



## Solving Kant's Problem: K. C. Bhattacharyya on Self-Knowledge\*

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### Kant's problem as K. C. Bhattacharyya sees it

Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya's (1875–1949) most important systematic work, *The Subject as Freedom* (1923), is first and foremost a sustained engagement, from the standpoint of Vedānta, with Kant's discussion of self-knowledge in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In the *Critique*, Kant argues that while we can *think* the transcendental subject—and indeed necessarily *must* think it as a condition of the possibility of subjectivity itself—we cannot *know* the subject, or self. Because knowledge requires intuition, and the forms of intuition are spatiotemporal, and because the self lies outside of space and time as their transcendental condition, Kant argues, the self lies outside of the domain of knowledge. It cannot fall under any category; it cannot be schematized; it cannot be the object of any judgment. Nonetheless, he argues, it must be possible for the “I think” to accompany any representation, and so we must think ourselves as unitary subjects in order for any experience to count as the experience of a subject.

While Kant is one of the most important influences on Bhattacharyya's thought, this central doctrine of the Kantian critical philosophy is anathema to him. From the standpoint of any of the major Indian traditions, including prominently the Vedānta and Vaishnava tantric traditions that form the backdrop of Bhattacharyya's thought, Kant gets things completely backwards. From the perspective of Vedānta, 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*.

So, there is broad agreement between the Kantian and the Vedānta perspectives that the self is a kind of epistemic singularity: it is the transcendental condition of discursive thought yet cannot be the object of discursive thought. This is the deep affinity that leads Bhattacharyya to explore the points of contact between the Kantian and the Vedānta frameworks. Nonetheless, there is a sharp disagreement about the nature of



this singularity: while Kant sees the self as in the domain of thought, but not in the domain of knowledge, Vedānta sees it as falling within the domain of knowledge but not within the domain of thought.<sup>1</sup>

So much for a tension between two traditions. But why does Bhattacharyya defend the Vedānta side of this dispute? I believe that this is primarily because he sees a deep tension in Kantian philosophy that can only, on his view, be resolved from the perspective of Vedānta<sup>2</sup>: Bhattacharyya sees the Kantian view as committed to a series of claims about the self that undermine its own commitment to the self's unknowability.

The first of these is the obvious claim that it is unknowable. To assert this is to assert something about it, and to know that it is unknowable is to know something about it.<sup>3</sup> But more importantly, Bhattacharyya takes seriously Kant's own association of transcendental subjectivity and freedom, especially as that doctrine is developed in the second and third *Critiques* and in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, but also as it emerges in the doctrine of the spontaneity of thought in the first *Critique*. Indeed, this connection is the focus of *The Subject as 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 (though as we will see, in an important sense nondiscursive and intuitive) 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 unmeanable. 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 which is also believed is formulated as *I* which is, however, understood as unmeanable though not as a mere word like *abracadabra*. The understanding here is not a mystical intuition though it may point to its possibility, nor an intuition of a meaning that can be a term of a judgment, nor yet the thought of a meaning that is not known because not intuited or that is known without being intuited. It is somewhere midway between a mystic intuition and the

consciousness of a meaning, being the believing awareness of a speakable content, the negation of which is unmeaning and which, therefore, is not a meaning. What is claimed to mystically intuited is speakable only in metaphor which represents a contradiction in meaning and what is affirmed or denied in metaphysic is a meanable. 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>4</sup>

Let us pause to unpack a few important ideas that run through this discussion. First, all of this 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."<sup>5</sup> In fact in ¶¶2–3 (87–88), Bhattacharyya explicitly ties meaning to intersubjective agreement and availability of referents for terms.<sup>6</sup> 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>7</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.<sup>8</sup> 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>9</sup> But the first-person indexical gets immediately, directly, at the speaking subject, and is so understood by addressees as well as by the speaker.

So, although the word "I" has no *meaning* in this strict sense, it 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 hence 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 answer these questions and to explain the manner in which the self is known is the goal of Bhattacharyya's inquiry.

Reading *The Subject as Freedom* is challenging in part because of the forbidding density and terseness of the text itself and because of Bhattacharyya's idiosyncratic and often opaque prose style. This opacity in part arises from Bhattacharyya's peculiar philosophical neologisms. It also emerges from the fact that he is always thinking, even while writing in English, with Sanskrit senses and contrasts in the background, but never making these Sanskrit references explicit. But reading this text is also challenging because Bhattacharyya does not signal the objects of his frequent anaphoric

discussions. It is left to the reader to figure out whether he has Husserl in mind, a particular Indian school, or whether he is working out his own ideas. Interpretation of this book is hence always fraught.

My aim here is *not* to provide a reading of *The Subject as Freedom* as a whole. That would require a book-length study. Instead, I simply intend to focus on the structure of Bhattacharyya's account of self-knowledge. I will begin with a brief discussion of his account of the relationship between subjectivity and freedom. I then turn to his hierarchy of grades of subjectivity, developing the relation between the various levels of bodily subjectivity, psychic subjectivity, and finally spiritual subjectivity, showing how each implicates a greater degree of freedom. I will then turn to the account of self-knowledge scaffolded by that hierarchy, an account according to which self-knowledge is complex and multileveled. We will then consider how that account of self-knowledge squares with Bhattacharyya's view that the subject cannot be *thought*, before concluding with some thoughts about the view of freedom that emerges from this discussion and the respect in which Bhattacharyya takes himself to have solved Kant's problem.<sup>10</sup> My aim is neither to defend nor to criticize Bhattacharyya's framework, but rather to articulate it as clearly and as sympathetically as possible so as to make it available for critical reflection and consideration by contemporary philosophers.

## 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 rid 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; emphasis in the original)

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)

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)

The plan of *The Subject of Freedom* is to develop this self-knowledge gradually, moving through progressively more abstract and complete levels of freedom, each corresponding to a more adequate form of self-knowledge. As we will see, complete self-knowledge, while achieved at the final stage of this hierarchy, comprises all of the stages, and depends on each sense of freedom to be adumbrated. Here is Bhattacharyya's outline of the plan:

24. . . . The steps . . . correspond to a gradation of subjective functions, of modes of freedom from the object. Identified as we are with our body, our freedom from the perceived object is actually realized only in our bodily consciousness, though even this, as well appear later, is only imperfectly realized . . . The next stage of freedom is suggested by the distinction of the perceived object including the body from the ghostly object in the form of the image, idea, and meaning, which may be all designated "presentation." Consciousness as undissociated from such presentation, but dissociated from the perceived and felt body, may be called presentational or psychic subjectivity. The dissociation of the subject of consciousness from this presentation conceived as a kind of object would be the next stage of freedom,

which may be called non-presentational or spiritual subjectivity. The three broad stages of subjectivity would then be the bodily, the psychical and the spiritual . . . Wedded as we are to our body, actual freedom is felt only in bodily subjectivity and freedom in the higher stages as suggested by psychology is believed not as what is actual but as what has to be achieved or realized. . . . The elaboration of these stages of freedom in spiritual psychology would suggest the possibility of a consecutive method of realizing the subject as absolute freedom, of retracting the felt positive freedom towards the object into pure intuition of the self. (102)

Let us be clear about this plan, as it structures the remainder of the account. 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.

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 toward ourselves that we are able to develop in relation to our objects, an unmeanable sense of ourselves as pure subjects. We will turn shortly to the account of the successive grades of subjectivity and freedom, but first we must turn to Bhattacharyya's general account of introspection.

### Interlude: the structure of introspection

Bhattacharyya's characterization of introspection and its objects is fundamental to his understanding of self-knowledge, and it is articulated through a rather unusual vocabulary. He refers to psychological phenomena as *psychic facts*, and he takes psychic fact to consist in relations of the subject to its objects. Introspection, then, is a form of abstraction in which I first become aware of an object of consciousness and then abstract from the object the way I, as subject, am related to it, distilling the psychological state that mediates my awareness. Bhattacharyya writes, "What is called psychological introspection is apparently a process of abstraction from the object of its modes of relatedness to the subject" (103).

The first thing to note about this account is that for Bhattacharyya introspection is not a direct sensation of my inner episodes, but rather a theoretical exercise. He hence rejects the direct givenness of the inner from the outset. He emphasizes (§26, p. 104) that this applies to feelings just as much as it does to abstract thoughts. In any case, while psychic facts or cognitive episodes are in one sense subjective, as

modes of relatedness to objects, they are, in introspective awareness, also objective, and hence are presented through higher-order psychic facts that take them as objects.

Just as in introspection we achieve a certain degree of subjective freedom from involvement with the object of the psychological state we consider, in reflection on introspection we can achieve a similar detachment from that state itself. Freedom hence emerges at each successive stage of reflective introspection, but is never complete so long as an objective attitude is maintained toward the state introspected. Bhattacharyya refers to the pure cognitive state abstracted from its object—the attitude itself—as the *fringe* of the psychic fact. This, he emphasizes (§32, p. 107), never occurs alone, but always in the context of the relevant psychic fact. So, while I may become aware of *believing* because *belief* is the fringe of my belief that Bengal is verdant, I am never aware of *belief*, per se, with no content of belief. Reflection on these fringes, or contentful state-types that are constitutive of our psychology, is hence always theoretical, never observational, simply because we never observe the fringes themselves, only the states in which they figure. We only know the fringes through subsequent reflection on the complex state of which we are directly aware.

Bhattacharyya draws an interesting corollary from his account of introspection: introspective awareness, or self-knowledge, is essential to knowledge itself (§§35–37, ff.). This is because knowledge requires the distinction between perception and illusion, which in turn requires the distinction between believing in the content of a perceptual state and not believing in it.<sup>11</sup> For me to be aware of something as an illusion is for me to be aware that I have a certain presentation and that I do *not* believe in the existence of that which is presented; and knowledge, for Bhattacharyya as well as for Kant, requires the awareness that we know; and to take myself to *know* something is to be aware of my reflective belief in what is presented. This is not a trivial matter: Bhattacharyya is pointing out that the subject and its relation to its objects cannot be excluded from the domain of knowledge, as that would be to eviscerate the entire structure of knowledge itself.

Bhattacharyya takes this to be a serious critique of the Kantian conception of knowledge. He anticipates the Kantian objection:

43. To such a view the Kantian may be supposed to object that the metaphysical reality thus adumbrated is only subjective though it appears real in the object by illusion, by a permanent illusion which we can critically correct without being able to remove. The critical correction may only be sought to be strengthened in a non-cognitive way—the moral or aesthetic way—with the entertainment of the metaphysical reality in faith. (113)

That is, the Kantian is taken to reply, the apparent knowledge of the subject that emerges from the kind of reflection that Bhattacharyya characterizes as introspection is not genuine knowledge, but transcendental illusion. In knowing an object, we necessarily have *faith* in the existence of the subject that considers it, as well as in its modes of subjectivity, but no *knowledge of it*, as that knowledge would have to be unmediated

knowledge of the thing as it is in itself (or, we might add, mere psychological knowledge of the empirical ego).

Bhattacharyya responds as follows:

44. That metaphysical reality is subjective is admitted in the sense that it is not an *object* behind the perceivable object. . . . But this unknown something that is known as such and formulated is not *merely* subjective in the sense of being illusory or in the sense of being the content of a faith that can never be turned into knowledge. To take it as merely subjective is to assume the object to be alone knowable and to be incapable of being *known* as put forth subjectively or freely. It is to deny the facthood of the constructive function by which the perceivable object comes to be for the subject. The epistemological functions are indeed believed and not known but they are not believed as merely subjective. (113–114; emphases in the original)

This is the crux of the matter. When Kant excludes 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; emphasis in the original)

This quest for the cognitive realization of the nature of subjectivity and hence the understanding of the conditions of subjective freedom is the project of *The Subject as Freedom*. Achievement of this knowledge is, for Bhattacharyya, the achievement of genuine self-knowledge. Having argued for the transcendental necessity of this kind of self-knowledge for any knowledge whatsoever, and having challenged Kant's claim that this kind of self-knowledge must be impossible, Bhattacharyya begins the project of constructing this knowledge of the subject.



## 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. In each case we will consider each of these three aspects: subjectivity, self-knowledge, and freedom. We will then turn to psychical and spiritual subjectivity and the modes of self-knowledge and freedom they each enable.

It is important to note when we consider physical subjectivity that we always identify ourselves with our bodies, and that part of self-knowledge is knowledge of our own bodies. We recognize ourselves in the mirror; we recognize and ostend others as bodies. But more than this, 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*. All of this is involved in Bhattacharyya's account of physical self-knowledge, an account that recalls some of Schopenhauer's reflections on the body as immediate object in *The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* and which anticipates important insights of Merleau-Ponty in *The Phenomenology of Perception*.

Bhattacharyya begins by emphasizing 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)

There is a lot going on in this rich paragraph, and we have the resources here to unpack Bhattacharyya's account of this first grade of subjectivity and of self-knowledge. First, 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 might at first be thought to be merely proprioception, but it is more than that. For, as we will see, it is not merely the immediate apperceptive awareness of the position or sensations of the body, but 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. Let us work through it with care. 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. . . . The 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 laparoscope, but rather a position that can never be

imagined to be perceived. It is in this sense, while physical, *purely subjective*. (Once again, the anticipation of Merleau-Ponty in this entire account is striking.)

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)

When my awareness of the space of the perceived body is indefinite, that space will be the same as that into which it might be resolved in a more definite awareness. So, for instance, if I can't say where exactly that itch on my back is, when I locate it with my finger, I locate it not in another space, but more precisely in the same space in which I originally only located it with some approximation. But 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; emphases in the original)

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. One cannot look down and develop awareness of subjectivity, and hence of freedom until one reaches the second rung of the ladder; while the first rung might in part constitute subjectivity, it cannot constitute awareness of that subjectivity. For that reason, while perceptual awareness is a mode of self-knowledge, it is not a mode of knowledge of subjectivity or of freedom. 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.

Just as it was a few decades later for Sartre, the awareness of absence constitutes an essential mode of subjectivity for Bhattacharyya. 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. Let us see how that goes. Bhattacharyya asks us to consider the awareness of absence. 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.

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. Consider 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 I 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)

What is going on here, and why is this so important to bodily self-consciousness? First, note that 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, as is our body as it is presented in the most basic mode of perceptual consciousness. 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; it is not *here*, in our subjective space (despite the fact that we do not literally locate the absence spatially, as we do, at least indefinitely, locate our felt body).

Now, 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. Nonetheless, the same is not the case for my experience of the felt body. I do not represent it also as *mine*, and so do not consciously associate it with the perceived body.<sup>12</sup> Now, he points out, in the same way, 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, by 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.

### Psychic and spiritual subjectivity

Bhattacharyya begins the transition to the discussion of psychic subjectivity—the subjectivity that takes the self to be a mind, and hence that which makes introspective self-knowledge possible—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 behaviour 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>13</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* 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. Throughout this discussion, Bhattacharyya's debt to Husserl, and in particular the first volume of *Ideas*, which Bhattacharyya read closely, is evident.

Moreover, Bhattacharyya argues (§§90 ff), unlike the conscious non-perception of the absent (the mere awareness of absence) our awareness of our representations, even when the objects of those representations are absent, is not merely the non-perception of objects, but an awareness of the actual facticity of the representations themselves. The ability to dissociate the representation from the object relies upon the final stage of body-consciousness, but, he argues, the positive awareness of the representation (*image*) as a psychic fact represents a new stage in consciousness and in self-knowledge.

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.<sup>14</sup> 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.

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*." 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; emphases in the original)

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, and 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 twentieth-century philosophy of mind. Let us work through these ideas to come to an understanding of Bhattacharyya's view of the highest level of subjectivity and of the kind of self-knowledge and freedom it suggests.

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 (here note as well the anticipations of Anscombe on the first person),<sup>15</sup> this speaking of the self, and hence self-consciousness itself, is parasitic on the very possibility of language, and so the existence of addressees who are also capable of using the first- and second-person pronouns. So, self-knowledge and therefore also subjectivity are essentially intersubjective phenomena, not private. There is no knowledge of subjectivity whatsoever outside of the context of social interaction and discourse.

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.

### The ladder of self-knowledge

Bhattacharyya, in *The Subject as Freedom*, presents a model of self-knowledge that is far from simple or immediate. The self he presents is multilayered, and the modes of self-knowledge corresponding to each layer are importantly different from one another. The first layer of the self is the physical body, an embodied self that we know in three distinct ways: at the most basic level, through external sense-perception; at a more abstract level through our first-person embodiment and the experience of the body from the inside, and finally through reflection on the relation of the body to that which is not even perceived, but only imagined. In each case we know as aspect of our embodiment, but also in each case, an aspect of the self. The second principal layer of the self is the cognitive, and this we know in two ways. First, we know ourselves as the subjects of representations of the individual objects we perceive or imagine, in thought that, if not imagistic, is at least singular. But we also know ourselves as the subjects of abstract thought, like that thought undertaken as we do philosophy. In this aspect, we know ourselves as users of arbitrary symbols that can relate us to universals as well as to particulars, of ideas as well as images.

It is important to note that these are not distinct selves. Bhattacharyya is not arguing that we are bodies plus minds, but rather that the self is both embodied and cognitive. The self we encounter at each of these levels of subjectivity and in each of these modes of self-knowledge is the same self, but manifest in a different way, known through a different modality.

In each case, the self is the subject, that which can be spoken, but never ostended, and there is only one such entity (or nonentity). Finally, there is the spiritual layer of the self, the self as that which can reflect both on its cognitive and physical functions, and so is free of both, and of their objects, what would be in Vedānta *atman* in its manifestation as *sākṣin*, the pure witnessing consciousness. This self is known in our use of the first-person pronoun in its purest sense, and is therefore known only in discourse, and hence only in interaction with other selves. *Dasein*, we might say, reflecting on Bhattacharyya's anticipation of Heidegger, demands *Mitsein*. Or, perhaps less grandly, meaning requires a linguistic community, and thought demands meaning. We can only know ourselves as things of a kind, not as ontological surds. And self-knowledge is complete only when it integrates each of these levels of self-understanding as modes of knowledge of the same self, the referent of *I*.

It is also instructive to note that at each of these levels of self-knowledge, even though the self and its subjectivity are in one sense present immediately in introspection, they are nonetheless always known through some epistemic mediation. Another way to put this is that Bhattacharyya does not succumb in his account of introspection or self-knowledge to any crude version of the Myth of the Given according to which we simply appear to ourselves just as we are. In fact one of the more remarkable aspects of Bhattacharyya's entire account of self-knowledge is his avoidance of

this epistemological framework, despite its dominance of the philosophical milieu in which he worked—both Indian and Western.

In bodily subjectivity, we know ourselves first through the mediation of perception, and hence subject to the conditions imposed by our sense-faculty, then through an inner self-awareness, which, though it might appear to be more *immediate*, is nonetheless mediated through being non-dissociated with the object of perception as well as the object of the third level of bodily awareness. That is, even though we may be immediately aware of ourselves as bodily interiors, to know that body is to know it as the perceived body, and as the body that stands in determinate relations to the perceived and to the imagined.

Cognitive subjectivity is also conceptually mediated, as it requires not only the awareness of representations and ideas, but also the awareness of ourselves as the subjects of, but as distinct from, those representations and ideas, and of that which they intend. This is obviously a highly conceptually and linguistically enriched and mediated subjectivity. And most dramatically, even the most rarified form of self-knowledge of all, spiritual self-knowledge, turns out to be entirely linguistically and socially mediated. This relentless rejection of self-knowledge as simply the taking of what is given in subjectivity is what sets Bhattacharyya apart from his contemporaries and antecedents, and may be the most original aspect of his philosophical program in *The Subject as Freedom*. Indeed, it is not until Wittgenstein writes *The Philosophical Investigations* and Sellars “Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind” that Western philosophers really catch up.

### Kicking away the ladder: freedom from what? For what?

When we assemble this complex and sophisticated form of self-knowledge, we can see the shape of Bhattacharyya’s 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.

Kant argues that the subject is entirely non-spatiotemporal. Bhattacharyya responds that in virtue of its embodiment it *must* have spatiotemporal locations and figure in spatiotemporal relations; nonetheless, as we have seen, that location is not one among many—not the location of an object (except at the lowest grade of self-knowledge, which is indeed, important), but location at the *origin* of the spatiotemporal coordinate system. Without that location, agency and perception, he argues, would be impossible. While Kant argues that we cannot know ourselves as thinkers, Bhattacharyya shows that in psychic subjectivity we know ourselves as minds, and necessarily as minds free to take alternative attitudes towards our cognitive contents. Without such self-knowledge, we could not *think* our own thoughts as *ours*. And even at the level

of spiritual subjectivity, Bhattacharyya argues *contra* Kant that although we cannot articulate this as knowledge as knowledge of a *thing*, we must be aware of ourselves and be able to speak of ourselves as subjects of our psychophysical lives.

So, Bhattacharyya goes halfway with Kant. Like Kant, he argues that the subject can never be object. Like Kant, he argues that it has a special ontological and epistemological status, and like Kant he believes that we cannot know it in the way that we know objects. Unlike Kant, however, Bhattacharyya argues that not all knowledge is *objective*, and he argues that non-objective self-knowledge and the ability to *speak* one's position as subject are necessary conditions of the possibility of any objective knowledge. Hence, even though he only goes halfway down one road with Kant, after parting company, he takes a road to a much more ambitious and complex account of subjectivity and self-knowledge still well within the transcendental idealist tradition, although clearly inflected with Husserlian phenomenology, and well on the way to the phenomenology of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty.

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.

Knowledge of the self is also knowledge of its freedom, again, a knowledge transcending the Kantian epistemic bounds. This freedom is a freedom *from* immediate involvement with our objects of experience and of thought; our freedom as transcendental entities of a specific kind who can engage or disengage as we choose from particular kinds of contemplation. But it is also a freedom *to* engage; a freedom for aesthetic and ethical engagement, and the freedom to engage with others in the collective epistemic activity that makes subjectivity possible in the first place.

## Notes

- \* My reading of K. C. Bhattacharyya's thought, and of *The Subject as Freedom* in particular, emerges from extended conversations with a number of close colleagues, each of whom has contributed a great deal to my thoughts about these matters. First and foremost, I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Nalini Bhushan, with whom I have read and taught this text, and with whom I have discussed these ideas in detail. Her impact on my thinking is evident throughout. I also owe a great deal to participants in the Yale-NUS/NUS/Kyoto University joint faculty seminar on Asian Engagements with Kantian and Post-Kantian European Thought in 2013–14. I especially acknowledge the contributions of Ben Blumson, Taran Kang, Neil Mehta, Nico Silins, Neil Sinhababu, Saranindranath Tagore, and Matt Walker. I also thank Ben Blumson, Neil Mehta, Saranindranath Tagore, and Ryo Tanaka for helpful comments on an earlier draft and Nalini Bhushan for an invaluable close reading and critique of an earlier draft.

1. See Balslev (2013, pp. 127–136) for a reading of Bhattacharyya as providing a modern Advaita Vedānta account of the self and consciousness.
2. Through a reading of Vedānta inflected by Bhattacharyya's reading of Husserl's *Ideas*, and a heavy dose of thinking about the body deriving from tantric traditions.
3. One might try to save Kant here by suggesting that all that he precludes is any knowledge of the specific nature of the self, or direct perceptual acquaintance with it. But that won't work. He denies that we can make any assertions whatsoever about it, in virtue of the inapplicability of the categories to noumena, and so the inability to deploy the copula. See Priest (2003) for more on this.
4. All references to *The Subject as Freedom* are from the edition reprinted in Burch (1975).
5. This distinction is drawn in the first paragraph of *The Subject as Freedom*:
  1. Object is what is meant, including the object of sense-perception and all contents that have necessary reference to it. Object as the meant is distinguished from the subject or the subjective of which there is some awareness other than meaning-awareness. The subjective cannot be a *meaningless* word: to be distinguished from it, it must be a significant speakable and yet if it be a meant content, it would be but object. It can thus be neither asserted nor denied to be a meant content and what cannot be denied need not be assertable. Apparently, the significant speakable is wider than the meanable: a content to be communicated and understood need not be meant. (87; emphasis in the original)
6. See Balslev (2013, pp. 131–132) for a similar reading.
7. 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.
8. Compare to Wittgenstein's discussion of discourse about inner states in *Philosophical Investigations*.
9. As John Perry (1979) was famously to point out. 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.
10. There is another dimension to Bhattacharyya's project that we cannot ignore, and that is the political dimension. As anyone who has read Bhattacharyya's powerful essay "Svaraj in Ideas" knows, Bhattacharyya was deeply concerned with the intellectual impact of colonization on Indian philosophical thought. He worried that the imposition of a European framework on the Indian academy not only marginalized Indian philosophy, but set the European tradition up as the subjective standpoint from which philosophical thought itself was to be exercised, with Indian traditions relegated at best to objects of contemplation from that standpoint. *The Subject as Freedom* can be seen as a determined reversal of that direction of gaze. Here the European tradition is interrogated from an Indian standpoint.
11. It is important to note that when Bhattacharyya uses the term "belief" he nearly always has in mind the sense of *believing in* as opposed to *believing that*.
12. This is but one of many cases in which Bhattacharyya delights in pointing out that *prima facie* symmetrical relations are in fact surprisingly asymmetrical.
13. It is likely that Bhattacharyya is thinking of the Sanskrit term "*ākāra*" 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." Balslev (2013, pp. 129, 131) also observes that Bhattacharyya often has Sanskrit in mind when he writes in English.

14. The distinction Bhattacharyya draws and the ways in which he draws it closely track the distinction between *pratyakṣa/svalakṣaṇa* (perception/particular) and *anumana/sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (inference/universal) as these are drawn in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and Buddhist epistemology.
15. Balslev (2013, pp. 136–137) also notes the anticipation of Anscombe.

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