

## Chapter 3

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# Mind and Knowledge at the Margins: On the Possible Revitalization of Research on Mind and Knowledge through a Reunion between Philosophical and Psychical Research

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I am as confident as I am of anything that, in myself, the stream of thinking (which I recognize emphatically as a phenomenon) is only a careless name for what, when scrutinized, reveals itself to consist chiefly of the stream of my breathing. The "I think" that Kant said must be able to accompany all my objects, is the "I breathe" that actually does accompany them. There are other internal facts besides breathing (intracerebral muscular adjustments, etc.), and these increase the assets of "consciousness," so far as the latter is subject to immediate perception; but breath, which was ever the origin of "spirit," breath moving outward, between the glottis and the nostrils, is, I am persuaded, the essence out of which philosophers have constructed the entity known to them as consciousness. *That entity is fictitious, while thoughts in the concrete are fully real. But thoughts in the concrete are made of the same stuff as things are* (James, 1904, p. 491).

Philosophy of mind is the area of philosophy in which thinkers engage questions about the ultimate nature of human minds. Two central questions are: What is the place of consciousness in nature? What is the place

of intentionality in nature? Consciousness is that feature of mental life that concerns *what it is like* to experience things from the subjective point of view, such as what it is like to see green. Intentionality is that feature of mental life that concerns *how the mind is directed at entities*, such as in the case of belief, where having a belief means one's mind is directed at something, what the belief is about. The two questions are about how we can explain these two features of mentality. Epistemology is the area of philosophy where thinkers engage questions about the nature of knowledge. Two central questions are: What is it to know something? What are the valid means by which we can come to know something? For example, Plato held that to know something is to have a justified true belief about it. And many philosophers, both Eastern and Western, hold that perception is a valid means through which we can know something.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Anglo-American philosophers were interested in philosophy, psychology, and psychical research. The main reason for this was that there was no exact and clean separation between these areas of inquiry. H. H. Price and William James serve as two examples of philosophers that took more than a mild interest in psychology and psychical research. In the case of James, research into telepathy was a serious 40-year investment and a serious part of his intellectual life. Marcus Ford (1998, pp. 611–612) presents an excellent reconstruction of some of James's core views on telepathy, understood as "the power of one mind to influence another mind at a great distance."

In his "What Psychical Research Has Accomplished" (1892/1960), James says:

[In the first part of this address] I have been willfully taking the point of view of the so-called "rigorously scientific" disbeliever [in psychic phenomena], and making an *ad hominem* plea [for scientific investigation]. My own point of view is different. For me the thunderbolt *has* fallen; and the orthodox belief has not merely had its presumption weakened, but the truth itself of the belief is decisively overthrown.

According to Ford, James arrives at this view from a study of Mrs. Leonora Piper:

In the trances of this medium, I cannot resist the conviction that knowledge appears which she has never gained by the ordinary waking use of her eyes and ears and wits. What the sources of this knowledge may be I know not, and have not the glimmer of an explanatory suggestion to make, but from admitting the fact of such knowledge I see no escape.

And in his "Final Impressions of a Psychological Researcher" (1911), he says:

When imposture has been checked off as far as possible, when chance coincidence has been allowed for, when opportunities for normal knowledge on the part of the subject have been noted, and skill in "fishing" and following clues unwittingly furnished by the voice or face of bystanders have been counted in, those who have the fullest acquaintance with the phenomena admit that in good mediums *there is a residuum of knowledge displayed* that can only be called supernormal: the medium taps some sources of information not open to ordinary people . . . I wish to go on record for . . . *the presence* in the midst of all the humbug, of *really supernormal knowledge*.

James's views and interest in psychical research never penetrated into mainstream philosophy as it developed in the twentieth century. At least since the 1930s, there has been little discussion of psychical research within mainstream Western philosophy, especially within the analytical tradition. More specifically, there has been little to no discussion of psychical research among metaphysicians of mind and epistemologists. Given that psychical research pertains to questions about the nature of mind and knowledge, why the neglect? One account is that the core focal point of twentieth-century analytic philosophy was the philosophy of language, logic, science, mathematics, and morality. For example, the idea that all philosophical problems could be answered through the analysis of language led many to simply examine problems, such as the mind-body problem or skepticism about the external world, by giving an analysis of language. But this can only be part of the story. It still does explain why there was neglect in the metaphysics of mind and epistemology in particular. It reveals only that the prevailing methodology would have not given attention to psychic phenomena. Thus, why the particular neglect of psychical research in studies of mind and knowledge?

In the case of the metaphysics of mind, this was perhaps due to the fact that the dominant theories of mind in this period were materialism or functionalism as opposed to dualism. Materialism holds that consciousness can be explained fundamentally in terms of purely physical properties. Dualism holds that consciousness cannot be explained in terms of purely physical properties. Functionalism is the view that mental states are primarily defined in terms of the causal role they play in cognition. Functionalism, in general, is compatible with both materialism and dualism, since a functional description of a mental state, such as belief, can be realized by physical as well as nonphysical entities. However, in the twentieth century, functionalism was most commonly paired with materialism. More importantly, though, neither materialism nor functionalism

gave any importance to psychical phenomena. The primary focus of both of these theories was overcoming what Gilbert Ryle (1900–1976) had called the Cartesian *ghost in the machine*. The core idea of the ghost in the machine was that there is a separate substance and self within the body that animates it and is responsible for all of our volitional activities, especially our thoughts. Ryle criticized this view in his famous work *The Concept of Mind* (1949).

In the case of epistemology, the neglect of psychical research was likely due to the influence of two important projects. First, Edmund Gettier, in his *Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?* (1969), argued that Plato's famous definition of knowledge as justified true belief was inadequate because one could have a lucky justified true belief that would not count as knowledge. His argument launched a great deal of analytical philosophy into a search for the correct analysis of knowledge, a debate that continues to this day. Second, W. V. O. Quine, in his *Epistemology Naturalized* (1969), proposed that there was no longer any need for philosophers to really engage in epistemology. In the place of traditional epistemological inquiry into the nature of knowledge and proper instruments of knowledge, Quine proposed the project of naturalized epistemology, which aimed to turn epistemology into a branch of empirical psychology and to unite epistemology with the philosophy of science. To study epistemology was either to study empirical psychology or to study the theory of how claims about reality could be justified through scientific investigation. As a consequence, little attention would be given to anything other than an understanding of how mainstream psychology, roughly from the 1960s to the 1980s, would have provided a picture of human cognition. And a consequence of both of these projects was that little attention was given to different means by which a person can know something. The standard model, which included perception, inference, and testimony, would serve as the core of what needed to be philosophically investigated. Thus, from the 1970s onward in analytic philosophy, one finds, for example, rich discussions of the nature of perception and testimony. However, there is no attempt to draw attention to other modes of knowing distinct from the standard picture of human cognition. One finds little to no discussion of psychic states.

However, philosophers and nonphilosophers in the twenty-first century should pause and look back at the history of twentieth-century metaphysics of mind and epistemology with the following question in mind: Should the long disconnect between these two fields come to an end? There is one good reason to think not and some reasons to think that it should.

*The negative position:* There is no reasonable evidence for the existence of any psychic states, precognition/remote viewing/anomalous cognition. As a consequence, trying to develop a metaphysical picture of the mind

or an epistemological account of knowledge that is sensitive to psychic states would amount to forcing an account of mind and knowledge to be sensitive to data that are corrupt or simply noise. Thus, the separation between philosophy and psychical studies, though accidental in certain respects, has been in the main a positive outcome for philosophical thinking about mind and knowledge.

*The positive position in philosophy of mind:* Assuming that certain kinds of mental phenomena are in fact real, such as remote viewing/precognition, puts additional data on the table for determining what the fundamental nature of the human mind is.

*The positive position in epistemology:* Assuming that certain kinds of mental phenomena are in fact real, such as remote viewing/precognition, puts additional data on the table for determining how and what knowledge is.

The positive position is grounded in the idea that at least some psychic phenomena are supported by rigorous and sound scientific investigation, experimentation, and statistical analyses. In particular, the positive position is supported by evidence in favor of *real-time remote viewing*. The positive position is not supported by evidence of telepathy or telekinesis. It is supported by models that take into consideration both neuroscience and physics (see Volume II of this work for discussion of these models).

While the disconnect between epistemology and studies of anomalous cognition within contemporary research is more than glaring, it is important to note that historically, this was not always the case. If one looks into classical Indian philosophy, one will find that there is ample discussion of a mental state within the context of discussions about knowledge that could be described as an instance of anomalous cognition. In fact, all of the major schools of classical Indian thought—such as the Nyāya (second century CE), the Mīmāṃsā (fifth century CE), and the Vaiśeṣika (second century CE)—debated the possibility of a type of information bearing mental state that could be characterized as a form of anomalous cognition whereby knowledge is acquired. Whether or not the mental state is an instrument of knowledge was the central question debated. It was debated within the context of the *pramāṇa* debates—debates about valid ways of knowing.

In what follows, I aim to accomplish two main tasks. First, I will present some accounts of anomalous cognition and its role in knowledge acquisition from classical Indian philosophy. This section will serve as a data point for the existence of discussions of psychic phenomena as part of *a philosophical tradition* that explored it within the context of debates about instruments of knowledge. My goal here is twofold. On the one hand, I hope to dislodge those that are *skeptical* of the idea that anomalous cognition is part of a proper philosophical discussion by showing that in at least one philosophical tradition, the phenomena were discussed within the area of mind and knowledge. On the other hand, my hope, from a

comparative philosophical standpoint, is to show that exploration of classical Indian philosophy can provide a pathway for future discussions in Western epistemology about the role of psychic phenomena in belief formation and knowledge acquisition. However, my goal here is not to suggest that the classical Indian philosophers in fact got it right about the existence of such states or whether they could be a source of knowledge. The point is more focused on the idea that philosophy can and should engage the *epistemology of anomalous cognition*, a topic it appears to have left behind. Second, I will argue that a theory, historically defended by James, known as neutral monism, and a contemporary theory known as micropsychism, defended by the British analytic philosopher Galen Strawson (2006), provide a distinct foundation for two things. First, they provide a framework for a potential reunion between philosophy and psychical studies. Second, they provide an alternative framework from that which is provided by dualism, materialism, and functionalism for thinking about the nature of anomalous cognition and the question: What is the place of consciousness in nature? Moreover, the standard opposition between dualism and materialism about the relation between mind and nature may be a barrier to future research that lies at the intersection between philosophy and psychical research. The question of how anomalous cognition is possible needs to be united to the question of what is the best explanation of consciousness. Much of what is suggested here is exploratory, rather than definitive, about the direction things should go. The hope is that other philosophers and psychical researchers will engage in more collaborative research.

### **CLASSICAL INDIAN THEORIES OF YOGAJA PRATYAKṢA**

In classical Indian philosophy, there are six orthodox schools and three heterodox schools. An orthodox school accepts the ultimate authority of the sacred texts known as the Vedas, and a heterodox school rejects the ultimate authority of the Vedas. All schools of Indian philosophy discuss a mental state, variously called, *yogaja pratyakṣa*, *ārsjñāna*, or *siddhadarśana*. The core debate, for example, is over whether *yogaja pratyakṣa* is a *pramāṇa*. In other words, are yogic perception, *ṛṣi* (sage) cognition, and siddhic vision a means of acquiring knowledge about something? Two schools, the Mīmāṃsā (fifth century CE) and the Cārvāka (the materialist school in Indian philosophy, origins about 600 BCE) argue that it is not (Das, 2002, p. 419). The remaining seven argue that it is. However, some thinkers within the seven schools disagree over exactly how the mental state is an instrument of knowledge, what its fundamental nature is, and whether *yogaja pratyakṣa* (paranormal awareness acquired by yoga practice), *ārsjñāna* (intuition of sages), and *siddhadarśana* (supernatural ability



acquired through spiritual perfection) should be thought of as being the same. Because of the immense literature on the topic in classical Indian philosophy, particularly with reference to the *Yoga Sūtra* (Rao, 2011) and the purpose of the current work, I will focus my discussion in this section on the Nyāya theory, the Vaiśeṣika theory, and the Mīmāṃsā critique. The core point of this presentation is that exploration of classical Indian philosophy does reveal discussion of a kind of *supernormal* perception within the context of a debate about valid instruments of knowing. Thus, it is not out of bounds to think that supernormal perception can be part of epistemology proper.

### The Nyāya Theory

Within the eminent tradition of the Nyāya school of philosophy, stretching from its founder Akṣapāda Gautama (second century CE) to members of the Navya-Nyāya (sixteenth century CE), the so-called New School, such as Udayana (tenth century CE), Gangeṣa (twelfth century CE), and Jayanta Bhaṭṭa (ninth century CE), there has been a great deal of discussion over a kind of perception called *extraordinary perception* (EP). There are at least two different understandings of EP. In the *person-based* model of EP, a perception is said to be *extraordinary* because of the kinds of things that it is about and because of the nature of the kind of person that can have such a perception. *Yogaja pratyakṣa* means perception of the yogin. In the *universal-based* model of EP, a perception is said to be *extraordinary* because it involves an ordinary sensory connection to something, a universal, which is taken to be extraordinary. A universal, in general, is the referent of a general term, such as “cow.” When we ask the question what does the name “Manjula” refer to, we are inclined to answer that it refers to the person picked out by the name “Manjula.” However, “cow” is not like “Manjula”—it refers to more than a single cow; it refers to all cows, past, prior, and present. In the *universal-based* model, a perception is *extraordinary* because when one is appropriately connected to the universal by a sensory connection, he or she is, through the nature of universals, also connected to all prior and future instances of the universal. *Sāmānyalakṣaṇapratyakṣa* means universal-based sensory connection. Following is an account of both models of extraordinary perception.

Das (2002) characterizes the person-based model as follows:

The Naiyāyikas hold that the supernormal perception of an individual, i.e., a *yogin* is also as real as any other perception. They call such a perception a supernormal one, for such perceptions are beyond the range of normal perception. They can perceive the subtle objects, atoms, and minds of others, air, space, time, etc. through this

perception. Jayanta Bhaṭṭa describes yogic perception as the perception of subtle, hidden, remote, past, and future objects and considers it to be the highest excellence of human perception. And he rejoins that *yogins* perceive all objects in all places through cognition simultaneously. The supernormal state of mind acts as the supernormal sense-object contact (*alaukika sannikarṣa*). This type of contact is known as *yogaja sannikarṣa* which causes *yogaja pratyakṣa*. (pp. 419–420)

The core account of extraordinary perception in the *person*-based model of EP is that it is a form of supernormal perception, a kind of perception in which one's normal perceptual capacities are enhanced so as to allow one to have a cognition of the past, the future, subtle things, hidden things, and even remote entities. Of course, one might simply ask: How can the mind make contact with future objects so as to have supernormal perception of them? Here it is interesting to note that the Nyāya do not hold that EP requires *contact*; rather, they hold that the supernormal overall state of the mind is sufficient to generate the perception. In normal perception, the senses come into contact with the objects that are thereby what is perceived by the knower. However, in yogic perception, it is because the mind is in a *supernormal* state that it can deliver perceptions that have elements that are (1) about the past; (2) about the future; (3) about entities that are remote in space; (4) about entities that are very subtle, like air; and perhaps, even (5) about entities that are partially occluded or hidden.

Chakrabarti (2010) offers a rendering of the *universal*-based account of EP. To understand the universal-based account, it is instructive to consider first how one could be justified in believing the conclusion of the following argument, called *the smoke to fire argument*:

There is a fire on the hill over there; because I can see smoke above the hill over there; and wherever there is smoke there is fire, such as when I am in my kitchen cooking.

The conclusion of this argument is *that there is a fire on the hill over there*. The core premises are: (1) *I can see smoke above the hill over there*, and (2) *wherever there is smoke, there is fire*. However, while it is clear that one can use perception to gain knowledge of the presence of smoke above a hill, which is stated in premise (1), one must ask: How can one know (2) that wherever there is smoke, there is fire? The Nyāya maintain that the only way one can know such a claim is through *extraordinary perception*. The reason is that the truth of such a claim requires grasping the universal *fire* and the universal *smoke* and understanding the relation between them. In general, one cannot infer from a finite set of observations of the



absence of fire and the absence of smoke, and the presence of fire and the presence of smoke, that wherever there is smoke, there is fire. A finite sample of co-variation of absence and presence of  $x$  and  $y$  cannot provide justification for the universal claim. In the universal-based model of EP, the following occurs:

1. S has an ordinary sensory perception of a particular P.
2. When S has an ordinary sensory perception of a particular P, she also has an ordinary sensory perception of a universal U present in P. For example, when Renu perceives a cow before her in the pasture, Renu has a sensory connection, through her ordinary perception, of the universal *cowness* present in the cow before her.
3. A universal that is wholly present in a particular P has an extraordinary property: *What one comes to know of it in a particular* extends to all instances of the universal, past, present, and future.
4. So, by (1)–(3), S can have an extraordinary perception of what is true of all of the instances of a universal U simply by having an ordinary sensory perception of a universal U present in P.

Given the distinction between the two accounts, it is legitimate to wonder whether both accounts of *yogaja pratyakṣa* are in fact renderings of a mental state that could be placed within the category of *anomalous* cognition. An initial response is to say that only the person-based model is an account that should be thought of as falling under the category of anomalous cognition. The universal-based account rests on the idea that the perception is extraordinary because of an ordinary connection to an extraordinary entity, a universal, something that is the referent of a general term, such as “cow,” and refers to all of its instances past, present, and future. Ultimately, though, the question of whether *yogaja pratyakṣa* should be thought of as falling under the category of anomalous cognition depends on deep historical and textual analysis. Another important question concerns whether practicing yoga is important. It could simply be that what is important is that a person has a certain brain structure rather than anything that derives from yogic practice.

### The Vaiśeṣika Theory

Praśastapāda (fourth century CE) is one of the core contributors to the Vaiśeṣika school of philosophy. *Ārṣjñāna* (*rṣi* cognition) is one of the four kinds of *vidya* (knowledge), and some Indian philosophers treat it as being a state that is similar to *yogipratyakṣa* (yogic perception) and *Siddhadarśana* (siddhic vision). Sjödin (2012) provides a delineation and discussion of Praśastapāda’s account of the distinction between the three states in his *Praśastapādabhāṣya*:

*Yogipratyakṣa*: Y-cognition. But for the yogis, different from us, who are *yukta* (absorbed in meditation), arises through the inner sense assisted by merit born from yoga, a correct vision of the own nature of their own self [the transcendental true self], [the self] of others, *ākāśa*, space, time, wind, atoms, inner sense [and] the qualities, motions, generalities, [and] particularities inherent in these [substances] and of inherence itself. For the ones who are *viyukta* then, arises perception of the subtle, concealed and remote, by means of the fourfold contact when assisted by merits born from yoga. (p. 473) . . .

*Siddhadarśana*: S-cognition. Siddhic vision is not a distinct (i.e. another) cognition. Why? This vision, which is preceded by effort [and] concerns subtle, concealed and remote objects visible to seers who are accomplished in [the practice of] eye and feet-ointment, the sword and globule, is just perception. Furthermore, the [distinctness of the] valid vision of matured merit and demerit of sentient beings in heaven, atmosphere and on earth, [being] grounded in the movement of the planets and stars, is just inferential. Furthermore, the [distinctness of the] valid vision of merit etc. [which is] independent of an inferential mark, is just included in either perception or *ṛṣi* cognition. (p. 474) . . .

*Ārṣajñāna*: A-cognition. For the *ṛṣis*, the ones who arrange the transmitted, arises a cognition which is a presentation of the object as it is and which is appearing. [The cognition] arises from a contact between self and inner sense and from specific merit. [The cognition] is of past, future and present objects beyond the senses, like merit etc., [and of objects] discussed and not discussed in texts. This [cognition] is said to be "*ṛṣic*". Though this generally [occurs] for heavenly *ṛṣis* [it occurs] sometimes for worldly beings as well. Like in the case of a girl who says: My heart tells me that my brother will come tomorrow. (p. 477)

According to Sjödin's account of Praśasta's theory, S-cognitions are not *distinct* from Y-cognitions because they are simply a form of *perception*. This, however, does not rule out that S-cognitions are in fact a kind of anomalous cognition. It merely shows that a specific thinker did not think of it as being the same as A-cognitions.

A-cognitions, by contrast, are distinct from Y-cognitions and S-cognitions because (1) A-cognitions involve the apprehension and presentation of an object as it is, (2) they arise because of a peculiar merit on the part of the subject of the cognition, and (3) they involve contact between the mind (*manas*) and the self (*ātman*). In this account, A-cognitions are a presentation of an object as it is due to a contact between the mind of the subject

and the self of the subject that is a product of some kind of merit on the part of the subject. The merit comes from a practice that improves one's capacity to have A-cognitions. The notion of merit is not the kind of merit that is innate or due to a person's heritage. Rather, just as Y-cognition is a function of yogic practices, A-cognition is a function of a practice as well. It is merit that is a contributing cause to the production of an A-cognition. The merit derives from a practice that involves some components of yogic practice, but not all of them. In addition, it is important to note that A-cognitions are a form of *prātibha*, which means "shine forth," "shine upon," "come in sight," and "appear to." They have a strong presentational phenomenology. The word is typically translated as "an instantaneous flash of insight or intuition."

#### *Profile for A-Cognition*

(1) A-cognitions are caused by a merit that is not identical to yogic practice, (2) A-cognitions are not sensual/perceptual because there is no contact between the sense organs and the relevant object, and (3) The experience of A-cognition is nonvolitional; the subject does not try to have an A-cognition.

#### **The Mīmāṃsā Critique**

The Mīmāṃsā school of philosophy (fifth century CE), unlike the Nyāya, the Vaiśeṣika, the Buddhist, and the Yoga school (400 CE), does not accept *yogaja pratyakṣa*. Like the Cārvāka, it challenges the idea that *yogaja pratyakṣa* is a form of knowledge. However, the Cārvāka school accepts only normal sensory perception, they deny testimony, inference, memory, and all other commonly discussed potential *pramāṇa* (valid cognition). By contrast, the Mīmāṃsā are more liberal in the sources they accept. Perception, testimony, and inference are all acceptable, while memory and yogic perception are not. At least one argument they offer against yogic perception is what I will here call the exclusion-by-reduction argument.

#### *Exclusion-by-Reduction Argument*

1. Yogic perception is the product of a sustained practice of meditation. The perception that is produced through a sustained practice of meditation is a presentational flash of insight that is information bearing.
2. The information presented by yogic perception either makes reference *only* to an event in the past that involved perception or testimony about something, or it presents itself as being about something *more than* that which has occurred in the past.

3. If it apprehends something that is just about the past, then it is not distinct from what is found in memory. And since memory is invalid, yogic perception is invalid.
4. If it apprehends something more than that which was perceived in the past, then it is illusory, since it apprehends something that is nonexistent.
5. So, yogic perception is invalid either because it reduces to memory of prior knowledge or because what it purports to be about is illusory.

Das (2002, p. 422) notes that there are three additional reasons why the Mīmāṃsā do not recognize yogic perception as a source of knowledge:

1. Sense organs by their nature have limitations. While it is true that the power of the sense organs can be increased by practice, there would appear to be a limit to what they can access.
2. While it is true that the power of a particular sense faculty can be increased, it is not true that a yogin that practices can see everything with his eyes. For example, his eyes cannot reveal sound nor his ears reveal color.
3. Although a person can possess a superior power of vision, the superior power of vision can be applied only to visible objects. *Dharma* (duty, righteous way of living) is not visible and is only knowable through the study of the Vedic texts. Thus, it cannot be the object of perception.

### General Commentary

It is not clear that these accounts of *yogaja pratyakṣa* are acceptable. And it is not clear that these critiques are decisive. Rather, it appears that a number of critical points of discussion are necessary. On the one hand, it is not clear, and in fact it may turn out to be false, that yogic practice, or practice of any kind, has anything to do with the capacity for psychic abilities. As noted earlier, it may turn out that it is the structure of the brain and some specific above normal or variations from the normative functioning that accounts for anomalous cognition. In addition, further analysis of classical Indian texts is needed to determine both the actual positions in defense of *yogaja pratyakṣa* and scope of the criticisms. Moreover, there are other criticisms leveled by the Mīmāṃsā that need to be considered.

What is plausible from this section and the discussion preceding is the following. There is a debate in classical Indian philosophy over whether *yogaja pratyakṣa* is an instrument of knowledge, which in turn shows that there are philosophical discussions of supernormal perception within

epistemology. A suggestive claim here is that perhaps contemporary philosophers should return to thinking about this phenomenon to move forward in the theory of knowledge. Epistemology might be drastically modified through consideration of extraordinary perception, especially in the case of real time remote viewing. In addition, this discussion need not and should not focus only on classical Indian philosophy. Rather, it should and must engage the relevant contemporary literature in neuroscience and physics.

## **PHILOSOPHY OF MIND AND ANOMALOUS COGNITION RESEARCH**

As we saw in the previous section, some schools of classical Indian philosophy were interested in the question: Is yogic perception a way of gaining knowledge and if so, how? This ancient question is completely absent from contemporary analytical and phenomenological investigations into the nature of the human mind or the limits and means of human knowledge. In this section, I wish to turn away from questions about methods of knowing to theories of consciousness. For, as James points out in his "Does Consciousness Exist?" (1904), one important fact about consciousness is that it is there for the purposes of knowing. Thus, investigating the nature of consciousness would appear to be central to understanding the possibility of knowledge through anomalous cognition. And by putting anomalous cognition on the table, there is new data for thinking about the nature of the human mind.

As I noted in the introduction, the dominant paradigm for thinking about the mind and psychic phenomena has been materialism and functionalism and, to a much lesser degree, dualism. The thrust of my exploration here will be the following: Could two distinct theories, James's neutral monism and Strawson's micropsychism, serve as a ground for reuniting and revitalizing philosophical collaboration with psychical research as a path forward in the debates about the nature of mind and knowledge? Although one can never be so confident as to think that labor on a new enterprise of research will deliver the fruits of new discovery, it is quite clear that to ignore the possibilities at the intersection of philosophy and psychical research that may come out of the foundation of a new framework for thinking about the place of mind in nature is simply to engage in *meta-epistemic negligence*: a failure to be openminded to the possibilities of inquiry by exposing oneself to a paradigm that confronts one's own potential cognitive blind spots and implicit biases in inquiry.

In addition, the current state of metaphysics of mind is quite distinct from what it was some 40 years ago when physicalism and functionalism reigned. In his *Realistic Monism: Why Physicalism entails Panpsychism*

(2006), Galen Strawson defends a version of *micropsychism*. While panpsychism maintains that mind is a fundamental feature of the universe present everywhere, micropsychism holds that some properties or elements at the fundamental level have experiential properties. The core motivation for the thesis is the following:

1. Humans are experiential conscious beings. Humans have real conscious experience.
2. If everything at the fundamental level of explanation is non-experiential and nonconscious, then we cannot explain human consciousness.
3. So, not everything at the fundamental level of explanation is nonexperiential.

Strawson's defense of (2) is centered on an analogy. Just as one cannot explain how to get extension in space from nonextended points, one cannot understand how to get experiential conscious properties from nonexperiential nonconscious properties. So, if we are going to take seriously the fact that human macroexperience is in space and time, we ought to think about the existence of microexperiential properties at the fundamental level. Microexperiential properties are the properties in virtue of which either macroexperiential states are constituted or emerge from.

Strawson is not alone in his defense of a nonmaterialist, nonfunctionalist, and nondualist account of mind in nature. David Chalmers (forthcoming, a) has also articulated a variety of positions in the area of panpsychism, as well as offered a defense and a critique of different versions. It is fair to say that even if contemporary analytic philosophy is dominated by materialism about the mind, the current defenses of nonmaterialist and nondualist type theories appears to suggest that a new paradigm could be on the horizon. In what follows, my point of departure into the relation between the metaphysics of mind and research into anomalous cognition will be the contemporary work of David Chalmers on consciousness and its place in nature. From there, I will present and critically explore an argument that brings James's neutral monism and Strawson's micropsychism into contact with research on anomalous cognition.

According to C. D. Broad (1951/1925) there are 17 different options for how one can think about the relation between mind and nature. David Chalmers, writing some 75 years later on the same topic, presents six basic options. For purposes of simplicity, I will use a modified version of Chalmers' (2003) setup for how to think about the relation between mind and nature.

Let *consciousness* be that property of existence that is captured through the subjective qualitative component of experience—how things seem and feel from the first-person point of view. Phenomenal properties are



the properties of subjective experience, how red looks, what a rose smells like, what F# sounds like, the difference in feel between velvet and sandpaper. Conscious human subjects, at least in their waking moments, experience a vast array of phenomenal properties unified together in their stream of consciousness as time passes.

Let *materialism* be the claim that human mentality, consciousness, phenomenal properties—the what it is like feature of human experience—is completely explainable and reducible to modern physics as it is currently understood. Perhaps the story is not completely available to us at present, but the materialist thesis is a commitment to the idea that ultimately consciousness is nothing more than a physically emergent phenomenon. With these two definitions in place, the antimaterialist argument based on conceivability is as follows:

1. If it is conceivable that consciousness can exist without materiality, then it is possible that consciousness can exist without materiality.
2. It is conceivable that consciousness can exist without materiality.
3. So, it is possible that consciousness can exist without materiality.
4. If materialism is true, then it is necessarily true.
5. So, materialism is false.

The Western historical origination point for this kind of argument is the early modern rationalist philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650). His famous mind-body dualism argument has the same basic structure as the previous argument. The core idea is that because we can conceive of our consciousness as being separated from our material bodies, it is possible for it to be the case. At least one reason it appears to us that we can conceive of consciousness independent of materiality is that when we introspect into the nature of our conscious field of experience, we do not notice any physical-like phenomena, such as the property of extension in space. This puts us in a position to project out consciousness without materiality even though we are beings for whom consciousness and materiality are united. This idea, the possibility, of disembodied consciousness is then brought into contact with the claim that materialism is necessarily true, if true at all. The idea here is that given that materialism is about how things are at the fundamental level, there is no possibility for it to be otherwise. Materialism is a claim about how things must be. Materialists are not just claiming that consciousness is actually a function of material properties. Rather, they are claiming that it must be the case that consciousness is a function of material properties. The contradiction is that the necessity of materialism conflicts with the possibility of disembodied consciousness. The conclusion is that materialism must be false. The conceivability argument is not to be defended here, even though

many have found it persuasive. Rather, it is to be used, as it often is, as a way to set up a space of theories about the relation between human consciousness and nature. Again, modifying somewhat from Chalmers' (2003) articulation, here are the relevant options.

1. *Type A materialism*. It is not conceivable that consciousness exists without materiality. So, even though conceivability is a guide to possibility, we have no evidence that it is possible for consciousness to exist without materiality. So, consciousness is reducible to fundamental physics.
2. *Type B materialism*. It is conceivable that consciousness exists without materiality, but we cannot conclude from the conceivability of consciousness without materiality that it is possible; so the antimaterialist argument fails. So, consciousness is reducible to fundamental physics.
3. *Type C materialism*. It is *at present* conceivable that consciousness exists without materiality, and conceivability does provide a guide to possibility, but it will *not* be conceivable in the future. The materialist at present faces a challenge of providing us with a framework for how to think about the relation between matter and consciousness. But there is no fundamental problem. So, consciousness is reducible to fundamental physics. We just do not have the story at present.
4. *Type D dualism*. Microphysics is not causally closed. Consciousness, via phenomenal properties, plays a role in affecting the physical world. In this view, also known as *interactionism*, conscious states can cause material states, and material states can cause conscious states. That is, causation goes both ways.
5. *Type E epiphenomenalism*. Conscious states are ontologically distinct from material states, but conscious states do not causally alter material states. By contrast, material states do causally alter conscious states. Causation only goes one way: from the physical to the phenomenal.
6. *Type F monism*. Consciousness is constituted by the intrinsic properties of fundamental physical entities, whatever they maybe. In this view, consciousness is located at the fundamental level of physics; it is not something that is reducible to fundamental physics.

As I noted at the outset, there are two dominant paradigms in discussions of anomalous cognition. Those paradigms are the materialist paradigm and the dualist paradigm; perhaps there is even a slight preference for the materialist paradigm, since skepticism about anomalous cognition is best engaged through rigorous scientific methods, which at present, rest

on a materialist paradigm. However, it could be that type F monism provides a distinct framework for thinking about how anomalous cognition is possible. For the purposes of the argument, I will be exploring neutral monism and micropsychism which can be defined as follows.

*Neutral monism* is the fundamental level; there is one substance that is intrinsically neither physical nor mental. *Micropsychism* posits that at least some of the elements at the fundamental level are experiential/conscious; call these micropsychic elements or properties. That is, neutral monism, in contrast to both dualism and materialism, holds that there is something neutral in nature that allows for both mental and physical properties to arise; micropsychism, in contrast to both dualism and materialism, holds that microexperiential/micropsychic/conscious properties are to be found at the fundamental level of explanation. With these definitions in place, there is an interesting argument worth exploring. It concerns how thinking about the best explanation of consciousness is central for thinking about the best explanation of anomalous cognition.

### **The Argument from Neutral Monism and Micropsychism to Anomalous Cognition**

1. Consciousness is a real phenomenon that needs to be explained rather than explained away as some kind of illusion.
2. Either materialism, dualism, neutral monism, or micropsychism provides the best explanation of consciousness.
3. Anomalous cognition is a conscious phenomenon dependent on conscious experience.
4. Neutral monism or micropsychism provides a better pathway for explaining consciousness than what is offered by materialism and dualism.
5. If theory  $x$  offers a better pathway for the explanation of phenomenon  $p_1$  than theories  $y$  and  $z$ , and phenomenon  $p_2$  is dependent for its explanation on an explanation of  $p_1$ , then theory  $x$  offers a better pathway for the explanation of phenomenon  $p_2$  than theories  $y$  and  $z$ .
6. So, neutral monism or micropsychism offers a better pathway for the explanation of anomalous cognition.

#### *Critical Exploration*

Consideration of premise (1): It is impossible to believe that consciousness is a mere illusion. For something to be an illusion is for there to be, as many philosophers have pointed out, an appearance/reality distinction. For example, the oar submerged in water appears to a perceiver *as bent*, but the reality of it is that it is not. By contrast, how consciousness is revealed to us in our waking life is through the phenomenology we

experience in our waking activities. If something seems a certain way to a person, then it surely seems that way to the person. They can be wrong about whether the way things seem to them captures reality, but they cannot be wrong about the way things seem to them, or that they seem a certain way at a given time. So, consciousness is a real phenomenon, and it needs to be explained.

Consideration of premise (2): Is it possible that materialism, dualism, neutral monism, and micropsychism do not provide an exhaustive set of options for explaining the place of consciousness in nature? As Broad delineated it, there are 17 options. So, the answer would be *yes* there are other positions to consider. However, within the current exploration, it appears that we have been generally considering two options: materialism and dualism. So, the question is: What is the best set of options to add to that set to get a more expansive set of theories for the purposes of innovation, explanation, and perhaps even a paradigm shift? With the historical precedent of James as a neutral monist, and the current defense of varieties of panpsychism, it is at least plausible to put neutral monism and micropsychism alongside materialism and dualism as the leading theories worth thinking about with respect to consciousness. However, it should be noted that David Chalmers (forthcoming, b) has given a larger, more expansive presentation of options in the space of panpsychism. For my purposes here, it will be sufficient to explore the argument with respect to neutral monism and micropsychism. I prefer micropsychism to panpsychism because micropsychism is the more conservative theory between the two. While panpsychism says that everything at the fundamental level has experiential and conscious properties, micropsychism holds that only some of the elements at the fundamental level do. One way to consider the point critically is by thinking through whether micropsychism is less revisionary with respect to physics than panpsychism is. On the one hand, it might be less revisionary because it posits only some experiential properties at the fundamental level. On the other hand, it can be argued that it is more complex because it posits only some experiential properties at the fundamental level. The idea is that the theory is then required to show how and why there are only some experiential properties at the fundamental level as opposed to being involved with every fundamental thing.

Consideration of premise (3): Is it possible to doubt that anomalous cognition is a real phenomenon? I believe that it is possible to doubt that everything that falls under the category of anomalous cognition is a real phenomenon. However, if sound scientific evidence through experimentation and statistical analyses supports the view that real-time remote viewing is actual, then I see no reason to push skepticism further simply because we have not found the appropriate model for understanding the phenomenon. The story goes the other way around. Given the evidence, we ought to be searching for an explanation. This is what makes the

possibility of unifying philosophy and research into anomalous cognition interesting.

Consideration of premise (4): Why believe that the currently under-researched options of neutral monism and micropsychism offer a superior explanation of consciousness than that offered by materialism or dualism?

### **The New Paradigm Argument**

1. Materialism faces the *hard problem of consciousness*.
2. Dualism faces the *hard problem of causation*.
3. Neutral monism faces the *hard problem of creation*.
4. Micropsychism faces the *hard problem of combination*.
5. We cannot conceive of a solution to the *hard problem of consciousness for materialism*.
6. We cannot find a model of interaction causation between the physical and the nonphysical to solve the *hard problem of causation for dualism*.
7. Although the creation problem and the combination problem are problems that stand in the way of neutral monism and micropsychism, we have not spent nearly as much time thinking about these problems as we have thinking about the hard problems of consciousness and causation.
8. So, neutral monism and micropsychism offer a better pathway for explaining consciousness than either materialism or dualism.

### **Critical Examination of the New Paradigm Argument**

*The hard problem of consciousness* is a particular problem for materialism. The question is: How can consciousness arise from purely nonconscious material matter and physical forces? A point of departure for negativity about a material explanation of consciousness can be found in the analogical argument, given earlier from Strawson. Just as we cannot understand how nonextended points can give rise to extension in space, we cannot understand how completely nonexperiential nonconscious matter and forces can give rise to something experiential and conscious.

*The hard problem of causation* is a particular problem for dualism. Given that it posits two distinct kinds of things—minds and matter—the problem is the following. Humans engage in the mind-to-matter direction of causation, such as when one decides in her mind where she wants to go, subsequently forms an intention to go to the location, and then actually does so. Humans are subject to the matter-to-mind direction of causation, such as when one retracts his hand from a flame because of the pain caused from the heat at the surface of his hand. The two directions require that the nonmaterial mind be able to interact with nonmental matter. How

so? Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia (1608–1680) initially articulated the hard problem of causation in her exchange with René Descartes. Unless we have a model of causation in which we can understand how two distinct kinds of things can interact, we have no grip on how to solve the hard problem of causation. Some 350 years after the initial articulation of the problem, it is no easier to see how to move forward on the problem.

*The hard problem of creation* is a particular problem for neutral monism. The issue is: How can something that is neither mental nor physical give rise to things that are physical and mental? Of course, this problem is hard. One could even argue as follows:

1. (E) Something nonextended gives rise to (creates) something extended.
2. (M) Something material that is nonmental gives rise to (creates) something that is material and mental.
3. (N) Something neither material nor mental gives rise to (creates) things that are either material or mental.
4. If (E) is impossible to understand, then (M) and (N) are impossible to understand.
5. (E) is impossible to understand.
6. So, (M) and (N) are impossible to understand.

If neutral monism is to have an advantage over materialism, it better have a way of distinguishing itself from Strawson's argument that merely shows that because (E) is impossible, (M) is also impossible. On a first pass, I would say that (M) and (N) both appear to be equally problematic for our understanding. But the first pass look is overridden by the real consideration that drives Strawson's and other antimaterialist arguments about the relation between (E) and (M). The key is that in addition to the *prima facie* impossibility of the relevant kind of explanation how (M) is possible, we have tried hard and *still* failed to come up with anything. Does the same issue hold true for neutral monism? It would seem not, since serious research into the prospects of neutral monism, and theories in the area of it, appears to be just starting. We have not even looked seriously at whether (N) could make sense. By contrast, we fail to see how (M) could make sense.

*The hard problem of combination* is a particular problem for micropsychism. (It is also a problem for panpsychism, but I am discussing it here only with respect to micropsychism.) The issue is the following. For micropsychic properties to sum up to conscious human experiences (macropsychic states), they need to *combine* in a special way. For example, how is one's conscious experience of seeing a painting from Picasso's blue period explained by the existence of microconscious properties? For the



microconscious properties to explain the macroconscious state, the properties must combine in certain ways. When the combination problem is stated in this way, it leads to an analogy with chemistry.

For us to understand how hydrogen and oxygen can combine to make water, we need some *chemical theories and laws* that explain the properties of water due to the properties of hydrogen and oxygen interacting in a specific way. Likewise, supposing that  $x$  and  $y$  are distinct micropsychic properties, we need an explanation of how  $x$  and  $y$  can combine to create a macropsychic state. This requires both a theory of what the micropsychic properties are and what their possible modes of combination are. Do we have a solution to the combination problem? Not yet. Is the situation with the combination problem similar to the problem that we face with the creation problem for neutral monism? It pretty much is.

Both the creation problem and the combination problem are requests for a new theory. In the case of neutral monism, the idea is that we need an account of what kind of thing is fundamentally nonmental and nonmaterial. Notice that it is negatively characterized as being nonmental and nonmaterial. Can it be given a positive characterization that still captures the fact that it is *neutral* with respect to the mental and the material? That would be a first step. In addition, we need to know how the neutral can give rise to mental and material kinds. In the case of the combination problem, we need to find out what the micropsychic properties are and to see how they can combine. The bottom line argument is that we know in detail from a philosophical point of view what the problems are with materialism and dualism. We do not have anywhere near the traction on the problem space with respect to neutral monism or micropsychism.

Finally, the defense of the main argument from neutral monism and micropsychism to anomalous cognition is not complete without consideration of the fifth premise.

If theory  $x$  offers a better pathway for the explanation of phenomenon  $p_1$  than theories  $y$  and  $z$ , and phenomenon  $p_2$  is dependent for its explanation on an explanation of  $p_1$ , then theory  $x$  offers a better pathway for explanation of phenomenon  $p_2$  than theories  $y$  and  $z$ .

This step is central to seeing the path forward for a possible union between philosophy of mind and research into anomalous cognition. There are two points to consider. First, there is the explanatory point that the principle aims to make. The idea is that when one phenomenon, the higher-level phenomenon, is dependent on another phenomenon, the lower-level phenomenon, then the theory that best explains the lower-level or enabling phenomenon must be the basis for explaining the higher-level phenomenon. Anomalous cognition is a conscious-level experience. No matter what one says about the unconscious processes that give rise to it, we would have no evidence for it, let alone be capable of thinking about anomalous cognition, were it not a conscious-level

phenomenon that is also reportable. Thus, we need to look at the best theory of consciousness to get at the best explanation of anomalous cognition. Second, there is the availability point. On the assumption that either neutral monism or micropsychism offers the best explanation of consciousness, it does not follow that neurological theories of cognition and physical theories of time are unavailable. The point can be put in two directions. In one direction, the idea is that if the best theory for explaining anomalous cognition is inconsistent with the best theory for what explains consciousness, then given the primacy of consciousness in enabling the phenomenon of anomalous cognition, we must abandon the best theory of anomalous cognition. In the other direction, given that there is good evidence in favor of at least some forms of anomalous cognition, we should perhaps seek a theory of consciousness that is consistent with it. In other words, neither neutral monism nor micropsychism disable current neurological theories or physical theories from playing a role in the final explanation. What these theories do is provide additional resources for a more complete explanation, one that takes into consideration two features of the human condition: consciousness and anomalous cognition.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration in the prior two sections was aimed at accomplishing two things. First, I offered a brief historical look at classical Indian philosophy in which one can find an epistemological discussion of a mental state that could be classified as an instance of anomalous cognition. Second, I offered a guided analytical architecture for thinking about how both research in philosophy of mind and anomalous cognition might find themselves in a useful union together. It is one way the story could go. I suppose that there are other stories as well. The core question that I have investigated is whether some benefit can be had within philosophy by taking on some of the phenomenon discussed in the vast research on anomalous cognition. I believe that the answer is that by placing at least real-time remote viewing on the table for philosophers to think about, there will be new data on the table for thinking about the nature of mind and knowledge. This data will take research that is at the margin of mind and knowledge closer to the center.

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## **Part II**

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# **Psi Research and Skepticism**

