.<sup>471</sup> Even in the absence of such error, however, knowing entails measuring particulars by means of words and universals. Words and their corresponding universals, though, are mere modifications of AUM, which is both the transcendent and immanent Brahman.<sup>472</sup>

Words are modifications of AUM in the same way that pot and lump are modifications of clay. When one grasps that pot, lump, and clay are ontologically non-different from one another, one is able to perceive clay as both pot and lump. As material cause, "clay" is realized by

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<sup>470</sup> MKBh 2.32, 2.36, and 3.26-27.

<sup>471</sup> MKBh 3.29.

<sup>472</sup> MK 1.26.



removing the ideas of “pot” and “lump” superimposed upon those particular entities. This removal, however, in no way obviates or sublates the fact that the particular pot and particular lump are still perceived to be ontically distinct from one another. Neither does it suggest that cognizing a clay pot as “pot” is either erroneous or illusory. It simply means that the particular pot seen by the eye is no longer reduced to a single idea or universal.

Taken in isolation, one could get the mistaken impression from this analogy that apophasis reduces all specification in favor of more broadly encompassing universals. One realizes, however, that the opposite is the case when one understands how Śāṅkara distinguishes between the *prājñā* and the *turīya*. The *prājñā* is said to have knowledge of all things, past present and future.<sup>473</sup> This is because one in the state of *prājñā* measures all and absorbs all.<sup>474</sup> Unlike the nonduality of the *turīya*, the *prājñā* is monistic. Since all has become one in the *prājñā*, there is no duality and no ignorance. But the *prājñā* is not the awakened state, since one perceives neither oneself nor others, neither truth nor untruth, in the *prājñā*, whereas the *turīya* is the “all-seer.”<sup>475</sup> The *prājñā* knows all things as universals, monistically reducing reality to knowledge. It fails to perceive particulars and cannot discern one thing from another.<sup>476</sup> In the *turīya*, however, knowledge is recognized to be ephemeral. Knowledge, which entails the measuring of particularity, is a transient pedagogical device.<sup>477</sup> It does not exist for another

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<sup>473</sup> MUBh 5, Panoli 313.

<sup>474</sup> MU 11.

<sup>475</sup> MKBh 1.12-13.

<sup>476</sup> MUBh 5.

<sup>477</sup> MKBh 3.24 and MKBh 1.18.

moment after the cessation of duality, since the means does not possess the same reality as the end itself.<sup>478</sup>

In the *vaiśvānara*, one perceives particulars discriminately, cognizing them verbally. The same is true for the *turīya*. In the *turīya*, though, the Self dwelling in all beings is seen as One, and all beings are seen to be existing in and as the Self.<sup>479</sup>

In this panentheistic vision, one certainly perceives particulars and discerns between them, as in the *vaiśvānara*. In this wakefully attentive state, however, perception is no longer regarded as merely a means to some other end (p181). Knowledge is seen to be transient whereas perception is not. Śruti removes all (pre)conceptions superimposed upon the *buddhi*, thereby enabling the Self to be perceived by the Self.<sup>480</sup> Having known the Self, measure-by-measure, and subsequently dissolving these measures, one is thus prepared for the event of hearing the scripture, embodied by a gracious *guru*.<sup>481</sup>

Thusly, one becomes able to perceive the truth, which is the immanent Brahman, possessed of infinite measure.<sup>482</sup> While the transcendent Brahman, beyond measure, remains ever imperceptible, Its effect is perceived.<sup>483</sup> As demonstrated in Kumāriḷa’s example of milk and curd, the ontological cause is known to be such due to its imperceptibility in the ontically present effect. Therefore, when one who is awakened gazes upon the face of another, he/she perceives this irreducibly particular embodied Self, distinct from every other, knowing Brahman

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<sup>478</sup> MUBh 7, MKBh 3.26.

<sup>479</sup> MUBh 3.

<sup>480</sup> MKBh 2.32, MU 12.

<sup>481</sup> Bannon, “Thou, That, and An/Other.” See also Chapter 7.

<sup>482</sup> MKBh 1.26-29.

<sup>483</sup> MU 12, MKBh 3.27.

to be the cause, perceptible as this unique manifestation. By such a sage, the highest Self is able to be seen in and as *this* and *that* particular. As we will see in chapter six (p321), because one who has heard the *śruti* harmoniously is able to perceive in this way, a gracious teacher is able to gesture to a student's heart and reveal, directly and particularly, "*This Self* is Brahman."<sup>484</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> MUBh 3 (citing Īśā Upaniṣad 6), MU 6, MUBh 2 and MUBhT 2.

## Part Two: The Apophatic Measure in Nicholas of Cusa

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Part One of the dissertation began with an examination of Śaṅkara's apophatic theological method, writ large. Next came a more focused analysis of his commentary on the first unit of the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad Bhāṣya, yielding a more nuanced assessment of Śaṅkara's philosophy of language in light of Mīmāṃsā's kataphasis. His method was then examined in practical application, including his interpretations of apophatic and kataphatic measuring in the second and third units of the MU. Part One then concluded with an analysis of sensuality and the apophatic measure. The first part, in other words, progresses through four organizational moments: (1) apophatic theological method, broadly formulated, followed by an analysis of the practical application of that method in terms of (2) apophasis, (3) measuring (i.e., kataphasis), and (4) perception through the apophatic measure.

Part Two of the dissertation also includes these four organizational moments, but in a different (and somewhat reverse) sequence. Chapter four reads Cusa's theology, after Vedānta, in comparative discourse with Śaṅkara. I begin by examining Nicholas of Cusa's apophatic epistemology of "learned ignorance," subsequently allowing it to coincide with Śaṅkara's markedly different epistemology. I then analyze perception through the apophatic measure from Cusa's perspective, which is also considered comparatively. In this way, chapter four considers some of the ways in which Śaṅkara's thought opens new possibilities for reading Cusa. Building upon his ontology of sensuality, chapter five analyzes Cusa's understanding of creativity, thereby significantly reconceptualizing the notion of "measure" and its ethical/vocational implications for Cusa's Trinitarian understanding of *imago Dei*. This, in turn, sets the stage for Part Three, which constitutes a turn towards a constructive theology of diversity and irreducible particularity comparatively grounded in the intimate, embodied encounter of human persons.

## Four: Apophatic Measures in Cusa, After Vedānta: Conjecture, Coincidence, and the Ontology of Perception

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### Outline and goals

Through an examination of Nicholas of Cusa's early writings, this chapter highlights themes central to his apophatic theological method. I begin with a brief analysis of his epistemology of "learned ignorance." For Cusa, *nearly* all human knowledge is mere conjecture,<sup>485</sup> rooted in an epistemic disjuncture between the world-as-it-is and the world-as-we-"measure"-it. I focus especially on his epistemic method of comparative relation as presented in the opening pages of *De docta ignorantia* (1440) and its companion text *De coniecturis* (1443). Calling into question the precision of nearly all positive (kataphatic) speech, Cusa thus sets the stage for his apophatic performance.

The second section allows Cusa's epistemology of conjectural measuring to coincide with Śāṅkara's understanding of language as a valid measure (*pramāṇa*). Learning our ignorance—after Vedānta—opens avenues for reading both Cusa and Śāṅkara differently. Building upon comparative insights regarding epistemology, language, and pedagogy, I reflect on the implications this specific comparison suggests for comparative theology.

In the third section, my attention turns to Cusa's phenomenological analysis of the ontology of perception in *De quaerendo Deum* (1445). As Cusa advises, I interpret this text through the hermeneutic lens of his final text, *De apice theoriae* (1464). His hermeneutic lens of the *coincidence of opposites* guides his reader up the "ladder of ascent," tracing vision's pathway from sensible objects to God, the Beholder of all sight. His analysis of vision, moreover,

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<sup>485</sup> The exceptions to this are examined in Chapter Five. See page 251.

discloses his cosmological ontology of being enfoldedly (*complicite*) and being unfoldedly (*explicate*).<sup>486</sup>

In the fourth section, I consider, as Cusa does, vision's pathway a second time, tracing the graceful descent of the divine light. Through the sensual interplay of subjective *intention* and *attention*, Cusa disrupts facile understandings of perception in terms of consumption. My analysis narrows to his analogy of failing to recognize a passerby. This bodily objectification of one's neighbor constitutes a failure to perceive through the apophatic measure. Since he employs this illustration in nearly all of his theological treatises, I draw from an array of his texts to highlight the analogy's significance to his apophatic theological method.

As was the case in my examination of Śāṅkara's writings, my aim is to clarify the role of sensuality in Cusa's apophatic theological method. Hence, I conclude this chapter by considering how comparative, back-and-forth reading fosters new insights regarding perception and apophasis. I reflect on comparative theology as a quest of faith seeking liberated understanding. Faithfully cultivating sensuality as an apophatic measure, I analyze two liminal analogies wherein Cusa and Śāṅkara teach us to see through doors.

### **Learned Ignorance: Comparative Relation and Conjecture**

#### *Comparativa Proportio*

In the opening pages of DDI, Cusa introduces several themes which he continues to develop throughout his oeuvre. While these evolve in later writings, the underlying principles remain the foundation of his thought. Among the most central is his observation that "every inquiry is comparative and uses the means of comparative relation (*comparativa proportio*)."<sup>487</sup>

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<sup>486</sup> DQD I.30.

<sup>487</sup> DDI, I.I.3, Hopkins trans., 5.

As he explains, when we perceive something unknown, we judge that unknown thing in proportion to what is already known.<sup>488</sup> While we can *see* that two things differ from one another, we only come to know things through their similarities to other things. To the extent that a given, unknown particular is utterly different than any other, its difference can be *seen* but not *known*. In this sense, Cusa does not differ from Aristotle: Particulars are subjects of propositions, of which universals are predicated, but particulars cannot be predicated of anything other than themselves.<sup>489</sup> For Cusa, however, since knowledge is grounded in the comparative relation of a known thing and an unknown thing which is uniquely unknowable, “it follows that precise truth is unattainable; every human affirmation about what is true is a conjecture.”<sup>490</sup> If the word “knowledge” signifies something known precisely and certainly, then Cusa forthrightly denies that such a thing is possible. By learning that one does not “know” but, instead, provisionally and subjectively *conjectures*, one learns one’s own ignorance (hence the titles of Cusa’s treatise, *On Learned Ignorance*, and its companion, *On Conjectures*).

For example, in order to prove a difficult mathematical principle, a mathematician traces the principle she seeks to prove back to “the first and most evident principles.”<sup>491</sup> In this way, what is unknown becomes known only to the extent that it stands in proportion to what is known. Because there is a ratio between the known and the unknown by means of which the unknown becomes known, it is said that the resulting judgment has been made rationally (i.e., according to

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<sup>488</sup> DDI I.1.2: “Omnes autem investigantes in comparatione praesuppositi certi proportionabiliter incertum iudicant; comparative igitur est omnis inquisitio, medio propotionis utens.”

<sup>489</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* I.27. See Aristotle. 1984. *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*. Edited by Jonathan Barnes. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 37.

<sup>490</sup> DC, I.Prologue.2: “... praecisionem veritatis inattingibilem intuitus es, consequens est omnem humanam veri positivam assertionem esse coniecturam.”

<sup>491</sup> DDI I.1.2.

ratio). In fact, the Latin word *ratio* signifies proportion (as does the English cognate, “ratio”), but also signifies “that faculty of the mind which forms the basis of computation and calculation, and hence of mental action in general,” which is to say “*rationality*.”<sup>492</sup> Cusa exploits this equivocation often, and to great effect.

He continues:

[S]ince *comparative relation* indicates an agreement in some one respect and, at the same time, indicates an otherness, it cannot be understood independently of number. Accordingly, number encompasses all things related comparatively. Therefore, number... is a necessary condition of comparative relation.<sup>493</sup>

To assert that number is a necessary condition of comparative relation is simply to insist that in order for a rational judgment to be made, it must be made regarding some finite thing in proportion to some other finite thing. For Cusa, this is a fundamental epistemological principle.

The human capacity to reason (*ratio*) functions according to comparative ratio.

Pauline Watts clarifies:

The mind’s use of number is not confined simply to mathematical calculation. Without number, it is impossible to make any kind of comparison between the known and the unknown. This is true not only for comparisons involving quantity but for all *proportionabilia*—all things that the mind chooses to contemplate.<sup>494</sup>

Cusa does not claim that all things are reducible to number for the sake of comparative relation, but, in fact, just the opposite. A wise person is one who knows that he/she does not know.<sup>495</sup> This is not due to shortcomings of education, but because the human faculty of reason only comes to

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<sup>492</sup> Lewis, Charlton T. and Charles Short. *A Latin Dictionary. Founded on Andrews' edition of Freund's Latin dictionary: Revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten.* Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1879.

<sup>493</sup> DDI I.1.2.

<sup>494</sup> Watts (1982), 37.

<sup>495</sup> ADI 2, Hopkins 460.



“know” the unknown by means of a comparative proportion that necessarily reduces entities to finite proportions or measures. As he explains, these measures always fall infinitely short of the truth of beings:

Both the precise combinations in corporeal things and the congruent relating of known to unknown surpass human reason to such an extent that Socrates seemed himself to know nothing except that he did not know.<sup>496</sup>

He later elaborates that Socrates:

... excelled the Athenians... in that he knew that he was ignorant, whereas the others (who were boasting that they knew something important, though being ignorant of many things) did not know that they were ignorant. Accordingly, Socrates obtained from the Delphic Oracle the attestation of his wisdom.<sup>497</sup>

#### No Proportion between Finite and Infinite

In the foundational chapter I.3 of DDI, Cusa demonstrates that “the precise truth is incomprehensible.” He begins with what he calls a “self-evident” principle: “there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite.”<sup>498</sup> All knowledge is known through comparative relation of one finite entity to another. It is critical to notice that Cusa is *not* asserting that the entities which are known are actually finite, but simply that what is known by the rational mind is known *qua* finite.

In these two simple but profound principles, Catherine Keller explains, Cusa subtly but importantly departs from the Thomistic tradition of “*analogia entis*, by which we are enabled to know God not univocally but proportionally.”<sup>499</sup> Both Cusa and Aquinas agree that we can know

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<sup>496</sup> DDI I.1.4, Hopkins 5-6.

<sup>497</sup> ADI 2, Hopkins 460.

<sup>498</sup> DDI I.3.9, Watts trans. in *Vision of Man*, 42: *infiniti ad finitum proportionem non esse*. As Catherine Keller notes, this principle was not self-evident to many others in Cusa’s epoch.

<sup>499</sup> Keller (2014), 95.

that God is, but we cannot know *what* God is. Aquinas posits a third path of theology, the *via eminentia*, which is founded upon the *via positiva* and the *via negativa*, but beyond both. From this perspective, we cannot know *what* God is, but we can know something about God through proportional analogies to the world we know. For Cusa, however, since we cannot know the world around us with precision, any analogical comparison to God infinitely compounds this imprecision. Moreover, even if we *could* know the world around us precisely, there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite.

Keller explicates:

For Cusa the boundless excess of the infinite at once exposes the finitude of our perspectives—which are always comparative relations—and enflames our relation to that very infinity. Perspective escapes both the univocity and equivocity that worry Aquinas, without resolving itself in the eminent way of analogy. More simply, it can be said to open a third way, that of a participatory ontology indebted to Thomas but radicalized, open-ended, and so precisely infinite, a way between relativism and certainty into a modernity that never quite was.<sup>500</sup>

Keller's assessment is consistent with Johannes Hoff's. Like Keller, Hoff points to Cusa's departure from (and indebtedness to) Aquinas in what he calls a "radicalization of the non-representationalist tradition."<sup>501</sup> As Hoff shows, Cusa undermines "analytic attempts to dissect the symbolically saturated language of our everyday life into 'merely metaphorical' and allegedly more elementary 'physical' truths."<sup>502</sup> As I demonstrate below (page 207), Cusa's phenomenological analysis of perception "exposes the finitude of our perspectives"<sup>503</sup> and

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<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> Hoff (2013), 42.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>503</sup> Keller (2014), 95.

celebrates the “symbolically saturated language of our everyday life”<sup>504</sup> without relativizing subjective experience or reducing it to analogy.<sup>505</sup>

### Non-proportionality of Singularity

As stated above (p192), comparative relation coincidentally indicates equality and otherness, in differing respects. To say that one thing is equal to another is always to say that the two entities are more similar to each other in some one respect (i.e., genus, species, spatial, causal, temporal, etc.) than they are to a third entity. He adds, however:

[W]e cannot find two or more things which are so similar and equal that they could not be progressively more similar *ad infinitum*. Hence, the measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different.<sup>506</sup>

Because of this, he reasons that “there is nothing in the universe which does not enjoy a certain singularity that cannot be found in any other thing.”<sup>507</sup> Since human knowledge is attained only through comparative relation, “we cannot know even one [particular entity in the world] perfectly.”<sup>508</sup> Cusa echoes and radicalizes the Thomistic assertion that we can know *that* God is but cannot know *what* God is.<sup>509</sup> Building upon his epistemology of comparative relation, Cusa asserts that when we sensually perceive a particular entity in the world, “we apprehend *that it is*,

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<sup>504</sup> Hoff (2013), 42.

<sup>505</sup> Hoff, it should be noted, employs the term “analogy” more capaciously, expanding it beyond Thomistic definitions. This is a welcome move and my intention is not to differ from him, though I use the term more narrowly in this particular context.

<sup>506</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

<sup>507</sup> DDI III.1.188, Hopkins 114.

<sup>508</sup> DDI III.1.189, Hopkins 115.

<sup>509</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.

rather than apprehending *what it is*.”<sup>510</sup> We can see, touch, or otherwise perceive a particular entity, knowing it to be different from other things. We sensually apprehend *that it is*. We perceive both its singularity *and* its similarity to other things. Hence, Cusa radicalizes Aquinas by extending God’s unknowability to all particular entities.

In order to cognitively apprehend *what it is*, however, we compare that unknown thing (given to the senses) to things that are already known. To the extent that we cognize *what it is*, we do so through comparative relation to what is already known. Because we are able to cognitively grasp similarities but have no epistemic means to cognize singularity, we thereby reduce unique particulars to universals. We can apprehend *that it is* unique, since its uniqueness is perceived, but we cannot apprehend its unique *quiddity*, since its uniqueness eschews any possibility of abstraction or comparison.

Even if we imagine, for example, two entities which are identical in every other respect, they are necessarily different with respect to spatiality to the extent that they are two entities.<sup>511</sup> However closely together they move, they could always be infinitely closer.<sup>512</sup> Moreover, the very fact that they are two entities logically entails that they are not identical, according to Aristotle’s laws of identity and non-contradiction.<sup>513</sup> Because knowledge is apprehended by means of comparative relation, it is a measure of similarity proportional to irreducible particularity or difference.

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<sup>510</sup> DP 43, Hopkins 936: Ideo de his potius ‘quia est’ quam ‘quid est’ attingitur.” cf. Albertus Magnus *In De div. nom.* (Cod. Cus. 96 fol. 79rb; 87rb).

<sup>511</sup> Cusa illustrates this, also, in terms of repetition. Even if one were to write the word *unum* (“one”) such that it filled the page, this would neither increase the number one to plurality, nor would it reduce the unique multiplicity of ones on the page. For a longer exploration of this illustration, see Hoff (2013), 160ff.

<sup>512</sup> As Tamara Albertini observes, Cusa originates the notion of the *infinitesimal*, which is foundational for the development of modern calculus and highly significant with respect to “positively formulated scientific statements.” See Albertini (2004), 374-377 and 386ff.

<sup>513</sup> See Aristotle, *Organon*.

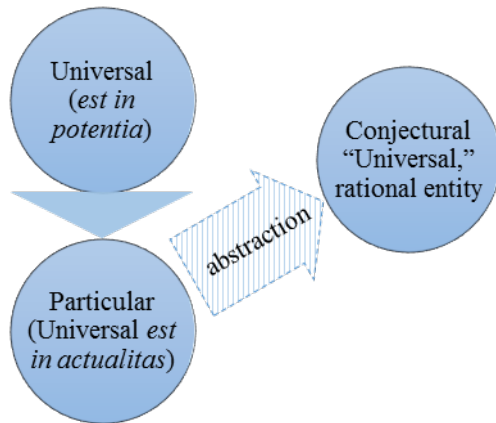


Figure 13: Conjectural Universals as abstracted rational entities

What is known through comparative relation is a universal, which is to say a measure which simultaneously reveals and conceals the particularity of the measured. Carefully distinguishing between potentiality and actuality, Cusa asserts that “universals do not actually exist independently of things. For only what is particular exists actually.”<sup>514</sup> He eschews nominalism by clarifying that universals are “not mere rational entities.”<sup>515</sup> They exist potentially in themselves and actually in particulars.<sup>516</sup> Nevertheless, when we cognize a particular, what is known is not that particular, but a universal which is an abstraction therefrom. Since the abstraction exists actually as a rational entity, it is neither identical with any true universal, which exists potentially in itself, nor with the particular in which that universal exists actually. The rational entity (i.e., cognized universal) is not an “un-forgetting” (*anamnesis*) as Neoplatonism claims, but is a human creation, representative of human creativity, which Cusa calls an “artificial form.”<sup>517</sup> As such, rational entities are epistemologically disjoined from both transcendental universals, which exist *in potentia*, and particulars, wherein universals exist contractedly, *in actualitas*, and therefore deemed to be conjectural, as diagrammed in Figure 13.

This stands in sharp contrast to Śāṅkara’s view, wherein universals are eternally connected with particulars and with words, by which they are cognitively grasped.<sup>518</sup> Human

<sup>514</sup> DDI II.6.125, Hopkins 74.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>516</sup> DP 5, Hopkins 793; DDI II.6.125, Hopkins 75.

<sup>517</sup> DB 6-7, Hopkins 793-4.

<sup>518</sup> See Figure 11, p186.

cognition, according to Cusa, does not measure the world, as is the case for Śāṅkara, but merely measures phenomena: things as they appear to us. Hence, as stated in the passage above, “the measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different.”<sup>519</sup>

For Cusa, while a given measure may be accurate and true to some extent, it can always be infinitely more so. To the extent that it is accurate and true, it only measures likeness, not difference. Knowledge reduces particulars to their likenesses, divorcing them from their particularity. Therefore, knowledge cannot precisely attain truth since truth, according to Cusa, is indivisible.<sup>520</sup> Here, he introduces an analogy discussed further throughout this dissertation:

Therefore, the intellect, which is not the truth, never grasps the truth so precisely that it could not be grasped infinitely more precisely, having a relationship to the truth which is like that of a polygon to a circle. Although a polygon would become more similar to a circle to the extent that it was inscribed with more angles, nevertheless, unless it is released into identity with the circle, it is never made equivalent, even if one multiplies its angles to infinity.<sup>521</sup>

It is both striking and significant to observe, with Pauline Watts, that Cusa’s theology “*begins at that very point at which the usual modes of philosophizing collapse.*”<sup>522</sup> Cusa’s doctrine of learned ignorance is not a final assertion of the utter ineffability of God. It is not a final unsaying of kataphatic theology. Where some others *conclude* that the finite human intellect cannot possibly know infinite reality or absolute truth, Cusa adopts this “self-evident principle” as his starting point, adding, also, that we cannot know the world around us as it is.<sup>523</sup>

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<sup>519</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

<sup>520</sup> DDI, I.3.10.

<sup>521</sup> DDI, I.3.10. Watts translation in *Vision of Man*, 43.

<sup>522</sup> Watts (1982), 43. Italics retained from the original.

<sup>523</sup> As Catherine Keller observes, this revolutionary shift is foreshadowed in Gregory of Nyssa. See Keller (2014), especially chapter two. As Cusa himself is eager to claim, the world’s unknowability is also foreshadowed by Plato’s Socrates, for example in *Theaetetus*.

## Conjectural Epistemology, after Vedānta

Having only begun to sow the seeds of Cusa's theology, after Vedānta, we glimpse fruits to be harvested later. Already, though, insightful similarities and differences in epistemology and language can be observed. As discussed above (p191), "every inquiry is comparative and uses the means of comparative relation."<sup>524</sup> From Cusa's perspective, the same must be true of the inquiry pursued in this dissertation. While it would certainly be anachronistic to label Cusa a comparative theologian in the sense that Clooney and others employ this term today, his methods nevertheless foreshadow the methods of comparative theology to some extent. Even setting aside, for the moment, his imaginative vision of an ecumenical council of sage representatives from the world's religions<sup>525</sup> and his lengthy treatise on the Koran,<sup>526</sup> I argue that Cusa's epistemology of comparative relation bears implications for the contemporary experiments in comparative theology, as does his methodological lens of *coincidentia oppositorum*. Below, I highlight three insights that arise from reading Śaṅkara and Cusa together, comparatively. I then consider some emergent implications for the methods of comparative theology.

### Polygonous Knowledge and Truth

First, the comparison suggests that while the accumulation of knowledge may draw one nearer to truth, truth is qualitatively different than knowledge. Cusa asserts that knowledge constitutes a finite measure of indivisible truth, respectively analogous to a polygon and circle. This bears striking similarity to Śaṅkara's analysis of the relationship between words and AUM. As we have seen, all words are a modification of AUM, just as "pot" and "lump" are

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<sup>524</sup> DDI, I.I.3, Hopkins trans., 5.

<sup>525</sup> I discuss *De pace fidei* (1453) below (p 252).

<sup>526</sup> *Cribratio Alcorani* (1461).

modifications of clay (p109). Even if all such modifications were amalgamated, their “sum,” would not be AUM, since their relationship is that of cause and effect, not part and whole.

Likewise, Cusa’s analogy of polygon and circle demonstrates that even if all “knowledge” was added together, the result would not be “truth” since truth is indivisible. If, for example, one were to compile an extensive list of true propositions about Socrates, one would still only know those things which Socrates shares in common with other entities. One would not “know” Socrates truly since his particularity “enjoy[s] a certain singularity” which can neither be reduced nor abstracted such that “Socrates” could be predicated of any well-formed proposition.<sup>527</sup>

Reading Śāṅkara, *after* Cusa, one can say that AUM is the subject of all true propositions, which is to say that AUM is the particularity of all particulars *as well as* the universal of all universals. Because AUM is all that was, is, and shall be—and also that which transcends these—AUM is the actuality of all actuals and the possibility of all possibles. Words unfold AUM, “the entire manifold of speech” (p112). Despite their differing epistemologies, then, we can see that knowledge constitutes a measure of truth for both Śāṅkara and Cusa, but both deny that knowledge and truth are related in terms of part and whole. The whole is qualitatively more than the sum of its parts, but each “part” (each “particular”) is also qualitatively more than *just* a part.<sup>528</sup> Adhering to the (ana)logic of polygon and circle, one must escape from the logic of part-and-whole altogether. As an apophatic measure, AUM disrupts attempts to posit binary opposition between the one and the many (p116). Coordinating (not conflating) words, one learns to hear AUM harmoniously, as the manifold (not the plurality) of all speech. Regardless of

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<sup>527</sup> Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* I.27.

<sup>528</sup> See p308ff below.



whether knowledge does (Śāṅkara) or does not (Cusa) measure Truth, the relationship between these cannot be articulated in terms of part-and-whole. Like polygonal chords inscribed in a circle, one can coordinate Śāṅkara's theology with Cusa's theology, without synthetically reducing difference to unison and without relativizing difference to plurality. Practicing *upasamhāra*, we begin to hear their theologies concordantly *because of* (and not despite) their differences. Harmony is not unison (p118).

### Linguistic Points and Concord

Second, reading the two together leads us to deeper understandings of their philosophies of language because of (not despite) considerable differences. As we have seen, Śāṅkara asserts that even though words are mere modifications of AUM, they nevertheless reliably measure Brahman, possessed of infinite measure (p160). In contrast, Cusa insists that words fail to reliably measure reality since measure and measured can never be equal (p196). However, Cusa's illustration of the polygon inscribed in a circle can be applied to each of these perspectives, thereby highlighting a subtle but important distinction between them.

As depicted in Figure 14, the polygon coincides with the circle at points A and B despite the fact that line AB does not coincide. Since words reliably measure Brahman possessed of infinite measure, we can understand Śāṅkara's epistemology, to some extent, by allowing words (and corresponding verbal cognitions) to be analogous to points A and B on the circle. Like

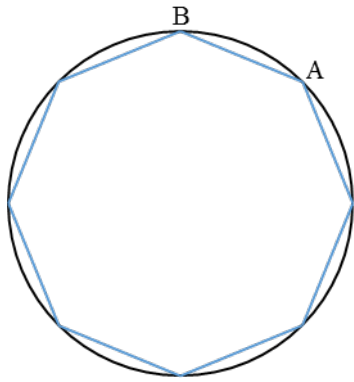


Figure 14: Measuring in Śāṅkara and Cusa in light of Polygon-Circle analogy

AUM, the circle is endless, composed of infinitely many dimensionless points, which are mere modifications of the circle. For Cusa, however, language and rational knowledge are analogous not to the *points* on the circle, but to the inscribed *chords*, such as line AB. The illustration enables us to see how closely related their epistemologies are. Attending to their differing intentions, we begin to read each differently, in light of the other. By distinguishing

between the points on the circle of truth and the inscribed chords, we better understand why words truly and reliably measure Brahman, from Śāṅkara's perspective, and why they fail to do so from Cusa's perspective. Moreover, by coordinating their points and chords, we begin to hear their calls for apophasis, concordantly. Whether one understands words to be analogous to points or chords on the circle of truth, the goal, nevertheless, is to glimpse the circle. Because words draw us nearer to the truth, kataphatically, their negation enables us to see beyond what points and chords can measure.

### Aporetic Pedagogy

Third, by maintaining comparative focus on theological method rather than doctrinal or philosophical differences, an important insight arises with respect to their pedagogical strategies. Confronted with different epistemic problems, neither Śāṅkara nor Cusa attempt to explain away or avoid these problems. Instead, each accentuates the aporia, underscoring it by articulating it

clearly. Through what might be called “aporetic pedagogies,” each masterfully converts an epistemic problem into a means by which to transcend that very problem.

For Śāṅkara, a problem arises concerning the distinct roles and scopes of scripture and direct perception as valid means of knowledge. Given that Brahman is something presently existing (unlike *dharma*, p86), knowledge of Brahman falls under the authoritative domain of perception, not scripture.<sup>529</sup> However, it is also asserted that Brahman cannot be known without scriptural revelation.<sup>530</sup> Rather than omit or “explain away” the tension between these views, Śāṅkara accentuates the Mīmāṃsaka boundary between the authoritative scopes of perception and scripture. Stretching the aporia to its limits, he finds a way through it, rendering it porous.<sup>531</sup> Scripture is indispensable because only it reveals to us what Brahman *is not*. While scripture cannot describe Brahman, which is *anabhidheyatva*, it “desires to indicate” Brahman, which is perceptible and before our very eyes, by progressively dissolving the measures of that which is beyond measure.<sup>532</sup> By accentuating the “problem,” Śāṅkara’s apophatic measure becomes a means to perceive particulars non-dually by progressively dissolving dualistic measures, which cannot be accomplished without the Vedānta scriptures.<sup>533</sup> In the hands of the *ācārya*, this pedagogical problem becomes a teaching strategy.

Similarly, Cusa’s learned ignorance begins by placing an impassable, infinite abyss, so-to-speak, between the world-as-it-is and the world-as-we-know-it in order that we might learn to see beyond the duality of comparative proportion. Accentuating the epistemic disjunction in the

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<sup>529</sup> E.g., MKBh 2.32; PMSBh I.1.4-5. See p177 above.

<sup>530</sup> E.g., MKBh 4.99, cited on p68 above.

<sup>531</sup> On the coincidence of “aporia” and “porosity,” see Keller (2010).

<sup>532</sup> MUBh 7, MKBh 2.37.

<sup>533</sup> MKBh 4.99.

opening pages of DDI, and elaborating thereupon at length in DC, Cusa masterfully transforms an epistemic conundrum into a sublime way of knowing. Like Śāṅkara, he stretches the aporia to its limits, rendering it porous. Moreover, as discussed later (p262), he finds human freedom and creativity within this very epistemic disjunction, transfiguring binding into liberation. That we are ignorant of the world in which we live is a problem, but by learning our ignorance more profoundly, we approach truth more nearly.

Śāṅkara accentuates and exploits the inherently necessary duality of perception (i.e., ontic perceiver and ontic perceived) in order to transcend this duality (ontologically).<sup>534</sup> He repeatedly pauses, though, to assert the reality of externally perceived things.<sup>535</sup> Similarly, Cusa accentuates and exploits the inherent, necessary duality of rational epistemology (i.e., Aristotle's laws of identity and non-contradiction) in order to transcend it. He regularly reminds his reader of this epistemological disjuncture, transcending it without losing sight of it. Rather than dismissing, overlooking, or explaining away the epistemic problems with which they are most concerned, Cusa and Śāṅkara emphasize and accentuate these aporiae as a pedagogical means to transcend those problems, ultimately privileging sensuality.

Beyond simply observing these similarities, reading Śāṅkara and Cusa together enable us to consider the fundamental relationships between apophasis, pedagogy, and phenomenology. Underscoring epistemic contradiction can be a pedagogical strategy that leads students or readers to question the underlying structures of knowledge from which such aporia arise. Laying aporia bare compels students to question what, precisely, is perceived and how those perceptions are cognized, thereby disclosing and removing (pre)conceptions in order to perceive particular

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<sup>534</sup> Cf. BUBh II.4.14, discussed on p148ff. above.

<sup>535</sup> E.g., MKBh 2.32 and 4.87. See p177ff. above.

phenomena more clearly. Moreover, the comparison invites us to perform precisely the same strategy within comparative reading itself. What aporiae do we perceive when juxtaposing Śāṅkara's theology with Cusa's and what are the structures of knowledge from which those aporiae arise? By accentuating aporia, such as their doctrines on language, we learn far more about each and, in the process, learn more about ourselves. Confronted with differing possibilities regarding how to think about signification, negation, and epistemology, one becomes wakefully attentive, dis/covering judgments one had made without consideration.

### Comparative Relation and Comparative Theology

These three cases bear implications for comparative theology as a method of inquiry. “[E]very inquiry is comparative and uses the means of comparative relation.”<sup>536</sup> As I have emphasized (p196ff.), Cusa's point is that the unique singularity of particulars is inescapably beyond compare. Rather than obviating inquiries such as comparative theology, it foreshadows them, rendering them all the more necessary. We *only* come to know the unknown in comparative relation to what is known. And yet one must not overlook Cusa's essential corollary to this: We can sensually apprehend *that* something is unique, but have no epistemic means to know its unique quiddity (p197). Learning our ignorance in this way, we draw nearer to truth in and through comparison. Comparative theology, like Cusa's notion of comparative relation, is less about accumulating knowledge and more about learning our ignorance in order that we might cultivate a better appreciation of uniqueness. While this apprehension of singularity remains beyond compare, it nevertheless arises *after* and *through* comparison. Comparative

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<sup>536</sup> DDI, I.I.3, Hopkins trans., 5.

theology, as a genre of writing, then becomes “a kind of biblio/biography,” as Clooney describes it, “of what I came to see through these texts.”<sup>537</sup>

Reading Śāṅkara and Cusa together, comparatively, we are confronted with no shortage of irreconcilable differences, some of which have already been discussed. Observing their common pedagogical strategy of accentuating paradox as a means to overcome it, one wonders whether comparative theology might do the same. Rather than overemphasizing points of commonality while tallying distinctions in the margins, I wager that accentuating alterity might be seen as a comparative theological strategy to allow opposites to coincide. Rather than constituting a means toward some other end, this method constitutes its own worthwhile way of knowing, a way theologically consistent with the creatively diverse multiplicity into which we find ourselves thrown. If apophatic theology does not shy away from comparative unsayings, then we learn our ignorance all the better from the wisdom of our theological neighbors. Perhaps the grace-full gift we unknowingly receive is the blessing of alterity itself. As discussed in the next section, perception proceeds where contradictions coincide.

### **Being Enfoldedly: Coincidence and the Sensual “Ladder of Ascent”**

#### Vision as a Pathway for Seeking God

As previously noted (p190), Cusa consigns *nearly* all human knowing to mere conjecture, observing that “the precise truth is ungraspable.”<sup>538</sup> If one forgets that Cusa embraces this premise as his starting point rather than his final conclusion, one may hear in it whispers of nihilism or relativism. Far from either standpoint, however, Cusa embraces unknowability as the groundless ground for a profound theological method by which to draw nearer to truth and God:

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<sup>537</sup> Clooney (1996), 47.

<sup>538</sup> The exceptions, which are of great importance, are discussed in chapter five. They include our knowledge of mathematics and other human technologies, such as spoons and houses.

... the quiddity of things, which is the truth of beings and which has been sought by all philosophers and has been discovered by none of them is unattainable in its purity; and the more profoundly we become learned in this ignorance, the more closely we approach the truth.<sup>539</sup>

As conjecture, what we call “knowledge” is the fruit of comparative proportion. As we have seen (p196), this way of knowing is distinguished by an irreconcilable, infinite disjuncture between measure and measured. Since there is no proportion between the infinite and the finite, knowledge cannot be a means to know truth. In the citation above, however, Cusa claims that by learning our ignorance more profoundly, we approach the truth more closely. Rather than ignore or downplay the disjuncture between the world and our knowledge thereof, he accentuates it, thereby rendering the aporia porous, to borrow Catherine Keller’s phrase (p46).<sup>540</sup>

In contemporary theology, Cusa’s name is most commonly associated with a hermeneutic lens he refers to as the *coincidence of opposites*. He employs this method often, and in a variety of philosophical/theological circumstances. Since my central focus in this dissertation is on the role of perception in apophatic theology, I examine Cusa’s method of the coincidence of opposites insofar as it directly relates to perception and apophatic method.

In *De apice theoriae (On the Summit of Contemplation, 1464, DAT)*, written in his final days, Cusa encourages his reader to return to three of his earlier works which contain insights he himself did not fully appreciate until then.<sup>541</sup> Sitting atop the summit of contemplation, in other words, he *sees* some of his earlier texts from a new perspective. Among these is a brief text

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<sup>539</sup> DDI, I.3.10. Watts translation (1982), 43: “Quidditas ergo rerum, quae est entium veritas, in sua puritate inatingibilis est et per omnes philosophos investigata, sed per neminem, uti est, reperta: et quanto in hac ignorantia profundius docti fuerimus, tanto magis ipsam accedimus veritatem.”

<sup>540</sup> Keller (2010), 25–44.

<sup>541</sup> DAT 16, Hopkins 1430. The three texts mentioned are *De dato patris luminum (On the Gift of the Father of Lights, 1446)*, *De icona Dei* (a.k.a., *De visione Dei, On the Icon of God or On the Vision of God, 1453*), and *De Quaerendo Deum (On seeking God, 1445)*.

entitled *De quaerendo Deum* (*On Seeking God*, 1445, DQD), which elaborates a sermon he preached on Acts 17. Therein, he reflects on several scriptural titles, including the title “King of kings.” Although this title seems to apply to the eschatological Christ in 1 Timothy and Revelation, Cusa ascribes it to the “Lord of lords, who is Beholding itself and *Theos* itself, or God, who has all other kings in [God’s] power.”<sup>542</sup> His lengthy explanation of this title begins with sensible things and progresses through the stages of perceptual cognition by means of the coincidence of opposites. Heeding the elder Cusa’s advice, I interpret DQD through the hermeneutic lens of his discussion of possibility and actuality in DAT. Adapting and applying the Vedānta method of *upasaṃhāra* (p72), I coordinate Cusa’s two teachings, discerning a meaning which is present in each, but difficult to discern without exegetical coordination.

Since “vision bears a likeness to the pathway by means of which a seeker [of God] ought to advance,” Cusa reasons, an analysis of perception provides a useful analogy for theological inquiry.<sup>543</sup> Vision, he states, requires three things: (1) an internal light which descends from the intellect, (2) a colored object which the eye reproduces as a mental image, and (3) an external light.<sup>544</sup> For sight to apprehend, these “two paths of light must meet.”<sup>545</sup> This simple point, to which I return later, is central to Cusa’s theo-ethics and likewise to this dissertation. My argument, in brief, is that apophasis enables perception by removing linguistic-conceptual obstacles, thereby enabling these two paths of light to meet through the intimate, embodied, sensual encounter of persons.

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<sup>542</sup> DQD 1.27, Hopkins 318.

<sup>543</sup> DQD 1.19, Hopkins 315.

<sup>544</sup> DQD 1.20, Hopkins 315.

<sup>545</sup> DQD 2.33, Hopkins 321.



## Being Senually: In Living Color

In the first chapter of DQD, Cusa traces vision's path from visible objects to the intellect, climbing a sensual "ladder of ascent."<sup>546</sup> In the second chapter, he explains the process again in the reverse direction, tracking the "descent" of the intellectual spirit to visible particulars. Since Cusa's cosmology is inextricable from his analysis of perception, it is necessary to pause along the path to expound his adverbial ontology of being "enfoldedly" (*complicite*). Intending to simplify and clarify, I have diagrammed Cusa's ontology of perception in Figure 15 (p223), to which I periodically refer below.

Though I first trace Cusa's "ladder of ascent," the *descent* is most pertinent to my thesis. As in Part One of this dissertation, this phenomenological analysis of perception (focused on but not limited to vision) enables us to discern where and how obstacles arise which impede perception. Learning these hindrances, a Vedāntin following Śāṅkara's method progressively dissolves them. Following Cusa, however, one cannot remove these obstacles, but learns to *see through* them by means of the coincidence of opposites. In either case, the first step is to analyze perception, learning how and why obstacles arise which impede it.

Towards that end, Cusa begins:

In the realm of visible things, only color is found. However, sight is not of the realm of visible things but is established above all visible things. Accordingly, sight has no color, for it is not of the realm of colored things. So that it can see every color, sight is not contracted to any color.<sup>547</sup>

Although this seems quite obvious and elementary, it is nevertheless emblematic of Cusa's method of comparative relation. True to his mathematic tendencies, he begins his "proof" with a premise that is both simple and certain, steadily progressing in small steps. It is significant and

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<sup>546</sup> DQD 1.19, Hopkins 315.

<sup>547</sup> DQD 1.20, Hopkins 315.

meaningful, from Cusa's perspective, that in order for sight to see color, it must be colorless. Sight is described apophatically: It sees color because it is devoid of color. He anthropomorphizes sight as an impartial judge and equitable ruler.

In the realm of visible things, possible colors exist actually. For example, "blue" as a possible color, exists as an actual color in blue objects; "blue" exists *in potentia* in itself, but exists *in actualitas* in visible objects. In the entire kingdom of visible objects, however, one can find nothing analogous to sight. Anthropomorphizing once again, Cusa asks his reader to suppose that someone spoke to visible objects, asking them to identify the "ruler who named them."<sup>548</sup> Since there is nothing analogous to sight in that kingdom, these living colors may suppose that whatever is the "best and most beautiful" among them must be their superlative king. "And when they attempt to fashion a concept of this best and most beautiful thing, they resort to color, without which they cannot construct a concept."<sup>549</sup> Learning their ignorance, these living colors reason that their ruler is a resplendent color such that it cannot be brighter.

Four points may be drawn from this analogy. First and most obvious, it illustrates the limitations of our own theological understanding. Like Cusa's anthropomorphized colors, we are unable to fashion a concept of God without resorting to that which we know cannot be God. We resort first to superlative language, and then to apophatic speech. These learnedly ignorant colors know that the ruler who named them is not a color such as themselves. Nevertheless, they have no means to attain a concept such as "sight," since there is nothing in the visible realm analogous thereto. Learning their ignorance, these wise colors mimic Anselmian maximality.

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<sup>548</sup> DQD 23, Hopkins 316.

<sup>549</sup> DQD 23, Hopkins 316.

Secondly, Cusa asserts that universals (“natural forms”) are unfolded as particulars, as depicted in Figure 15 [A]. What exists enfoldedly as “Blue” (*in potentia*) exists unfoldedly as particular blue entities (*in actualitas*). Blue *qua* form “exists otherwise” in blue things than it does in itself.<sup>550</sup> To be sure, blue *is* this or that particular blue entity. “[U]niversals exist actually only in a contracted manner... universals do not actually exist independently of things.”<sup>551</sup> Hence, what is seen with the eye *actually is* blue, according to Cusa; it is not a mere likeness, image, or shadow of a transcendental form of blue, as some Neoplatonists might suggest. The distinction between blue *as such* and blue things is not ontological, but adverbial. As a universal, blue *exists potentially*, and thus invisibly, in itself, but only *exists actually*, and thus visibly, in blue particulars. As a universal, blue things exist enfoldedly and coincidentally in blue *qua* universal, which exists unfoldedly *as* all blue things, diversely. Hence, blue is in all blue things (*actually*), and all blue things are in blue (*potentially*).

In DB, Cusa provides a geometrical example which may be helpfully coordinated with the former.<sup>552</sup> An angle, he explains, can be larger or smaller than it is, but angularity cannot. For any angle to exist, angularity must first exist as a possibility. For angularity to exist *actually*, however, it must exist as an angle which can be larger or smaller than it is, which it not angularity *qua* form. All angles exist enfoldedly in angularity, which only exists possibly, and thus invisibly. However, angularity exists unfoldedly as particular angles, which exist actually and thus visibly. Therefore, when one sees an angle with one’s eye, what one sees is *not other than angularity itself*, despite the fact that angularity itself is other than that angle.

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<sup>550</sup> DB 5, Hopkins 793.

<sup>551</sup> DDI II.6.125, Hopkins 74.

<sup>552</sup> DB 14, Hopkins 797.

To be clear, to say that a thing exists potentially is neither merely nor necessarily to say that it has the potential to exist, but rather to say that it *does exist* as a possibility. Unlike classical theism, Cusa refuses to acquiesce to an equivocation of being. All things which actually exist must possibly exist, but not all things which exist possibly exist actually.<sup>553</sup> For example, a hare exists actually and possibly; a hare's horns exist possibly, but not actually; a square circle neither possibly nor actually exists. Nevertheless, a square circle must exist as a rational entity. If this were not the case, then the statement, "a square circle neither possibly nor actually exists," would neither be true nor false, but would be utterly meaningless. Hence, we can ontologically distinguish between possible entities, actual entities, and rational entities, but Cusa's cosmology requires that we do so adverbially: Entities exist possibly, actually, and rationally. Cusa's cosmology safeguards being's temporal gerund without disregarding ontological difference. Possibilities, actualities, and rationalities do not "have" being, but rather *are* possibly, actually, and rationally. Moreover, Cusa's list of ontological adverbs is not limited to these three. Entities exist sensually, intellectually, creatively, incomprehensibly, etc. Hence, colors exist *actually* in particular visible objects, but exist *sensually* in vision. Despite the epistemic disjunction between the world-as-it-is and the world-as-we-know-it, there is no corresponding ontological disjunction. Instead, Cusa's cosmology entails a (non-dual) continuum of being demarcated adverbially: being enfoldedly and unfoldedly.

Third, it should be noticed that Cusa's analysis of vision's pathway is phenomenological.<sup>554</sup> He is not analyzing particular objects which exist in the world in the manner in which they exist (i.e., *actually*). Such an approach, for Cusa, is outside the scope of

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<sup>553</sup> DAT 18, Hopkins 1431.

<sup>554</sup> Cusa's phenomenological method is discussed in more detail below. Also, see Harries (2001), 69.

human pursuit, which is precisely why a phenomenology of sensuality is necessary for one who seeks God. Rather, his analysis is grounded in the specific manner by which sensible objects are sensible.

For example, since his phenomenology is exclusively limited to visual perception, he attends exclusively to color rather than to shape, behavior, or motion. Only differences in color are given to vision. Based upon these differences, one conjectures differences in shape, motion, etc. While Cusa encourages his reader to expand one's phenomenological analysis to the sense of touch, smell, taste, and hearing, his own analysis stops short of this broader sensuality.<sup>555</sup> His intention is not to privilege vision, as if this pathway for seeking God was uniquely available to the sighted, but instead to underscore a phenomenological method that necessarily differs according to sensual phenomena.<sup>556</sup> Unlike particular colored things, color "does not have life and vital movement."<sup>557</sup> Though we see living things, we do not see life.<sup>558</sup>

Fourth, it has been stated that all visible things have color while sight is colorless (p211). It follows, then, that sight is not visible. Visible things lack sight, but sight lacks visibility.<sup>559</sup> Color lacks life, but color *lives* in sight. He elaborates:

Now, all that which exists unfoldedly (*explicate*) in the sensible kingdom, exists enfoldedly (*complicite*) in the kingdom of the senses more vigorously and, moreover, [exists] vitally in a way that is more complete.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>555</sup> DQD I.24.

<sup>556</sup> In this regard, Rene Descartes' *Meditations* may be seen as an enormous philosophical step backwards, from which the retrieval of Cusan thought marks a recovery. As Johannes Hoff explains, scientific realism did not begin with Descartes; it ended in the Renaissance with Leon Alberti, Cusa, et. al. See Hoff (2013), 72-73.

<sup>557</sup> DQD I.30, Hopkins 319.

<sup>558</sup> In this instance (at least), "life" should not be read as a universal classification. "Being alive" is not analogous to "being orange," for example.

<sup>559</sup> Mayra Rivera Rivera comments that Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues "that visibility ties the seer and the seen—a common condition of possibility." Cusa would agree. Likewise Yājñavalkya: BU II.4.13.

Sensuality is *complicated*: Sight enfolds all color, which exists enfoldedly and vitally in living color, which is sight. Opposites cannot coincide in sensible objects (e.g., a particular cannot be both white and not-white in the same respect at the same time), since that is contrary to being actually, which is being unfoldedly (*explicate*). However, opposites necessarily coincide in sight, since that is essential to being sensually, which is being enfoldedly (*complicite*) and vitally.

For example, white and not-white must coincide—*potentially*—in sight. If that were not the case, then sight would not have the potential to see either white or non-white. Hence, sight is the coincidence of opposites with respect to color. Because of this, sight *sees* color through the coincidence of opposites, enfolding it and giving it life. Though sight cannot see life, it brings to life that which it sees, sensually.<sup>561</sup> Sight neither objectifies nor consumes; it animates, vitally.

Sight's enfolding, however, is not to be confused with the enfolding inherent to universals, discussed above (p212, see also Figure 15 [A, B]). As a universal, blue enfolds all blue things, which exist *potentially* in blue *in se*. In sight, however, opposites *actually* coincide, since sight exists actually. Through this simple analogy, it becomes clear that universals are directly perceptible (since they actually exist unfoldedly as particular entities which are visible), but are not knowable (since they exist potentially in an enfolded manner, invisibly). While we cannot know universals as they exist in themselves, we are able to conjecture as to their nature since we directly perceive them and can thus abstract from our perception rational entities which exist as our own creations.

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<sup>560</sup> DQD I.30, my translation: Sed id omne, quod est in regno sensibilibus explicate, est vigorosiori modo complicite et vitaliter atque perfectiori modo in regno sensuum.

<sup>561</sup> Of course, sight does not bring actual beings to life actually, but brings actual beings to life sensually.

Accordingly, Cusa clarifies his terminology by distinguishing between two distinct kinds of universals, thereby avoiding the extremes of nominalism and idealism.<sup>562</sup> He uses the term “natural forms” to refer to universals which exist in themselves (*in potentia*) and the term “artificial forms” to refer to universals which exist as rational entities in the human mind (*in actualitas*). As illustrated in Figure 15, natural forms *are not* unfolded as artificial forms, but as actual, particular objects in the world. For Cusa, this is not a speculative philosophical stipulation, but a logical necessity since anything which exists actually must exist possibly. Nevertheless, there is an epistemic disjuncture or “cut” between natural forms and artificial forms. As will be discussed in more detail later (p256), Cusa maintains that natural forms exist enfoldedly in the Divine Intellect, which is their Source and Creator, and unfoldedly as the natural, created world around us. Artificial forms exist enfoldedly in the human intellect, which is their source and creator, and unfoldedly as human technologies, be they doctoral dissertations or spoons, which do not necessarily coordinate with any natural form.<sup>563</sup>

#### Being Rationally: Measuring Binaries

Continuing the “ladder of ascent” from visible things to sight, one next comes to reason.<sup>564</sup> Though all colors exist enfoldedly in sight such that it is the coincidence of all colors, sight is unable to differentiate between one thing and another. Sight sees but does not discern. Just as sight was determined to be the “king” presiding over the kingdom of visible things, reason is determined to be the “king” presiding over sight.

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<sup>562</sup> On this topic, see all of DB, especially DB 7.

<sup>563</sup> Regarding spoons, see *Idiota de mente* (1450).

<sup>564</sup> DQD 25, Hopkins 317.

Rationality proceeds by means of comparative relation (p191), such that what is perceived is abstracted, thus marking the “cut” or moment of epistemic disjunction (See Figure 15 [C]). Reason measures by differentiating one thing from another in the form of rational entities and in terms of number.<sup>565</sup> Insofar as they are *rational* entities, they must conform to the basic principles of logic, such as Aristotle’s laws of identity, non-contradiction, and excluded middle. That is to say that “white” must mean the same thing at all times and in all contexts (identity); “white” must be opposed to “not-white” (excluded middle); and no entity can be logically conceived that is both “white” and “not-white” at the same time in the same respect (non-contradiction).<sup>566</sup> Reason’s binary does not permit the coincidence of contradictories, but instead measures particulars numerically, discerning them as either white or non-white, 1 or 0, etc. Unknown things become *rationally* known through comparative proportion to what is “known,” which is to say abstracted and conjectured. Reason multiplies, with logical certainty and mathematical precision, rational universals which are directly proportional to unknown (but *seen*) variables. Realizing this, one learns one’s ignorance.

#### Being Intellectually: Learned Ignorance

Just as there are manifold colors, Cusa explains, so too are there manifold rational entities. Just as there is a “king” presiding over colored things and a “king” presiding over sight, there is likewise a “king” presiding over reason, *viz.*, intellect, as depicted in Figure 15 [D]. All that has been said above regarding the relationship between sight and visible things is analogously true of the relationship between reason and intellect. Colored objects are visible but cannot see; sight sees but is not visible; reason differentiates but does not see/apprehend. As

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<sup>565</sup> DDI I.1.2. See p197 above.

<sup>566</sup> On these principles, see Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* (II and IV) and *Organon*.



Cusa explains, reason is “seen” or apprehended by the intellect, (much as the *buddhi* is “seen” by the *antahkaraṇa*, p103):

Rational things are apprehended by the intellect, but the intellect is not found in the realm of rational things, for the intellect is as the eye, and rational things are as colors... For example, the intellect judges *this* to be a necessary reason, *that* to be a possible reason, a contingent reason, an impossible reason, a demonstrative reason, a sophistical and pseudo-reason, or a probable reason, and so on—even as sight judges *this* color to be white and *that* color not to be white... and so on.<sup>567</sup>

Sight sees because it is devoid of all actual color, yet all colors exist enfoldedly in sight, which is the coincidence of opposites with respect to color. Likewise, the intellect apprehends reason because it is devoid of all actual reason, yet all reasons exist enfoldedly in the intellect, which is the coincidence of opposites with respect to rational entities.

For example, suppose one sees a blue object with the eye. Sight perceives the color of the object; it *sees* it, but does not know its quiddity.<sup>568</sup> Reason discerns between white and non-white, blue and non-blue, etc.; reason *discerns*, but does not apprehend. Since “white” and “not-white,” “blue” and “not-blue” all coincide in the intellect, the intellect is able to judge what is rationally discerned and seen with the eye and thus apprehend that the object is blue. Hence, one *sees*, intellectually (and sensually), through the coincidence of opposites.

However, if the intellect has learned its ignorance, then it understands the following: That which was seen by the eye differs, ontologically, from that which was discerned by reason. That is not to say that the object is ontologically *other than* its rational expression; reason is *not-other*

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<sup>567</sup> DQD 25, Hopkins 317.

<sup>568</sup> DDI, I.3.10, DP 43, et. al.

than that which it discerns. Nevertheless, they differ ontologically because one exists *rationally* and “the other” exists *actually*.<sup>569</sup>

What specifically, then, is the ignorance that is to be learned here? That the object *has been seen* and that the object *is blue* are not in question. What stands in doubt (and is, in fact, known to be unknown) is the quiddity of the thing. Learning one’s ignorance through a careful phenomenology of perception, one realizes that even though a particular entity’s quiddity may be seen, it *cannot* be discerned since comparative proportion is unsuitable to discern it. As noted (p196), “there is nothing in the universe which does not enjoy a certain singularity that cannot be found in any other thing.”<sup>570</sup> Since what is seen by the eye enjoys a certain singularity, it cannot be discerned in proportion to any other thing with respect to that singularity. Since reason discerns through comparative proportion, then reason is powerless to discern that which is singular, unique, and uncategorical. To the extent that any given particular is unique, it is beyond compare. “Hence, the measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different.”<sup>571</sup> Nevertheless, by learning our ignorance more profoundly, we approach the truth more closely.<sup>572</sup> Though the quiddity of that which is irreducibly particular cannot be apprehended in its purity, it can, nevertheless, be sensually perceived.<sup>573</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> When I walk quickly, for example, I am not ontologically other than myself when I walk slowly, but my modes of walking differ.

<sup>570</sup> DDI III.1.188, Hopkins 114.

<sup>571</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

<sup>572</sup> DDI, I.3.10.

<sup>573</sup> *Ibid.* It goes without saying, of course, things may possibly exist which can neither be sensually perceived nor known, but about such things we can only pass over in silence.

## Beyond Coincidence: Being Seen and Being Known

Tracing the pathway of vision in order to construct his “ladder of ascent,” Cusa ventures to take one final step:

Now, intellectual natures likewise cannot deny that a king is appointed over them. And as visible natures maintain that the king appointed over them is the ultimate end of all visible perfection, so intellectual natures, which are natures that intuit truth, state that their king is the ultimate end of all the perfection that is intuitive of all things. And they name this king *Theos*, or God—on the ground that in being the completeness-of-perfection of seeing-all-things, [God] is Beholding itself, or Intuiting itself.<sup>574</sup>

Cusa’s anthropomorphized colors found nothing in their visible “kingdom” suitably analogous to sight, and yet could not formulate any conception without reference to color (p211 above).

Likewise, we are unable to find anything in the intellectual “kingdom” suitably analogous to God, and yet cannot formulate any conception without reference to intellect. As Cusa has done (in living color), we resort to the language of superlativity and apophasis and thus refer to God as King of kings, Queen of queens, Lord of lords, etc.

More importantly, though, Cusa describes God in terms of intellectual activity:

“Beholding Itself, or Intuiting itself.”<sup>575</sup> As I have discussed elsewhere, Cusa’s DQD masterfully turns on a certain equivocation he ascribes to the name *Theos*.<sup>576</sup> “*Theos*,” he states, “is derived from ‘*theoro*,’ which means ‘I see’ and ‘I hasten.’”<sup>577</sup> Having traced the path of vision as a pathway for seeking God, Cusa arrives, finally, at a vision beyond the intellect, which is the coincidence of opposites. Looking “upstream,” so-to-speak, from intellect to God rather than

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<sup>574</sup> DQD 26, Hopkins 317.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>576</sup> Bannon (2014).

<sup>577</sup> DQD 19, Hopkins 315.

“downstream” from intellect to rationality, Cusa beholds a Beholder (Figure 15 [E]). Just as intellect was seen to behold rational entities and sight was seen to behold visible things, God is now seen to behold the intellect. Having climbed vision’s “ladder of ascent,” the pathway folds back on itself. The agent of Cusa’s verbal etymology radically shifts. No longer does *Theos* refer to God as the One Whom we hasten to see. Gazing beyond the intellect through the coincidence of opposites, one sees God to be “*Theos*, God, Beholding, and Hastening, Who sees all things, Who is present in all things, and Who traverses all things.”<sup>578</sup>

Cusa first led us to believe that his phenomenology of vision was simply an analogy: “a *likeness* to the pathway by means of which the seeker ought to advance.”<sup>579</sup> In the end, however, one realizes that this pathway is far more than an analogy. Hastening along the path, as if walking to Emmaus, one beholds the Beholder through the coincidence of opposites. Faithfully seeking understanding, one finds oneself seen. God remains inconceivable because, Cusa explains, “in [God’s] light all our knowledge is present, so that we are not the ones who know but rather God [knows] in us.”<sup>580</sup> As mentioned earlier, DQD is an elaboration of a sermon Cusa preached on Acts 17. Paraphrasing verse 28, he states:

*Theos*—Who is the Beginning from which all things flow forth, the Middle in which we are moved, and the End unto which things flow back—is everything.”<sup>581</sup>

Cusa’s (ana)logic of being enfoldedly and unfoldedly flows back to its scriptural foundation: Paul’s sermon on the Unknown God. Turning, perichoretically, atop his “ladder of

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<sup>578</sup> DQD 31, Hopkins 320.

<sup>579</sup> DQD 19, Hopkins 315.

<sup>580</sup> DQD 36, Hopkins 323. See also Bannon (2014), 58.

<sup>581</sup> DQD 31, Hopkins 320.

ascent,” Cusa finds the Seeking God on his pathway for seeking God. Pausing at this liminal apex, he concludes: “just as being depends on [God], so too does being known.”<sup>582</sup> As Beholder, *Theos* neither objectifies nor consumes. Rather, God attends to one’s intentions.

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<sup>582</sup> DQD 36, Hopkins 323. See also Bannon(2014), 58.

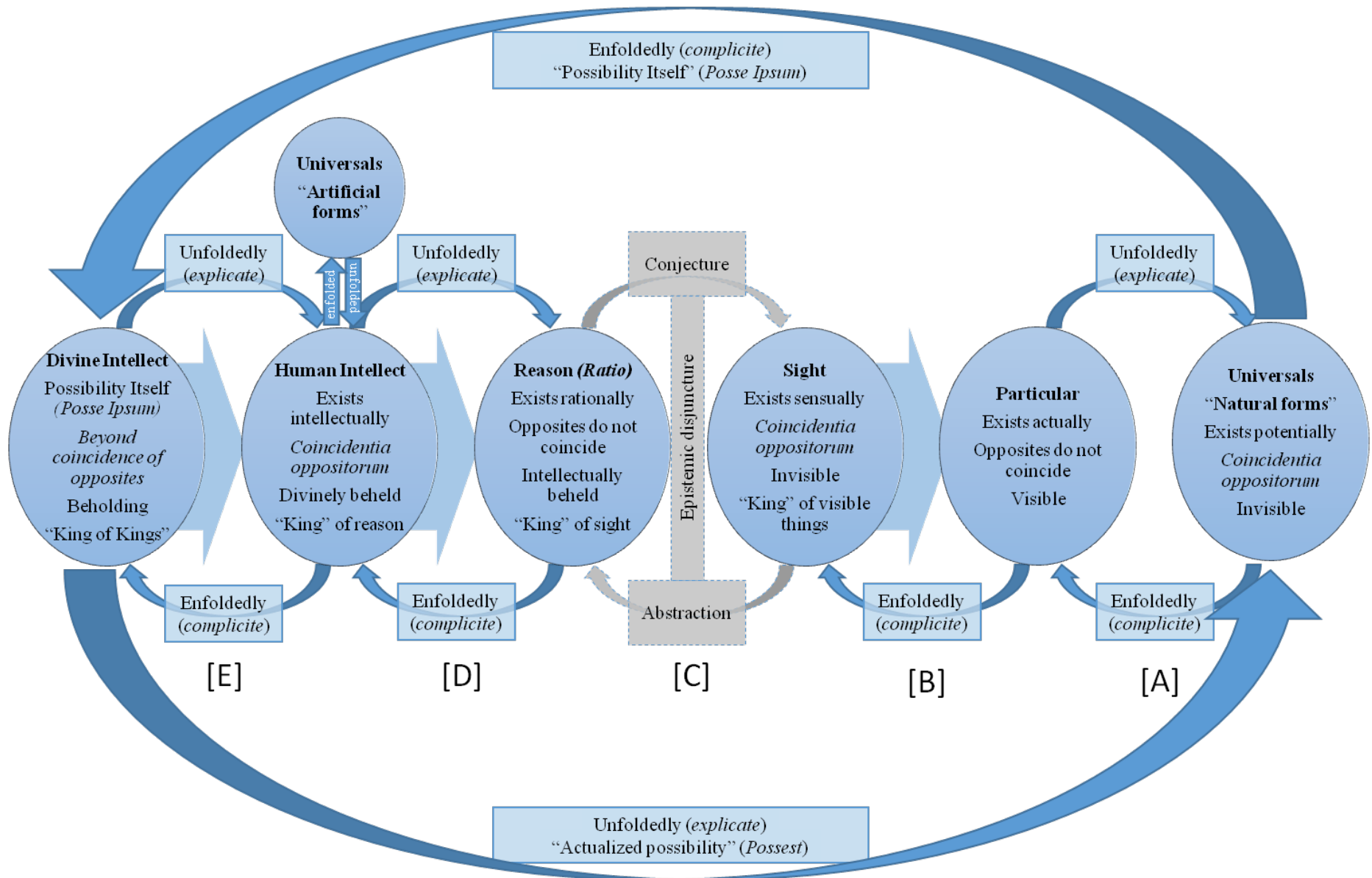


Figure 15: Cusa's Ontology of Perception

## **Attention: Graceful Descent of the Divine Light**

Coincidence of Orientation: Attention and Intention

In the second chapter of DQD, Cusa performs a textual metanoia. He turns around to trace vision's pathway in its graceful descent. Having dis/covered the divine light to be the Seer of sight, Cusa seeks a second light. The reason for this quickly becomes apparent when we recall that "in order that sight may apprehend distinctly that which is visible, two paths of light [must] meet."<sup>583</sup> In DQD 1, he began with the external light, which shines on visible things and ascends upwards through sight, reason, and intellect, and then beyond the intellect to *Theos*, the Beholder, who sees all things. In DQD 2, however, he highlights the descent of the higher light, "for it is not the spirit of vision that imposes a name on colors but it is rather its [Parent's] spirit, which is in it."<sup>584</sup>

His intention here is to draw attention to that which impedes vision: If it is not we who see, but rather the Beholder who sees all things, and if "we are not the ones who know but rather God [knows] in us,"<sup>585</sup> then how can it be that we fail to perceive, fail to know, or see erroneously? This question is hardly far from one of Śaṅkara's guiding question: If Brahman is non-dual, perceptible, and before our very eyes, and if perception never goes astray, then how can it be that we do not see Brahman, but see duality? Here, Cusa's focus is not on the pathway of vision, but on the light which descends along this pathway.

As he explains, the internal light is analogous in many ways to the external light. Though color may be present before one's eyes, and though one may be intent upon seeing it, the color

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<sup>583</sup> DQD 33, Hopkins 321. (See p211 above)

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>585</sup> DQD 36, Hopkins 323. See also Bannon (2014), 58.

“must be made visible by another light, from a source that illumines the visible, for in a shadow and in darkness, what is visible is not apt to be seen.”<sup>586</sup> As before, Cusa begins from a simple premise, which is obvious, verging on trite: though something may be before our eyes, available to be seen, it can only be seen if a light is shone upon it.

More subtly, his point is that we see what we willfully intend to see. When we *intend* to see something, we intentionally shine a light upon it. As discussed below, however, Cusa upends this understanding of *intention*. If we aspire to see what God intends for us to see, then we must quiet our own intentions and allow the divine light to draw our attention to what God intends. In order to quiet our intentions, however, we must consider how volition captures—and consumes—our attention. Only by progressively dissolving distraction does one become wakefully attentive<sup>587</sup> to the divine light’s graceful anointing.

As the ruler of reason and sight, the intellect guides vision. When the eye is stimulated by a sensation:

The power of the sensitive nature takes interest in the sensation and pays attention to it in order to discriminate. Accordingly, the spirit in the eye does not discriminate but rather in that spirit a higher spirit accomplishes the discriminating.<sup>588</sup>

In DAT, he emphasizes that this discriminating power is not other than free will:

For example, when the eyes are directed toward an object, the free will does not always allow the eyes to observe that object but turns them away, in order that they not view what is worthless or shameful.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>586</sup> DQD 34, Hopkins 321.

<sup>587</sup> Cf. p120ff. above.

<sup>588</sup> DQD 33, Hopkins 321.

<sup>589</sup> DAT 23, Hopkins 1432.



Just as one intentionally shines an external light upon what is to be seen, free will directs our attention towards (or away from) that which we wish (or do not wish) to perceive. The internal light that descends, in other words, is synonymous with attentiveness.

As Johannes Hoff points out, though:

In his late *Compendium* (1463), Cusa deepens this approach through his use of the terminological distinction between ‘attention’ (*attentio*) and ‘intention’ (*intentio*), in which the ‘in’ indicates the inward[ly] orientated aspect of perception as distinct from the ‘at’ which indicates its outward orientation. Consequently, the phenomenon of visual perception is the outcome of the interpenetration between the *intention* of the illuminated object that ‘addresses’ the viewer, and the *attention* of the viewer who responds to this address.<sup>590</sup>

By placing *intention* in opposition to *attention*, Cusa compels his reader to radically rethink, reconsider, and revise what is usually signified by the word “intention.” Though attention and intention coincide in sensual perception, they coincide as opposites: an address from the “outside,” so-to-speak, and a response from “within.” If we long to see what God intends, our attention must be a response; it cannot be motivated by our own intentions.

This coincidental interpenetration disrupts, if not *reverses*, any facile understanding of perception in terms of consumption. Perceiving the world cannot, from this vantage, be understood as merely “taking in” or “consuming” the world according to our own whims and desires. The world has other *intentions*. Perception, as Hoff eloquently states, is the outcome of an interpenetration: An attentive response to an intentional address.

Reading Cusa’s theology, after Vedānta, Śaṅkara’s distinction between perception in the *vaiśvānara* and the *turīya* proves helpful here. As was shown, perception in the *vaiśvānara* is understood as a means to some other end: a means of valid knowledge. In the *turīya*, however, knowledge is seen to be ephemeral, a transient *measuring* of true reality which does not exist for

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<sup>590</sup> Hoff, 41, emphasis retained.

another moment after the truth of nonduality is known. While perception persists in the *turīya*, it ceases to be a means to an end but is realized to be an end unto itself. Similarly, by opposing *intention* to *attention* and positioning *intention* such that it addresses the perceiver, perception ceases to be a means of consumption, producing sense data as intellectual fodder. Instead, perception becomes a vocational response: attending to an intentional address.

Sense perception, then, cannot simply be the action of a “subject” which grasps and consumes “objects.” Rather, perception is a re/action, where attentive response coincides with intentional address. But an intentional address from whom? Do we glimpse in Cusa’s coincidence of intention and attention hints of a Levinasian *Other*, who beckons us into being from indiscriminate infinitude? Or has Cusa simply “personified” objects as he anthropomorphized colors in DQD 1? Whence comes intention?

As before, it becomes clear that any discussion of Cusa’s analysis of perception is inextricable from his cosmological ontology. We misread Cusa’s analysis—and certainly miss his point—if we conceive of sense perception as the action of a “subject” who perceives “objects” which are “outside” of that subject. Likewise, even though *intention* and *attention* having differing orientations, it would be a mistake to think that either comes from the “inside” or “outside” of a perceiving “subject.” Though Cusa uses the terms “subject” and “object,” it would be anachronistic to read these in a modernist, Cartesian sense. To do so, in fact, would obviate most of what he has to teach us. The same, of course, should be said of Śāṅkara’s understanding of *ātman*.

As already emphasized (p218), perceived entities are not ontologically other than our vision of them, from Cusa’s perspective. That which *exists actually* as a particular entity *exists sensually* in sight, *exists rationally* in the *ratio*, *exists intellectually* in the intellect, and *exists*

*divinely* in *Theos*, the Beholder Who hastens to see all things. Perception, then, is neither a reproduction nor a consumption of “objects outside” by an inner “subject,” but is, instead, an existential enfolding. Sensuality, as we have seen, is *complicated*: that which exists unfoldedly (*explicate*) as particular entities exists enfoldedly (*complicite*) in the senses.<sup>591</sup>

Catherine Keller warns of another possible misreading of Cusa’s cosmology which is highly pertinent here. Her reading of an important passage from Cusa’s DDI aids our attempt to understand his distinction between *intention* and *attention* by shedding light on what he does—and does not—say about the ontological relationship between God and particulars. In Book II of DDI, Cusa writes:

In the First Book it was shown that God is in all things in such a way that all things are in God, and now it is evident that God is in all things as if by mediation of the universe. It follows, then, that all are in all and each is in each.<sup>592</sup>

Keller explains:

If God is unfolded in everything and everything enfolded in God, then the ‘everything’ of the universe as a whole is the way God is in everything. This is important: there is no chance here of a standard pious interiority of ‘God within’ ... That would be a misreading... If God is in me, it is me-with-the-whole-universe attached.<sup>593</sup>

While there is much in these two rich passages upon which to reflect, my focus here is necessarily narrow. As Keller demonstrates, one misreads Cusa’s panentheistic cosmology if one conceives of God as a “pious interiority.” God is not (merely) a still small voice dwelling in the depths of one’s heart and soul. Rather, God exists unfoldedly as all in all. Because God is infinite, our reason runs amiss if we bind God by denying God’s being in any part of any being.

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<sup>591</sup> DQD I.30. See p216, above.

<sup>592</sup> DDI II.117, Bond 140, cited also in Keller (2014), 114.

<sup>593</sup> Keller (2014), 114.

Quoting Cusa, Keller states: “‘Infinite unity, therefore, is the enfolding of all things,’ for nothing can be outside of what is infinite. It has no boundaries to be outside of.”<sup>594</sup> Cusa’s theological cosmology, Keller continues, “yields a world in which God cannot be separated from anything anywhere.”<sup>595</sup>

Cusa’s cosmology, then, does not permit of ontological alterity between subject and object. To say that God is infinite is to say that God is all in all, which bears radical implications with respect to one’s ontological relationship with other beings in the world. He explains:

In each creature, the universe is the creature, and each receives all things in such a way that in each thing all are contractedly this thing. Since each thing cannot be actually all things, for it is contracted, it contracts all things, so that they are it... All things, therefore, are not many things... therefore many things are not actually in each thing, but rather all things are, without plurality, each thing.<sup>596</sup>

Returning, then, to Cusa’s distinction between *intention* and *attention*, we can venture an answer to the question posed above. As Hoff has stated, visual perception is the outcome of the interpenetration between an *intention*, which ‘addresses’ the viewer, and the *attention* of the viewer who responds to this address.<sup>597</sup> From whom does this address come? Clearly, we would not be mistaken to say that the address comes from God, but *only* provided that we grasp the weight of Keller’s warning together with its logical corollary: God is not merely or simply some hidden potentiality within that which is to be seen any more than God is some “standard pious

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<sup>594</sup> Keller (2014), 117, citing DDI II.3.105, Bond 134.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>596</sup> DDI II.5.117, Bond 140; see also Keller (2014), 114-115.

<sup>597</sup> Hoff, 41, emphasis retained.

interiority of ‘God within’” oneself.<sup>598</sup> Rather, God exists unfoldedly as that very thing which *intends* perception coincidental with the perceiver’s *attention*. Cusa invites us to suppose:

Suppose someone sees—beyond all knowledge... all things apart from measure... Then, assuredly, [one] sees all things in terms of a most simple oneness. And to see God in this manner is to see all things as God and God as all things.<sup>599</sup>

As concluded earlier, the internal light that descends from God is synonymous with attentiveness. We can now conclude that the external light, which *intends*, is also divine in origin. True perception occurs when these two paths of light meet, which is to say when we attend to that which is intended by removing distractions that capture our attention, thereby seeing “beyond all knowledge” and “apart from measure.”<sup>600</sup>

Suppose, however, that someone does *not* see “beyond all knowledge” and “apart from measure.” Though attentiveness is guided by free will, it nevertheless happens that we fail to perceive that which the eye sees even if we freely will to see it. Just as our sensual spirit may be seductively attracted towards sensual objects that consume our attention, our intellectual spirit may be seductively attracted towards intellectual matters that capture our attention. We are prone to intellectual distraction just as we are prone to distraction by sensual things. In either case, our attention is “captured,” meaning it is drawn away from that which intends to be seen. In the same way that we better understand perception in the wakefully attentive state of *turīya* when this is contrasted with inattentive “seeing” in the *vaiśvānara*, we better understand Cusa’s attentive

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<sup>598</sup> Keller (2014), 114.

<sup>599</sup> ADI 9, Hopkins 465. This passage need not sound any pantheism alarms since Cusa is clearly not positing anything whatsoever about God, but instead discussing how one perceives “all things” and how one perceives “God.” On Cusa’s apophatic pantheism and its distinction from pantheism, see Keller (2014), 75 and 94.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*

sensuality by contrasting it to inattentive “seeing.” In other words, sensuality as an apophatic measure is best grasped in contrast to everyday seeing.

#### Failing to Recognize the Passerby

To illustrate this, Cusa employs an analogy which he uses in nearly all of his theological texts. The analogy is clearly significant to him, and likewise to my thesis. He uses the same analogy twice in DVD, as we shall see later (p297), to distinguish everyday vision from Christ’s vision. It is, moreover, relevant to Cusa’s understanding of *theosis* (p329). That the analogy is brief and simple, then, should not distort its importance. To provide context and clarity, I recite and extend the passage cited earlier from DQD. He writes:

The power of the sensitive nature takes interest in the sensation and pays attention to it in order to discriminate. Accordingly, the spirit in the eye does not discriminate but rather in that spirit a higher spirit accomplishes the discriminating. Indeed, by our everyday experience we ascertain, in our own cases, this to be true. For sometimes we do not recognize passers-by, whose images are reproduced in the eye; paying attention to other things, we do not attend to them.<sup>601</sup>

Two years earlier, Cusa used the same analogy in much the same way. In DC II.16, he analyzed vision’s pathway much as he later does in DQD, but includes “imagination” as an element in his analysis. Therein, the higher, spiritual light of attentiveness descends from the intellect, to rationality, to the imagination, and finally to the senses. When one fails to recognize a passerby, Cusa explains, the passerby is “seen” by the eye and an image of the person is reproduced in the imagination. The passerby is discerned, also, by rationality, else one would neither know that one had failed to recognize the passerby, nor would one avoid colliding with that body.

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<sup>601</sup> DQD 33, Hopkins 321.

In the earlier account, Cusa describes “attentiveness” in terms of wakefulness. When the intellect is distracted, the other elements of perception are sleepy. When the intellect turns its attention towards what is to be seen, however:

... somnolent reason is awakened through wondering, so that it hastens toward that which is a likeness of the true object. Next, intelligence is stimulated, so that it is raised up more alertly and more abstractly from a slumbering power to a *knowledge* of the true object. For the intelligence... unites—in the imagination—the differences of the things perceived. It unites—in reason—the variety of differences among images. It unites—in its own simple intellectual oneness—the various differences of forms.<sup>602</sup>

In DC, the analogy of the passerby is employed to illustrate an epistemic distinction between multiplicity and oneness within Cusa’s cosmology of enfoldedness.<sup>603</sup> The analogy supposes that one does not see, beyond all knowledge and apart from measure.<sup>604</sup> When one fails to recognize the passerby, one “sees” the other “objectively.” That is, one sees the other as a material object impeding one’s path. The other is measured as some-*thing* to be avoided: an “object” over and against one’s own subjectivity.<sup>605</sup>

But “suppose someone sees—beyond all knowledge... all things apart from measure,” as Cusa has supposed in the passage cited above.<sup>606</sup> When the intellect is awakened from its distracted slumber such that one sees “apart from measure,” the passerby is no longer measured as merely an “other,” but is enfolded into a oneness that descends unto a multiplying otherness:

The oneness of the intellect descends unto the otherness of reason; the oneness of reason descends unto the otherness of imagination; the oneness of

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<sup>602</sup> DC II.16.159, Hopkins 244.

<sup>603</sup> See DC II.16.155, which references his diagram in DC I.9, explained in DC I.10.

<sup>604</sup> ADI 9.

<sup>605</sup> In DC II.16 and DVD 25, Cusa distinguishes between “animalistic” seeing (described here) and “human seeing.”

<sup>606</sup> ADI 9, Hopkins 465.

imagination descends unto the otherness of the senses. Therefore, enfold intellectually the ascent together with the descent, in order that you may apprehend.<sup>607</sup>

Cusa variously employs the analogy of the passerby to illustrate epistemic failures related to cosmology, ontology, theology, and ethics. One fails to see an/other subject, but objectifies the other as one might a stone, a chair, or some other obstacle to be navigated.

Opening oneself to the divine light, the intellect awakens the perceptual faculties from their objectifying trance. No longer consuming and objectifying, the awakened intellect enfolds and enlivens. Cusa equates the descending light of attentiveness with the soul, which gives life and motion to body and senses alike. Just as the soul enlivens one's foot in order to walk, the soul enlivens the senses so they might see. Stirred from the dualistic dream of subjects and objects, the soul animates the senses to a state of wonder: one attends to an/other subject who intends, uniquely, to be seen. Aroused from a sensory plurality of "mere others" or "wholly others," one is alerted to the divine multiplicity and its singular unfolding: a messianic passerby who is to-come.

As noted previously (p214), sight cannot see life, but it "brings to life" that which it sees, sensually. Sight enfolds all color, which exists enfoldedly (*complicite*) and vitally (*vitaliter*) in sensuality.<sup>608</sup> In failing to recognize the passerby, the intellect fails to awaken the senses, and thus fails to enfold and enliven the other. By turning one's attention to the other, "somnolent reason is awakened through wondering, so that it hastens" to see the other.<sup>609</sup> God is named *Theos*, says Cusa, because we hasten to see God and because God hastens to see us.<sup>610</sup> As

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<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>608</sup> DQD I.30.

<sup>609</sup> DC II.16.159, Hopkins 244.

<sup>610</sup> DQD 19, Hopkins 315.



persons created in the image of *Theos*, we likewise hasten to see our neighbor, awakened through wondering. Thus intellectually awakened, we no longer see the other *objectively*. The other is not objectified. Rather, the passerby exists enfoldedly and vitally in sensuality, in living color.

That is not to say, of course, that we animate the other, bringing the inanimate to life. Though the passerby was not recognized, seen as a mere object, the passerby was (obviously) alive. Nevertheless, in failing to recognize the passerby, it is *as if* the other were not alive. The passerby is seen as mere *matter*, an object for visual consumption. But suppose one sees, beyond all knowledge and apart from measure.<sup>611</sup> Turning one's attention to one's neighbor, one is awakened, in a state of wonder, to see one's neighbor, bringing him/her to life, as it were, insofar as he/she exists enfoldedly and vitally in sensuality. In wonder, my neighbor *matters*.

#### Awakened to Perceive the Quiddity of Beings

In Part One (p347), I distinguished between *vaiśvānara* and *turīya* by distinguishing between “seeing” and “perceiving.” Though one sees and discriminates in *vaiśvānara*, it is only in *turīya* that one is fully awakened to the truth of nonduality and thus able to see the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.<sup>612</sup> Similarly, the analogy of the passerby enables us to distinguish between “seeing” and “perceiving” from Cusa's perspective. Though one *sees* the passerby with the eye, “reproduces” this other in the imagination, and discriminates this other *qua* other in the mind (*ratio*) through comparative proportion, one only *perceives* one's neighbor when one's attention is no longer captured by intellectual distractions but is awakened to a state of wonder, shining an intellectual light upon the senses, gazing upon his/her face so that this passerby might be re/cognized as he/she *intends*. The other is no longer seen objectively, but

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<sup>611</sup> ADI 9.

<sup>612</sup> MUBh 3 (citing Īśā Upaniṣad 6),

exists enfoldedly (*complicite*), vitally, and wonder-fully, in sensual complicity. Just as *Theos* hastens to see the seeker, the awakened intellect hastens to see the passerby.

In DQD 3, Cusa ascends the ladder of vision once more. Just as an external light must have some source, so also the internal light must have a source. He continues:

And just as sight itself does not discriminate but in it a discriminating spirit discriminates, so too in the case of our intellect, illuminated by the divine light of its own Beginning, in accordance with its aptitude for [that light] to enter: in and of ourselves, we will neither understand nor live by means of our intellectual life; rather, God, who is Infinite Life, will live in us.<sup>613</sup>

In re/cognizing the passerby, the seer (epistemically) gives life to the other, as it were, in living color. The seer gives life in this way because the Source of intellectual attentiveness is the divine light which descends. When I recognize my neighbor, passing by, it is not “I” who gives life to my neighbor, but *Theos*, the Beholder, who is the Seer of my sight. Earlier, it was stated that intellectual attention is guided by free will which guides one’s attention towards or away from things seen.<sup>614</sup> The intellectual light descends, in other words, in accordance with our agential direction. In the passage cited above, though, Cusa writes not of the intellectual light in its descent, but in its Source. The divine light descends, anointing the intellect, in accordance with its aptitude for that light to enter. The divine light descends gracefully, provided that we are apt to receive its christening. God manifests Godself, Cusa explains, to “[one]-who-is-hastening-onward unto the quiescence of motion.”<sup>615</sup> Having removed intellectual distractions, one removes, also, agential direction. One does not will to see, but rather removes selfish will, in a “quiescence of motion,” in order to perceive. Sensuality *qua* apophatic measure entails shedding

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<sup>613</sup> DQD III.38, Hopkins 324.

<sup>614</sup> E.g., DAT 23, Hopkins 1432.

<sup>615</sup> DQD III.39, Hopkins 324.

distractions which capture our attention, shedding our willful intentions to sensually consume, and awakening to see in a state of wonder *beyond* measure.

According to Cusa, in other words, there are competing wills to see. God wills me to perceive my neighbor (passing by), but my own will moves my attention in another direction. Empowered with “free will,” I move my attention towards that which captures it: that which *I* intend to see. Objects consume my attention. I measure the world—objectively—according to my subjective intentions. But suppose I see—beyond all knowledge and apart from all measure.<sup>616</sup> In that case, I quiet my own intention in a “quiescence of motion.” In this quiescence of willful (selfish) intention, I attend to divine intention. Having awakened the intellect by removing distractions, I cultivate an aptitude to receive the divine light. This light descends unto the intellect, the rational mind, the imagination, the senses, and finally to sensible things which intend my attention. Thusly, God manifests Godself. Cusa’s phenomenology of vision constitutes an apophasis of distraction and will such that one cultivates an aptitude to receive the graceful descent of God’s divine light.

For vision to occur, *two* paths of light must meet, not simply pass-by, unrecognized. Since the divine light is the Source of life and light, then it is *this* divine light which enlivens my senses. When I gaze upon the face of the passerby, into the *eyes* of my neighbor, what I see is the divine light that has descended “in” this other seer. If I fail to re/cognize this passerby, I fail to see this divine light which *intends* to be seen as it *attends* to me. Though our lights crossed paths, they failed to meet. Awakened to perceive, though, I perceive my neighbor in a state of wonder. “[H]astening onward unto a quiescence of motion,” the seeker of God finds God revealing

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<sup>616</sup> ADI 9.

Godself in, through, and *as* the divine light that has descended unto the other, anointing one's neighbor.

*Attending* to the passerby, I see God-who-*intends-to-be-seen-by-attending-to-me*. Having traced the descent of the divine light, one finds oneself seen, as was the case when climbing the "ladder of ascent." The path folds back upon itself. Ascending, hastening to see *Theos*, one finds oneself *seen* by *Theos*. Descending, attending to one's neighbor, one also finds oneself seen: By the passerby, of course, but by the passerby-who-is-an-utterly-unique-revelation-of-God. Again, that is not to say that one is seen by a "pious interiority of 'God within'" one's neighbor.<sup>617</sup> Rather, it is to insist that being seen by one's neighbor (passing by), in his/her "quiddity" or irreducible particularity is *synonymous* with being seen by God, since God exists unfoldedly *as and in* this unique passerby.

"The quiddity of things, which is the truth of beings," cannot be known but can be seen.<sup>618</sup> Since all knowledge, at least from Cusa's perspective, is attained through comparative proportion of the known to the unknown, then the quiddity of any particular thing is unknowable since every particular entity "enjoy[s] a certain singularity that cannot be found in any other thing."<sup>619</sup> Perceiving through the apophatic measure, one removes all conjectures about any particular entity. In a gesture of hospitality that seems (lamentably) radical, one attends to one's neighbor, without expectation. In wondrous attention, one awakens to discover an/other's irreducible particularity: a unique *quiddity* that can be seen but not known.

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<sup>617</sup> Keller (2014), 114.

<sup>618</sup> DDI, I.3.10.

<sup>619</sup> DDI III.1.188, Hopkins 114.

## Seeing through Cusa's Wall and Śāṅkara's Liminal Darkness

### Comparative Theology as Faith Seeking Liberated Understanding

In the two previous sections, I have examined Cusa's ontological analysis of vision as a pathway for seeking God, first through the "ladder of ascent" and then through the graceful descent of the divine light. As we have seen, vision turns out to be far more than a simple analogy for theological inquiry, but is a path wherein seeking for God coincides with being sought by God and where seeing God coincides with being seen. Sight, for Cusa, is *complicated*. It cannot be examined in anything less than a systematic way, incorporating cosmology, ontology, epistemology, theology, and even ethics. Reading Cusa after Vedānta complicates matters all the more. Since Śāṅkara and Cusa each offer rather systematic and "complete" analyses of perception, what value can there be in comparison? Doesn't comparison simply make already complicated matters more complicated?

If one defines theology, as Anselm did, as *faith seeking understanding*, then we might define comparison as *understanding seeking freedom*. Comparison disrupts systematic coherence by presenting systematically coherent alternatives. It frees us to consider unforeseen possibilities. Matters that seem settled and closed are opened up again. Comparative theology, then, faithfully seeks understanding while simultaneously resisting systematization and rigidity. It liberates theological systems from reified structures of thought. My goal in comparing Śāṅkara's sensual epistemology with Cusa's is neither to determine which one is "correct," nor is it to stitch them together to animate a Frankenstein-like amalgamation. Rather, the goal is to faithfully seek an understanding of our own ignorance of perception. Refusing to decide between one or the other perspective, then, becomes a sign of faith, not a marker of its absence. Faith *seeks* understanding. As Augustine cautioned: If one has understood, then that which one has understood is not

God.<sup>620</sup> Faith neither seeks nor finds certainty. Comparative theology liberates faith so that one might faithfully seek all the more truly and unknowingly.

For example, the internal, systematic coherence of Śāṅkara's analysis of perception forecloses other possible avenues for thinking about perception. Doubts and questions are faithfully raised, but are systematically considered and coherently decided. This results in an analysis of perception clear enough to be mapped out and diagrammed, as depicted in various images throughout Part One. Reading Cusa's analysis of perception after Śāṅkara, however, one is confronted with a system that is similar enough to be recognizable and comparable, but different enough to liberate previously decided matters from settled determinacy. Understandings faithfully sought in theology are faithfully liberated (deconstructed) through comparison.

Juxtaposing Cusa's ontology of perception with Śāṅkara's, noteworthy similarities arise, as do significant differences. Comparing and contrasting is of limited value if the result is a merely descriptive tallying of agreements and disagreements. Rather, the similarities give us an entrée for rethinking each theologian, thereby opening each of them up for reconsideration. What seem, *prima facie*, to be significant differences prompt contemplation. Alterity presents opportunity for imaginative subjectivity. To posit a musical analogy: Can we transpose Cusa into the key of Śāṅkara and Śāṅkara into the key of Cusa, not because one or the other key is "better," but because theological truth is an aesthetic measured by harmony, not unison? Comparative theology frees faith from monotonous understanding, unfolding unison into concordant polyphonies.

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<sup>620</sup> Augustine, Sermon 52.

## Seeing through Doors

As discussed in Part One (pp93, 100, etc.), knowledge is functionally negative in Śāṅkara's method. Just as antibiotics are a means to remove illness, knowledge is a means to remove ignorance.<sup>621</sup> It does not possess the same reality as the end itself.<sup>622</sup> *Māyā*, as we have seen, indicates knowledge as well as illusion.<sup>623</sup> As *measuring*, knowledge is merely for the sake of instruction.<sup>624</sup> Just as a teacher may point, by the gesture of a finger, to that which is to be seen, the finger is merely a means of indication which is no longer needed once it has fulfilled its purpose.<sup>625</sup> Likewise, knowledge does not exist for another moment once the truth of nonduality has been perceived.<sup>626</sup> Apophasis, for Śāṅkara, is the negation of the measure, enabling us to perceive that which is measured. Sense perception is a way of knowing that is irreducible to knowledge.<sup>627</sup>

For the doctor of learned ignorance, however, ignorance must be learned (*docta*) but cannot be removed. In the opening chapters of *De docta ignorantia*, he diagnoses the epistemic dis/ease: Our knowledge of the world in which we live is mere conjecture. Cusa suggests a “treatment” for this condition: the coincidence of opposites as a way of knowing. It does not “cure” the ailment since the condition is intrinsic to our knowing. Instead, by examining the specific epistemic causes of the disjunction (*viz.*, comparative relation of similarities and

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<sup>621</sup> MUBh, Intro. See page 89, above.

<sup>622</sup> MKBh 3.26.

<sup>623</sup> MKBh 3.19 and 3.24, respectively, discussed on pp168ff. and 171ff.

<sup>624</sup> MKBh 1.18. See also p167, above.

<sup>625</sup> UMSBh III.2.21.

<sup>626</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>627</sup> On knowledge as reductive conceptualization, see p166ff. above.

differences), the coincidence of opposites finds a way *through* the condition. Thus, by learning our ignorance, we learn to see through the coincidence of opposites.

The coincidence of opposites leads us to a super-rational or hyper-rational intellectual intuition beyond rational comprehension. As Cusa explains, there are various ways of knowing, each of which is best suited to know reality differently. Thus, we “know” sensible things sensibly (i.e., by means of sense organs), rational things rationally (i.e., by means of comparative relation), and intellectual things intellectually (i.e., by means of the coincidence of opposites). Accordingly, we come to know incomprehensible things (i.e., infinite things) incomprehensibly, which is to say, by contemplatively removing epistemic measures so that we might see through the coincidence of opposites.

Although the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad describes the *prājñā* as the “entrance to the mind,” Śaṅkara explains that it is a door through which one can enter or exit, so-to-speak.<sup>628</sup> The *prājñā* is the “entrance to the mind” from states of ignorance and duality, but also the “entrance to the mind” from the perspective of the sole Witness, the seer of sight who “enters” the body up to the tip of the fingernail.<sup>629</sup> Due to the perception of the Self in the effect (i.e., the manifest world), it is said to have “entered.”<sup>630</sup> Therefore, the *prājñā* is the liminal state between dualistic discrimination and non-dual realization. It is a crossroads or turning point from which one either returns to the states of ignorance, or proceeds to a realization of the Self. Despite his assertion that one in this state is a “wise one” who knows all things (past, present, and future), Śaṅkara regards this state as merely a door: a liminal threshold between duality and nonduality.

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<sup>628</sup> MUBh 5.

<sup>629</sup> BU I.4.7.

<sup>630</sup> BUBh I.4.7.



Reading back-and-forth, Śaṅkara’s discussion of the *prājñā* as the liminal “door” between ignorance and realization invites juxtaposition to one of Cusa’s most celebrated and discussed illustrations of seeing through the coincidence of opposites. In *De visione Dei*, we find:

And I have found the abode wherein You dwell unveiledly—an abode surrounded by the coincidence of contradictories. And [this coincidence] is the wall of Paradise, wherein You dwell. The gate of this wall is guarded by a most lofty rational spirit; unless this spirit is vanquished the entrance will not be accessible. Therefore, on the other side of the coincidence of contradictories You can be seen—but not at all on this side. If, then, O Lord, in Your sight impossibility is necessity, then there is nothing which Your sight does not see.<sup>631</sup>

Like the *prājñā*, one who “knows” fails to see. For Śaṅkara, one perceives by removing ignorance. For Cusa, one perceives by “vanquishing” rationality and, along with it, all knowing. From one vantage, these may seem to be opposing views. Prodding deeper, though, it is clear that knowledge ceases, according to Śaṅkara, when ignorance ceases.<sup>632</sup> Moreover, the ignorance which scriptural knowledge removes is not other than duality inherent to language and reason. Opposites do not coincide, for Śaṅkara, because opposites were never truly opposed to one another; in truth, opposites are non-dual.

Standing at the door (*ostium*) of the coincidence of opposites, Cusa again links perception with being, as discussed earlier in DQD:

You are seeable by all creatures, and You see all creatures. For in that You see all creatures You are seen by all creatures. For otherwise creatures could not exist, since they exist by means of Your seeing. But if they were not to see You, who see [them], they would not receive being from You. The being of a creature is, alike, Your seeing and Your being seen.<sup>633</sup>

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<sup>631</sup> DVD 9.39, Hopkins 697.

<sup>632</sup> MUBh 7 and MKBh 1.18.

<sup>633</sup> DVD 10.41, Hopkins 698.

Seeing, whether divine or human, is *enfolding*. As we have seen in DQD, colors exist *enfoldedly* and *vitally* in sight. Likewise, all creatures exist *enfoldedly* in God through God’s vision such that “the being of a creature is, alike, [God’s] seeing and [God’s] being seen.”<sup>634</sup> For Śāṅkara, the sole Witness is the seer of sight who is said to have “entered” the body up to the tip of the fingernail because the Self is perceived in the effect (i.e., the manifest world).<sup>635</sup> As non-dual cause and effect, the being of the Self is its seeing and being seen. While the Self as supreme cause remains beyond our grasp, Its effect, which is ontologically non-different from that cause, is perceived in the form of the visible world (as in the milk-curd analogy).<sup>636</sup> Transposing Cusa’s melody into a Śāṅkaran key, we might say that Śāṅkara’s Witness, the seer of sight, sees its own unfolding. Modulating again to a Cusan mode, we might say that God, as supreme cause, remains beyond our grasp, but God’s “effect,” which is ontologically non-different from God, is perceived in God’s unfolding. Harmonizing Cusa’s adverbial ontology with Śāṅkara, one might say that the cause *exists effectively (enfoldedly)* in the effect and the effect *exists causally (unfoldedly)* in the cause.

Like the liminal darkness of the *prājñā* in Śāṅkara, the coincidence of opposites is, for Cusa, a liminal passageway where seeing coincides with entering and being seen coincides with exiting:

How is it that from the one Concept there are so many different things? You enlighten me, who am situated *at the threshold of the door [in limine ostii]*; for Your Concept is most simple eternity itself.<sup>637</sup>

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<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>635</sup> BUBh I.4.7.

<sup>636</sup> MKBh III.27, CUBh VI.1.4, Kumāṛila, *Ślokavārtika*, 243-4.

<sup>637</sup> DVD 10.43, Hopkins 699.

Just as the *prājñā* is the liminal door between the non-dual Self and duality, the coincidence of opposites is a liminal door between unity and multiplicity. Unsayings his own sayings, Cusa proceeds to find God “beyond the wall of the coincidence of enfolding and unfolding.”<sup>638</sup> Not unlike Śaṅkara’s liminal darkness, Cusa transgresses liminality by entering and exiting:

When I find You to be a power that enfolds all things, I go in. When I find You to be a power that unfolds, I go out. When I find You to be a power that both enfolds and unfolds, I both go in and go out.<sup>639</sup>

Entering and exiting, folding and unfolding, Cusa then turns to the language of cause and effect. Like Śaṅkara’s interpretation of clay, pot, and lump in the Chāndogya Upaniṣad, frequently cited in his MKBh, one misreads Cusa if effect is thought to be ontologically other than cause. Like milk and curd, cause is not identical with effect, but exists otherwise: possibly and actually. Standing upon the groundless ground of the liminal threshold, peering through the coincidence of opposites, Cusa continues:

From creatures I go in unto You, who are Creator—go in from the effects unto the Cause. I go out from You, who are Creator—go out from the Cause unto the effects. I both go in and go out when I see that going out is going in and that, likewise, going in is going out.<sup>640</sup>

Creation, in Śaṅkara’s non-dual cosmology, is to be understood allegorically.<sup>641</sup> Though Indra is ever unborn (*ajāti*), the unmanifest Indra unfolds (*vyākriya*) Itself as the manifest for the purpose of making itself seen and thus known, lest it remain a mere “lump of cognition.”<sup>642</sup> But Creation, insists Śaṅkara, cannot occur in any real sense, since something cannot come from

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<sup>638</sup> DVD 11.47, Hopkins 701.

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>641</sup> MKBh 3.24, discussed on p172 above.

<sup>642</sup> MK and MKBh 3.24, MKBh 3.33,

nothing. Indra is neither creature nor Creator. Rather, what is allegorically called “creation” is the manifest unfolding of the Unmanifest, for the sake of making Itself known:

If name and form were not manifested, the Self’s unconditioned state called *prajñānaghana* would not be known. But when name and form become manifested as the body and senses, then its nature becomes known.<sup>643</sup>

Hence, the unborn Self unfolds by measurings (*māyābhiḥ*) so that it might be known, measure-by-measure.<sup>644</sup>

Modulating once again into a Cusan key, we find that unfolding and enfolding resist dualistic conception. Like the four states of the *catuspāt* doctrine, the Creator’s *enfolding* and creation’s *unfolding* are epistemic measures which aid our understanding but must, ultimately, be transcended:

For creation’s going out from You is creation’s going in unto You; and unfolding is enfolding. And when I see You-who-are-God in Paradise, which this wall of the coincidence of opposites surrounds, I see that You neither enfold nor unfold— whether separately or collectively. For both separating and conjoining are the wall of coincidence, beyond which You dwell, free from whatever can be either spoken of or thought of.<sup>645</sup>

In this passage, Cusa is not, I argue, throwing his theological hands in the air in mystical homage to that from which words turn away.<sup>646</sup> He is not simply reaching the limits of what can be said and signaling “all that and more!” He is, I argue, shifting away from language of theological description towards a language of perspective and modality. Rather than elaborate such an argument here, I state it now as a hypothesis, to be supported in the next chapter.

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<sup>643</sup> BUBh II.5.19, Panoli’s translation, 586.

<sup>644</sup> MKBh 1.11-13. Cf. also MKBh 1.16.

<sup>645</sup> DVD 11.47, Hopkins 701.

<sup>646</sup> Taittirīya Upaniṣad II.4.

To say that God neither enfolds nor unfolds is not to unsay what Cusa has previously said. Rather, it marks a shift towards an adverbial ontology consistent with what has been shown earlier in this chapter. To say that God enfolds and unfolds would be to bind God to temporal and ontological modalities or activities in a manner inconsistent with God's infinity.

Alternatively, to say that God exists *enfoldedly* as well as *unfoldedly* signals an ontological unity which is not opposed to multiplicity, since the adverbial distinction is neither rooted nor dependent upon ontological alterity, but, instead, in perspective. In other words, God is seen in the manner in which God is sought. Just as one and the same particular thing exists potentially in its form, actually in materiality, sensually in the senses, rationally in *ratio*, intellectually in the intellect, and divinely in God, so also God exists enfoldedly in unity and unfoldedly in multiplicity.

## **Conclusions**

All human knowledge arises through comparative relation, insists Cusa. When we perceive the world around us, we observe unique particulars, each of which enjoy a certain singularity that cannot be found in any other thing. Though we see *that* each is unique, we cannot know them in their uniqueness, but only in comparative proportion to what is known. Each creature we see is beyond compare. Learning that we do not and cannot know the *quiddity* of these creatures, we learn that they escape our reductive measures. Because we see *that they are* and *that they are unique*, we cannot but stand in wonder at this unique, unprecedented creature.

We cannot know God, Cusa explains, because there is no proportion between the finite and the infinite. More profoundly, though, we cannot know our neighbor because singularity escapes all proportion, as well. While each of these notions is insightfully provocative on their own, their entanglement with one another must not be overlooked. The first enfolds the second;

the second unfolds the first. God unfolds Godself *in and as* the multiplicity of creatures, each of which is unique, and (for that very reason) unknowable. Cusa radicalizes—and democratizes—Thomistic apophysis. We can know *that* God is, but cannot know *what* God is. Because we sensually perceive particular creatures, we know *that* they are and we see *that* they are unique, but we cannot know *what* any particular creature is, in its quiddity. Cusa extends the Creator's unknowability to each and every creature. The Creator's infinite creativity is such that each and every creature reveals God uniquely, beyond knowledge and beyond compare. A significant theological implication follows from this, which is discussed in the next chapter: each creature is an unprecedented—and creative—image of the Creator.

Learning this ignorance in the opening pages of this chapter, some other implications began to unfold. Since singularity can be sensually perceived, a phenomenology of perception becomes a pathway for seeking God. While Cusa first led us to believe his ontology of perception was merely a “likeness” of a pathway for seeking God, he led us up his “ladder of ascent” only to find *Theos*, the Beholder of vision, the Seer of sight, looking back at us. Seeking to behold God, we found ourselves beheld by God.

Cusa's path then folded back on itself, tracing the graceful descent of God's anointing light. Faithfully seeking the point at which two paths of light meet, Cusa revealed his other intentions through his othering of intentionality. If we long to see what God intends, we must shed our own willful intent. By tracing vision's pathway in its graceful descent, we cultivate a sensuality beyond all knowledge and apart from all measure. We awaken to a quiescence of motion, renounce agential intent, and remove distractions which capture our attention. At this moment, when sensuality becomes an apophatic measure, perception becomes a vocational response: attending to an intentional address.

Two paths of light then meet. The divine light that gracefully descends through the attentive, undistracted intellect, rationality, and the senses meets another light. Having anointed my neighbor, I find myself seen by God once again, at the other end of vision's pathway. Gazing hospitably, without expectation, beyond knowledge, and apart from measure, I attend to my neighbor, whose gaze intends—uniquely—to be seen. I re/cognize my neighbor, passing by, as irreducibly particular creature, a singular *imago Dei*, an unspeakable measure of the Creator's creativity. Having shed my willful intention, I attend, in wonder, to this other's intention.

### Apophatic Measure

This spiritual praxis unfolds the trifold meaning of what I have called the “apophatic measure.” First, we come to know what is unknown through comparative relation to what is known. Though we *see* the irreducible particularity of creatures, we only come *to know* creatures through comparative relation. We abstract universals, thereby reducing particulars to cognitive measures, as if measuring a circle with an inscribed polygon. Though we can see their quiddity, we cannot know it. Learning this ignorance, we unsay—and unknow—these measures. Learned ignorance is an apophasis of measuring.

Second, this learned ignorance leads us to examine sensuality more closely. How are phenomena given to the senses? How do our intentions capture our attention? How might we eschew objectification? How might we receive phenomena hospitably, in living color, renouncing the logic of consumption? Cusa's phenomenology of perception cultivates sensuality as an apophatic measure. Having learned our ignorance, we learn to see, beyond all knowledge and apart from measure. Significantly, we cultivate this vision at the very moment when we find ourselves seen: at the apex of Cusa's “ladder of ascent” where *Theos* is found to be the Seer of sight, the Beholder of beholding, the “King of kings,” in whom all is enfolded.

Third, sensuality as an apophatic measure leads us to trace the graceful descent of the divine light. Folding back on itself, Cusa's pathway for seeking God leads us to the multiplicity of creatures. Having learned our ignorance and having learned to perceive without measure, we gaze, in wonder, at our neighbor passing by. No longer consumed with distractions, our attention awakens to an/other's intention. We perceive our neighbor as a unique—and thus unspeakable—measure of divine creativity.

### Enfolding Touch

While similar—but qualitatively different—insights may have emerged from a less complicated exegesis, these constitute “a kind of biblio/biography—of what I came to see through these texts.”<sup>647</sup> Francis Clooney describes comparative theology as a praxis through which “the engaged reader is ‘inscribed’ into an ever more complexly composed context, in order to write after and out of it.”<sup>648</sup> In this chapter, I have attempted to capture some degree of the complexly composed context into which I have inscribed myself and from which I write. I compose this biblio/biography conscious of the fact that my reader will, on occasion, regard connections I draw between the two to be somewhat tangential. While I hope these occasions are rare, I nevertheless appeal to the reader to consider the sensual etymology of “tangential,” from the Latin *tangere*, “to touch.”

Śāṅkara and Cusa are irreducibly unique. It would be altogether contrary to my thesis reduce their singularity through an abstraction won through comparative relation. Points at which their theologies seem to touch draw attention, if only to again accentuate their unique intentions. If they were saying the same thing, one could simply leave one or the other aside. If they were

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<sup>647</sup> Clooney (1996), 47.

<sup>648</sup> Clooney (1993), 7.



saying something altogether different, there could be no basis for comparison whatsoever. Neither is the case. Each, in his own way, disrupts any facile duality between unity and multiplicity. In so doing, each frustrates monism and subject-object dualism. Each cultivates a sensuality whereby the One and the Many are seen, without opposition.

As I have argued (200ff.), their epistemologies and theologies of language are not merely different, but are at opposite ends of a continuum. Only by reading them together can one glimpse this continuum. Their articulations of linguistic measures unfold in near opposite directions. For Śāṅkara, (Sanskrit) language has no temporal/historical origin... human, divine, or otherwise. For this reason, linguistic cognition resulting from direct perception reliably and truly measures reality. Perception is a valid means of knowledge. For Cusa, language is a human creation: a rational measure that forever falls infinitely shy of measuring truth, as a polygon fails to measure a circle. Perception is not a valid means of knowledge; it is a prelude to conjecture. Learning our ignorance, we learn to see—beyond all knowledge and apart from all measure. In the next chapter, I accentuate this opposition<sup>649</sup> all the more strongly. For Cusa, language is not *mere* human creation; it exemplifies creativity and is, thus, a way of knowing the Creator.

Standing at the threshold of Cusa's door in the wall of paradise where opposites coincide, one stands at a crossroads. One is able to see multiple possibilities from this liminal vantage. Depending which way one turns, everything changes. Looking in, one enters, enfolded into the oneness of God. Looking out, one exits, unfolded into the divine multiplicity of the Creator's creation. Is God one or multiple? For Cusa, the answer must be "yes." God's unity and multiplicity are not opposed to one another. Both possibilities are actualized, simultaneously, without contradiction. As one's perspective changes, one's view of God changes. Regardless of

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<sup>649</sup> That is, the opposition between Śāṅkara's view that perception is a valid means of knowledge and Cusa's assertion that perception is not a valid means of knowledge.

whether one looks “in” to unity or “out” to multiplicity, one peers beyond contradictories. One finds oneself seen, anointed by the divine light that gracefully descends. Attending to the intentional gaze of one’s neighbor, two paths of light meet.

In the liminal state of *prājñā*, analogous to deep sleep, one stands at the threshold between the nonduality of the *turīya* and the duality of the *vaiśvānara* and *taijasa*, analogous to everyday waking and dream. Though all dualistic measures have been absorbed into this “lump of consciousness,” one is certainly not awakened to the truth of Brahman. Only when one’s eyes are opened to the multiplicity does one realize Brahman’s simplicity. Only after all measures have been progressively dissolved is one awakened to see beyond the liminal door between monism and dualism.

Reading back and forth between Cusa and Śaṅkara, we *see* that they are different. Each is unique. And yet, reading them together discloses a liminal space where the two seem to touch, tangentially. If we are to apprehend the relationship between unity and multiplicity, we must learn to see differently. Regardless of whether linguistic knowledge reliably measures reality or is inescapably conjectural, it is nevertheless true, for both Śaṅkara and Cusa, that these measures obscure our perception. Removing all measures, we cultivate a sensuality without measure, enabling us to see the inherent divinity of creatures, in, through, and as a multiplicity that is not opposed to unity.

## Five: Creative Measuring in Nicholas of Cusa: Math, Maps, and the Trinitarian *Imago Dei*

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### Outline and Goals

I previously noted (p190) that *nearly* all human knowledge is mere conjecture, from Cusa's perspective. Due to the nature of human epistemology, we fail to know the world-as-it-is, but instead conjecture the world-as-we-"measure"-it. Not all human knowledge, however, is knowledge of the world, so not all human knowing is conjectural. While the human mind cannot precisely measure the world in which we live, it can precisely measure that which it creates. In sharp contrast to Mīmāṃsaka doctrine regarding the eternal, unauthored connection between particulars, words, and universals (p97), Cusa understands human language, especially the language of mathematics, to be a human creation *par excellence*. To be created in the image of the Creator, from Cusa's perspective, means to be creative.

In this chapter, I examine the relationship between creativity, measuring, and sensuality from Cusa's Trinitarian perspective. I begin with a brief historical sketch to introduce and contextualize three texts Cusa either completed or began in the world-changing year of 1453. I then outline Cusa's four premises as articulated in the third of these texts, *De Beryllo*, especially his notions of measuring and creativity. In the second section, my focus narrows to analyze three creative measures of key importance to Cusa's apophatic theology, *viz.*, mathematics, cartography, and perspective. Because mathematical certainty plays a role in Cusa's theology similar to that played by *pratyakṣa pramāṇa* in Śāṅkara's theology, I briefly compare and contrast their views (p263). Unlike the world in which we live, we know mathematics precisely and certainly because it is a human creation. Given that we do not know the world-as-it-is but only the world-as-we-measure-it, Cusa employs cartographical analogies to make profound theological and ethical points about human creativity. Combining the methods of mathematics

and cartography, I illustrate Cusa's theory of perspective, which grounds his theo-ethics of intersubjectivity

How do our creative measures shape the world in which we live? How might we create in the Spirit of God? How might the trifold meaning of "apophatic measure" foster a creative (re)measuring of ourselves, our neighbors, and our ecologies? In the third section, I explore these questions through a constructive theological formulation of Cusa's Trinitarian *imago Dei*. Reading Cusa's *De visione Dei*, *De beryllo*, and *De pace fidei* synoptically, I again examine the role of perception in his apophatic theology, this time taking into account his understanding of measuring as creativity. In *De visione Dei*, Cusa encourages his reader to learn to see other persons as Christ saw them. Gradually learning to see others in this way, one learns, also, to see the Creator's harmonious intention in and through natural ecologies, as considered in *De beryllo*. Learning to see in this way constitutes a *theosis*, *filiation*, or *christiformitas* which promotes human creativity in the concordant Spirit of God. Cusa offers a vision of this concordant creative Spirit in *De pace fidei*. By cultivating this sensual *theosis*, we begin to actualize the possibility of a Trinitarian *imago Dei* through an eco-Spiritual vocation of creativity.

### **Historical and Theoretical Context**

1453

It is difficult to overstate the distress experienced by Western society resulting from the siege and destruction of Constantinople by Sultan Mehmet II and his Ottoman troops in May 1453. The destruction was so dire that even the Sultan is said to have been moved to tears.<sup>650</sup> In a letter conveying the news to Cusa, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini (later Pope Pius II) wrote:

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<sup>650</sup> Watanabe (2011), 42.

Who of sound mind will not mourn?... The river of all doctrines is cut off; the mount of the Muses is dried up. Where now is poetry to be sought? Where now philosophy?<sup>651</sup>

The trauma struck Cusa personally. He had visited the city fifteen years earlier, returning with the Byzantine Emperor, Patriarch, and Greek Bishops to attend the Union Council of Ferrara. In Constantinople, he was exposed to a wealth of Eastern Orthodox theological ideas which significantly shaped his thought. On the return sea voyage in 1438, he had an epiphany, which inspired his *De docta ignorantia*. Upon hearing the news of Constantinople's fall, he records a second vision in his *De pace Fidei (On the Peace of Faiths, 1453, DPF)*.

Mirroring, in many ways, the pneumatological conciliar theology expressed in his first major text, *De concordantia catholica (On Universal Concord, 1433, DCC)*, DPF envisions a heavenly ecclesiastical council attended by theologians representing all of the world religious traditions known to him at the time. According to his vision, the council was summoned after the devastation of Constantinople because, "The Lord... has heard the moaning of those... who suffer on account of the diversity of the religions."<sup>652</sup> Cusa writes this dialogue in the voice of religious others, calling for the peaceful coexistence of faiths. In fact, his assertion that "there is only one religion in a variety of rites" echoes an utterance by the Prophet Muhammad from a text Cusa had in his possession.<sup>653</sup> The differences between religious traditions should not be eliminated, he argues, "in order that the diversity may make for an increase of devotion."<sup>654</sup>

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<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>652</sup> DPF III.9, Hopkins 637.

<sup>653</sup> DPF I.6: *non est nisi religio una in rituum varietate*, Hopkins 635. Regarding the attribution to Muhammad, see Nicholas of Cusa. *On Interreligious Harmony: Text, Concordance, and Translation of De Pace Fidei*. Ed. James E. Biechler and H. Lawrence Bond. New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990, 7.

<sup>654</sup> DPF I.6: *non est nisi religio una in rituum varietate*, Hopkins 635.

While it would certainly be anachronistic to categorize DPF as comparative theology, it foreshadows this inclination in compelling ways. In this interreligious dialogue, Cusa attributes theological value to religious diversity. As in DCC, he argues that the *truth* of spiritual thought does not manifest as a unison, but as a harmony of sundry voices, speaking from diverse perspectives.<sup>655</sup> Perhaps more clearly than any of his other writings, DCC and DPF articulate the in-breaking movement of the Holy Spirit, whose presence is discerned through concord.

The goal of interreligious theological discourse in DPF is not to synthetically fabricate a universal religion or perennial philosophy. To do so would abstract universals from unique particulars through comparative relation, thereby reducing singularity to similarity. Cusa has learned this ignorance already and certainly avoids cognitive dissonance here. This cardinal has social and political intentions, of course, as he did when he composed DCC.<sup>656</sup> And yet, his motivation is clearly pneumatological, as well. The Spirit of God is discerned neither through unison nor discord, but concordantly.

Just weeks later, Cusa completes his theological masterpiece, *De visione Dei* (*On the vision of God*, 1453, DVD). On behalf of the Benedictine monks at Tegernsee Abbey, Abbot Kaspar Ayndorffer asked Cusa, “whether the devout soul can attain to God without intellectual knowledge... and [thus] only by means of affection.”<sup>657</sup> In one of more than 450 letters exchanged with Tegernsee Abbey, Cusa insists that both are necessary, and subsequently composes DVD as a robust response.<sup>658</sup> He sends the text to the monks accompanied by a “most

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<sup>655</sup> DPF XIX.68, Hopkins 669.

<sup>656</sup> Catherine Keller eloquently unfolds some of these intentions while mapping the geopolitical landscape in chapter eight of *Cloud of the Impossible*. See Keller (2014), 239ff.

<sup>657</sup> Watanabe (2011), 211-2.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*

peculiar painting,” which I discuss later (p328). My focus on this text is primarily limited to Cusa’s articulation of Christology in that text and a related sermon.

In December of the same year, Cusa began composing a companion text to DVD, also addressed to the monks at Tegernsee. He completed the text five years later, while effectively imprisoned in Castle Andraz following the final of several assassination attempts and having been taken hostage.<sup>659</sup> *De Beryllo* (*On the Beryl Stone*, 1453-8, DB) sketches and unfolds four philosophical/theological premises that encapsulate Cusa’s understanding of God as Creator together with his Renaissance humanism. Hence, when read synoptically with DPF and DVD, one gleans unique insights into Cusa’s humanist anthropology and his theology of the economic Trinity, as demonstrated below (p305).

#### Four Premises

Cusa begins *De beryllo* by identifying the text as a work which reveals a method of inquiry which exemplifies the coincidence of opposites. Through this method, “the indivisible Beginning of all things would be attained.”<sup>660</sup> This method is aided by four philosophical-theological premises which are subsequently expounded in the rest of the text.

#### *First Premise*

Cusa’s first premise asserts that God is a divine intellect. “From Intellect all things come into existence *in order for* the Intellect to manifest Itself.”<sup>661</sup> Creation, then, is not an accident, it is not the result of logical necessity, and it is not an epiphenomenon that proceeds from an Aristotelian *prime mover*. Creation is an intentional, manifest revealing of the Creator-Intellect.

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<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4 and 348-351.

<sup>660</sup> DB 3, Hopkins 793.

<sup>661</sup> DB 4, Hopkins 793, emphasis added.

If that Creator-Intellect is to be manifest, then it follows that it must create beings, “that are capable of beholding Its Reality/Truth [*veritas*].”<sup>662</sup> Hence, “the Creator offers Itself to these substances in the manner in which they are able to apprehend It as visible.”

For Cusa, the first premise states nothing different than what Paul has stated in his Roman Epistle: “Ever since the creation of the world, God’s invisible nature, namely, God’s eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.”<sup>663</sup> Citing this verse, he adds:

So visible things exist *in order that* the Divine Intellect—the Maker of all things—may be known in and through them... For perceptible objects are the senses’ books; in these books *the intention of the Divine Intellect* is described in perceptible figures. And the *intention* is the manifestation of God the Creator.<sup>664</sup>

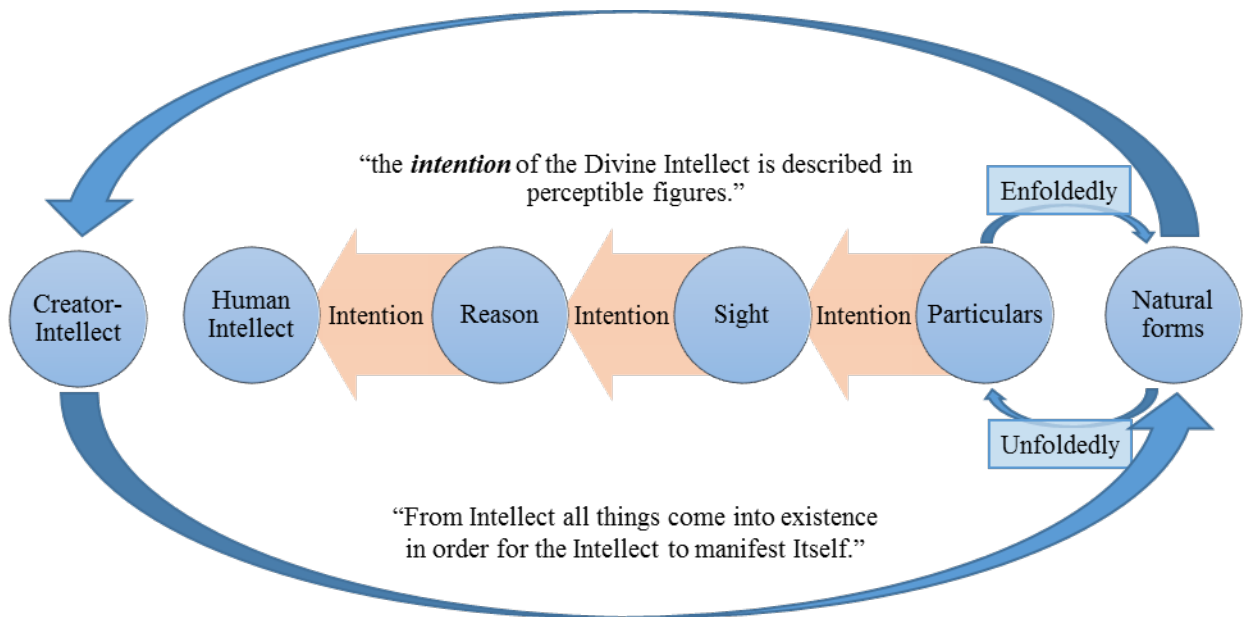


Figure 16: First Premise in DB

<sup>662</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>663</sup> Romans 1:20, NRSV, modified for gender-neutral language.

<sup>664</sup> DB 65-66, Hopkins 824, emphasis added.



Natural forms exist *enfoldedly* in the Divine Intellect, which is their Source and Creator, and *unfoldedly* as the visible, natural, created world around us “*in order that* the Divine Intellect... may be known in and through them.” In this first premise, Cusa concludes, “all that remains to be said is contained enfoldedly [*complicite*].”<sup>665</sup>

### *Second Premise*

He articulates the second premise as follows:

Whatever exists exists otherwise in something else than it exists in itself. For in itself it exists as in its own true being; but in something other [than itself] it exists as in its own truthlike being.<sup>666</sup>

Though stated more concisely here, this premise has already been expounded in the previous chapter (p212). Turning again to his ontology of perception, Cusa explains that that which exists actually in perceptible things exists sensually in the senses, rationally in the *ratio*, and intellectually in the intellect. Importantly, however, the second premise only captures one aspect of his ontology of perception, *viz.*, intentionality. As cited above, “perceptible objects are the senses’ books,” which manifestly reveal the Creator’s *intention*. As discussed earlier (p226), *intention* indicates the *inwardly* orientated aspect of perception whereas *attention* indicates the outwardly oriented aspect of perception.<sup>667</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> DB 4: Hoc scire est primum, in quo complicite Omnia dicenda continentur.

<sup>666</sup> DB 5: Omne autem quod est aliter est in alio quam in se. Est enim in se ut in suo vero esse, in alio autem ut in suo esse verisimili..., Hopkins 793.

<sup>667</sup> See Hoff, 41, cited on p230.

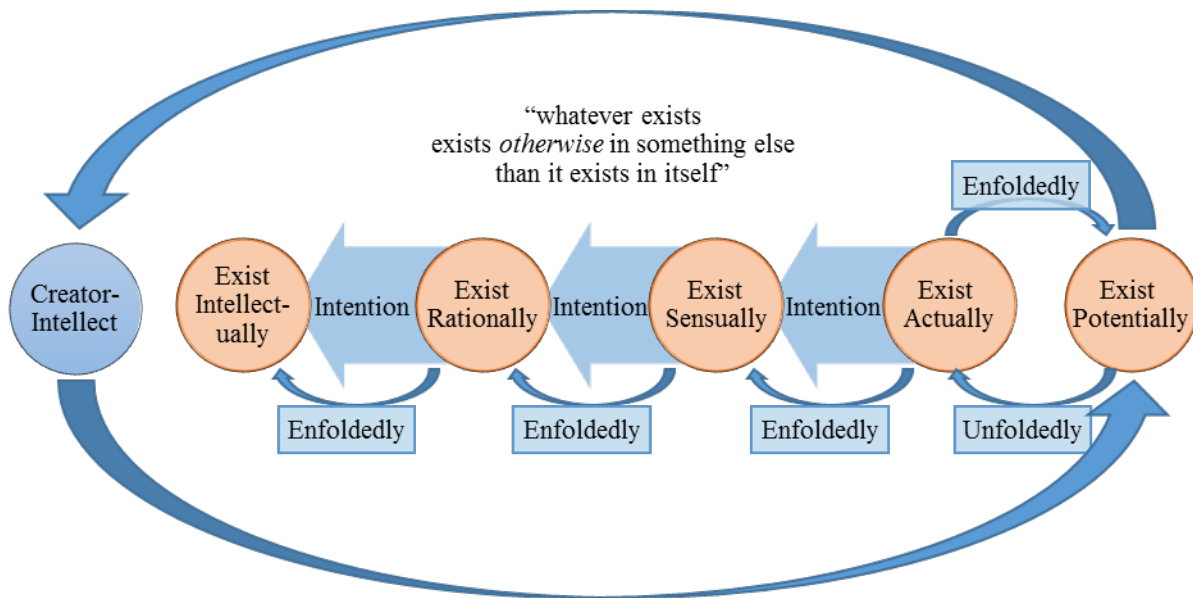


Figure 17: Second Premise in DB

Moreover, natural forms exist potentially in themselves but actually in perceptible objects. Hence, “whatever exists exists otherwise in something else than it exists in itself.” As discussed in section three below (p300), this subtle but important point grounds Cusa’s theology of the body.

The language of the second premise is thoroughly ontological. No ontological alterity is implied in *either* the first or the second premise, but only in the third. Ontological distinctions in the first and second premises are best expressed adverbially: That which exists *actually* in perceptible things exists *sensually* in sensuality, *rationally* in *ratio*, *intellectually* in intellect and *potentially* in itself (*in se*). Notice that the previous sentence has but one subject (i.e., “that which exists actually in perceptible things”) and one verb (i.e., “exists”), but various modes of being which are in no way mutually exclusive. The Divine Intellect exists *unfoldedly* as natural forms, which exist *unfoldedly* as perceptible objects. These are the “senses’ books; in these books *the intention of the Divine Intellect* is described in perceptible figures.”<sup>668</sup>

<sup>668</sup> DB 65-66, Hopkins 824, emphasis added.

### *Third Premise*

Cusa's third premise is as follows:

Thirdly, note the saying of Protagoras that [the human person] is the measure of things. With the senses one measures perceptible things, with the intellect one measures intelligible things, and one attains unto supra-intelligible things transcendently. One does this measuring in accordance with the aforementioned [premise]. For when one knows that the cognizing soul is the goal of things knowable, one knows on the basis of the perceptive power that perceptible things are supposed to be such as can be perceived. And, likewise, regarding intelligible things... and transcendent things. Hence, one finds in oneself, as in a measuring scale, all created things.<sup>669</sup>

*Prima facie*, the third premise may seem to rephrase the second premise. Though it does follow from and depend upon the second, closer inspection reveals a significant ontological difference. The human intellect is the *measure* of things. "With the senses one *measures* perceptible things, with the intellect one *measures* intelligible things." The perspectival direction reverses from premise two to three. It does not speak of perceptible objects as manifestations of divine *intention*, but rather of the human mind and its measuring *attention*. [refer to Figure]

Because one measures the unfamiliar through comparative relation to the unfamiliar, and because each and every particular entity enjoys "a certain singularity that cannot be found in any other thing,"<sup>670</sup> as discussed previously (p196), it follows that "the measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different."<sup>671</sup> I have previously described this as an *epistemic* disjuncture between the world-as-it-is and the world-as-we-measure-it (p196). But if there is an *ontological*—and not merely *ontic*—difference between measure and measured, one must ask: Whence come these measures?

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<sup>669</sup> DB 6, Hopkins 793-4, modified for gender-inclusive language.

<sup>670</sup> DDI III.1.188, Hopkins 114.

<sup>671</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

#### *Fourth Premise*

Fourthly, note that Hermes Trismegistus states that [the human person] is a second god. For just as God is the Creator of real beings and of natural forms, so [the human person] is the creator of conceptual beings and of artificial forms that are only likenesses of one's intellect, even as God's creatures are likenesses of the Divine Intellect. And so, one has an intellect that is a likeness of the Divine Intellect with respect to creating.<sup>672</sup>

What the second premise expresses ontologically, the third expresses epistemologically. Hence, Cusa states, "one does this measuring in accordance with the aforementioned [premise.]" In other words, one should measure sensual things sensually, rational things rationally, etc., rather than reducing particular entities to any one of these various ways of knowing. However, the fourth premise makes explicit what the third premise implies: the disjuncture between measure and measured is not merely epistemic, but *ontological*. The human mind *measures* using measures it *creates*. For Cusa, this does not represent human fallenness; his purpose is not to highlight the insufficiency of human language to describe the divine (though his purpose follows *from* that belief). Rather, his purpose is to emphasize that we *create* the measures by which we measure the Creator's creation. As free beings, we can choose to create in the Spirit of God (attending to the Creator's intentions), or create selfishly, intending to consume. As I argue later (p309), this insight is central to grasping Cusa's humanistic *imago Dei*. If one is to know the Creator *qua* Creator, one must know creative things creatively.

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<sup>672</sup> DB 7, Hopkins 794, modified for gender-inclusive language.

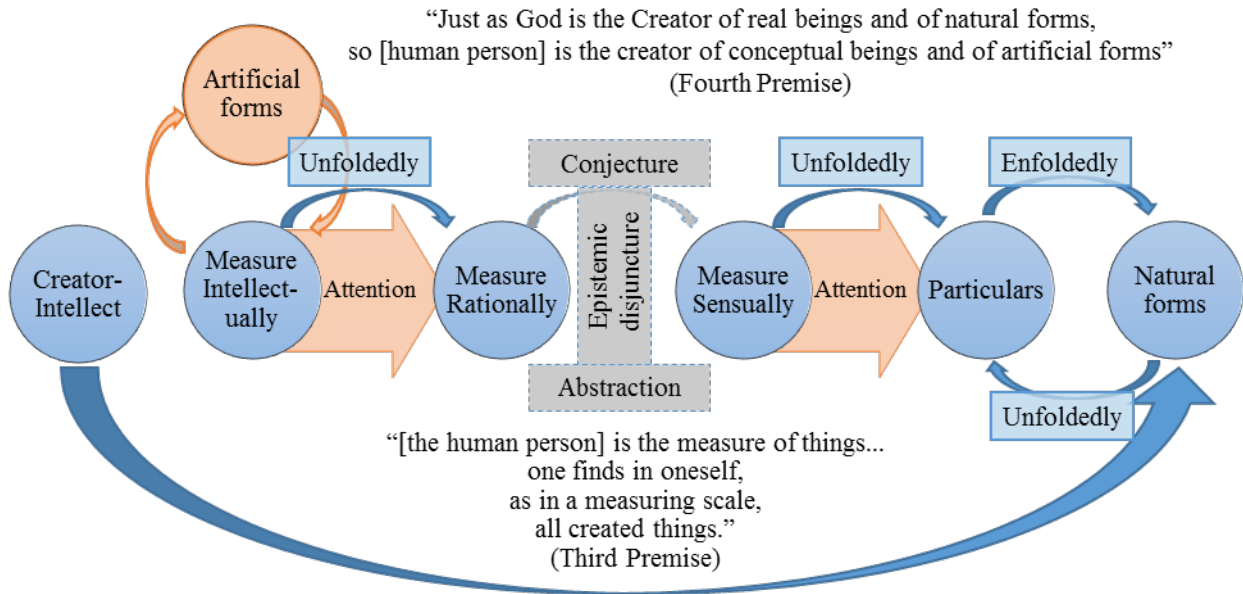


Figure 18: Third and Fourth Premises in DB

Here again, Cusa stresses an epistemic problem as a means to transcend that very problem. While it remains the case that we do not know the world- as-it-is but only as-we-measure-it, Cusa has transfigured our ignorance into a likeness of Divine Creativity! *Because* there is an ontological difference between measure and measured, it follows that these measures are human creations. As a “second god,” we do not create in the same manner that God creates. Nevertheless, the human intellect “is a likeness of the Divine Intellect with respect to creating.”

Cusa then comes full circle, relating the fourth premise to the first:

Therefore, one measures one’s own intellect in terms of the power of its works; and thereby one measures the Divine Intellect, even as an original is measured by means of its image.<sup>673</sup>

The first (theological) premise is rearticulated in terms of (theological) humanism. The Divine Intellect creates in order to manifestly reveal Itself. Likewise, the human intellect creates in order to manifestly reveal itself. In other words, God reveals Godself in, through, and *as* God’s creative work in the world, as Paul states in Romans 1:20. Likewise, we reveal ourselves in,

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*

through, and *as* our creative works. Or, in the words of Matthew's Jesus: "Thus you will know them by their fruits."<sup>674</sup> We create faithfully when our creative measures are attentive to the Creator's harmonious intention.

## **Creative Measures**

Through the foregoing sketch of Cusa's four premises introduced his notion of creative measures. As stated above (p256), Cusa describes *De beryllo* as a method of inquiry. As such, this method can be applied in various ways and contexts. In this section, I examine two creative measures of particular import within Cusa's *oeuvre*: mathematics and cartography. Subsequently comparing these two, I distinguish between two distinct but interrelated apophatic methods they exemplify: epistemic and perspectival apophasis. Taken together, these methods reveal Cusa's theory of perspective and, simultaneously, the relationship between perception, apophasis, and theological ethics. In differing ways, each cultivates sensuality as an apophatic measure. They train us to perceive beyond the measures we have created, so that we might attend to the Creator's intention. They call us (vocationally) to create measures more in tune with those harmonious intentions.

### Mathematics as Theological Method

#### *Incorruptible Certainty*

Śaṅkara, like Śabara before him, grounded his theology in direct perception because of the certainty and reliability of perception. Cognitive errors, such as mistaking a rope for a snake, do occur, but can be explained by identifying a discernable problem in the mechanism of perception which can be remedied. If someone sees two moons, this may be the result of a

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<sup>674</sup> Matthew 7:20. Cf. Matt. 7:16, 12:33, Luke 6:43-44, James 2:18, et. al.

disease on the physical eye, such as *timira*.<sup>675</sup> If someone sees a shell but cognizes silver, it may be because the internal organ of perception is sleepy or distracted.<sup>676</sup> Though reality is non-dual, things are seen, dualistically, due to the superimposition of conceptions upon the *buddhi*, which can be removed through scriptural understanding.<sup>677</sup> In each case, however, perception is understood to be certain and reliable. There is no need, says Śābara, to either investigate or question the verity of perception. Through a clear understanding of the process through which perception yields knowledge, one is able to identify the various defects that result in error. “If we do not ascertain a defect, having sought assiduously for one, then we should think ‘there is no defect,’ due to the absence of proof.”<sup>678</sup> In that case, the resulting knowledge must be true and certain since sense perception is never wrong, according to Śābara (p104).

Cusa’s view of perception is quite the opposite of this. Since there is an insurmountable disjuncture between the world-as-it-is and our rational cognition of it, “the measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different.”<sup>679</sup> However, the role of mathematics in Cusa’s methodology is quite similar to that of perception in Śānkara’s method, though for strikingly different reasons. He states:

Proceeding on this pathway of the ancients, I concur with them and say that since the pathway for approaching divine matters is opened to us only through symbols, we can make quite suitable use of mathematical signs because of their incorruptible certainty.<sup>680</sup>

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<sup>675</sup> UMSBh III.2.21.

<sup>676</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>677</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>678</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: प्रयत्नेनान्विञ्चन्तो न चेद्दोषमुपलभेमहि प्रमाणाभावाददुष्टमिति मन्येमहि ।

<sup>679</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

<sup>680</sup> DDI I.11.32, Hopkins 19.

To say that mathematics is incorruptibly certain is not to say that mathematical errors do not occur. Mathematical certainty is only as good as the data involved in the calculations, and only as reliable as the mathematician performing the calculations. Nevertheless, Cusa would very likely echo, with respect to mathematics, what Śābara states with respect to perception: “If we do not ascertain a defect, having sought assiduously for one, then we should think ‘there is no defect,’ due to the absence of proof.”<sup>681</sup>

Cusa regards mathematics to be *incorruptibly certain* because it is entirely a human creation. In his trialogue *De possest (On Actualized Possibility, 1460, DP)*, Cusa explains:

[R]egarding mathematical [entities], which proceed from our reason and which we experience to be in us as in their source: they are known by us as our entities and as rational entities; [and they are known] precisely, by our reason’s precision, from which they proceed.<sup>682</sup>

Real entities in the world, however:

... remain unknown to us precisely as they are. If we know something about them, we surmise it by likening a figure to a form... If we have any knowledge of them, we derive it from the symbolism and the mirror of [our] mathematical knowledge.<sup>683</sup>

Mathematics is certain, then, because it begins and ends in the rational mind. Our knowledge of mathematics is certain, in other words, because mathematics *is* knowledge, from Cusa’s perspective. There is no difference between mathematics *qua* measure and mathematics *qua* measured. Real entities in the world, however, are obviously not “knowledge,” and hence there is

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<sup>681</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>682</sup> DP 43, Hopkins 936.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid.*



a disjuncture between things-as-they-are and things-as-they-are-known. “[T]he measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different.”<sup>684</sup>

### *Complementary Pramāṇas*

Likewise, the intellect does not operate in this way. The intellect constitutes a different way of knowing than does the rational mind. Somewhat ironically, this is proved by the fact that humans can make mathematical mistakes. A computer, for example, is incapable of miscalculating. Because the intellect is something other than or beyond reason, it bears the capacity to judge incorrectly as well as correctly, with respect to rationality. It is for this reason that Cusa has stated, “we can make quite suitable use of mathematical signs” when approaching divine matters.<sup>685</sup> Mathematics may not yield to us any actual knowledge of real entities in the world and may not yield to us any knowledge of divine matters, but mathematics is indispensable, from Cusa’s perspective, as a tool to determine whether or not our knowledge of the world and knowledge of the divine is rational or not.

Hence, Cusa regarded the relationship between the mathematical sciences and philosophical theology to be complementary. Like complementary angles on an infinite line, the two ways of knowing represent two very different conceptual domains, each of which must be distinguished from direct perception and its precision. In 1453, he composed a pair of texts, *De mathematicis complementis* and *De theologicis complementis* (DTC), both addressed to Pope Nicholas V, who commissioned a translation of Archimedes’ geometrical works as a gift for Cusa.<sup>686</sup> In his introduction to the latter, he explains: “If what I here say is to be understood, then

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<sup>684</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

<sup>685</sup> DDI I.11.32, Hopkins 19.

<sup>686</sup> Watanabe (2011), xxv.

this present book must be appended to that [*De mathematicis complementis*]; for these present complementary considerations are drawn from mathematics.” He adds, however, that one should attend to his intent rather than to his words because, “these theological matters are better seen with the mind’s eye that they can be expressed in words.”<sup>687</sup>

Like the circle and the polygon, philosophy/theology is qualitatively different from mathematics. Regarding Śāṅkara, it was shown that scripture and perception operate in differing domains, yielding different kinds of knowing.<sup>688</sup> Scripture does not reveal knowledge of Brahman, but instead reveals knowledge of what Brahman is not, thereby removing conceptual impediments to perceiving that which is perceptible and before one’s very eyes.<sup>689</sup> Similarly, mathematics does not reveal knowledge of God, but instead reveals to us errors in our theological reasoning and the limitations of what can be known rationally. Like squaring the sides of a polygon, reason brings us ever nearer to the truth of things, while ever remaining infinitely far from truth. Learning this ignorance is paramount in Cusa’s theological method.

### *Squaring Circles*

While Cusa consumed and composed mathematical texts throughout his life, he becomes especially fascinated with mathematics in the years immediately following the fall of Constantinople (1453), for reasons we can only speculate. He composed at least fifteen mathematical treatises. As Tamara Albertini points out: “[W]hen Nicholas of Cusa was rediscovered by German historians in the nineteenth century, their attention was all on his

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<sup>687</sup> DTC 1, Hopkins 747.

<sup>688</sup> E.g., MKBh 2.32. See also BUBh II.1.20.

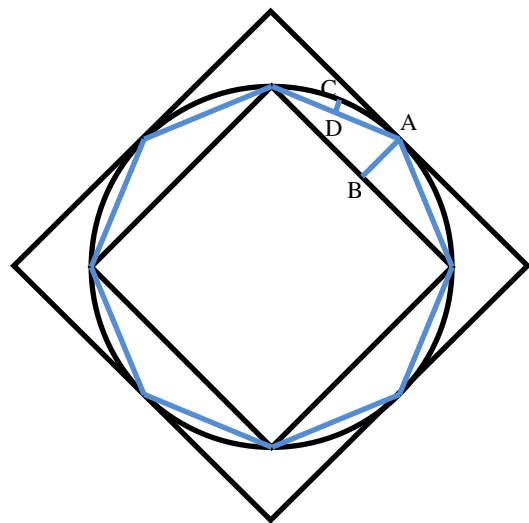
<sup>689</sup> MKBh 2.32-36. See also BU 3.4, Upad I.18.26, et. al.

mathematics. It is only twentieth-century scholarship that revealed what a towering figure of Renaissance thought he was.”<sup>690</sup>

Many of his mathematical texts discuss a problem known as the quadrature of the circle, which is closely related to the polygon-circle analogy discussed previously. Stated briefly, the ancient Greek mathematician Archimedes (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) postulated that “if there exists a square inferior in surface to a given circle, and if there exists a square superior to the same circle, [then] there exists a square equal to it.”<sup>691</sup>

As depicted in Figure 19, the perimeter of the square inscribed in the circle is clearly less than the circumference of the circle. The perimeter of the square inscribing the circle is clearly greater than the circumference of the circle. Since there are an infinite number of squares with perimeters between these two extremes, Archimedes postulated that a square must exist of which the perimeter is equal to the circumference of the circle.

Figure 19: Quadrature of a Circle



Prima facie, Archimedes’ logic seems sound. However, the circumference of a circle is actually  $2\pi r$  where  $r$  is the distance between the center of the circle and its circumference. Another way of saying this is that  $\pi$  is the ratio of the circumference of the circle to its diameter. Because of the nature of  $\pi$ , it is an irrational number, meaning that the number never ends. In contrast, the perimeter of a square is simply four times the length of one of its sides. Regardless

<sup>690</sup> Albertini (2004), 377.

<sup>691</sup> Counet, J.-M. “Mathematics and the Divine in Nicholas of Cusa.” In *Mathematics and the Divine: A Historical Study*, 273–290. Boston: Elsevier, 2005. 286.

of the size of the square, then, its perimeter will also be equal to a rational number.<sup>692</sup> While there obviously exists a square the perimeter of which is *nearly* equal to the circumference of the circle, the two will never be equal insofar as the circumference must either be expressed as an irrational number (some value times  $\pi$ ) or rounded to an approximation of  $\pi$ . Strictly speaking, then, the two can never be equal.

Cusa argued that if one squares the number of sides of a square ( $4^2$ ) (increasing the perimeter of the inscribed polygon proportionally), and repeats this ( $16^2$ ,  $256^2$ , etc.), then the perimeter of the resulting polygon will approach the circumference of the inscribing circle, but it will never be equal to it. However close the chord comes to its inscribing arc, the two will never be equal, even if the difference between them becomes infinitesimal. As depicted in Figure 19, the distance between a point on the circle (A) and a point bifurcating a side of the inscribed square (B) becomes proportionally smaller when the number of angles of the inscribed polygon are increased. Hence, line CD is shorter than line AB and, therefore, the perimeter of inscribed polygon more closely approaches the circumference of the circle. While our practical efforts to measure the circle will become ever more accurate as the difference between the two approaches the infinitely small, the measures will never be equal. Regardless of the number of chords inscribed in the circle, each chord will always be bifurcated by a radius of the circle and, therefore, the measurement can be more accurate.

Analogously, because of the “cut” between mental cognition and sense perception, whatever we “know” will never be equal to what we perceive. “The measure and the measured—

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<sup>692</sup> In theoretical mathematics, one could conceive of a square with a side equal to  $\pi$ , thereby expressing the perimeter in terms of  $\pi$ . Practically speaking, however, the length of a finite line must be expressible as a rational number.

however equal they are—will always remain different” (p196).<sup>693</sup> We perceive precisely (*prae/cisio*, before the cut), but we know conceptually (*concipio*, to take in) and rationally (*rationaliter*, by comparative ratio). Hence, true knowledge is to truth as a polygon is to a circle. While true knowledge, whether it is scientific knowledge of the world around us or theological knowledge through divine revelation, can bring us infinitesimally closer to truth, it will always remain beyond our grasp. However, because rational opposites coincide in the intellect, this epistemic disjuncture is not altogether insurmountable.

Learning that we cannot *know* precisely, but can *perceive* precisely, one learns to see beyond discursive reasoning, aided by the coincidence of opposites. This critically important insight foreshadows (or, arguably *initiates*) the phenomenological method, as I discuss later (p284). Moreover, it exemplifies a sensuality I am calling the *apophatic measure*. By learning to perceive particular phenomena beyond discursive reasoning, one learns to perceive the Creator’s intention ever more pre/cisely (but never cognitively or discursively). Cultivating this ontological mode of *being sensually*, one becomes ever more attentive to these intentions and one creates measures in harmony with those intentions. One creates in the Spirit of the God (p305), and thusly begins to know the Creator creatively (p309).

But how does one cultivate this mode of *being sensually*? How do we learn to perceive in this way? The coincidence of opposites is a lens through which we learn to perceive particular phenomena, beyond discursive measures. We observe this in Cusa’s *Apologia Doctae Ignorantiae* (*Defense of Learned Ignorance*, 1449, ADI).

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<sup>693</sup> DDI I.3.9, Hopkins trans. 8.

*Circles under our Eyes*

In his sharp critique of Cusa's DDI, John Wenck quotes Psalm 46:10 as somewhat of a refrain throughout his text: "Be still and see that I am God." Wenck claims that Cusa's "coincidence of opposites" is a "stratagem" with which Cusa "destroys the fundamental principle of all knowledge," citing Aristotle's principle of non-contradiction.<sup>694</sup> In response, Cusa essentially agrees with Wenck, refuting only the word "destroys" through clarification.

He regards the coincidence of opposites as a strategy by which one is able to be faithful to the Psalmists command to "Be still and see that I am God." It is an effective strategy not because it "*destroys* the fundamental principle of all knowledge," as Wenck charges, but because it enables one to overcome the inherent limitations of this fundamental epistemic principle. "To see God in this manner," Cusa explains, "is to see all things as God and God as all things."<sup>695</sup> He elaborates, "... learned ignorance is concerned with the mind's eye and with apprehension-by-the-intellect—so that whoever is led to the point of seeing ceases from all discursive reasoning."<sup>696</sup>

Although it is an intellectual seeing, "concerned with the mind's eye," that in no way denies that it is also sensual vision. Charles Carman argues that the liminality of Cusa's coincidence of opposites maintains "a certain dialectical indistinctiveness between physical and intellectual vision."<sup>697</sup> Cusa's ontology of perception never permits complete distinction between intellect and sensuality, since they are enfolded and unfolded as each other. In seeing all things

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<sup>694</sup> Wenck, *De Ignota Litteratura* 21, Hopkins 427, citing Aristotle's *Metaphysics* IV.

<sup>695</sup> ADI 9, Hopkins 456.

<sup>696</sup> ADI 14, Hopkins 469.

<sup>697</sup> Carman, Charles H. *Leon Battista Alberti and Nicholas Cusanus: Towards an Epistemology of Vision for Italian Renaissance Art and Culture*. Visual Culture in Early Modernity. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2014. 113.

with one's physical eye, "one sees all things as God" with the mind's eye. What rational conception *cuts* by de/fining entities in terms of contradictories, the intellect *mends*, so to speak, by enfolding contradictories. The coincidence of opposites does not *destroy* the fundamental principle of all knowledge, as Wenck claims, but rather emphasizes it, accentuates it, and transforms it into a method to transcend it. Because Wenck's critique has, perhaps, motivated Cusa to write more plainly and directly than he typically does, a lengthy citation is especially warranted, with Hopkins' parentheticals:

Rational animals reason discursively. Discursive reason investigates and makes inferences. Inference is, necessarily, bounded by a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem*. And things which are opposed to each other we call contradictories. Hence, opposing and separate boundaries belong to inferential reasoning. Therefore, in the domain of reason [*ratio*] the extremes are separate; for example, with regard to a circle's definition [*ratio*] (*viz.*, that the lines from the center to the circumference be equal): the center cannot coincide with the circumference. But in the domain of the intellect [*intellectus*]—which has seen that number is enfolded in oneness, that a line is enfolded in a point, that a circle is enfolded in a center—the coincidence of oneness and plurality, of point and line, of center and circle is attained by mental sight apart from inference.<sup>698</sup>

When one sees a circle with one's eye, one sees the whole circle, sensually. Rationally, the center of the circle and the circumference of the circle cannot coincide. The two must be different and distinct from one another and, moreover, must, by definition, be opposed to one another. To know a circle rationally is to distinguish between these contradictories:  $2\pi r$ . To make a judgment as to whether what-is-seen is or is not a circle, however, center and circumference must coincide, intellectually. What is seen precisely with the eye is unfolded rationally through contradictories, but enfolded intellectually, and hence "seen" with the mind's eye.

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<sup>698</sup> ADI 15, Hopkins 469-470.

Mathematics plays an important role in Cusa's apophatic theological method not only because it is "incorruptible certainty,"<sup>699</sup> but also, and especially, because it reveals human creativity. For Cusa and contemporaries such as Leon Battista Alberti, mathematics highlights *ingegno*, the human capacity for insight and creative meaning. For Cusa, to be created in the image of the Creator entails being creative, and mathematics stands at the zenith of human creativity: a lens through which we map our world.

### Cosmography as Theological Method

During Cusa's near constant travel in and around the German territories, he created a map of Germany believed to be the first map of central Europe.<sup>700</sup> Cartography was a passion he shared with his lifelong friend, Paolo dal Pozza Toscanelli, who cared for Cusa on his deathbed ten years before he created the map Christopher Columbus would use on his first voyage to the new world.<sup>701</sup> While a consideration of his *cartographical* skill is outside of the purview of our concern, his *cosmographical* intuitions are foundational thereto.<sup>702</sup> Like his political, scientific, and mathematical contributions, his cosmography also influenced his theology considerably, and vice versa. As Pauline Watts explains in her discussion of Cusa's *Idiota de Mente* (IDM), "man creates both his own interior mental world and his external world through the various arts and crafts."<sup>703</sup> While Cusa's analogy of the polygon and circle is often emphasized in contemporary scholarship (and rightly so), his cartographic/cosmographic analogies are too often overlooked.

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<sup>699</sup> DDI I.11.32, Hopkins 19.

<sup>700</sup> Watanabe (2011), 238.

<sup>701</sup> Hoff (2013), 4.

<sup>702</sup> Cartography etymologically signifies "writing on paper," hence cartography is the art of drawing maps on paper. Cosmography, on the other hand, etymologically signifies a "world-writing" or graphing one's cosmos. While the distinction is subtle, its import will become increasingly clear.

<sup>703</sup> Watts (1982), 137.



On the one hand, these analogies seek to demonstrate the same thing, *viz.*, the conjectural nature of knowledge exemplified in Cusa's doctrine of learned ignorance. On the other hand, these analogies shift the focus from the transcendent to the immanent, which is to say the natural geography and landscape in which we live. The cartographer's map, produced from direct perception and measuring, is always a mere likeness or image of the natural world. Like the polygon, it always falls shy of the reality it measures. Our maps can always be more accurate insofar as they are an image of the world.

### *Creative Disjunction*

Here, as with Cusa's notion of comparative relation, the disjunction between the representation and the represented is not Cusa's *final* point, but rather his *starting* point. Despite the conjectural nature of cartography, the map represents our actual experience and understanding of the world around us. When one creates a map, one produces a likeness of the world from one's own perspective. When I use a map someone else has created, I locate myself on their map, thereby locating my own perspective of the landscape within the other's perspective.

An inherent purpose of a map is its usability. It is a technology: A human creation manifesting the human creator's will and purpose. It is a likeness of the natural world in which we live, move, and have our being, which is a likeness of the Creator's divine will and purpose. Each entity in this infinite manifold manifestly and visibly reveals to us the Creator's invisible divinity and power (Romans 1:20). The natural world, then, is a creation freely and willfully created by the Divine Creator for some purpose.<sup>704</sup> Similarly, the map of that world is a creation freely and willfully created by the human creator for some purpose which simultaneously

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<sup>704</sup> DB 1-7.

represents the human conjectural understanding of the Divine will and purpose. While the divine will and purpose is perfectly and completely revealed in the Creator's creation, which is directly and precisely perceived by the cartographer, our "knowledge" of what is perceived is always conjectural, measured and perceived from some vantage.

The map is created by one person for the sake of another. It graphs on paper (*cartography*) one's perspective of the natural world; it is a graphic journal of one's journey through the cosmos. Locating oneself on another person's map, then, is to see the world, albeit in a limited way, from the perspective of another. This second person, from a second vantage, is able to build upon the creation of the first, thereby refining the map and improving it. One discovers more than one's predecessor because one benefits not only from one's own perspective, but from the cartographer's perspective.

### *Being Other-wisely*

In a very real way, then, the map is analogous to the metaphor of the squaring of the circle. When one locates oneself on another's map, the proliferation of perspectives is comparable to increasing the number of points on the circle coinciding with angles of the polygon. The more perspectives we have, the closer the polygon comes to measuring the circle, while always remaining infinitely far. The goal, then, is never to see precisely (*prae/cisio*) as another sees. To do so is obviously impossible since we are all unique individuals standing in some place at some time, which differs from others.

More importantly, though, it is also *undesirable*, from Cusa's perspective. Because each individual person is a unique creature, each person is an irreducibly particular manifestation of the free divine will and purpose.<sup>705</sup> Each one of us stands at the center of the infinite universe, of

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<sup>705</sup> See section three, below.

which the circumference is nowhere and center everywhere.<sup>706</sup> The perspective of the other (subjective genitive) is a perspective of the cosmos from another center of the universe. Locating oneself on another's map enables me to stand, imaginatively and partially, in the other's place, a vantage which enables me to see myself as another "other," but which also allows me to view the Creator's infinite creation from another perspective. Though stated in a different context, Keller's observation is pertinent here: "it is as if the universe is what it is only in the perspective of each and all of its creatures. But each creature *is* its perspective on its universe."<sup>707</sup>

Since each creature *is* its perspective on the universe and the universe *is what it is* only in the perspective of each creature, then another's map enables me (to a limited extent) to *be* another. Here again, perception and perspective are linked to adverbial ontology: Perceiving the universe from an/other's cartographical perspective enables one to *be other-wisely*. In Cusa's ontology of perception, cartography becomes ethics.

### *Cartography as Cosmography*

Mapmaking, for Cusa, is not simply cartography (graphing on paper) but also cosmography (graphing the cosmos). As discussed above, the cartographer's map, produced from the cartographer's perception and measure, always falls infinitely shy<sup>708</sup> of the reality it measures. *For the very reason* that the map fails to precisely represent the natural world, it also records and images what is meaningful to us in this world. A map of political boundaries reveals something meaningful only insofar as political boundaries are meaningful to us. A topographical

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<sup>706</sup> DDI I.12, DDI II.12. The metaphor of universe as an infinite sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference nowhere, which Cusa receives from Meister Eckhart who in turn received it from the pseudo-Hermetic *Liber XXIV philosophorum* is discussed in more detail in the latter portion of this chapter. See also Harries, Karsten. "The Infinite Sphere: Comments on the History of a Metaphor." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (1975): 5–15.

<sup>707</sup> Keller (2014), 115.

<sup>708</sup> Or "infinitesimally close." See footnote 512 (p205).

map depicting a diversity of landscapes and natural environs reveals something meaningful only insofar as these are meaningful. In other words, the map fails to precisely represent the natural world because it graphs the cosmos according to our measured perspective—including and especially that which we measure to be valuable or meaningful. As cosmography, mapmaking reveals more about ourselves and our understandings of our place in our ecology than it does about the world-as-it-is. The very realization of this cosmographic perspective leads us beyond the limitation of that perspective. It discloses the possibility of graphing our world otherwise and other-wisely, through other measures, other values, other meanings and perspectives.

Cosmography is an apophatic measure. While mapmaking *qua* cartography fails to measure the world-as-it-is, mapmaking *qua* cosmography enables us to learn our ignorance and thus learn to perceive otherwise and other-wisely. For the very reason that cartography fails to measure nature precisely, cosmography measures our perspectives, our values, and our creative economies of meaning. Cosmography awakens us to attend to another's intentions: an/other's journey through the world. An/other's image of the cosmos enables us to imagine the world as it might look from another center of the universe in comparative relation to our own learned ignorance.

Theory of Perspective (Phenomenology)

*Epistemic Apophasis*

Cusa's creative measures of mathematics and cartography direct us towards two distinct (but interrelated) methods of apophasis, which we might label cognitive or epistemic apophasis and perspectival apophasis. To learn our ignorance is to understand the infinite divide or "cut" between perception and its cognition. We do not know the world-as-it-is, but only the world-as-we-measure-it. Like the polygon and circle, however near our measure draws to the measured,

the two will never be equal since each and every particular entity in the universe enjoys a certain singularity: Its quiddity is beyond compare and thus cannot be known through comparative proportion. In this sense, Cusa's epistemic apophasis is not only an unsaying of our knowledge of God, but also an unsaying of our knowledge of the world.

Cusa's epistemic apophasis stands in sharp contrast to Śāṅkara's epistemology of language and perception. In the *vaiśvānara*, one sees a particular pot with the eye, the *buddhi* assumes the form of that which is seen, and the internal organ of perception verbally grasps it by means of a word which is eternally connected to *both* the universal *artha*, "pot," and also that particular pot. The truth of this perception is never doubted or denied by Śāṅkara and is, in fact, repeatedly asserted throughout his MKBh. Measures are to be progressively dissolved *only* to the extent that they are measures of that which is possessed of infinite measure. If they were *not* reliable measures of Brahman, there would be no means by which to know Brahman at all. For Cusa, though, our measures fail to measure reality, as a polygon fails to measure a circle.

#### *Perspectival apophasis*

Perspectival apophasis, however, is rooted in Cusa's ontology of perception. Though we cannot *know* the quiddity of a thing, it nevertheless can be seen. Though we cannot know natural forms, which exist potentially and enfoldedly, we nevertheless *directly perceive* these natural forms insofar as they exist actually and unfoldedly as particular entities. Although we directly perceive the quiddity of things, we necessarily perceive this quiddity from some perspective. Cusa's perspectival apophasis does not negate or unsay the truth of what we see, but instead emphasizes the inherent perspectival limitations of vision.

In this sense, Cusa's position suddenly draws very near to Śāṅkara's. We *perceive* reality as it is, but only a small measure of that reality. Here, though, "measure" does not refer to

epistemology at all, but rather to the reality that is directly perceived. Consider, for example, Edmund Husserl's illustration regarding the phenomenal appearance of a die.<sup>709</sup> Though one knows that a die has six square sides with differing symbols on each, one can only ever see, at most, three sides at once, which appear as non-square polygons unless perceived directly from above. Due to the limitations of perspective, we perceive only a small measure of a particular entity at a time. Notwithstanding the epistemic disjunction between *what is* and *what is known*, the perception is *true* despite being partial. To see the quiddity of a thing more truly, we do not deny or negate the truth of what is seen from one perspective, according to Cusa, but multiply our perspectives, adding together partial truths which will *never* amount to truth, but draw ever nearer, as a polygon does towards a circle. Like Śāṅkara's method of knowing Brahman, measure-by-measure and then progressively dissolving the measures to perceive Brahman possessed of infinite measure, Cusa's perspectival apophasis multiplies perspectives, thereby removing the limitations of those perspectives *without* denying the truth of any one perspective. For Cusa, this is true even if that perspective is not "mine," but comes from another, provided that I *attend* to the other, having faith in the testimony of another's witness.

Cusa's theory of perspective can be grasped, to some extent, by combining his creative measures of mathematics and cartography. By mapping, as it were, multiple perspectives onto a circle, we multiply the sides of the inscribed polygon. Attempting to harmoniously (not monotonously) perceive that towards which our attention is drawn, we draw nearer to the truth by removing the limitations of our perspective, which requires only that we listen faithfully to one another's testimony. Much like the Vedānta method of *upasamhāra*, coordinating multiple perspectives neither alters nor undermines any one perspective, but instead constitutes a mutual

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<sup>709</sup> Husserl, Edmund. *Logical Investigations*.

corrective: an apophasis which unsays limitations and potential misinterpretations of vision so that particularity might be seen more truly. Like *upasamhāra*, Cusa's perspectival apophasis is, effectively, an apophasis *by means of* kataphasis, and kataphasis *by means of* apophasis. These opposites creatively coincide in our perspectival dialogue with one another.

### *Transcending perspective*

Regardless of how many perspectives we adopt on *any* given phenomenon, there remains an infinite number of perspectives, each of which holds the potential to radically shift our intellectual understanding of the phenomenon. For Cusa, objective knowledge is not only impossible, it is also undesirable. Learned ignorance is not a "cure" for our ignorance, but it is a "treatment." By recognizing and multiplying our perspectives, we begin to transcend perspective. We do not transcend perspective by imagining an objective view from no-where, but by becoming other-wisely: listening to our neighbor's witness, reading our neighbor's maps, imagining ourselves to be at *their* center of the universe.

Cusa asserts that, "we have mental sight that looks unto that which is prior to all cognition."<sup>710</sup> Similar to Śāṅkara's distinction between *antaḥkāraṇa* and *buddhi*, Cusa distinguishes between the intellect and the mental image produced from sense-data. While we see precisely by means of a mental image "prior to all cognition,"<sup>711</sup> we cognitively apprehend that vision through signs and comparison. A wider variety of signs and perspectives enables us to judge *more* confidently, but never certainly. He continues:

[N]o sign designates the mode-of-being as fully as it can be designated. If we are to arrive at knowledge in the best way in which this can be done, then we must do so by means of a variety of signs in order that from them knowledge

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<sup>710</sup> *Compendium*, 1.2, Hopkins trans., 1386.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid.*

can better be had. [Similarly] from five perceptual signs, a perceptual object is better known than from one or two perceptual signs.<sup>712</sup>

As one learns that one can never “know” a given phenomenon precisely, one simultaneously learns how to know it more accurately: By perceiving it from multiple perspectives and cognizing those perceptions with multiple signs or concepts. Thus, learned ignorance compels us to move beyond our limited perspective *without devaluing that perspective*. Learned ignorance negates the limitations of perceptual signs by coordinating and harmonizing those inherently limited perceptual signs with a multiplicity of them.

By simply recognizing the inherent limitations of perspective, one begins to transcend those limitations. Karsten Harries explains:

Cusanus’ speculations presuppose an increased awareness of and interest in the phenomenon of perspective. To be aware of perspective is to be aware not only of what is seen, but also of the conditions imposed on the seen by our point of view. The space of perspective has its center in the perceiver; the objects which present themselves in that space are necessarily appearances. This awareness cannot be divorced from another: *the awareness of what constitutes a particular point of view carries with it an awareness of other possible points of view; to recognize the limits imposed on my understanding by my location here and now I have to be, in some sense, already beyond these limits.*<sup>713</sup>

While Harries has stated Cusa’s position well, there is a danger that his words may be misread. To rightly suggest, as Harries does, that recognizing the limitations of perspective signals that one has already moved “in some sense... beyond these limits,” is *not* to imply any modernist notion of objectivity. One can never have a view from nowhere. One’s view of reality is always already subjective and perspectival. My perspective is always, necessarily, *my* perspective and is, to that extent, relative to my facticity, my actuality, my spatial and temporal finitude, my

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<sup>712</sup> *Ibid.*, 1387. For the sake of clarity, I have made minor editions to Hopkins’ translation, in which the entire passage is written as single sentence.

<sup>713</sup> Harries (1975), 7. My emphasis added.



language and conceptual measure, my beliefs and personal history, etc. My perspective, in other words, is irreducibly particular.

Elsewhere, Harries explains that objectivity and phenomenology are fundamentally incompatible notions:

As old as philosophy is the thought that the search for the truth requires us to seek reality behind appearances. Inseparable from this thought is another—that reason is not imprisoned in perspectives, that it can transcend its initial limitations and arrive at a more objective understanding of what is. The idea of objectivity, as I am here using it, is tied to the idea of a knowing that is free from perspectival distortion, an angelic, divine, or ideal knowing. It is thus linked to the idea of a knower not imprisoned in the body and not bound by the senses, a pure subject. The idea of such a knower and that of objectivity belong together. *If the idea of such a knower is illegitimate, so is that of objectivity.* And with these ideas, that of absolute truth also collapses.<sup>714</sup>

As Harries shows, Cusa unequivocally rejects objectivity as a possibility in human knowledge. This rejection is fundamental to his notion of learned ignorance, with respect to *both* divine/theological matters and natural/scientific matters.

More importantly, though, Cusa eschews any notion of “objectivity” in the sense described above not merely because it is illusory, but also because it is undesirable. Objectivity devalues the particularity of perspective and, along with it, the very *raison d’être* of Creation. If objectivity is valued as a goal, then perspective is devalued; it becomes the primary obstacle in our pursuit of that goal. In its place is posited an idealized “knower not imprisoned in the body and not bound by the senses, a pure subject.”<sup>715</sup> In one’s pursuit of the unachievable (i.e., the objective view from nowhere), one obviates the one indubitable certitude: namely, that one’s perspective of the world is true. In my irreducible particularity, I stand, as it were, on the infinite

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<sup>714</sup> Harries (2001), 123.

<sup>715</sup> Harries (1975), 7.

circle, which is truth. The truth, as such, is inaccessible to us because truth is infinite, as discussed earlier.<sup>716</sup> My perspective on truth, which is infinite, is nevertheless *true* for the very reason that it is my finite perspective of Truth. The fact that it is finite does not obviate the fact that it is true. To learn that it is finite is to learn my ignorance (*docta ignorantia*).

Moving beyond the limitations of perspective, in the sense that Harries intends, does not at all foreshadow modernist longings for objectivity. Rather, learning one's ignorance means learning that one's *true* perspective of Truth *ignores* every other true perspective of Truth. Transcending perspective, in this sense, entails the dis/closure of possibility. "My" finitude means that "I" will always ignore other true perspectives. Because Truth is infinite, it requires an infinity of perspectives. As Harries explicates, "the awareness of what constitutes a particular point of view carries with it an awareness of other possible points of view."<sup>717</sup> Learning that my perspective is both true and finite compels me to seek out other possible points of view, *not* because my perspective is untrue, but—to the contrary—because it *is* true.

While I can never grasp the Truth *qua* Truth,<sup>718</sup> I can approach it more truly by ceasing to ignore all other possible points of view.<sup>719</sup> Insofar as learning my ignorance means learning that my true perspective *ignores* other possible true perspectives, it is utterly useless if I then fail to seek out these other true perspectives, each of which is irreducibly particular. This point is foundational for Cusa's thought, and it is also the fundamental premise that guides this dissertation as a whole. "Objectivity" is neither attainable *nor desirable*. As discussed below, valuing "objectivity" necessarily and consequently devalues the divine will and purpose.

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<sup>716</sup> DDI. I.4.11.

<sup>717</sup> Harries (1975), 7.

<sup>718</sup> DDI. I.4.11.

<sup>719</sup> DDI II.12.

*Mapping the Circle of Life*

Eschewing “objectivity,” Cusa’s perspectival apophysis is phenomenological. Harries explains:

The theory of perspective teaches us about the logic of appearance, of phenomena. In this sense the theory of perspective is phenomenology. So understood, phenomenology lets us understand why [and how] things present themselves to us as they do.<sup>720</sup>

Each new perspective on a given reality grants us additional insight into that reality’s phenomenon, enabling us to know the phenomenon more truly. As Martin Heidegger argues in *Being and Time*:

The expression ‘phenomenology’ signifies primarily a methodological conception. This expression does not characterize the *what* of the objects of philosophical research as subject-matter, but rather the *how* of that research.<sup>721</sup>

As Heidegger avers, the goal of phenomenology is, “to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself.”<sup>722</sup> As Harries has shown in *Infinity and Perspective*, Heidegger’s turn to phenomenology is, in many ways, a return to theories of perspective found in pre-modernist thinkers such as Eckhart, Alberti, and Nicholas of Cusa.<sup>723</sup> Far from subjective relativism, and perhaps contrary to Heideggerian phenomenology, Cusa’s theory of perspective is grounded in the insistence that we do, in fact, *see* the truth we cannot possibly *know*.

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<sup>720</sup> Harries (2001), 69. The bracketed insertion is mine.

<sup>721</sup> Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008. 50 (H27).

<sup>722</sup> *Ibid.* 58, H34.

<sup>723</sup> Harries (2001), especially chapters 6 and 16.

Knowledge requires cognition. Given that one sees truly and cognizes truly, there is, nevertheless, an epistemic disjuncture between seeing pre/cisely (*prae/cisio*, before the cut), and knowing ratio/nally by comparative ratio. One who strives to “know precisely,” Cusa explains, “strives in vain, just as would someone who attempted to touch with his hand a *color*— something which is only *visible*.<sup>724</sup>

In Śaṅkara’s articulation of the *turīya*, perception *ceases* to be a means to knowledge. For Cusa, perception does not “cease” to be a means of knowledge because it never was in the first place. Like perception in the *turīya*, however, perception becomes an end unto itself when rooted in Cusa’s theory of perspective. Having become aware of other possible perspectives, philosophical and theological dialogue emerge as *means for seeing*, rather than means of knowing. Though their methods differ from one another, each method is an apophatic measure in the first sense of the word: A praxis of measuring the world without reducing particular phenomena to measures, thereby cultivating a wakefully attentive sensuality.

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<sup>724</sup> *Compendium*, 1.2, Hopkins trans., 1386. I have clarified Hopkins’ insertions and retained his italics.

Consider, for example, Figure 20. Standing at point C on the circle, I perceive the center of the circle precisely, from a limited perspective. When I share my perspective with another through dialogue, cartography, or by writing theology, I effectively and analogously describe a chord on the circle, thereby adding an angle and two sides to the polygon inscribed in this circle. Through discourse, I lend a new perspective on

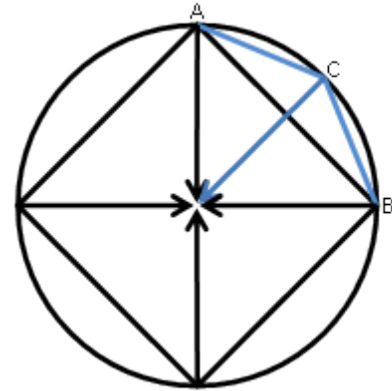


Figure 20: Mapping the Circle of Life

phenomenal reality, thereby bifurcating chord AB and adding chords AC and CB in dialogue with my neighbors, standing at points A and C on the circle. My cognition of perceived reality creates a new measure of phenomenal reality which stands in comparative relation (*ratio*) with the true cognitions of others, mapped at points A and B. Through discourse, I map my perspective for others, enabling them to stand, as it were, where I stand. Though we cannot know the world-as-it-is, we can *see* it. Standing together on the circle of life, we map our world together by standing, as it were, where our neighbor stands. By rounding the edges of our square maps, not through a unison of perspectives sung by an angelic no-body, but by de/scribing harmonious chords in a polygon that draws nearer to truth when more voices join the choir. Knowing that our *true* perspectives ignore other true perspectives, we transcend perspectival limitation as we hear one another into speech.

Negating one's own perspective does not mean devaluing it. To the contrary, by recognizing the finitude of my perspective, I simultaneously recognize the value of my perspective for my neighbor, and the value of my neighbor's perspective for me. Through this perspectival apophasis, I learn to listen.

Just as perception ceases to be a means to know and becomes an end unto itself, so, too, does hearing one another. Knowing our ignorance, the emphasis refuses to shift, as it does in modernist “objectivity,” to objects. While the circle’s center provides a focal point, it does not *intend* to our *attention* as an object, but rather as a *topic*: a *topos* or place about which we map our world through speaking and hearing. Though hearing becomes a means to see, it is a means to see from the perspective of the other, and hence a graceful end unto itself. Far from a “cognitive mapping” intent upon “knowing things,” Cusa’s perspectival apophasis provokes an aesthetic education of imagined subjectivity wherein hearing becomes grace and grace entails being heard.<sup>725</sup> Reciting and re-siting Nelle Morton’s words into this quite different context, we might map her “great ear” to the center of the circle in Figure 20:

Hearing in this sense can break through political and social structures and image a new system. A great ear at the heart of the universe—at the heart of our common life—hearing human beings to speech—to our own speech.<sup>726</sup>

Hearing one another into speech, we chart chords in a polyphony that never speaks Truth, but sings ever more truly as others’ voices are added to the choir.

Since my perspective is always irreducibly particular, it cannot possibly be in unison with my neighbor’s perspective, since my neighbor stands elsewhere, at another time and place. This does not mean that our relative perceptions are inaccurate, imprecise, or in any way untrue, but simply that each is incomplete (insofar as our perspectives *ignore* other possible perspectives) and conjectural (insofar as they are measured by comparative relation). While a conjecture may be *true* in the sense that it truly measures the phenomenon, it necessarily falls infinitely shy of truth, which is immeasurable. To the extent that each perspective is *true*, however, our chords

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<sup>725</sup> Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2012. *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 372-398.

<sup>726</sup> Morton (1986), 128.

should be concordant. They should harmonize. Dissonance signals cognitive error, conceptual error, or both.

Hence, Cusa's analogies of cartography and squaring the circle ground phenomenology in perspective and dialogue. We stand together on the circle of life, seeking to understand what we see, and seeking to understand our faith. We do so by believing what we see (precisely) from our own irreducibly particular perspective. We seek to *understand* our perceptions more accurately (never precisely) through faith in our neighbor's witness.<sup>727</sup> Standing on but one of the infinite points on the circle, we map our perspectives by describing chords between our points of view, gradually coming to see our neighbors as other seers. This requires both trust in the other and understanding of the other's words. Listening for the harmonious concord, we steadily shift, with Cusa's help, to a different orientation of sight. Imaginatively locating ourselves on the other's map, we begin to see that our neighbor's perspective, while not in *unison* with our own, is in *harmony* with our own. We see in order to believe. For Cusa, though, this is but the first step. Faithfully listening to our neighbor, we believe in order to see.

## **Creative Spirit**

### Apophatic Measure as Creative Remeasuring

As introduced in the opening pages of this thesis, the phrase "apophatic measure" unfolds a triad of interrelated meanings. It signifies (1) methods by which conceptual measures are identified and removed with the aim of cultivating (2) attentive sensuality beyond words which perceives (3) particular entities as unique (unspeakable) measures of ultimate reality. Thus far in this chapter, we have seen how the created measures of mathematics and cosmography enable us to identify (pre)conceptions and help us to learn our ignorance of the world-as-it-is-measured. By

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<sup>727</sup> De Certeau (1987).

learning the limitations of our perspectives on reality, we begin to transcend those perspectives. We do so not by *unsaying*, per say, but hearing others into speech, attending to their witness, and thus multiplying perspectives.

Thus, the trifold meanings of “apophatic measure” begin to fold back on themselves: sensuality becomes a method of negating limitations. When sensuality ceases to be a means of consumption, it becomes an end unto itself, as we saw earlier with the *tur̄ya* (p181). Attentive to the fact that one is measuring, one becomes free to measure creatively. As *theology*, this creative measuring bears vocational and ethical import. Our cosmographical measuring discloses the ways in which we assign value and meaning to the world, which are actions with theo-ethical significance. Aware that we are measuring value and meaning, we begin (hopefully) to do so apophatically. That is to say that every creative measure carries with it its own unsaying, or at least stands open to theological critique or deconstruction.

While creative measuring like cartography are theological, these measures are human creations: artificial forms unfolded by “second gods.” They are, therefore theo←logy, which is to say human creations striving to create in the *Spirit* of the Creator. As kataphatic measures of divine intention, they stand open to theo←logical critique, which takes forms such as hearing others into speech, as discussed in the previous section. Our creative measures must also stand open to theo→logical critique. That is, our creative measures must strive to be in harmony with scriptural revelation, natural revelation, and the movement of the Holy Spirit.

This section examines Cusa’s theology as an apophatic measure *qua* method which unsays (pre)conceptions about the *imago Dei* doctrine. By cultivating an attentive sensuality, one learns to see others and nature differently. Knowing that we measure (creatively), cognizant of



the theo-ethical import of the ways in which we measure value and meaning, we learn (or at least strive) to create measures that are more harmoniously attuned to the Creator's Spirit.

### Unsayings *Imago Dei*

The doctrine typically referred to as *imago Dei* derives from Genesis 1:26-27:

Then Elohim said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness..." So God created humankind in God's image, in the image of God, God created them. Male and female, God created them.<sup>728</sup>

In what sense are humans the image of God? In what image is the "rest" of the universe created?<sup>729</sup>

Kathryn Tanner points out a curious irony. On the one hand, we have a doctrine of God's incomprehensibility, and on the other, we have a doctrine of *imago Dei*. "Putting the two ideas together," she explains, one would expect the *imago Dei* to reflect divine incomprehensibility, but theology frequently moves in the opposite direction.<sup>730</sup> This approach is problematic, Tanner explains, because it abstracts human nature from relationality. It also neglects the Social Trinity. Faithfully seeking to understand this teaching, Cusa interrogates this *image of God* in light of the Trinitarian mystery and the facticity of our relational ontology.

Elucidating Cusa's position, Catherine Keller explains: "It is the whole universe, not the little human speck of it, that is made in *imago Dei*."<sup>731</sup> She then cites a portion of the following passage from DDI:

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<sup>728</sup> Genesis 1:26-27, NRSV, modified for gender neutrality.

<sup>729</sup> One might interrogate the verb, *bara*, as do Ibn Ezra and Nachmanides, which elsewhere means "to cut." Doing so, one might also recall Śaṅkara's analogy of tree and axe, insisting that bifurcation does not change the inherent form of what is cut.

<sup>730</sup> Tanner, Kathryn. "In the Image of the Invisible," In *Apophatic Bodies: Negative Theology, Incarnation, and Relationality*. Transdisciplinary Theological Colloquia. New York: Fordham University Press. 117.

<sup>731</sup> Keller (2014), 118.

The infinite form is received only in a finite way; consequently, every creature is, as it were, a finite infinity or a created god, so that it exists in the way in which this could best be.<sup>732</sup>

This foreshadows, of course, the fourth premise from DB (p261 above), but with a considerable difference. It is not merely the human person that is a “second god,” but “*every creature* is... a created god.” Moreover, Cusa subsequently emphasizes in the same paragraph the inherent divine value of irreducible particularity:

Therefore, God communicates without difference and envy, and what God communicates is received in such a way that contingency does not permit it to be received otherwise or to a higher degree. Therefore, *every created being* finds its rest in its own perfection, which it freely holds from the divine being. *It desires to be no other created being*, as if something else were more perfect, but rather it prefers that which it itself holds, as if a divine gift from the maximum and it wishes its own possession to be perfected and preserved incorruptibly.<sup>733</sup>

In other words, every created being is *uniquely* created in the image of God. “It desires to be no other created being” because that which makes it itself is a divine gift from God. As we have seen already in the previous chapter, because an entity’s *quiddity* is irreducibly particular such that it enjoys “a certain singularity that cannot be found in any other thing,” it is unknowable through comparative proportion even though it is inherently perceptible.<sup>734</sup> Every creature, as a unique image of God, is perceptible, yet reflects divine incomprehensibility. Hence, Cusa’s articulation of *imago Dei* avoids the curious irony Tanner observes to be frequent in other theologies.

Mary-Jane Rubenstein observes:

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<sup>732</sup> DDI II.2.104, Bond, 134.

<sup>733</sup> *Ibid.*, my emphasis added.

<sup>734</sup> DDI III.1.188, Hopkins 114.

Cusa, in other words, is shattering the simple mirror-game between God and the universe by folding God *into* God's own image, as its omniscient center. The universe does not resemble a God who stands outside it; it resembles God only insofar as it embodies God, everywhere in the universe, equally.<sup>735</sup>

The universe embodies God everywhere. As discussed earlier, though, two important provisos must be added: God is not embodied as a "pious interiority" hidden within and God is not (simply) embodied by the universe as a whole. Rather, *each* created body embodies God, and does so uniquely as its very *quiddity*.

In light of these points, we can add a corollary to Cusa's statement above. Each created being "desires to be no other created being," but it does *desire to be seen*. As a unique image of God, the *quiddity* of creatures *intends* to be seen; one need only *attend* to it through an intellectual awakening, lest one fail to recognize the passerby. As stated in DB's first premise (p256 above), the Divine Intellect exists unfoldedly as creatures in order to manifestly reveal itself (Rom 1:20). It reveals itself *as* bodily creatures who incarnate unique images of God. They desire to be seen and desire to be themselves, not others, because each creature is *needed* by God. Without any given creature, God's self-revelation would be incomplete. Here again, mathematics provides a guide: infinity plus one is infinity, but infinity *minus* one is not.<sup>736</sup> For the infinite Divine Intellect to manifestly reveal itself, infinite images of God are required. Hence, each and every body is necessary; none are superfluous. Each and every body desires (and *intends*) to be seen because that is its very reason for being. The role and purpose of each creature is *to be* a unique image of God so that God may be seen.

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<sup>735</sup> Rubenstein, Mary-Jane. 2014. *Worlds without End: The Many Lives of the Multiverse*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014, 82. This passage is also cited in Keller (2014), 118.

<sup>736</sup> Infinity minus one is irreducible; the equation can only equal itself. Infinity plus one is reducible to infinity because the "plus one" is superfluous. Infinity is neither greater than nor less than "infinity plus one." However, "infinity minus one" is necessarily less than "infinity," since that is precisely what the equation "infinity minus one" states.

In the statement cited above, however, Cusa has added another dimension of desire to these created gods. As observed, a creature “desires to be no other created being,” and desires to be seen, but it also “wishes its own possession to be perfected and preserved incorruptibly.”<sup>737</sup> Because each creature is a unique revelation of God, an unprecedented, unrepeatable, and un-representable *imago Dei*, it bears divine responsibility. It must perfect itself—not, of course, by becoming something *other* than what it is, but by becoming itself more truly and more completely. The “divine gift” does not require reciprocation or recompense, lest it cease to be graceful, but this gift *does* entail an ability to respond, and, hence, a response-ability. To be responsible, then, is to respond to this divine gift of uniqueness by receiving it as truly and completely as one is able. One is responsible for being oneself: becoming an image of God as truly and completely as one might. *Theosis* is inherent to *imago Dei*.

We stand in need, therefore, of an ethics of *imago Dei*. If the irreducibly particular *quiddity* of a creature manifestly reveals God by uniquely embodying God *qua* image, then how can it be “perfected”? If one is, by nature, an image of God, then how does one *become* that image more truly and completely? Moreover, if each creature is an image of the Trinity, how does one become one’s Trinitarian image more fully? In the following sections, I approach these questions by briefly analyzing the trio of texts from 1453 introduced earlier, *De visione Dei*, *De Beryllo*, and *De pace Fidei*, which respectively articulate a *theophany* of Christ as *imago Dei*, a *theophany* of Creation as *imago Dei*, and a Spiritual Theosis of Creative Harmony.

#### Theophany and Christ: Learning to See

*De visione Dei* is a remarkably rich text. Only scratching the surface of its depths, my focus here is narrowed to close readings of a handful of passages highlighting Cusa’s

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<sup>737</sup> DDI III.1.188, Hopkins 114, my emphasis added.

Christology. I return to this topic again, from a different perspective and with a different purpose, in the next chapter (p328).

*A more anointed image*

In the passage from DDI analyzed above, Cusa has said “Every created being finds its rest in its own perfection, which it freely holds from the divine being.”<sup>738</sup> In Chapter 25 of DVD, this language emerges again. Addressing God, Cusa writes:

O Lord God, without Your Son, Jesus—whom You anointed more than his fellow-persons and who is the Christ—You would not yet have brought about the completion of Your work. In His intellect the perfection of creatable nature finds rest. For He is the ultimate and most perfect unmultipliable Likeness of God. And there can be only one such supreme [Likeness]. Yet, all other intellectual spirits, by the mediation of this Spirit, are also likenesses. And the more perfect they are, the more like unto this Spirit they are. In this Spirit they all find rest, as in the ultimate perfection of the Image of God. And they have attained unto a likeness of this Image and unto a certain degree of its perfection.<sup>739</sup>

A close reading of this passage brings several points to our attention.

First, Cusa states that Jesus has been “*anointed more than his fellow-persons*” (*prae consortibus suis unxisti*) and therefore is the Christ (the anointed). This is consistent with Cusa’s reading of John’s Gospel, which states that to all who received the true light is given “the power to become children of God.”<sup>740</sup> That is to say that the “true light” which anointed (*christened*) Jesus also anoints all creatures, but was received by Jesus more truly and completely than any other. As discussed earlier, the divine light gracefully descends unto the intellect, which is received in accordance with its wakeful attentiveness. When distracted by intellectual matters,

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<sup>738</sup> DDI II.2.104, Bond, 134.

<sup>739</sup> DVD 25.112, Hopkins 735, modified for gender-inclusive language.

<sup>740</sup> John 1:12, NRSV. On Cusa’s reading, see *De filiatione Dei*.

the descent of the divine light is not received in the manner in which it descends. Because Jesus was not distracted in this way, “in His intellect the perfection of creatable nature finds rest.”

Second, Cusa states that Jesus “is the ultimate and most perfect unmultipliable likeness of God (*dei similitudo*).” In Paul’s epistle to the Colossians, he states that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (*imago Dei invisibilis*), the firstborn of all creation.”<sup>741</sup> Thus, Jesus is a *theophany*: a visible image of the invisible God. However, Jesus’ uniqueness is not due to the fact that he is an image of the invisible God, since “all other intellectual spirits, by the mediation of this Spirit, are also likenesses.” Jesus’ uniqueness, from Cusa’s perspective, is one of magnitude. He is *more anointed* than his companions and thus the ultimate and *most perfect* (*perfectissima*). While all creatures are images of God, anointed by the graceful descent of the divine light, to whom are offered the power to become children of God,<sup>742</sup> Jesus stands apart as the exemplar of reception. Therefore—and this point is critical—we gaze upon Jesus *not* because he is an image of the invisible God (for this is true of all creatures), but because he is a perfected model of *how to be* an image.

Third, the passage above leads us to a better understanding of what Cusa means by “perfection.” “Perfection” does not entail drawing nearer towards a transcendent, universal form. Rather, “perfection” means receiving the divine gift of *what one is* more truly, thereby “perfecting” or “making whole” one’s unique *quiddity*. “Therefore, every created being finds its rest in its own perfection... It desires to be no other created being, as if something else were more perfect.”<sup>743</sup> As unique images of God, our responsibility is not to perfect ourselves by

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<sup>741</sup> Colossians 1:15, NRSV with Latin Vulgate.

<sup>742</sup> On Cusa’s reading of John 1:12, see *De filiatione Dei* (1445).

<sup>743</sup> DDI II.2.104, Bond, 134.

emulating Jesus in every possible respect (desiring to be another); rather, we perfect ourselves by receiving the divine gift of our irreducible particularity more truly and more fully, regarding Jesus as the model who received that gift most completely.

*The amazing grace of an amazing gaze*

As the “visible image of the invisible God,” Jesus is, of course, inaccessible to our sight as a visible object. The Greek Testament, though, offers to us a *vision of Jesus*. In DVD, Cusa approaches this vision of *Jesus* primarily as a *subjective* genitive. In Chapter 22, which is entitled “How Jesus Sees and Toiled,” Cusa “conjectures” about Jesus’ “exceedingly marvelous and amazing gaze.”<sup>744</sup>

For while You, Jesus, walked amid this sensible world, You used fleshly eyes that were like ours. For with these eyes You perceived in no other way than do we: *viz.*, one thing and another.<sup>745</sup>

Throughout his text, Cusa repeats the phrase “*fleshly eye*” (*carnali oculo*) as somewhat of a refrain. Echoing the “ladder of ascent” traced in DQD, Cusa makes clear that Jesus saw just as we do, in living color. Rationally discerning between one thing and another, Jesus “saw distinctly and discretely *this* object to be colored in this way and that object to be colored in another way.”<sup>746</sup> Attending to “the poses of the face and eyes of those upon whom You looked, You were a true judge of the passions of the soul.”<sup>747</sup> Cusa continues:

From merely a few signs, You comprehended that which lay hidden in a person’s mind. For whatever is conceived in the mind is signaled in some

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<sup>744</sup> DVD 22.95, Hopkins 725.

<sup>745</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>746</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.*

way in the face (and especially in the eyes), since the face is the messenger of the heart.<sup>748</sup>

Here again we observe, more acutely, what Charles Carman describes as “a certain dialectical indistinctiveness between physical and intellectual vision.”<sup>749</sup> Cusa underscores, time and again, the humanity of Jesus’ incarnate gaze because physical vision and intellectual vision are but aspects of a continuum inherent to Cusa’s ontology of vision. Jesus *sees* the way he does, with fleshly eyes, because his intellect is devoid of all distraction. In the more-anointed Jesus, the graceful descent of the divine light proceeds along vision’s pathway without interruption or impediment. It attends.

Due to this unimpeded, graceful descent of the divine light, Cusa sees, in the vision of *Jesus*, that divine sight, intellectual apprehension, rational discernment, and sensuality coincide. Jesus’ “seeing, which was not accomplished without fleshly eyes, was human.”<sup>750</sup> It was a “finite, human vision... contracted to a [bodily] organ,” and yet it was “perfect” because it was united to an “absolute and infinite Vision.”<sup>751</sup> It was not united to a divine vision in a manner that is inaccessible to us. To the contrary, this vision of *Jesus* is revealed, in its perfection, so that we might learn to see as Jesus saw.

In this context, Cusa again turns to the analogy of failing to recognize a passerby. Though one sees the person with fleshly eyes, the passerby is not recognized when one’s intellectual vision is distracted. “From this example,” Cusa explains, “we ascertain that even though the natures of these powers are united in one human form, nevertheless they remain distinct and have

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<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>749</sup> Carman (2014), 113.

<sup>750</sup> DVD 22.96, Hopkins 726.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, 727.



distinct functions.”<sup>752</sup> Likewise, he continues, “I see that in You, Jesus, who are one, the human intellectual nature is united, in a certain similar way, to the divine nature.”<sup>753</sup>

A few pages later, however, Cusa either contradicts himself or, at least, dramatically clarifies what he meant by “united, in a certain similar way.” He states:

Jesus, You cannot be said, either, to be the uniting medium between the divine nature and the human nature, since between the two natures there cannot be posited a middle nature that participates in both. For the divine nature cannot be participated in, because it is completely and absolutely most simple. Moreover, in such case, Blessed Jesus, You would not be either God or man.<sup>754</sup>

Human nature is finite while the divine nature is infinite and “there is no comparative proportion of the finite to the infinite.”<sup>755</sup> Were Jesus’ human nature to “pass over” into divine nature, it would become infinite, and thus no longer be human. (Clearly, Cusa is dissatisfied regarding the dual nature of Christ as mysterious.)

Here, Cusa turns yet *again* to the analogy of the passerby:

By comparison, suppose one that a man were to seek intently to discern by means of sight someone approaching him. And suppose that he were seized by other thoughts and that his attention subsequently ceased with regard to his seeking, though his eyes were no less directed toward the on-comer. In this case his eye would not be separated from his soul, although it would be separated from the discerning attention of his soul. However, if when seized [by other thoughts] he not only ceased enlivening [the eye] with the power of discernment but also ceased enlivening [it] with the power of sensation, then the eye would be dead, because it would not be enlivened.<sup>756</sup>

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<sup>752</sup> DVD 22.97, Hopkins 726-7.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>754</sup> DVD 23.100, 729.

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid.*, 728.

<sup>756</sup> DVD 23.101, 729.

As was the case in DQD, Cusa links perception and enlivening. In the earlier text (p215), he states that, “all that which exists unfoldedly (*explicate*) in the sensible kingdom, exists enfoldedly (*complicite*) in the kingdom of the senses more vigorously and, moreover, [exists] vitally in a way that is more complete.”<sup>757</sup> In the passage above, he has simply extended this notion of “vitality” farther up vision’s “ladder of ascent.” When one sees an inanimate color, one does not bring it to life in a literal sense, but that color *exists vitally* in sensuality. Likewise, the intellect does not “enliven” the eye in a literal sense, such that the eye “dies” when the intellect is distracted. The eye still *sees* the passerby. But the distracted intellect does “enliven” the eye in the sense of awakening, as discussed earlier, and so one fails to recognize the passerby.

Analogously, the divine nature “enlivens” the intellectual nature. When the intellect is distracted, and thus “closed” to the divine light, it does not “die.” It still performs its intellectual activity, just as the eye sees the passerby. When awakened, or “opened” to the descent of the divine light, however, the intellect is enlivened by the divine nature just as the eye is enlivened by the intellect. Applying the analogy to Jesus, then, it is not that the divine and human natures are “united,” but rather that Jesus’ human intellect was fully awakened, fully opened, and thus fully receptive to the divine nature, such that it could not possibly be more open to it.

Following the graceful descent of the divine light, it follows that the divine nature awakens/enlivens the intellect, *ratio*, and senses such that they could not be more awakened or attentive. It is for this reason, then, Jesus sees, with fleshly eyes like our own, “that which lay hidden in a person’s mind. For whatever is conceived in the mind is signaled in some way in the face (and especially in the eyes), since the face is the messenger of the heart.”<sup>758</sup> Because Jesus

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<sup>757</sup> DQD I.30, my translation. See footnote 560 on page 189.

<sup>758</sup> DVD 22.95, Hopkins 725.

was *more anointed*, he never failed to recognize the passerby. To say that he “recognized” them, of course, does not mean that he knew them by the name their parents gave them... it means that he re/cognized the passerby as an unprecedented, irreducibly particular image of God.

### Theophany and Creator: Double-Beryl Vision

As a theophany of the invisible God, the vision of *Jesus* teaches us how to see as Jesus saw, with fleshly eyes like our own. As we learn to see in this way, how might this alter our vision of creation? Cusa grounds *De beryllo* in Romans 1:20, wherein Paul states that God’s invisible power and divinity are manifestly revealed through creation. Nature is a *theophany*: an image of the Creator.

### *Intentional bodies*

In DB, Cusa argues, fervently and at length, against Aristotle and Plato. The details need not encumber us here, but only his central point: Because God creates freely and willfully, then every creature reveals some unique aspect of God’s will and purpose. He writes:

*Every creature* is an intention of the Omnipotent Will. Neither Plato nor Aristotle knew the foregoing fact. For, clearly, both of them believed that the Creator-Intellect made all things because of a necessity of its nature. From this [belief] their every error followed.<sup>759</sup>

If creation is not an act of necessity, but a free and willful act, then it follows that “every creature has its reason-for-being only from the fact that it was created to be thus... [by] the will of the Creator.”<sup>760</sup> Aristotle’s taxonomic distinction between essence and accident is faulty and misleading, in Cusa’s view.<sup>761</sup> If any creature were superfluous or unnecessary, then God would

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<sup>759</sup> DB 38, Hopkins 809.

<sup>760</sup> DB 51, Hopkins 815.

<sup>761</sup> DB 50-51.

not have created that creature. Creatures do not “participate” in universal forms to varying degrees, but are as they are because they were created to be thus.<sup>762</sup> By its very existence, however, it follows that “the creature is the *intention* of the Creator.”<sup>763</sup> By *attending* to God’s creation, with fleshly eyes like Jesus’s, we are able to see the Creator’s *intention*.

### *Perceptible oikos*

To illustrate this assertion that the creature is the visible intention of the Creator, Cusa offers a simple, but profound, analogy which recurs throughout DB. By observing a house, one is able to apprehend the architect’s intention, which was present in her intellect.<sup>764</sup> He then uses the analogy to contradict Plato and assert the significance of material bodies:

For example, humankind knows the mechanical art. One has the forms of this art more truly in one’s mental concept than as they are formable outside one’s mind—just as a house, which is made by means of an art, has a *truer form* in the mind than in the pieces of wood... But it does not follow that the house which exists in terms of wood (i.e., the perceptible house) exists more truly in the mind—even though the form of the house is a *truer form* in the mind. For there is required—for the *true being* of the house and because of *the end for the sake of which the house exists*—that the house be perceptible.<sup>765</sup>

Like Plato, Cusa acknowledges that the house has a more perfect *form* in the architect’s mind than it does in the wood and stone assembled by craftsmen. *Against* Plato, however, he points out that the will and purpose of the architect is *only* realized in the material image. In other words, the architect may *imagine* a house more perfect than what craftsmen *create*, but only the latter will keep you warm at night, sheltered from the storm. If this artificial form is to fulfil its intended purpose, it must be unfolded.

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<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>763</sup> DB 54, Hopkins 817.

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>765</sup> DB 56, Hopkins 817-8. Translation modified for gender-inclusivity. My emphasis added.

Though simple and straightforward, Cusa's architectural analogy is profound. Elsewhere, he writes with equal philosophical depth about spoons.<sup>766</sup> Unlike fire, water, and other natural forms, it is difficult to imagine a place for houses and spoons in Plato's transcendental realm of Forms. For Cusa, the ontological source of these artificial forms is *not* the Divine Intellect, but the human intellect, as is the case for math and maps. Moreover, there is hardly any doubt that Plato's Forms exist; Plato created them.<sup>767</sup>

Like "visions' pathway" in DQD, the architectural analogy is more than an analogy. Far from Plotinian *apháresis*, one does not draw nearer to the Divine source through removal, but by creating.<sup>768</sup> When the architect creates a house, it is not *as if* the architect is creating; the architect is *actually* creating—freely, intentionally, and with willful purpose. If the architect's house remains immaterial, its purpose remains unfulfilled. Bodies are necessary. Diversity is necessary. Without diverse bodies, the architect's (or Architect's) will cannot materialize.

If one is to grasp the architect's intention, one must consider how the parts "fit together." How do they relate and cooperate? How is this wall, that window, or that door incorporated into its *ecology*? Likewise, natural diversity manifests the Creator's intention. This diverse *oikos* reveals the free will of its Architect. To grasp the intention behind this ecological *imago Dei*, it is necessary to consider how diverse creatures "fit together." To see more clearly with our fleshly eyes, Cusa offers a method.

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<sup>766</sup> See *Idiota de Mente*.

<sup>767</sup> Harries (2001), 199.

<sup>768</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads* I.6.9.

*One and Many: Seeing through the Beryl Stone*

Cusa entitles his text: *On the Beryl Stone*. Anticipating that his reader will not know what a *beryl* stone is, he explains:

Beryl stones are bright, white, and clear. To them are given both concave and convex forms. And someone who looks out through them apprehends that which was previously invisible.<sup>769</sup>

In Cusa's native German, the word *brille* means "eyeglasses," and etymologically derives from the Greek *beryllos*. What Cusa seems to have in mind is curved crystal, like the lens of an eyeglass. Gazing through it, tiny things are magnified. Turning the same lens over, large things are miniaturized. The *beryl stone*, then, represents a coincidence of opposites (micro and macro) that enables one to focus on particular entities (microscopically), but also see how these particular entities harmonize with their larger environment (macroscopically).

Through the beryl stone, Cusa trains his reader to see the One in light of the Many. To see this *theophany* of the Creator, one must appreciate the uniqueness of each and every creature, microscopically, but also appreciate how these diverse creatures relate to one another, macroscopically. Through the beryl stone, each creature is regarded as a "locus of relationality."<sup>770</sup> One discovers the architect's intention by gazing at the material *oikos*, first at each of its parts and their construction, and then taking note of its purpose and necessity as it relates to its environment. Likewise, one discovers the Creator's intention through an ecological gaze, taking note of the unique *quiddity* of each *imago Dei* through the microscopic lens of the beryl stone, but also the relation of each creature to its environment through the macroscopic beryl.

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<sup>769</sup> DB, Hopkins, 792-793.

<sup>770</sup> Thanks to Jon Paul Sydnor for this turn of phrase.

Gazing by means of this double-beryl vision, the theophany of this ecological *imago Dei* reveals the Creator's intentional *harmony*, "a concordance of differences."<sup>771</sup> He explains:

For example, harmonic forms are varied. For the generic harmony is variously specified through various differences. And the union by which a difference (e.g., treble with base) is united... has within itself a proportionate harmony... For, indeed, a likeness of Eternal Reason, or of the divine Creator-Intellect, shines forth in harmonic or concordant proportion. And we experience this fact, since that proportion is delightful and pleasing to each of the senses whenever it is perceived.<sup>772</sup>

Beauty and harmony, he explains, are not to be found in monotony or unison, but in the harmonious proportion of difference. "A harmonious song contains many differences of voice."<sup>773</sup> Through one side of the beryl, one perceives the unique *quiddity* of that which is irreducibly particular, and unprecedented *imago Dei*. Reversing the beryl, one perceives a map of relationships, an ecology of differences. When these opposites coincide intellectually, according to Cusa, one perceives harmony, and thus the Creator's intention for each particular becomes manifest. Here again, we observe that Cusa refuses to separate physical sight of material bodies from intellectual/spiritual vision. The "intellectual beryl stone" mends, as it were, what rationality severs. It awakens our vision so that we might *attend* to what nature *intends*. Thus awakened, the *imago Dei* sheds its anthropocentrism. Through this double-beryl vision, one recognizes the passerby as a uniquely created image of the Creator, but also the flowers, trees, and rivers along the path. Standing on the circle of life, recognizing the Architect's *Dynamis* and *Theos* manifestly revealed in harmonious diversity from a limited perspective, one maps the *oikos*.

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<sup>771</sup> DCC I.8.

<sup>772</sup> DB 62, Hopkins 821-2.

<sup>773</sup> DB 64, Hopkins 823.

## Spiritual *Theosis*: Creative Harmony

In the first of these three sections on Cusa's Trinitarian *imago Dei*, I argued that the *theophany* of Christ in DVD teaches us how to receive the divine gift of our unique *quiddity* more truly and fully such that we learn to see one another as unprecedented images of God (p293ff). Learning to see in this way, the *theophany* of the Creator in DB reveals to us that every creature (whether animate or inanimate) is likewise a unique *imago Dei* which, when perceived ecologically, reveals the Creator's harmonious, creative intention (p300ff). Unlike these, the pneumatological *imago Dei* is not a *theophany*, but a *theosis*. It is something futural which must be brought into being, like the *dharma* of Mīmāṃsā.<sup>774</sup> It is an *imago Dei* that we, as "second gods" must create, in the Spirit of the Creator.

I began this chapter by sketching the historical context in which Cusa composed DVD and DB. With the fall of Constantinople, the world had ended. New maps needed to be created. As he penned DB, barricaded within Castle Andraz, his lifelong friend Pope Pius II organized troops for a new Crusade, hoping to reclaim the old world hegemony, while Duke Sigismund and other German nationalists sought to assassinate Cusa, hoping for a new world division. In September of 1453, however, Cusa envisioned a new creation.

The end of the world, in other words, occasioned a new cosmography. Learning to see others and Nature through Jesus's fleshly eyes and double-beryl vision, Cusa imagined creating a world in the harmonious Spirit of the Creator. Being a "second god" bears divine responsibility. Creativity is a spiritual vocation.

*De pace fidei*, as the title makes clear, envisions the peace of religious faiths. Because there can only be one Creator of all, Cusa reasons, there can only be one religion. Because all

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<sup>774</sup> PMSBh I.1.4-5.



creatures are diverse, however, there must be a diversity of rites.<sup>775</sup> What Cusa means by the word “religion” is clearly not what Wilfred Cantwell Smith refers to as “cumulative traditions,” but neither is it what Smith calls “personal faith,” either.<sup>776</sup> Talal Asad points out, “that [Smith’s] text makes no mention of adverbs.”<sup>777</sup> As I have noted, Cusa’s ontology is adverbial. Cusa does not reify religion as a Platonic Idea in which religious traditions “participate,” nor does he reduce religion to a variety of subjective experiences, as William James perhaps does.<sup>778</sup> Rather, religion is an ontological mode: be-ing in the key of religion. To exist religiously is to exist enfoldedly: being oneself, not another, as one was created to be, harmoniously, ecologically.

As already mentioned (p254), DPF mirrors and echoes, in countless ways, Cusa’s first major treatise, *On Universal Concord*, composed two decades prior. Therein, he argues that ecclesiastical councils, such as the Council of Basel (for which DCC was written), are more authoritative than the Pope because they receive their authority from the presence of the Holy Spirit. The issue of authority, then, is one of spiritual discernment. In other words, how does one discern whether or not the members of an ecclesiastical council are *listening* to the Holy Spirit?

In *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, Amos Yong argues that Christians must have some “criteria by which we can discern... the presence and activity” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>779</sup> The Spirit blows where She wills, works in mysterious ways, and is perceived to be absent (or at least hidden/ignored) at times. By what criteria can one discern the Spirit’s presence and movement?

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<sup>775</sup> DPF I.6: *non est nisi religio una in rituum varietate*.

<sup>776</sup> Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. 1991. *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

<sup>777</sup> Asad, Talal. “Reading a Modern Classic: W. C. Smith’s *The Meaning and End of Religion*,” *History of Religions* 40, 3 (2001): 205-222. 207.

<sup>778</sup> James, William, and Martin E. Marty. 1985. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. New York: Penguin Books.

<sup>779</sup> Yong, Amos. *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

Cusa's criterion is harmony. In the *theophany* of Christ, one observes harmony. In the *theophany* of Creation, one observes harmony. Beauty and melody are pleasing due to harmonious proportion. While the persons and activities of the Divine Trinity are diverse, there is harmony in their perichoretic dance. The authority of an ecclesiastical council, Cusa reasons, is not discerned by a unison of voices, but by diverse voices in harmony. Hence, it is incorrect to say, as historians are prone, that Cusa left or abandoned the Council of Basel. Observing the complete absence of harmony in Basel in 1437, he left because it was no longer a council. Likewise, "religion" in DPF is not a sociological, historical, or even personal category in which traditions or persons "participate." Rather, persons *are religiously* when they *are harmoniously*.

While the words "harmony" and "concord" are virtuously synonymous, it is far from insignificant that Cusa prefers the latter, often pairing the two. As cited above, for example, he observes that "the divine Creator-Intellect, shines forth in harmonic or concordant proportion."<sup>780</sup> Etymologically, concordance implies affection, and agreement *with heart*. In the final chapter of DCC, Cusa describes the interrelated functions of civil and sacred order (church and empire) through an analogy to the human body. While both Pope and Emperor receive their authority from God, they cannot function without the willful consent of the people. Just as the body cannot live without the heart, pumping life through one's veins, neither can Pope and Emperor govern without *concordantia*, the heartfelt agreement and harmonious consent of the people. Political governance itself constitutes a coincidence of opposites: Hierarchical authority from above coincides with democratic concord from below. As Paul Sigmund describes, "the concordant mean position (*medium concordantiae*) is that 'rulership is from God through

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<sup>780</sup> DB 62, Hopkins 821-2.

[persons] and councils, by elective consent.”<sup>781</sup> In the context of Cusa’s conciliarism, though, it is critical to note that whatever political “check-and-balance” may be implied in his concordant mean, it is thoroughly Trinitarian. Elective consent and heartfelt agreement are pneumatological criteria. They signify the presence and movement of the Holy Spirit. Since that Spirit cannot be in discord with the other persons of the Trinity, then the absence of elective agreement with hierarchical authority signals that those “at the top,” so-to-speak, are not attending to the divine light, whence their temporal authority derives.

To create the world in the Spirit of the Creator, then, necessarily requires the heartfelt agreement (*con-cord*) of diverse persons in the world. As “second gods,” humans are gifted with the power and freedom to create whatever world we desire to create, be it divine or demonic. We are free to create in the Spirit of God, and free to create in a manner contrary to that Spirit. The criteria by which to discern the spirit of our creativity, insists Cusa, is concordance. The great diversity of persons, cultures, ideas, and even religious faith-traditions poses neither problem nor obstacle to harmony: It is the necessary prerequisite for it. “All being and living is constituted by *concordance*, and all concordance is a concordance of differences.”<sup>782</sup>

Reflecting at length on the “weights” that rest upon the “scales of Justice,” Cusa writes:

Concordant harmonies are... investigated by means of weights. Indeed, the weight of a thing is, properly speaking, *a harmonic proportion that has arisen from various combinations of different things*. Even the friendships and the animosities of animals and of persons... as well as their customs... are weighed by harmonic concordances and opposing dissonances.<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>781</sup> Sigmund, Paul E. 1963. *Nicholas of Cusa and Medieval Political Thought*. Harvard Political Studies. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 144, citing DCC II.34.

<sup>782</sup> DCC I.8, Weiler (2004), 77-90, (p79 above).

<sup>783</sup> IDSE, 193, Hopkins 623. Emphasis added.

The world having ended in May 1453, Cusa recognized the need to (re)create the world in the Spirit of God. Social justice is not measured by a transcendental ideal in which we participate to varying degrees in a Platonic shadow-world. Rather, the scales of social justice are weighed from below: through the heartfelt harmonizing of irreducibly particular creatures.

Hence, we regard this futural *imago Dei*, an adventive image of God that is *to-come* in and through our creativity, with a double-beryl vision. Seeing each and every creature as Jesus saw, with fleshly eyes that attended to every passerby, we recognize the value of each unique voice. Reversing the beryl, we hasten to see a harmonious proportion, waiting *in potentia* to be actualized. In his final text, when Cusa retreats from his understanding of God as *Possest*, “Actualized-Possibility,” in favor of *Posse Ipsum*, “Possibility Itself,” it was because he realized that the God Who May Be (as Richard Kearney paraphrases *Posse Ipsum*) has not yet been actualized.<sup>784</sup> Like Derrida’s *messianic*, the divine *Possest* remains always *to-come*, an adventive *imago Dei* that requires both our individual (*quidditive*) and ecological *theosis*. Though created in the image of the Creator, we are yet in-process. If we are to “perfect” ourselves (one and many), we must *attend* to one another, seeking the heartfelt concord the Spirit *intends*.

## Conclusions

We do not know the world-as-it-is, insists Cusa. What we call knowledge is mere conjecture. However, as Cusa’s first premise states—paraphrasing Romans 1:20—the Divine Intellect exists unfoldedly as creation for the purpose of manifesting Itself. Hence, God shows Godself such that God can be seen, if only we learn to attend. As the measure of all things, the human mind knows the world-as-it-is-measured. Learning this ignorance, we discover our creativity. Though we only know measures we create, we bear a likeness to the Divine Intellect

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<sup>784</sup> Kearney, Richard. *The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion*. Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.

in that very creativity. Just as we know sensual things sensually, rational things rationally, and intellectual things intellectually, we learn of the Creator creatively.

As “second gods” we create measures by which to know ourselves, our world, and our Creator, while remaining infinitely far from the truth, as a polygon remains infinitely far from a circle. Though we do not know the world-as-it-is, we nevertheless map the world that we measure, thereby revealing to us the value we attribute to things. Our maps reveal less to us about the world than about our perspectives thereupon—and thereby reveal to us the possibilities of alternative perspectives. Standing on the circle of life, we share our limited perspectives, transcending those limitations by multiplying them, listening to our neighbors, having faith in their witness.

As unique images of God, we do not desire to be others, but strive to perfect our unique *quiddity* by becoming ourselves more fully. We do so by learning to see as Jesus saw, since he was *more anointed* than we. But to us is given the power to become children of God,<sup>785</sup> if only we remove intellectual distractions, awakening and opening vision’s pathway to the graceful divine light that anoints, descending so that we might attend to the passerby. Gazing attentively to the Creator’s intention, we wonder at nature’s diversity, the manifold unfolding in an infinite image. With double-beryl vision, we see all-in-all and each-in-each, a divine revelation of harmonic proportion. Learning to see these *theophanies* of Christ and Creator, we seek to create in the Spirit of God. Actualizing possibility, we awaken to diverse voices, hearing one another into speech, attending to diverse intentions, and thus seek heartfelt concord. Seeing, listening, recognizing, and attending, we describe chords on the circle of life, mapping concordance in a web of relationships. Through an eco-spiritual creativity that begins, always, with sensuality—

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<sup>785</sup> On Cusa’s reading of John 1:12, see *De filiatione Dei* and p286, above.

seeing bodies and hearing voices, with heart (*con-cord*)—we actualize the possibility of a Trinitarian *imago Dei*.

## Part Three: Comparative Theology as Learning to See

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Śaṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa are rich and profound theological thinkers. In order to write about them, coordinately, difficult decisions arise if they are to be heard, harmoniously. Though I have often turned from one to the other just as the work begins to bear fruit, I never turn my back on either. Hearing one, the other's voice beckons. While sometimes dizzying and disorienting, this perichoretic dance between contexts spins webs of interrelations. By describing polygonal chords from Śaṅkara's perspective to Cusa's and back again, these turns map a journey: a quest of faith seeking understanding and understanding seeking freedom. And yet every fork in this journey has left a path untread. While this is true of any comparative endeavor, it is nevertheless necessary to demonstrate that what is gained through comparison is worth foregoing what is left unwritten, unspoken, and unheard. That is not to suggest that academic theology is a zero-sum game, quantifiable in utilitarian measures, but simply to acknowledge that research methods deserve scrutiny and justification.

Comparison yields far more than description. Mere tallying similarities and differences is of limited value, especially when the scope is limited to just two individuals without any discernable historical connection, exceptional though they may be. Comparison enables us to *perceive* something in each thinker that we might not otherwise have been able to perceive. It enriches our reading of each theologian in historical context, while also contributing meaningfully to contemporary concerns of our own. This comparison of Śaṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa, therefore, intends to touch (*tangere*) theologians whose interest and exposure to one or the other thinker may only be tangential.

Moreover, theology cannot—if it is theology—remain altogether descriptive, but must at least signal towards practical theology and ethics. This is all the more true with respect to

apophatic theology, since its purpose must be more than simply underscoring our ignorance regarding the topic about which we speak (and unspeak). It should direct us towards some new understanding of ourselves, our world, and our theo-ethical purpose therein. Śāṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa, after all, did not toil over their texts motivated by the thought that they might one day become dissertation fodder. Reading their texts, it becomes readily apparent that they believed their insights meaningfully contribute to their worlds, prompting some changed orientation and comportment in their readers. Any worthwhile retrieval of their texts, therefore, must also retrieve some measure of their theo-ethical prompting, translated (temporally as well as linguistically) for the contemporary context.<sup>786</sup>

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<sup>786</sup> This criterion extends beyond the discipline of theology, as well.



## Six: Theosis and Perception in Śaṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa

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### Introduction

Toward the end articulated above (p313), this final chapter aims to articulate the contemporary theological value of this comparative experiment. I begin by identifying two areas to which this comparison most directly contributes. The first, far briefer than the second, is more theoretical, pertaining to mysticism as a performative method. In other words: What does this particular comparative endeavor tell us about apophatic theology in general? Juxtaposing Śaṅkara and Cusa, one sees that their respective justifications for negation appear to be markedly different, even opposed. Each is motivated by epistemic problems which, frankly, do not exist for the other. The comparison invites us (re)consider the nature of apophatic theology, which performs its own way of knowing.

The second area pertains to our understanding of *theosis* and, consequently, theo-ethical responsibility. If *theosis* is understood as *deification* or *sanctification*, as is often the case, the notion appears somewhat alien to Śaṅkara's Vedānta. One does not *become* Ātman-Brahman because one always already *is* Ātman-Brahman. Reading Cusa after Śaṅkara, learning to hear the two harmoniously, it becomes clear that Cusa understands *theosis* much as Śaṅkara understands awakening to the truth of Brahman. Coordinating their theologies, reading one in light of the other without reducing difference to unison, one attends more alertly to the relationship between *theosis* and sensuality. Realizing one's innate divinity ("I am Brahman"; "I am an unprecedented *imago Dei*"), one begins to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch otherwise and other-wisely. In this emergent sensuality, diversity and difference find an absolute—and concordant—worth. Irreducible particularity bears divine value as the unique revelation of ultimate reality, accessible only through embodied, relational encounter and awakened perception. While, as I have argued,

these insights are present and available in the writings of Śāṅkara and Cusa in isolation, the comparison prompts us to consider the ubiquity of the human desire to be seen—just as one is—and the theo-ethical responsibility to perceive our neighbors and ecologies as they uniquely reveal themselves to be.

I demonstrate these points through close readings of two episodes. The first is the embodied encounter between spiritual guide and disciple (*guru* and *śiṣya*) culminating in the direct, personal revelation: *tat tvam asi, Thou art that*. The second is the sensual encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, wherein he sees her just as she is: an unprecedented *imago Dei*. Adapting and applying the methods of *upasamhāra* and *samanvaya* (p75), I coordinate these readings without obviating their particularity, hearing them harmoniously. Each, in its own way, models the apophatic measure as attentive sensuality. Seeing an/other through the apophatic measure, the *guru* and the *rabbi* awaken the *śiṣya* and the Samaritan by perceiving them as a singularity: a unique manifestation of the One that unfolds in and as the manifold. Attentive sensuality—seeing another into being, hearing another into speech—performs an awakening to one's inherent divinity. Being seen initiates *theosis*.

Finally, I conclude by reflecting on comparative theology as a method by which one learns to see. Building upon the previous sections, I argue that Christian apophatic theology can claim neither to be systematic nor learnedly ignorant lest it venture beyond its historically defined religious boundaries. Comparative theology transgresses the historical boundaries between traditions of theo←logy. In so doing, it dis/closes previously unseen (pre)suppositions inherent to social, cultural, and traditional structures of knowledge. Before we can unsay, unknow, or deconstruct our (pre)suppositions, we must first identify them. While comparative theology is but one method among many others for identifying and naming our theological

(pre)suppositions, it is, nevertheless, an important if not indispensable task. As Catherine Keller has shown, the assumptions and presuppositions of Christian theology are poignantly revealed when one pauses to consider what Christian theologians deem worthy and unworthy of being unsaid. Guided by Dionysius the Areopagite, Emmanuel Levinas, Elizabeth Johnson, Mary Daly, and others, we have grown comfortable unsaying God's goodness, being, and gender. Even the most faithful Christian mystics, however, shift uncomfortably in their chairs when God's Christianity is proffered for apophatic consideration.<sup>787</sup> Nevertheless, if God creates freely and intentionally, and if unique particulars reveal God uniquely, then our perception of the divine remains obscured, superimposed by measuring (*māyā*), unless our apophasis roams beyond tribal borders, faithfully seeking understanding beyond traditional territories, aided by comparative theology as learning to see.

### **Apophatic Measure as Theory and *Theoro***

In chapter I.26 of *De docta ignorantia*, Cusa offers a straightforward and simple articulation of apophatic theology and its necessity. As Keller notes, "it may offer the most lucid definition of negative theology within the Christian corpus."<sup>788</sup> Agreeing with Keller, I simply wish to emphasize the conditional nature of this "lucid definition... *within the Christian corpus*." In other words: what limitations might this definition of negative theology have if we attempt to apply it to the body of texts *beyond* the Christian corpus? Cusa writes:

The worshipping of God, who is to be worshiped in spirit and in truth, must be based upon affirmations about God. Accordingly, every religion, in its worshipping, must mount upward by means of affirmative theology...

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<sup>787</sup> Mary Daly's provocative and controversial syllogism might provocatively and controversially inspire another. As she asserts, disdainfully, in *Beyond God the Father*: "If God is male then the male is God." Perhaps an apophatic comparative theology, intent on social justice and theo→logical revelation alike, might at least whisper, in a footnote: If God is Christian then the Christian is God.

<sup>788</sup> Keller (2010), 31.

[However] the theology of negation is so necessary for the theology of affirmation that without it God would not be worshiped as the Infinite God but, rather, as a creature. And such worship is idolatry; it ascribes to the image that which befits only the reality itself.<sup>789</sup>

To worship God, one must affirm something about God. From Cusa's Christian perspective, however, these affirmations are merely humanly created measures which necessarily fall infinitely shy of the Infinite God, and hence must be unsaid. As I have shown, the measures do not measure God, *from Cusa's perspective*, but only measure our limited understanding of God, since the human person is the measure of all things. Like chords inscribed in a circle, they approach, but never resolve to truth.

This definition of negative theology, however, cannot apply to Śaṅkara. In Śaṅkara's theological tradition of (Uttara-) Mīmāṃsā, (Sanskrit) language is not a human creation. There is an eternal, unauthored connection between words, universal ideas, and particular entities (p97). Words are limited, finite<sup>790</sup> measures of the infinite and therefore must be unsaid—but they are, nevertheless, true and reliable measures of the infinite.<sup>791</sup> Though finite in semantic scope, words are temporally infinite: eternally signifying each and every particular and simultaneously signifying universals, according to the speaker's intention (p110). Like finite points on an infinite circle, words measure that which is possessed of infinite measure (p165).<sup>792</sup>

For both Cusa and Śaṅkara alike, then, negative theology is necessary if one desires to know Ultimate Reality. For Śaṅkara, though, worshipping the finite is not idolatry,<sup>793</sup> because

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<sup>789</sup> DDI I.26.86, Hopkins 44-45.

<sup>790</sup> Though eternal and unauthored, words are semantically finite and hence "finite measures." See p105.

<sup>791</sup> If this were not the case, says Śaṅkara, then we would be left without a means by which to know Brahman. MUBh 7, MKBh 2.32, BUBh II.1.20, et. al. See p336.

<sup>792</sup> MUBh 12, MKBh 1.29.

<sup>793</sup> On Śaṅkara's affirmative perspective on superimposition (*adhyāsa*) in meditation, see Clooney (1993), 169.

the finite is not other than the infinite. The finite is a modification of the infinite. Words are modifications of AUM, just as a pot is a modification of clay (p111).<sup>794</sup> Notwithstanding fundamentally different understandings of language, Cusa's position, in the end, comes quite near to this. Each and every creature, in its unique *quiddity*, reveals the intention of the Creator (p256). An infinite number of finite bodies manifest images of the Divine Intellect, which unfolds so that it might be seen. Consistencies (and inconsistencies) between Śāṅkara's view of particularity and Cusa's view of the same invite us to hear their voices harmoniously, without reducing concordance to unison.<sup>795</sup> Finite particulars both *are* and *are not* the infinite. Apophasis unsays *measuring* in order that that-which-is-measured may be seen, without superimposing expectation or universal categories.

Therefore, both Śāṅkara and Cusa assert the need for apophasis to remove epistemic measures of reality, though their understandings of *measuring* are markedly different. Moreover, their understandings of ordinary, everyday perception are importantly distinct. For Śāṅkara, *pratyakṣa* is a valid means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Perception is never wrong (p105). Verbal cognition of the *buddhi* measures truth, *truly* (p165, p181). For Cusa, we cannot know the world we see (p196). We see it, *truly* and *pre/cisely*, but "knowledge" arises after the epistemic "cut," and thus remains ever conjectural (p269). "The measure and the measured—however equal they are—will always remain different" (p196). Nevertheless, the *effect* of apophasis is similar for both: apophasis enables us to unknow so that we might see (p181, p278). For each, apophasis removes distractions, leading to a wakeful attentiveness (p100, p234). Learning to perceive through the apophatic measure, sensuality ceases to be a means to an end, an act of consumption.

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<sup>794</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>795</sup> Christian doctrine, for example, may prompt us to distinguish between *adoration* and *veneration* with respect to icons and other images of God.

It becomes an end unto itself: perceiving this and that as the visible manifestation of “All *This*” (p165), attending to the Creator’s intentional bodies (p300).

This comparison compels us to reconsider the fundamental motivation behind *apophasis*. Without denying that apophasis negates or “unsays” as a means to unknowing, the comparison leads us to reconsider the end towards which apophasis is a means. Simply stated, my central argument throughout the foregoing chapters is as follows: Apophasis is a means to see the uniqueness of irreducible particulars as unprecedented disclosures of Ultimate Reality. Implicitly enfolded in this statement is the trifold meaning of “apophatic measure” as introduced in the opening pages of this thesis (p3): It is (1) a method of removing measures in order to cultivate an (2) attentive sensuality by which one can perceive (3) particulars as unique, unspeakable measures of transcendence. Apophasis yields unknowing, enabling us to see Reality in its sacred Ultimacy.

Through the apophatic measure, one hastens to see *Theos*, the Beholder Who hastens to see. Negating measures of expectancy, one finds oneself to be radically hospitable, and, thus, finds oneself to be seen as unique, *intentional imago Dei*. Being seen, one attends to the passerby, who intends to be seen as the Creator’s actualized possibility. Through the apophatic measure, one prepares oneself for a graceful revelation: *tat tvam asi*. Negating entirely the very category of *anātman* (non-Self), one sees that one’s very Self is always already Brahman (*aham brahmāsmi*); one “becomes” Brahman (*theosis*), as it were, and is thus able to utter: *tat tvam asi*.

### **Becoming Oneself**

*Theosis*, as it is commonly conceived, is synonymous with deification, sanctification, or “Becoming God.” From a Christian Neoplatonist perspective, the many proceeds, exits, or even

“boils over” from the One. *Theosis*, then, is a turning back towards the One: A return to the Creator.

For Cusa, however, *theosis* is synonymous with filiation, Christiformitas, or realizing one’s divine nature. He writes: “Therefore, this is the pathway of pursuit of those who strive toward *theosis*: To perceive the One in the diversity of any modes whatsoever... in this school of the sensible world, the One, *which is all things*, is sought diversely.”<sup>796</sup> From Cusa’s perspective, the many does not “proceed” (*proodos*) from the One; rather, the Simple (*Ein-feld*) exists unfoldedly as the manifold (p215). As a manifest unfolding of God, each creature is an image of God, *imago Dei*. Since God is without limitation, and so cannot be marked off from anything else,<sup>797</sup> then God is not-Other (*non-aliud*).<sup>798</sup> For Cusa, therefore, *theosis* is not a “return” to God, but is a realization that “I exist *enfoldingly* in God and God exists *unfoldedly* as me.”<sup>799</sup>

While no Sanskrit term directly correlates with the Greek notion of *theosis*, the term aptly applies to *Brahmanjñāna anubhava*, or the realization of the knowledge of ultimate reality. According to the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad, the manifold exists as the One which is *avyakṛtam*: unmanifest or undifferentiated. This One is differentiated into diverse names and forms which are not-other (*na anyat*) than their material cause.<sup>800</sup> With respect to Śaṅkara, I use the word *theosis* to signify the realization that “I am Brahman,” *aham brahmāsmi*.

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<sup>796</sup> *De filiatione Dei*, 84-85.

<sup>797</sup> Keller (2014), 117: “nothing can be outside of what is infinite. It has no boundaries to be outside of.” See p214.

<sup>798</sup> *De Li Non Aliud* (1462).

<sup>799</sup> And likewise, of course, all creatures exist enfoldingly in God and God exists unfoldedly as all creatures. While there is much more to be said on this topic, Catherine Keller has said it far better than could I dream. See especially Keller (2014).

<sup>800</sup> CUBh VI.1.4, Panoli, 556.

Therefore, for Śāṅkara and Cusa alike, *theosis* should not imply “becoming” or “returning” to God. Rather, *theosis* is a *realization* of one’s inherent divinity. It is a realization that the manifold is not-other than the One-fold (*sim-pli-city*).<sup>801</sup> For each, our everyday manner of perceiving the world is the primary impediment to properly understanding our divine nature. Awakened to our nature, our perception of the world changes; we perceive the world—and one another—in a divine manner. In the following two examples, I examine the role of perception in the process of *theosis*, and the corresponding difference in everyday perception in contrast to perception after realization of one’s divine nature. Summarizing key points and themes from Parts One and Two, I draw together and build upon all I have written to this point.

Awakened to Perceive

*Scriptural apophasis*

According to Śāṅkara and his interpretation of scripture, Supreme Reality is non-dual.<sup>802</sup> Every-thing that exists is Brahman, which is identical with the Self (p165).<sup>803</sup> As shown earlier, Supreme Self is *able to be perceived* by those who have heard the meaning of *śruti* (p171). Although Brahman is before one’s very eyes and perceptible, it is expressed indirectly prior to being pointed out perceptibly and particularly by means of a teacher’s gesture to the non-dual Self dwelling in the heart of the student.<sup>804</sup> In other words, scripture leads one to the brink of

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<sup>801</sup> Keller (2014), 181. Etymologically, the word *simple* implies a one-fold (*Ein-felt* in German) or a “together-fold.” One without a second.

<sup>802</sup> MK and MKBh 3.18: अद्वैतं परमार्थो हि ।

<sup>803</sup> MU and MUBh 1-2.

<sup>804</sup> MKBh 2.36, BU 3.4, Upad I.18.26, et. al.; MUBh 2 and Ānandagiri’s *Tikka* thereupon.



grasping one's inherent divinity, but final realization of one's divinity arises only in the embodied encounter of teacher and student.<sup>805</sup>

According to the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, there are three modes of ordinary consciousness, plus a fourth state of realization. Although the MU distinguishes these modes as waking, dream, and deep sleep, Śaṅkara and his predecessors insist that all three states analogously describe someone who is awake (p155).<sup>806</sup> They indicate degrees of mental alertness or attentiveness (p132). For example, one can see a rope with one's eyes and cognize it as a rope (analogous to waking); one can see a rope but mistakenly cognize it as a snake (analogous to dream); or one can see a rope but have no cognition of it at all, as if in a daze or consumed with other thoughts (analogous to deep sleep). Śaṅkara likens these to darkness characterized by not being fully awakened to the truth (p146).<sup>807</sup> In the fourth state, then, one is fully awakened, perceiving a rope *qua* rope, but also understanding "rope" to be a partial *measuring* of Brahman possessed of infinite measure (p165). Hence, one perceives and discerns particulars in *turīya*, but understands that which is measured to be ontologically non-different from the measurer, and thus knows (or "enters") the Self by means of the Self (p163).<sup>808</sup> Prior to this awakening, one *sees* the non-dual Self which is all that was, is, or will be, but one fails to *perceive* because epistemic *measuring* (*māyā*) impedes the pathway of true perception (p106).<sup>809</sup>

Śaṅkara's theology, I have argued, is best understood within the context of his theological tradition, which considers perception and scripture to be unfailing means to valid

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<sup>805</sup> UMSBh III.2.21.

<sup>806</sup> MK and MKBh 1.1-2. See also PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>807</sup> MKBh 1.14, et. al.

<sup>808</sup> MUBh 12.

<sup>809</sup> MUBh 5, MU 1, BU 4.3.23, et. al.

knowledge with distinct authoritative domains and purposes (p56). As his predecessor, Śābara, stated 500 years or so earlier, “sense-perception is never wrong” (p104). If perception is never wrong, then how can it be that one sometimes sees a shell but mistakes it for silver, or sees a rope but mistakes it for a snake? Śābara asserts that error such as this is not the result of perception, but is instead a marker of its absence. To explain, he turns to the analogies of waking, dream, and dreamless sleep (p132). For perception to occur, there must be a connection between the sense organs, the perceptible object, and an alert mind.<sup>810</sup> When one is sleepy, one’s mind is impotent. Erroneously cognizing a shell as silver is not due to any defect in perception, explains Śābara. Rather, sleep is the cause of false appearance (p104).<sup>811</sup>

Therefore, perception depends not only on the connection between sense organs, object, and mind, but also on the *quality* of that connection. Although one’s body may be awake, perception only occurs when the mind is fully awake. If one’s mind is preoccupied or in a daze, then there is no cognition of the perceptible object; perception does not occur. When the mind is inattentive, false knowledge arises, but this does not constitute perception, according to Śābara. Perception only occurs when there is a connection between object, sense organ, and the alert mind (p131). This perception never goes astray and is not subject to doubt or error (p105).<sup>812</sup> The wakefulness of the mind, however, is subject to doubt, since error arises when the mind is inattentive (p104).

Likewise, Śāṅkara explains that although one’s sense organs may be capable of perceiving, perception only occurs when the internal organ of perception, called the mind, is

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<sup>810</sup> PMSBh I.1.5: इन्द्रियमनोर्थसंनिकर्षो हि ज्ञानस्य हेतुः असति तस्मिन्ज्ञानात् ।

<sup>811</sup> PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>812</sup> PMSBh I.1.5, Jha 15.

joined to those sense organs.<sup>813</sup> Here, Śaṅkara is commenting on the following passage from the Brhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad:

“I didn’t see it; my mind was elsewhere. I didn’t hear it; my mind was elsewhere.” For it is through the mind that one sees and hears.<sup>814</sup>

The *prājñā*, then, is analogous to deep sleep due to an absence of the connection between attentive mind and sense organs. This is significant for Śaṅkara for the following reason: When there is the absence of cognition, there is also the absence of duality (p145). The cessation of duality, however, is not the same as being awakened to the truth of nonduality.<sup>815</sup> Apophasis alone, in other words, does not lead to *theosis*. At issue, for Śaṅkara, is the distinction between perception in the waking state and perception in the enlightened state (p179).

As we have seen, perception in the waking state is not subject to doubt. It is not unfaithful (*na vyabhicarati*). When one sees a rope with one’s eyes and cognizes it as a rope due to a connection between the rope, the eye, and an alert mind, this perception is never sublated, unlike a snake superimposed on the rope.<sup>816</sup> Although this perception of the rope *qua* rope is true, there is yet a higher truth. To explain, Śaṅkara draws upon an episode from Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.1.4.

Uddālaka explains to his son, Śvetaketu, that although one sees a clay pot, one comes to know all things made of clay when one understands clay to be the material cause of the pot (p111).<sup>817</sup> Importantly, realization of the material cause does not sublimate the perception of the

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<sup>813</sup> BUBh I.5.3.

<sup>814</sup> BU I.5.3. Olivelle (1998), 53.

<sup>815</sup> MKBh 1.12-14, 16.

<sup>816</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>817</sup> CUBh VI.1.4. Panoli 556.

particular form. To the contrary, the particular form manifests the material cause. Manifestation (*abhivyaktiḥ*), Śaṅkara explains, means coming before one's very eyes (*sākṣāt*).<sup>818</sup> The clay must exist in some particular form if it is to be perceived. That perceptible form (i.e., the pot) is a material effect which is non-different from its material cause (i.e., the clay).<sup>819</sup> Likewise, although Brahman as supreme cause is beyond our grasp, its effect is perceived in the form of the visible world.<sup>820</sup> By perceiving the effect *qua* effect, one comes to know the cause in its absence. For example, by perceiving the absence of milk in curd, one knows the curd to be an effect which is ontologically nondifferent than its cause (milk) (p172).<sup>821</sup> Although one perceives the pot, one is awakened to a higher truth, which is the clay. The *turīya*, then, is a higher state of wakefulness wherein one perceives a particular entity as it is, but also as a real effect of an unseen cause.<sup>822</sup>

In the same way that an external light must be present for the eye to see a jar, an internal light must be present for the mind to perceive what the eye sees. Just as the external light may be too dim to see clearly, one's internal light may also be too dim to perceive clearly.<sup>823</sup> Śaṅkara describes this apophatically: Scripture removes the darkness, so that one's internal light (the self-luminous *ātman*) is able to perceive the Brahman that is before one's very eyes and perceptible (p146).<sup>824</sup> While scripture is utterly indispensable, final realization arises in a moment of direct

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<sup>818</sup> BUBh I.2.1, Panoli 29.

<sup>819</sup> MKBh IV.22. Cf. CUBh VI.1.4: *na tu evam anyat kāraṇāt kāryam*.

<sup>820</sup> MKBh III.27.

<sup>821</sup> Kumāriḥ, *Ślokaṅgārttika* I.1.5.9, Jha 243-4.

<sup>822</sup> MKBh III.27.

<sup>823</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>824</sup> MKBh 2.32; MKBh 1.12; MKBh 2.36, BU 3.4, Upad I.18.26, et. al.

perception. Scripture intends to indicate what cannot be described (p175).<sup>825</sup> A teacher can point something out to a student, turning one's face towards what is to be seen, but knowledge only arises when the student perceives it directly, since perception is the only valid means of knowledge suitable to that purpose (p107).<sup>826</sup>

### *Perception and theosis*

The foregoing summarizes key points established in Part One, thereby forming a basis for the central point I want to make here, grounded in Śaṅkara's comments on MU 2. According to Śaṅkara, scripture describes Brahman indirectly (*parokṣa abhihitam*) by removing obstacles to direct perception. Scripture's *apophasis* prepares one for direct perception (p149). Subsequently, Śaṅkara explains, the Brahman that is immediate and direct is pointed out perceptibly and particularly (*pratyakṣato viśeṣeṇa nirdiśati*) by means of a teacher's gesture (*abhinayaḥ*) to the non-dual Self dwelling in the heart of the student.<sup>827</sup> As a knower of Brahman, who is well versed in Vedānta scriptures, the highest Self is able to be seen by this *sannyasin* (p171).<sup>828</sup> As Śaṅkara depicts in MUBh 2, the teacher literally points at the student and gives voice to the scripture, uttering: *ayam ātmā brahma*, "This Self is Brahman."<sup>829</sup> At this moment, the student is *seen* to be Brahman.

Just as a pot is perceived to be a manifestation and effect of its unseen material cause (i.e., clay), the student is perceived to be a manifestation and effect of Brahman. The student is

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<sup>825</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>826</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 714-5.

<sup>827</sup> MUBh 2 and Ānandagiri's *Tikka* thereupon.

<sup>828</sup> MKBh 2.35.

<sup>829</sup> MUBh 2.

awakened by this supremely compassionate teacher when the student is seen to be Brahman.<sup>830</sup> Only at this moment of *hearing* the scripture, uttered by the teacher, and *being seen* by the teacher as Brahman does the student then understand—and *believe*—*sa aham*, “I am that,” *aham brahmāsmi*, “I am Brahman.”<sup>831</sup> Hence, the student realizes his/her innate divinity when he/she is directly perceived as divine by the teacher.

Before one can truly confess, “I am Brahman,” one must first hear, *tat tvam asi*, “Thou art that [Brahman].” Before one can see oneself as Brahman, one is first *seen* as Brahman and hears the teacher’s revealing witness. Hearing “*thou art that*,” in its intimate, embodied indexicality, the student is awakened and enters the state of *turīya*, which is devoid of sleep and dream.<sup>832</sup> Having become a knower of Brahman, the highest Self is able to be seen by the awakened student, who can then reciprocate, saying “Thou art that.”<sup>833</sup> Having been “awakened by a supremely compassionate teacher,” one then “perceives the unborn, sleepless, dreamless nonduality.”<sup>834</sup> Therefore, *theosis*, as a process of realizing one’s inherent identity with Brahman, culminates in a moment of being perceived as Brahman. Having been seen as Brahman, the student is awakened to his/her divine nature and thus able to perceive.

Here again, the trifold meanings of “apophatic measure” fold back on themselves. Because the teacher is one who has heard the *śruti* which removes measures (apophatic measure<sub>1</sub>), the teacher perceives, wakefully and attentively without superimposing measures on the measured (apophatic measure<sub>2</sub>), and thus perceives the disciple as a particular manifestation

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<sup>830</sup> MKBh I.16.

<sup>831</sup> MKBh 1.1 and 1.5; BUBh I.4.10.

<sup>832</sup> MKBh I.16.

<sup>833</sup> MKBh 2.35.

<sup>834</sup> MKBh I.16, quoted also in UMSBh II.1.9.

of Brahman possessed of infinite measure (apophatic measure<sub>3</sub>). Because the teacher *sees* in this way, the teacher is able to incarnate the scripture, giving it voice so that it might be heard. As a *śrottriya* who has heard *śruti*'s truth, the teacher embodies the method, which now includes not only *hearing* the *śruti* as an apophatic measure<sub>1</sub>, but also *being seen* as an apophatic measure<sub>3</sub>. In this moment of *theosis*, the student realizes that he/she is the non-dual Seer of sight and thus enters the state of wakefully attentive sensuality beyond words (apophatic measure<sub>2</sub>).

### Perceiving *Imago Dei*

#### *The vision of God*

As mentioned earlier (p256), when Cusa sent *On the Vision of God* to the Benedictine monks at Tegernsee Abbey, the text was accompanied by a painting. The portrait, which Cusa calls the "Icon of God," was chosen because of a most peculiar feature: From whatever vantage one views the painting, the portrait's eye appears to gaze directly at the viewer.<sup>835</sup> He instructs the monks to hang the painting on the North wall of the common room.<sup>836</sup> They should stand in a semi-circle around the painting and walk in opposite directions. The monks will marvel, writes Cusa, "how the icon's gaze is moved immovably," remaining fixed on each brother.<sup>837</sup> The point of this spiritual/liturgical exercise, he explains, is as follows: To have a vision of God (*visione Dei*) is to realize that God's vision (*visione Dei*) is ever fixed on each and every one of us. If we should ever see God, we will see God seeing us. This echoes what we have seen in DQD: Hastening to behold *Theos* by ascending the ladder of vision's pathway, one finds oneself seen by the Beholder, *Theos*, Who hastens to see the seeker of God.

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<sup>835</sup> DVD 2, Hopkins 680.

<sup>836</sup> DVD 3, Hopkins 680.

<sup>837</sup> DVD 4, Hopkins 681.

Addressing the Lord in DVD, Cusa prays:

You embrace me with a steadfast look, and when I turn my love only toward You, Who are Love, You are turned only toward me.<sup>838</sup>

The Lord's gaze attends, *as if* only to "me." And yet the Lord's steadfast gaze simultaneously attends to all beings:

For if You do not desert me, who am the least of all men, then You will never desert anyone. You are present to each and every thing.<sup>839</sup>

In the companion text (*De beryllo*), Cusa reflects on the *imago Dei* doctrine, as previously discussed. Realizing that one is created in the image of God, one realizes that one is divine by nature. Because God is the Creator, then to be created in the image of God means to be creative.<sup>840</sup> Although one is inherently divine (*in actualitas*), this means, for Cusa, that one is also divine *in potentia*. So long as we live, our creation is in-process. Though unfolded as a unique image of God, we are free to become ourselves more truly and completely, thus "perfecting" our unique *quiddity*, or to create ourselves otherwise, desiring to become another. Through creative measures, we create the world-as-we-measure-it. Because we are free and creative, we have the power to be both divinely creative and sinfully creative. Thus, our divine creativity bears with it a divine responsibility.

### *The vision of Jesus*

For Cusa, the exemplar for divine responsibility is, of course, Jesus of Nazareth. In the previous chapter, I examined Cusa's Christology in DVD, wherein he writes:

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<sup>838</sup> DVD 12, Hopkins 685.

<sup>839</sup> DVD 4, Hopkins 684.

<sup>840</sup> DB 7, Hopkins 794.



For while You, Jesus, walked amid this sensible world, You used fleshly eyes that were like ours. For with these eyes, You perceived in no other way than do we.<sup>841</sup>

By observing “the poses of the face and eyes,” Cusa continues, Jesus “comprehended that which lay hidden... since the face is the messenger of the heart.”<sup>842</sup> His discussion of Jesus in DVD (and likewise my analysis) remains somewhat abstract, theoretical, and even speculative. Twice, as we have seen, he turns to the analogy of failing to recognize the passerby. Jesus, it was suggested, never failed to recognize the passerby. But what might this look like? How does this sensual attention play out in the intimacy of actual human encounter?

To consider these questions, I draw upon a sermon Cusa preached during this period.<sup>843</sup> Therein, he reflects upon the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, as recounted in John 4. Using naught but fleshly eyes like ours,<sup>844</sup> Jesus gazed upon the face of the Samaritan woman. He saw her just as she was. Peering into her eyes, Jesus regarded her as a unique, irreducibly particular *imago Dei*, an image of God unlike any before or after her. He recognized her inherent divinity. He did not see a “pious interiority” hidden within and common to all; rather, he *attended* to her *quiddity*, the unique particularity *intended* by her Creator, Who exists *unfoldedly* as all-in-all and each-in-each. By the poses of her face and eyes, Jesus saw that she was wounded: She was afflicted by her station, her biography, her social status and other cosmographical measures creatively valued by the map-makers of her day. Jesus healed her soul

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<sup>841</sup> DVD 95, Hopkins 725.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>843</sup> Sermon 247, *Loquimini ad Petram coram Eis*, March 25, 1457, Brixen. Cusa, Nicholas of. *Cusa’s Last Sermons 1457-1463*. Translated by Jasper Hopkins. Minneapolis: Jasper Hopkins, 2011. <http://jasper-hopkins.info/SermonsCCLX-CCLXXV.pdf>.

<sup>844</sup> DVD 95-99, Hopkins 725-728.

by doing nothing more—and nothing less—than *seeing her*. He did not pass by. He recognized her as a unique image of God, an unprecedented *imago Dei*.

Throughout the sermon, as in DVD, Cusa emphasizes Jesus' humanity. He vividly describes the scene for his Sunday morning congregation. Having carried his weary body through the arid landscape, Jesus was tired and thirsty, so he asked the woman for a drink.<sup>845</sup> Though his flesh was weary and he did need water—from *Jacob's* well—to drink, his faithful *quaerens* sought understanding, as well. As Cusa explains, Jesus “asks in order to motivate [her] to receive” (*ut excitet ad recipiendum*).<sup>846</sup> “Faith enters through hearing... [but] knowledge is face-to-face seeing.”<sup>847</sup> Reversing the intellectual beryl, Cusa reminds his attentive listener of the contextual ecology for this intimate encounter. Under the midday sun, Jesus and the Samaritan woman sit at Jacob's well.<sup>848</sup> Giving voice to Jacob's ghost, Cusa preaches: “I have seen the Lord face to Face and my soul has been saved.”<sup>849</sup>

Though we have *fleshy eyes* like his, we do not always see as Jesus saw.<sup>850</sup> Like a somnolent student at the feet of Śāṅkarācārya, we fail to recognize what is before our very eyes and perceptible (*sākṣāt aparokṣāt*), even though our face may be turned towards what is to be shown. Intellectually distracted by theo←logy, we hasten to see God, failing to recognize our neighbors passing by.<sup>851</sup> Though our neighbor's divine image is “reproduced in the eye, paying

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<sup>845</sup> Sermon 247, para 4, Hopkins 168.

<sup>846</sup> Sermon 247, para 6. [http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=Sermo\\_CCLXXIV\\_6](http://www.cusanus-portal.de/content/werke.php?id=Sermo_CCLXXIV_6)

<sup>847</sup> Sermon 247, para 33, Hopkins 182.

<sup>848</sup> John 4:6.

<sup>849</sup> Sermon 247, para 33, Hopkins 182. Genesis 32:30.

<sup>850</sup> DVD 95, Hopkins 725.

<sup>851</sup> DVD 97 and 101, Hopkins 726 and 729.

attention to other things, we do not attend to them.”<sup>852</sup> Jesus, who is “more anointed than his fellow-persons,” neither says nor unsays theo←logy, but is intellectually awakened to receive the divine light that gracefully descends; thus, he sees, he attends, and he reveals God’s Word (theo→logy).<sup>853</sup> His gaze, like his Word, excites, motivating to receive (*ut excitet ad recipiendum*) the divine gift of *quiddity*.<sup>854</sup> Like the icon’s gaze, the gift of *quiddity* attends uniquely—a gift intended *only* for you, a creature who does not desire to be another, but only yourself. Receiving this gift—this theo→logy—more truly, one discloses God’s power and divinity (*dynamis, Theos*), which is manifestly revealed through one’s very Self. Christ’s gaze and divine Word (theo→logy) points, like the gesture (*abhinayah*) of a finger: *ayam ātmā brahma*, “*This Self is Brahman*.”<sup>855</sup> His gaze awakens. Being seen, one exists, *enfoldedly, sensually, vigorously, and vitally*, in living color. Recognized.

#### Perception and theosis

Without overlooking or discounting the many differences between Śaṅkara and Nicholas of Cusa, the similar role played by perception in the process of theosis is noteworthy, prompting us to read each in a new light. Before one can have a vision of God, one must first realize God’s gaze. In order to see, one must first be seen. Only then does one realize that one is inherently divine, created in the image of the Creator. To have a vision of God, therefore, one cultivates Jesus’s vision through attentiveness. Being seen, one’s mind is awakened such that one can begin to see the divinity that is before one’s very eyes and perceptible (*sākṣāt aparokṣāt*). Removing

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<sup>852</sup> DQD 33, Hopkins 321.

<sup>853</sup> DVD 25.112, Hopkins 735, modified for gender-inclusive language.

<sup>854</sup> Sermon 247, para 6.

<sup>855</sup> MUBh 2.

mental distractions, progressively dissolving all epistemic measuring (*māyā*), as if entering the cloud at Sinai where Moses sees YHWH pass by, I recognize that the one who passes before me is a unique revelation, a creative expression and visible manifestation of God's dynamic divinity.<sup>856</sup> "The Divine Intellect," Cusa explains, "willed to manifest itself to the perceptual cognition in order to be known perceptibly."<sup>857</sup> Whatever vocational purpose to which God has called me, that purpose is realized only after I begin to see my neighbor as an *imago Dei*, a particular image of God created without superfluity. Like the Samaritan woman at the well, God has freely and intentionally created my neighbor for some purpose.<sup>858</sup> She is not an "extra" in this divine play, passing by to busy the stage. Realizing that I am seen by God, I realize that she is also seen by God. The monks at Tegernsee, walking in opposite directions, describing a semi-circle around the icon on the North Wall, realize that the brother who passes by is seen, uniquely and distinctly, by the omnivoyant icon of God.<sup>859</sup> God is looking at my neighbor, attending with interest, intention, and perhaps creative curiosity. Perhaps I should look, too, to see what God thinks is so interesting and worthy of divine attention. Realizing that I am a unique and creative expression of God's creativity, I realize that she is, too. In what way is she unique? I don't know. I must look, hospitably, without expectation, having dissolved all measures, attending to her intent in a state of wonder. For vision to occur (whether double-beryl or single-beryl), says Cusa, two paths of light must meet, entangle, and harmonize. In the after-math of apophasis, *theosis* begins with a vision of God (*visione Dei*), wherein one is seen and addressed (*ayam ātmā brahma, tat tvam asi*). Being seen, one learns to see. Gazing through the apophatic measure, one

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<sup>856</sup> Exodus 33:22, Romans 1:20; DB 65, Hopkins 823-4.

<sup>857</sup> DB 66, Hopkins 824.

<sup>858</sup> DB 65-66, Hopkins 823-4.

<sup>859</sup> DVD 4, Hopkins 681.

has a vision of God (*visione Dei, non aliud*). Only one by whom the highest Self is able to be seen is thus able to truly recognize the passerby and utter: *tat tvam asi*.

### **Comparative Theology and Perception**

Comparative Theology, as an exercise of deep, back-and-forth reading, enables us to perceive what we might otherwise miss. Comparative Theology awakens us (*prabudhyate*) so that we might see what is before our very eyes (*sākṣāt*). Reading Cusa's *vision of God* alongside Śāṅkara's *Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya*, we can better observe the significant role that *being seen* plays in the process of *theosis*.

As Cusa emphasizes, Jesus sees others more truly because the Spirit of Life, which enlivens the sensible organs, was fully awakened, fully attentive, and undistracted in him.<sup>860</sup> By the poses of the face and eyes, which are messengers of the heart, Jesus perceived the Samaritan woman as a unique image of God. He sees her in a manner that others failed to recognize. Peering into her eyes, he sees her just as she is: divine *in esse* and divine *in potentia*, a potency that his gaze awakens, motivating her to receive.<sup>861</sup> Catherine Keller observes: "As he has read her more correctly than she could have imagined, she reads him—*reciprocally*... 'Sir, I see you are a prophet.'" <sup>862</sup> She sees him because his vision opened her eyes. Receiving his gaze, she drinks from the eternal "Fount of Life."<sup>863</sup> She drinks the living water from Jacob's well—the watery depths won from seeing (and wrestling with) God, face-to-face. His vision initiates her *theosis*. Having been seen as an *imago Dei*, she sees herself likewise. The divine spark he sees in

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<sup>860</sup> DVD 95, Hopkins 725.

<sup>861</sup> DAT 4, Hopkins 1424; Sermon 247, para 6.

<sup>862</sup> Keller (2006), 24.

<sup>863</sup> DVD 108, Hopkins 733; John 4:14.

her is not a divinity or “pious interiority” common to all creatures, but a divine spark that is irreducibly particular and utterly unique to her; it is a divine spark manifestly revealed only in *her* face, her incarnate *quiddity*. It is her uniqueness that makes her divine because, Cusa repeats, God does not create without intent or purpose; each and every creature is a visible manifestation of the Creator’s will, and thus enjoys a certain singularity.<sup>864</sup> Because Jesus sees her as she is, his vision heals and transforms her. Being seen, she learns to see. Significantly, she is the only person in John’s Gospel to whom Jesus professes himself to be the Messiah.<sup>865</sup>

Similarly, Śāṅkara emphasizes over and over again the necessity of learning Vedānta with a qualified *guru*, a knower of Brahman by whom the highest Self is able to be seen.<sup>866</sup> This qualified teacher sees the Divine Self in all beings and all beings in the Self.<sup>867</sup> Before a student is able to confess, “I am Brahman,” he/she must first hear—and *believe*—the teacher’s revelation: *tat tvam asi*, “You are that.” In other words, before a student can realize his/her innate divinity, the student must be seen in this way. Much like the Samaritan woman at the well, the student of Vedānta is healed by the teacher’s vision. Reading the encounter of *guru-śiṣya* together with the encounter of Rabbi-Samaritan in John 4, we recognize that the reciprocity of gazes is central to theosis, the awakening to one’s divine identity.

As Śāṅkara asserts, there must be a true connection between our eyes, our mind, and what we see. As Cusa asserts, when the mind is distracted, it is as if the eye is dead, disconnected from the enlivening attention of the soul.<sup>868</sup> Peering into the eyes of the other, our mind is distracted

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<sup>864</sup> DB 65-66, Hopkins 823-4.

<sup>865</sup> John 4:26.

<sup>866</sup> MKBh 2.35.

<sup>867</sup> MUBh 3, MKBh 4.46, Īśā Upaniṣad 6.

<sup>868</sup> DVD 101, Hopkins 729.

by notions of ego and alterity which impede and disrupt this connection, like darkness characterized by not being fully awakened to the truth.<sup>869</sup> In order to realize one's identity with the Supreme Self, Śāṅkara avers, one must "be awakened by a supremely compassionate teacher who knows the true meaning of the Vedānta scriptures."<sup>870</sup> Hearing the words "This Self is Brahman," accompanied by a gesture to the non-dual Self dwelling in the heart, the student is awakened to her innate divinity.<sup>871</sup>

Comparative Theology enables us to focus on the intimate relationship between student and spiritual guide and the significance of seeing and being seen without the risk of conflating or syncretizing these two very different traditions. I have made no claim that the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei*, i.e., being created in the image of God, is identical to the Vedānta doctrine of the unity of Self and Brahman. I have made no *explicit* claim that Cusa's emphasis on uniqueness and irreducible particularity finds a corollary in Śāṅkara's nonduality.

I have argued, though, that each theologian regards ordinary, everyday perception to be an impediment to the realization of one's innate divinity. I have argued that *theosis*, or the realization of one's innate divinity and consequent ethical comportment, requires a dramatic shift in perception. For both Śāṅkara and Cusa, this shift begins passively and compassionately when one is truly *seen* by another in a divine way. It begins when the Samaritan woman at the well is *seen* by Jesus as a unique *imago Dei*. It begins when the student of Vedānta is *seen* by the guru who professes, "Thou art that." Having been seen in this divine way, one is healed and able to confess, "I am created in the image of God" or "I am Brahman." For Cusa, "knowledge is face-

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<sup>869</sup> MKBh 1.14, et. al.

<sup>870</sup> MKBh 1.16.

<sup>871</sup> MUBh 2.

to-face seeing.”<sup>872</sup> Having been the object of the vision *of God*, one becomes the conduit of God’s vision. One becomes a Son/Daughter of God (Jn 1:12), *more anointed* than before, striving to be oneself, not another, as the Creator intended.

Early in the morning, when He saw them, straining against the storm, He walked on the water. “He intended to pass them by.”<sup>873</sup> They failed to recognize Him.

We don’t expect our neighbor to walk on water. We don’t expect our neighbor to be an unprecedented image of God. We don’t expect our neighbor to be Brahman. Distracted by our desire to be seen, staring, like Narcissus, on the surface, we fail to recognize those who pass us by. We have an attention deficit problem. (This has caused cartographic problems.) Progressively dissolving expectations, perceiving through the apophatic measure, we attend to those who “intended to pass [us] by.”<sup>874</sup> Unsay the category of “profane,” we perceive the sacred. We see the Self in all beings and all beings in the Self. We begin to actualize the possibility of a Trinitarian *imago Dei*, creatively manifesting possibility itself, wherein unity is fulfilled in diversity. Learning to see through the apophatic measure, we proceed, concordantly, towards a theology of irreducible particularity.

## **Toward**

In the opening pages of this thesis, I introduced the heuristic I have called the apophatic measure. Therein, and at various points along the way, I have indicated that this phrase intends a triad of meanings that unfold from and fold back upon one another (p3). To be true to the forms

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<sup>872</sup> Sermon 247, para 33, Hopkins 182.

<sup>873</sup> Mark 6:48.

<sup>874</sup> Mark 6:48.



and methods I seek to advocate, at least some measure of what I have spoken must now be unsaid.

While I have referred to the apophatic measure as “a” method, the phrase signals not a single method, but quite a variety of methods, each with similar intentions. To systematize the apophatic measure *qua* method with a certain form or procedural rigidity would be altogether counter to both my intentions and underlying rationale. It is, perhaps, more fitting to speak of a variety of methods which more or less proceed in the “spirit” of apophatic measures.

What these methods share in common is an intention to cultivate a heightened state of sensual attentiveness. Predominately (I am reluctant to say *exclusively*), this heightened state of sensual attentiveness practiced through a perpetual progress of identifying and removing (pre)conceptions. The difficulty of this task looms most prominently in the fixity of the (pre)fix I have placed in parentheses. While removing conceptions imposed by cultural and linguistic structures of knowledge is daunting and arduous enough, far more difficult (and risky) is identifying *pre*-conceptions, which one must first dis/cover for oneself. Insofar as they are *pre*conceptions, they are prior to conception, raising doubt as to how one might *conceive* of a method to discover them—and thus *say* them—much less *unsay* them. And so, no method which proceeds in the *spirit* of the apophatic measure can ever become a “proper” method, since that would entail definitively affixing the prefix to *pre*conception, as if one had formulated an epistemic method whereby all structures of knowledge could be identified.

In fact, I have only gradually—and with much assistance from my dissertation committee—become attentive to the similarities shared by “these” methods (i.e., Śāṅkara’s, Cusa’s, and my own) and those that usually fall under the heading “phenomenology.” Nearly as often as I have written that word in these pages, I have deleted it, perhaps performing the praxis

of apophasis I otherwise seek to describe. My use of the word intends to recall Edmund Husserl's vocational charge: *To the things themselves!* And yet, my confessional hesitancy here at the end intends to unsay my own use of the word (especially the occasions that have survived my delete button) along with a portion of Husserl's dictum. Thus, these final words do not fall under the heading "to the things themselves," but simply "Toward."

An impulse that Śāṅkara, Cusa, and I seem to share is that "we" (you, I, and our passers-by) are not "subjects" oriented *towards* "objects." Husserl's rallying call (if not Husserl himself) seems to presume more about the relationship between perceiver and phenomena than is consistent with the apophatic measure *qua* method. The non-dual Seer of sight in the wakefully attentive state of *turīya* is an apophatic Measurer that *measures* Brahman, "All *This*." It is not, therefore, an agent that performs an "act" of seeing, thereby consuming "the things themselves" as cognitive parts of a monistic (or atomistic) "all." The Self *attends* to this and that effect of the Self, each of which *intend* to be seen as nothing (ontologically) other than the Self. The directionality of the "toward" remains undecided until it is measured. This wave function collapses only when measured, and thus awaits a measured unsaying. Likewise for Cusa, one awakens to attend to the gaze of the passerby, who intends to be seen. And yet, one intends to be seen—both by the passerby and by the Beholder, *Theos*, who hastens and attentively seeks for the seeker. It is not only our *being* that depends on God, says Cusa, but also our *being known*. And so, the apophatic measure is a method that moves *toward*, without predetermining who/what moves toward whom/what. It is theo←logy that seeks to awaken to theo→logy. In that *spirit*, the methods of the apophatic measure intend to identify and remove epistemic measures as a means to the end of attentive sensuality. Attending and intending move *toward* one another. *This* phenomenology (if that word can measure it at all), does not hasten *to the things themselves*, but

attends toward particulars that intend toward attention. *Two* paths of light meet, tending toward one another and eventually collide. (Sight happens.)

A man embraced by the woman he loves knows neither inside nor outside (p157). The man and the woman do not become “one,” but they cease to be “two” (*advaita*). Learning to see as Jesus saw, with “fleshly eyes like our own,” one cultivates a double-beryl vision whereby the *quiddity* of irreducible particulars are perceived (but not *known*) as unique revelations of the Creator’s intent. They are seen/heard in harmony with their environment (or, at least, potentially, should our will attend to the creative Spirit). In wakefully attentive sensuality, “the divine Creator-Intellect shines forth in harmonic or concordant proportion” (p304). Attending to the differing intentions of *śruti*’s kataphasis and apophasis, one learns to hear words coordinately and harmoniously as AUM, “the entire manifold of speech” (p119). Mapping our respective perspectives on the circle of life, we begin to hear one another into speech, charting chords in a polyphony that never speaks Truth, but sings ever more truly as others’ voices are added to the choir (p287). Do these insights fit together? Do they belong together? Are they discordant or disconnected? Rehearsing the skill of *upasamhāra* by reading diverse texts coordinately, without synthesis or pluralistic dissonance, we learn to hear, concordantly. Through the tangential touch (*tangere*) that inscribes Cusa and Śaṅkara into this complexly composed context, we begin to see *this* and *that* as “All *This*,” as singular dis/closures of the Creator’s image. Through these methods in the spirit of the apophatic measure, we awaken to an attentive sensuality that sees all beings in the Self and the Self in and as all beings. Thou art that [Brahman]. Thou art that [unprecedented *imago Dei*]. Thou art that: an apophatic measure of ultimate reality... irreducibly particular. Bracketing language in an epistemic *epoché*, we do not move towards the things themselves; seeing and being seen move toward one another.

## Hospitable Wonder

In the introduction, I claimed that this experiment in comparative theology could contribute toward a theological valuation of difference and diversity. I also claimed that the apophatic theological methods practiced by Śaṅkara and Cusa differ from those examined by Michael Sells in his *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* insofar as their performances do not culminate in a “meaning event,” but instead in a *sensual event* (p13). In these closing words, I reflect (after Cusa and after Vedānta) on value of irreducible particularity in the apophatic measure’s sensual event.

Apophatic measures<sub>1</sub> are methods that must be practiced: they must be rehearsed if they are to perform. (Pre)suppositions should be measured and removed—with one exception. When we see an/other, intending to re/cognize this passerby, the only hospitable presupposition we should have about *this* other is that he/she is an irreducibly particular revelation of the divine. One thinks: “There is something about *this* person that I have never seen before because it can only be seen in/as *this* person. I *wonder* what it is.”

In this awakened state of wonder,<sup>875</sup> wherein expectations and presuppositions regarding *this* stranger passing-by have been removed, one is prepared to perceive *this* one who is to-come. Unlike the seeing in the everyday (*vaiśvānara*) state, this seeing is not an act of consumption, a means of valid knowledge. In this wakefully attentive state (the *turīya*), perceiving my (strange) neighbor is an end unto itself. Stretched open to the descent of the divine light, I attend to *this* other’s intentions to be seen beyond measure. Two paths of light meet, wonderfully anointing. *This* Self (the Incarnate Witness I perceive) is Brahman (MU 2).

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<sup>875</sup> Not far, perhaps, from Heidegger’s attunement of awe (*Scheu*) and the *Er/eignis* of the beginning that must be begun again.

One who perceives in this way does not regard the passerby *intending* to find common ground.<sup>876</sup> I cannot attend to the other's intentions lest my own are first removed (progressively dissolved volition, intentional *epoché*). My ignor/ance must be learned (*docta ignorantia*); the veil must be removed (*avidyāmātram vyavadhāna*). One regards the passerby attending to difference/uniqueness. One sees (but cannot cognize) this other's singular *quiddity* in its actualized possibility.<sup>877</sup> Hospitably removing expectations, one attentively senses *this* neighbor's unprecedented revelation of infinite multiplicity. Seeing *this imago Dei*, one glances in awe and wonder, re/cognizing *this* passerby.<sup>878</sup> *This* Self is Brahman. Although the infinite is not finished (*infini*), its unfolding would be incomplete if it did not include *you*, in particular. *Thou* art that. Rehearsing, practicing, and performing our fugal variations in the Spirit of apophatic measures, we learn to see one another in living color, hearing what is to be heard (*śruti*), tasting the living water at *Jacob's* well—re/cognizing ourselves and those passing by.

Sensuality is a way of knowing that is necessarily embodied and relational. In the historicity of the sensual event, perceiver and perceived are ontologically connected (non-dual). One cannot *be sensually* in isolation. Two paths of light must meet, mapping polygonal chords in the circle of life. All concordance is a concordance of differences.<sup>879</sup> Cultivating this attentive sensuality, we awaken to an ecoSpiritual creativity of harmonic intentions. Seeing one another into being, hearing one another into the manifold of speech (AUM), we transgress the liminal doors (the *prājñā, coincidentia oppositorum*) and enter the sensuality of hospitable wonder,

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<sup>876</sup> *Mit-sein* is sufficiently common ground for perception.

<sup>877</sup> This is not to say, of course, that similarity/commonality are suddenly devalued.

<sup>878</sup> And how they find themselves (Heidegger's *Befindlichkeit*).

<sup>879</sup> DCC I.8, Weiler (2004), 77-90, (p79 above).

intending not to consume but to have a vision *of* God. We attentively re/cognize *this* Self (intending to passing us by)<sup>880</sup> as an apophatic measure of the immeasurable divine.

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<sup>880</sup> Exodus 32: 22; Mark 6:48.

## Appendix

### The Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad (Sanskrit Text)

ॐ इत्येतदक्षरं इदं सर्वं तस्योपव्याख्यानं भूतं भवद्भूविष्यदिति सर्वं ॐकार एव । यच्चान्यत्रिकालातीतं तदप्योकार एव ॥१॥

सर्वं ह्येतद्ब्रह्मायं आत्मा ब्रह्म सोऽयं आत्मा चतुष्पात् ॥२॥

जागरितस्थानो बहिःप्रज्ञः सप्ताङ्ग एकोनविंशतिमुखः स्थूलभुग्वैश्वानरः प्रथमः पादः ॥३॥

स्वप्नस्थानोऽन्तःप्रज्ञः सप्ताङ्ग एकोनविंशतिमुखः प्रविविक्तभुक्तैजसो द्वितीयः पादः ॥४॥

यत्र सुप्तो न कञ्चन कामं कामयते न कञ्चन स्वप्नं पश्यति तत्सुप्तं । सुप्तस्थान एकीभूतः प्रज्ञानघन एवानन्दमयो ह्यानन्दभुक्चेतोमुखः प्राज्ञः तृतीयः पादः ॥५॥

एषः सर्वेश्वर एष सर्वज्ञ एषोऽन्तर्याम्येष योनिः सर्वस्य प्रभवाप्ययौ हि भूतानां ॥६॥

नान्तःप्रज्ञं न बहिष्प्रज्ञं नोभयतःप्रज्ञं न प्रज्ञानघनं न प्रज्ञं नाप्रज्ञम् । अदृष्टं अव्यवहार्यं अग्राह्यं अलक्षणं अचिन्त्यं अव्यपदेश्यं एकात्मप्रत्ययसारं प्रपञ्चोपशमं शान्तं शिवं अद्वैतं चतुर्थं मन्यन्ते । स आत्मा स विज्ञेयः ॥७॥

सोऽयं आत्माध्यक्षरं ॐकारः । अधिमात्रं पादा मात्रा मात्राश्च पादा अकार उकारो मकार इति ॥८॥

जागरितस्थानो वैश्वानरः अकारः प्रथमा मात्राप्तेरादिमत्त्वाद्वा । आप्नोति ह वै सर्वान्कामानादिश्च भवति य एवं वेद ॥९॥

स्वप्नस्थानस्तैजस उकारो द्वितीया मात्रोत्कर्षादुभयत्वाद्वा । उत्कर्षति ह वै ज्ञानसंततिम् । समानश्च भवति ।

नास्याब्रह्मवित्कुले भवति य एवं वेद ॥१०॥

सुप्तस्थानः प्राज्ञो मकारस्तृतीया मात्रा मितेरपीतेर्वा । मिनोति ह वा इदं सर्वमपीतिश्च भवति य एवं वेद ॥११॥

अमात्रश्चतुर्थोऽव्यवहार्यः प्रपञ्चोपशमः शिवोऽद्वैतः । एवं ॐकार आत्मैव । संविशत्यात्मनात्मानं य एवं वेद ॥१२॥

### Māyā

Perhaps no single term in Advaita Vedānta is as fraught with controversy as the term *māyā*. Its meaning is fiercely debated among advaitins in the generations after Śaṅkara, most of whom cite Śaṅkara's use of the term to defend their diverse interpretations. It is hardly surprising, then, that contemporary scholars also debate its meaning, accompanied by ample evidence to support a wide variety of meanings. One might conclude from this that Śaṅkara is inconsistent in his use of the term, or perhaps conclude that his own understanding of it shifts over time, or at least shifts according to differing contexts. Conversely, though, one might

conclude that Śaṅkara does not intend for the term to be imbued with significant technical weight. Limiting my focus to the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya, I argue that the latter is the case.

Similarly, Richard King argues:

The authors of the MK do not develop the notion of *māyā* to any great extent. This is probably because they had little interest in the idea, the primary focus of the MK being the truth of non-origination [i.e., *ajāti*].<sup>881</sup>

Since my purpose is to examine the role of perception in Śaṅkara's apophatic method, it is necessary to grasp how he uses the word *māyā*. Any discussion of the term is useless, however, lest it remain in service to Śaṅkara's aim: Realization of Brahman. Thomas O'Neil explains:

Much of modern scholarship has utilized the word *māyā* to mean only illusion. But we must remember that the word *māyā* is etymologically a word which means 'to measure...' Thus, we must begin to see *māyā* within Śaṅkara not only as it has been seen by his opponents or later critics, but within the context of 'an inquiry into Brahman.'<sup>882</sup>

While O'Neil's observation is grounded in Śaṅkara's UMSBh, it is nevertheless true for his MKBh, as well. Therein, he uses the term *māyā* to mean "measuring," consistent with O'Neil's research. Even more narrowly, though, Śaṅkara uses the term to refer to verbal cognitions of the *buddhi*, which is the mental image of sense data which takes the form of particular external objects. As Śaṅkara emphasizes several times in his MKBh, particulars constitute the real basis or substratum (*āspadam*) of mental images, even when the cognition is illusory.<sup>883</sup> Hence, *māyā* refers to the measuring of particularity by means of signifiers within the process of perception, as illustrated below:

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<sup>881</sup> King, 175.

<sup>882</sup> O'Neil, L. Thomas. *Māyā in Śaṅkara: Measuring the Immeasurable*. 1st ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980. 92, 93.

<sup>883</sup> E.g., MUBh 7, MKBh 2.32, and MKBh 3.29. See also Śabara, PMSBh I.1.5.



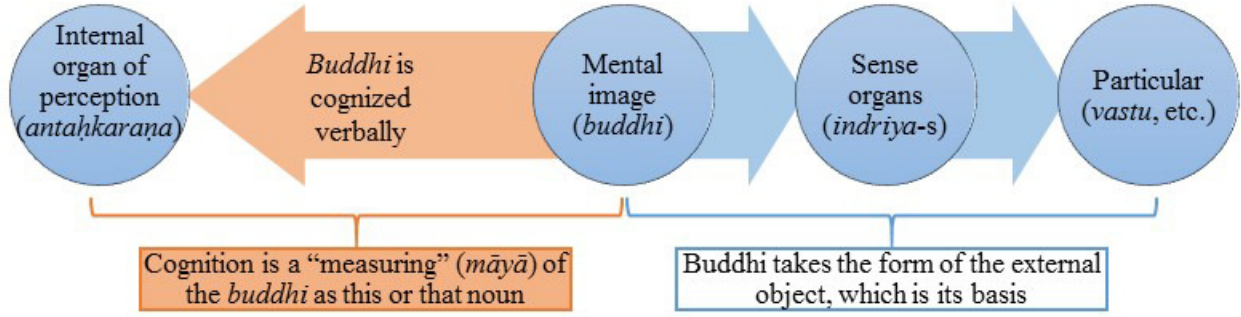


Figure 21: *Māyā* in the process of perception

As we have seen, signifiers are partial measures (*mātra*-s) of the immanent Brahman, possessed of infinite measure,<sup>884</sup> and are modifications (*vikalpa*-s) of AUM,<sup>885</sup> which is both the transcendent and the immanent Brahman.<sup>886</sup> Thus, the cognition of *buddhi* by means of signifiers is, quite simply, the act of conceptually measuring Brahman. When one sees a rope, the *buddhi* assumes the form of the rope, since that is its basis.<sup>887</sup> This mental image can either be grasped correctly with the word “rope,” or cognized incorrectly as “snake.” In the latter case, Śāṅkara explains, the rope is seen by the eye with the form of a rope; the snake exists only as a conception superimposed thereupon.<sup>888</sup> In either case, however, there is an act of measuring the *buddhi* by means of a signifier which is nothing other than a modification or partial measure of AUM.<sup>889</sup> As shown below, Śāṅkara uses the term *māyā* regardless of whether this measuring of the *buddhi* constitutes an illusion, as in the case of the snake, or knowledge, as in the case of the rope. To understand *māyā*, then, one must understand how and why it can mean both “illusion”

<sup>884</sup> MK 1.29.

<sup>885</sup> MUBh 1.

<sup>886</sup> MKBh 1.26: परापरे ब्रह्मनि प्रणवः । Panoli 354.

<sup>887</sup> MUBh 7, MKBh 2.32, and MKBh 3.29. Cf. Śābara, PMSBh I.1.5.

<sup>888</sup> MKBh 3.29. : यथा रज्ज्वां विकल्पितः सर्पो रज्जुरूपेणावेक्ष्यमाणः ... ।

<sup>889</sup> MUBh 1 and 8.

and “knowledge.” It is both an obstacle to realizing Brahman and a means to indicate Brahman. Building upon insights from O’Neil and King, I first explain *māyā* as “measuring” and then analyze two examples of Śaṅkara’s use of the term in the MKBh, as “illusion” and “knowledge.”

### Māyā as “Measuring”

As O’Neil explains, the word *māyā* appears more than one hundred times in the ṚgVeda with a range of meanings.<sup>890</sup> As Richard King points out, it is used cosmologically in ṚgVeda VI.47, which states that the Supreme Lord Indra was born through *māyā*, as referenced in MK III.24 and BU II.5.19.<sup>891</sup> O’Neil clarifies that “while it is true that Śaṅkara did utilize *māyā* as “illusion” in certain instances, it was not used to explain away the world but rather to explain the world.”<sup>892</sup> More precisely, I argue, it is used in the MKBh primarily to differentiate between the everyday “seeing” of *vaiśvānara* and “perception” in *turīya*. While reality is “seen” in each case, “measuring” is superimposed upon particulars in *vaiśvānara*, but reality *qua* particulars is perceived in *turīya*, through the apophasis of measuring.

Prabhu D. Shastri’s etymological explanation is insightful, and largely consistent with my analysis of the word *mātra* above:

The word *māyā* is derived from √mā, to measure—*māyate anayā iti*, i.e., by which is measured, meaning thereby, as tradition has it, that illusive projection of the world by which the immeasurable Brahman appears as if measured.<sup>893</sup>

Because Brahman is devoid of measure (*amātra*), then *māyā* can be understood as the illusory measuring of that which is beyond measure. However, Shastri’s description of Brahman as

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<sup>890</sup> O’Neil, *Māyā in Śaṅkara*, 29ff.

<sup>891</sup> King, 175 and 297 (note 122).

<sup>892</sup> O’Neil, *Māyā in Śaṅkara*, 94.

<sup>893</sup> Shastri, Prabhu Dutt. *The Doctrine of Māyā in the Philosophy of the Vedānta*. London: Luzac, 1911. 29.

“immeasurable” is misleading. If Brahman were not measurable, then we would be left without any means by which to know Brahman, as Śaṅkara explains:

The same Self belonging to the three states is intended to be arrived at by means of *turīya*, as stated in the *śruti*, “Thou art that.” Moreover, if it were the case that *turīya* was other than that which is characterized by the Self in the three states, then scriptural teachings would be pointless due to the nonexistence of a means to arrive at that, or it will lead to nihilism.<sup>894</sup>

The three states are measures of Brahman.<sup>895</sup> From the vantage of the highest truth, these measures may rightly be understood as illusory, but that does not mean that they can be altogether dismissed as illusion since they are the very means by which one comes to know Brahman.<sup>896</sup> Although the three quarters/measures must be negated in order to realize the truth of Brahman, this method is only effective because these measures are, indeed, measures of Brahman. *Māyā*, then, is both the means to realize Brahman and an obstacle to that realization.

King clarifies:

*Māyā* is the construction of boundaries and distinctions (*vikalpa*) in that which has none (*nirvikalpa*); it is a measuring (*mā*) of the immeasurable (*amātra*).<sup>897</sup>

All conceptions of reality are approximations in that they attempt to define the infinite in terms of finite categories. For the advaitin, then, all views are partial apprehensions of Brahman... Dualistic experience is an inevitable result of any attempt to conceptualize (*vikalpa*) reality.<sup>898</sup>

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<sup>894</sup> MUBh 7: त्र्यवस्थस्य एवात्मनस्तुरीयत्वेन प्रतिपिपादयिषितत्वात् । तत्त्वमसि इतिवत् । यदि हि त्र्यवस्थात्मविलक्षणं तुरीयं अन्यत्तत्प्रतिपत्तिद्वाराभावाच्छास्त्रोपदेशानर्थक्यं शून्यतापत्तिर्वा । Panoli 330.

<sup>895</sup> MU 8.

<sup>896</sup> MKBh 1.24.

<sup>897</sup> King, 178.

<sup>898</sup> King, 300, note 140.

Importantly, King connects *māyā* as the construction of boundaries, and *māyā* as the conceptualization of reality, placing the word *vikalpa* in brackets next to each of these. While *vikalpa* is often translated “false conception,” both Gauḍapāda and Śāṅkara employ the term more broadly to mean any and all conceptions, as discussed earlier. Some conceptions may be “more false” than others, such as the conception of a snake superimposed on a rope, but the conception of a rope *qua* rope is false *only* insofar as it is a concept. “If it is said that the rope is nonexistent, like the snake, that is not the case,” says Śāṅkara, because the rope existed as something that was not conceived even before the nonexistence of the snake became known.<sup>899</sup> The particular rope is neither unreal nor illusory, but the conception of the rope as something ontologically other than one’s Self entails “the construction of boundaries and distinctions (*vikalpa*) in that which has none (*nirvikalpa*).”<sup>900</sup>

Śāṅkara glosses the term *mātrā* as “that by which something’s limit is measured,”<sup>901</sup> which is consistent with King’s explanation of *māyā* above. As we have seen, all words are simply modifications of AUM just as the clay pot and lump of clay are modifications of clay.<sup>902</sup> To “define” a word means to “make finite” (*de-fine*) by constructing boundaries; to define is to identify the limits or scope of a particular word’s meaning, thereby setting it apart from the infinity of possible meanings. Sine AUM is infinite, then every word is a modification of AUM insofar as it measures a finite portion of AUM. The word *māyā* indicates the process of

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<sup>899</sup> MKBh 3.29: रज्जुसर्पवदसत्त्वमिति चेत् । न, एकान्तेनाविकल्पितत्वादविकल्पितरज्ज्वंशवत्प्राक्सर्पाभावविज्ञानात् । Panoli, 385. More literally: “If it is said that the rope is nonexistent, like the snake, that is not the case No, because it is necessarily/invariably the case that the rope-possessed-of-snake is not conceived since it was not conceived even before there was knowledge of the nonexistence of the snake.”

<sup>900</sup> King, 178.

<sup>901</sup> MKBh 1.29: मीयतेऽनयेति मात्रा परिच्छित्तिः सानन्ता यस्य स अनन्तमात्रः । Fort’s translation, 203.

<sup>902</sup> MUBh 1.

constructing boundaries and measuring limits through the verbal cognition of reality. When a particular entity is perceived and verbally cognized, the particular entity is cognitively reduced to the limitations of a given linguistic measure. The particular becomes cognitively “de-fined” as this or that.

Therefore, *māyā* means “measuring,” in an epistemic and linguistic sense. It refers to various acts of knowing Brahman wherein there is a conceptual cognition of Brahman, by means of which a limit of Brahman is measured. Since Brahman is limitless, then this measuring is illusory, but that which is measured is certainly not illusory. Hence, this measuring must not be taken as *altogether* illusory, since Brahman is to be known quarter-by-quarter and measure-by-measure.<sup>903</sup> Though illusory, these measures are nevertheless reliable. Were this not the case, “scriptural teachings would be pointless due to the nonexistence of a means to arrive at [realization of Brahman].”<sup>904</sup>

In the Māṇḍūkya Kārika Bhāṣya, Śaṅkara employs the term *māyā* with two distinct but interrelated meanings: *māyā* as “illusion” and *māyā* as “knowledge.” While both constitute a measuring of that which is beyond measure,<sup>905</sup> *māyā* is illusory insofar as the measure is mistaken to be the measured and *māyā* is “knowledge” insofar as knowledge is understood to be a finite measure of that possessed of infinite measure.<sup>906</sup> While there are numerous examples of each in the MKBh, it should suffice to examine one or two instances of each.<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>903</sup> MKBh 1.24.

<sup>904</sup> MUBh 7, cited above.

<sup>905</sup> MU 12.

<sup>906</sup> MK 1.29.

<sup>907</sup> Several factors have guided my decision to focus on these particular examples, leaving aside other equally compelling passages discussing *māyā*. As discussed in Chapter One, the four *prakaraṇa*-s of the *Kārika* are most likely composed by at least three different authors. I have selected examples from the third *prakaraṇa*, which was

Māyā as “Illusion”

Because a “measure,” according to Śāṅkara, is that by which a limit is measured, “measuring” bifurcates non-dual reality by imposing a boundary on the limitless.<sup>908</sup> This is exemplified in Śāṅkara’s comments on MK 3.19. To appreciate the significance of his comments, it is first necessary to understand the context.

Gauḍapāda states:

This unborn (Self) undergoes modification through *māyā* and not in any other way. For, if the modifications are to be a reality, the immortal would tend to be mortal.<sup>909</sup>

In this verse, Gauḍapāda places *māyā* in direct opposition to “reality,” which he previously defined as follows:

That which does not exist in the beginning and end is also likewise in the present. Unreal things, being joined with the eye, are seen as if not unreal.<sup>910</sup>

The unborn does not undergo any real modification at all. According to Gauḍapāda, then, even though *māyā* is unreal, it is seen as if it is not unreal due to being joined with the eye.

Hereupon, Śāṅkara comments:

That which is non-dual, being the Supreme Reality, is cleaved by measuring, just as a man with defective vision sees the one moon as many or as the rope

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most likely composed by an author with views that differ from both Śāṅkara’s and the author of the first *prakaraṇa*. Most notably, the author of the third *prakaraṇa*, unlike Śāṅkara and the author of the first *prakaraṇa*, holds the view that there is no real distinction between *vaiśvānara* and *taijasa*. As a result of this, Śāṅkara repeatedly emphasizes the reality of external objects of perception and emphasizes that only *vaiśvānara*, not *taijasa*, is characterized by perception. In his nuanced explanation of *māyā* in the third *prakaraṇa*, Śāṅkara is careful to distinguish between a cognition that is utterly false, such as cognizing a snake on a rope, and cognitions which are true from a conventional and even scriptural perspective, but ultimately sublated by realization of nonduality. More simply, though, I have also selected the third *prakaraṇa* as the source of these examples because *māyā* is discussed far more often in this *prakaraṇa* than others, enabling me to draw different examples from a single context.

<sup>908</sup> MKBh 1.29 and MKBh 3.19.

<sup>909</sup> MK 3.19: मायया भिद्यते ह्येतन्नान्यथाजं कथञ्चन । तत्त्वतो भिद्यमाने हि मर्त्यतां अमृतं व्रजेत् ॥ Panoli trans., 425.

<sup>910</sup> MK 2.6: आदावन्ते च यन्नास्ति वर्तमानेऽपि तत्तथा । वितथैः सदृशाः सन्तोऽवितथा इव लक्षिताः ॥

appears differently as a snake, water line, etc., (but that) is not the Self because the highest reality does not possess parts.<sup>911</sup>

That is to say that if the phenomenal manifestation of Brahman is considered to be the highest reality, then this misconception can be characterized as an illusion. It is an illusion because it is expressly *not* perception, which requires a fully awake mind in contact with sense organs and a perceptible object resulting in a verbal cognition of the mental image.<sup>912</sup> If *māyā* is to be understood as “illusion,” then it should be clarified that what is illusory is not that particular object which is seen by the eye, but rather the dualistic measure by which the mental image thereof is cognized. Neither the particular entity nor its particularity is unreal, but rather the conceptualization which is a modification thereof.

The two-moons example has already been discussed. The issue here, as before, involves identifying the ailment that is to be removed. Śaṅkara’s purpose is obviously not to insist that *only* those persons who have an eye disease “cleave” the non-dual Self by measuring. Rather, his purpose is to explain conceptualization as the ailment that is to be removed. In the same way that the eye disease causes the one moon to be seen as many, conceptualization causes the non-dual Self to appear as if dual. In the rope-snake example, the rope is not illusory because it is the foundation upon which the false conception is superimposed.<sup>913</sup> The rope is seen by the eye with the form of the rope.<sup>914</sup> What is illusory is the conception superimposed on the mental image.

The point of the example, then, is to diagnose the ailment that is to be removed. By juxtaposing the two-moons analogy with the rope-snake analogy, we must note how the two

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<sup>911</sup> MKBh 3.19: यत्परमार्थसद्वैतं मायया भिद्यते ह्येतच्चैमिरिकानेकचन्द्रवद्रज्जुः सर्पधारादिभिर्भेदैरिव न परमार्थतो निरवयवत्वादात्मनः ।

<sup>912</sup> PMSBh I.1.5

<sup>913</sup> MKBh 2.32.

<sup>914</sup> MKBh 3.29.

differ and how they are similar. Both directly relate to the *pramāṇa* of perception, but highlight distinct problems resulting in epistemic error. As emphasized, perception only occurs when there is a connection between an alert mind, sense organs, and particular object. In both analogies, this connection is obstructed, but at different moments, as illustrated below:

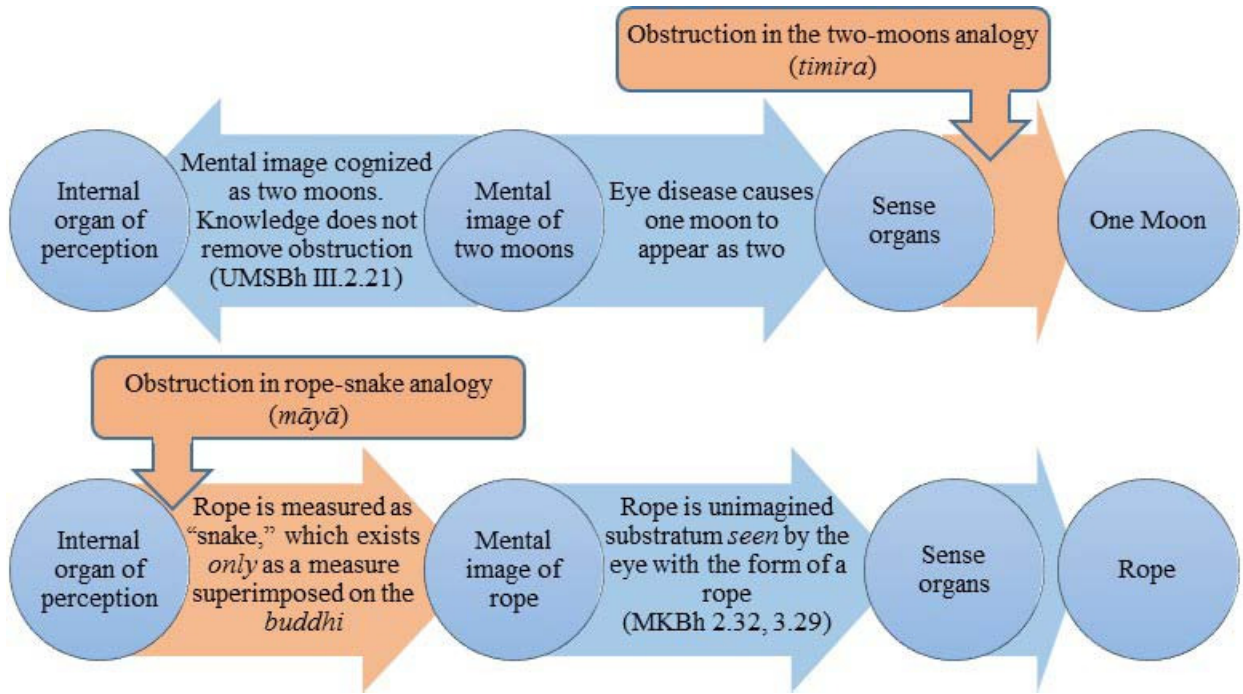


Figure 22: *Māyā* in rope-snake analogy

In the two-moons analogy, an eye disease (*timira*) causes the one moon to appear as many. As discussed earlier, Śāṅkara's point there is to demonstrate that knowledge alone will not remove the disorder. Diagnosis does not heal the patient. The obstruction really exists and must actually be removed for perception to occur.<sup>915</sup> In the rope-snake analogy, however, the ailment is not with the eye. As Śāṅkara states explicitly, the rope is *seen* by the eye in the form of a rope.<sup>916</sup> However, the rope is not *perceived* because the mental image is not grasped by the internal organ of perception. Instead, the mind's measuring (*māyā*) superimposes a snake upon the mental

<sup>915</sup> UMSBh III.2.21.

<sup>916</sup> MKBh 3.29.



image of the rope, which is the foundation or basis of the illusion.<sup>917</sup> Unlike *timira*, the obstruction is not real. The snake exists *only* as a conception.<sup>918</sup> Because the snake is the unreal result of ignorance, it can be removed simply by knowledge. When knowledge of the rope arises, the idea of snake is removed, enabling the rope to be *perceived* as well as *seen*. The point of the analogy is not to suggest that the “world” is unreal, like the snake. Rather, the point is to distinguish between the world as it is *seen*, and the world as it is *measured*. *Māyā* is illusory when measuring is mistaken as the measured.

### Māyā as Knowing

As we have seen, perception is distinct from mere seeing insofar as perception involves verbally cognizing the mental image, which takes the form of a particular entity connected to the sense organs. If the particular is cognized by means of a word which is merely a modification of AUM, then the object is not perceived as AUM, but as a mere measure of AUM. In that case, measuring is superimposed upon the *buddhi*, which has the particular as its basis, and, therefore, the particular is not perceived. Stated otherwise, the external organ of perception sees that which is measured, but the internal organ of perception sees the measure, mistaking it for the measured. Only by dissolving the superimposed measure is the particular object perceived, not otherwise. If the particular is cognized by means of a word that is eternally related to that particular and a corresponding universal, the cognition constitutes true knowledge. Even in that case, however, the resulting knowledge is merely a measure of the immanent Brahman, which is possessed of infinite measure, since words are merely modifications of AUM, as established in MUBh 1.

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<sup>917</sup> MKBh 2.32 and 3.29.

<sup>918</sup> MKBh 3.29.

It logically follows that even a true cognition, resulting in true knowledge, is nevertheless *māyā*. Śaṅkara uses the term *māyā* to refer to any cognition which constitutes a measuring of Brahman possessed of infinite measure, regardless of the truth of that cognition. In other words, while the word *māyā* certainly applies to illusory cognitions, such as the rope-snake, it also applies to true cognitions. Hence, the word “measuring” signifies “knowing”.<sup>919</sup>

Śaṅkara uses the word *māyā* in this sense in MKBh 3.24. Gauḍapāda states:

From the sacred text “There is no plurality here, etc.” and “Indra on account of *māyā*, etc.” [it is to be known that] “He being unborn is however born in various ways through *māyā*.”<sup>920</sup>

As noted earlier, the *śruti* quoted here derives from ṚgVeda VI.47, which is also found in BU II.5.19. It is helpful to examine Śaṅkara’s comments in each context. He states:

Therefore, creation, which has not actually occurred, is an allegory for the purpose of ascertaining the unity of the Self, like the discourse on *prāṇa*, since what is designated by the word *māyā* in the sentence “Indra by means of measurings” is an explanation of a non-existent thing.<sup>921</sup>

Importantly, even though Śaṅkara admits that *māyā* is something which is nonexistent, he nevertheless insists that this nonexistent thing is useful. Scriptural accounts of creation do not intend to convey information about an historical event. Rather, they are allegories for the purpose of ascertaining the unity of the Self.

Śaṅkara then employs a *pūrvapakṣin* to shift the discussion away from allegories of creation towards an understanding of the role of *māyā* in the process of perception:

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<sup>919</sup> MKBh 3.24, Panoli 430.

<sup>920</sup> MK 3.24: नेह नानेति चाम्नायादिन्द्रो मायाभिरित्यपि । अजायमानो बहुधा मायया जायते तु सः ॥ King’s translation, 250.

<sup>921</sup> MKBh 3.24: तस्मादात्मैकत्वप्रतिपत्त्यर्था कल्पिता सृष्टिरभूतैव प्राणसंवादवत् । इन्द्रो मायाभिः (बृ.उ. ३।५।१९) इत्यभूतार्थप्रतिपादकेन मायाशब्देन व्यपदेशात् । Panoli, 430.

(*Pūrvapakṣa*) That is not the case [because] the word “māyā” signifies “knowing” (*prajñā*).

(*Siddhānta*) That is true. But measuring is not detrimental because it is inferred by knowing the senses which consists of ignorance.<sup>922</sup>

Śaṅkara is certainly not the first to associate the *māyā* with *prajñā*. As Thomas O’Neil notes, *māyā* is regarded as a synonym of *prajñā*, meaning “wisdom,” “consciousness,” or “knowing,” even in the earliest etymological commentaries, the *Nirukta* and *Nighaṇṭu*.<sup>923</sup> More importantly, though, the term in this context harkens back to MU 5, wherein *prājñā* is described as a lump of consciousness (*prajñānaghana*), as discussed extensively earlier in this chapter.

Commenting on the same scriptural passage in BU II.5.19, Śaṅkara also explains *māyā* in terms of *prajñānaghana*. Therein, he explains Indra’s creation/emission by means of *measurements* from a different perspective. Rather than having the purpose of ascertaining the unity of the Self, as in MKBh III.24, there he explains that Indra manifests as name and form for the purpose of making Himself known:

If name and form were not manifested, the Self’s unconditioned state called ‘dense with Intelligence’ would not be known. But when name and form become manifested as the body and senses, then its nature becomes known.<sup>924</sup>

Śaṅkara makes an important distinction between ontological creation and manifestation or “unfolding.” Distinguishing between the unmanifest and its manifestation is a primary concern for Śaṅkara in his BUBh.<sup>925</sup> While this topic is certainly beyond the scope of this dissertation, its

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<sup>922</sup> MKBh III.24: ननु प्रज्ञावचनो मायाशब्दः । सत्यम्; इन्द्रियप्रज्ञाया अवद्यामयत्वेन मायात्वभ्युपगमाददोषः । Panoli 430.

<sup>923</sup> O’Neil, 35.

<sup>924</sup> BUBh II.5.19, Panoli’s translation, 586.

<sup>925</sup> E.g., BUBh I.4.7 and I.4.10.

significance is discussed by Haesook Ra in her dissertation, *Śaṅkara as Writer*.<sup>926</sup> For our purposes, it is sufficient to note, from Śaṅkara's perspective, that the unmanifest unfolds (*vyākriya*) itself as the manifest for the purpose of making itself seen and thus known, lest it remain a mere "lump of cognition."<sup>927</sup> *Māyā*, then, is the measuring of the manifest which is seen. Even though *māyā* is a nonexistent thing (*abhūtārtha*), it is not detrimental (*adoṣaḥ*) because it constitutes the very means by which the manifest becomes known. Without *māyā*, in fact, there could be no means by which to know Brahman.<sup>928</sup>

As shown earlier, the absence of duality is not synonymous with the realization of Brahman, since the latter requires perception and discrimination.<sup>929</sup> Scripture and teacher can do no more than indicate that which is to be seen, since knowledge can only arise in accordance with a valid means of knowledge suitable to that purpose (p107).<sup>930</sup> Likewise, *māyā* serves the purpose of indicating Brahman possessed of infinite measure, since it is to be known measure-by-measure.<sup>931</sup> Though ultimately nonexistent, *māyā* is useful as a means to know Brahman. However, since *māyā* is nonexistent and because Brahman is devoid of measure, these measures must also be progressively dissolved.<sup>932</sup> As Śaṅkara warns, one should not commit the error of thinking that the means has the same reality as the end.<sup>933</sup> While this method desires to indicate

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<sup>926</sup> Ra, Haesook. *Sankara as Writer: Method and Style in the Brhadaranyaka Upanisad Bhasya*. 2011. Collections of the Harvard University Archives. Dissertations.

<sup>927</sup> See also, for example, MKBh 3.33.

<sup>928</sup> MUBh 7, discussed above.

<sup>929</sup> MKBh 1.13, discussed above.

<sup>930</sup> UMSBh III.2.21, Shastri, 714-5.

<sup>931</sup> MKBh 1.11-13. Cf. also MKBh 1.16.

<sup>932</sup> MUBh 2.

<sup>933</sup> MKBh 3.26. See also MKBh 2.32ff.

the Brahman that is before one's very eyes and perceptible,<sup>934</sup> realization may arise at one time and not at another, even though one's face may be turned towards what is to be seen.<sup>935</sup> In other words, while measuring (*māyā*) and the apophysis thereof are a reliable means to indicate Brahman, final realization depends upon perception.

Having described *māyā* as a useful means to an end, Śaṅkara concludes his comments on MKBh 3.24 by affirming that the aim of *śruti* is the perception of unity:

Since [*śruti*] is possessed of the result, which is just the perception of unity, that is, without a doubt, the aim of *śruti*. This is due to the very wording of [Vedānta texts] such as: "What delusion and what grief is there for the one who sees (*anupaśyati*) unity" (Īśā Upaniṣad 7).<sup>936</sup>

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<sup>934</sup> MUBh 7.

<sup>935</sup> UMSBh III.2.21.

<sup>936</sup> MKBh 3.24: फलवत्त्वाच्चात्मैकत्वदर्शनमेव श्रुतिनिश्चितोऽथः"तत्र को मोहः कः शोक एकत्वमनुपश्यतः" (ई.उ.७) इत्यादिमन्त्रवर्णात् । Panoli, 431.

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