

GROUNDING INDIVIDUALITY IN ILLUSION: A PHILOSOPHICAL EXPLORATION OF ADVAITA VEDĀNTA IN LIGHT OF CONTEMPORARY PANPSYCHISM

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Abstract. The metaphysical vision of Advaita Vedānta has been making its way into some corners of Western analytic philosophy, and has especially garnered attention among those philosophers who are seeking to develop metaphysical systems in opposition to both reductionist materialism and dualism. Given Vedānta's monistic view of consciousness, it might seem natural to put Vedānta in dialogue with the growing position of panpsychism which, although not fully monistic, similarly takes mind to be a fundamental feature of reality. This paper will evaluate to what extent Śāṅkara's monism can bypass the most pressing issues facing panpsychism, namely combination and individuation problems. As will be seen in this paper, while Advaita Vedānta is able to avoid some of the panpsychist problems, it struggles ultimately to ontologically ground illusion (*māyā/avidyā*) in a coherent manner. As a result, a conclusion of this paper is that although Śāṅkara's vision offers a promising route for those philosophers who take consciousness to be fundamental — including panpsychists — it cannot be uncritically adopted due to the problem of grounding Illusion.

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Given the recent push within philosophy of mind to explore non-dualistic and anti-reductionist solutions to the body-mind problem, the monistic-idealistic system of Advaita Vedānta has gained renewed interest within Western analytic philosophy.² The 8th century Indian philosopher and theologian Adi Śāṅkara is credited with formulating what is today called Advaita Vedānta, through philosophical reasoning and a monistic reading of the Vedic canon (*The Upanishads*, *The Brahma Sutras*, and *The Bhagavad Gita*). A main theological task of Śāṅkara was to systematise and bring into clarity the unity between the Absolute (*Brahman*) and the Self (*Ātman*) and avoid the conclusions of those Hindu systems (*darśana*) that tacitly or explicitly support a doctrine of difference. For Śāṅkara, the message of the central Hindu texts spoke loud and clear: “*Brahman* is *Ātman*, and *Ātman* is *Brahman*”. This non-dualist Vedānta has often been suspected of an anti-realist view of the Self, and Śāṅkara was many times accused of expressing a crypto-Buddhist affirmation of *anātman*. It has also been argued that the Vedānta conception of *mokṣa* (spiritual liberation) entails contradiction if not absurdity as there is, strictly speaking, no self that can seek *mokṣa*. Śāṅkara and later writers have sought to clarify the *Brahman-Ātman* unity through a variety

¹ I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their many helpful suggestions and comments.

² Luca Gasparri, “Priority Cosmopsychism and the Advaita Vedānta”, *Philosophy East and West* 69, no. 1 (2019); Anand Jayprakash Vaidya and Purushottama Bilimoria, “Advaita Vedānta and the Mind Extension Hypothesis”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22, no. 7–8 (2015); Michael Silberstein, “Panentheism, Neutral Monism, and Advaita Vedānta”, *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* 52, no. 4 (2017); Anand Jayprakash Vaidya, “A New Debate on Consciousness: Bringing Classical and Modern Vedānta into Dialogue with Contemporary Analytic Panpsychism”, In *The Bloomsbury Research Handbook of Vedānta*, ed. Ayon Maharaj (Bloomsbury, 2020); Evan Thompson, “Dreamless Sleep, the Embodied Mind, and Consciousness: The Relevance of Classical Indian Debate to Cognitive Science”, *Open MIND* 37 (2015).

of philosophical and theological concepts pertaining to the hierarchy of being, including *māyā* (illusion), *sat* (absolute existence), *asat* (non-existence), and *mithyā* (neither real nor unreal).

The goal of this paper is to evaluate the way that Śaṅkara articulates human individuality, situate Śaṅkara's monism in relation to contemporary non-dualistic philosophies (panpsychism), and critically evaluate how illusion is grounded in this form of Vedānta. The first two sections of this paper will outline the central tenets of Advaita Vedānta, and evaluate whether this monism can escape a seeming *double-talk problem*.

As others have recently pointed out, the concerns of Advaita Vedānta mirror to a significant extent the concerns of contemporary analytic philosophers.³ Therefore, recent attempts have been made at utilizing the resources of monistic Vedānta within contemporary philosophical discussions. The third section of this paper will evaluate to what extent Advaita Vedānta is able to avoid the most common philosophical challenge to panpsychist frameworks, that is, the combination and the individuation/derivation problem. It will be argued that Advaita Vedānta, in virtue of the appearance/reality distinction, framed through the doctrines of *māyā* (illusion) and *avidyā* (ignorance), can bypass some of the immediate problems of panpsychist ontologies as it assumes a different conception of *subjects*.

However, in section four I will argue that Śaṅkara's monism encounters significant problems in grounding illusion or explicating it in a way that would render it consistent with the emphasis on Brahman as the ultimate reality. My conclusion will then be that Śaṅkara's monism, while being able to avoid the problems associated with some versions of panpsychism, seems unable to successfully ground a fundamental part of its theological vision, namely illusion (*māyā/avidyā*). As a result, a conclusion of this paper is that although Śaṅkara's vision offers a promising route that should be of interest to panpsychists, it cannot be uncritically adopted due to the problem of grounding Illusion.

II. OUTLINE OF ŚAṅKARA'S MONISM

While Gaudāpada (6th century CE) is often recognised as the first advaitin, Adi Śaṅkara is credited with laying the conceptual foundation for Advaita Vedānta. Plenty of written sources are attributed to Śaṅkara but are, as Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi note, of dubious worth.⁴ Though, it is reasonably certain that Śaṅkara authored the commentaries of the *Brahma Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and other Upanishadic texts.⁵ Śaṅkara strived in opposition to other Hindu schools to uphold a strict monism, and employed both scriptural exegesis and philosophical analysis to show how the unqualified character of Brahman could be reconciled with the seeming plurality of reality. Of course, Śaṅkara's goal was not merely theoretical, it was to guide people to *mokṣa*, liberation from illusion by reaching a state of non-dual awareness, thus overcoming ignorance and breaking the concealing power of *māyā*.⁶

Śaṅkara's monism can be articulated in terms of five distinct, but interrelated, propositions:

SM1: Brahman alone is ultimately real (*sat*)

SM2: There is metaphysical unity between Brahman and Ātman

SM3: Ātman falls within the category of *Mithyā*, meaning that Ātman is neither real nor unreal

SM4: The perceived separation between Brahman and Ātman springs from *Māyā* (illusion)

SM5: *Mokṣa* consists in the realization of one's Self as Brahman by overcoming ignorance (*Avidyā*)

3 Gasparri, "Priority Cosmopsychism and the Advaita Vedānta"; Itay Shani, "Cosmopsychism: A Holistic Approach to the Metaphysics of Experience", *Philosophical Papers* 44, no. 3 (2015); Vaidya and Bilimoria, "Advaita Vedānta and the Mind Extension Hypothesis"; Silberstein, "Panentheism, Neutral Monism, and Advaita Vedānta".

4 Eliot Deutsch and Rohit Dalvi. *The Essential Vedānta: A New Source Book of Advaita Vedānta* (World Wisdom, Inc., 2004), 161.

5 Ibid., 163.

6 David Loy, "Enlightenment in Buddhism and Advaita Vedānta: Are Nirvana and Moksha the Same?" *International Philosophical Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (1982).

Advaita Vedānta takes for granted that there is being, and its “project, ontologically, is to clarify what this ‘being’ entails.”⁷ Commonly, this form of Vedānta distinguishes between the Absolute aspect of Brahman and the God-for-us aspect of Brahman. The former is *nirguṇa*, which means Brahman as pure unqualified consciousness, without quality or distinction.⁸ Brahman as pure being is “understood as tranquil consciousness undisturbed by differences.”⁹ Thus, on SM1, Brahman as absolute reality is the cause and ground of the universe, and the ontological foundation of everything that exists. As already mentioned, Brahman alone enjoys ultimate reality, and because of the infinite nature of *sat*, meaning that it is not conditioned by space and time, Brahman can never be known directly. For Śāṅkara, Brahman can only be known via negation (*via negativa*); we can comprehend Brahman in virtue of what it is not. As this reality forms the basis of all other realities, it is trans-categorical, lack features, and is “exempt from all actions and changes (*niskryak*)”.¹⁰ Brahman, however, is knowable with attributes as *saguṇa* Brahman, as Īśvara (God). Śāṅkara postulated *saguṇa* Brahman, for without this aspect of the Absolute it was impossible to make sense of the coming into being of the world. This God of Īśvara becomes “the home of all finite existence.”¹¹ Does not this introduction of Īśvara, then, betray Śāṅkara’s absolutist view of Brahman as non-dual and free of distinctions? As Arvind Sharma points out, Śāṅkara sought to retain a non-dualist view of God by considering Īśvara as empirically but not ultimately real. From an absolute point of view, “*saguṇa* has no transcendental validity.”¹² Brahman alone is ultimately real.

The central Vedantic claim is that there is ontological unity between Brahman and Ātman (SM2). Through an Advaitic reading of the Upanishads, it is maintained that one’s true nature is “the same as undifferentiated pure being (the *brahman*).”¹³ It is important to point out that Ātman does not merely carry the properties of Brahman, but Ātman *is* Brahman. Hence, the self “does not have consciousness as a quality; it simply *is* consciousness under certain conditions...”¹⁴ Does this ontological unification entail causal overdetermination¹⁵, such that the agential powers of the self are subsumed within the absolute reality of Brahman, or is it possible to frame this relationship in more compatibilist terms? One strategy for the Advaitin is to stress the difference between relative/empirical reality and absolute reality as it pertains to Ātman. From an absolute point of view, Ātman is devoid of action. Indeed, Śāṅkara’s soteriology stresses the intrinsic difference between and contradictory natures of action and wisdom; only wisdom can lead to liberation, not by performing rituals or actions.¹⁶ Yet, on the subjective level, “the self imagines itself as an agent engaged in action and as the locus of sensation...”¹⁷ Śāṅkara seeks to dissolve a seeming contradiction by maintaining that Ātman *is* and *is not* causally efficacious with regard to different levels of reality — the empirically real and the absolutely real. Ātman is, therefore, neither fully real nor unreal (SM3).

But, why do we mistake realness for un-realness, and vice versa? T.R.V Murti explains that any monistic system must draw a distinction between the empirically real and what is ultimately real.¹⁸ Our inability to recognize the ontological unity between Ātman and Brahman is because of *Māyā*; plurality

7 Joshua Anderson, “An Investigation of *Moksha* in the Advaita Vedānta of Shankara and Gaudapada”, *Asian Philosophy* 22, no. 3 (2012), 276.

8 Arvind Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedānta* (The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995), 2.

9 Christopher Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Hindu and Buddhist Ideas from Original Sources* (Bloomsbury, 2015), 183.

10 *Ibid.*, 189.

11 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (vol.2) (George Allen & Unwin, 1927), 559.

12 Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedānta*, 2.

13 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Hindu and Buddhist Ideas from Original Sources*, 183.

14 Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, “Saving the Self? Classical Hindu Consciousness and Contemporary Physicalism”, *Philosophy East and West* 51 no. 3 (2010), 385.

15 Jaegwon Kim, *Supervenience and Mind: Selected Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1993); *Physicalism, Or Something Near Enough* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2005).

16 Sthaneshwar Timalsina, “Self, Causation, and Agency in the Advaita of Śāṅkara”, in *Free Will, Agency, and Selfhood in Indian Philosophy*, ed. Matthew R. Dasti and Edwin F. Bryant (Oxford Univ. Press, 2013), 189.

17 *Ibid.*, 190.

18 T.R.V Murti. *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (George Allen & Unwin, 1974).

is caused by illusion (SM4). Of course, as Michael P. Levine points out, those who maintain an appearance/reality distinction “do not generally deny the reality of the phenomenal world in a limited sense. It is rather that the existence of such phenomenal realm should not be confused with reality.”¹⁹

Lastly, the soteriology of Advaita states that *mokṣa* or liberation, consists in the realization of one’s self as Brahman (SM5). One reaches such “truth of non-difference, then, the moment one understands that one is a reflection of Ātman that only appears to be different from it, but is identical with it in reality.”²⁰ As long as such ignorance persists, “the individual engages in *adhyāsa* (superimposition) and does not see himself as he really is...”²¹ The real nature of Ātman is distorted by the concealing power of illusion.

III. ADVAITA VEDĀNTA AND THE SEEMING DOUBLE-TALK PROBLEM

The ontology of Advaita Vedānta has been discussed for a long time, and the debate between Monistic Vedānta and Qualified nondualism — as exemplified by Rāmānujā’s philosophy — has at times been heated. In upholding a monistic view of Brahman, the Advaitin suggests that only Brahman is ultimately real. Whatever is perceived by human creatures, or other natural agents, is a product of *avidyā*, ignorance. The critics of Vedānta have argued that such a view entails outright absurdity. In a 1962 article, the issue was framed in this way: “The illusory world presents both a metaphysical and epistemological problem. What is its ontological status? Why do we see it? These are both moot problems in monistic Vedānta.”²² For George Bosworth Burch, there is a problem of “plurality” within Vedānta: either individuality is taken seriously in an ontological sense, which would betray the pureness of Brahman; or, individuality is sacrificed in light of Brahman’s ultimacy, which makes it more difficult to uphold a robust doctrine of *mokṣa*. How can the individual be ignorant if the individual does not ultimately exist? We can call this the seeming *double-talk problem* of monistic Vedānta.

How might the defender of Advaita Vedānta respond to the double-talk problem? A first, possible, line of defence is to note that Śaṅkara is not offering a philosophy in the Western sense of constructing a logically consistent system. Śaṅkara’s concerns were primarily religious and spiritual, seeking to offer the most viable interpretation of the Upanishadic conception of Brahman. Śaṅkara believed that the truth about Brahman should be achieved by means of meditation and not by argumentation in the rationalist sense of the terms.²³ Nevertheless, given that Śaṅkara offered a philosophical analysis of the oneness of Brahman, and Advaitins in general seek to offer a philosophy consistent with human experience, this defence does not work. As Deutsch also argues: “Vedānta’s concern with spiritual realization, in short, does not make it less of a technical philosophy.”²⁴ Vedānta should not be construed as a form of quietism.

It is, then, a better strategy to thoroughly explicate the distinctions between the absolutely real (*sat*), empirically real (*mithyā*), and unreal (*asat*), so as to offer some relief to Burch and others. This sort of monist is not claiming that individuality is merely an illusion in a simplistic sense, as in being ontologically non-existent (*asat*). Instead, as covered in SM3, Ātman is neither metaphysically unreal nor metaphysically real (*mithyā*). Unreality, on the other hand, is construed as that which entails a logical contradiction.²⁵ Critics of Advaita Vedānta, unfortunately, fail to recognize this important distinction — or in worst case willfully ignores it. In a polemical article, L. Stafford Betty argued that he has located Śaṅkara’s fatal mistake, namely that the Advaitic system cannot do justice to sin and suffering. Betty asks, what “in each of us actually experiences the lives that we call ‘ours’? What experiences happiness and unhappiness, pleasure and pain? What does the knowing? And what is it that actually wills the good or the evil

19 Michael P. Levine. “Appearance and Reality: Misinterpreting Śaṅkara”, *Asian Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (1995), 155.

20 Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction* (Univ. of Hawaii Press, 1969), 52.

21 *Ibid.*, 53.

22 George Bosworth Burch, “Principles and Problems of Monistic Vedānta”, *Philosophy East and West* 11, no. 4 (1962), 233.

23 Harry Oldmeadow, “Śaṅkara’s Doctrine of Māyā”, *Asian Philosophy* 2, no. 2 (1992), 132.

24 Eliot Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, 4–5.

25 Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedānta*, 174.

things that we do?”²⁶ What sins and what suffers? We all experience suffering, pleasures and pains, yet Śaṅkara cannot account for these phenomenological features of human life, according to Betty. There is no real suffering on this monism, only “seeming suffering”. But, as Betty goes on to argue, it is impossible to make a sensible distinction “between *seeming suffering* and *outright suffering*. Who has ever *seemed* to suffer who did not *really* suffer?”²⁷ If Śaṅkara claims that the *jīva* (the individual soul) only seems to suffer but in reality does not, then this system amounts to incoherence. Betty concludes, therefore, that it is better to consider Śaṅkara’s work as myth-making, rather than a philosophical attempt at making sense of human experience. For Betty, “Śaṅkara was a mystic in philosophical guise.”²⁸ In other words, the non-dualism of this form of Vedānta “is an *experience*, not a coherent metaphysical system.”²⁹ Even though Betty accurately locates a *seeming* tension within Śaṅkara’s system, he also underestimates the resources within Advaita Vedānta for addressing this issue in a way that can harmonize the phenomenology of suffering with the metaphysical priority of Brahman. The main problem with Betty’s critique is that it does not appreciate the importance of the three-fold distinction between the ultimately real, the empirically real, and the unreal. By deeming suffering as ultimately illusory, Śaṅkara was not denying the felt experience of suffering on the empirical or phenomenological level. In fact, Śaṅkara seeks to account positively for suffering through his account of ignorance (*avidyā*) in order to do justice to the phenomenological complexity of human experiencing. In a response to Betty, Michael P. Levine highlights this issue as well. He writes, “It is precisely because Śaṅkara seeks to account for sin and suffering, to take it seriously and significant — a genuine problem for life — that Śaṅkara constructs the particular metaphysical account of reality that he does...”³⁰ As it starts off with a severe misinterpretation of Śaṅkara’s metaphysical schema, Betty’s critique fails to hit its target.

We can find similar debates within Christian theology regarding the morality or immorality of positing theodicies in light of suffering and evil. Many have argued that Christian theodicies fail morally as they trivialize evil by *reinterpreting* it. The point of this argument is that “theodicy trivializes suffering if it reinterprets suffering in a way the sufferer cannot accept.”³¹ Thus, similar to the critique of Śaṅkara, the complaint here is that a metaphysical explanation of evil in terms of some broader framework — perhaps in light of God’s overarching purpose for creation and humanity — undermines the sufferer’s own experience. Samuel Shearn argues that this problem is particularly evident when it comes to cases of *horrendous evils*. In response to such concerns, Atle Søvik and Asle Eikrem argue that Shearn’s criterion seems too strict, especially since the sufferer can be mistaken in identifying the cause of his/her suffering. As they write: “Individual sufferers are often mistaken in their attempts to identify the causes of what they have experienced, and they can certainly be wrong about what made the evils possible (be it physical, biological, psychological, or metaphysical).”³² Śaṅkara’s monism does not disregard the authenticity of the sufferer’s experience but seeks to place it within a broader metaphysical framework.

It is not enough to claim that Śaṅkara is not taking human experiencing seriously. One needs to show that Śaṅkara’s metaphysical project does not hold weight by, in this case, pointing out some internal inconsistencies. As Levine further argues, the critic needs to attack the fundamental building block of Advaita Vedānta, which is the distinction between *appearance* and *reality*. Many ontologies, ranging from materialist to dualist, employ such a distinction. For a materialist you are, despite your various experiences, nothing “but a pack of neurons” — as famously expressed by Francis Crick. For the dualist, on the other hand, there is more to you than your physical body even though such additional features cannot be directly perceived. There is on both of these ontologies a degree of appearance. Thus, I agree

26 Stafford L. Betty, “Śaṅkara’s Fatal Mistake”, *Asian Philosophy* 4, no. 1 (1994), 4.

27 *Ibid.*, 5.

28 *Ibid.*, 6.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Levine, “Appearance and Reality: Misinterpreting Śaṅkara”, 152.

31 Samuel Shearn, “Moral Critique and defence of theodicy”, *Religious Studies* 49, no. 4 (2013), 441.

32 Atle Ottesen Søvik and Asle Eikrem, “A Critique of Samuel Shearn’s moral critique of theodicies”, *Religious Studies* 51, no. 2 (2015), 264.

with Levine's conclusion: "the apparent plurality of substance or experience cannot be rejected as a basis for the 'oneness' of Reality unless A/R itself is discredited. To do so one must consider the metaphysical scheme in which the distinction is found."³³

As I will argue for in the next section, Śāṅkara's distinction between appearance and reality offers him resources for engaging several problems that face monistic ontologies, especially those forms of monism that seek to develop panpsychism as a viable alternative to dualism and reductionism.

IV. ŚĀṅKARA'S RADICAL MONISM: BYPASSING COMBINATION AND INDIVIDUATION

As with many monistic ontologies, Śāṅkara's monism faces the issue of balancing individuality and pluralism. The Viśiṣṭādvaita of Rāmānujā (1017–1137) critiqued the Vedānta conception of Brahman as undifferentiated, suggesting that such a conception of realness collapses into an epistemological anti-realism that makes knowledge impossible.³⁴ Moreover, asks the critic, how is it that human creatures, and perhaps other natural agents, seemingly face an abundance of plurality when it is claimed on this idealist philosophy that only Brahman is ultimately real?

In recent years, panpsychist contributions have enjoyed a significant revival and renewed attention. For thinkers such as David Chalmers, Galen Strawson, Thomas Nagel, Gregg Rosenberg and William Seager, panpsychism — and closely related monistic philosophies — is a promising perspective for grounding consciousness in the natural order, while avoiding both reductive materialism and dualism.³⁵ Panpsychism is roughly speaking the idea that "all things have mind or mind-like quality."³⁶ Material entities have, in some way, "a very simple experiential nature, from which the complex experience of humans and animals is somehow derived."³⁷ By positing mind as a basic feature of reality, the panpsychist seeks to show how human consciousness can be explained as a natural product within the physical domain in a non-reductive fashion. Mind is no longer a metaphysical anomaly because "consciousness and physical reality are deeply intertwined."³⁸ I will briefly explain a few versions of panpsychism before relating this explanatory strategy to Śāṅkara's Vedānta.

The first version stipulates that microphysical entities are conscious, at least to a lesser degree. Generally speaking, those who hold to this view tend to also affirm *constitutive panpsychism*, meaning that the macroexperience of higher-level organisms is grounded in the microexperience of microphysical entities.³⁹ On this perspective, phenomenological features *go all the way down* — although it might be very difficult to specify exactly the ontological status of such microexperience and its relationship to more robust forms of experience.⁴⁰ As Sam Coleman has argued, this view of mind usually lends itself to a form of *subject panpsychism*, whereby experiences are had by subjects at the microphysical level. This is so because "phenomenal

33 Levine, "Appearance and Reality: Misinterpreting Śāṅkara", 155.

34 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Hindu and Buddhist Ideas from Original Sources*, 229.

35 David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1996); *The Character of Consciousness* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2010); Galen Strawson, "Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism Entails Panpsychism", *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 13, no. 10–11 (2006); Thomas Nagel, *Mind and Cosmos: Why the Materialist Neo-Darwinian Conception of Nature is Almost Certainly False* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2012); Gregg Rosenberg, *A Place for Consciousness: Probing the Deep Structure of the Natural World* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); William Seager, *Theories of Consciousness: An Introduction and Assessment* (Routledge, 1999).

36 David Skrbina, *Panpsychism in the West* (MIT Press, 2005), 2.

37 Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 19.

38 David Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*, 133.

39 David Chalmers, "Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism." In *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. by Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (Oxford Univ. Press 2017), 25.

40 This has led some thinkers to instead posit what is called "panprotopsychism". This is a more cautious form of panpsychism, suggesting the existence of "proto-phenomenal properties". Such properties are "not themselves phenomenal but together they can yield the phenomenal" (Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind*, 127). See also Chalmers, "Panpsychism and Panprotopsychism", 19–47.

qualities necessarily exist as belonging to subjects.⁴¹ On this *subject constitutive panpsychism*, we have micro-subjects possessing phenomenological features which give rise to complex phenomenological features in macro-subjects. Of course, explaining this panpsychist theory in a systematic manner is very complicated, involving a great degree of speculation, and gives rise to a number of metaphysical issues. The most famous metaphysical problem facing subject constitutive panpsychism is the *combination problem* — a term coined by William Seager (inspired by a problem outlined by William James). That is, even if we concede the panpsychist notion that “all elements of reality have some kind of mental, conscious aspect to them, how is it that some groups of such elements form higher level and unified states of consciousness?”⁴² How does a myriad of tiny subjects, with their particular phenomenological perspectives, combine into a large scale macrolevel subject with a unified experience of the world? Coleman argues that this is not merely an epistemological issue, as opposed to Philip Goff,⁴³ but suggests more critically that the idea of subjects combining is a metaphysical impossibility. This is because, points of views cannot combine. If two subjects, *S1* and *S2*, combine into *S3*, then we would have to say that one point of view has ceased to exist. But then we are no longer talking about *combination*, we are talking about *annihilation*. However, if the phenomenological perspectives of *S1* and *S2* were to survive this combination, then it would be rather difficult to make sense of a unified form of experience of *S3*.⁴⁴ This is the real combination problem for panpsychism, according to Coleman.⁴⁵

Is Advaita Vedānta a form of panpsychism, and does Śāṅkara’s monism encounter a similar combination problem? Advaita shares obvious similarities with a panpsychist ontology: It posits consciousness as a fundamental feature of reality (SM1 and SM2), and suggests that higher-level agency is made possible by Brahman as pure consciousness. Yet, the Advaitin conception of Ātman takes it beyond subject panpsychism. Śāṅkara, as I explained earlier, places Ātman on the level of *mithyā* (SM3). Ātman does not exist at the same metaphysical level as Brahman and cannot be construed as an ontologically robust subject. Thus, the Advaitin conception of Ātman bypasses the subject combination problem — at least as outlined by Coleman. Moreover, subject constitutive panpsychism is committed to a bottom-up explanatory strategy by appealing to the combination of subjects that together yield larger or more complex subjects. It progresses from micro to macro.

Advaita Vedānta seems to paint a different picture. As Brahman alone is ultimately real, other levels of consciousness, including human minds, are the result of this pure consciousness. This is, in effect, a top-down explanation which accounts for human mentality in terms of fundamental consciousness. This brings Advaita Vedānta closer to the thesis of *cosmic panpsychism*. This formulation of panpsychism suggests that “experiences are ultimately not ontologically distinct from cosmic consciousness, and its particular patterns result in different experiences.”⁴⁶ Cosmic panpsychism builds on the *priority monist* claim that “exactly one basic concrete object, the cosmos, exists.”⁴⁷ Yujin Nagasawa and Khai Wager have developed a “priority cosmopsychism” which shares strong similarities with the Advaitin emphasis

41 Sam Coleman, “The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-Subjects, and Emergence”, *Erkenntnis* 79, no. 1 (2014), 25.

42 Seager, *Theories of Consciousness: An Introduction and Assessment*, 243.

43 Philip Goff, “Why panpsychism doesn’t help us to explain consciousness”, *Dialectica* 63, no. 3 (2009).

44 Coleman, “The Real Combination Problem: Panpsychism, Micro-Subjects, and Emergence”, 33. For more on how various phenomenological experiences are unified and the implications for the study of consciousness, see Timothy J. Bayne and David Chalmers, “What is the unity of consciousness?” in *The Unity of Consciousness: Binding, Integration, and Dissociation*, ed. Axel Cleeremans (Oxford Univ. Press, 2003). For William Hasker, the very idea of a unified consciousness poses a significant challenge to various reductionist ambitions within naturalistic philosophies of mind. William Hasker, *The Emergent Self* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1999), 122–146.

45 The combination problem can be expressed in different ways, and David Chalmers has identified three possible articulations of this problem: *The Subject Combination Problem*, *The Quality Combination Problem*, and *The Structure Combination Problem*. See David Chalmers, “The Combination Problems for Panpsychism”, in *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 179–214.

46 Bernardo Kastrup, “The Universe in Consciousness”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25, no. 5–6 (2018), 139.

47 Yujin Nagasawa and Khai Wager, “Panpsychism and Priority Cosmopsychism”, in *Panpsychism: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Godehard Brüntrup and Ludwig Jaskolla (Oxford Univ. Press, 2017), 116.

on the reality and ultimacy of Brahman. On this view, the cosmic consciousness is “the most fundamental form of phenomenality”, meaning that it is more fundamental than the “phenomenal properties of individuals.”⁴⁸ Cosmopsychists, including Nagasawa/Wager, Bernardo Kastrup, and Itay Shani, argue that a cosmic formulation of panpsychism can avoid some of the immediate problems of a bottom-up panpsychism, especially pertaining to the (subject) combination problem. A main motivation behind panpsychism is to escape the explanatory problems facing physicalism. Yet, it seems as if “the problem of explaining how micro-phenomenal subjects, or states, or qualities, or processes combine to form macro-phenomenal subjects, or states, or qualities, or processes is just as formidable as the hard problem afflicting physicalism.”⁴⁹ If this were the situation, then panpsychism would lose most of its appeal.

Cosmopsychism, according to its proponents, manages to escape the panpsychist combination problem as it considers phenomenal experiences to be derivative of a larger consciousness.⁵⁰ Before outlining a common critique of cosmopsychism, we should consider the differences and similarities between Advaita Vedānta and this way of accounting for consciousness. Although both of these metaphysical systems hold to priority monism, they express this monism in markedly different ways. For Śāṅkara, Brahman is ontologically prior (SM1) and is alone metaphysically real. Brahman is “always existent, pure being. *Brahman*, therefore, is unable to be disvalued by any other experience.”⁵¹ Brahman, although ineffable, is also described as being (*sat*), consciousness (*sit*), bliss (*Ānanda*), and pure intelligence.⁵² Brahman is also taken as “simply the name for consciousness as the universal and singular basis for all of reality, and from which, in some sense, all reality is no different.”⁵³ For the cosmopsychist, on the other hand, the cosmos, which is depicted as a conscious entity, is ontologically prior. This goes contrary to Śāṅkara’s monism, which argues that the physical cosmos is sublatable by the level of *sat* — meaning that it lacks metaphysical ultimacy. The belief in the physical is due to ignorance and should be overcome through the realization of the reality of Brahman. On Advaita Vedānta, human beings are, moreover, not constituent parts of a larger whole, given that individuality is an illusion. This sets monistic Vedānta apart from the cosmopsychist description of how individuality fits into reality. Cosmopsychism seeks to ground macro-consciousness in fundamental consciousness, but the very reality of macro-consciousness is rejected within a monistic construal of Vedānta.⁵⁴

This has significant implications for one of the major issues facing cosmopsychism. In contrast to the subject panpsychist, the cosmo-proponent is not forced to give an account of how micro-subjectivity combines into macro-subjectivity in a bottom-up fashion. Nevertheless, a top-down version of panpsychism needs to offer an explanation of its own, especially pertaining to how individual minds can emerge from a cosmic mind; or, how a cosmic consciousness can instantiate a plurality of minds with different phenomenological perspectives. This objection is often referred to as the individuation/derivation problem.⁵⁵ The objection can be put like this: how “does one consciousness give rise to many distinct subjects, whose experience and perspective is neither identical to each other, nor to the former single consciousness?”⁵⁶ Another version of this concern, expressed by Nagasawa and Wager, asks how “the cosmic consciousness can be built from medium-sized individual consciousness.”⁵⁷

48 Ibid., 117.

49 Shani, “Cosmopsychism: A Holistic Approach to the Metaphysics of Experience”, 394.

50 Nagasawa and Wager, “Panpsychism and Priority Cosmopsychism”, 117.

51 Anderson, “An Investigation of *Moksha* in the Advaita Vedānta of Shankara and Gaudapada”, 276–277.

52 Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, 9; T.M.P Mahadevan. *The Philosophy of Advaita* (Bharatiya Kala Pragashan, 1938/2006), 134.

53 Chakravarthi Ram-Prasadd, “Saving the Self? Classical Hindu Consciousness and Contemporary Physicalism”, *Philosophy East and West* 51, no. 3 (2010), 220.

54 This difference is also highlighted in Gasparri, “Priority Cosmopsychism and the Advaita Vedānta”.

55 Joanna Leidenhag discusses several overlapping issues about how to frame the relationship between the cosmic mind and individual minds: *The Subject Individuation Problem*, *The Quality Individuation Problem*, *The Experience Individuation Problem*, *The Awareness Individuation Problem*, and *The Structural Individuation Problem*. See Joanna Leidenhag, “Unity Between God and Mind? A Study on the Relationship between Panpsychism nad Pantheism”, *Sophia* 58, no. 4 (2019).

56 Leidenhag, “Unity Between God and Mind? A Study on the Relationship between Panpsychism nad Pantheism”, 551.

57 Nagasawa and Wager, “Panpsychism and Priority Cosmopsychism”, 121.

Recall that Śaṅkara's monism places individual minds — or the perception of such — at the level of *mithyā*, according to which they are neither unreal nor metaphysically real. Advaita Vedānta does not posit individual minds as independently existing subjects that we need to ontologically explicate in relation to a fundamental, all-pervading, consciousness. As I mentioned with regard to the *subject combination problem*, on monistic Vedānta individuals are not portrayed as constituent parts of a greater whole. Śaṅkara's philosophy does not seek to ground human subjectivity in either a bottom-up fashion by building macro-mentality from micro-mentality, nor in terms of a top-down strategy where human minds are seen as ontologically derivative from a greater mind or cosmic consciousness. Both subject constitutive panpsychism and cosmic panpsychism subscribe to richer ontological conceptions of individuality: distinct subjects with personal and private phenomenological perspectives. And this situation is very different in Advaita Vedānta, in which personal individuality “is an illusion, which is created by the interactions between our modes of experiencing and the world.”⁵⁸

One might wonder, then, if Śaṅkara's monism commits itself to another ontology on the panpsychist spectrum, namely *panexperientialism*. It is a middle-path between materialism and dualism, and it suggests that “experience exists throughout nature and that mentality (i.e., a thing requiring cognition, functionally construed) is not essential to it. It is a milder form of traditional *panpsychism*.”⁵⁹ For panexperientialism there are no *enduring subjects*. Rather, there are *compound individuals*, which means that higher and more inclusive types of experiences “give the society as a whole an overall experiential unity.”⁶⁰ While this view of consciousness is closer to the Vedāntic conception of individuality, the two should not be equated. On Śaṅkara's monism, there is at least one Subject or Self: Brahman. It affirms “the existence of one non-dual Self, which alone is absolutely self-existent, and so independently real.”⁶¹ From this Self, all plurality emanates, but this plurality has no independent existence and so no ultimate reality. Unlike the panexperientialist, Vedānta does not consider individuals as the sum-total of higher-order experiences, and *Ātman* is not a compound individual that has emerged in a bottom-up manner. Panexperientialism is a milder form of panpsychism but it does, however, face its own version of the combination problem — a version that Śaṅkara seemingly escapes. As Philip Goff has argued, the idea of experiences summing together is difficult to make conceptual sense of: “Whatever sense we can make of experiences summing together, it is contradictory to suppose that the experiential being of lots of little experiencing things can come together to wholly constitute the *novel* experiential being of some big experiencing thing.”⁶² The panexperientialist narrative here is that innumerable tiny units of experience combine so as to form a larger unit of experience, for example a human being. Nevertheless, given the abundance of phenomenological experiences at hand, this sort of combination cannot account for the unified experience of macro-experiential individuals — or, there is at least no straightforward path from these units of micro-experience to the richer phenomenological entity of a unified experience.

Advaita Vedānta, by placing subjects on the level of *mithyā*, can circumvent this issue as well. Indeed, “all the mental activities of the self who identifies himself as a mental being are subject to a pervasive *avidyā*.”⁶³ When *avidyā* is removed, *Ātman* is revealed as pure, self-shining, undifferentiated, and timeless consciousness.⁶⁴ It is in virtue of the Vedāntic emphasis on illusion, which is tied to both *mayā* and *avidyā*, that this sort of monism can escape the various combination/individuation problems of the outlined panpsychist ontologies. This might seem like a cheap solution, or a slippery linguistic trick, but if one wishes to undermine Śaṅkara's monism, one needs to show some major flaws in his appearance/reality distinction — his emphasis on illusion. The next section will look more closely at the nature and func-

58 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Hindu and Buddhist Ideas from Original Sources*, 211.

59 Rosenberg, *A Place for Consciousness: Probing the Deep Structure of the Natural World*, 91.

60 David Ray Griffin, *Unsnarling the World-Knot: Consciousness, Freedom, and the Mind-Body Problem* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 186.

61 Keith Ward, *Religion and Human Nature* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 31.

62 Philip Goff, “Experiences Don't Sum”, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 13, no. 10–11 (2006), 58.

63 Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, 60.

64 *Ibid.*, 48.

tion of Illusion. What is the locus of Illusion, and how does it relate to Brahman as the only metaphysical reality? My argument will be that the task of explaining Illusion within Vedānta, without disrupting some other core belief within this monism, faces substantial challenges. Yet, if the appearance/reality distinction cannot be upheld, then Vedānta does not offer immediate relief to the metaphysical conundrums of panpsychism.

V. GROUNDING ILLUSION

As already suggested, there is a close relationship between *mayā* (illusion) and *avidyā* (ignorance). Roughly speaking, according to both Śaṅkara and post-Śaṅkarian commentaries, *mayā* gives rise to *avidyā* and thus the erroneous belief in individuality and separation from Brahman — the ground of all reality. I have so far suggested that this emphasis on Illusion, and the level of *mithyā*, provides important conceptual resources for avoiding the combination and individuation problems of the outlined panpsychist frameworks. This, however, raises the questions: How can Illusion be grounded in Advaita Vedānta? How can *mayā/avidyā* be grounded in this monism without threatening or undermining the metaphysical primacy of Brahman? My argument in this section is that the task of explicating the nature and function of Illusion in Vedānta faces significant challenges. To illustrate this, I will focus particularly on how *mayā* is accounted for by Advaitin philosophers, which constitutes the ground for the illusoriness of the world. As we will see, there are at least three ways to explain *mayā* — the illusoriness of reality — from a Vedānta point of view.

The first route is to simply say that *mayā* is indeterminable: it cannot be explicated philosophically in a systematic manner without disrupting the pureness of Brahman. This is the position of T.M.P Mahadevan, who argues that the Advaitin needs to navigate between two unacceptable conclusions. *Mayā* cannot be construed as different from Brahman since “if it were really different, the scriptural texts declaring non-difference would be contradicted.”⁶⁵ Nor can *mayā* be declared as a part of Brahman, given that “Scripture which declares that Brahman is partless would be invalidated.”⁶⁶ At the same time, the Advaitin is forced to say that Brahman and *mayā* cannot independently account for the world. They need to be combined so that they form “only one material cause” — otherwise it creates a dualistic causality which undermines the commitment to strict monism.⁶⁷ Mahadevan confesses that it is impossible to explain the nature and function of *mayā*. From the perspective of metaphysics, *mayā* is “a riddle”; for the logician, *mayā* is a “puzzle”. The nature of *mayā* is simply inscrutable. Inquiries into such matters, about the causal relations of the world and the potency of *mayā*, can only lead “us into, and not out of, ignorance.”⁶⁸

However, the doctrine of *mayā* is evidently clothed in causal language, and we need some explanation of how we can reconcile this with the monistic requirements of Vedānta. It should be noted that my concern does not pertain to a lack of causal or mechanistic explanation for how Brahman produces or gives rise to Illusion. This would, certainly, be to ask for too much. Rather, my concern is that it is not clear how the phenomenon of *mayā* can be squared with the unqualified oneness of Brahman. On Mahadevan’s own view, *mayā* is described as possessing two causal aspects, it obscures and projects. Yet, Mahadevan says that the “Advaitin recognizes the futility of the task of determining the nature of obscuration”, because *mayā* should not be able to obstruct the luminosity of Brahman.⁶⁹ A similar issue emerges with regard to projection, or *superimposition*.⁷⁰ Mahadevan simply acknowledges this tension, and suggests that it is “certainly in conflict with reason... But it is because of this character of superimposition that it is called indeterminable... the intellect cannot thoroughly explain.”⁷¹ Nonetheless, most scholars maintain that Illusion, construed as

65 Mahadevan. *The Philosophy of Advaita*, 201.

66 *Ibid.*, 205.

67 *Ibid.*, 197.

68 *Ibid.*, 201.

69 *Ibid.*, 207, 208.

70 *Ibid.*, 212.

71 *Ibid.*

either *mayā* or *avidyā*, has some form of existence that cannot be merely reduced to a lack of knowledge given that it has the capacity to actively manifest error.⁷² It seems, then, that a quietist rejection of further philosophical pursuit into the nature of illusion lacks justification and risks jeopardizing the internal consistency of Śaṅkara's metaphysics.⁷³

Some have instead looked to the concept of *Līlā* (the divine sport) to find some explanatory relief. *Līlā* has a central place in Hindu theology, and Advaita Vedānta is no exception. It represents in this context the divine playfulness in bringing about “cosmic ignorance” and, thus, *mayā*.⁷⁴ Śaṅkara holds that Brahman by his creative powers as Īśvara, similar to a magician, “deludes us into believing that the phenomenal world is real.”⁷⁵ Similarly, some scholars of Vedānta suggest that *Līlā* provides helpful resources to tackle the issue of suffering and evil in the phenomenal world.⁷⁶ Īśvara creates out of pure joy, and it is “simply a release of energy for its own sake.”⁷⁷ It is, moreover, “spontaneous, without any purpose.”⁷⁸

Although the Hindu notion of *Līlā* offers some metaphysical relief in light of suffering and evil,⁷⁹ it seems as if it does not adequately explain how *mayā* connects to the reality of Brahman. *Līlā* does not explain the ontology of Illusion, what it actually *is* in relation to the metaphysical ultimacy of Brahman. Instead, it moves the question into the domain of divine playfulness. Frederic F. Fost relies on *Līlā* to describe the status of an illusory creation, yet he also exclaims that the “status of the phenomenal world is ultimately an inexplicable and incomprehensible mystery for one who is in the state of ignorance or *avidyā*.”⁸⁰ The argument here is that as we are in a state of Illusion, we are not cognitively equipped to unmask the nature of *mayā*. This, of course, begs the question: Can we say anything positive about *mayā*, or even Brahman, when we are epistemologically stuck at the level of Illusion? If not, which seems to be the conclusion of Advaita Vedānta, then we cannot demonstrate the consistency of raising Brahman to the level of metaphysical ultimacy, while employing *mayā* to explain the appearance of plurality in the world. Although the notion of *Līlā* might explain why individuals are in a state of illusion, it does not shed light on the deeper metaphysical problem of how one can connect *mayā* to Brahman without undermining the ultimacy of Brahman.

A final way of solving the apparent tension between Brahman and Illusion is to place the latter at the level of *mithyā*, thus it would not compete with Brahman for metaphysical ultimacy. Hence, *mayā/avidyā* is neither real nor unreal.⁸¹ Such a philosophical move would help to retain the unqualified reality of Brahman. Nevertheless, this way of systematising Śaṅkara's monism is strikingly problematic as *mayā/avidyā* is typically employed to explain or make sense of the appearance of plurality — to explain *mithyā*. Otherwise it becomes tantamount to saying that *mayā/avidyā* explains *mayā/avidyā* — Illusion explains Illusion. Perhaps it is unsurprising that some proponents and scholars of Advaita Vedānta leave illusion unexplained, suggesting that it is a mystery beyond human understanding. Śaṅkara's monism delivers a promising route for avoiding the combination/individuation problems of the panpsychist systems. Nevertheless, more conceptual work is needed in order to show how *mayā/avidyā* can be grounded in this monism without threatening or undermining the metaphysical oneness and primacy of Brahman.

72 Martha Doherty, “A Contemporary Debate Among Advaita Vedantins on the Nature of Avidyā”, *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 33, no. 2 (2005), 214.

73 Rāmānujā aimed a severe critique at Śaṅkara's understanding of ignorance and illusion. Rāmānujā argued that if Brahman's luminosity could be covered by ignorance or illusion, then this would mean the destruction of the essential nature of Brahman. See Bina Gupta, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Perspectives on Reality, Knowledge, and Freedom* (Routledge, 2012), 262.

74 Frederic F. Fost, “Playful Illusion: The Making of Worlds in Advaita Vedānta”, *Philosophy East and West* 48, no. 3 (1998), 394.

75 Ibid., 397.

76 Sharma, *The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedānta*, 27–30.

77 Deutsch, *Advaita Vedānta: A Philosophical Reconstruction*, 39.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid., 38–39.

80 Fost, “Playful Illusion: The Making of Worlds in Advaita Vedānta”, 397; Doherty argues something similar in regard to the epistemological implications of *avidyā*: Doherty, “A Contemporary Debate Among Advaita Vedantins on the Nature of Avidyā”.

81 Mahadevan. *The Philosophy of Advaita*, 202; Fost, “Playful Illusion: The Making of Worlds in Advaita Vedānta”.

VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is time to summarize the argument so far, and to highlight some of the broader implications for Advaita Vedānta. Śaṅkara's monism has been making its way into Western analytic philosophy, and has especially garnered attention among those philosophers who are seeking to develop metaphysical systems in opposition to both reductionist materialism and dualism. Given Vedānta's monistic view of consciousness, it has been natural to put Vedānta in dialogue with the growing position of panpsychism which, although not fully monistic, similarly takes mind to be a fundamental feature of reality. I discussed three positions which, while different in significant respects, all fall on the panpsychist spectrum: subject constitutive panpsychism, cosmopsychism, and panexperientialism. As with all philosophies of mind, panpsychism faces its share of problems — most notably different versions of combination and individuation problems. Given that monistic Vedānta departs from a subject-based account of individuals and, moreover, rejects the reality of macro-individuals by placing such phenomena at the level of *mithyā*, I suggested that this philosophy might offer unique resources to contemporary philosophies of mind.

I started off this essay by defending the *prima facie* plausibility of the sort of appearance/reality distinction that forms the conceptual basis for Advaita Vedānta — it does not, contrary to some critiques, invite a double-talk problem. I then applied the Vedāntic emphasis on Illusion and showed in what ways it could escape the combination and individuation problems of the three panpsychist positions.

However, any celebration of a solution to the panpsychist combination problems would be premature. In section four, I unpacked some of the tricky issues of accounting for Illusion within Vedānta in a way that could stay true to the fundamental assumption about the ultimacy (*sat*) of Brahman. These conclusions echo to some extent Rāmānujā's critique of Śaṅkara's attempt at formulating a purely monistic understanding of Brahman. My critique is not that the Śaṅkarian emphasis on Illusion, in order to provide a middle-path for human agency, is problematic in itself. Rather, my aim was to demonstrate the tension between the phenomenon of Illusion and Brahman as *sat* — as unqualified oneness.

The Advaitin has, it seems, two options in light of the problems of grounding *māyā*. She can collapse *mithyā* to *asat* and embrace a fully anti-realist view of individuality. However, as even the sternest defenders of Śaṅkara's monism are quick to note, giving up *mithyā* undermines the very idea of *mokṣa* and, thus, the whole soteriological enterprise of this philosophy. If there is no illusory realm, then there is nothing to seek liberation from. If *māyā* cannot be grounded in this monistic system, then there is nothing that gives rise to ignorance and the perceived separation from Brahman. This should, therefore, not be an option for the Advaitin.

The other option is to follow Rāmānujā, give up the middle-path of *mithyā*, and elevate Ātman to *sat*; meaning that individuals are real in a heavier metaphysical sense. Individual *jīvas* (souls) would be dependent on Brahman as pure consciousness, yet possess their own reality. This would bring Śaṅkara's monism closer to the qualified non-dualism of the Viśiṣṭādvaita tradition. As opposed to the anti-realist-leaning conception of Advaita, those who support Rāmānujā maintain that “we really are individual souls, enduring substantial entities...”⁸² The soul, on this view, “is a permanent principle of identity that underpins the synthetic unity of experience in the present and through time.”⁸³ As Rāmānujā employs a significantly more robust conception of individuality, in relation to Brahman as the ultimate metaphysical reality, it is also more vulnerable to the combination/individuation problems of panpsychism. In a similar way to both subject constitutive panpsychism and cosmopsychism, Viśiṣṭādvaita needs to show how either a) individual souls combine into a larger consciousness, or b) how individual souls, and their different phenomenological perspectives, can be derived or deduced from the fundamental consciousness of Brahman.

To conclude, we have arrived at a two horned problem. If panpsychists adopt Advaita Vedānta to alleviate the combination/individuation problem, then they encounter the problem of grounding illusion in

82 Bartley, *An Introduction to Indian Philosophy: Hindu and Buddhist Ideas from Original Sources*, 231.

83 *Ibid.*, 232.

an acceptable manner. If the Advaitin, on the other hand, goes in the direction of Rāmānujā by adopting a more robust conception of Ātman, then they alleviate the problem of Illusion but fall back into the combination/individuation problem. Although Advaita Vedānta demonstrates how the panpsychist can circumvent the combination/individuation problems, more work is needed on resolving the seeming tension that arises from squaring Illusion with Śāṅkara's monism.

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