Śrīharṣa's Dissident Epistemology: Of Knowledge as Assurance ⊟

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Abstract and Keywords

Śrīharṣa's 12th-century Amassed Morsels of Refutation (Khandaṇa-khaṇḍa-khādya) is a brilliant take-down of the system-building philosophical activities of past thinkers, who had developed great philosophical edifices out of the various sūtra-compilations. Śrīharṣa demonstrates that a philosophical method based on the search for definitions is misguided, indeed incoherent. He develops a rival method, a method of refutation, to undercut the earlier approaches. His method requires him to reconstruct the best possible version of any definition, not merely the best one formulated, and his ability to articulate philosophical positions with greater insight, accuracy, and acuity than their own proponents is astonishing. This chapter examines his reconstruction of a theory of knowledge from his Nyāya predecessor, Udayana, and the counter-reaction of Gaṅgeśa, his Nyāya successor. I will also look at Bimal Matilal's development of a theory of knowledge from post-Śrīharṣa early modern sources and comment on implications for the study of global epistemology.

Keywords: Śrīharṣa, Udayana, Gaṅgeśa, Bimal Matilal, knowledge, epistemology, assurance

Śrīharṣa's Cases

FOR the ancients in India knowledge was a matter of cognizing nature (*tattva-jñāna*), experiencing things as they are (*yathārtha-anubhūti*). Outside of knowledge lay not only inaccurate experience but also doubt, dream, hypothesis, assumption, and pretence. The value of knowledge lay in the escape it afforded from the torments of a cognitive dystopia. It seemed to the ancients that the route to knowledge was through the ability clearly to tell things apart, and so through clarification of concepts and formulation of definitions. This included clarity about the concept of knowledge itself, and the varied provenance of knowledge. For how could one inquire unless one knew the techniques and targets of inquiry, and it is only through inquiry that there can be clarity, and so, in the

end, peace of mind. The energies of the philosophers were therefore spent, and lavishly so, in the search for definitions.

Śrīharṣa, in the twelfth century, saw all this as the height of folly.[1] Mastery of a concept does not require knowledge of a definition, and that is good because nothing anyway can be defined, not even knowledge. Śrīharṣa invents a practice of refutation to set against the practice of definition, but he is not against the things themselves: there is argument and there is reason, just as there is experience and language; what there are not are definitions. Śrīharṣa is no skeptic therefore, nor is he a quietist of Nāgārjunian or Wittgensteinian bent. He is perfectly happy to commit himself to large philosophical claims and to make use of the efficacy of argument.[2] Śrīharṣa is not against philosophy but wants a more liberal philosophical method, using concepts but not fixing them. One need not have a definition of aesthetic greatness to *appreciate* a particular work of art as great.

Śrīharṣa's typical method of refutation is to tie the definitions of the philosophers in so many dialectical knots that they eventually choke to death. He claims to prefer this (p. 523) method because its very complexity discourages abuse by the disingenuous; those with sincerity, on the other hand, could adopt his method, which was fully generalizable, and use it against whatever new definitions were brought forth. When it came to the definition of knowledge, however, and only then, Śrīharṣa introduces a rather different approach.[3] He tells miniature stories, the import of which is that there can be accurate experience that is not knowledge. His stories serve to test his readers' epistemic intuitions. Let me call any such story a "Śrīharṣa case." His aim is not to show that the definition of knowledge requires supplementation, but that the act of defining knowledge is absurd. This is why a Śrīharṣa case is different in ambition from a Gettier case in contemporary epistemology.[4] A feature of the cases is there is always an implied contrast scenario, and what is tested are the differential intuitions one has in the two scenarios.

The first is the Case of the Self-Confident Gambler.[5] This gambler sees the closed fist of his opponent and is immediately convinced that the fist contains exactly five shells. His conviction is a pure guess, but Śrīharṣa is careful to point out that the fact that chance is involved does not allow us to respond that he does not really believe; for a farmer too is convinced that the scattered seeds will yield a crop, even knowing at the same time that chance events may intervene. And indeed there are five shells in the closed fist; the conviction is correct. The implied contrast scenario is one where all is the same except that there are four shells, not five, and the gambler's conviction is misplaced.

The second Śrīharṣa case is the Case of the Deceived Deducer.[6] A deduction is made to the effect that a fire is burning on the far-off mountain, based on the premise that a plume of smoke can be seen rising up above it. What is seen, in fact, is a plume of mist in the crisp early morning air: the premise is false. We are nevertheless to suppose that there is a fire and the deducer is accurate in his firmly inferred belief that this is so. Śrīharṣa says that the inferential belief that there is a fire on the mountain does not fall into the category of knowledge, and it is not clear if he thinks he is simply reporting the intuition of any competent user of the Sanskrit word *pramā* or if he is actually tutoring

those intuitions with the help of the story. It does not make any difference to the case that the deducer is not having a singular thought about a particular fire, and this case does in fact bear a structural resemblance to a standard Gettier case involving existentially quantified belief, something Bimal Matilal was the first to point out.[7] Since then other Indian examples have been found in the work of Dharmottara, the ninth-century Buddhist philosopher, and an extensive Tibetan discussion has also come to light.[8] In Dharmottara's vivid example, a swarm of flies is taken as evidence that there is a piece of rotting meat: there is indeed meat there, but what looked like flies is in fact just black dust.

A third Śrīharṣa case is the Case of the Misprimed Perceiver.[9] A person spots a far-off creature and sees that it is a cow. The categorical perception is a result of the perceiver's exercise of an ability to distinguish cows from other quadrupeds by the visual cue of having a dewlap. In this case, however, visual cuing is achieved by a piece of cloth that hangs under the cow's neck, not the dewlap; yet the perception is correct. Categorical perception is non-inferential: the role of the visual cue is not to provide a premise in a deduction but to trigger categorization. Śrīharṣa claims that the miscuing undermines (p. 524) the perceiver's right to claim to know (and this example serves by and by to undermine the "no false lemmas" type of response to Gettier, for it is a case where there is no lemma).

A fourth and final Śrīharṣa case appears only later in the discussion, and for that reason is often overlooked.[10] This is the Case of the Lucky Listener. An entirely unreliable witness reports that there are five flowers on the bank of the river; and indeed there are. A second witness, this one wholly reliable, makes the same report. Here Śrīharṣa explicitly describes a pair of contrasting scenarios. In the first scenario, he seems to suggest, the listener has true belief but not knowledge; in the second, the listener knows the reported fact. The point is that merely believing what one hears, even when true, is no way to know. Candrakīrti, the seventh-century Mādhyamika philosopher, had a similar example (and I wonder if Śrīharṣa knew of these Buddhist antecedents)[11]. Candrakīrti considers two people who testify to witnessing a crime, one actually having seen it happen, the other maliciously but perchance veridically fabricating. Should the judge base a guilty verdict on the testimony of the second person our intuition is that justice has not been done. If fairness is to justice what truth is to knowledge then the point of the examples seems to be that conformity to a norm requires more than just getting it right.

One might be tempted initially to respond that in every case there is a fault in the functioning of the mechanism of knowledge-generation (*pramāṇa*), but Śrīharṣa argues that appeal to the origins of one's beliefs cannot solve the problem of definition. That is because there is no way to say what the fault is, in terms general enough to cover every case, other than that the fault is that the source of belief has not yielded accuracy. The proposed definition is now that knowledge is true belief produced by a source that produces a true belief, and the new condition clearly adds nothing to the original. To give an example: it is certainly useful to know what are the sources of clean water, but one cannot define clean water by saying it is such water as comes from a certain source.

The defender of definitions therefore requires an additional condition, but one which bears only on content and not on origin. Śrīharṣa denies that there is any such condition, but he nevertheless wants to review not merely every candidate that has actually been put forward in the history of epistemology but the best possible candidate that is conceivable. In search of the best possible candidate, he now turns to Udayana, his illustrious Nyāya predecessor from the preceding century, and develops out of Udayana's suggestive but undeveloped comments a quite new theory of knowledge. It is a measure of Śrīharṣa's extraordinary intellectual sincerity and ability that he does this even though his eventual ambition is to discredit the reconstructed account.

The Assurance Theory of Knowledge

I said that for the ancients in India knowledge is a matter of experiencing things as they are. By the time of Bhāsarvajña, a little before Udayana, the idea is expressed as being that knowledge consists in accurate circumscription (*samyak-pariccheda*).[12] (p. 525) Bhāsarvajña uses the adjective *samyak* with the meaning "accurate, correct, proper, true, right." It acquires this meaning from its more fundamental sense "going along with or together; turned together or in one direction" (*sami+añc*). One might then, Śrīharṣa proposes, return to this more fundamental meaning and reach a theory of knowledge according to which knowledge consists in true beliefs turned together or pointing in one direction. One version of that idea is that knowledge consists in completeness ("complete, entire, whole" being another secondary meaning of *samyak*), for example that knowledge requires true belief about all the properties or aspects of an object; but this is far too stringent a condition, rendering knowledge unavailable to mortals.[13] Yet the general form of the proposal is perhaps a good one: to know that *p* one must have a true belief that *p* and other true beliefs in some way aligned with the belief that *p*. Let me call any such theory an assurance theory of knowledge, for what it states is that the condition one should add to true belief is additional "collateral" true beliefs, other true beliefs turned in the same direction and thereby providing an assurance. Assurance, as I will explain below, is a notion quite distinct from that of justification.

Śrīharṣa now develops an idea in Udayana in a most interesting way. Udayana had wondered how one can tell if someone's belief is knowledge and had proposed that there are situations in which one can do so because of what he called the "sameness-of-sort" (*tajjātīyatā*) of their belief.[14] He too uses the device of parallel scenarios to illustrate the idea. An "Udayana scenario" is one in which a person can be said to know something immediately, without hesitation or question, because of their having been in states or situations of the same sort. The contrast scenario involves someone who has a belief with the same content, but is encountering the state or situation for the first time, and as a result is not claimed to know. Udayana provides just one example. One sees that a figure is a human being. One has seen many figures of the same sort, and as a result when one sees this figure one can be said to know, immediately and without question, that this is a human being. The contrast is with someone who sees a figure dressed as a wandering monk. They again quickly come to the belief that the figure is a wandering monk, and we can as-

sume they are correct, but having had no experiences of the same sort, it seems intuitively wrong to say that they know. The import of an Udayana scenario is that attributions of knowledge to a subject in a given situation are sensitive to whether the subject has been in situations of the same sort.

Consider a slightly different case. A subject is watching a screen that is alternatively red, green, and blue. After watching for some time the pattern switching regularly in a red-green-blue-red-green-blue sequence, the subject is asked when the screen is red which color will come next. The subject instantly responds "green," and intuitively it is right to attribute to the subject knowledge that the next color will be green. The contrast scenario involves a subject who has seen the sequence of three colors just once. They too are prompted and they too respond "green." The intuition is that it is not right to ascribe knowledge to such a subject. The contrasting intuitions are meant to be as they are even if we stipulate that the first subject does not engage in any sort of inductive reasoning, but their response is simply made in the context of repeated exposure to the (p. 526) color sequence. The mere fact that they have repeatedly been in situations of the same sort, it is alleged, is what inclines us to attribute knowledge.

Udayana's cryptic explanation is that in the case where there is knowledge, it is because the figure is seen together with an indicative mark (*lakṣaṇa-sahacarita-lakṣya-viṣaya-jñā-na*).[15] Situations "of the same sort" are situations in which the figure is seen with that same indicative mark. I am willing to attribute the knowledge "it is a human" to a subject who sees the figure together with hands and feet, and has made an association of the one with the other. I am not willing to attribute knowledge if I do not find in the subject that association. While Udayana's discussion is within the context of knowledge-attribution, Śrīharṣa picks up the idea and proposes it as a solution to the question generated by the Śrīharṣa cases, namely what additional condition distinguishes knowledge from mere true belief.[16] The proposal is that when there is knowledge there is true belief together with additional true belief involving a special detail (*viśeṣa*).[17] Knowledge fails "when one does not see the special detail," he says. Śrīharṣa does not apply the proposal explicitly to his four cases, but we might venture to do so. The proposal seems to handle two of the cases rather well. In the Case of the Deceived Deducer, the particular detail that goes unnoticed is that the plume is made of mist and not of smoke. It is the deducer's unawareness of this specially relevant detail that blocks knowledge. The same can be said of the Case of the Misprimed Perceiver, where the special detail is the fact that there is a piece of cloth under the cow's neck. Again, the perceiver does not know because they are unaware of this special detail of the situation.

Knowledge is true belief along with collateral additional true belief embodying information about special details in the situation. Śrīharṣa now claims that the most general description of the nature of the particular detail is this: it is that an awareness of which settles the question of the presence or absence of a hindrance or glitch, and a lack of awareness of which is the occasion for doubt and error.[18] The very distinction between truth and falsity in belief depends on there being something of this sort. In the Case of the Deceived Deducer there is a glitch, the fact that the plume is made of mist, and the

deducer's lack of knowledge is put down to his lack of awareness about this. He does not know because there is a particular detail about the situation, a detail falling under the generic description, of which he is unaware. Knowledge is assured true belief, and in this Śrīharṣa case belief is unassured. Assurance derives from same-sorted experience, that is to say acquaintance with the particular details that settle the question of the existence of an epistemic glitch.

What about the Self-Confident Gambler? The assurance theory of knowledge, as reconstructed by Śrīharṣa on the basis of hints in Udayana, bears comparison with one contemporary approach to knowledge. The adequacy theory claims that knowledge consists in adequate belief, where belief is adequate if the believer does not lack important information (more true beliefs in the neighborhood of the belief itself).[19] What counts as important cannot be defined other than in generic terms. Adequacy theory struggles, however, over cases where there is simply no important information around, that is, where the negative condition is satisfied trivially, for example a scenario in which one just believes that there is a beetle in a box, and there is no other information about (p. 527) the circumstance that one could be said to be lacking. One's belief is true, and adequate, but ought one count as knowing? A scenario like this resembles the case of the Gambler (on one interpretation; on another interpretation the Gambler is more like a version of a lottery scenario, in which one believes—and rightly so—that one holds a winning ticket), and assurance is here preferable to adequacy insofar as it is a positive, not a negative, condition, and so cannot be fulfilled trivially. In the scenario just mentioned, there is nothing to assure the believer about the truth of their belief, and so they lack knowledge. In short, assurance provides one with *safety* against epistemic risk, the risk that one's beliefs may be false or that the evidence for them may be defeated.[20]

Why Śrīharṣa Nevertheless Rejects His Own New Theory

Śrīharṣa has constructed a new and seemingly very powerful theory of knowledge, of knowledge as assurance. In characteristic manner he now sets out to demolish it. Among his battery of arguments the main lines of attack are these.[21] First, to say that in each knowledge situation there is a certain particular detail is not yet to give a general theory of knowledge, for if one cannot provide a general description of the nature of the detail, then one simply has an infinitely long disjunction of specifications. The only such description available is one put in terms of glitches, but a glitch is a hindrance to knowledge, and so one ends up not having said what knowledge is (one has defined knowledge in terms of assurance, but defined assurance in terms of knowledge—a circularity). Second, while the theory seems to deal well with at least two, perhaps three, of the Śrīharṣa cases, it cannot handle the fourth case, the Lucky Listener. For here the content is identical in both scenarios, and it has already been demonstrated that appeal to the provenance of beliefs, the sources of knowledge, fails (indeed the whole point of assurance theory is to find an alternative). Thus the special detail cannot be the reliability of the witness, for this would

be tantamount to saying that it is again that the belief is true. Third, the assurance theory is still too weak: there are situations where the new condition is met and yet one's intuitions are that there is no knowledge; the situations in question are cases of pretence and hypothetical conjecture. Fourth, and finally, there can be no condition of the sort envisaged, because the possibility that one is dreaming, or that all is a fiction, will not go away. In other words, the proposal does nothing to speak to the possibility of radical skepticism.

One might try to answer some of these criticisms. One might say that what counts as a special detail, just as what counts as important, varies from case to case, and the fact that no generic characterization can be given simply shows that knowledge is irredeemably contextual. To say this is in a sense to agree that knowledge cannot be defined, but only because an overly demanding notion of definition has been brought to bear. Much of Śrīharṣa's argumentation is based on the idea that definitions require the identification (p. 528) of a "running thread" (*anugama*) among what would otherwise be a collection of heterogeneous items. And he is quite right when he says that no such running element can be found. There is no general theory of particular details. Again, one could say that states of pretence and hypothesis are not states of belief, and so do not count as candidates for knowledge. Finally, one could point out that it is not the job of a theory of knowledge to show that radical skepticism is impossible. The possibility of radical skepticism is compatible with our having knowledge in everyday life. One of Matilal's important interventions in *Perception* was to develop a response to skepticism along such lines out of remarks in Uddyotakara and Udayana.[22] Perhaps one could also point out that when one is dreaming, even veridically, the missing information is that one is asleep.

For Śrīharṣa the lesson to be learnt from the defeat of assurance theory is that the very attempt to define knowledge is absurd. One response is that he has loaded the dice by asking for a context-free definition of a context-sensitive concept. Gaṅgeśa, though, draws a different conclusion.[23] The lesson to be learnt is that the right response to the Śrīharṣa cases cannot be to go in search of additional conditions on knowledge. In those cases something has gone wrong, but Śrīharṣa is manipulating our intuitions when he says that they are cases where knowledge comes apart from accuracy. The right response, according to Gaṅgeśa, is to reaffirm the original theory of knowledge as accuracy, and at the same time to diagnose the epistemic problem in the Śrīharṣa cases as having different origins. What we need to do is to draw a distinction between knowledge that is robust and knowledge that is fragile. Fragile knowledge is intolerant of even small variation in the parameters of the situation. There could easily have been four not five shells in the closed fist, and then the gambler would not have known. Fragile knowledge is easily broken. This fragility explains why we are reluctant to agree that the gambler has acquired anything epistemically valuable, but acquiring merely fragile knowledge is nevertheless not the same as failing to acquire knowledge at all. Every one of the Śrīharṣa cases is an illustration of fragile knowledge, not an example of knowledge-failure. Knowledge really is nothing more than believing of something that it is what it is, and not believing of it that it is when it is not. The sources of knowledge generally give rise to robust knowledge, but even when they misfire one may still be lucky enough to gain fragile knowledge, although more often than not one will be led only to error or doubt. Knowledge just

is true belief, because when a belief is true its causal history necessarily constitutes evidence for it (truth necessitates evidential aetiology; necessarily, when a belief is true, cause equals because). Doubt destabilizes knowledge, and when doubts have arisen, for example in contexts of inquiry, what is needed to resolve them is robustness. Śrīharṣa tries to game our intuitions in such a way that we start to think that what we meant all along by "knowledge" is robustness. Gaṅgeśa's view is that we ought not even play the game he invites us to play, the game of searching for an additional condition. Knowledge is a matter of hitting the target, winning the prize (here truth),[24] and how one came to do it or whether one could repeat the feat does not change the fact that one has won. Gaṅgeśa has a cognitive ethologist's conception of knowledge, and indeed his epistemology is naturalist.[25]

Śrīharṣa and Gaṅgeśa, we have seen, have strikingly divergent intuitions about the attribution-conditions of *pramā*. Contextualism is a claim about the semantics of epistemic attribution, the claim that "the truth-conditions of <S knows that p> vary (p. 529) depending on the context in which it is uttered,"[26] context here including the interests, expectations, and so on of knowledge ascribers. Śrīharṣa argues that truth alone does not suffice, and he presents a series of cases where a subject has a true awareness-episode but in which, he claims, no attribution of *pramā* is correct. Gaṅgeśa's opposing view is that truth is sufficient even in these cases. What seems to be in question is whether Śrīharṣa's cases reveal something hidden about the truth-conditions of *pramā*, that more is in general needed to ensure epistemic credibility than successful epistemic performance alone, or whether he is in fact manipulating our intuitions, that he is tutoring us into a new and more demanding way of using the term than is the case in ordinary speech. A fascinating experiment has recently been conducted bearing on just this issue. Various standard cases from contemporary epistemology, including Gettier cases and Goldman's famous "barn" example, were translated into Sanskrit and a very learned traditional Sanskrit philosopher, Pandit Viśvabandhu Bhaṭṭācārya, someone with no training in Western philosophy and little English, was asked for his reaction.[27] In every case he insists that if the awareness is true then it is proper to attribute *pramā*. His linguistic intuitions concur with Gaṅgeśa against Śrīharṣa. Viśvabandhu is, however, steeped in the philosophical tradition of Gaṅgeśa, and this may itself have colored his intuitions.

Bimal Krishna Matilal on Our Epistemic Orientation

Bimal Matilal looks at this entire Indian discussion, a *pramāṇa-śāstra* stretching from the earliest writings of Gautama in the *Nyāya-sūtra* through to the sophisticated epistemology of Gaṅgeśa's Navya-Nyāya, and asks another question: What is the value of knowledge? What is the importance of being a knower rather than a believer? Why is this something one should care about? Matilal agrees with Śrīharṣa that philosophy cannot be reduced merely to an arid game of searching for definitions, something hardly true to the spirit of the ancients, for whom philosophy is a matter of profound importance in the conduct of

human life. Śrīharṣa's dialectical maneuverings do not undermine philosophy but save it from the definition-mongers. The new epistemology in *Perception* draws its inspiration from the early modern South Asian theories of knowledge that emerged in Śrīharṣa's aftermath. Matilal transforms Śrīharṣa's reconstruction of Udayana's epistemology, a transformation responsive to Śrīharṣa's fault-finding with that reconstructed theory.

In each of the Śrīharṣa cases, something is missing, some feature other than truth but which makes true belief worth having. Matilal's answer is that it has to do with our overall epistemic orientation, our epistemic identity. Fragile knowledge makes no contribution to our bearing toward the world. It is just haphazard information that has come our way. Vācaspati Miśra II claimed that fragile knowledge is valuable because our minds then at least coincide with the mind of God. Such happy coincidence is to be celebrated, but it is not terribly useful. Matilal instead proposes that the distinction between fragility and robustness has to do with whether *one knows that one knows*. I think the idea $_{(p.\ 530)}$ can be understood by noting an affinity with Harry Frankfurt's move about autonomy. Frankfurt distinguished autonomy of agency from alienation of will by linking the first to what *one wants to want*, and the second to what one merely wants, the former being the states one identifies with and which constitute one's identity as an agent. One identifies with desires one wants, and is alienated from those one doesn't.[28] Matilal in effect introduces a epistemic version of the idea of identification. The point of Matilal's proposal is to locate the mishap in the Deceived Deducer's and the Misprimed Perceiver's attitude toward their own epistemic state: they have a mistaken surety about knowledge that is fragile. Pursuing the analogy with Frankfurt, one might speak of a contrast between belief that is an expression of one's deeper epistemic orientation and belief from which one is epistemically alienated. It is a distinction between what is a part of one's fundamental cognitive orientation toward the world and what is merely an accidental bonus. Matilal's new epistemology is thus a type of assurance theory of knowledge, but assurance now coming from one's true second-order beliefs about oneself rather than from collateral information about the environment of believing. Matilal reports Gaṅgeśa as holding that mere true belief is knowledge *simpliciter* or knowledge "in the primary sense," and he contrasts this with what he calls "second-order certitude."[29] For Gaṅgeśa, a truth-hitting episode or a true awareness already amounts to knowledge. When Matilal, by contrast, affirms that "a knowledge-event is a true awareness which is not infected with a dubious attitude," he is formulating what I have described as an assurance theory of knowledge, with now assurance consisting in second-order certitude. Second-order certitude is another piece of information, without being information about provenance: it is the true belief that one has a true belief; it is epistemic self-confidence. Lack of such confidence destabilizes one in one's epistemic orientation. As Matilal puts it, "if an awareness which happens to be true is infected by a doubt about its knowledge-hood or the lack of it, then the resultant state cannot perform all the functions that a piece of knowledge is supposed to perform,"[30] for example making deductions with that piece of knowledge as a premise.

Let us return to perhaps the trickiest of the Śrīharṣa cases. The Self-Confident Gambler seems to pose a problem even for knowledge as assurance because it could be, at least in principle, that there is no relevant additional feature of the circumstance. The gambler

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truly believes that he truly believes; his self-belief in his gambling prowess is as unshakable as it is veridical. One might say this is not knowledge because, if one proceeds up the hierarchy, at some point the fact that guess-work is at play will show up in a lack of confidence. Yet a gambler who completely identifies with the orientation of chance may, like the willing addict described by Frankfurt, have an autonomous epistemic identity. Matilal himself worries whether even this new epistemology can "resolve all the problems raised by Śrīharṣa when he formulated the counter-examples," but thinks it can as long as "we use the insight contained in the analysis somewhat liberally." His move here is to argue that second-order epistemic confidence does not consist in any inner perception but is rather an inference based on evidence.[31] Though he never says this explicitly, this move permits him to deal with cases like the Self-Confident Gambler in a clever way, for the gambler's conviction is not the result of evidence and inference but merely brute self-belief. Matilal does say of the Śrīharṣa cases that "from this point of view he knows (p. 531) (in this special sense) provided he has certitude (justified or not) which also happens to be true, and that he does not know that he knows for he inferred its knowledge-hood from wrong evidence."[32] Paraphrasing, the point is that the gambler's true belief that there are five shells cannot be part of an epistemic orientation, because orientation consists in those second-order convictions that have a basis in rational endorsement and not in mere willfulness. There is no place for reason in the gambler's identity as an agent of knowing: the gambler wants to be right, and wants to want to be right, but that is all. To say this is to bring the idea of epistemic orientation into line with that of one's epistemic self, conceived of as the set of beliefs one rationally endorses.[33] The gambler's belief isn't knowledge but more akin to a non-perceptual insight of the same sort as the seer's divine insight into the mind of God. The proposal also allows us to explain why we do not attribute knowledge to the blindsight patient, who without awareness of seeing anything is able to guess accurately, when prompted, what lies before them. The blindsighted do not have knowledge because they have no epistemic orientation, no awareness of themselves as knowers, even though their unacknowledged perceptual states are true.

Matilal contrasts the theory, a theory reclaimed from Śrīharṣa against his own refutation, with the idea of knowledge as justified true belief in the Western tradition. In his astute interrogation of the latter idea, the point Matilal emphasizes is that justification provides what he calls "subjective mooring," which is the ability, on demand, to produce a reason for one's belief. And what I have been at pains to stress is the way in which, in his retrieval of Indian epistemology, Matilal does not mine the Indian tradition to find some new account of justification sufficient to answer Gettier, for that would be to appeal to a model of comparative philosophy he absolutely rejects. What he does is to articulate, with great precision and sensitivity, a way of thinking about epistemology in which the notion of justification plays no part, and he does this drawing on and yet transforming a variety of strands in the Indian discussion, reconceptualizing points made by Udayana and Gaṅgeśa in coming to a modern response to Śrīharṣa, a response whose modernity consists in the way it speaks to contemporary concerns about the place and value of knowledge. The new epistemology is, he says with typical understatement, somewhat "different from the commonly accepted notion of knowledge in the Western tradition."[34] Matilal wants to pre-

serve the insights of both Śrīharṣa and Gaṅgeśa by saying that there are two distinct uses of the term "know," a weak sense in which it applies to any truth-hitting episode and a strong sense in which it applies just to those truth-hitting episodes that constitute one's identity as an epistemic agent.

Epistemology from a Sanskritic Point of View

It is far from uncommon in translations of Sanskrit philosophical texts into English to find the neologisms "true knowledge," "false knowledge," "valid knowledge," and "invalid knowledge." At first sight these phrases seem to indicate something amiss in (p. 532) the translators' understanding of the concept of knowledge, for if knowledge is factive then surely phrases like "false knowledge" and "invalid knowledge" are oxymoronic (as in "faith unfaithful kept him falsely true")? If it is a conceptual truth about the verb *know* that <S knows that p> entails or presupposes that p, then the "true" in the phrase "true knowledge" is redundant. In fact these curious neologisms are very revealing about variations in the use of epistemic terminology between English and Sanskrit, something that becomes clear when one looks to see which Sanskrit terms are getting translated in this way. The key term being translated as "knowledge" is the Sanskrit noun *jñāna*, derived from the verb *jñā*. This noun is cognate with Latin *cognosere*, with Greek *gnosis*, and so with English *knowledge*. In popular Sanskrit usage, it is indeed often rightly translated as knowledge, and that is also the meaning one will find if one looks it up in a Sanskrit-English dictionary. Yet, and this is where confusion comes in, there is another meaning of *jñāna*, more common in the philosophical literature but also current in popular usage, where a better translation would be *cognition*. Unlike *to know, to cognize* is not a factive verb, and when a state of cognition arises, there is a further question as to whether it is true or false. When used this way, the contrast being emphasized is with affective and conative states. A similar confusion has been noted with regard to the translation of Latin *cognitio* as used in early modern European works. Jonathan Bennett notes, for example, that the translation of *cognitio* as *knowledge* rather than as *cognition* "has negatively affected scholarship on Spinoza."[35]

One reason this fact is significant is that the same term is inherited in many modern Indian languages including Hindi and Bengali. So when experiments are conducted whose aim is to test the folk Gettier intuitions of modern Indian speakers, and when the experimental questionnaire is translated from English using *jñāna* as a translation for *knowledge*, the apparent discovery that Hindi- or Bengali-speakers to not share Anglophone intuitions about Gettier cases may be an aberration resulting from the use of a false cognate rather than constituting a genuine experimental finding about cross-cultural variation.[36] There is an even greater risk of confusion when the test is performed in English on Indians speaking English as a second language. For what happens then is that the subject mentally translates the English word *knowledge* in the test scenario with vernacular *jñāna*, and is willing to say of a case that there is knowledge, but meaning only to assert thereby that there is cognition. Fresh experiments have indeed challenged the earlier finding that Indians do not share the Gettier intuition of North Americans.[37] One author concludes

that "these results should lead us to reconsider earlier claims that the Gettier intuition isn't shared on the Subcontinent. This is certainly fitting, because in the Indo-Tibetan philosophical tradition, Gettier-style cases were discussed along the banks of the Ganges well over a thousand years before Edmund Gettier published his paper from the banks of the Detroit River."[38] This is true, with the caveat that if the notion of justification is provincial, then so too is the notion of justified true belief, and that may cast doubt on the experimental viability of testing Gettier intuitions across cultures.

In philosophical Sanskrit, *jñāna* is distinguished from another epistemic noun, *pramā*, and it was *pramā* that concerned all the authors discussed above. The noun is (p. 533) derived from the verb *pra+mā*, meaning *to measure*. Unlike *jñāna* this noun is indeed used factively, from its most ancient explication as an experience that represents things as they are (*yathārtha-anubhūti*) onward. It is *pramā* that ends up being translated as "true knowledge" or "valid knowledge" by translators wishing to preserve this point and nevertheless regarding *knowledge* as a true cognate of *jñāna*. Matilal has summed up the whole situation rather well:

> The Sanskrit term *pramā* is usually translated by a careful translator today as "knowledge". This is certainly an improvement upon the older and wrong translation of *pramā* as "valid knowledge". It may be of some interest to see why such a mistaken phrase was offered by earlier (mostly Indian) scholars as a translation of *pramā*. A *pramā* is usually regarded as a special kind of *jñāna* whose truth is guaranteed. This is mostly, though not always, true in Sanskrit (classical) philosophical literature. The word *jñāna*, however, is sometimes used for "knowledge" in ordinary Sanskrit. A knowledgeable person is called *jñānin*. Even in philosophical Sanskrit the distinction between *jñāna* (which can be better translated as a cognitive event or an awareness-episode) and *pramā* is not always maintained, and hence we see *jñāna* used indiscriminately for *pramā*; and it is left to us to gather from the context whether an ordinary cognitive event or a piece of knowledge is being referred to. This interchangeability of *jñāna* for *pramā* has apparently led modern interpreters of Indian philosophy to confuse the issue, and most of them have felt the need for some adjective like "valid" to qualify "knowledge" in order apparently to gain the full force of *pramā* which is distinct from ordinary awareness. This was at best misleading and at worst a blunder that perpetuated misunderstanding of Indian philosophical doctrines by English readers.[39]

I have noted that *pramā* is, unlike *jñāna*, factive. For Matilal this brings the term closer to the English word *knowledge*. Recently, however, Pranab Sen has argued with conviction that the English *know* is actually *not* factive.[40] If that is right, then *knowledge* and *jñāna* would ironically turn out to be genuine cognates after all, genuine because neither is truth-implying. More importantly, the possibility would open that *pramā* is actually a better term to capture the normative concept epistemologists are interested in than *knowledge* is; *knowledge* in English would have parochial features that make it inappropriate or unsuitable for use in epistemology. If what we want to investigate is the epistemic credibility of our cognitive life, then perhaps the Sanskrit vocabulary of *pramā* is a better vehi-

cle for doing so than the Anglophone vocabulary of *knowledge*. There is also an important difference in perspective encoded in the two vocabularies. This follows from the fact that both *pramā* and *jñāna* refer to cognitive episodes, while the English term *belief* normally denotes a dispositional state. Thus *pramā* is to be analyzed not as true belief but as a true awareness-episode. A consequence is that *pramā*, as a cognitive event, has a causal history, and when one asks if a given cognitive event is *pramā* or not (whether it has *pramātva, pramā*-ness), it is natural to seek an answer in the form of a causal explanation. One wonders, for example, whether the same causal factors that brought about the cognitive event also bring about its property of being true.[41] More generally, the term *pramā* refers to a successful performance of an act of experiencing, (p. 534) where success is a matter of experiencing things the way they are, hitting the truth, just as success for an archer is a matter of hitting the target with an arrow. In Sanskrit intuition, epistemology is to be pictured as a cognitive performance.

The rather different picture that English vocabulary encourages is a static picture, one in which there are standing dispositional states, somewhat like virtues, and the relevant question is not whether a performance is successful but whether a standing state is merited. Does the believer have the ability, if demanded to do so, to produce something that would count as evidence or justification for the claim that the belief is true? It would thus be wrong to translate *pramā* as *knowledge*, and then to wonder what counts as justification in the Sanskrit model. The answer is that nothing does, because justification is a parochial feature of a way of thinking rooted in English lexical quirks. A different question must be posed instead: are there any important epistemic differences between different types of successful (truth-hitting) performances of experience?

It is commonly supposed that the properties of the English word *know* and the English sentence <S knows that p> are shared by the translations of these expressions in most or all languages. I have argued not only that Sanskrit *pramā*, the closest term to English *knowledge*, has different properties, but that *its* properties, rather than those of the English term, are the ones most closely related to what epistemologists are actually interested in investigating. English epistemic vocabulary brings with it a variety of parochial associations, including a static rather than performative picture of epistemic agency, an emphasis on the "driving license" model of justification, which skews discussion about the actual value of our epistemic practices, and even, if Sen is right, a non-factive semantics quite at odds with the goals and aspirations of epistemology. What we are interested in as epistemologists is the nature of epistemic performance, the importance of epistemic agency, and the concept of epistemic success, and what we should learn from this is the need to take seriously how philosophy is done in languages other than English.

Conclusion

Intellectual practices are no less open to criticism than are social practices, and sometimes for similar reasons: if, for example, they lack legitimacy or fail to respect the dignity of those involved, as when research in bioethics is conducted without due respect for

the consent of those involved, including the wider public. Sometimes though the criticism of an intellectual practice takes a different form altogether, when what is shown or sought to be shown is that the practice in question fails even to make sense, that it is not simply reprehensible but absurd. Meno famously said this about the practice of inquiring, arguing that it is strung out between the horns of a dilemma: one cannot set off in search of that about which one knows nothing, for inquiry requires a direction; and yet to go in search of what one already knows is an entirely quixotic (p. 535) enterprise. This same dilemma was described by the early Mīmāṃsā philosophers, Śabara and Kumārila, too. Śrīharṣa wants to say something similar about a different practice, the practice of formulating full-bodied definitions, by which I mean definitions that could serve to introduce a concept to someone who does not yet possess it. His objection to the practice is not sociological or political; it is that the very practice of formulating definitions falls short when considered against reasonable criteria of intelligibility. The eminently reasonably criteria he proposes are that an intellectual practice is intelligible only if it is grounded in something other than itself ("well-groundedness"), that these grounds distinct from itself do not themselves turn out to be grounded in it ("non-circularity"), but also that the search for grounds does not sink without ever hitting rock bottom ("finiteness"). The whole of his intellectual effort in *The Amassed Morsels of Refutation* is to show, for each attempt to engage in the practice of providing a full-bodied definition of some concept of philosophical interest, that it fails to achieve intelligibility by these lights, an effort Śrīharṣa describes as making up a different type of intellectual practice altogether, one he calls the practice of refutation (*khaṇḍana*). We don't need a definition of perception in order to see, or a definition of argument in order to argue, and what is wrong with the practice of definition is its claim that mastery of a concept requires possessing a definition. It might seem that this is the very practice on which philosophy as a discipline rests, and if so then Śrīharṣa's target would have been philosophy itself. In the end Śrīharṣa leaves us somewhat uncertain whether we should be searching for a new way to do philosophy, a way that doesn't require us to participate in ungrounded intellectual activities, or whether we are meant to abandon philosophy altogether and adopt less aggressive ways of approaching truth.

Further Reading

Bhaṭṭācārya, Viśvabandhu, translated by J. L. Shaw. "Valid Cognition (*pramā*) and the Truth (*satyatā*) of Its Object." In *Concepts of Knowledge: East and West*, pp. 107–118. Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2000.

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Notes:

(1.) "Little is known of Śrīharṣa's life. Scholars agree that he lived and wrote in North India, sometime in the 12th century C.E., which was a period of great productivity in all branches of Indian culture. The only reliable information that we have about him comes from his statements in his poem, the *Naiṣadhīyacarita.* There, in the closing verse of each *sarga* or chapter, he gives the name of his mother, Māmalladevī, and his father, Śrīhīra. He also states that he was honoured by the king of Kanauj, who has been identified either with the Gāhaḍavāla king Govindacandra (1104-1151 C.E.) or Jayacandra (1168-1200 C.E.)." Granoff, Phyllis. "Śrīharṣa," in *Critical Concepts in Philosophy: Indian Philosophy*, Volume 3 (London: Routledge, 2016).

(2.) For these and other reasons, Granoff casts great doubt on traditional claims that Śrīharṣa is correctly described as an advocate of Advaita Vedānta: Granoff, "Śrīharṣa".

(3.) The method of refutation as applied to the definition of knowledge had been tried, before Śrīharṣa, by Jayarāśi, but with qualified success. Jayarāśi Bhaṭṭa, *Tattvopaplavasiṃha*, edited by Shuchita Mehta and translated by Esther Solomon (Delhi: Parimal Publications, 2010). See Ethan Mills, "Jayarāśi's Delightful Destruction of Epistemology," *Philosophy East and West* 65.2 (2015): 498–541.

(4.) Edmund L. Gettier, "Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?" *Analysis* (1963) 23: 121–123.

(5.) Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya of Śrīharṣa with the Commentary Khaṇḍana-bhūṣāmaṇi*, edited by Brahmadatta Dvivedī (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 1990), 241.

(6.) Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, 244–247.

(7.) Bimal Krishna Matilal, *Perception: An Essay on Classical Indian Theories of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 135–140.

(8.) Jonathan Stoltz, "Gettier and Factivity in Indo-Tibetan Epistemology," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 57, no. 228 (2007): 394–415.

(9.) Stoltz, "Gettier and Factivity," 248.

(10.) Stoltz, "Gettier and Factivity," 259.

(11.) See Matilal, *Perception*, 101–103.

(12.) *Nyāyabhūṣaṇa*, edited by Yogīndrānanda (Varanasi: Udasina Samskrita Vidyalaya, 1968), 11.

(13.) This idea nevertheless finds supporters in Jaina epistemology; see Phyllis Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument in Late Vedānta: Śrī Harṣa's Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1978), 32.

(14.) *Pariśuddhi*, in *Nyāyadarśana of Gautama with the Bhāṣya of Vātsyāyana, the Vārttika of Uddyotakara, the Tātparyaṭīkā of Vācaspati and the Pariśuddhi of Udayana*, ed. Anantalal Thakur (Dharbanga: Mithila Institute of Post-Graduate Studies and Research, 1967), 96.

(15.) *Pariśuddhi*, 96.

(16.) Granoff rightly comments that for Udayana "this mark is not meant as a definition of validity but only as a means of knowing validity. Śrī Harṣa takes it here as a definition." Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument*, 33.

(17.) Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, 256.

(18.) Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, 256; cf. Granoff, *Philosophy and Argument*, 34.

(19.) Richard Foley, *When Is True Belief Knowledge?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

(20.) For these notions of safety and risk, see Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and Its Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

(21.) Śrīharṣa, *Khaṇḍanakhaṇḍakhādya*, 259–260.

(22.) Matilal, *Perception*, 57–65.

(23.) Gaṅgeśa, *The Tattvacintāmaṇi of Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya with Extracts from the Commentaries of Mathurānātha Tarkavāgīśa and Jayadeva Miśra*, ed. Kāmākhyānātha Tarkavāgīśa. Vol. 1: *Pratyakṣakhaṇḍa* (Calcutta: Bibliotheca Indica, 1888), 277–282.

(24.) So "knowledge-ness consists in truth-hitting character"; Matilal, *Perception*, 141.

(25.) See further my *The Lost Age of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 131–144.

(26.) Keith DeRose, "Contextualism and Knowledge Attributions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52, no. 4 (1992): 913–929, quotation 914.

(27.) Viśvabandhu Bhaṭṭācārya, "Valid Cognition (*pramā*) and the Truth (*satyatā*) of Its Object," in *Concepts of Knowledge: East and West*, tr. J. L. Shaw (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2000), 107–118.

(28.) Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68, no. 1 (1971): 5–20.

(29.) Bimal Krishna Matilal, "Knowledge, Truth and *pramātva*," in *his Collected Essays, vol. 1: Mind, Language and World*, 149–161 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, reprinted 2015), 161.

(30.) Matilal, "Knowledge, Truth," 161.

(31.) "Knowledge-hood is established (known) by an inference based on either confirmatory behaviour or likeness." Matilal, *Perception*, 167.

(32.) Matilal, *Perception*, 162.

(33.) Laura Ekstrom, "Alienation, Autonomy, and the Self," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 29 (2005): 45–67.

(34.) Matilal, 161. For a recent attempt to defend the idea that there are grades of knowledge, within the framework of Western epistemology, see Stephen Hetherington, *Good Knowledge, Bad Knowledge: On Two Dogmas of Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). Hetherington agrees with Matilal and Gaṅgeśa that in Śrīharṣa or Gettier cases, the epistemic agent does indeed know; in his terminology, the knowledge they have is "failable" knowledge. The concept of failability is a close cousin to that of fragility.

(35.) Jonathan Bennett, *A Study of Spinoza's Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1984).

(36.) Jonathan Weinberg, Shaun Nichols, and Stephen Stich. "Normativity and Epistemic Intuitions," *Philosophical Topics* 29 (2001): 429–460.

(37.) John Turri, "A Conspicuous Art: Putting Gettier to the Test," *Philosophers' Imprint* 13, no. 10 (2013): 1–16. See also Edouard Machery, Stephen Stich, David Rose, Amita Chatterjee, Kaori Karasawa, Noel Struchiner, Smita Sarkar, Naoik Usui, and Takaaki Hashimoto, "Gettier Across Cultures," *Noûs* (2015): 1–20, which contains impressive confirmation that folk Gettier intuitions do not vary across cultures, and where an anomaly in results from Bengali speakers is explained with reference to this point about *jñāna*.

(38.) Turri, "Conspicuous Art," 10. Turri cites Matilal as his source of information here.

(39.) Matilal, "Knowledge, Truth," 150.

(40.) Pranab K. Sen, "Knowledge, Truth, and Scepticism," in *Concepts of Knowledge: East and West* (Kolkata: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2000), 234–243. Reprinted in his *Knowledge, Truth and Realism: Essays in Philosophical Analysis* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2007). Further argumentation is provided by Allen Hazlett, "Factive Presupposition and the Truth Condition on Knowledge," *Acta Analytica* 27, no. 4 (2012): 461–478.

(41.) I have in mind the extended Indian discussion about *svataḥ-prāmāṇya*; see Matilal, *Perception*, ch. 4 and "Knowledge, Truth."

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