

## **Self and Subjectivity in Colonial India: AC Mukerji and KC Bhattacharyya**

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### **1. Context**

By the 1920's, philosophy in India was conditioned by two broad intellectual currents, one internal to the academy, and the other deriving from religious movements in the more public sphere. Academically, Kant and post-Kantian German philosophy were at the center of philosophical education, and the impact of British neo-Hegelianism, through the enormous influence of Hiralal Haldar, was widespread. Outside of the academy, Swami Vivekananda and Śri Aurobindo had brought Advaita Vedānta to the center stage. Their impact was enormous, not only on public discourse, but also in the philosophical academy. Vedānta had come to represent *the* Indian philosophical tradition in a way that Nyāya had in earlier times, and the confluence of this Indian idealistic tradition and the German idealism was a powerful determinant of philosophical speculation.

This modern Vedānta, when it entered the sphere of academic philosophy, was brought into dialogue with two other important intellectual movements: Anglo-American psychology and European phenomenology, each of which had made its way to the subcontinent. The psychology was that of James, Ward and Watson. The phenomenology was that of Husserl. The encounter with psychology forced important questions concerning the boundaries between the domains of philosophical and empirical speculation regarding the mind; the encounter with phenomenology forced parallel questions concerning the boundaries between the first- and third-person perspectives on subjectivity, and concerning embodiment and the mental, and between experience and knowledge. Taken together, these two streams of thought raise what has come to be called, following David Chalmers (2003), the "hard problem," or what the philosophers we are about to encounter would have called "the old problem," the problem of understanding the nature of consciousness or subjectivity itself. This problem, of course, is what animates Vedānta thought from the very beginning.

It is therefore not surprising that the two most prominent academic epistemologists and metaphysicians of the last three decades of the colonial period—AC Mukerji of Allahabad and KC Bhattacharyya of Calcutta—were preoccupied with the puzzle of subjectivity and consciousness. Nor is it surprising that each of these, also accomplished historians of Western philosophy and steeped in the Sanskrit tradition of Indian philosophy approached this problem with both of these traditions in view. Neither was a comparativist; neither took the history of philosophy, whether Indian or Western, as the focus of his research; but both took each of these traditions to be the background against which questions were to be raised and solutions considered. In this respect as well, we see in Mukerji and Bhattacharyya a distinctively secular, academic approach to the discipline of philosophy, and indeed, one more innovative and cosmopolitan in its scope than we might find in their European or American contemporaries (or successors, for that matter).

## **2. AC Mukerji (1888-1968)**

### **2.1 Biography**

Anukul Chandra Mukerji was born in 1888 in Murshidabad in West Bengal. He studied philosophy, earning his BA and MA at Central Hindu College (now Benares Hindu University) in Varanasi, where he was a student of the prominent philosophers Bhagavan Das and PB Adhikari. Although Mukerji taught and wrote entirely in English, he read both Sanskrit and German and was trained in both Indian and Western philosophy. Mukerji's entire professional career was spent at the University of Allahabad, one of the best institutions of higher learning in colonial India.

Despite a stellar academic reputation during his lifetime, however, Mukerji was and remains unknown in the West; surprisingly, he is little known in contemporary India. This is largely because he, like many of his Indian contemporaries, published almost entirely in local venues. Most of his articles were published in the campus

journal *Allahabad University Studies*. Mukerji's two books were published by the Juvenile Press (later the Indian Press) of Allahabad and are currently almost impossible to find, even in second hand book stores. Bhattacharyya, by contrast, remains well-known, especially in India, and is widely regarded in India today as the *only* truly great and original Indian philosopher of the colonial period. During their careers both were very prominent, leading the two most prestigious philosophy departments in India. Mukerji served several terms as President of the Indian Philosophical Congress, and Bhattacharyya was a leading figure in the philosophical scene at the Institute for Indian Philosophy at Amalner, a center in remote Maharashtra where many luminaries of Indian philosophy gathered for regular seminars.

## 2.2 AC Mukerji's Philosophical Program

Mukerji approached Indian idealism through the Advaita Vedānta school. He focused there on the work of Śankara and Yajñavalkya as well as Ramanujan, Vācaspati, and Prabhākara. He also attended to Buddhist idealism, particularly that of Dignāga, Vasubandhu and Uddyotakara and to its Buddhist Mādhyamika interlocutors, such as Nāgārjuna and his commentator Candrakīrti and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika figures such as Kanada and Praśastapāda. His scholarship in the Indian tradition—both the orthodox and the Buddhist schools—is impeccable, and his readings are both insightful and critical.

Despite his impressive scholarship in the history of Western and Indian philosophy, Mukerji is not primarily a historian of philosophy. He draws on the history of philosophy as a *resource* for his systematic thinking about then current philosophical problems, many of which continue to attract philosophical attention. Mukerji was a specialist in the philosophy of mind and psychology. He was a committed naturalist, in that he saw the deliverances of empirical psychology as foundational to an understanding of the mind. He paid close attention especially to the psychologists William James, John B Watson and James Ward. Nonetheless, Mukerji was convinced that psychologism was in the end insufficient as an

understanding of subjectivity, and required supplementation by a transcendental philosophy of the pure subject, for which he turned principally to Hegel, Caird and Śankara as inspirations for his own synthetic view.

It is striking as well that despite the penchant at the time of many young philosophers to use the method of comparison in their work, Mukerji was not a comparativist. While he was philosophically concerned with the project of comparativism, a preoccupation initiated in India by BN Seal, he explicitly rejected it as a method. This put him at odds with Radhakrishnan and with his younger contemporary PT Raju, each of whom followed Seal in taking this to be the best avenue for advancing Indian philosophy in a global context. Mukerji instead insisted simply on *doing* philosophy, and doing it using all available resources, no matter their origin. He believed that the best way to advance Indian philosophy was to use it in philosophical practice, and never distinguished between Indian and Western sources in a systematic fashion. In short, he was more a cross-cultural than a comparative philosopher.

Mukerji wrote two substantial monographs: *Self, Thought and Reality (1933)* and *The Nature of Self (1938)*. Each of these develops themes first articulated in a series of journal articles published in *Allahabad University Studies*. These two books can profitably be read as a single two volume study exploring and defending a naturalistic, Vedānta-inflected transcendental idealism as an account of the nature of subjectivity and of the relation of mind to the world. In each book, Mukerji is concerned to emphasize the rational intelligibility of the world and the foundational role that consciousness and self-knowledge play in the edifice of knowledge more generally. Here we focus on the philosophy articulated in this two volume study, as these volumes present the clearest statement of Mukerji's reconstruction of the history of philosophy, his philosophy of mind, and his account of the interface between epistemology and metaphysics, and because it, along with the philosophy of Bhattacharyya, is representative of the attention to the philosophy of mind in the

context of both Indian and Western traditions so characteristic of philosophy in the Indian renaissance.

Both books are animated by a single puzzle that preoccupies Mukerji as well as Bhattacharyya (and many of their contemporaries): given that it is (1) *manifest* that we do know ourselves; (2) *necessary* that we do so in order for any other knowledge to count as knowledge; but (3) clear that we don't know ourselves as *objects*, in what sense and how does self-knowledge arise and count as knowledge? Mukerji sees the conundrum posed by this apparently inconsistent triad as the central problem of modern epistemology, and as central both to the Western and the Indian problematic, and only soluble by bringing the two traditions to bear on the problem. *Self, Thought and Reality* begins with the epistemology of the world of objects and the relation between knower and known; *The Nature of Self* uses this platform to launch the investigation of knowledge of the subject itself. We begin with the epistemology of the outer.

### **2.3 Self, Thought and Reality**

*Self, Thought and Reality* is organized around three concerns. The first is the relation between idealism and realism: Mukerji is concerned to show that they are not in fact rivals, but rather complementary aspects of any plausible philosophical position. Second, Mukerji is interested in the relationship between correspondence theories and coherence theories of truth and knowledge, once again, concerned to show that the dichotomy is false. Finally, he is concerned, as he puts it, in the relation between "being and becoming," by which he really means the relation between metaphysics and science. These three concerns structure Mukerji's account of our knowledge of the outer world and frame his inquiry into the possibility of knowledge of the inner.

Mukerji opens his inquiry into the relationship between idealism and realism by examining Kant's response to Hume. He sees the foundation of Hume's realism in his commitment to a reductionist program—one he takes to be aligned with the positivism and forms of empiricism fashionable in his own time. He then reads Kant

as rejecting that reductionism in favor of a view of entities as constituted as unities in virtue of the synthetic operation of consciousness. Put this way, we can see Mukerji as arguing for the robust reality of the objects of the human *lebenswelt*, as opposed to those who would see them as merely constructions and who look for greater reality in the ephemeral, atomic and disconnected which constitute them. Here is how he puts the point:

Our aim, therefore, is to show, in how imperfect a form, that Kant's answer to Hume has thoroughly undermined the only basis upon which all forms of realism must ultimately stand, and consequently the realistic and empirical philosophies of our time, in spite of what value they may possess for students of philosophy, do not represent a real development of thought. If we attempt a brief formulation of the underlying principle of empiricism it will be found to consist in the assumption that the "unconnected manifold" have a superior reality in comparison to their unity. (20)

This ontological insight is grounded as much in a reading of Bradley and Green as of Kant. Mukerji hence sees another way of posing Hume's problem and Kant's response: Hume argues that real entities exist prior to the relations in which they stand, and that they exist independent of those relations. Kant, on his view, sees that things exist only in relation to consciousness in some sense; but Bradley completes this ascent. He does so, on Mukerji's view, by arguing that the identity of any thing is constituted by its relations to everything else, and hence that relations are essential, or internal, to being not mere accidents attaching to things that would exist even were they not to stand in those relations. Mukerji hence lines up the distinction between Kantian idealism and Humean realism with the neo-Hegelian distinction between holism and atomism.

Things... do not exist at first in separation from each other so that all connections between them would be mere fortuitous generalizations; on the contrary, their existence has no intelligible meaning except in relation to each other. What we call the real existence of the world is constituted by the various relations, spatial, temporal, causal, etc subsisting between things, and each thing is what it is only through its relations. ... Green puts the whole position this way: "abstract the many relations from the one thing, and there is nothing. They, being

many, determine or constitute its definite unit. It is not the case that it first exists in its unity, and then is brought into various relations. Without the relations it would not exist at all." [Green, *Prolegomenon* §28] (33)

Mukerji takes the second issue between Hume and Kant as a debate concerning the ontological role of mind itself. To the question, "does the mind have a special ontological status?" Hume, argues Mukerji, answers "no." Kant, he argues, answers "yes." That is, Hume adopts a psychologistic approach to epistemology, while Kant adopts a normative, transcendental approach. Mukerji defends Kant here, arguing that to be an empirically real object is to be an object for a subject, and that is to be an object whose unity is the consequence of the synthesis of the manifold of sense by the operations of the understanding. To say this, he argues, is not to reject empiricism, per se, in epistemology; but it is to reject the demotion of the mind to one entity among others and to refuse to reduce the project of epistemology to the project of understanding the operations of the mind from an empirical point of view. Introspection, Mukerji argues, cannot displace epistemological reflection (a view in which, as we will see, Bhattacharyya concurs). Mukerji characterizes the psychological attitude as the view that "the minds he studies are objects, in a world of other objects." [James, *Principles of Psychology I*, p. 183] He contrasts this with the epistemological attitude:

The epistemological attitude, on the other hand, is distinct from the psychological... and consists in treating the knowing mind, not as one object among other objects, but as that which is presupposed by everything known or knowable and in treating knowledge not as an attribute of a particular thing, but as the medium through which all objects reveal themselves. (294-295)

Mukerji forcefully rejects subjective idealism, which he takes to be an inevitable consequence of psychologism, and which he associates with Berkeley as well as certain Vedānta thinkers such as Śrīharṣa, as well as Buddhist idealists such as Dignāga and Vasubandhu, according to which external objects are unreal. Instead, he argues that when each is properly understood, the apparent duality between idealism and realism is chimerical. Instead, they are complementary, and even

mutually entailing: idealism, he argues, presents an answer to the question, “what is it to be real?” and realism is guaranteed by the fact that although objects exist for us only as they are represented, their existence and character is independent of any particular thought or thinker. And it is science, he argues, that is the measure of the empirically real. Mukerji thus defends both transcendental idealism and scientific realism, so long as each keeps to its respective domain. On his view, things exist independently of us—the core of realism—but our knowledge of them is dependent on the structure of thought, and so they exist *for us* only subject to the conditions of thought—the core of idealism.

Far from subtracting anything from the common things of the world, idealism adds to the reality of the things, insofar as it alone makes it clear that things have far other aspects of their life than those which are revealed to commonsense or to science. (47)

This synthesis of idealism and realism provides the basis for Mukerji’s second synthesis—that of correspondence and coherence. Given the association of coherence theories with idealism and correspondence theories with realism, it is natural to see them as in tension with one another, but also therefore natural to anticipate Mukerji’s reconciliation of this apparent dichotomy. A pure correspondence theory of thought and truth would hold that the mind and the world are entirely independent of one another, and that our ideas can be examined to determine the degree to which they correspond in some way to be specified with an independently examined world. As Mukerji points out, Berkeley puts paid to this naïve idea.

But as a theory of truth, Mukerji argues, correspondence is not bad. The idea that correspondence is the *content* of truth, he says, makes good sense, but to take it as a *test* for truth does not.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note the remarkable anticipation of Davidson’s (1984) joint commitment to a correspondence theory of truth and to holism about meaning and justification.



The real defect of the correspondence theory consists in not the *definition* but the *test* that it claims to offer of a true judgment. It is futile... to attempt to know whether our knowledge at a particular stage is true or not by reference to things external to knowledge. The correspondence can be known only by the amount of harmony that knowledge has so far attained to. The more knowledge tends to be a whole, the greater is our assurance of correspondence; the more there are discords and disharmony in knowledge, the greater is the distance between knowledge and reality. (127-128)

That is, he argues, it is internal to the very idea of the truth of a thought or a sentence that it represents the world correctly. The problem arises when we also take correspondence to provide a *criterion* of that correctness, requiring the impossible independent access to the representation and to the represented. Instead, he argues, a coherence theory, while it makes no *constitutive* sense of truth, provides the best possible criterion that we can use in the *evaluation* the truth of sentences or of thoughts. We take something to be true to the degree that it coheres with the weight of other evidence and other secure views, including our evidence regarding the methods by means of which we test it. We can never escape the web of coherence criterially; but this does not mean that we do not discover the world, and that our criteria are not criteria for accurate correspondence.

Another way to put this subtle point is that the dichotomy between construction and discovery, on Mukerji's view, is also chimerical. One way that Mukerji defends this view is to argue that the very concept of belief presupposes the concept of truth: truth is that at which belief aims. But the concept of truth presupposes in turn an objective order of things. So, even to believe that one merely believes—the idealistic view—presupposes that the reality in which one believes is independent of that belief—the essential core of realism.

Once it is admitted that the distinction between a true and a false belief is not to be found in the nature of the belief as an event in the mental history of the individual, it is easy to see that what invests it with the logical character is its conformity or otherwise to something beyond itself. That is, the truth or falsity of the belief has to be

ascertained by reference to an objective order of things, so that when an assertion is claimed to be true, what is implied is not simply that an individual has somehow or other come to hold a particular belief, but that it has an objective basis in the nature of things. No theory of truth that does not distinguish between these two aspects of an assertion can stand the scrutiny of critical thought. (172)

Here we see Mukerji drawing together the question of the relation between the real and the ideal with the critique of psychologism. Neither epistemology nor the philosophy of mind, he argues, can make do with a naïve naturalism about truth, knowledge, belief, or indeed cognition itself. Each of these involves an ineliminable normative dimension. Mukerji's third concern in this book, as we have noted, is the status of scientific knowledge, and its relation to pure epistemology and metaphysics. It is very important to him that the philosophical and the scientific standpoints are each necessary to provide a complete picture of the world, and that neither—pretensions of some partisans to the contrary notwithstanding—can replace the other. Nonetheless, he argues, they must each be regarded as a distinct *standpoint*, and not as providing distinct *worlds*.<sup>2</sup> The world whose transcendental conditions we investigate when we do philosophy, the world we experience in everyday life, and the world delivered by the best science are the same world, differently understood. And it is the task of good philosophy to explain why and how this is so.

The resolution of the dichotomies between realism and idealism and between correspondence and coherence take us to Mukerji's resolution of a third apparent duality: that between metaphysics and science. He argues that these two cognitive enterprises stand in need of one another. On his view, transcendental idealism ensures that the world is a systematic unity; its dependence as object on the mind ensures that it is intelligible.

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth comparing this acceptance of multiple standpoints (perhaps drawing on a Jain tradition) with Bhattacharyya's account of multiple levels of subjectivity—distinct from one another, but each presupposing the others, and each generating different kinds of knowledge of a *single* self—that we will encounter below.

Thus, even empirical science has an a priori basis: science itself and its methodology, he argues, depend upon our conception of what constitutes explanation, and on our transcendental demand that all phenomena can be subsumed by explanation. Therefore, without the metaphysics and epistemology that constitute its methodological ground, we can have no science. Without science, on the other hand, we can have no confidence in the reality of any objects of knowledge. Even the quantum theory, and the uncertainty principle, Mukerji argues, presuppose transcendental conditions on explanation, the notion of truth, knowledge, and of entities in interaction with one another. So, while scientific revolutions might alter the details of our metaphysical picture, they still presuppose a metaphysics and an epistemology that renders the science itself intelligible.

...The indeterminacy of an entity in certain respects presupposes its determinateness in other respects; in other words, we can conceive arbitrariness in the behaviour of an entity, only insofar as it behaves in perfectly definite ways under other conditions. Absolute lawlessness is inconceivable, either in the world matter, or in that of spirit.

If then so much be granted, one must give up the idea of constructing physical structures on a non-causal basis. No knowledge is possible without the categories of cause and substance, because they enter into the essence of every conceivable entity, no matter whether we are thinking of energy, mass, wave-function or quantum constant. (273)

Mukerji—as Goodman would decades later—characterizes science as “drawing world-pictures.” The world constrains the content of those pictures; epistemology guarantees that they can be drawn in the first place and constrains their form. The pictures, he insists, are not, simply in virtue of being drawn by us, fictions; instead, they are interpretations.

What is called a world-picture is but an extension of the same process of interpretation that begins with identification. Even the things of ordinary commonsense knowledge would not be what they are if the sense-given data had not been interpreted and taken into conceptual frames. To feel a feeling and to know it as a feeling... are two very different functions of the mind.

The distinction then, between the world of sense-data and world-pictures, we submit, is based on an unreal abstraction. (276)

All of this scientific realism notwithstanding, for Mukerji the most important consequence of all of this, returning to his initial critique of Hume, is that the self cannot be conceived of as a thing among things, or as a substance with attributes, even cognitive attributes, as the Cartesian might have it. Instead, he argues, the self is that to which all things or substances are related, that in relation to which they can be real, and by which they can be known. Its special place in the world is what grounds the normativity of knowledge and of the scientific enterprise in the first place.

Mukerji closes this first book, and anticipates the second, by examining this special role of the self and our knowledge of that self. In his conclusion, he draws in the Indian Advaita Vedānta philosopher Śankara to understand this. But while one might think that this turn to the east is a turn away from reason and towards mysticism, Mukerji insists that that is inadmissible. The very demand for rational understanding that takes one this far is the demand that self-knowledge be rationally comprehensible.

The relation between dialectic thought and intuition... is not, for Śankara at least, one of antagonism. The path to intuition lies through the labyrinth of reasoned discourses, and this explains his invectives against mystical practices, or of mere feeling. (401)

#### **2.4 *The Nature of Self***

In the preface to *The Nature of Self*, Mukerji dismisses mere comparative philosophy:

Comparative philosophy has so far been either predominantly historical and descriptive, or it has contented itself with discovering stray similarities between the Western and Indian thought. No serious attempt, as far as I know, has yet been made to undertake a comparative study for mutual supplementation of arguments and

consequent clarification of issues. Yet, this alone can suggest the paths to new constructions and thus help the development of philosophical thought. (v-vi)

Mukerji is committed to this project of “mutual supplementation” and he is interested not in comparison but in the “clarification of issues.” This book makes good on this promise.

Mukerji frames *The Nature of Self* in terms of what he calls “the egocentric paradox.” He formulates the paradox in terms of another apparently inconsistent triad: On the one hand, the self must be known, and indeed must be known better and more intimately than any object. On the other hand, for anything to be known, it must be an object, and so not a subject. But, the self is that which is always subject and never object. It hence appears that while self-knowledge is the necessary condition of all knowledge, it itself is impossible.

The first approach to resolving this trilemma, already considered and rejected in the first book, is to reject the third claim, through psychologism, a position Mukerji associates in this volume both with the Buddhists and with Hume. On this view, the self is placed on the object side of the divide. While this makes empirical psychology possible, it can never reveal or generate any understanding of the subject which then must contemplate the objective self, and so remains a failure.

The second approach is that of Caird— the theory of so-called mediated self-consciousness—and rejects the second thesis of the trilemma. On this view, we know the subject in virtue of a thorough analysis of the object, and a transcendental inquiry into the nature of a subject that can construct such an object. Mukerji objects that this falls prey to another form of skepticism. For given the co-relativity of subject and object, it is impossible to completely know the object without also knowing the subject. This project hence cannot get off the ground. A Hegelian approach, in which we seek higher categories that can apply not only to objects but also to subjects, Mukerji argues, only gets us more of the same: the self is either

recast as an object of knowledge of yet another subjective self, or it must be known in relation either to that as yet unknown self or to an object which remains unknowable so long as the self is not known.

Mukerji considers a number of philosophical maneuvers conducted both in Europe and in India, and concludes that any model that distinguishes the self as knower from the self as known opens an unacceptable skeptical gap. He is led then to an articulation of Śankara's idea of *svaprakāśa*, or self-illumination, as a model of self-understanding. It is important to see that he does not simply adopt Śankara's own view, but rather takes on an insight shared by Śankara and certain Buddhist philosophers, combines it with ideas drawn from Hegel, Bradley and Green and develops a highly original synthesis as an account of self-knowledge. While *svaprakāśa* is introduced in the classical tradition as an explanatory primitive, Mukerji modernizes it (anticipating contemporary neo-Husserlian positions according to which consciousness is necessarily self-revealing), arguing that *svaprakāśa* is at bottom a *theory* of consciousness. The account of *svaprakāśa* at which Mukerji aims is an account of pure, unmediated consciousness of self.

It is therefore necessary for him to resolve a metaphysical tension at the outset: Is consciousness prior to, or posterior to matter in the order of explanation? This is, of course, another way of putting the question regarding idealism and realism Mukerji addressed in *Self, Thought and Reality*, and his approach here is similar. He argues that while matter may be prior to thought in the order of *being*, thought is prior to matter in the order of *knowing*. An emphasis on the fundamental role of consciousness in knowledge, he argues, is therefore not antithetical to modern scientific materialism, and the analysis of existence in terms of transcendental subjectivity does not preclude a material theory of the origin of the mind.

A word of explanation may be useful... in regard to the precise meaning in which consciousness is said to be the *prius* of reality. This doctrine is often interpreted on the idealistic line and supposed to deny the independent existence of the material world apart from consciousness. ... It is, therefore, important to dissociate the assertion of the priority of

consciousness from the idealistic contention, and realize clearly that the doctrine of the priority of consciousness is equally compatible with the realistic belief in an independent world. Even if it be granted that knowledge does not create but only reveal a pre-existent reality, yet it would remain unchallengeable that the external reality could not be revealed to us apart from consciousness which is the principle of revelation... The epistemological priority of the conscious self is thus reconcilable with realism as well as with idealism. (113-114)

Mukerji interprets *svaprakāśa* as a kind of immediate self-knowledge in which there is no distinction between subject and object. He is concerned to argue that there is nothing *mystical, irrational, or even essentially Indian* about this notion. Moreover, he argues, if it is known to be true, that cannot be by means of introspection, but only through philosophical argument. For introspection can tell us nothing about the self as subject.

...Neither inference nor introspection is capable of proving the reality of the conscious self, for the simple reason that the self is not a thing in the democracy of things. What introspection can guarantee is the reality of pleasure and pain, desire and aversion, because they are objects; but the self as foundational consciousness, as the universal logical implicate of all known things, cannot be grasped as an object. That *for* which my entire world has a meaning, that in the light of which my universe shines, cannot be objectified and perceived in the same way in which the cow or the tree is perceived. Self-consciousness is not, therefore, the consciousness of the self as an object given in introspection; and Hume as well as his Indian predecessors, the Buddhists, failed to find it in the flux of mental states, because they wanted to know it as a definite type of object among other objects. (247-248)

While Mukerji argues that this absolute self is pure subjectivity, he hence argues as well that it is not a Kantian transcendental existence, but rather is entirely immanent. Nor is it a concrete universal as Hegel would have it, but is rather a personal self, only non-objectified, existing only as subject. It is important to note that this is not simply a recitation of Śāṅkara's version of Advaita Vedānta. For unlike Śāṅkara, Mukerji does not take the absolute reality of the self as subject to disparage the reality of its objects. In fact, on Mukerji's understanding of the fundamental predicament of skepticism, Śāṅkara's own position opens up one more

skeptical abyss by denying the reality of the object that must be correlative with the subject. Mukerji's own position is simply that subjectivity is immediately self-revealing not in introspection, but rather in the pre-reflective awareness of the fact that one is the subject of one's objective experience. It is the impossibility of denying this fact and the distinctive awareness of it that preclude skepticism about the self, and hence skepticism in general; but it can never be reduced to any other kind of knowledge. He concludes as follows:

...The Self is not a category at all, and, consequently, it cannot be said to be even a system or a relational whole or, again, a unity-in-difference. On the contrary, it is the ultimate, non-relational, Consciousness, which is necessarily distinctionless, unobjectifiable, and immediate. (338-339)

This return to classical Vedānta categories for a solution to a problem posed by Modern European philosophy, but a return informed not only by a scholarly engagement with the Indian tradition but also with the Western tradition, and in a way that simply refuses to draw boundaries between the two is characteristic of Mukerji's thought. But it is not characteristic only of *his* thought. The Indian renaissance evoked a new kind of philosophical subjectivity that we see evinced here in the study of subjectivity itself. It is a subjectivity that was experienced as problematic, and even as opaque by those practitioners themselves.

### **3. KC Bhattacharya (1875-1949)**

#### **3.1 Biography**

KC Bhattacharyya was born in Serampore in West Bengal, and educated at Presidency College in Calcutta. He spent his entire professional career at the University of Calcutta where he was King George V Professor of Philosophy, and is widely regarded as the foremost Indian philosopher of the colonial period. His early work was focused on logic and the philosophy of language addressing such topics as negation and the logic of indefinite articles and the debate between coherence and correspondence theories of truth. He then turned to topics in metaphysics and



phenomenology, addressing topics in Jain philosophy and Vedānta, in particular the nature of illusion and error.

### 3.2 Introduction

Bhattacharyya and Mukerji never refer to each other's work, and there is no way of knowing how what of the other's work they were reading. Nonetheless, they were ploughing very similar fields, at roughly the same time, heading (as we have mentioned before) two of the most prestigious philosophy departments in India. Each took Kant's account of subjectivity and knowledge to provide a compelling account of our empirical knowledge of the external world, and each follows Kant closely in their respective accounts of empirical knowledge and of the relation between the conceptual and sensory contributions to knowledge. Mukerji and Bhattacharyya are also in agreement regarding their critique of the Kantian project. Kant, they each argue, although in different ways, that Kant fails to provide an account of *self-knowledge*, assimilating the status of the self to the degree that it can be known to that of external objects—as distinct from the knowing subject—and arguing that the subject itself is unknowable. Neither Mukerji nor Bhattacharyya is content to deny our knowledge of ourselves as subjects.

### 3.3. *Subject as Freedom: The Problematic*

Bhattacharyya's most important systematic work, *The Subject as Freedom* (1923), is a sustained engagement with Kant's discussion of self-knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason* from the standpoint of Vedānta. In this respect, his project is akin to Mukerji's. The central doctrine of the Kantian critical philosophy that the self is an unknowable knower is anathema to Bhattacharyya as well. From the standpoint of the Vedānta and Vaishnava tantric traditions that form the backdrop of Bhattacharyya's thought, Kant gets things completely backwards: knowledge of the self is the very goal of philosophical and spiritual practice, and the self, being that with which we are most intimately involved, must be knowable, if indeed anything is truly knowable—since anything that is known as object must be known in relation to the self. On the other hand, given that the self is never *object*, but only

*subject*, and given that *thought* is always *objective*—that is, directed upon an object—the self, from the standpoint of this tradition, cannot be *thought*.

The view shared by Kant, Mukerji and Bhattacharyya, that the self is a kind of epistemic singularity leads Bhattacharyya to explore the points of contact between the Kantian and the Vedānta frameworks. He parts company from Kant, as well as from Mukerji in diagnosing the nature of this singularity: while Kant sees the self as in the domain of thought, but not in the domain of knowledge, Bhattacharyya sees it as falling within the domain of knowledge but not within the domain of thought. Bhattacharyya sees a deep tension in Kantian philosophy that can only, on his view, be resolved from the perspective of Vedānta: he sees the Kantian view as committed to a series of claims about the self that undermine its own commitment to the self's unknowability.

Bhattacharyya takes seriously Kant's own association of transcendental subjectivity and freedom. The awareness of our acts—including our act of thought—as our own, is at the same time the awareness of our freedom as thinkers, as subjects and as actors. And it is a condition of our subjectivity that we *know* that these acts are ours; hence that we *know* that we are free; hence that we *know* the self. This knowledge of the self is not a knowledge of acquaintance, but rather a direct awareness of the fact that we are *selves*, a knowledge of *who* we are, and of our freedom. For these reasons, Bhattacharyya takes it that on Kant's own terms, self-knowledge must be possible. Vedānta, because of the affinities we have just noted to the broader Kantian perspective, provides the entrée for the explanation of how this is possible. Here is how Bhattacharyya himself puts the predicament:

11. The metaphysical controversy about the reality of the subject is only about the subject viewed in some sense as object. The thinnest sense in which it is objectified is "being taken as meant." Ordinarily the validity of this degree of objectification of the subject is not questioned, nor therefore the possibility of a dispute about its reality. If, however, the subject is taken, as explained, to be what is expressed by the word *I* as expressing itself, it is not meant or at best meant as unmeant and is accordingly above metaphysical dispute. There is properly no metaphysic of the subject, if by metaphysic is understood an enquiry into the reality conceived as meanable. Even the unknowable thing-in-itself of Spencer and Kant is not taken to be unmeant. It is at worst taken to be a problem in meaning. The knowable

is meant and the negation of the knowable is, if not meant, tried to be meant, being not a gratuitous combination of words but a believed content that is problematically formulated. ... The subject as *I* is neither contradictory nor meanable and the exposition of it accordingly is intermediate between mysticism and metaphysic. As, however, the subject is communicable by speech without metaphor, it cannot be taken as falling outside philosophical inquiry. (93)<sup>3</sup>

This discussion trades on Bhattacharyya's distinction between the *speakable* and the *meanable*. The *meanable* roughly coincides with Kant's knowable. Whatever can be designated intersubjectively as an object falls, for Bhattacharyya, under the head of the "meanable." In fact in ¶¶2-3 (87-88), Bhattacharyya explicitly ties meaning to intersubjective agreement and availability of referents for terms. This anticipation of Wittgenstein and Sellars takes him a bit beyond Kant, of course, but the ideas are nonetheless congruent. The *speakable*, on the other hand, is whatever can be spoken of or communicated about through language. It is a broader category than the meanable, since there may be some things we can communicate—that are not nonsense—even though we cannot assign them meanings.<sup>4</sup> So, we can talk about ourselves, even though there is no term that can *mean* the self.

With this distinction in mind, we can return to the dilemma Bhattacharyya poses for the Kantian view: The subject cannot be taken to be *meant*, for it is not intersubjectively available as the referent for *I*. Nobody but me is aware of my own subjectivity, and so there is no way to establish a convention of reference or meaning. And the first person pronoun has a unique role in designating the self. Were *I* to refer to myself using a name or a description, in the third person, the possibility of error through misidentification intrudes.<sup>5</sup> But the first-person

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<sup>3</sup> All references to *The Subject as Freedom* are from the edition reprinted in Burch (1975).

<sup>4</sup> There is a nice parallel here to the problematic with which Wittgenstein wrestles in the *Tractatus*, a book with which Bhattacharyya would not have been familiar.

<sup>5</sup> As John Perry was famously to point out in (1979). So, I might erroneously believe myself to be John Perry. I would then misidentify John Perry as the person thinking this thought. I cannot, however be wrong about the fact that *I* am thinking this thought.

indexical gets immediately, directly, at the speaking subject, and is so understood by addressees as well as by the speaker.<sup>6</sup>

So, although the word *I* has no *meaning* in this strict sense, is not *meaningless*. It conveys something, and is understood; indeed, it is indispensable. It is therefore speakable, but not meanable. But it is therefore not nonsense, and therefore denotes a possible object of knowledge. But knowledge of what kind? Not discursive, or “metaphysical” knowledge, for that would suggest that the self is an entity among entities, an object, and not the subject we wish to know. Nonetheless, it is communicable, but communicable as a kind of “intuition,” not entirely mystical, but not entirely empirical either. To explain the manner in which the self is known is the goal of Bhattacharyya’s inquiry.

### 3.4. Subjectivity and Freedom

At the end of the first chapter of *The Subject as Freedom*, Bhattacharyya returns to the Kantian problem. Here he develops the direct connection between subjectivity and freedom.

21. The persisting objective attitude of Kant in his first *Critique* explains not only his admission of the thing-in-itself and his denial of self-knowledge, but also his disbelief in the possibility of a spiritual discipline of the theoretic reason through which self-knowledge may be attainable. From the subjective standpoint, object beyond knownness, *this* beyond *this-ness* is, as explained, meaningless. It may be that, wedded as we are to our body, we cannot get ride of the objective attitude and the tendency to look beyond the constructed object to the purely given. But not to be able to deny need not imply admission and though the Kantian disclaimer of idealism as accomplished knowledge is intelligible, his admission of the unknowable reality appears to be an unwarrantable surrender to realism. ... (100)

22. Self-knowledge is denied by Kant: the self cannot be known but can only be thought through the objective categories... there being no intuition of it. (101)

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<sup>6</sup> Note that while Bhattacharyya agrees with Mukerji that Kant can make no sense of self-knowledge, despite being, by his own lights, required to do so, the *reason* is very different. Mukerji focuses primarily on the transcendental conditions of *knowledge*, whereas Bhattacharyya focuses on the transcendental conditions of *speech* and of *experience*.

This is the summation of Bhattacharyya's diagnosis of the Kantian predicament. Kant allows the reality of the self, and indeed its necessity, but denies us any knowledge of it, including, presumably the knowledge that it lies beyond knowledge. The "surrender to realism" is the commitment—incoherent on Kant's own grounds—to something that is *real*, yet in its nature independent of our mode of intuition and knowledge. We will see that when Bhattacharyya examines the self as an object of knowledge, it will importantly *not* be *real* in this sense, but will turn out to be transcendently ideal, not *given* independent of our modes of subjectivity, but *determined* by those very modes. In this sense, as we will see, Bhattacharyya takes himself to be even more of a transcendental idealist—more relentlessly consistent in this commitment—than Kant himself. Bhattacharyya continues later in this paragraph:

...The subject is thus known by itself, as not meant but speakable and not as either related or relating to the object. It is, however, believed as relating to object and symbolized as such by the objective relations. The modes of relating are at the same time the modes of freeing from objectivity, the forms of the spiritual discipline by which, it may be conceived, the outgoing reference to the object is turned backwards and the immediate knowledge of the *I* as content is realized in an ecstatic intuition. (101)

Self-knowledge, that is, is knowledge of the self as it exists independent of its objects, even though that must be knowledge of a self that is essentially capable of objective relations. And this is the first link of subjectivity to freedom. The self must be capable of being understood simply as a self, *free of* any relation to a particular object. That knowledge must be immediate, on pain of turning the self into an object, but can only be realized through an act of ecstatic transcendence in which subjectivity stands outside of itself. Bhattacharyya emphasizes this in the next paragraph:

23. Spiritual progress means the realization of the subject as free. ... One demand among others—all being absolute demands—is that the subjective function being essentially the knowing of the object as distinct from it, this knowing which is only believed and not known as fact *has* to be known as fact, as the self-evidencing reality of the subject itself. (101)

Bhattacharyya identifies three broad stages of subjectivity, each consisting in a distinctive level of freedom. The first is bodily subjectivity. In being aware of ourselves as bodies in space, we are aware of our determinate location in relation to other objects, and so our freedom to consider or to disengage with other objects in space and time. In psychic subjectivity we are aware of ourselves as mental subjects, whose direct intentional objects are representations. In this awareness, we recognize our freedom *from* our bodies and from our location in space and time, and the fact that we can entertain representations in the absence of any external object to which they correspond.<sup>7</sup> In the final level of subjectivity, spiritual subjectivity, we recognize our freedom from those representations. We come to realize that our existence is not dependent upon our objects, but they depend upon us. At this point we intuit ourselves as spiritual subjects *per se*. We complete this process of self-knowledge, Bhattacharyya intimates, when we adopt the same cognitive attitude of freedom towards ourselves that we are able to develop in relation to our objects, an unmeanable sense of ourselves as pure subjects.

Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, rejects the idea that introspection alone can ever give us knowledge of the self—the subject of experience. This is because while introspection, he argues, is essential to any knowledge—since we must know what we know and that we know it in order for any state to count as knowledge at all—introspection always retains an objective attitude towards the epistemic subject, so taking it implicitly as object. Thus, while in introspection we achieve a certain kind of necessary detachment from the object of knowledge, in virtue of seeing it as object for ourselves as subjects, our subjectivity is presented to us only in a mediated sense, and we, to whom it is presented, remain absent from the cognitive state.

To take introspective knowledge as knowledge of the subject would take us only as far as Kant goes in his account of empirical self knowledge, and when Kant excludes

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<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting in this context that Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, is concerned to develop an idealistic system that is nonetheless robustly realistic about the external world. While for Mukerji the strategy to that goal involved the reconciliation of transcendental idealism and science, for Bhattacharyya the route goes through the phenomenology of embodiment.

the subjective side from the domain of knowledge, Bhattacharyya argues, he excludes what must be presupposed even as a ground of the argument for its exclusion, sawing off the metaphysical branch on which the transcendental philosophy rests. The very fact that we can only know what is subject to the constructive activity of the mind entails that if knowledge of *that* is possible, knowledge of the subject that conditions it must be possible as well, and this in two respects: first, to know that our knowledge is always conditioned by the subject is to know something about the subject; and second, to really understand the objects of our knowledge, to understand their limitations to the conditions of our subjectivity and to understand them as *our* objects, is to be aware of ourselves as subjects.

Bhattacharyya sums this up as follows:

51. Thus we meet the Kantian difficulty. Psychic fact... is object and more than object. It is *more* in the sense of being a metaphysical reality constitutive of the object which is its phenomenon, a reality that is known as unknown and as knowable... [it] is at once real and realizing, realizing as being already real, this being the objective counterpart of knowing the object as unknown. To Kant, metaphysical reality... is only thought and believed.... We agree that the introspective awareness of the presentation... is not knowledge of knowing but only imagination of knowing the metaphysical. The imagination, however, is not an illusion, but only incomplete or unrealized knowledge.... Cognitive realization of the metaphysical reality as subjective has to be admitted, at least, as an alternative spiritual possibility. (115-116)

### 3.5. The Grades of Bodily Subjectivity

The first grade of subjectivity is the physical: awareness of and knowledge of oneself as a body. Bhattacharyya distinguishes three successive moments of this subjectivity, each involving a distinct aspect of self-knowledge, and each implicating a distinct mode of freedom. The first of these is the awareness of the body as an external object; the second is the awareness of the body as a felt immediate object; the third and most abstract, the awareness of absence. Let us consider each of these in turn.

We identify ourselves with our bodies; we recognize ourselves in the mirror; we recognize and ostend others as bodies. Our bodies constitute the perspective from which we are perceptually engaged with others, the mode under which we act, and the loci of our sensations. They also provide the spatial reference point from which

we experience the world—the *here* that makes it the case that *I* am always *here*.

Bhattacharyya emphasizes this centrality of the body to self-experience:

58. The materialistic view that the subject is but the body is true insofar as the body represents a stage of being of the subject. But it ignores the unique singularity of one's own body even as a perceived object. No merely objectivist account can do justice to this singularity. The objectivity of other perceived objects is constituted by their position relative to the percipient's body, which itself, therefore, cannot be taken to be so constituted. To the percipient, the body is an object situated relatively to some other percipient's body as imagined, being not perceived by himself in a space-position though not known, therefore, as non-spatial. The percipient as in his body or as his body is in this sense, dissociated from the external world, being what his perceived world is distinct from. At the same time he cannot help imagining himself as included in the world though it may be as a privileged object. (122-123)

At a basic but nonetheless essential level, the subject is the body. When I use the first-person singular pronoun to refer to my physical incarnation, I am correct. Nonetheless, one way in which I know my body is to perceive it as an *object* using external senses including sight, touch, and even smell and taste. I am hence perceivable, and am hence, as body, a kind of fusion of subject and object. My senses give me knowledge of my body as object, but although the mechanism of their doing so is the same as that by means of which they deliver *other* objects, they also do so in a way importantly different from that in which they give me those others: for I lie at the origin of the spatial coordinate system that structures my knowledge of the external world, and all other bodies are spatially located relative to my body. The only way that I locate my body in subjective space is by reference to the imagined gaze of another, as to assign a determinate location (as opposed to a subjective origin) presupposes another origin for the coordinate system (as Merleau-Ponty was to argue later).

Self-knowledge at this level of subjectivity is hence in part perceptual, and in part an immediate knowledge of myself as spatial origin. Without the former, I cannot represent myself as a physically instantiated subject in a physical world, and so cannot even represent my own sensory knowledge as mine; without the latter I cannot distinguish myself as a subject from all else in the world that is object. And at



this level of subjectivity I already distinguish myself as subject precisely by a kind of freedom—in this instance, the freedom from being simply another object located in the external world, and hence the freedom to posit the loci of the objects of my *lebenswelt* in relation to me, to my body.

The second moment of bodily subjectivity concerns the body not as perceived in external sense, but as known immediately. This immediate knowledge is the awareness of the body *from the inside*, as *subjective*. The account of this subjectivity, which is the first level at which, Bhattacharyya argues, a genuine *sense of freedom* emerges, and at which subjectivity is first experienced *as subjectivity*, is complex. Bhattacharyya draws the distinction between the perceived and the felt body as follows:

60. One's own body is not only perceived from the outside; one is immediately or sensuously aware of it also from within in what is called "feeling of the body." This feeling is not, like the feeling of an object, a psychic fact from which the object known is distinguished. The bodily feeling is but the felt body, which is not known to be other than the perceived body. Yet the perceived body is distinct from it so far as it is an "interior" that is never perceived and cannot be imagined to be perceived from the outside. ... [T]he interior cannot be understood here as the interior that one may imagine oneself seeing. ... (123-124)

The first distinction here is the distinction between an awareness in which the object is distinct from the psychic fact of which it is an object, on the one hand, and feeling, in which there is no such distinction, on the other. When I perceive any object—say, when I see my hand—we can distinguish between the *act of perception*, in this case, perhaps, a visual perception, and the *object*, my hand. The former is psychic fact; the latter object. But when I *feel* my body as a physical interiority there is no such distinction. There is not an *act of feeling* distinct from my *being* my body. Second, Bhattacharyya emphasizes, this interiority is not simply a distinct perspective on the same object. The interiority of my felt body is not an imagined *spatial* interior that I might see, for instance in a laproscope, but rather a position that can never be imagined to be perceived. It is in this sense, while physical, *purely subjective*.

Bhattacharyya draws this distinction in yet another way, pointing out that the *kind* of space represented in the interior of the felt body is different from the *kind* of space the perceived body occupies. He puts this in terms of a kind of indefiniteness. The guiding idea here is that while the interior space of the felt body is not experienced as having definite dimensions or spatial location, that indefiniteness is not the same kind of indefiniteness that we might find in an indefinite awareness of the location of a sensation, such as an itch in our back, or in a hazy awareness of our posture at the end of a long day:

61. Objective space that is indefinitely perceived is the same as the objective space that is definitely perceived... But felt space is indefinite in the sense that it is more than the objective space it is defined into, ... (124)

The indefiniteness of spatial representation in the felt body is not an *absence* of precision; it cannot be precisified at all, in fact. Instead, even when we limn perfectly the volume of the interior of the body, we leave out the *interiority* of the body, which, while spatially oriented, outruns any attempt at location. Bhattacharyya now turns to the implications of these differences for the nature of subjectivity itself and the freedom it implicates:

64. We may consider body-feeling in relation to psychic fact and introspection into psychic fact on the one hand and to the perceived body and perceived object on the other. The perceived body is only potentially dissociated from the perceived object inasmuch as it is not merely like presentation not denied to be object but is positively known as object.... The object, however, is fully distinguished from the felt body: the perceived object presents exterior surface only.... Corresponding to this full distinction from the felt interior, there is the actual but imperfect dissociation of freedom of the felt body from the perceived environment, The felt body, however, does not appear even imperfectly dissociated from the perceived body.... (125)

The perceived body is, he points out, not all that different from other perceived objects. While to be sure, it has, as he argued earlier, a subjective dimension, it is also represented as an object from which, like all other objects, the subjective awareness of it is dissociated. The felt body is entirely different in this respect. Even though, as Bhattacharyya notes at the end of this passage, the felt body is in one sense *the same thing* as the perceived body, in its mode of presentation as *felt*, it is entirely distinct from the object. Perceived objects are only surfaces—they are

essentially exterior; the felt body, as opposed to the perceive body, *has no surface*— it is essentially interior. Bhattacharyya now brings this point to bear in order to draw another important distinction, in terms of psychic fact and identification:

65. Again, the perceived body is fully distinguished from psychic fact... There may be consciousness of the body as *mine* and at the same time as not other than myself, unlike the consciousness of the object which if felt as *mine* is felt as *not me*. The felt body, however, is only half distinguished from psychic fact, since it is the feeling of the body on the one hand is not actually dissociated from the perceived body on the other. (126)

When we perceive objects, including our own bodies, there is, as noted above, a distinction between object and cognitive act. The object is hence *alien* to the self, and this is true even of the perceived body, *as perceived*. But the felt body is not *mine*, but *me*; not *alien*, but *intimate*. For that reason, the felt body is more like a psychic fact than the object of one; it is hence, unlike the perceived body, on the subject side of the subject-object duality, not on the objective side. This has important consequences for subjectivity and freedom:

66. The facthood of the subjective is constituted by the feeling of detachment or freedom. The first hint of this freedom is reached in the feeling of the body. ... When the perceived body is distinguished from the felt body, the exterior from the interior, we have an explicit feeling of distinction, detachment or freedom from the perceived object. ... (127)

While there is indeed, as we saw above, a simple level of freedom in the perceptual awareness of the body, there can be, Bhattacharyya, argues, no *awareness of that freedom* in that perceptual consciousness of body, simply because without the awareness of interiority, there is no awareness of the distinction between psychic fact and object, and hence of subjectivity itself. Only when we have this feeling of body do we rise to the level of true self-consciousness, and at that, only at the most basic level. We climb one step further when we enter the third and final moment of bodily awareness: the awareness of absence.

The awareness of absence constitutes an essential mode of subjectivity for Bhattacharyya, as Sartre was to notice a few decades later. Unlike Sartre, however, he argues that this mode of subjectivity is an aspect of bodily self-consciousness, and indeed is the most abstract and profound mode of that consciousness. It is

noteworthy that Bhattacharyya introduces the knowledge of *absence* at this point. He does so without comment, but it is clear that here he is relying on the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology in which absence (*abhāva*) is one of the fundamental categories of existence. In this classical philosophical system—whose center was and still is Bengal—specific absences of objects at loci are among the basic constituents of reality, and are objects of immediate perceptual knowledge. Bhattacharyya relies on this ontology here.

The examples he gives us are the awareness of the absence of a tree in a field in which the tree once stood, and the absence of a book we seek in a room where we expected to find it. In each case, a specific absence becomes the object of our awareness. Now, Bhattacharyya concedes (§ 74) that our awareness of the absence is not entirely perceptual. After all, we see an empty field, not an absent tree, and we see a space on the table where we expected the book, not an absent book. There is hence an essentially inferential aspect to this awareness. So, unlike the perception of the body, or even the feeling of the body in perception of an external object, here the object of our awareness is not a perceived particular, but rather an inferred abstraction, although inferred in the very act of perception.

Bhattacharyya characterizes the mode of our awareness of the absent object as *imaginative*. Using an example closer to that Sartre was to mobilize in his discussion of the absence of Pierre in the café, Bhattacharyya writes:

77. ...[C]onsider the absence of a beloved person... When such a person is missed or imaginatively perceived as now absent, there may not be any relevant reference to the locus, namely the room. But one may come to imagine the room as with the person and then realize his absence in reference to this imagined content. To imagine an object in a perceived locus is a special form of imagination in which the present locus is viewed as characterizing and not as characterized by the imagined content. The belief in the absence of the object as thus characterized by the locus, the absence here of the imagined room as sentimentally associated with the beloved person, is immediate knowledge but not perception. The absence is not taken to be fact in the present locus; and as the presentness of the absence is not the presentness of any concrete thing, it cannot be said to be perceived. The secondary cognition is conscious non-perception, the room that is perceived by sense being turned into the imagined character of the location of the imagined person. (133)

While Bhattacharyya regards the awareness of absence as in a certain sense *immediate*—that is, we are not first aware of seeing something, and then aware of inferring an absence from it—that is not the immediacy of perception, but rather of an automatic act of imagination. Sartre sees the empty café, but he is instantly aware of the absence of Pierre. And he is not thereby perceptually aware of Pierre, but rather *imaginatively* aware of the *café avec Pierre*, while perceptually aware of it *sans Pierre*, and at the same time aware that that is *mere imagination*, or, as Bhattacharyya puts it, *conscious non-perception*.

But this conscious non-perception requires more of us than would the actual perception of Pierre. The latter requires awareness of the object, and so immediately of its relation to our body in space. To become aware of that awareness, in turn requires attention to our own bodily interiority—to the fact that our subjectivity is *in* our body, even though it is not perceivable. But to become aware of the absence requires us to be immediately aware of the fact that we are *perceiving one thing and imagining another*, and hence of the position of the body with respect not only to that which impinges upon it and to which it is perceptually related, but also with respect to what we merely imagine. We imagine the absent object—even though it actually bears no determinate relation to our body—in relation to our body. The awareness is hence bound up with the body, but free of the actual nexus of our body with its surrounds. Bhattacharyya puts it this way:

78. In the imaginative perception of absence and the absent, there is no explicitly felt dissociation from the position of the perceived body, which however is imperfectly distinguished from the imagined position of absence or of the absent. In conscious non-perception, there is the explicitly felt dissociation from the perceived body but not from the felt body, though the felt body has begun to be distinguished from the absence of the absent. The relation of the perceived body in the former case and the felt body in the latter to the known absence is like the relation of the perceived body to the felt body. The perceived body is half distinguished from the felt body which, however, is not felt to be dissociated from the perceived body. Absence imaginatively perceived is thus on a level with the felt body, both being felt undissociated from the perceived body which however is half distinguished from them. Absence known by conscious non-perception is on a higher level... (134)

This paragraph is far from transparent. But once we see what is going on here, we will see why this form of consciousness is, according to Bhattacharyya, physical, and why it is so important in the hierarchy of modes of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. First, Bhattacharyya notes, when we are aware of an absence, we are aware of that as an absence *in a particular locus*, and that locus is identified in relation to our body. It is an absence *here* or *there*. But second, we do not relate the absent thing to our perceived body. After all, the perceived body occupies a particular space, and the absent thing does not. Instead, we locate it with respect to the felt body. Bhattacharyya calls attention to a strange asymmetry in the relation between the perceived and the felt body: When we are aware of the perceived body, it is “half distinguished” from the felt body; that is, it is present as *mine*, not as *me* in perception, even though I identify myself with it in other respects, taking it to be the same as the felt body. I do not, on the other hand, represent the *felt* body also as *mine*, and so do not consciously associate it with the perceived body. Bhattacharyya points out that the absence is represented as distinct from the perceived body—it is represented as an absence in a space outside of the perceived body—but it is not dissociated from the felt body, for it is not represented as a real concrete thing, but rather as a cognitive act of imagination carried out by the embodied subject. For this reason, the awareness of absence is a higher level of consciousness, and implicates a higher level of self-consciousness, despite remaining tied to an embodied perspective. Bhattacharyya concludes this discussion with the following observation:

79. Conscious non-perception then is a transitional stage between body-feeling and imagination with which psychic fact begins. It is the consciousness of presentness without space-position ... It is free from space but not from the present and accordingly does not imply a presentation of the object as dissociated from the object. Psychic fact begins with the distinguishing of what the present is not... Were one to start with object-perception,... the first clear hint of the subjective fact would be realized in the knowledge of absence through conscious non-perception. (135)

The awareness of absence is hence the pivot point in self-knowledge. It allows us to be aware of an object, but not at a particular place. Nonetheless, in virtue of the temporality of that awareness, it is an awareness of that object in relation to the

physical self. And it is a direct awareness of the *object*, albeit as absent, not an awareness of a representation of that object. So, once again, it is tied to the physical, to embodied reality, the world of objects that exist in relation to the physical self. Nonetheless, because of the awareness of the distinction between what is perceived and what is imagined, reflection on this mode of awareness takes us for the first time beyond the physical into the realm of psychic fact. For the distinction between perceiving Pierre and imagining Pierre is a psychic, not a physical distinction. Self-knowledge here then rises to the apperceptive awareness of myself as a being who perceives in distinct modes. It is on this basis that I can come to be aware of myself as a mind, and of the distinction between my representations and reality. It is to that mode of awareness, and that level of self-knowledge that we now turn.

### 3.6. Psychic and Spiritual Subjectivity

Bhattacharyya begins the transition to the discussion of psychic subjectivity with this observation:

80. Psychology does not begin till the perceived object is distinguished from the half-perceived body.... To those who would not go further in psychology, introspection is only observation of the indefinite body-interior and psychic fact is only a bodily attitude, the beginning of the behavior of an organism to the environment. Some, however, would go one step further and admit the image as a unique fact, appearing as a quasi-object from which object including the body is distinguished. ... The image may be functional in character as a reference to the object,... but that it appears presented as a substantive something from which the object is distinct and exists in a sense in which the object does not exist cannot be denied. (136)

Here we see the transition from the final mode of bodily consciousness to psychic consciousness. Bhattacharyya uses the term *image* as Kant does *vorstellung* or we do *representation*.<sup>8</sup> He is noting that while we can make sense of the activity of introspection into somatic self-consciousness, we also, upon reflection, recognize the presence in our psychological life of thought mediated by representations, and hence of those representations themselves. While representations share with *felt*

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**Deleted:** <sup>8</sup> It is likely that Bhattacharyya is thinking of the Sanskrit term *ākara* here, often translated as *image*, though more often these days as *representation*, a term that would have the semantic range he is here attaching to *image*.

somatic states (as opposed to *perceived* somatic states) the absence of any determinate spatial location, and like them are on the subjective, as opposed to the objective side of experience, unlike somatic states they lack both spatial temporal determinateness. Our beliefs or imaginings need not be occurrent; they need not have fixed temporal boundaries. And unlike felt somatic states, he urges (§§ 86 ff), these are not experienced as internal to the *body*, but rather to the *mind*. Introspection into our cognitive activity finds not felt states but rather thoughts, and these thoughts are all intentional in structure.

A second moment of psychic subjectivity, Bhattacharyya argues, emerges when we move from the awareness of *images*, or representations of objects, to *ideas*. Ideas are non-imagistic, discursive symbols that do not represent concrete objects. Bhattacharyya's principal examples of ideational thought are logical thoughts, and thoughts expressed in words. Bhattacharyya draws the distinction between the representational and the ideational in two ways: in terms of their respective *vehicles* of thought and in terms of their respective *objects* of thought. The vehicle of imagistic thought is the representation of an object, and its object is a particular; the vehicle of ideational thought is the word, and its object is a universal.

Corresponding to each of these moments of subjectivity is a new degree of freedom. In imagistic thought the subject is conscious of its freedom from the object. Unlike perception—even "perception" of absence—there is no requirement in representational thought of the representation of the body, or of the presence in thought of any external object or space whatsoever. And when we move to ideational thought there is a further freedom—a freedom from the particular as an object of thought, together with a freedom from any sensory component of thought whatsoever. The purely symbolic frees thought from any reference to the concrete at all, even in intentional content. To be conscious of oneself as a thinking subject is hence to be conscious of oneself as free in a sense far greater than that involved in thinking of oneself as an embodied subject—it is to represent one's cognitive subjectivity as absolutely independent not only of the external world, but also of the modes of appearance of that world to physical senses. The affinities to Vedānta, and



indeed to Mukerji's own analysis of subjectivity should be apparent: the subject as a unique, primordial ontological status, and is the unconditioned condition of all of this objects.

Reflection on this mode of subjectivity yields yet another level of self-knowledge. Even at the level of imagistic representational thought, Bhattacharyya claims, introspection finds not somatic states or feelings, but intentionality. And once the climb has been made to ideational subjectivity, introspection finds intentionality directed to the abstract and not the concrete. We come to know ourselves at this level of subjectivity not as conscious bodies, but as intentionally directed, concept-and-language-wielding thinking things. Again, this self-knowledge does not *replace*, but supplements that developed earlier, layering our self-understanding as we layer our subjectivity.

The final moment of subjectivity for Bhattacharyya is the spiritual. In developing his account of this kind of subjectivity, the level at which complete freedom emerges, as well as the most complete self-knowledge, he begins with the concept of *feeling*. Importantly, this term must be understood not in the sense of *somatic feeling* that is in play in the discussion of the second level of bodily subjectivity, but rather in the sense of *aesthetic*, as well as *ethical* feeling. In approaching spiritual subjectivity in this way, Bhattacharyya is following not Kant's path to the third *Critique* but the Vedānta emphasis on aesthetic sensibility as the path to the understanding of *Brahman*, a track he also treads in his important essay, "The Concept of *Rasa*." (in Bhushan and Garfield 2011, pp 193-206) Bhattacharyya argues in that essay that it is essential to aesthetic experience not only that we are affected by the aesthetic object, but that we *free* ourselves from that affection by contemplating that affection, and so achieving reflective awareness of ourselves *as subjects*.

In ethical experience we address one another as subjects in dialogue with one another. In this discussion at the close of *The Subject as Freedom*, Bhattacharyya recurs to an important insight he defends near the beginning of the book: to take oneself as the referent of *I* is to take addressees as *you*, others as *he* or *she*. In short, he argues in the first chapter of the book, the possibility of speech—and hence

subjectivity—is conditional upon intersubjectivity, simply because speech presupposes both addressees and conventions that constitute meaning. He deploys that insight at the denouement of the discussion to argue that to understand oneself as a subject is to understand oneself as a member of a class of those capable of introspective self-awareness:

120. The realization of what a speaker means by the word *I* is the hearer's awareness of a possible introspection. Such awareness is as much knowledge as actual introspection. The speaker calls himself *I* and may be understood by the hearer as *you*. As thus understood, the introspective self is individual, not an individual being—for introspection is not a subjective *being* like feeling—but the function of addressing another *self*. The speaker does not understand himself through the meaning of the word *I*: his introspection is through the word and not through its meaning and is less a self-knowing than a self-revealing, revealing to a possible understander of the word *I*. Yet as the addressing attitude is only implicit, it is to him accidental and posterior to his self-knowing. To the understanding self, however, although he understands the speaker's self-knowing because he is himself self-knowing, his understanding of the other *I* is primary while his own self-knowing is accidental and secondary. The speaker knows himself in implicitly revealing to the hearer and the hearer knows the speaker in implicitly knowing himself. ... There are thus two cases—self-intuition with other-intuition implicit in it and other-intuition with self-intuition implicit in it. Both are actual knowledge... Because the word *I* is at once the symbol and the symbolized, it cannot be said to have simply the symbolizing function.... (161-162)

121. Actual introspection is implicitly social, being a speaking or addressing or self-evidencing to another possible introspection or self... (162)

This is dramatic stuff, original to Bhattacharyya, and quite different from the individualistic perspective we encounter in Mukerji, despite the shared Vedānta roots. It is hard to miss the anticipations of Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Sellars, whose respective emphases on the necessarily social nature of self-consciousness, language and thought were to transform 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy of mind.

First, Bhattacharyya notes, the term *I* does not denote an object. It is, in the language of the first chapter of the text, a term expressing a *speakable*, but not a *meanable*. When we use the first-person pronoun, we signal that we are introspectors—that we are capable of self-consciousness—but we do not denote that which is the ultimate content of introspection, for that is subjectivity itself, which, if denoted, becomes object, and not subject. Second, in virtue of the role of *I* as a vocable, but

non-denoting term this speaking of the self, and hence self-consciousness itself, is parasitic on the very possibility of language, and so on the existence of addressees who are also capable of using the first, and the second person pronouns and on consciousness of myself as a possible addressee by another. So, self-knowledge and therefore also subjectivity, are essentially intersubjective phenomena, not private.

Spiritual subjectivity, the awareness of oneself as pure subject, capable of action, reflection and judgment is then not the awareness of an isolated ego, but the awareness of a self among selves, and for this reason can rise from the level of mere awareness to that of knowledge. Bhattacharyya concludes his investigation with this reflection on the nature of freedom as it emerges from this collective notion of subjectivity:

135. I am never positively conscious of my present individuality, being conscious of it only as that which is or can be outgrown, only as I feel freeing myself from it and am free to the extent implied by such as feeling. I do not know myself as free but I conceive that I can be free successively as body from the perceived object, as presentation from the body, as feeling from presentation and as introspective function from feeling. ... [I] may be free even from this distinctness, may be freedom itself that is de-individualized but not therefore indefinite—absolute freedom that is to be evident. (171)

Absolute freedom, like absolute subjectivity, Bhattacharyya concludes, is not an object of immediate awareness, not something of which I am positively conscious as an entity. Instead, it is something that I know as a potential; the potential to ascend in reflection at any time through reflection on my identity as a body to reflection on my identity as a thinker, and finally to reflection on my self as that which can be aware of itself either as body or as cognitive subject. The cognitive subject is transcendental and, like Kant's transcendental subject, is absolutely free in aesthetic or ethical experience. On the other hand, *contra* Kant, I can speak intelligibly about it, even if that self about which I speak remains beyond denotation.

That self is not pure individual, but a social subjective position of which I have knowledge whenever I speak with others as a person among persons. While the absolute subjectivity, with its special mode of transcendental access to the self is

inspired by that articulated in Vedānta, the insight that the social turn is necessary for its intelligibility is Bhattacharyya's.

When we assemble this complex and sophisticated form of self-knowledge, we can see the shape of Bhattacharyya's distinctive response to Kant. While Kant insisted that we could *think*, but could never *know* the subject, Bhattacharyya shows that we know the subject in a variety of modalities: perceptual, cognitive-introspective and reflective; cognitive, ethical and aesthetic. Nonetheless, we do not know the subject as an object among objects; that would be to deny its subjectivity and its transcendental status. Instead, while we know and can even speak *of* the subject, we can never directly *refer to*, or *mean* it. Rather, we engage with it as a mode of freedom, and as a mode of our engagement with other subjects.

Bhattacharyya hence makes good on the promise to vindicate a central insight of the Vedānta tradition—the insight that the self as subject is knowable, and that knowledge of it is a necessary context for all other knowledge. And he does so both through the surprising route of a detailed examination of bodily consciousness, undoubtedly inspired by Vaishnava tantric ideas. But as we have seen, it is not a mere appropriation. There is a dramatic linguistic and communitarian twist. This transcendent self-knowledge is not immediate, but is mediated through our linguistic interactions with others.

#### 4. Conclusion

Bhattacharyya's account of subjectivity and his response to the Kantian problem of self-knowledge are very different from Mukerji's. Our aim here is not to assess their relative merits, but to point out that each is a strikingly original and powerful contribution to philosophy, and that each is emblematic of the renaissance sensibility we have characterized. Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, is *doing* philosophy, not reporting on it, and he is doing philosophy in an easy cosmopolitan dialogue with Indian and European sources and ideas (despite his own exasperating refusal to acknowledge any of them explicitly). Bhattacharyya, like Mukerji, takes a

classical tradition (or several) as his reference point for addressing modern problems. And like Mukerji, he works happily in an Indian vernacular language—English—albeit in conversation with texts he is reading in German and in Sanskrit. Once again, we see a philosophically progressive moment—indeed one that anticipates many later developments in European philosophy—in continuity with an Indian tradition, and in dialogue with the West. However different the specific approaches to the account of subjectivity are of Mukerji and Bhattacharyya are, their own subjectivities are remarkably akin.

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