

## *Pratibhā*, Intuition, and Practical Knowledge

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In Sanskrit philosophy, the closest analogue of intuition is *pratibhā*.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will focus on the theory of *pratibhā* offered by the Sanskrit grammarian Bhartṛhari (5<sup>th</sup> century CE). On this account, states of *pratibhā* play two distinct psychological roles. First, they serve as action-guiding states of linguistic understanding. They are states by means of which linguistically competent agents effortlessly understand the meanings of novel sentences and undertake actions on the basis of that understanding. Second, states of *pratibhā* serve as sources of practical knowledge. On the basis of such states, both human and non-human agents unreflectively know which actions they should perform under which circumstances. Given these two roles of *pratibhā*, some modern commentators have claimed that states of *pratibhā*, as understood by Bhartṛhari, are intuitions.<sup>2</sup>

When these writers make this claim, the notion of intuition they have in mind is not the one that contemporary philosophers appeal to.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary philosophers disagree about the nature of intuitions: about whether intuitions are beliefs, or judgements, or dispositions to believe or judge, or *sui generis* states. But many of them agree on two things. The first is that intuitions are states where certain propositions about abstract matters—e.g., propositions about modality, morality, or mathematics—are presented or represented as true. The second is that the contents of intuitions can be treated as evidence in philosophical inquiry. By contrast, commentators on Bhartṛhari typically invoke a much broader, pre-theoretic concept of intuition. For them, intuitions are just conscious states of awareness<sup>4</sup> (*jñāna*)—conscious experiences or thoughts—which arise without conscious reflection and which yield knowledge about *both* practical and theoretical truths that aren't perceptually accessible.

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<sup>1</sup> The Sanskrit word “*pratibhā*” is derived from the prepositional particle “*prati*”, which means “towards” or “with respect to” and the verbal root “*√bhā*”, which means “to appear” or “to shine.” When used as a noun, the word can refer to appearances or seemings, but, more broadly speaking, also to intellect or understanding.

<sup>2</sup> See Sastri, *The Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, Kaviraj, “The Doctrine of *Pratibhā*,” Akamatsu, “*Pratibhā* and the Meaning of a Sentence,” and Ho, “Meaning, Understanding, and Knowing-What.”

<sup>3</sup> See Bealer, “Modal Epistemology and the Rationalist Renaissance,” Pust, *Intuitions as Evidence*, Huemer, *Moral Intuitionism*, Williamson, *The Philosophy of Philosophy*, Chudnoff, “What Intuitions are Like,” and Bengson, “The Intellectual Given.”

<sup>4</sup> I translate the Sanskrit term “*jñāna*” as “awareness” or “state of awareness.” The term refers to occurrent mental states like experiences and thoughts. Though it is often translated as “cognition,” this translation is misleading in the broader context of Sanskrit philosophy. Contemporary philosophers and cognitive scientists take cognitive states to be states like beliefs and judgements whose contents can be verbally reported, and used for the purposes of reasoning as well as controlling and guiding action. But, according to Buddhist philosophers like Dignāga (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries CE) and Dharmakīrti (7<sup>th</sup> century CE) and later Naiyāyikas like Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya (14<sup>th</sup> century CE), non-conceptual experiences—which count as *jñāna* according to most Sanskrit philosophers who accept them—aren't like this. So, more neutral terms like “awareness” and “states of awareness” are preferable.

I agree with these commentators that conscious occurrent states of *pratibhā* can be regarded as intuitions in this broader, pre-theoretic sense. Henceforth, I will use the word “intuition” in this broader sense. My aim here will be to reconstruct the view that these states of *pratibhā* are intuitions, and to explore its consequences. I will argue that, if Bhartṛhari’s theory of *pratibhā* is right, then a form of *human exceptionalism*—which makes rationality a unique trait of human beings—becomes difficult to maintain.<sup>5</sup> The view in question depends on two commitments. First, an attitude or action can be treated as rational only if that attitude or action is based on conscious reasoning which involves the use of conceptual capacities. Second, an agent cannot have such conceptual capacities unless she also has the capacity to acquire a public language,<sup>6</sup> which belongs exclusively to human beings or cognitively sophisticated enough animals. Bhartṛhari’s theory of *pratibhā* seems incompatible with these commitments. If Bhartṛhari is right, many of our apparently rational attitudes and actions are based on conscious occurrent states of *pratibhā*. But these are just intuitions that arise without any conscious reasoning or reflection and without the use of any conceptual capacity which requires mastery over a public language. Thus, on this view, there is no reason to treat rationality as a peculiar feature of human attitudes and actions.

I will proceed as follows. I will begin by laying out a background assumption of Bhartṛhari’s theory: namely, that all action-guiding states of awareness are language-laden (§1). Then, I will distinguish the two psychological roles that Bhartṛhari attributes to *pratibhā* (§§2-3). Next, I will offer a unified conception of *pratibhā* which accounts for these roles (§4). In the conclusion, I will explore the consequences of this theory (§5).

## 1. Awareness, Action, Language

Bhartṛhari worked within the Vyākaraṇa tradition—the tradition of Sanskrit grammarians—which grew out of Pāṇini’s (5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE) grammar for Sanskrit. Beginning with early grammarians like Kātyāyana (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE) and Patañjali (2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE), this tradition dealt not only with technical aspects of Pāṇinian grammar, but also with philosophical questions pertaining to the nature of language and linguistic comprehension. In his most prominent work *Vākyapadīya* (translated as “Of Sentences and Words”), Bhartṛhari connected his discussion of these questions to a metaphysical thesis, *linguistic monism*. This is the view that there is only one basic object—a language-essence (*śabdatattva*)—on which

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<sup>5</sup> While this view is traced back to figures like Aristotle and Descartes, recent defenders of human exceptionalism about rationality include Donald Davidson and John McDowell; see Davidson, “Rational Animals,” and McDowell, *Mind and World*, Lecture IV. Most of these authors accept some version of the two commitments that I list. See Allen, Todd and Winsberg, “Reasoning and Rationality,” and Hübner, “Introduction.”

<sup>6</sup> Here, the term “public language” refers to a language like English, where the application of linguistic expressions is governed by public conventions and which can be used by multiple speakers to verbally communicate with each other. Importantly, the term doesn’t function here as an antonym of the word “private language” as used by Wittgenstein to refer to a language which is intelligible only to a single agent because its expressions refer to items that are exclusively epistemically accessible to that agent. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* §243. However, as Fodor argues, a language that fails to be public in the sense specified above needn’t be a private language in the sense intended by Wittgenstein. See Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, ch. 2.

the existence and the nature of all other objects depend. Roughly, Bhartṛhari's argument for this claim is this. All states of awareness are language-laden; they represent their objects through the mediation of linguistic expressions. Since we are never directly aware of mind-independent particulars and their properties without the mediation of language, there is no reason to think that the objects of awareness have an existence or a nature that is independent of language. This lends support to the claim that there is no object whose existence and nature is language-independent. In this section, I will focus on Bhartṛhari's claim that action-guiding states of awareness—states of awareness that guide purposeful actions—are language-laden.

In *Vākyapadīya* 1.129 [SI 1.113],<sup>7</sup> he states the idea as follows:

Every way of performing an action—which even a child, in whom dispositions have been deposited previously [i.e., in a previous birth] (*pūrvāhitasamkāraḥ*), is aware of (*pratipadyate*)—is based on the activity of language in this world. (VP I.186.1-2)

In his commentary *Vṛtti* on this verse, Bhartṛhari makes two claims (VP I.186.3-5 and I.187.1-12). First, he suggests that objects that our actions are directed towards—e.g., the beer that I want to grab from the fridge or the snake that I want to leap over while walking—don't give rise to actions in virtue of their mere existence. Unless an existent object is represented through language, it is no better than a non-existent object, since it cannot give rise to any action. Moreover, even non-existent objects like a hare's horn can give rise to various actions—as if they had mind-independent reality (what Bhartṛhari calls *mukhyasattā* or primary existence)—when they are represented to an agent by means of language.

Second, Bhartṛhari points out that this hypothesis—that language-laden states of awareness are necessary for guiding purposeful actions—isn't just true of intellectually mature human beings, but also of linguistically untrained children (and animals). In his *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 1.129 [SI 1.113], he says:

And even in infants who are endowed with language in accordance with their respective species [or their births] due to the deposition of dispositions (*bhāvanā*) caused by their previous association with language, there arises an awareness (*pratipattiḥ*), based on inarticulable linguistic expressions (*anākhyeyaśabdanibandhanā*), with respect to specific purposeful actions. (VP I.186.3-187.2)

Thus, for Bhartṛhari, all practical undertakings are based on states of awareness that involve linguistic expressions of some sort. For intellectually mature human adults, these linguistic expressions can be (in some but not all cases) *articulable*. But the actions of linguistically untrained children (or animals) are based on states of awareness that depend on *inarticulable*

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<sup>7</sup> I am not following K. A. Subramania Iyer's numbering of verses in VP I-III, which are marked inside square brackets as SI, but rather the numbering in Rau, *Bhartṛharis Vākyapadīya*.

linguistic expressions. As Bhartṛhari tells us, a state of awareness that involves these inarticulable expressions arises from linguistic dispositions (*śabdabhāvanā*)—dispositions to understand or construct linguistic representations—caused by the relevant agent’s association with language in previous lives. In his sub-commentary *Paddhati*, Vṛṣabhadeva explains what these inarticulable linguistic expressions are.

This very linguistic expression, which serves as the basis for the awareness of that child and which conforms to a disposition (*saṃskāra*) for [undergoing] a state of awareness, doesn’t recur (*nānuvartate*). This doesn’t become articulate (*nāsāv ākhyānaṃ yāti*). (VP I.187.10-11)

This suggests that inarticulable expressions are expressions that cannot be repeated or made articulate through overt speech. So, these expressions cannot belong to a public language. Rather, they are (arguably) part of an unspoken language—what Bhartṛhari elsewhere calls the *intermediate* form of language (*madhyamā*)—which is available to the linguistically untrained child independently of any training in a spoken public language. This unspoken language is comparable to (but not the same as) what Jerry Fodor calls a “language of thought,” a system of mental representations used in the process of thinking (Fodor, *The Language of Thought*, especially chs. 2-3). As Marco Ferrante notices, Bhartṛhari’s intermediate form of language shares certain features of what Fodor takes to be the language of thought (Ferrante, *Indian Perspectives on Consciousness, Language, and Self*, 65-66). Unlike a public language, it is internal (*antaḥsanniveśinī*) and has awareness alone as its basis (*buddhimātropādānā*); this implies that it consists solely in mental representations. But, like expressions belonging to a public language, expressions in this unspoken language appear as if they are characterized by temporal order (*parigrhītakrameva*); this suggests that this unspoken language appears to have syntactic structure.<sup>8,9</sup>

In *Vākyapadīya* 1.130 [SI 1.114], to illustrate the need for positing inarticulable linguistic expressions and the linguistic dispositions that underlie them, Bhartṛhari offers the

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<sup>8</sup> See *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 1.159 [SI 1.134] (VP I.214.2-3). Bhartṛhari calls this the *intermediate* form of language because it falls between two other forms of language, the undifferentiated (*paśyanī*) (where the distinction between a referring expression and its referent doesn’t exist) and the spoken (*vaikharī*). Despite the similarities with Fodor’s language of thought, there are two salient differences between that and Bhartṛhari’s intermediate form of language. First, Fodor’s “language of thought” hypothesis is offered within the framework of a computational theory of the mind according to which cognitive processes should be characterized as computational processes that manipulate mental representations. Bhartṛhari endorses no such view. Second, Fodor takes the language of thought to be compositional: more complex expressions in the language of thought are composed out of simpler expressions. For Bhartṛhari, the intermediate form of language doesn’t in fact have any compositional syntactic structure. This is suggested by the expression “*iva*” (which means “as if”) when Bhartṛhari says that the intermediate form of language appears as if it is characterized by temporal order. For this point, see Vṛṣabha’s *Paddhati* on *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 1.159 (VP I.214.16-18).

<sup>9</sup> In *Paddhati* on Bhartṛhari’s *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 1.129 [SI 1.113], Vṛṣabha emphasizes that this isn’t the only way to understand the Bhartṛhari’s reference to inarticulable linguistic expressions (VP I.187.13-14). An inarticulable expression could be an expression that may belong to a spoken language, but “isn’t capable of being articulated [or explained by the relevant infant] in the form, ‘This is the referent of this expression’ (*idam asya vācyam iti*).” While this second interpretation is *prima facie* plausible, I don’t think it’s defensible given Bhartṛhari’s commentary on *Vākyapadīya* 1.130 where he offers the example of a young child who cannot be explicitly instructed to perform any action.

example of a child who doesn't understand any public language but intentionally emits a sound by moving its vocal organs for the first time.

Without a linguistic disposition, the first movement of the vocal organs, the upward motion of the vital air, and the striking of the places of articulation would not be possible. (VP I.187.3-4)

In his commentary, Bhartṛhari explains:

Moreover, this linguistic disposition is beginningless and contain the seeds of awareness for every person (*pratipurūṣam avasthitajñānabījapratigrahā*). For it is not possible for this disposition somehow to be of human origin. That is to say, the movement of the vocal organs, and so on, simply cannot be brought about by any instruction and must be known by means of *pratibhā* [i.e., intuition]. For what is capable of bringing about [or conveying] these human properties apart from something that has the nature of language? (VP I.187.5-188.2)

The claim is that the child who intentionally emits a sound by moving her vocal organs cannot do so unless she is aware of the way to perform that action. But, since the child hasn't acquired any public language, she hasn't learnt how to perform that action on the basis of any instruction given through a public language. Yet, for Bhartṛhari, she can be aware of the way to perform that action only if she represents the action by means of language or a language-like representational medium. So, the action must be based on a state of awareness—called *pratibhā*—which represents the way of performing the relevant action through an *inarticulable* language or language-like representational medium. Therefore, this state of awareness arises not due to any exposure to a public language, but rather on the basis of linguistic dispositions that the child has inherited from previous lives.

Thus, for both linguistically trained adults and linguistically untrained children, purposeful actions must be based on language-laden states of awareness. In the commentary on *Vākyapadīya* 1.123 [SI 1.111], Bhartṛhari offers an argument for this view.

This is because every object—which has as the basis [for its awareness] a word that conveys it—descends into the domain of action insofar as it is determined by means of recollective determination (*smṛtinirūpaṇā*), linguistic determination (*abhijalpanirūpaṇā*), and determination through a form (*ākāranirūpaṇā*). And the distinction amongst musical notes such as *ṣaḍja*, *ṛṣabha*, *gāndhāra*, *dhaivata*, *niṣāda*, *pañcama*, and *madhyama*—relative to which no commonly known word that conveys them has been established—isn't determined without an awareness of a word that could serve as the basis for that determination. This is [also] because cowherds, shepherds, and the like—by inventing words that serve as the basis [for their awareness or actions] with respect to cows and so on—embark on actions directed at the distinctions [amongst those cows, etc.]. Therefore, an object, which depends [for its awareness] on general and specific expressions that are either articulable

(*samākhya*) or inarticulable (*asamākhya*) and which is endowed with distinctions, is manifested, apprehended, and accepted through a state of awareness that is associated with the powers of language, intertwined with language, and has the nature of language. (VP I.182.3-183.3)

When an agent acts with regard to an object for the sake of achieving some goal, she does so only insofar as she distinguishes that object from others that aren't practically relevant to achieving that goal. For example, a musician who wishes to play a certain note on her instrument is able to do so only insofar as she has the capacity to distinguish it from other notes. Similarly, a cowherd who wants to take a certain cow out to the field to graze is able to do so only insofar as she can distinguish that cow from other cows in the stable. But an agent cannot distinguish any object in this way unless she determines it to be a certain way. In the passage, Bhartṛhari speaks of three kinds of determination that are required for performing an action: recollective determination, linguistic determination, and determination through a form. Let's distinguish them following Vṛṣabha (VP I.182.11-14).<sup>10</sup> Initially, when an agent initially perceptually discriminates an object, she doesn't immediately act towards it. Then, she recalls other similar objects that she has encountered earlier, and thereby categorizes the relevant object as being of a certain kind. So, she judges, "This is like that." This is recollective determination. At the second stage, she identifies the object using a general or specific linguistic expression: for example, it could be a general expression "*ṣadja*" that refers to a type of musical note, or a specific one like "Daisy" which refers to a particular cow. According to Vṛṣabha, this kind of determination involves taking the object to be non-distinct from a linguistic expression, and so it is called linguistic determination. Finally, the agent determines that the object can serve some practical purpose, making judgements that take the form, "This is a means to accomplishing that goal," and "This goal can be accomplished by means of that means." For Vṛṣabha, this is what Bhartṛhari calls "determination through a form." Due to this third kind of determination, the object becomes something that the agent can act towards. At each of these stages, the agent's determination of the object depends on linguistic expressions that may be either articulable or inarticulable.

In his commentary on *Vākyapadīya* 1.131[SI 1.115], Bhartṛhari makes the idea explicit using an example of a man who is walking quickly.

Just like one's linguistic dispositions when they are in a withdrawn form, non-conceptual awareness—even when it is produced—also does not bring about any effect in relation to objects of awareness. This is just as in this example. For a man who walks quickly, even though there arises some awareness due to the contact [of his feet] with the grass and clods of earth, there is only a certain state of awareness

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<sup>10</sup> Vṛṣabha offers an alternative interpretation on which recollective determination is the determination of the state of awareness, linguistic determination is the determination of a linguistic expression, and determination through a form is the determination of the object (VP I.182.15-17). This interpretation is compatible with the interpretation that I give above, and is closer to the interpretation favoured by Ogawa, "Bhartṛhari on Representations (*buddhyākāra*)," 273-274

characterised by the seeds of linguistic dispositions that are present, in which—when the specifically restricted powers of meaningful linguistic expressions that are either articulable or inarticulable have appeared—the nature of the thing, which is grasped insofar as it is shaped by the awareness that is penetrated by language and is connected to the powers of language, is said to “become an object of awareness” inasmuch as it appears in a clear manner in conformity with the awareness. (VP I.188.5-7, 189.1-3)

In this passage, Bhartṛhari seems to allow for an initial non-conceptual perceptual awareness which isn't action-guiding. The man who walks quickly may indeed undergoes some initial perceptual awareness where he doesn't identify what he is touching with his feet as *grass* or as *clods of earth*. But whatever is presented in such an awareness cannot be said to “become an object of awareness” (*jñāyate*) insofar as it appears in a confused or unclear manner. That is why such a state of awareness cannot give rise to any purposeful action. However, when the linguistic dispositions of a subject—i.e., her latent tendencies to conceptually represent objects using linguistic expressions—become activated, he undergoes a state of conceptual awareness which *can* motivate purposeful actions. For Bhartṛhari, the nature of a thing appears in a state of conceptual awareness in a clear manner, precisely because the relevant state of awareness represents the object through the mediation of linguistic expressions in a clear or determinate manner. For example, the man who walks quickly might perceive the objects in his path as *grass*, *clods of earth*, *stones*, *snakes*, etc. by conceptually categorizing them using linguistic expressions.<sup>11</sup> Such determinate, linguistic representations will, then, allow the man to control his actions in various ways: he might walk on the soft grass; he might leap over the clods of earth; he might avoid the stones and snakes in his path.

The upshot is this. If an agent is to perform a purposeful action with regard to an object, then the relevant agent must determine that object to be a certain way. To determine that object to be a certain way, the agent must determinately or clearly represent the object through a state of conceptual awareness by means of linguistic expressions. So, any purposeful action must depend on a language-laden state of awareness.<sup>12</sup> In the rest of this

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<sup>11</sup> These passages raise the intriguing question of what a concept is on Bhartṛhari's view. I cannot explore this in detail here. But here are some initial thoughts. Suppose we accept a representationalist view on which concepts are mental representations that serve as constituents of cognitive states like beliefs and judgements. Then, two possible analogues of a concept are available within a Bhartṛharian framework: (i) a token awareness-internal linguistic expression (*buddhistha-śabda*) (mentioned in *Vākyapadīya* 1.47 [SI 1.46] at VP I.103.7-8) and (ii) a token occurrent state of conceptual awareness (*vikalpa* or *savikalaka-jñāna*). The first is a token internal linguistic representation (perhaps belonging to a language of thought), while the second is a token occurrent state of awareness that conceptually represents an object through the mediation of linguistic expressions. Neither of these can be a concept, since the same concept can be shared (in some sense) by multiple subjects but a token representation or state of awareness can't be shared by multiple subjects. A better analogue of a concept could be what Bhartṛhari calls a *type of linguistic expression* (*śabdajāti*) which can be instantiated or manifested by token awareness-internal linguistic representations in multiple subjects (discussed in *Vākyapadīya* 3.1.9-10 at VP III.1.21.15-16, III.1.23.14-156). Thanks to an anonymous referee for helpful suggestions here.

<sup>12</sup> Bhartṛhari claims that, in other non-action-guiding states of awareness too, a connection with language is present. This includes three kinds of mental states: (a) states of awareness that persist even when one is asleep (VP I.189.4-5), (b) the initial perceptual awareness before full-blown conceptual categorisation occurs (VP I.190.7-8), and (c) recollective awareness (VP I.190.8, 191.1-2).

essay, we will see that, for Bhartṛhari, such language-laden states of awareness are simply states of *pratibhā* that arise effortlessly without conscious reasoning or reflection.

### 3. *Pratibhā* as a State of Linguistic Understanding

In the last section, *pratibhā* made a brief appearance in the context of Bhartṛhari's explanation of how a child intentionally emits sounds by moving its vocal organs. In fact, Bhartṛhari's theory of *pratibhā* is designed to explain how linguistically trained agents are able to effortlessly understand the meanings of novel sentences that they have never heard before and are able to undertake actions on the basis of that understanding. To see how this theory works, we can begin by contrasting Bhartṛhari's approach to semantics and linguistic comprehension with what we may call a *compositionalist approach*.

According to a compositionalist approach to semantics, the meaning of a sentence is simply composed out of the meanings of the constituent words. Sanskrit philosophers (both Naiyāyikas and Mīmāṃsakas) who adopt this view would claim that the meaning of a sentence is a connection (*samsarga* or *anvaya*) amongst the meanings of the individual words. For instance, the meaning of the sentence, "The tree is standing in the garden," is simply a connection amongst the tree, the garden, the event of standing, and the spatial relation picked out by "in." According to a compositionalist approach to linguistic comprehension, to understand the meaning of a sentence, one must initially understand the meanings of the individual words and then engage in a kind of reasoning whereby the word-meanings are combined to construct the sentential meaning. Sanskrit philosophers (e.g., the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsakas and some Naiyāyikas) who accept this approach would claim that, when I hear the sentence, "The tree is standing in the garden," my auditory perception of the individual words trigger a memory of the corresponding word-meanings, which I then combine to understand the meaning of the sentence.

Turn now to Bhartṛhari's theory of sentential meaning. At first glance, Bhartṛhari seems to make conflicting claims about sentential meaning. In his *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 1.24-26, he claims that the meaning of a sentence is a qualified action or event: a "unitary qualified entity that has the nature of action [or event]" (*viśiṣṭa ekaḥ kriyātmā*) (VP 1.65.7-68.1). This consists of an action or event that is picked out by the verb in the sentence and qualified or characterized by its participants (*kāraka*) such as its agent, its object, its instrument, etc., which, in turn, are picked out by other words in the sentence. So, the meaning of a sentence like "The tree is standing in the garden" will be the qualified action or event of the tree's standing in the garden. This sort of sentential meaning has two characteristics. Unlike the meanings of the individual words that are abstract (*apoddhārapadārtha*), the meaning of a sentence has a determinate character (*sthitilakṣaṇa*): the qualified action or event that constitutes the meaning of a sentence can be determinately real or unreal (in a mind-independent manner) depending on whether the sentence is true or false. Second, it is divisible into parts. As Bhartṛhari himself tells us, that sentential meaning is "a bundle of elements that are connected together" (*samsargīṇāṃ mātrāṇāṃ kalāpam*): namely, the bare action or event of standing and its participants like the agent, i.e., the tree,



and the substratum, i.e., the garden (VP I.75.2-3). This would commit Bhartṛhari to a version of compositionality about sentential meaning.

However, in other contexts such as *Vākyapadīya* 2.132 and 3.3.32-33, Bhartṛhari claims that the meaning of a sentence is an intentional object of awareness or a mental object (*buddhiviṣaya*, *buddhyartha*) (VP II.62.13-14; VP III.1.145.11-12; VP III.1.146.12-13). Even though it cannot be a mind-independently existing object, it is regarded as the meaning of a linguistic expression only insofar as it is erroneously treated as external to awareness. Typically, commentators—both pre-modern and modern—take this to imply that the meaning of a sentence meaning is a mental representation (*buddhyākāra*) which the agent falsely superimposes on to the external world.<sup>13</sup> This interpretation also fits Bhartṛhari’s claim in his *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* on 1.24-26 and *Vākyapadīya* 2.27 that the meaning of a sentence is something whose division into parts is fictitious (*kalpitoddeśavibhāga*) and which is devoid of distinctions (*vyāvṛttabheda*) (VP I.67.1-2; VP II.15.7-8). The claim doesn’t make sense if we take the meaning of a sentence to be a qualified action that can be analysed into its qualificand and its qualifiers, but does make more sense if we take to be a mental representation that lacks spatial or temporal parts. How can we reconcile these apparently conflicting claims?

The solution emerges from *Vākyapadīya* 2.445 [SI 2.441].

On the basis of the object [or meaning] that has the nature of awareness (*sampratyayārthāt*), an external object [or meaning]—whether or not it exists—is divided up. However, this division by externalization (*bāhyīkr̥tya vibhāgaḥ*) on the basis of capacity has the characteristic of abstraction (*apoddhāralakṣanaḥ*). (VP II.175.6-7)

Following Bhartṛhari’s *Vṛtti* (VP II.318.10-13), Puṇyarāja expands on the point as follows (VP II.175.8-24). When one understands the meaning of a sentence like “The tree is standing in a garden,” one’s state of linguistic understanding consists simply in entertaining a mental representation. For Bhartṛhari, this mental representation constitutes the meaning of the sentence; it is an “object [or meaning] that has the nature of awareness.” When one becomes aware of this mental image or representation, one determines this *partless* mental representation to be a *complex* qualified action or event: namely, the tree’s standing in the garden. This happens in two steps. First, by a process of externalization (*bāhyīkaraṇa*), one superimposes the partless mental image on to the external world, judging it to be a qualified action or event that is external to one’s states of awareness. Then, by a process of abstraction (*apoddhāra*), one analyses it into fictitious parts: for example, into (i) the bare action or event of standing and (ii) its two participants—the tree and the garden—which have the capacity to play the roles of an agent and a substratum respectively in relation to that action or event.

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<sup>13</sup> See Puṇyarāja’s *Ṭīkā* on *Vākyapadīya* 2.132 (VP II.62.15-6), Helarāja’s *Prakīrṇaprakāśa* on *Vākyapadīya* 3.3.32 (VP III.1.145.13-147.5), and Kamalaśīla’s commentary *Pañjikā* on Śāntarakṣita’s *Tattvasaṅgraha* v. 891 (TS I 284.6-7). This view is convincingly defended in Ogawa, “Bhartṛhari on Representations (*Buddhyākāra*).”

Once one has separated out these components, one treats them as the meanings of the different words in the sentence such as “tree” and “garden.”

On Bhartṛhari’s view, therefore, both a partless mental representation and a divisible qualified action or event can be regarded as the meaning conveyed by a sentence. When a subject understands a sentence, what they actually grasp is a partless mental representation. That is the *awareness-internal* meaning (*bauddhārtha*) of the sentence. But, then, since she projects it outward on to the external world, the meaning conveyed by the sentence appears from her perspective to be a qualified action or event. That is the *awareness-external* meaning (*bāhyārtha*) of the sentence. Since this external meaning is constructed only on the basis of a mistake, the compositionalist approach to sentential meaning, endorsed by the Naiyāyikas and the Mīmāṃsakas, isn’t quite right.

Focus now on Bhartṛhari’s rejection of the compositionalist approach to linguistic comprehension. In his *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 1.24-26, he argues against it.

This is because it is not possible for the activity of a linguistic expression with respect to [conveying] its own meaning, etc. to take place according to a temporal order, pausing again and again. For the expression is uttered once, and it is always associated with its meaning. This is because there is no fixed sequence of awareness for either the hearer or the speaker. For the hearer or the speaker divides at a later time through other states of awareness—insofar as he wishes to do so—an entity which is qualified by all its qualifiers, which is a bundle of elements that are connected together, and which has simultaneously attained the status of being the intentional object of a single awareness. But, even though that entity is divided, without its synthesis there arises no *pratibhā* that is directed at a purposeful action (*arthakriyāviṣayā*). So, once again, the hearer or the speaker recognizes (*pratyavamaṣati*) the form of a connection (*saṃsargarūpam*) [amongst the word-meanings]. (VP I.74.7-75)

The argument here is best explained using the example of a command. For example, when a farmhand hears a farmer’s command, “Bring the white cow with the stick!” she may understand that she is being asked to bring the white cow by means of the stick. She doesn’t understand the meaning of this sentence gradually, by initially grasping the meanings of the individual words and then consciously combining them together. Rather, she grasps the meaning of the sentence as soon as it is uttered. This sentential meaning, for Bhartṛhari, is a unitary mental representation that the farmhand erroneously takes to be a qualified action of bringing the white cow with a stick. This is followed by two extra optional steps. First, if she so desires, the farmhand may analyse that qualified action or event by means of her other states of awareness into fictitious parts, such as the act of bringing, the cow, its white colour, the stick and so on. However, these distinct states of awareness, which are directed at these individual parts, cannot guide any purposeful action. So, if she is to perform any purposeful action on the basis of her understanding of the command, the farmhand must synthesize the word-meanings, so as to become aware once again of the specific action that she is being

asked to perform. This action-guiding state of awareness, which is directed at a purposeful action and which involves linguistic understanding, is what Bhartṛhari calls *pratibhā*.

Bhartṛhari repeats the same point elsewhere in *Vākyapadīya* 2.143 and 2.145:

Even though the meanings of the words are apprehended separately, there arises a *pratibhā* that is indeed distinct. They [i.e., the grammarians] call that *pratibhā*, which is brought about by the meanings of the words, the “meaning of the sentence.” (VP II.65.16-17)

It is as if that *pratibhā*, which is unaccompanied by reflection (*avicāritā*), brings about the synthesis of the meanings of the words. As if by assuming the form of all [the word-meanings], it occurs as an intentional object (*viṣaya*) [of awareness]. (VP II.66.67).

Two ideas are salient from these verses. First, Bhartṛhari is referring to what is grasped by a state of *pratibhā*—the meaning of the sentence—as “*pratibhā*.” This is neither an accident nor a confusion. On Bhartṛhari’s view, the meaning of a sentence, grasped by a state of *pratibhā*, is still a mental representation. Since such a mental representation is merely an aspect of that state of *pratibhā*, it isn’t strictly speaking distinct from that state. After initially understanding the meaning of a sentence and then analysing it into fictitious parts, a subject may grasp the meanings of the words one at a time. But her action-guiding awareness of the sentential meaning—given through her state of *pratibhā*—doesn’t present those word-meanings or their connection. Rather, it simply presents a partless mental representation which takes “the form of a connection” between the relevant action or event and its qualifiers. The agent may take this representation to be a qualified action, but that will be an error. This is brought out by Bhartṛhari’s use of the term “as if” (*iva*) twice in the second verse.

Second, Bhartṛhari wants to deny the compositionalist view that, in understanding the meaning of a sentence, a linguistically competent hearer engages in some kind of conscious reasoning or reflection whereby she combines the meanings of the words in order to understand the meaning of a sentence. Rather, he wants to say that, when we undergo a state of *pratibhā*, there is simply no such conscious process of reflection or reasoning. As he says, “It is as if that *pratibhā*, which is unaccompanied by reflection, brings about the synthesis of the meanings of the words.” When a linguistically competent hearer listens to a linguistic utterance, she typically understands the meaning of the sentence in a flash without engaging in any conscious reasoning about how to combine the meanings of the words.

These two aspects of *pratibhā*—namely, that it involves a partless mental representation and isn’t based on any conscious reasoning—makes it difficult to determine what its nature is and how it arises. In *Vākyapadīya* 2.144, Bhartṛhari goes on to say more about this.

That *pratibhā* cannot be explained (*anākhyeyā*) in any way to others, in the form, “It is this.” While it is established by everyone’s mental occurrences (*vṛtti*), it cannot be determined even by the agent. (VP II.66.2-3)

In his commentary *Tīkā* on this verse (VP II.66.4-5), the commentator Puṇyarāja glosses the expression “established by everyone’s mental occurrences” by appealing to the thesis that *pratibhā* is established by reflexive awareness (*svasaṃvedana*). A state of awareness is reflexively aware of itself insofar as it constitutes an awareness of itself and its own aspects, e.g., the mental representations that it involves. So, Puṇyarāja’s claim suggests that the states of *pratibhā* are self-intimating conscious mental occurrences that a subject can be directly or non-inferentially be aware of. Yet, Bhartṛhari also wants to say that a subject who undergoes such a state of *pratibhā* cannot determine that state to have any fixed or determinate character. That is why she cannot explain her own states of *pratibhā* to others. At first glance, this seems to be in tension with the claim that *pratibhā* is established by everyone’s mental occurrences. In fact, there is no such tension. First, on Bhartṛhari’s view, we are invariably mistaken about our own states of *pratibhā*. When we understand a sentence and then undergo a state of *pratibhā*, we are presented with a partless mental representation, but we mistake that mental image or representation to be a complex qualified action or event. As a result, we can neither accurately determine what our states of *pratibhā* really present us with, nor explain their nature to others without distortion. Second, as Bhartṛhari tells us, even though a state of *pratibhā* may itself be introspectively accessible through reflexive awareness, it arises without any conscious reasoning or reflection. Thus, we do not have any introspective access to the cognitive processes that underlie our states of *pratibhā*.<sup>14</sup> Since we cannot introspectively determine how we arrive at our states of *pratibhā*, we *a fortiori* cannot accurately explain the origins of those states to others.

There is some textual evidence that this feature of *pratibhā*—its inexplicability—is a more pervasive feature of expert knowledge on Bhartṛhari’s view. In *Vākyapadīya* 1.35, Bhartṛhari says:

The awareness of jewels, coins, and so on—which cannot be explained (*asamākhyeyam*) to others—arises from habituation (*abhyāsāt*) alone for experts. It is not inferential. (VP I.93.1-2)

Bhartṛhari explains the verse as follows. (VP I.93.3-6). For Bhartṛhari, the knowledge that an expert jeweller has of precious jewels and metals arises from habituation, i.e., from repeated exposure to the relevant jewels and metals. For instance, when a jeweller comes to know that a certain object is a silver coin, her knowledge may not be based on any conscious inference. The differences between the precious jewels and metals may be so subtle that the jeweller lacks the linguistic or conceptual vocabulary to consciously entertain them, let alone report them as reasons for her judgement. Yet, that doesn’t prevent the jeweller from gaining the

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<sup>14</sup> I say more about the underlying process when I discuss the distinction between manifest and unmanifest states of *pratibhā* in §4.

knowledge that the object before her is a silver coin. As Bhartṛhari's discussion suggests, this sort of habit-born awareness arises from an ability to conceptually categorize what one is perceiving without engaging in any conscious reasoning. Bhartṛhari asks us to consider a trained musician's ability to distinguish musical notes such as *saḍja*, *ṛsabha*, *gāndhāra*, *dhaivata*, and so on. Bhartṛhari emphasizes that the differences between these notes are objects of auditory perception. We only learn about these differences by listening to the notes: inference or testimony cannot help us here. That is why a trained musician acquires the skill of identifying the notes or recognizing their differences only by repeatedly listening to them and mentally registering them as distinct. And when the musician later exercises that skill in singing or playing an instrument, her awareness of one note being distinct from another isn't based on any conscious reasoning.

Elsewhere, in *Vākyapadīya* 2.117, Bhartṛhari approvingly entertains the view that habituation plays a similar role in producing (at least some) states of *pratibhā*.

Others have taught that language is the cause of *pratibhā* due to habituation, just as in children as well as animals, in bringing about an awareness of meaning. (VP II.57.12-13)

His commentator, Puṇyarāja, explains the idea as follows (VP II.57.14-22). For human beings who have learnt a public language, hearing a sentence in that language can generate an awareness of sentential meaning—a state of *pratibhā*—insofar as they have mastered the conventions of that language through habituation, i.e., the repeated observation of the behaviour of other members of their linguistic community. But, even in other children and other animals who haven't learnt a public language, the use of certain fixed linguistic expressions (or other signs) can indeed give rise to a state of *pratibhā*. For example, if I call out my cat's name, she comes running towards me expecting to be fed. My cat's understanding of what my utterance means is a state of *pratibhā* that arises out of habituation, i.e., her repeated exposure to that expression in contexts where I give her food.

Thus, Bhartṛhari's description of these cases of expert knowledge matches his description of *pratibhā*: both, he claims, cannot be described to others. This suggests the following hypothesis. Just as the perception of an expert jeweller or musician manifests their expertise, e.g., their ability to identify precious metals or musical notes, so also does our understanding of the meaning of a sentence manifest a form of expertise, e.g., our ability to figure out the meaning of a sentence on the basis of the word-meanings. Since both kinds of awareness are based on an unreflective exercise of expertise that arises out of habituation, those who undergo such states of awareness cannot describe to others how or why they arrived at the relevant states.

Given this account of *pratibhā*, it seems plausible to characterize states of *pratibhā* as intuitions. Two distinct features of *pratibhā* stand out from this discussion. First of all, for Bhartṛhari, a state of *pratibhā* is a conscious, occurrent state of linguistic understanding. It is (or appears to be) directed at a purposeful action that is conveyed by a sentence, and arises

after an agent has understood the unitary meaning of the relevant sentence, divided it up into fictitious parts, and synthesized those parts again to form a representation of a qualified action. Second, states of *pratibhā* are habit-born states of awareness. Much like states of expert knowledge, they arise effortlessly without any conscious reasoning or reflection. These two features of states of *pratibhā* may be taken to show that these are just intuitive, action-guiding states of linguistic understanding.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. *Pratibhā* as a Source of Practical Knowledge

For Bhartṛhari, states of *pratibhā* are not just sources of linguistic comprehension. They are also sources of practical knowledge and thereby guide purposeful actions.

As Bhartṛhari notes in *Vākyapadīya* 2.147, ordinary people regard such states of *pratibhā* as sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*), presumably with regard to what action the relevant agents should perform under certain circumstances and how they should perform the relevant actions.

All ordinary people regard that *pratibhā* as a source of knowledge. Even for animals, practical undertakings arise due to the influence of that *pratibhā*. (VP II.66-17-18)

In his commentary, Puṅyarāja explains the idea by quoting a half-verse (1.19cd) from Kālidāsa’s play *Abhijñānaśakuntala* (translatable as “The Recognition of Śakuntalā”) (VP II.66.17): “For good people, the workings of their conscience are sources of knowledge with respect to things that are subject to doubt” (*satām hi sandehapadeṣu vastuṣu pramāṇam antaḥkaraṇapravṛttayaḥ*). In the context of the play, the verse occurs in a situation where the king, Duṣyanta, is immediately attracted to Śakuntalā when he sees her, but is assailed by doubts about whether she is fit to be a wife of a *kṣatriya*, i.e., someone who belongs to the warrior-caste, like him. Puṅyarāja’s use of this verse suggests that states of *pratibhā*—which may just be inclinations of the mind—put us (if we are good) in a position to know what to do even when we are uncertain about such matters. Thus, states of *pratibhā* yield practical knowledge in these cases.<sup>16</sup> As Bhartṛhari tells us in *Vākyapadīya* 2.148, in all these cases, the action is guided by a state of *pratibhā* which arises effortlessly—without conscious reasoning or reflection—just like the intoxicating power of alcohol that emerges when certain substances are fermented (VP II.67.4-5).

Bhartṛhari is keen to emphasize that states of *pratibhā* don’t just yield practical knowledge in intellectually mature humans, but also in young children and animals. In *Vākyapadīya* 2.149-150, he says:

<sup>15</sup> See Sastri, *The Philosophy of Word and Meaning*, 255, and Ho, “Meaning, Understanding, and Knowing-What,” 410-411.

<sup>16</sup> Here, and in the rest of the essay, I will be using the expression “practical knowledge” in a relatively broad sense. It will not only refer to knowledge-how, but also to other forms of practical knowledge, e.g, knowledge of which action to perform, for what reason, by what means, and so on.

Who changes the male cuckoo’s rendering of notes in spring? By whom are the animals taught to make their dwellings, etc.?

Who propels animals and birds towards acts of eating, loving, hating, swimming, and so on, which are well-established according to species and clan? (VP II.66.12-67.15)

Here, Bhartṛhari is giving examples of actions that manifest a certain kind of practical knowledge. Insects like spiders effortlessly construct intricate webs that human beings cannot make, and the cuckoo suddenly begins to sing certain notes in spring. Animals belonging to different species strive for different kinds of food, which are good for them, without any instruction or repeated observation of the beneficial effects of such actions. Some animals, like ducks, are able to perform skilled activities like swimming, without any instruction. Doves are instinctively friendly towards each other, while the snake and the mongoose fight each other constantly. For Bhartṛhari, all these actions are guided by states of *pratibhā*.

What this doesn’t tell us is *how* states of *pratibhā* guide actions. A later Mīmāṃsaka and Vedāntin, Maṇḍana Misra (8<sup>th</sup> century CE), answers this question clearly. In *Vidhiviveka* (translatable as “A Discrimination of the Origins of Action”), Maṇḍana Miśra ascribes to his Prābhākara opponent the Bhartṛharian view that episodes of *pratibhā* guide action insofar as they put the relevant agents in a position to know what they should do in a certain scenario. The opponent describes the nature of *pratibhā* as follows:

It is an insight (*prajñā*) which is conducive to the awareness (*pratipatti*) of an action delimited by a means that is invariably connected to it. Moreover, that is the cause of a practical undertaking. Unless a certain *pratibhā* that takes the form, “This is to be done in this way by this means,” arises in a person, he does not undertake any action with respect to an object that is known by perception, etc. It is in *pratibhā* that the effects of the different means of knowing culminate. For, in this world, a person, who has *pratibhā* as his eye, strives towards the ways of performing actions. (VV<sup>MG</sup> 175.3-5, 176.3-5)<sup>17</sup>

Here is one way of understanding this characterization of *pratibhā*. When an agent undergoes a state of *pratibhā*, she is presented with a mental representation. But she erroneously takes that representation to be a qualified action that she should perform. Thus, it seems to the agent as if a qualified action appears to her through her state of *pratibhā*. In this way, the state of *pratibhā* gives rise a distinct state of awareness—a state of practical knowledge—which represents a certain purposeful action as something to be performed in a certain way by a certain means. This precisely is the sense in which a state of *pratibhā* is *conducive* but not identical to “an awareness of an action delimited by a means that is invariably connected

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<sup>17</sup> The definition of *pratibhā* given by Maṇḍana matches that given by the Buddhist philosopher, Kamalaśīla (8<sup>th</sup> century), in his commentary *Pañjikā* on v. 892 in Śāntakarakṣita’s (8<sup>th</sup> century CE) *Tattvasaṅgraha* (translatable as “A Compendium of Truths”) (TS 1 286.10-11).

to it.”<sup>18</sup> When the agent undergoes that *pratibhā*-based state of practical knowledge, she undertakes the relevant action by that means in that way. For example, in a case where I am trying cook a dish, my action at every step may be guided by a background state of *pratibhā*. Even though this state of *pratibhā* may only present me with a mental representation, I may take it to present (b) the action of cooking the dish as something to be performed by me, (b) the required ingredients and utensils as the means to bring it about, and (c) the steps in the recipe I have in mind as the way to perform the action.

In *Vākyapadīya* 2.146, Bhartṛhari highlights two features of such states of *pratibhā*.

With respect to the way of performing an action, no one transgresses that *pratibhā* which is produced either directly by language or by the continuity of dispositions. (VP II.66.11-12)

Take the first feature of *pratibhā*: namely, that no one transgresses *pratibhā* when it comes to the way of performing an action. This just means that, in intentionally performing any action, the agent must conform to a state of *pratibhā*. The argument, presumably, is this. Any purposeful action must be guided by the agent’s awareness of what she should do, by what means she should do it, and how she should do it. Only a state of *pratibhā* can constitute such an awareness. So, in performing any purposeful action, an agent must conform to a state of *pratibhā*. The second feature of *pratibhā* is more familiar: namely, that all states of *pratibhā* either arise from a direct exposure to language or indirectly due to linguistic dispositions. The first sort of case is simple. If a farmer tells her farmhand, “Bring the white cow!” the farmhand may do as she is told, because she understands what the farmer says and thereby knows what she should do in those circumstances (as well as how she should do it). In this case, the relevant state of *pratibhā* is produced directly by the farmer’s linguistic utterance (and the farmhand’s ability to understand that utterance). But, in other cases, language needn’t play any such direct role. Sometimes, we undertake actions without being instructed to do so. Similarly, linguistically untrained children and animals undertake actions on the basis of *pratibhā* without being exposed to any public language. But recall that, according to Bhartṛhari, the states of awareness that guide purposeful actions have to be language-laden. If that is right, the action-guiding states of *pratibhā* must arise from latent linguistic dispositions present in the relevant agents.

Given this second role of *pratibhā* as a source of practical knowledge, we might think that at least some of these states of *pratibhā* are the same sorts of mental states that

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<sup>18</sup> My reading of Bhartṛhari through Maṇḍana is importantly different from that of Hugo David who claims that *pratibhā* is a *non-representational* form of practical knowledge. See David, “*Pratibhā* as *Vākyārtha*?” If we take David’s claim simply to be the strong thesis that a state of *pratibhā* doesn’t present or represent anything, then it becomes difficult to accommodate Bhartṛhari’s description of *pratibhā* as “directed at a purposeful action” (*arthakriyāviṣayā*). On my view, a state of *pratibhā* can be said to *represent* a purposeful action insofar as it presents an agent with a mental image or representation that is erroneously construed by the agent to be a purposeful action that she should perform. As a result, the agent becomes aware of a purposeful action that she should perform. This fits Vṛṣabha’s comment that a state of *pratibhā* gives rise to an awareness of a purposive action (VP I.75-26-27).



psychologists call “intuition.” For some psychologists, an *intuition* or a *hunch* or a *gut feeling* is a judgement “that appears quickly in consciousness, whose underlying reasons we are not fully aware of, and is strong enough to act upon” (Gigerenzer, *Gut Feelings*, 16).<sup>19</sup> These psychologists have studied the role of expert intuition in different contexts of decision-making. Some experiments indicate that the intuitive judgements that handball players make about what move to make in a game are often more accurate than the judgements that they make after conscious reflection (Johnson and Raab, “Take the First”). Other case-studies suggest that, in high-stakes situations, experienced fire-fighters, pilots and critical care nurses often make split-second decisions on the basis of intuitive judgements that show them which option is the best, without requiring any conscious deliberation about the different available options (Klein, *Sources of Power*). Just like such intuitions, the action-guiding states of *pratibhā* are conscious mental occurrences that arise effortlessly even though the agent is unaware of how they arise. And, in virtue of representing actions as things to be done by certain means and in certain ways, they are able to guide purposeful actions across a range of cases.

#### 4. A Unified Conception of *Pratibhā*

So far, we have focused on states of *pratibhā* which are conscious mental occurrences that serve as states of linguistic understanding or sources of practical knowledge. But Bhartṛhari explicitly says that states of *pratibhā* are in fact much more varied.

Take his list of the six sources of *pratibhā* given in *Vākyapadīya* 2.152 and his commentary on it (VP II.67.2-3, II.222.3-10). First, Bhartṛhari says that the source of *pratibhā* can be the nature (*svabhāva*) of the relevant agent. Bhartṛhari gives two slightly puzzling examples: the disposition (*ānugūṇya*) of a person in deep sleep to wake up again, and the disposition of unconscious primordial matter (*mūlaprakṛti*) to transform itself into some apparent multiplicity of objects that we encounter in the material world. His commentator, Puṅyarāja, gives a more intelligible example (VP II.67.4): he takes natural *pratibhā* to be something an animal like a monkey has, presumably its ability to perform activities like swinging from one branch of a tree to another. Second, Bhartṛhari says that *pratibhā* can also arise from past actions (*carāṇa*). This sort of *pratibhā* belongs to sages like Vasiṣṭha who have practised penance (*tapas*), the study of the Veda, and so on, and thereby have gained a certain kind of awareness (*prakāśa*), e.g., the awareness of empirically inaccessible past, present and future facts. Third, as we have already seen, habituation (*abhyāsa*) can also be a source of *pratibhā*. For example, experienced well-diggers, in virtue of having repeatedly dug wells, are able to easily figure out the location of water veins under the ground. Fourth, the practice of meditation or *yoga* can also give rise to a different kind of *pratibhā*. That is why *yogins* who practice such meditation are able to know what is going on in other people’s minds. Fifth, *pratibhā* can arise in other cases in virtue of karmic factors (*adrṣṭa*), like the merit and the demerit that certain agents have accumulated in past lives. For

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<sup>19</sup> Similar definitions are found in Bruner, *The Process of Education*, 60, Simon, “What is an ‘Explanation’ of Behavior?”, 155, and Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and its Rational Tail,” 814.

example, demons of different kinds have a karma-induced *pratibhā* in virtue of which they are able to enter into other people's bodies or vanish suddenly. Finally, an agent can also acquire *pratibhā* due to the intervention of other distinguished people. For example, in the battle described in the epic, *Mahābhārata*, the charioteer, Sañjaya, was able to describe the action in the battlefield to his master, the blind king Dhṛtarāṣṭra, because the sage Vyāsa granted him divine sight, i.e., the ability to see things happening far away.

The first thing to notice about this list is that, in some of these cases, the state of *pratibhā* consists in a capacity or a disposition (*ānugūṇya*) that is manifested through some activity the relevant agent is able to perform, or through certain states of awareness that the agent is able to acquire. In his *Vṛtti* on *Vākyapadīya* 2.152, Bhartṛhari makes the point clearer in another passage by distinguishing two kinds of *pratibhā*: manifest and unmanifest (VP II.222.10-14). Manifest states of *pratibhā*, presumably, are conscious occurrent states of awareness that involve the use of linguistic items like sentences, words and phonemes. These linguistic items may either belong to a public language in the case of a linguistically trained agent or may be inarticulable in the case of linguistically untrained children and animals. By contrast, unmanifest forms of *pratibhā* are dispositional states that aren't themselves introspectively accessible but manifest themselves through conscious, occurrent states of awareness that are language-laden.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, they are just the linguistic dispositions that Bhartṛhari spoke of earlier: our latent dispositions to understand and construct linguistic representations. Bhartṛhari's earlier discussion of the relation amongst awareness, language and action (covered in §1) suggests that such dispositions cannot directly give rise to purposeful actions without the mediation of a conscious occurrent state of conceptual awareness that involves the use of linguistic expressions. So, unmanifest states of *pratibhā* can guide actions only through the mediation of manifest states of *pratibhā*.

The second thing to notice about Bhartṛhari's list of different kinds of *pratibhā* is that, for him, states of *pratibhā* can not only be sources of linguistic understanding and practical knowledge, but also yield knowledge about other factual matters, e.g., about where the water is located underground in the case of well-diggers, or about what is going on in other minds in the case of *yogins*. To understand the connection between these cases and the two psychological roles of *pratibhā*, it might be worth revisiting those psychological roles.

Let us start by considering cases where children and animals, e.g., my cat who comes running when I call out her name, undertake actions on hearing and understanding certain signals due to habituation. In *Vākyapadīya* 2.118, Bhartṛhari spells out one view about what such habituation amounts to.

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<sup>20</sup> One worry here might be that, if the unmanifest, dispositional states of *pratibhā* aren't self-intimating, Bhartṛhari will be contradicting his own earlier characterization of states of *pratibhā* as "established through everyone's mental occurrences." I don't think there is any threat of inconsistency here, since the context of that earlier characterization makes it clear that Bhartṛhari is talking about occurrent action-guiding states of linguistic understanding.

That habituation doesn't involve authoritative testimony. Some accept it to be convention (*samaya*). It is a representation (*upadarśana*) of the form, "This is to be done immediately after [that]." (VP II.12-13)

As Puṇyarāja explains, the aim of this verse is to describe the kind of habituation that gives rise to *pratibhā*. First, even though linguistically untrained children and animals understand linguistic expressions or signals, the process of habit-formation that gives rise to that understanding needn't be the same as the one that gives rise to linguistic comprehension in some linguistically trained humans. Some human beings may learn to use an expression belonging to a public language partly on the basis of instruction. For example, they may be explicitly taught by other linguistically competent agents what different expressions in the relevant language mean. In this sense, the relevant process of habit-formation is based on authoritative testimony (*āgama*), i.e., instruction. By contrast, linguistically untrained children and animals don't come to understand the use of linguistic expressions (or other signals) on the basis of instruction. They just inherit certain linguistic dispositions from previous lives, which allows them to associate specific meanings with specific linguistic expressions when those expressions are repeatedly used in certain contexts.

As Bhartṛhari reports, some people think that this process of habituation takes the form of a convention. But his own view about this process, according to Puṇyarāja, is different: it involves forming the representation, "This is to be done immediately after that." In his commentary on *Vākyapadīya* 2.118cd, Puṇyarāja explains:

The habituation has the nature of the representation (*upadarśana*), "This is to be done immediately after [that]." Just as horses move with greater speed only immediately after the mere strike of the whip and elephants do so due to the strike of the [elephant-driver's] hook, so also do other living beings, each to their own, carry out worldly transactions while performing appropriate actions on the basis of *pratibhā* under the influence of beginningless [linguistic] dispositions and habituation. This is established. (VP II.58.5-8)

Modern commentators, like Raghunātha Śarmā, take Puṇyarāja to mean that the representation that takes the form, "This is to be done after that," is in fact nothing other than *pratibhā* (VPA II.204.16-17). Habituation is the process by which an animal or a child comes to form such representations in a certain range of situations. For example, an animal like a horse or an elephant may be repeatedly exposed to training scenarios where certain kinds of behaviour are rewarded and others punished. As a result, whenever a charioteer strikes the horse with a whip or the elephant-driver strikes the elephant with his hook, the horse or the elephant may form the representation, "I should move faster immediately after I am struck." Similarly, according to Puṇyarāja, other living beings—depending on their innate linguistic dispositions—perform actions on the basis of such representations.

Puṇyarāja's explanation of Bhartṛhari is significant, because it gives us a unified explanation of how states of *pratibhā* enable humans and non-humans to perform actions on

the basis of their understanding of signals and sentences. In both cases, a state of *pratibhā*—which involves a mental representation—seems to present a qualified action. In a case where a horse understands its rider’s signal, it may undergo a state of *pratibhā* that involves a representation of the form, “I should move faster immediately after I’m struck.” Similarly, when the farmhand understands the command, “Bring the white cow!” she may undergo a state of *pratibhā* that involves a representation of the form, “I should bring the white cow.” Each representation gives rise to a state of practical knowledge through which the relevant agent knows what to do under the relevant circumstances.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly, the story generalizes to most other states of *pratibhā*, including those states which yield factual knowledge. Manifest states of *pratibhā* are conscious occurrent states of awareness. By contrast, unmanifest states of *pratibhā* are the agent’s capacities or dispositions to arrive at these states of awareness. However, any state of *pratibhā* (whether it is manifest or unmanifest) makes a mere mental representation appear to the agent. The relevant agent, then, erroneously takes this representation to be a qualified action or event that is external to the relevant awareness. In doing so, she may gain practical or factual knowledge about actions or events: the knowledge of what to do under the relevant circumstances, of what happened in the distant past or future, of where the underground water is, of what is going on in other minds, and so on.

The only difference between states of *pratibhā* that yield practical knowledge and states of *pratibhā* that yield factual knowledge is that the latter needn’t be action-guiding. When an agent undergoes a state of *pratibhā* that yields practical knowledge, she doesn’t take the relevant action as something that has been performed, or is being performed, or will be performed. Rather, she takes it to be an action—qualified by an agent, a goal, a means, a method, and so on—which is to be performed (*kārya*). That is why the state of practical knowledge which arises from her state of *pratibhā* has a distinctively normative content. And that is what motivates the agent to undertake the relevant action. By contrast, when the agent undergoes a state of *pratibhā* on the basis of which she gains knowledge about factual matters, she doesn’t take the relevant action or event to be something that she should bring about. In such cases, her *pratibhā*-based state of knowledge needn’t have any normative content. It may only have a descriptive content and therefore needn’t motivate the agent to undertake any action.

## 5. Against Human Exceptionalism

Where does this leave us with the analogy between *pratibhā* and intuitions? As we have seen, states of *pratibhā* can be conscious and occurrent as well as dispositional and unconscious. Conscious, occurrent states of *pratibhā* can be regarded as intuitions in a

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<sup>21</sup> A similar explanation is also suggested by Bhoja’s discussion of this theory in his *Śṛṅgāraprakāśa* (translatable as “The Illumination of Passion”); see Raghavan, *Bhoja’s Śṛṅgāraprakāśa*, 707-708.

broader, pretheoretic sense. This is because, like intuitions, these are conscious thoughts or experiences that arise without conscious reasoning or reflection and are able to provide knowledge about things that are not accessible by perception. Such states of *pratibhā* will not only include intuitive states of linguistic understanding that guide actions, but also other intuitions that serve as sources of factual and practical knowledge.

If this is right, then we end up with three conclusions about such intuitions. The first is that intuitions are products of an unconscious cognitive process. In virtue of this process, an agent is able to effortlessly form certain mental representations which she erroneously construes to be actions or events that are external to awareness. Such mental representations are useful: they allow the relevant agent to gain factual and practical knowledge. The second conclusion is that the role that such states play in our cognitive and practical lives is much more pervasive than we normally think. If Bhartṛhari is to be believed, the practical knowledge that guides many (if not all) of our purposeful actions is derived from intuitions. The third—and perhaps most significant—conclusion is that such intuitions are not mental states that only intellectually mature human beings have; even young children and animals that haven't acquired a public language can have them.

This undermines a form of *human exceptionalism* that treats rationality as an exclusive trait of human beings. This view depends on two commitments. First, an attitude or action rational only if that attitude or action is based on conscious reasoning or reflection which involves the use of certain conceptual capacities. Second, these conceptual capacities are intimately connected to the capacity that intellectually mature human beings (or animals with similarly sophisticated cognitive systems) have for acquiring a public language.

Even though Bhartṛhari doesn't explicitly argue against this kind of human exceptionalism, his view seems incompatible with these commitments. On the one hand, he argues that many of the cognitive and physical tasks that both human beings and other animals perform are guided by states of *pratibhā*, intuitions that arise without any conscious reasoning whatsoever. For him, the unconscious cognitive processes that give rise to action-guiding states of linguistic comprehension and practical knowledge in intellectually mature humans are not fundamentally different from the unconscious cognitive processes that allow animals to understand signals and gain practical knowledge. Unless we want to say that our states of linguistic understanding and practical knowledge are either irrational or exempt from assessments of rationality, we must reject the claim that an attitude or action can be treated as rational only if it is based on conscious reasoning or reflection.

On the other hand, Bhartṛhari denies any intimate connection between conceptual capacities and the capacity to acquire a public language. He grants that, in intellectually mature humans, the intuitions that serve as states of linguistic understanding and practical knowledge are language-laden states of conceptual awareness. But he doesn't think that only humans can have these states of awareness. On his view, even young children and animals can have such intuitions in virtue of their innate capacity to construct linguistic representations. The only difference is that, in the case of young children and animals, these

concepts are inarticulable linguistic expressions that belong to a language of thought. Thus, Bhartṛhari rejects the second commitment.

Therefore, if Bhartṛhari is right about *pratibhā*, the cognitive difference between humans and other animals is less radical than defenders of human exceptionalism make it out to be. Bhartṛhari doesn't deny that human beings may indeed have certain capacities, e.g., the capacity to acquire a public language or the capacity to engage in complicated forms of conscious reasoning, that young children and animals lack. But he shows us that a vast majority of apparently rational attitudes and actions that we attribute to intellectually mature humans are based on the same kind of unconscious concept-involving cognitive processes that enable animals and children to understand signals and to perform purposeful actions.

This brings out an intuitive cost for human exceptionalism about rationality. For defenders of this view, what makes human beings (or human attitudes and actions) rational is the human capacity for conscious concept-involving reasoning. But we often act on the basis of intuitive judgements, but cannot consciously articulate the reasons for those judgements. Though these judgements aren't based on any conscious concept-involving reasoning, they don't seem irrational or unresponsive to the normative reasons that justify them. Rather, they seem to track normatively significant features of our practical situations. The same seems true of the intuitive understanding that children and animals have of signals or the intuition-driven goal-oriented actions that children and animals perform. In these cases, they too seem to be habitually or instinctively responding to normatively significant features of their practical situations. A defender of human exceptionalism will be forced to say that these states of understanding or these actions are irrational or exempt from assessments of rationality, because they don't involve the kind of conscious concept-involving reasoning that humans are capable of. But, for the sake of being consistent, the exceptionalist will then have to say that many of our own apparently rational intuition-driven judgements and actions too are irrational or exempt from assessments of rationality for the same reason. If we want to avoid this cost, we shouldn't treat rationality as a unique feature of human beings.<sup>22</sup>

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