Śrīharṣa on Two Paradoxes of Inquiry
Nilanjan Das

Abstract

In *A Confection of Refutation* (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*), the 12th century philosopher and poet Śrīharṣa addresses a version of Meno's paradox. A version of Meno's paradox was well-known in first millennium South Asia through the writings of two earlier Sanskrit philosophers, Śabarasvāmin (4th-5th century CE) and Śaṃkara (8th century CE). Both these thinkers proposed a solution to the paradox. I show how Śrīharṣa rejects this solution, and splits the old paradox into two new ones: the *paradox of triviality* and the *paradox of incoherence*. And I argue that these paradoxes are connected to Śrīharṣa's broader pessimism about the possibility of successful rational inquiry into certain philosophical questions.

In the *Meno* 80d-e, Meno and Socrates pose a paradox of inquiry. When we seek to find out something through inquiry, either we already know what we are looking for, or we do not. If we already know what we are looking for, then our inquiry is pointless: we can gain no new knowledge by inquiring. If we don't know what we are searching for, then we cannot successfully inquire either. First, even if we were to discover our object of inquiry, we wouldn't be able to recognize it as that object. Second, we won't even know what to look for in the first place. In either case, our inquiry is pointless. This is paradoxical: we often do gain new knowledge by inquiring, so inquiry doesn't seem pointless. The aim of this essay is to consider paradoxes of this kind in a different context: in the context of the first millennium South Asia.

My focus will be on the 12th century Sanskrit philosopher and poet Śrīharṣa.[1] In *A Confection of Refutation* (*Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, henceforth the *Refutation*), Śrīharṣa addresses a version of Meno's paradox that was discussed by two earlier Sanskrit philosophers, Śabarasvāmin (4th-5th century CE) and Śaṃkara (8th century CE). Both these thinkers proposed a solution to the paradox. I will show how Śrīharṣa rejects this solution, and splits the old paradox into two new ones: the *paradox of triviality* and the *paradox of incoherence*.[2] These paradoxes, as I will show, are connected to Śrīharṣa's broader pessimism about the possibility of successful rational inquiry into certain philosophical questions.

A bit more background on Śrīharṣa is necessary to see where that pessimism arises from. Śrīharṣa is a defender of non-dualistic Vedānta, a view that emerges from a certain reading of the Upaṇisads, which are the last part of the Vedic corpus and therefore sometimes called "*vedānta*" (literally, "the end of the Veda"). Non-dualistic Vedāntins accept a form of monism:

---

[1] For discussions of Śrīharṣa's philosophical views, see Granoff (1978), Phillips (1999), and Ram-Prasad (2002) and Das (2018).

[2] Carpenter and Ganeri (2010) discuss some of these paradoxes, but my reading of Śrīharṣa will differ from theirs: they don't distinguish the two paradoxes of inquiry, and don't connect these paradoxes with Śrīharṣa's defence of non-dualistic Vedānta.

NON-DUALISM. There is only a single entity that ultimately exists (*paramārthasat*), i.e., exists independently of our attitudes like beliefs, desires, judgements and so on: namely, consciousness (*vijñāna*).

Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika philosophers reject NON-DUALISM. They make two claims. The first is an *ontological* claim: there are many kinds of entities that ultimately exist. The Vaiśeṣika metaphysicians offer a list of six ontological categories—substance (*dravya*), quality (*guṇa*), motion (*karman*), universals (*sāmānya*), ultimate differentiators (*antyaviśeṣa*), and inherence (*samavāya*)—that is supposed to exhaust everything that ultimately exists. The second is an *epistemological* claim: our ordinary methods of knowing can help us know various facts about ultimately existent objects. The Nyāya epistemologists offer a list of four methods of knowing (*pramāṇa*)—perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), analogy (*upamāna*), and testimony (*śabda*)—which are supposed to give us epistemic access to the constituents of ultimate reality.

In the *Refutation*, Śrīharṣa dissents from both these claims: he refutes the definitions (*lakṣaṇa*) that the Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika thinkers propose for their preferred ontological and epistemological categories. Importantly, however, Śrīharṣa doesn't put forward any positive argument for NON-DUALISM. Rather, his own commitment to NON-DUALISM leads him to embrace:

ANTI-RATIONALISM. There cannot be any successful rational inquiry into the question of what ultimately exists.

For Śrīharṣa, what we ordinarily regard as *methods of knowing*—perception, inference, and testimony—cannot yield any knowledge about the nature of ultimate reality. We can only gain an insight into the nature of ultimate reality through a state of direct, non-conceptual awareness that arises after a much more radical epistemic transformation. I will argue that Śrīharṣa's paradoxes of inquiry are intimately connected to his ANTI-RATIONALISM.

I

Meno in South Asia. A version of Meno's paradox was well-known in first millennium South Asia through the writings of Śabarasvāmin and Śaṃkara. Śabara wrote a commentary on Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* (MS). This text is concerned with the task of interpreting those sections of the Veda which prescribe various rituals. Since these rituals give rise to good outcomes like heavenly bliss, they (along with their constituents and their intermediate results) are called *dharma*, defined sometimes as "something that promotes the good" (*śreyaskara*). Śabara's commentary on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* paved the way for the development of the Mīmāṃsā text-tradition through later figures like Kumārila Bhaṭṭa and Prabhākara Miśra. In contrast, Śaṃkara's commentary was on Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahmasūtra* (BS). Unlike the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*, the *Brahmasūtra* offers an interpretation of the early Upaniṣads. These Upaniṣads claim that *brahman* is the origin of the universe, describing it at various places as consciousness, as non-dual, as all-pervading, and as eternal. The *Brahmasūtra* seeks to offer a unified account of what these early Upaniṣads teach us about the nature of *brahman*, the relationship between *brahman* and the self (*ātman*), the means to knowing *brahman*, and the path to liberation (*mokṣa*), i.e., complete freedom from suffering. Śaṃkara's commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*—along with his

commentaries on the Upaniṣads—laid the foundation for non-dualistic Vedānta. Śrīharṣa is a later defender of this view.

Both the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* and the *Brahmasūtra* name a desire for awareness (*jijñāsā*) as the driving motivation for their respective projects of inquiry. In this context, a state of awareness (*jñāna*) is a non-factive, occurrent mental state like an experience or a thought.[3] The very first *sūtra* in the *Mīmāṃsasūtra* says:

> MS 1.1.1. Then, therefore, there is a desire to be aware of *dharma*.

Śabara explains that the point of MS 1.1.1 is to lay out the subject-matter of the *Mīmāṃsasūtra:* a system of scriptural hermeneutics that explains what the Veda says about *dharma*. So, its aim is to investigate what *dharma* is, what its defining characteristics are, which methods serve as sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) about *dharma*, which methods fail to yield knowledge about *dharma*, what an instance of *dharma* is for the sake of (e.g., the agent or the sacrifice), and so on. Since the remaining *sūtra*s address these questions, the theses to be stated by those *sūtra*s are summarised through this first *sutra*.

Echoing MS 1.1.1, the very first *sūtra* in the *Brahmasūtra* says:

> BS 1.1.1 Then, therefore, there is a desire to be aware of *brahman*.

Mirroring Śabara, Śaṃkara explains that the point of BS 1.1.1 is to state the purpose of the *Brahamasūtra*: namely, to give rise to an awareness of *brahman*. *Brahman* is something one should desire to apprehend by means of a state of awareness (*jñāna*)—an experience or a thought—that has the status of being a source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). Such a state of awareness destroys undesirable mental states, such as our ignorance (*avidyā*) about the nature of the self and its relationship to the world, which cause us to be caught up in the cycle of rebirth (*saṃsāra*).

Śabara and Śaṃkara note that this gives rise to a puzzle: one shouldn't have the desire to be aware of either *dharma* or *brahman*. Śabara poses the puzzle as follows.

> Would *dharma* be well-established (*prasiddha*) or not well-established? If it were well-established, then it wouldn't be something that one should desire to be aware of. If it weren't well-established, it wouldn't be so *a fortiori*. Therefore, this discussion of the desire to be aware of *dharma* is without a purpose. (MSBh 1.11.1-3 ad MS 1.1.1)

---

[3] The term "*jñāna*" is sometimes translated as "cognition." Typically, philosophers and cognitive scientists take cognitive states to be mental states like beliefs and judgements whose contents can be directly used for theoretical reasoning, verbal reports and controlling action. But some Sanskrit philosophers think that non-conceptual perceptual experiences—which count as "*jñāna*"—aren't like this. So, it is better to use a term like "awareness." Even though a construction like "*S* is aware that *p*" in English ascribes a factive mental state insofar as it entaisl that *p*, philosophers use constructions of the form, "*S* is aware of *o* as being *F*," which don't always entail that *o* is *F*. I will use the latter kind of construction stipulatively: on my view, *S* is aware of *o* as being *F* if and only if *S* perceives/judges/suspects *o* to be *F*. None of these attitudes entail that *o* is *F*, even though they entail that *o* exists (which is an assumption shared by Śrīharṣa's Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika interlocutors).

Śaṃkara repeats the passage almost verbatim.

> Still, would that *brahman* be well-established or not well-established? If it were well-established, it wouldn't be something one should have a desire to be aware of. If it were not well-established, it is not possible for it to be something one desires to be aware of. (BSBh 78.1-79.2 ad BS 1.1.1)

Taking the expression "well-established" in these passages to mean something like "an object of awareness", we can reconstruct the argument as follows.[4] Take any object of inquiry *o*.

> P1. Either *o* is well-established for the inquirer, or it is not.
> P2. If *o* is well-established for the inquirer, then it is already an object of their awareness.
> P3. If *o* is already an object of the inquirer's awareness, then they should not have a desire to be aware of *o*.
> P4. If *o* is not well-established for the inquirer, then it is not an object of their awareness.
> P5. If *o* is not an object of the inquirer's awareness, then they cannot have a desire to be aware of *o*.
> P6. If an inquirer cannot have a desire to be aware of *o*, they should not have a desire to be aware of *o*.
> C. Therefore, the inquirer should not have a desire to be aware of *o*.

This is a perfectly general argument, not restricted to *dharma* or *brahman*. If it is sound, then an inquirer shouldn't have any desire to gain any awareness regarding any object of inquiry. But, given the assumption that it is (instrumentally) rational for an agent to engage in an inquiry only if they can rationally have such a desire, it will follow that (instrumentally) rational inquiry is impossible.

Śabara and Śaṃkara reject this argument by rejecting P3. Śabara says:

> On the contrary, this treatise does have a purpose; for learned people disagree about *dharma*. Some have said that *dharma* is one thing, while others have said that it is another. Now, a person who undertakes action without investigating—insofar as he chooses one of these things—would be thwarted, or would attain an undesirable outcome. That is why one should have a desire to be aware of *dharma*. (MSBh 11.3-13.2 ad MS 1.1.1)

Śabara's commentator Kumārila glosses this as follows (ŚV vv. 125-6 ad MS 1.1.1). Amongst ordinary people, *dharma* is generally accepted as whatever promotes the good. But, even though we may be aware of *dharma* in this way, we are uncertain of its specific characteristics because experts disagree about them. There are two kinds of disagreements: about the nature of *dharma*, and about how we can gain knowledge about *dharma*. First, learned people don't agree about the nature of *dharma*. For example, since the Brahmanical thinkers acknowledge the epistemic authority of the Veda, they think that sacrificial rites that are prescribed by the Veda are *dharma*.

---

[4] Kumārila's interpretation of the text in his *Detailed Commentary in Verse* (*Ślokavārttika*) (ŚV v. 124 ad MS 1.1.1) supports this. An implicit assumption in this discussion is that we cannot be aware of an object *o* unless *o* exists and we are accurately aware of *o* as possessing some general characteristics.

The Buddhists, who reject the epistemic authority of the Veda, think that other actions—such as worshipping Buddhist shrines—constitute *dharma*. Second, learned people also disagree about which source of knowledge gives us access to *dharma*. While Brahmanical thinkers like Mīmāṃsakas regard Vedic injunctions to be the sole source of our knowledge about *dharma*, others like the Vaiśeṣikas claim that the kind of supramundane perception that yogins undergo in a state of meditative absorption could also yield knowledge about *dharma*. But we cannot just act without figuring out which of these views about *dharma* are correct. If we were to arbitrarily choose one of these conceptions of *dharma* and perform the actions that count as *dharma* on that view, then we would run the risk of being unsuccessful or of attaining some undesirable result. Therefore, we should want to resolve our uncertainties about *dharma*, before acting, by gaining awareness about the specific characteristics of *dharma*.

Śaṃkara follows in Śabara's footsteps. Like Śabara, he concedes that we are indeed aware of *brahman* (BSBh 79.2-81.2 ad BS 1.1.1). First, the Upaniṣads describe *brahman* as eternal, pure, and so on. This fits the etymology of the expression "*brahman*." Since this expression is derived from the root "*bṛh*" that refers to growth or increase, it can be taken to refer to some kind of excellence (*atiśaya*) that, in turn, can be interpreted in terms of characteristics like eternality, purity, and so on, in light of the Upaniṣads. Second, the Upaniṣads say that *brahman* is nothing other than the self, and we are already committed to the existence of the self. The self is the referent of the reflexive pronoun "I." Since no one thinks, "I don't exist," no one denies the existence of the self. Yet, if people were not committed to the existence of the self, there would indeed be some scope for such denial. These two arguments imply not only that we are already aware of the nature of *brahman*, but also that we are already committed to its existence.

Śaṃkara notes that, despite our commitment to the existence of the self, we don't agree about the nature of the self (BSBh 81.3-83.3 ad BS 1.1.1). Is the self identical to the conscious body, or to the senses, or to just the inner sense? Or, is it a subject distinct from the body, who experiences pleasure and pain, or an agent who performs actions, or both? And is there a divine self, an omniscient and omnipotent God-like being—the Lord (*īśvara*)—who is distinct from the subject of experience? Since philosophers who disagree on these questions offer all kinds of arguments and testimony—both good and bad—in support of their views, there needs to be an investigation to decide which of them are right. Without such an investigation, the nature of the self would remain undiscovered. But all these philosophers agree that discovering the nature of the self is the only way of attaining the highest good of human existence, i.e., liberation. So, if we were to arbitrarily pick any one of these views without any inquiry, we might either fail to attain liberation, or, worse, entrench ourselves in a way of life that perpetually brings us suffering. This shows why the desire to be aware of these specific characteristics of *brahman* is rational. It is this desire that the *Brahmasūtra* seeks to satisfy.

Thus, Śabara and Śaṃkara reject the claim that if an inquirer is already aware of an object of inquiry *o,* they shouldn't desire any further awareness of it. Both say that the kind of awareness that we desire when we inquire into *dharma* or *brahman* isn't the kind of awareness of these things that we already possess. Initially, we are aware of *dharma* or *brahman* as things that possess certain general characteristics: for example, as something that promotes the good, or as the self. But this isn't enough to settle disagreements about the specific characteristics of these things. Without settling such disagreements, we run a substantial risk of depriving ourselves of

desirable outcomes like heavenly bliss or liberation. That is why it is rational for us to have a desire to be aware of such specific characteristics.

II

The Paradox of Triviality. In the third chapter of the *Refutation*, Śrīharṣa considers two versions of the paradox of inquiry that Śabara and Śaṃkara discuss. There are two distinctive features of Śrīharṣa's paradoxes.

First, they are closely tied to the context of a debate between the theist and the atheist. According to a standard Nyāya classification of debates, debates (*kathā*) can be of three kinds: truth-directed, victory-directed and destructive. A truth-directed debate (*vāda*) aims at the determination of truth: in such a debate, there are two interlocutors who disagree about a thesis *P*, but both of whom wish to determine whether *P* is true. A victory-directed debate (*jalpa*) aims at victory: in such a debate too, there are two disagreeing interlocutors, but they only wish to defeat each other. Finally, in a destructive debate (*vitaṇḍā*), one of the interlocutors has no thesis to defend: their aim is simply to undermine the opponent's view by dismantling the arguments for it. The debate that Śrīharṣa is considering is probably either truth-directed or victory-directed. In that debate, the theist and the atheist disagree: the theist accepts the existence of an omnipotent and omniscient God-like being called the Lord, and the atheist denies it. Their aim is either to determine whether the Lord exists, or to defeat each other.

Second, Śrīharṣa's paradoxes of inquiry revolve around "what"-questions that take the form, "What is *a/the* source of knowledge (*pramāṇa*) with respect to *o*?" Call such a question a *proof-seeking "what"-question*. The aim of such a question is to challenge one's interlocutor to cite a source of knowledge that serves as proof for their thesis. The questioner, then, can proceed to state refutations against that putative source of knowledge. Here, Śrīharṣa is concerned with a challenge posed by the atheist: "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?"

Śrīharṣa begins by distinguishing the possible attitudes that the atheist could be expressing by using the interrogative pronoun "what" (*kim*) in such an utterance (KKh §3.1-2).[5] But, soon, he isolates the most likely possibility: namely, that the atheist is asking a question (*praśna*)—and therefore expressing an inquiring attitude—about the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence. Śrīharṣa argues for two claims. The first is that, in a (truth-directed or victory-directed) debate, in response to a proof-seeking "what"-question, it is permissible for an interlocutor to offer a trivial answer. And the second is that, in a (truth-directed or victory-directed) debate where there is genuine disagreement between the interlocutors, such a proof-seeking question cannot be coherently asked at all. The first claim poses the *paradox of triviality*; the second poses the *paradox of incoherence*. In this section, I shall focus on the paradox of triviality.

Let's begin by noting an ambiguity in questions of the form, "What is *o*?" In such a question, "*o*" may be either an indefinite or definite description. If "*o*" is an *indefinite* description, then the

---

[5] Throughout this paper, I will refer to Ganganatha Jha's edition of the *Refutation* (abbreviated by KKh) by citing the text sections in the relevant chapters: so, "§*x.y*" will refer to the *y*th section in the *x*th chapter.

question is likely about the *kind* of entity that fits the relevant description. The question "What is a zebra?" may be understood in this way: someone who sincerely asks this question is asking for a characterisation of zebras in general. But if "*o*" is a *definite* description, it is a question about the unique entity that fits that description. The question "What is the capital of India?" is like this: someone who sincerely asks this question wants to know which particular city is the capital of India.

The Sanskrit question that the atheist asks, "*īśvarasadbhāve kiṃ pramāṇam?*" could be understood in either way. The expression "*pramāṇam*" (declined in the nominative singular case) could mean either "*a* source of knowledge" or "*the* source of knowledge." On the first interpretation, the question is "What is *a* source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" This is a question about *the kind of source of knowledge (pramāṇasāmānya)*, e.g., inference, that establishes the Lord's existence. On the second interpretation, the question is "What is *the* source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" On this reading, it is a question about a *particular source of knowledge (pramāṇaviśeṣa)*, e.g., a particular inference, that establishes the Lord's existence. Śrīharṣa's puzzling claim is that, on either of these two interpretations, a trivial response to the question—either "a source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence" or "the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence"—would be an adequate answer in the context of that debate.

To show this, Śrīharṣa begins by motivating an account of adequacy for answers to "what"-questions.

> Certainly, from the expression "what" that has a question as its meaning, the status of some entity as the object of a desire for awareness (*jijñāsyamānatā*) is apprehended. And, since [the word "what"] is accompanied by the word "*a/the* source of knowledge" in this context, [the desire] is apprehended to have as its object (*viṣaya*) *a/the* source of knowledge. Further, whatever is the object of a question, that should be directly conveyed (*abhidheya*) by the respondent. (KKh §3.3)

Here is the principle that Śrīharṣa has in mind.

> THE ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS. An answer to a "what"-question that takes the form, "What is *o*?" is adequate just in case it directly conveys *o*.

The argument is this. Unless the questioner is insincere, a "what"-question that takes the form, "What is *o*?" will express the questioner's desire to be aware of *o*. If *o* is what the questioner desires to be aware of, then *o* is what the relevant "what"-question is about. In that sense, it is the object of that question. Intuitively, an answer to a "what"-question is adequate just in case it satisfies the desire that underlies the question. But that desire will be satisfied just in case the answer brings about the desired outcome. In this case, the desired outcome is a state of awareness about *o*. Since directly conveying (*abhidhāna*) *o* to the questioner will produce precisely such a state of awareness, an answer that does so will be an adequate response to that question. This supports THE ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS. For Śrīharṣa and other Sanskrit philosophers of language, what is *directly* conveyed (*abhihita*) by a linguistic expression is its

literal referent (*vācyārtha* or *mukhyārtha*). So, it follows that an answer to the "what"-question, "What is *o*?" is adequate just in case it literally refers to *o*.[6]

Śrīharṣa applies this idea to the two interpretations of the question that the atheist asks.

> So, is this question intended to have as its object a kind of source of knowledge (*pramāṇasāmānya*) with respect to the Lord's existence, or a particular [instance] of that (*tadviśeṣa*)? If it were the first option, then the answer "a source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence" (*īśvarasadbhāve pramāṇam*) would follow. For, whatever is the object of a question, that is to be conveyed. And the question has as its object a kind of source of knowledge, and that indeed is conveyed by the expression "a source of knowledge." If it were the second option, even then the very same answer, "the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence" (*īśvarasadbhāve pramāṇam*) would follow. Just as the expression "the source of knowledge" conveys a particular [source of knowledge] in the utterance of the question, so too [does it convey the same particular source of knowledge] in the utterance of the answer. (KKh §3.3)

Suppose the atheist's question is, "What is *a* source of knowledge about divine existence?" Then, it is naturally understood as being about the kind of source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. Then, given THE ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS, the answer "a source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence" should be adequate; for that *indefinite* description does refer to the kind of entity that the question is about. Alternatively, if the atheist's question is, "What is *the* source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?", then it is about a particular source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. The atheist's use of the definite description "the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence" refers to the particular source of knowledge that the question is about. Thus, again, given THE ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS, the answer "the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence" should be adequate. But both these results seem wrong: the answers are trivial and therefore seem inadequate in the relevant context of conversation. This is the paradox of triviality.

This is a version of Śabara's and Śaṃkara's paradox. The implicit claim is that, to initiate an inquiry into anything by means of a "what"-question, the questioner must already be aware of the relevant object. Otherwise, they won't be able to pick it out by means of a definite or indefinite description. But, then, answering the question in a non-trivial manner is unnecessary, given that the questioner already possesses the relevant awareness.

A natural response to this puzzle is to reject THE ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS. This says that an answer to a "what"-question is adequate just in case it refers to the object that the question is about. As a result, it allows even uninformative answers to be adequate responses to "what"-questions. The trivial answers that Śrīharṣa considers are uninformative because they merely reuse the description that the questioner uses. While such an answer would indeed refer

---

[6] It is important that the answer should refer to the same entity as "*o*," but need not have the same sense or meaning as the expression "*o*." The answer "New Delhi" is an adequate answer to the question "What is the capital of India?" But "New Delhi" and "the capital of India" don't have the same sense or meaning, even though they refer to the same thing.

to the kind of source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence or some specific instance of that kind, it won't give the questioner any information that they didn't already possess. So, we may revise THE ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS as follows:

THE REVISED ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS. An answer to a "what"-question that takes the form, "What is o?" is adequate just in case:

(a) it directly conveys o, and
(b) it is sufficiently informative in the context of the conversation.

Here, (b) is the new condition: to count as an adequate response to a "what"-question, not only must an answer refer to whatever that question is about, but it must also be sufficiently informative in the context of the conversation. Śrīharṣa argues that, no matter how we try to spell out the notion of informativity, the same problems will arise again.

Take one proposal about informativity.

INFORMATIVITY I. An answer to a "what"-question, "What is o?" is sufficiently informative in the context of conversation just in case it refers to a specific alternative from amongst the salient alternatives that could (by lights of the questioner) satisfy the description "o."

Suppose someone asks me, "What is the capital of India?" In the relevant context of conversation, let's say, it's clear to me that my interlocutor is uncertain about which city could be capital of India: about whether it is Chennai, or Kolkata, or Mumbai, or New Delhi, or… The answer "New Delhi" is sufficiently informative because it refers to a specific city that is amongst those contextually salient cities.

Śrīharṣa indirectly addresses this proposal while entertaining a response from the atheist. In reply to the theist's trivial answers, the atheist might persist in asking further questions about *which* particular source of knowledge establishes the Lord's existence.

[The atheist:] Let this be the case. By means of the expression "particular," an indeterminate arbitrary particular is not intended to be spoken of, but rather a unique individual [is intended]. The intention (*tātparya*) underlying the expression "particular" is [to speak of] that [individual]. Therefore, the meaning of the question is, "What is this unique individual source of knowledge?" And, in response to that [question], an answer that (directly) conveys such an individual source of knowledge is appropriate, not this kind of prattle. (KKh §3.4)

This argument presupposes something like INFORMATIVITY I. When the atheist presses the theist by saying, "What is this particular [source of knowledge]?" (*ko'yaṃ viśeṣaḥ*), their question is directed at the unique source of knowledge serves as proof for the Lord's existence. So, an adequate—and therefore sufficiently informative—answer to that question must pick out a specific source of knowledge amongst the contextually salient sources of knowledge that could (by lights of the atheist) establish the Lord's existence. So, the answer "the argument from

intelligent design" might be an adequate answer, because it refers to a specific inference that could establish divine existence. But the trivial answer "this particular source of knowledge" isn't adequate since it doesn't pick out any such specific source of knowledge.

Śrīharṣa disagrees.

> [Reply:] This is not so. For, even in response to this [question], the answer could indeed be "particular." Just as the intention underlying the expression "particular," which occurs in the utterance of the question, is [to convey] an individual source of knowledge whose nature is distinguished from everything [else], so too is the case for [the expression "particular"] that occurs in the utterance of the answer. And, if this is so, the following is appropriately said: whatever object is intended [to be conveyed] by your utterance of the question, that very object is conveyed by our utterance of the answer. (KKh §3.4)

Take the question, "What is the capital of India?" asked in a context where New Delhi is amongst the salient cities that could be (by the questioner's lights) the capital of India. Here, the trivial answer "the capital of India" refers to—and is intended to refer to—the specific city that is in fact the capital of India, i.e., New Delhi. So, INFORMATIVITY I will predict that it is sufficiently informative. The same is true of the question, "What is the particular source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence?" Since the trivial answer "the particular source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence" does refer to the specific source of knowledge that in fact establishes the Lord's existence, it will count as sufficiently informative according to INFORMATIVITY I. So, THE REVISED ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS, taken together with INFORMATIVITY I, is unable to avoid the problem of triviality.

This response shouldn't satisfy us. Suppose I am asked, "What is the capital of India?" in a context where the questioner doesn't know which of the salient alternatives is the capital of India. Then, the trivial answer "the capital of India" may refer to New Delhi but cannot help the questioner distinguish New Delhi from the other salient Indian cities that, by their lights, could be the capital of India. This makes this answer uninformative. So, this suggests a reformulation of our account of informativity.

> INFORMATIVITY II. An answer to a "what"-question is sufficiently informative in a context of conversation just in case it gives the questioner the capacity to distinguish a specific alternative from other contextually salient alternatives that could (by lights of the questioner) satisfy the description "o."

Śrīharṣa suggests that this strategy too won't succeed.

If the atheist wants a capacity to distinguish the specific source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence from other salient sources of knowledge, what they should ask is an *alternative question*: "Is inference the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence, or is it perception, or is it testimony, or is it…?" An adequate answer to this question will help the atheist distinguish the correct source of knowledge from the other alternative sources of knowledge. But this question is easy for the theist to answer: they could just say that inference is the source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence. But, then, if the atheist again asks,

"What is the inference that establishes the Lord's existence?" the same dilemma that Śrīharṣa raised for the original question could be raised again: is this a question about the kind of inference that establishes the Lord's existence, or about the particular inference that establishes the Lord's existence? Śrīharṣa puts the point as follows.

> Suppose you think, "The person who asks, 'What is the source of knowledge with respect to this?' has the following intention: 'With respect to this object, is inference the source of knowledge, or something else?'" Even in response to that, our answer is "inference."
>
> [The atheist:] What is that inference?
>
> [Reply:] Does this question have as its object any arbitrary inference, or a particular inference? Having posed these alternatives, a response is to be stated just as in the case of the question about the source of knowledge. (KKh §3.5)

Śrīharṣa recommends that, in response to the atheist's query "What is that inference?" the theist use the same defensive strategy that they used earlier in response to the question about the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence. But there is a deeper upshot: what Śrīharṣa seems to be recommending to the theist is a method of engaging in an inquiry without undertaking any non-trivial epistemic work. If INFORMATIVITY II is correct, then in asking the question, "What is that inference?" what the atheist intends to ask is an alternative question, "Is it inference *A*, or inference *B*, or inference *C*, or…?" But, if the atheist were to ask that alternative question, then, in reply, the theist could easily select one of the listed options as their preferred answer. This process could continue until the atheist themself pins down the inference that establishes the Lord's existence without much help from the theist.

The challenge here is to spell out a notion of informativity that rules out trivial answers to "what"-questions, but doesn't make "what"-questions replaceable in all contexts by alternative questions.[7] Here is a way of addressing this challenge.

> INFORMATIVITY III. An answer to a "what"-question about an object *o* is sufficiently informative in a context of conversation only if it helps the questioner learn something about *o* that they didn't know (or weren't in a position to know) earlier.

Together with THE REVISED ADEQUACY CONDITION FOR ANSWERS, this proposal implies that an adequate answer to a "what"-question about *o* must not only refer to *o*, but must also yield previously unpossessed knowledge about *o*. This explains why a trivial answer cannot be treated as an adequate answer to such a question: such an answer yields no previously unpossessed knowledge at all about the relevant object of inquiry. Yet, unlike INFORMATIVITY II, this proposal doesn't make "what"-questions replaceable by alternative questions in *all* contexts. For instance,

---

[7] One response to this challenge—considered by Carpenter and Ganeri (2010)—is to invoke the Fregean sense/reference distinction, and say that informative answers have a different sense than the expression used in the "what"-question even though they refer to the same object. To see why this won't work, consider the answer "the entity that is actually the capital of India" as a response to the question "What is the capital of India?" This rigidified definite description picks out New Delhi in all possible worlds (where New Delhi exists), but "the capital of India" doesn't. So, if two expressions can have the same sense only if, in every possible world, they refer to the same entity, then these two expressions have different senses. But this still looks like a trivial answer.

you might ask me, "What is the capital of India?" even though you have no clue which city could be the capital of India. So, you cannot formulate an alternative question like "Is the capital of India Chennai or Kolkata or…?" But you can surely ask this "what"-question to expand your knowledge about the capital of India.

While this proposal looks promising, we shall see why Śrīharṣa's second paradox—the paradox of incoherence—shows that this response cannot succeed.

III

The Paradox of Incoherence. Śrīharṣa's second paradox arises from his argument that the atheist shouldn't—on pain of incoherence—ask the question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" This paradox bears some similarity to Kripke's (2011) dogmatism paradox, and rules out the possibility of certain kinds of philosophical debates.

Śrīharṣa frames the paradox in the form of a dilemma.

> Moreover, on the basis of the expression "what" that has a question as its meaning, the status of some object as an object of a desire for awareness is apprehended. And a desire for awareness is a desire to be aware. And a desire doesn't arise with respect to something that isn't an object of awareness, because that would lead to a problem of overgeneration. Therefore, the person who desires to be aware of the source of knowledge with respect to the existence of the Lord should describe their own awareness, which serves as the cause for their desire. Would that awareness be inaccurate, or accurate? (KKh §3.6)

Here, Śrīharṣa presupposes a principle that should be familiar to us from Śabara's and Śaṃkara's treatments of their paradox:

> THE DESIRE-AWARENESS PRINCIPLE. For any object of inquiry *o*, if an agent desires to be aware of *o*, then they must be antecedently aware of *o*.

Let's assume that the atheist's question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" expresses a desire for awareness about the source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence. Then, by THE DESIRE-AWARENESS PRINCIPLE, the atheist must be antecedently aware of the source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence. This is plausible. There are only three ways in which one could come to know that the Lord exists: through perception, or inference, or testimony. For each of these sources, the atheist should—or at least should be able to—imagine or conceive a state of affairs where that source serves as proof for the Lord's existence. In other words, they must (be able to) undergo a state of imaginative awareness that represents that source of knowledge to be proof for the Lord's existence. The question for the atheist, then, is this. Is such a state of awareness accurate (*yathārtha*) or inaccurate (*ayathārtha*)?

The atheist cannot say that the awareness in question is accurate (KKh §3.6). If it accurately represents the way the world is, then there will indeed be a source of knowledge that establishes

the existence of the Lord. But, if there were such a source of knowledge, the Lord would exist. So, the atheist will be committed to the Lord's existence. Thus, the theist, without putting in any effort at all, will have won the debate.

This result obviously will be anathema to the atheist. Since they are certain that the Lord doesn't exist, they should say that any state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence is inaccurate. Given this, it is unclear what the atheist wants from the theist when they ask, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" There are two possibilities.

> *Option 1*. The atheist wants the theist to produce yet another *inaccurate* state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence.
> *Option 2*. The atheist wants the theist to produce an *accurate* state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence.

Śrīharṣa argues that neither of these options should be attractive to the atheist.

Consider *Option 1*. Since the atheist themself is capable of *falsely* imagining a source of knowledge to be proof for the Lord's existence, they need no help from the theist in producing such a false state of awareness. In fact, they have confessed that they have already undergone such an inaccurate state of awareness. But the theist has confessed no such thing; rather, they have claimed that their awareness regarding this subject-matter is accurate. So, clearly, the atheist is better suited for the job of producing another inaccurate awareness regarding the same subject-matter. So, Śrīharṣa asks, "What's the point of depending on others for a purpose that is within your own power?" (KKh §3.6)

A better way of interpreting the atheist's question will be to take it as an expression of a different desire: the desire that the theist produce an *accurate* state of awareness regarding the source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. But this is an impossible task by lights of the atheist themself. The atheist doesn't just think that their *own* awareness regarding the source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence is inaccurate, but rather is certain that *any arbitrary* state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence is false. Thus, if they want the theist to produce a state of awareness that accurately portrays a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence, then they are asking for something that is impossible by their own lights. Śrīharṣa explains the point using an example (KKh §3.6). For the atheist, any state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence is like a state of awareness that erroneously portrays mother-of-pearl as silver. Therefore, wanting the theist to produce a state of accurate awareness with that very content is like wanting a state of accurate awareness that portrays mother-of-pearl as silver. Since such a desire involves a contradiction, no prudent person will act on such a desire. So, the atheist too shouldn't ask the question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" on the basis of such a desire.

We can reconstruct Śrīharṣa's argument as follows.

P1*. In a debate between the theist and the atheist about the existence of the Lord, the atheist is certain that the Lord doesn't exist.

P2*. If the atheist is certain that the Lord doesn't exist, then they are certain that there is no source of knowledge that proves that the Lord exists.

P3*. If the atheist is certain that there is no source of knowledge that proves that the Lord exists, then they cannot coherently desire an accurate state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence.

P4*. If the atheist cannot coherently desire an accurate state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence, they shouldn't ask the question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?"

C*. Therefore, in a debate between the theist and the atheist about the existence of the Lord, the atheist shouldn't ask the question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?"

The similarity between this argument and the argument underlying Kripke's (2011) dogmatism paradox is unmistakable. Kripke's paradox arises from the premise that, if an agent knows P, then they know that any evidence against P (i.e., any evidence that will rationally undermine their belief in P) is misleading. So, if this agent cares only about having a true belief in P, then they should resolve either not to look for such evidence or not to change their mind about P once they receive such evidence. This is paradoxical, since this kind of resolution—of not looking for further evidence, and of not being moved by counterevidence—seems dogmatic and therefore unreasonable (at least in some cases). Unlike Kripke, Śrīharṣa is concerned with a debate where the two interlocutors are certain of two incompatible theses: one is certain in P, while the other is certain in $\sim P$. The defender of $\sim P$ should ask, "What is the source of knowledge that proves P?" only if they can coherently have a desire to be accurately aware of a source of knowledge that proves P. But, since the defender of $\sim P$ is certain that there cannot be any such accurate awareness, they cannot coherently have that desire. So, they shouldn't ask such a proof-seeking question. This is paradoxical, since it seems as though it is permissible to ask such proof-seeking questions in debates. This is the paradox of incoherence.

This argument can be generalised to other proof-seeking questions like, "How do you know P?" or "What is the evidence for P?" On a natural reading, these are questions about a way of coming to know P, and about evidence that shows that P is true. Given that the defender of $\sim P$ is certain in $\sim P$, they must be certain that there is no way of knowing P, and that there is no evidence that shows that P is true. So, they cannot coherently have a desire to be accurately aware of a way of knowing P or any non-misleading evidence for P. So, they cannot coherently have the desire to gain an accurate state of awareness about there being a way of knowing P, or about there being any non-misleading evidence for P. So, they shouldn't ask proof-seeking questions of this sort.

Śrīharṣa entertains two possible responses to this argument. The first involves rejecting P4*. P4* says that, if the atheist cannot coherently desire an accurate state of awareness that represents a source of knowledge as proof for the Lord's existence, then they shouldn't ask the proof-seeking "what"-question that they pose. But this claim is questionable. The theist has acknowledged their commitment (*siddhānta*) to the existence of the Lord. In virtue of this commitment, they have incurred a further obligation to show that there is a source of knowledge that proves the existence of the Lord. The question "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's

existence?" simply expresses a desire for them to fulfil that obligation. Śrīharṣa has his opponent express this worry.

> Suppose you think: "You—who conform to your own commitments—should produce an accurate awareness with respect to that [putative source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence]. So, for that reason, you are being questioned." (KKh §3.7)

Thus, the question that the atheist asks the theist should be interpreted as elliptical: in fact, it is the question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence *according to you*?" The atheist wants to theist to *show* them which source of knowledge—*according to the theist, given their commitments*—proves the Lord's existence. This desire is compatible with the atheist's certainty that the theist is wrong, i.e., that there is no source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. Since it is coherent for the atheist to have this desire, it is permissible for the atheist to ask this question. So, P4* is false.

Note that the atheist's question—even if it is elliptical—cannot just be about the theist's *beliefs* or *commitments* about which source of knowledge serves as proof for the Lord's existence; the atheist also wants the theist to show that this source of knowledge does in fact prove the Lord's existence. Śrīharṣa denies that the atheist can coherently attribute to the theist the obligation to do this.

> This is not so. We don't have any commitment of the following sort: "We should demonstrate that the fake source of knowledge with respect to the existence of the Lord— which you have apprehended by mistake as a source of knowledge—has the status of being a source of knowledge." Rather, we should establish the source of knowledge with respect to the existence of the Lord—which you have apprehended by mistake to be a fake source of knowledge—to be a source of knowledge. (KKh §3.7)

The atheist is certain that any putative source of knowledge that the theist cites in favour of the Lord's existence is only a fake source of knowledge (*pramāṇābhāsa*). So, when the atheist asks the question, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence according to you?", whatever they intend to pick out by means of the definite description "the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence according to you" must be a fake source of knowledge by their own lights (even if they are able to imagine it—albeit falsely—to be proof for the Lord's existence). For example, it may be a fallacious argument that purports to prove the Lord's existence, but in fact fails to do so. Such a fake source of knowledge cannot be shown to be a genuine source of knowledge. So, the theist has no obligation to perform the impossible task of showing that a fake source of knowledge is a genuine source of knowledge. In fact, as Śrīharṣa notes, the theist is committed to the view that there *is* a genuine source of knowledge that establishes the Lord's existence, a source of knowledge that the atheist (due to some confusion) has mistaken to be a fake source of knowledge. So, they have an obligation to show that a genuine source of knowledge—which the atheist has mistaken to be a fake source of knowledge—proves the Lord's existence. Though Śrīharṣa doesn't say this, it should be clear to us by now that the atheist, given their own commitments, cannot recognise this obligation. Since they are certain that there cannot be any source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence, they must also be certain that it is impossible for the theist to show that there is such a source.

So, they must admit that the theist has no obligation to show that there is such a source of knowledge (since, in general, no one has any obligation to perform impossible tasks).

Besides P4*, the atheist could reject P1*. So far, Śrīharṣa has assumed that the atheist—in virtue of their status as an atheist—is certain that there is no source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. But the atheist might claim that they are not certain about this. They have imagined a state of affairs where some source of knowledge—like perception, inference, or testimony—proves the existence of the Lord. But they are unsure about whether this imaginative awareness is accurate or not. So, they are seeking the theist's help in dispelling that uncertainty.

> Let this be the case: "We have the following uncertainty: Is this very awareness—which has arisen for us with respect to the Lord's existence—erroneous or true? For that reason, there is no room for this objection that you have stated, which depends on [our] having determined one of these alternatives [to be true]." (KKh §3.8)

However, as Śrīharṣa notes, the atheist cannot say this without relinquishing their position as an adversary in a (truth-directed or victory-directed) debate about the Lord's existence.

> This is not the case. For, if this were so, due to [your] uncertainty about the accuracy and the inaccuracy of that awareness, this question would belong to you who uncertain about the existence of the Lord, which in turn is the object of the source of knowledge that is the object of that awareness. But it wouldn't be a question of someone who disagrees. And so, assume the status of a disciple and please us a while through services at our feet. We shall uproot your uncertainty. (KKh §3.8)

By definition, in a truth-directed or victory-directed debate about a thesis P, the two participants must disagree: one of the participants must be certain in the thesis P, while the other must be certain in the anti-thesis $\sim P$. If the atheist is to be believed, then, in this case, even though the theist is certain about the existence of the Lord, the atheist is uncertain. So, there is no disagreement between the two. Śrīharṣa follows up this initial observation with a deeper recommendation: given that the atheist is in fact not an atheist at all, but rather agnostic about the Lord's existence, they shouldn't enter the arena of a truth-directed or victory-directed debate debate at all. Rather, they should take up the tutelage of the theist and learn about the different arguments for the Lord's existence.

A tempting response here is to say that the disagreement between the theist and the atheist needn't require any attitude as demanding as certainty on their part: each of them may only have an outright belief that falls short of certainty. But this response won't work. First, for Sanskrit epistemologists, certainty isn't a demanding attitude: to be certain in P just is to judge P without doubting whether P is true. Moreover, if the atheist genuinely believes that the Lord doesn't exist, they must believe that there is no source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. So, their desire that the theist show that there is such a source of knowledge won't cohere with this belief either.

A better response is to say that the disagreement between the theist and the atheist may only require high confidence in their respective theses. For example, if the atheist has a credence of

0.7 that the Lord doesn't exist, then they can have non-zero credence that some source of knowledge proves the Lord's existence, and therefore can coherently desire to know which source that is. But this proposal raises a different problem. In the debate about the existence of the Lord, the atheist must assert claims like, "The Lord doesn't exist." It is not obvious whether one can felicitously assert *P* in the absence of certainty (Unger 1975, p. 258). If the atheist could felicitously assert that the Lord doesn't exist in the absence of certainty, then they could also felicitously assert Moore-paradoxical conjunctions like "The Lord doesn't exist, but I am not sure of this." And that seems bad.

It's time to take stock. Śrīharṣa has argued that the atheist cannot coherently ask the proof-seeking questions like, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to the Lord's existence?" This argument blocks the possibility that was left open at the end of §2: namely, that a trivial answer to this proof-seeking question won't be adequate, because, in asking this question, the atheist is expressing a desire to gain new knowledge of a source of knowledge that proves the Lord's existence. But if, by the atheist's own lights, there cannot be any such source of knowledge, that desire becomes incoherent, and the question becomes impermissible to ask.

If Śrīharṣa's argument is sound, then, in the context of any debate that is *based on a disagreement*, one shouldn't ask such proof-seeking questions. As we've seen, truth-directed and victory-directed debates are based on disagreements, but destructive debates aren't. So, the paradox of incoherence leaves open the possibility that a destructive debater who doesn't explicitly take a stance on *P* or *~P* can ask such proof-seeking questions. This is important for Śrīharṣa: in the *Refutation*, he is engaged in precisely this kind of destructive debate against his Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika opponent.

IV.

Anti-Rationalism. The paradox of incoherence is connected to Śrīharṣa's ANTI-RATIONALISM: the view that there cannot be any successful rational inquiry into the question of what ultimately exists. To see where the connection lies, it is worth surveying Śrīharṣa's positive philosophical views.

In the *Refutation*, Śrīharṣa's aim is to defend NON-DUALISM indirectly, by showing that the world beyond consciousness is indescribable (*anirvacanīya*): it can be treated neither as existent nor as non-existent (KKh §1.89). It cannot be treated as existent, because, as Śrīharṣa intends to show, his *refutation-arguments* (*khaṇḍanayukti*) rebut any evidence that we might have for treating it as existent. It cannot be treated as completely non-existent either; for we are able to successfully perform our ordinary activities only on the assumption that the world beyond consciousness exists. If we rejected the existence of the world beyond consciousness, we wouldn't be able to perform those activities at all. Thus, the world beyond consciousness has a kind of *transactional, practical existence* (*vyāvahārīkī sattā*) in virtue of being practically indispensable, even though it cannot be regarded as *ultimately existent* (*paramārthasat*), i.e., existent independent of our attitudes like beliefs, desires, and judgements.

The point of this argument, according to Śrīharṣa, is to uncover a structural limitation of the system of rational inquiry that his Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika opponents take to be suitable for discovering

what ultimately exists (KKh §1.93). If we take the rules laid down in that system for granted, then we cannot treat the apparent world of consciousness-independent objects as ultimately existent, because it can be refuted according to those rules. Yet, it cannot be treated as completely non-existent, because, according to the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers (who are staunch realists), a completely non-existent object cannot appear as the intentional object of our experiences and thoughts and thereby give rise to actions. Thus, the rules of their own system of rational inquiry prevent the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers from describing the world as either existent or non-existent. For Śrīharṣa, what this demonstrates is the unsuitability of this kind of rational inquiry for discovering what ultimately exists. Śrīharṣa contrasts the predicament of the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers with that of the non-dualistic Vedāntin who doesn't seek to rationally determine whether the world beyond consciousness exists. The Vedāntins are happy simply to accept the view that only *brahman*—which has the nature of consciousness and is self-revealing—is ultimately existent.

This might prompt the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers to ask Śrīharṣa what source of knowledge establishes this non-dual nature of consciousness. In response, Śrīharṣa poses a paradox similar to the paradox of incoherence.

> [The opponent:] What is the source of knowledge with respect to non-duality?

> [Reply:] First of all, this very question doesn't make sense for someone who doesn't countenance non-duality. (KKh §1.99)

Śrīharṣa explains the idea by appealing to an analogue of THE DESIRE-AWARENESS PRINCIPLE:

> THE QUESTION-AWARENESS PRINCIPLE. For any object o, it is not appropriate for an agent to ask, "What is the source of knowledge with respect to o?" unless they are antecedently aware of o.

So, it is not appropriate for Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinkers to ask the relevant question unless they are already aware of non-duality: they must be able to imagine the object with respect to which they are seeking a source of knowledge (KKh §1.99). Once again, there are just two possibilities: either that imaginative awareness of non-duality constitutes or yields knowledge (*pramiti*) of non-duality, or it doesn't (KKh §§1.100-1). If it does, then whatever method gives rise to that awareness of non-duality will be the source of knowledge with respect to non-duality. If the opponent is a Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika thinker who rejects the non-dual nature of consciousness, they should say that the relevant awareness of non-duality doesn't constitute or yield any knowledge of non-duality; in fact, they should say that any awareness of non-duality is inaccurate. But, then, they cannot ask the non-dualist to show that there is source of knowledge with respect to non-duality. This is an instance of the paradox of incoherence.

This argument is subject to the same response as earlier: given that the non-dualistic Vedāntin is committed to the non-dual nature of consciousness, they are obligated for citing a source of knowledge with respect to it. In response, Śrīharṣa's predictably notes that, even though the non-dualist is committed to the non-dual nature of consciousness, they have no obligation to show

that the content of the inaccurate awareness that their opponent undergoes can in fact be known (KKh §1.101). But the second rejoinder is more interesting:

> Even if I were to accept non-duality, would the instrument that brings about that very awareness of yours necessarily be a source of knowledge simply in virtue of that? If someone, having apprehended mist as smoke, infers fire on a hill that in fact contains fire, is their awareness as of there being smoke, which has the mist as its object (*viṣaya*), to be accepted as a source of knowledge merely because of this? (KKh §1.101)

The example Śrīharṣa has in mind is this.

> *Mist and Fire.* I see what appears to be smoke emerging from a hill. I remember that wherever there is smoke, there is fire. So, I judge that there is fire on the hill. In fact, what I saw is just mist. But, luckily, there is fire on the hill.

This is a Gettier case. Elsewhere in *Refutation*, Śrīharṣa notes that, even though one's judgement in a case like this may be true, one doesn't acquire any knowledge in making this judgement (KKh §1.296). Even if the opponent is somehow able to accurately imagine what non-duality is, that doesn't mean that there should be a source of knowledge corresponding to that accurate awareness.

The point generalises. For Śrīharṣa, from a conventional standpoint, the Upaniṣads alone can be treated as a source of knowledge with respect to the non-dual nature of consciousness. But, in the final analysis, no conventionally recognized source of knowledge can yield any knowledge about how the world ultimately is. Perception, inference and testimony inaccurately represent the world as populated by distinctions amongst particulars and their properties. Even when the Upaniṣads describe the nature of consciousness as non-dual, eternal, all-pervasive, etc., they ascribe properties like non-duality, eternality, and all-pervasiveness to it. But this is misleading: if consciousness alone ultimately exists, then there cannot ultimately exist any properties that are distinct from consciousness itself. Nor can there be any semantic relations that would connect the referring expressions of our language to the characteristics of consciousness that they seemingly pick out. So, the Upaniṣads—as far as their literal content is concerned—cannot accurately describe the nature of consciousness. They can only figuratively describe what consciousness is, by *implying* what it is not. Śrīharṣa explains this idea as follows.

> Therefore, experience (*anubhava*) isn't the object of any linguistic usage that arises due to the apprehension of properties. In virtue of its not being temporally limited, it is figuratively called eternal. In virtue of its not being spatially limited, it is described as all-pervading. In virtue of the absence of any limitation imposed by qualifying characteristics, it is said to have the nature of everything, to be non-dual, and so on. (KKh §1.76)

Just as my false judgement that there is smoke on the hill in *Mist and Fire* helps us accurately judge that there is fire on the hill, so also can the false testimony of the Upaniṣads help us gain an accurate awareness of how the world ultimately is. Śrīharṣa wants to claim that having faith (*śraddhā*) in the content of the Upaniṣads clears room for a kind of non-conceptual—

metaphysically and epistemically direct—awareness that gives us access to the non-dual nature of consciousness. When one comes to have faith in the contents of the Upaniṣads, one doesn't just abandon one's belief in other competing pictures of ultimate reality, e.g., the Vaiśeṣika view on which there are many kinds of ultimately existent entities. But one also comes to see that the literal content of the Upaniṣads themselves cannot be true: if consciousness alone ultimately exists, then it cannot really possess properties like eternality, all-pervasiveness and non-duality. Thus, the Upaniṣads not only dismantle other false views about the world, but also the picture of the world that they literally convey.

As one continues to contemplate the content of the Upaniṣads, one can—through these practices of contemplation—get rid of the ordinary experiences and thoughts that present the world as populated by consciousness-independent objects. And, then, one can finally become aware of the non-dual nature of consciousness in a direct manner. Śrīharṣa prescribes this process of epistemic transformation to his Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika opponent.

> So, even though you are fond of revelling in ignorance, you should first of all have faith in this non-duality, which is put forward by these arguments that are endowed with the characteristics of good arguments established on your own view. And, after that, as you inwardly desire to be aware of the nature of the highest self on the basis of this faith in the content of the Upaniṣads, you—when ordinary mental occurrences have been expelled from your consciousness—will become directly aware of that [nature] to which self-revealing awareness bears witness and which far surpasses the taste of honey. (KKh §1.135)

On Śrīharṣa's view, the only useful role that reason can play in this epistemic transformation is negative. Philosophical arguments cannot help us discover the nature of ultimate reality. But, when deployed correctly, they can create the conditions for faith in the content of the Upaniṣads by ruling out possible defeaters for Upaniṣadic testimony.

For Śrīharṣa, then, it is futile to inquire into the question of what ultimately exists. No amount of rational inquiry can successfully establish or rebut *at least* one of the possible answers to that question: namely, NON-DUALISM. If NON-DUALISM is true, there is simply no source of knowledge that can represent how the world ultimately is. And even if it is false, it is difficult—given Śrīharṣa's own refutation-arguments—to show that the apparent world beyond consciousness ultimately exists. This is Śrīharṣa's ANTI-RATIONALISM.[8]

References

A. Primary Sources

BS   Bādarāyaṇa's *Brahmasūtra*. In Śāstrī, N. S. Anantakṛṣṇa and Pāṇasīkara, Vāsudeva Lakṣmaṇa Śarmā (eds.) (1917). *Brahmasūtraśāṅkarabhāṣyam*. Mumbai: Nirṇayasāgara Press.

BSŚBh Śaṃkara's *bhāṣya* on *Brahmasūtra*. In Śāstrī, N. S. Anantakṛṣṇa and Pāṇasīkara, Vāsudeva Lakṣmaṇa Śarmā (eds.) (1917). *Brahmasūtraśāṅkarabhāṣyam*. Mumbai: Nirṇayasāgara Press.

KKh   Śrīharṣa's *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. In Ganganatha Jha (ed.) (1904–1914). *Śrīharshapraṇītam Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādyam*. Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Book Depot.

MS   Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*. In Āpaṭe, Vināyaka Gaṇeśa (ed.) (1929). *Śrīmajjaiminipranīte Mīmāṃsādarśane Āditaḥ Ārabhya Dvitīyādhyāyaprathamapādāntaḥ Prathamo Bhāgaḥ*. Pune: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaya.

MSBh Śabarasvāmin's *bhāṣya* on Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*. In Āpaṭe, Vināyaka Gaṇeśa (ed.) (1929). *Śrīmajjaiminipranīte Mīmāṃsādarśane Āditaḥ Ārabhya Dvitīyādhyāyaprathamapādāntaḥ Prathamo Bhāgaḥ*. Pune: Ānandāśramamudraṇālaya.

ŚV   Kumārila's *Ślokavārttika* on Śabarasvāmin's *bhāṣya*. In Śāstrī, Dvārikādāsa (ed.) (1978). *Ślokavārttikam Kumārilabhaṭṭapādaviracitaṃ Pārthasārathimiśraviracitayā Nyāyaratnākaravyākhyayā Sanātham*. Edited by Dwarikadas Sastri. Varanasi: Tara Publications.

B. Secondary Literature

Carpenter, Amber & Ganeri, Jonardon (2010): Can you seek the answer to this question? (Meno in India). *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 88 (4):571-594.

Das, Nilanjan (2018): Śrīharṣa. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition). https://plato.stanford.edu|archives/spr2018/entries/sriharsa/.

Granoff, Phyllis E. (2012): *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrī Harṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*. Dodrecht: D. Reidel.

Kripke, Saul (2011). On Two Paradoxes of Knowledge. In *Philosophical Troubles: Collected Papers Vol I*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Phillips, Stephen H. (1999)@ *Classical Indian Metaphysics: Refutations of Realism and the Emergence of "New Logic."* Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court.

Ram-Prasad, Chakravarthi (2002): *Advaita Epistemology and Metaphysics*. London: Routledge.

Unger, Peter K. (1975): *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.