

Research Statement

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The fourteenth-century philosopher Gaṅgeśa Upādhyāya was the most influential Sanskrit author of the second millennium and a philosopher of considerable range: His only extant text, the *Gemstone for One's Concerns about the Truth* (*Tattvacintāmaṇi*) covered issues in epistemology, philosophy of mind, metaphysics, and philosophy of language, and generated a centuries-long tradition comprised of nearly eighty known commentaries alongside many more texts that directly engaged his work. Through his breadth, Gaṅgeśa not only provides plausible views about issues ranging across areas of philosophy, but develops the toolkit necessary for thinking about epistemology—the structuring concern of the *Gemstone*—at the juncture of metaphysics and mind. My work explores issues in epistemology, metaphysics, and philosophy of mind by reconstructing the history of Sanskrit contributions to these fields, with a particular focus on Gaṅgeśa and his interlocutors. Below, I detail the research projects in which I am currently engaged.

Dissertation Research: Absence

We often learn about absence: You open the drawer where you thought you last placed your wallet, only to find it missing; you search for your cat, but notice she is not in any of her usual spots. This raises the question: How do we learn of absence? Some philosophers of the Sanskrit tradition answered that we learn of absence *non-inferentially* just from non-observation of an object or property that we would observe, were it there. Others argued that we instead *infer* absence on that basis. Assuming that there are true propositions about absence, however, seemingly commits one to the existence of absences. For this reason, philosophers of the Sanskrit tradition also attend to the metaphysical question that arguably underlies the epistemology: What is it for something to be absent? Some argued that absences are nothing more than some positive entity, sometimes identifying absence with a mental state—and thus reducing knowledge of absence to self-knowledge. Others *denied* that there are such things as absences.

Gaṅgeśa defends a surprising set of answers. He argues that absences are *sui generis* entities, akin to concreta, that are irreducible to any kind of positive. Despite its counterintuitive force, his metaphysics of absence comes with important upshots, allowing him to develop solutions to problems that combine views which would otherwise be in tension. Gaṅgeśa's anti-reductionism allows him to defend his strong *perceptualist* epistemology of absence: He pairs the view that we literally perceive absence with *direct realism*, according to which perception is a direct cognitive relation to objects and properties. Further, it enables him to maintain a Russellian theory of propositions, whereby propositions are structured states of affairs, while still allowing for negative propositions. My dissertation research was structured around Gaṅgeśa's epistemology of absence and is published as the following articles:

- **Gaṅgeśa on Absence in Retrospect (2021).** *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 49(4):603–639 (19400 words). I examine *cases of past absence* in which one learns of absence in retrospect, such as when one realizes later that a colleague was not at a talk. I argue that Gaṅgeśa's account of such cases, according to which we learn that a recollectable object was absent from being unable to recall that object, looks highly plausible against a backdrop of prior theories and their shortcomings.

- **Raghunātha on Seeing Absence (2023).** *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 31(3):421–447 (11000 words). I show that Gaṅgeśa argues for a condition according to which we are always aware of an absence as an absence of its corresponding absent object: We cannot perceive the absence of a violin without perceiving that *a violin* is absent. I appeal to material by Gaṅgeśa’s commentator Raghunātha Śīromaṇi to show there are cases in which this condition fails.
- **Śālikanātha on Absence in the *Pramāṇapārāyana* (2023).** *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 51(3):215–238 (11000 words). I provide the first English-language translation of the ninth-century philosopher Śālikanātha Miśra’s arguments for reductionism about absence in his *Study of the Instruments of Knowledge*, with which Gaṅgeśa engages, along with annotations and a philosophical introduction. Śālikanātha identifies absence with a mental state, consequently reducing knowledge of absence to self-knowledge. Accordingly, theories of introspection determine how we learn of absence.

As part of this project, I am now working on the following article:

- **Absence and Extrinsic Properties.** Reductionism about absence, according to which absence reduces to a kind of positive entity, promises to capture two seemingly competing desiderata: Reductionism allows that there are real features of the world to serve as the truthmakers for negative propositions, but still respects the common intuition that the world is exhaustively positive. Comparatively, anti-reductionism captures the former at the cost of the latter, while eliminativism captures the latter at the cost of the former. I show, however, that Gaṅgeśa raises a challenge for reductionism by revealing a link between absence and extrinsic properties: Just as one is the parent *of a child*, something is an absence *of an object or property*. He argues that, if absences reduce to positives that do not depend on their absent object or property, extrinsic properties more generally should reduce to intrinsic properties. To use his example: If the absence of a pot reduces to something that stands in no dependence relation to that pot, then the properties of being tall or being short should reduce to dimensions alone. But objects are tall or short *only* relative to other objects; likewise, absences are always absences of an object or property. Gaṅgeśa, I argue, shows that reductionism about absence is implausible: One must be either an anti-reductionist or an eliminativist. The conclusion implicit within this argument, I argue, is that, to best capture a variety of phenomena about absence, we should be anti-reductionists.

Current Research: Introspection

How do we learn about our own thoughts and feelings? Within the Sanskrit tradition, the Buddhist philosopher Dignāga defended the earliest and most influential answer: Phenomenally-conscious states of awareness are *self-intimating*. Being in a conscious state, he argued, simply entails being aware of that state. While Prābhākara philosophers and Buddhists received Dignāga’s self-intimation thesis sympathetically, many others did not. Instead, some defended a picture according to which we *infer* that we are undergoing some state of awareness from features of the external world. And, just as he defends a perceptualist epistemology of absence, Gaṅgeśa maintains a higher-order perceptual account of introspection. On his view, we have perceptual knowledge of our conscious mental states distinct from the mental state itself.

Gaṅgeśa’s views about introspection have implications for a range of issues. He denies a crucial assumption of self-intimation views: States of awareness, on his view, are not *luminous*. That is, one can be in a mental state without being in a position to know as much. Further, some defenders of self-intimation within the Sanskrit tradition argue, from self-intimation, for an analogous strong version of the KK principle: Knowing that *p* constitutively entails knowing that one knows that *p*. But plausibly, if states of awareness are not self-intimating, this version of the KK principle cannot hold. My current research project is structured around

Gaṅgeśa's views about introspection. I aim to publish papers from this project, leading to a book project reconstructing the wider history of introspection within Sanskrit philosophy. The articles planned as part of this project include:

- **Epistemic Instability in Gaṅgeśa's *Gemstone*.** According to a view about reflection ascribed to Gaṅgeśa, inquiring into whether we have knowledge often improves our epistemic situation: By prompting us to consider the reasons for our beliefs, reflection moves our knowledge from fragile to robustly safe. Similarly, Gaṅgeśa has also recently been interpreted as a default trust theorist who maintains that, when we turn reflective, we are disposed to self-ascribe knowledge where we have no evidence of error. I argue, however, that these interpretations are mistaken. On Gaṅgeśa's view, knowledge is initially *lost* under the ordinary course of reflection—*destabilizing*, rather than improving, our epistemic situation. Not only is Gaṅgeśa committed to this view on the basis of principles he accepts, I argue, the instability of knowledge under reflection serves as a structuring assumption throughout his epistemology. Gaṅgeśa, for instance, ascribes a minimal normative role to higher-order knowledge and maintains that agents navigate the world with a limited body of higher-order attitudes. Ultimately, Gaṅgeśa develops an epistemology around epistemic instability, with payoffs for externalists skeptical about the value of reflection: He is able to solve a classical regress problem without accepting, as his interlocutors often do, a luminosity thesis according to which we are always in a position to know our own mental states. Further, I argue, by denying standard intuitions about high-stakes action, Gaṅgeśa is able both to deny that prudent agents acting under high-stakes require higher-order knowledge and deny that pragmatic considerations can constitute a difference in knowledge.
- **Gaṅgeśa against Self-Intimation.** Although he was the first prominent defender of self-intimation in the Sanskrit tradition, Dignāga denied the existence of a substantial self: Any sense of ownership over one's thoughts and feelings is *erroneous*, on his view, and cannot come packaged in self-knowledge. Prābhākara philosophers such as Śālikanātha were sympathetic to Dignāga's self-intimation thesis, but extended his view to accommodate their realism about the self. In their terminology, all phenomenally-conscious states of awareness are *self-presenting* and convey three features first-personally: the object of awareness, the state of awareness itself, and *the owner* of that state of awareness. The content of ostensibly first-order perception of a piano is not merely 'this is a piano', but rather '*I am aware of a piano*'. This arguably puts Prābhākara philosophers in the good company of early modern philosophers such as Descartes and Locke. I argue, however, that Gaṅgeśa shows, from a principle of cognitive economy, that such a view is implausible: Since first-order states that convey neither the state itself nor its owner are often sufficient to explain action and reports of content, there is no reason to maintain that states of awareness are self-presenting.

Following publication, I plan to further develop these articles as part of the larger monograph. The book project, however, will not focus exclusively on Gaṅgeśa, but will also examine the history leading up to his work. Further planned chapters include, for instance, a chapter on Śālikanātha's defense and extension of Dignāga's self-intimation thesis; and a chapter on the eighth-century philosopher Kumāriila, examining his critiques of Dignāga and his defence of a thesis according to which we infer our mental states from features of the external world. Whereas existing secondary literature on introspection in Sanskrit philosophy has often focused on Buddhist theories of self-intimation, my project will uncover the full landscape of views.