

4 Vyāsatīrtha's Analysis of Advaita Philosophy

4.1 *Brahman* and the world in Advaita philosophy

According to the Advaitins, Mādhva philosophers' identification of *brahman* with Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is utterly wrong. The *brahman* of the Upaniṣads is not a personal being of infinite qualities, and the theistic tendencies observable in many Upaniṣads do not convey *brahman* as it truly is. In his *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya*, Śaṅkara attempted to harmonise the diverse expressions of the Upaniṣads to show that *brahman* is identical with the innermost self (*ātman*) of sentient beings. The "self" in this context should not be confused with the "personal self", in the sense of the individuated knowing subject who interacts as an agent with the everyday world and undergoes rebirth and death. *Brahman/ātman* is, for the Advaitins pure, unchanging consciousness. From the ultimate point of view, *brahman* is completely free from qualities (*nirguṇa*), good or bad. We can thus not refer to it directly through the use of words.

Brahman is self-manifesting (*svayam-prakāśa*), but it is concealed by a force that was known variously as "nescience" (*avidyā*), "illusion" (*māyā*), "ignorance" (*ajñāna*), and a number of other terms. According to Advaitin philosophers, it is this force that obstructs the self-luminosity of *brahman* and leads to the emergence of the appearance of a world of mutually-differentiated conscious subjects and objects. This world may enjoy a provisional reality from the point of view of those trapped in the illusion of transmigratory existence, but it certainly cannot be said to "exist", as the Mādhvas claim. The differences that make up the empirical world of thinking subjects and inanimate objects are, in the ultimate analysis, an illusion which is superimposed on pure consciousness due to the effect of beginningless nescience. As a "virtual-effect" of nescience, the world is thus mere appearance, and, like all illusory appearances, it is liable to sublation (*bādha*) through true awareness. The final goal of Advaita philosophy is to bring about a radical realisation in which the apparent dualities of the world vanish and the self-luminous *brahman* manifests itself without the obstructing veil of nescience.

After Śaṅkara, Advaitin philosophers came to focus on the nature of nescience and its relationship to *brahman*, rather than on the nature of the ineffable *brahman* itself. The task of explaining the relationship between *brahman* and nescience presented numerous problems. If *brahman* alone exists, then how can we explain the appearance of the individual souls and the world-illusion? The *Brahmasūtra* itself seems to speak of *brahman* as the source of the world, but what exactly could this mean if the world is unreal? Should *brahman* or nescience be spoken of as the "cause" of the world-appearance, and, if so, what sort of a cause are they? Does nescience constitute a further entity besides *brahman*, or is it simply nonexistent like

the proverbial “son of a barren woman”? Does *brahman* act as the locus of nescience, and, if not, where does nescience reside? Does nescience have an “object”, and, if so, what is it? Moreover, if the world does not really exist, how are philosophical debate and liberation itself possible? The programme of liberation proposed by the Advaitins and the practice of philosophical debate itself seem to depend on the assumption that the empirical world has some kind of existence, yet Advaitin philosophers deny that it truly exists.

By the time Vyāsātīrtha was writing, Advaitin philosophers had articulated a wide range of different stances on these questions. Many Advaitin philosophers concluded that it is nescience itself, and not *brahman*, that acts as the stuff out of which the world is formed. Śaṅkara's commentator Sureśvara concluded that illusion (*māyā*) alone is the material cause of the world-appearance. He said that *brahman* is both the support and the object of nescience.¹ In his *Iṣṭasiddhi*, Vimuktātman claimed that the world is “made up” of illusion (*māyānirmīta*).² He compared the relationship between *brahman* and the world to the relationship between a canvas and the painting painted onto it. Vimuktātman used this rich metaphor to show how *brahman* can act as the support for the world-appearance without acting as its material cause or undergoing any true change. The canvas (*brahman*) acts as a support for the painting (the world-illusion) which is superimposed onto it. The canvas is not the material cause of the painting, nor is the painting a modification of the canvas in the way a pot is a modification of the clay from which it is formed. The canvas existed before the painting came into being, and it would continue to exist even if the painting were wiped from it. Like *brahman*, the canvas existed before the painting and can continue to exist even if the painting is destroyed; the canvas can appear without the painting, yet the painting can only be perceived if it is superimposed on the canvas.³

1 See Dasgupta (1932: 101–102) for a discussion of Sureśvara's view on the relationship between *brahman* and nescience.

2 See Dasgupta (1932: 202–203) for a discussion of the significance of this statement.

3 *yathā citrasya bhittiḥ sākṣān nopādānam, nāpi sahajaṃ citraṃ tasyāḥ, nāpy avasthāntaraṃ mṛda iva ghaṭādiḥ, nāpi guṇāntarāgama āmrasyeva raktatādiḥ, na cāsyāś citrajanmādaḥ janmādiḥ, citrāt prāg ūrdhvaṃ ca bhāvāt, yady api bhittiḥ vinā citraṃ na bhāti, tathāpi na sā citraṃ vinā na bhātīty evam ādy anubhūtibhittijagaccitrāyor yoḥyam.* (IS: 37.) “The canvas is clearly not the material cause of the painting, nor does the painting belong innately to [the canvas]. The [painting] is not [the canvas] in a different state, as a pot is clay [in a different state]; nor is [the painting] the appearance of a new trope [in the canvas], like the colour red [appearing] in a mango [as it is exposed to the sun]. Nor does [the canvas] come into being [or cease to exist] when the painting comes into being [or ceases to exist], since the [the canvas] exists both before and after the painting. Even though in the absence of the canvas the painting cannot appear, it is *not* the case that [the canvas] *cannot* appear

By contrast to *Vimuktātman* and *Sureśvara*, in his *Bhāmatī* commentary on Śaṅkara's *Bhāṣya*, Vācaspati Miśra said that *brahman* "associated with *avidyā*" constitutes the material cause of the world.⁴ Like Maṇḍana, Vācaspati claimed that nescience is located in the individual soul (*jīva*) and not in *brahman* itself. Padmapāda was not absolutely clear on the nature of the causal relationship between *brahman* and the world, but he does seem to say that *brahman* itself is the cause of the world through the operation of nescience.⁵

Padmapāda's commentator, Prakāśātman, whose thought looms large in the *Nyāyāmṛta*, claimed that *brahman* is the changeless material (*avikāryupādāna*) that acts as the basis of the world-illusion. In his *Vivaraṇa*, Prakāśātman famously said that *brahman* is the cause of the world insofar as it is "combined with" (*viśiṣṭa*) indeterminate illusion (*anirvacanīyamāyā*). He clarified that this claim could be interpreted to mean that *brahman* combined with illusion is the cause of the world in the manner in which two threads twisted together combine to make up a length of rope. Alternatively, he says it could mean that *brahman* is the cause of the world insofar as it possesses illusion (*māyā*) as a "potency" (*śakti*). Finally, Prakāśātman says that this claim could also be interpreted to mean that *brahman* is ultimately the cause of the world because it acts as the locus of illusion, illusion itself being the material cause of the world.⁶

in the absence of the painting: these facts, and others [about the relationship between the canvas and the painting] apply equally to the awareness-canvas [(i.e. *brahman*)] and the world-painting."

4 See Suryanarayana Sastri (1933: 136) for the text and a translation of this passage. See Dasgupta (1932: 109–110) for a discussion of Vācaspati's view.

5 Dasgupta (1932: 104–105).

6 *tasmād anirvacanīyamāyāviśiṣṭaṃ kāraṇaṃ brahmeti prāptam. ... traividhyam atra sambhavati—rajivāḥ saṃyuktasūtradhvayan māyāviśiṣṭaṃ brahma kāraṇaṃ iti vā; devātmaśaktiṃ svaguṇair nigūḍhām iti śruter māyāśaktimad brahma kāraṇaṃ iti vā; jagadupādānamāyāśrayatayā brahma kāraṇaṃ iti veti. (Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa, PP/PPV: 652.)* "Therefore, it follows that *brahman*, insofar as it is combined with indeterminate illusion, is the cause [of the world-appearance]. ... There are three ways [in which *brahman*, combined with indeterminate illusion, could be the cause of the world]: (1) *brahman* combined with illusion is the cause [of the world], just as two threads bound together [are the cause] of a rope; or (2) *brahman* insofar as it is possessed of the potency (*śakti*) of illusion is the cause [of the world], on the basis of the following passage of *śruti*: '[Those who follow the discipline of meditation have seen] god, the self, and the power, all hidden by their own qualities ...' (*Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* 1.1.3); or (3) *brahman* is the cause [of the world] insofar as [*brahman* is] the locus of illusion, which [illusion itself] is the material cause of the world." The full verse from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* reads: *te dhyānayogānugatā apaśyan devātmaśaktiṃ svaguṇair nigūḍhām / yaḥ kāraṇāni nikhilāni tāni kālātmayuktāny adhiṣṭhātay ekaḥ* // (Olivelle, 1998: 414.) Olivelle translates: "Those who follow the discipline of meditation have seen God, the self, and the power, all hidden by their own qualities. One alone is he who governs all those causes, from 'time' to 'self'."

Prakāśātman also gave a clear articulation of the *vivarta-vāda*, the doctrine that the world-appearance is merely an apparent transformation of *brahman*. Prakāśātman says that *vivarta* refers to “the appearance in one thing of multiple unreal forms contrary to the prior state [of that thing] which, in reality, remains unchanged”. He contrasts *vivarta* with the process of “(true) transformation” (*pariṇāma*), which occurs when “a single thing, through the loss of its prior form/essence (*svarūpa*), takes on a real new form”.⁷ According to this doctrine, the world is a “virtual effect” of *brahman*, which, in reality, remains unchanged despite the appearance of the illusion. From the ultimate point of view, all Advaitin philosophers deny the existence of the world. Nevertheless, the earliest philosophers identified with the Advaita tradition—Gauḍapāda, Śaṅkara, and Maṇḍana—all accepted that it can be spoken of as having some degree of reality, and their followers explored this hierarchy of being in detail.

Advaitin philosophers distinguish between that which is “ultimately real” (*pāramārthika-sat*), that which has “practical/transactional reality” (*vyāvahārika-sat*), and that which is “completely illusory” (*pāribhāṣika-sat*). *Brahman* alone is ultimately real, and the objects of everyday perceptual illusions (the “snake” seen where there is only rope) belong to the lowest, “illusory” level of reality. The empirical world, however, has some existence, at least from the point of view of those who have not yet been liberated from it. Until the world is sublated by the awareness of *brahman*, it has a provisional, “transactional” reality, just as dream-objects appear to exist to the dreamer until she wakes up. Advaitin philosophers took it that this aspect of their philosophy distinguishes them from “nihilistic” Buddhist philosopher (*śūnyavādin*) who, according to Brahmanical philosophers, claimed that the world is completely nonexistent like the “sky-flower”.

4.2 Three definitions of “illusoriness” (*mithyātva*)

The different positions of the classical Advaitins on the above issues have been discussed by Dasgupta (1932), Deutsch (1969), Granoff (1978), Phillips (1995), Gupta (1998), Schmücker (2001), Ram-Prasad (2002), and Minkowski (2011), among others. In this chapter, I will focus on Vyāsatīrtha's reconstruction of Advaita philosophy in the *pūrvapakṣa* he gives at the beginning of the *Nyāyāmṛta*. As this part of the text shows, Vyāsatīrtha was acutely sensitive to the subtle differences between the positions of the classical Advaitins. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the text he

⁷ *ekasya tattvād apracyutasya pūrvaviparītāsatyānekarūpābhāso vivartaḥ. ekasya pūrvarūpa-paritāgena satyarūpāntarāpatitiḥ pariṇāmaḥ. (Pañcapādikāvivaraṇa, PP/PPV: 653.)*

wishes to draw a single binary disagreement between the Mādhvas and the Advaitins about the empirical world. Vyāsātīrtha takes it that the commonality binding the diverse strands of Advaita philosophy together is the claim that the “world is ‘illusory’” (*viśvaṃ mithyā*).⁸ He devotes the remainder of the *pūrvapakṣa* to clarifying what exactly this statement could mean, and how the Advaitins can support this claim. He focuses particularly on the formal inferences that Advaitin philosophers adduced to support their position.

The Advaitin wants to prove that the world has the quality of “illusoriness” (*mithyātva*), but what does this mean? At the beginning of the Advaita *pūrvapakṣa*, Vyāsātīrtha presents the following list of definitions of “illusoriness”:

1. “complete nonexistence” (*atyantāsattvam*);
2. “indeterminacy” (*anirvācyatvam*);
3. “being different from what exists” (*sadviviktatvam*);
4. “not being a locus of existence” (*sattvānādhikaraṇatvam*);
5. “not being an object of knowledge” (*pramityaviśayatvam*);
6. “being an object of error” (*bhrāntiviśayatvam*);
7. “sublatability” (*bādhyatvam*);
8. “being the object of a sublating cognition” (*bādhakajñānaviśayatvam*);
9. “being the object [of a sublating cognition] by virtue of being the counterpositive of an absence that is made known by the cognition, ‘It is not, it was not, [and] nor shall it be’” (*nāsti, nāsīt, na bhaviṣyati bodhyamānābhāvapratiyogitvena tadviśayatvam*);
10. “being liable to cancellation by knowledge” (*jñānanivartyatvam*);
11. [something’s] “being the counterpositive of a constant absence that shares a common locus with [that thing itself]” (*svasamānādhikaraṇātyantābhāvapratiyogitvam*);
12. [something’s] “being the counterpositive of a constant absence that is not the locus of the property of not occurring completely [in its locus] (*avyāpyavṛttitva*), and which constant absence shares a common locus with [that thing itself]” (*avyāpyavṛttitvānāśrayasvasamānādhikaraṇātyantābhāvapratiyogitvam*);
13. “being either nescience or an effect of [nescience]” (*avidyāatatkāryayor anyatara-tvam*).⁹

This list of definitions is similar to the list of definitions that Citsukha gave in the *Tattvapradīpikā*.¹⁰ Given his deep familiarity with Citsukha’s work, it seems likely

⁸ NAB, 1:8.

⁹ See NAB, 1:36–38 for the relevant passage.

¹⁰ *kiṃ punar idaṃ mithyātvam? (1) pramāṇāgamyatvaṃ vā? (2) apramāṇajñānāgamyatvaṃ vā? (3) ayathārthajñānāgamyatvaṃ vā? (4) sadvilakṣaṇatvaṃ vā? (5) sadasadvilakṣaṇatvaṃ vā? (6)*

that Vyāsātīrtha drew on the *Tattvapradīpikā* in this regard. Vyāsātīrtha argues that all of these definitions suffer from obvious flaws, and finds them unworthy of further discussion. However, he goes on to consider five further definitions that seem to warrant deeper analysis. These five definitions, along with the Advaita philosophical works Vyāsātīrtha ascribes them to, are:

- D¹: “Indeterminacy” (*anirvacanīyatā*), that is, “not being the locus of existence or nonexistence” (Padmapāda, *Pañcapādikā*),¹¹
- D²: [Something’s] being the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence in the very thing that was taken to be [its] substrate (Prakāśātman, *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa* and Sureśvara, *Bṛhadāranyakopaniṣadbhāṣyavārttika*),¹²

avidyātatkāryayor anyataratvaṃ vā? (7) jñānanivartyatvaṃ vā? (8) pratipannopādhau niṣedhapratīyogitvaṃ vā? (9) bādhyatvaṃ vā? (10) svātyantābhāvasamānādhikaraṇatayā pratīyamānatvaṃ vā? (TP: 32–33.) “And what is this ‘illusoriness’? Is it: (1) ‘Not being knowable through the means of knowledge’? Or, (2) ‘Being knowable through a cognition that is not produced by a valid means of knowledge’? Or, (3) ‘Being knowable through a cognition that does not correspond to its object’? Or, (4) ‘Being different from what exists’? Or, (5) ‘Being different from both what exists and what does not exist’? Or, (6) ‘Being either nescience or an effect [of nescience]’? Or, (7) ‘Being liable to cancellation by knowledge’? Or, (8) [Something’s] ‘being the counterpositive of an absence in the very locus where [it itself was] perceived’? Or, (9) ‘Sublatability’? Or, (10) [Something’s] ‘being experienced as sharing a common locus with its own constant absence’?”

11 Vyāsātīrtha says the following: *tathāpi mithyāśabdo ‘nirvācyavacana iti pañcapādikārītyā sadasattvānadhikaraṇatvarūpānirvācyatvaṃ mithyātvam; tatprasiddhiś ca khyātivāde vakṣyate.* (*Nyāyāmṛta*, NAB, 1:37.) “Nevertheless, in the fashion of [Padmapāda’s] *Pañcapādikā*, which says, ‘The word “illusory” denotes what is indeterminate’, illusoriness is indeterminacy in the form of ‘being the locus of neither existence nor nonexistence’. And [we, the Advaitins,] will demonstrate in [our] discussion of perceptual error that [indeterminacy] is well-established [in everyday perceptual illusions].” Vyāsātīrtha seems to have in mind here a passage of the *Pañcapādikā* found in PP/PPV: 23.

12 Vyāsātīrtha is clear in the *Nyāyāmṛta* that he considers both this definition and D³ to be subdefinitions of “sublatability” (*bādhyatva*), which can itself be considered an analysis of “indeterminacy”. He attributes D² primarily to Prakāśātman’s *Vivarāṇa*, although he indicates that it could be implicit in Sureśvara’s *Vārttika* also: *yad vā bādhyatvaṃ anirvācyatvaṃ. tac ca śūktirūpyādir eva pāramārthikatvākāreṇa traikālikaniṣedhapratīyogīti mate pratipannopādhau traikālikaniṣedhapratīyogitvaṃ. uktam hi vivarāṇe—pratipannopādhāv abhāvapratīyogitvalakṣaṇasya mithyātvasyeti. uktam ca vārttike—tat tvaṃ asy ādivākyārthasamyagdhījanmamātrataḥ / avidyā saha kāryeṇa nāśīd asti bhaviṣyati // iti.* (*Nyāyāmṛta*, NAB, 1:37.) “Or ‘indeterminacy’ consists in ‘being liable to sublation’. And [the quality of being liable to sublation] consists in [something’s] being the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence in the very thing that was taken to be [its] substrate, that is, according to the view that it is the ‘silver’ superimposed on mother-of-pearl that is the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence from the ultimate point of view. For, [Prakāśātman] says in [his *Vivarāṇa*]: ‘Of illusoriness, which consists in [something’s] being the counterpositive of an absence in the very thing that was taken to be [its] substrate ...’. And Sureśvara says in his [*Bṛhadāranyakopaniṣadbhāṣya*]/*vārttika*: “Only upon the arising of the understanding of the Upaniṣadic passages like,

- D³: Being liable to be cancelled by cognition by virtue of the fact that [the cancelling cognition] is a cognition (Prakāśātman, *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa*),¹³
- D⁴: [Something’s] being the counterpositive of a constant absence that shares a common locus with that thing itself (Citsukha, *Tattvapradīpikā*),¹⁴
- D⁵: The absence of the quality of being existent by essence (Ānandabodha, *Nyāyadīpāvalī*).¹⁵

In the opening chapters of the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha cycles through these definitions in turn, giving reasons to show that each cannot be the quality that the Advaitin wants to prove of the world. In this volume, I will mainly discuss three of these definitions—those of Padmapāda (D¹), Prakāśātman (D²), and Citsukha (D⁴). These are the definitions that Vyāsātīrtha devotes the most attention to in the opening chapters of the *Nyāyāmṛta*.

Advaitin philosophers argue that the illusoriness which they ascribe to the world is already established in the case of the mundane perceptual illusions we sometimes encounter in our everyday lives. The illusion where we mistake a piece of mother-of-pearl for silver serves as the “empirical instance”/example (*dr̥ṣṭānta*) in the formal inferences that Advaitin philosophers adduced to support their position. The episode could be narrated as follows. A person comes across a piece of mother-of-pearl sparkling on the ground in the sunlight. However, rather than forming the veridical judgment, “This is mother-of-pearl” (*idaṃ śuktiḥ*), for one

‘That is how you are[, Śvetaketu] ...’ (*tat tvam asi*), does it become clear that nescience, together with [its] effect were never, are not, and never shall be.” See *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa*, PP/PPV: 174–175, for the passage that Vyāsātīrtha draws this definition from, and Gupta (2011: 234–235) for a translation of that passage. Sureśvara’s verse (number 183) is found in BĀUBh: 58. In the edition the verse in question reads as follows: *tat tvam asy ādivākyotthasamyagdhijānamamātrataḥ / avidyā saha kāryeṇa nāsīd asti bhaviṣyati ||*.

13 Vyāsātīrtha (NAB, 1:38) says that this definition is derived from a passage of Prakāśātman’s *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa*: *matāntare tu bādhyatvaṃ jñānatvena jñānanivartyatvam. uktaṃ hi vivaraṇe—ajñānasya svakāryeṇa vartamānena pravilīnena vā saha jñānena nivṛttir bādha iti. (Nyāyāmṛta, NAB, 1:38.)* “On another view [of Advaitin philosophers], sublatability consists in the quality of ‘being liable to be cancelled by cognition by virtue [of the cancelling thing’s] being a cognition’. For, [Prakāśātman] says in [his] *Vivarāṇa*—‘Sublation (*bādha*) is the destruction (*nivṛtti*), through knowledge, of ignorance (*ajñāna*) together with its effects, which either exist or have [already] been annulled’.” The passage in question is found in *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa*, PP/PPV: 178. It has been translated by Gupta (2011: 246). See also Pellegrini (2015: 305–306) for further discussion of this passage in Prakāśātman’s work.

14 *atha vā citsukharītyā svasamānādhikaraṇātyantābhāvapratiyogitvaṃ mithyātvam. (Nyāyāmṛta, NAB, 1:38.)* The passage is found in Citsukha’s *Tattvapradīpikā*; see TP: 67.

15 *yad vānandabodharītyā sadvivikatatvaṃ mithyātvam. (Nyāyāmṛta, NAB, 1:38.)* See *Nyāyadīpāvalī*, NM: 1, for this definition of Ānandabodha.

reason or another they become persuaded that what lies before them is, in fact, silver. They greedily reach for the precious metal, only to find that, on closer inspection, it is just a worthless piece of shell. This final discovery is referred to as the “sublating-cognition” (*bādhakajñāna*). A sublating cognition is one that cancels an earlier, erroneous cognition. Indian philosophers often considered the process where one entity becomes confused with another as entailing the “superimposition” (*adhyāsa*) of the false thing on the real one. Hence the fake silver was often termed the “superimposed thing” (*āropya*, *āropyamāṇa*), and the mother-of-pearl as the locus/object of the superimposition (*āropaviṣaya*).

The Advaitins ascribe the property of “illusoriness” (*mithyā-tva*) to the “silver” that appears in this illusion. *Mithyā* is a difficult term to translate; there is no single English term that can fully capture its implications. According to the Monier-Williams Sanskrit dictionary, the term *mithyā* is primarily an adverb, which can be rendered as “distortedly”, “contrarily”, and “falsely”, among other translations. It has often been rendered with the word “false” by modern translators. A problem with translating the term *mithyā* as “false” is that it is strange to refer to *things* as “false”. In English, the term is usually used in connection with statements/propositions. I thus translate the terms *mithyā* and *mithyātva* as “illusory” and “illusoriness” throughout this volume.

Translating the term *mithyā* is further complicated by the fact that the Mādhvas and the Advaitins disagree fundamentally about what it means. Although they differ among themselves about how the two terms should be defined, all Advaitin philosophers agree that there is a fundamental semantic distinction to be drawn between the words “illusory” (*mithyā*) and “nonexistent” (*asat*). So far as the Advaitins are concerned, their claim that the world is “illusory” is significantly different from the claim that the world “does not exist”. This claim is crucial for the Advaitins because it should distinguish their stance on the world from the position of the nihilistic Buddhist philosopher (*sūnyavādin*), who was taken to claim that the world simply does not exist like the hare’s horn.

Mādhva philosophers argue that this is a distinction without a difference. For Madhva’s followers, to say that something is *mithyā* essentially means the same thing as saying that it is “nonexistent”. The two terms ultimately mean one and the same thing, and the “silver” that we seem to experience in the silver/mother-of-pearl illusion is “nonexistent” in just the same way that the “square circle” is. Madhva himself argued at length that the Advaitins’ claim about the world is no different from the nihilist’s, and that other aspects of the Advaitins’ philosophy draw parallels with the stances of Buddhist philosophers. The Mādhvas were certainly not the first tradition to accuse the Advaitins of being “Buddhists in disguise” (*pracchanna-bauddhas*). Bhāskara and Rāmānuja both made this claim before Madhva. The Mādhvas are unique, however, in the quantity and the depth of the arguments they

make to justify this claim. Vyāsātīrtha himself pressed the case that the Advaitins are just crypto-Buddhists in the *Nyāyāmṛta*.¹⁶ In turn, medieval and modern Advaitin scholars have argued that certain aspects of Mādhva philosophy sit uncomfortably close to Buddhist thought.¹⁷

All of the five definitions of illusoriness given above should thus draw a clear distinction between the Advaitins’ position about the world and that of outright nihilism. The first definition of “illusoriness” of the five that Vyāsātīrtha takes seriously in the *Nyāyāmṛta* is “indeterminacy” (*anīrvacanīyatā, anīrvācyatā*). A large part of the present volume will be concerned with showing how the Mādhvas respond to this doctrine of the Advaitins. “Indeterminacy” (a more literal, but cumbersome, translation would be “indeterminability”) has often been taken to be a mystical statement to the effect that something is simply ineffable or beyond lan-

16 Vyāsātīrtha draws comparisons between the Advaita and Yogācāra Buddhist philosophies in his refutation of the concept of “perceptibility” (*dṛśyatva*) in the *Nyāyāmṛta*, for instance. He says that the Advaitins’ inference that the world is illusory because it is perceptible is simply a “regurgitation” of the Yogācāra-Buddhist position which is further inconsistent with Advaita epistemology: *dṛśyatvaheṭūktir api—stambhādīpratrayayo mithyā, pratyayatvāt tathā hi yah / pratyayaḥ sa mṛṣā dṛṣṭaḥ svapnādīpratrayayo yathā // iti bauddhoktayukticchardimātram. iyāms tu viśeṣaḥ—bauddhamate hy aprāmānyasya svatastvāt tad yuktam. tvanmate tu prāmānyasya svatastvāt, tad ayuktam iti.* (NAB, 1:126.) “Further, the statement of ‘perceptibility’ as a reason [in Ānandabodha’s inferences] is just a regurgitation of the [following] inference made by the Buddhists—‘The cognition of the post and so on is illusory, because [it is] a cognition; whatever is a cognition, is [also] illusory, just like the observed case of a dream-cognition’. But there is this difference [between the Advaitins’ and the Buddhists’ use of this inference]—In the view of the Buddhists, non-validity is intrinsic [to cognition], so [this inference] is legitimate[, at least from their point of view]. In your view, by contrast, validity is intrinsic [to cognition], and so [this inference] is untenable [on your own terms, because it is already ruled out by the witness’s initial perception that the cognition of the post is valid].”

17 Madhva, for instance, devotes a large part of his topical treatise the *Tattvoddṛyota* to proving this claim (*Vādaḥ [=Tattvoddṛyota]*, SMGs, 47–48). Madhva points to the apparent similarities between the Advaita and Buddhist theories that there are multiple levels of truth/existence. He also argues that the Advaitins’ concept of the “qualification-free” *brahman* is ultimately indistinguishable from the nihilistic Buddhist’s position. The modern Advaitin scholar Anantakrishna Sastri attempted to turn the tables on the Mādhvas, arguing that key Mādhva doctrines are quite close to certain Buddhist philosophical positions. Sastri (NAK: 44), apparently following Gauḍa Brahmanānda, argues that the Mādhva theory of perceptual illusion, according to which the object of illusions is simply nonexistent, is little different to the *asatkhyāti* theory of the *śūnyavādins*: “On the other hand, it is the Mādhvas who adopt the *Asat-khyāti* view in the case of error, since in the illusion, shell-silver, they acknowledge the nonexistent silver to manifest itself as existent. So it is the view of the Mādhvas and not that of the Advaitins that is at least partially coloured by the view of the Buddhists”. Sastri (NAK: 43–44) also argues, *contra* Madhva, that the Advaita position that there are multiple levels of truth (*pāramārthika*-vs. *vyāvahārika*-*sat*) is logically incompatible with the Buddhist theory of *sāṃvṛta*-vs. *pāramārthika*-*sat*. See Whaling (1979) for an overview of the different arguments proposed by medieval and modern scholars to prove that the Advaitins are really “crypto-Buddhists”.

guage. The Advaitin philosophers referred to in this volume used the term in a more specific sense, however.¹⁸ When Advaitin philosophers say that the object of perceptual error (the “silver”) is “indeterminate”, they usually mean that we cannot assign it a definite ontological status as existent (*sat*) or nonexistent (*asat*).

In the first chapters of the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha usually defines indeterminacy as “not being the locus of existence or nonexistence” (*sadasattvānadhikaraṇatva*). This is the analysis of indeterminacy given by Citsukha in the *Tatvaprādīpikā*, which was also used by Jayatīrtha in the *Vādāvalī*.¹⁹ According to Advaitin philosophers, the facts about the silver/mother-of-pearl confusion make it impossible for us to assign the silver a definite ontological status. On the one hand, the “silver” appears vividly to consciousness. In fact, the victim of the illusion comes to believe that they are perceiving a real piece of silver in front of their eyes, and the experience is so convincing that they reach down to pick it up. On the other hand, this erroneous belief is eventually sublated when the victim of the illusion comes to realise that what was really in front of them was mother-of-pearl, not silver.

The Advaitins argue that these facts about perceptual error cannot be reconciled with the hypothesis that the “silver” either exists or does not exist. The “silver” we see where there is really mother-of-pearl cannot truly exist, otherwise we would not have the cognition that sublates it (“This is not silver, it’s mother-of-pearl!”). Then again, it cannot be entirely nonexistent either, because we have a vivid, perception-like cognition of it. The “silver” has *appearance without reality*, and these facts force us to abandon our attempts to account for the illusion by attributing a determinate ontological status to the silver. Like the silver, the empirical world in its entirety is indeterminate according to the Advaitins; it cannot be said to truly exist, but it is not completely nonexistent like a sky-flower, either.

In the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha attributes this definition of indeterminacy to the works of Padmapāda (*fl.* 740), who is taken to have been one of Śaṅkara’s direct students. The concept goes back further in Advaita philosophy, however. An early use of the term *anirvacanīya* in this way is found in the *Brahmasiddhi* of Maṇḍana Miśra

¹⁸ As Schmücker (2001: 85–86) points out, Vimuktātman uses the term *avācya* to mean “ineffable” or “indescribable”. By contrast, he always uses the terms *anirvacanīya* and *anirvācya* in the technical sense described here. Schmücker writes: “Die Bezeichnung ‘unbestimmbar’ (*anirvacanīya*) unterscheidet Vimuktātman von der Bezeichnung ‘nicht benennbar’ (*avācya*). Mit keiner weltlichen Bezeichnung benennbar ist nur der Ātman/das Brahman. In diesem Zusammenhang ist mit *anirvacanīya* gemeint, daß die Welt und ihre materielle Ursache die Māyā/Avidyā—ein vom absoluten Sein des Brahman und vom absoluten Nitchsein unterschiedenes Kennzeichen (*sadasadvilakṣaṇa*) haben”.

¹⁹ See VĀ: 4, for instance.

(fl. 690). Maṇḍana uses the term when giving an explanation of the relationship between nescience (*avidyā*) and *brahman*:

Nescience is not the essence (*svabhāva*) of *brahman*, nor is it something other [than *brahman*]; it is not completely nonexistent, nor is it existent [like *brahman*]. For this very reason is it called “nescience”, “illusion”, [and] “illusive appearance”. If it were the essence of something, then, whether it were different or non-different [from that thing], it would be ultimately real, and hence it would not be nescience. If[, on the other hand,] it were completely nonexistent (*atyantāsat*), it could not enter into practical discourse/activity (*vyavahāra*), like the sky-flower, for instance; hence, [nescience] is indeterminable.²⁰

The concept of indeterminacy was developed considerably in the tenth century by Vimuktātman, whose work featured prominently in Madhva’s critique of Advaita.²¹ In a signal passage early on in his *Iṣṭasiddhi*, he outlines his position about the world in response to the argument of a hypothetical opponent who claims that liberation is simply impossible according to the nondualistic stance that only *brahman* exists. Vimuktātman sets up this opponent’s argument as follows:

Objection: In that case [i.e., if nothing other than *brahman* is truly real], what is the status of this world of duality, which is the object of [the instruments of knowledge]—perception and so on—[and] the basis of the parts of the Veda that enjoin/forbid actions and teach knowledge?

If, on the one hand, this world simply does not exist, then perception and [the other things taken to be instruments of knowledge] would have no object, and so they would not be valid instruments of knowledge. Likewise, the parts of the Veda that deal with action and knowledge [respectively would] have no basis, and[, being part of the world,] they would be by essence nonexistent; hence they too would not be valid instruments of knowledge. Moreover, since perception and so on are very much part of the world, if [the world] did not exist, then they [themselves] would not exist. [It might be objected that since *śruti* and *smṛti* have *brahman* for their object, they can be valid means of knowledge. However,] *śruti*, *smṛti*, and reasoning (*nyāya*) are not self-established [and hence they have no essence]. For all of these reasons, [if this world of duality simply does not exist then] the existence of *brahman* as [you have] described it could not be established on the strength of [any of the means of knowledge].²²

²⁰ *nāvidyā brahmaṇaḥ svabhāvaḥ, nārthāntaram, nātyantam asatī, nāpi satī; evam eveyam avidyā māyā mithyāabhāsa ity ucyate. svabhāvas cet kasya cit, anyo ’nanyo vā paramārtha eveti nāvidyā, atyantāsatattve khaṇuṣpasadr̥ṣī na vyavahārāṅgam. tasmād anirvacanīyā.* (BS: 9.) This passage has also been translated by Thrasher (1993: 1).

²¹ Vimuktātman’s arguments on indeterminacy have been studied extensively by Marcus Schmücker (2001).

²² *nanu yady evam, kā tarhi gatir dvaitaprapaṇcasya pratyakṣādiviṣayasya karmajñānakāṇḍāśrayasya? athāyaṃ prapaṇco nāsty eva, tadā pratyakṣāder nirviṣayatvād aprāmāṇyāt; karmajñānakāṇḍayor āśrayāsiddheḥ, svarūpāsiddheḥ cāprāmāṇyāt; pratyakṣādeḥ ca prapaṇcāntahpātītāt tad-abhāve ’bhāvāt; śrutismṛtinyāyānām ca svato ’siddheḥ, na tadbalād yathoktabrahmavastusiddhiḥ.* (IS: 32.)

Vimuktātman's hypothetical opponent goes on to anticipate some possible lines of response Advaitin philosophers could give to these criticisms, but finds them wanting, and concludes that the Advaitin's position is hopeless:

If, seeking to avert these flaws, [you, the Advaitin,] accept that there is a world, then [you] must accept that [this world] is either different, non-different, or *both-different-and-non-different* from *brahman*. [The world cannot be] otherwise, for it is not possible for something to be in anything other than one of these three states. [If you accept] that [the world] simply is not a real thing (*avastutva*), then the faults [I] have [just] described pertain. For, the practical discourse that [I] have described cannot come about on the basis of [something that is entirely nonexistent,] like the horn of a man, or a sky-flower, etc. Even if [you accept that the world] is substantially real, then *brahman* as [you] have described it [i.e., as "one without a second"] would not be established as being in any of the three states [just outlined, i.e. being different, not different, or *both-different-and-not-different* from *brahman*].

Thus, whether the world exists or does not exist, *brahman* as you have described it cannot be established through the statements of the Vedānta. It is thus not tenable to claim that the perception [of *brahman*] leads to the ultimate obtainment of what is desired and avoidance of what is undesirable on the part of a man. Thus, [one] must have recourse to some other mode of liberation [than the one proposed by you,] or there is no liberation at all!²³

Vimuktātman believes that liberation follows from the direct experience of *brahman* generated by a deep understanding of the Upaniṣads. However, as an Advaitin, Vimuktātman also holds that *brahman* is "one, without a second". Only *brahman* can really be said to exist; the world does not truly exist, and only a direct experience of the non-dual *brahman* has the power to dispel the world-illusion. In this case, what is the status of the empirical world? Does it "exist" in any sense of the term? Or is it a "mere nothing", like the "son of a barren woman"?

Vimuktātman is apparently caught in a dilemma. He clearly cannot accept that the world truly exists in the same way that *brahman* does, because that would contradict his monistic stance about *brahman*. However, he cannot accept that the world is a complete nonentity either. It seems that Advaitin philosophers need to accept that we can know things through the valid instruments of knowledge, because they accept that it is these instruments which can ultimately lead us to the direct realisation of *brahman* which serves to liberate us. For this reason it seems that the Advaitin needs to assume that there is, in some sense, a world in order to explain

²³ *athaitaddoṣaparijihīṣayā prapañco 'bhyupeyate, tadā sa brahmaṇo bhinnno 'bhinnno bhinābhinnno vābhyupeyaḥ, nānyathā; na hi vastunaḥ prakāratrayaṃ muktvaṇyathāsiddhiḥ samasti. avastutve cokto doṣaḥ prasajyeta. na hi nṛṣṅgakahapuspādīnāvastunā yathokto vyavahāraḥ sidhyet. vastutve 'pi prakāratraye 'pi yathoktaṃ brahma na sidhyet. ataḥ prapañcasya bhāve 'bhāve 'pi vedāntavākye-bhṛyo yathoktabrahmāsiddheḥ, taddarśanād iṣṭāniṣṭaprāptiparihārāv ātyantikau puṃsah sidhyata ity ayuktam. ato mokṣasyānyaḥ prakāra āśrayaṇīyaḥ, na vā mokṣa iti. (IS: 32.)*

how the instruments of knowledge can function to lead us to this liberating insight. How can the Veda tell us things about the world, if there is no world to speak of? We cannot perceive, talk about, or act in regard to things that have no existence whatsoever. Moreover, the instruments of knowledge themselves, including the Veda, must surely be part of the world. If the world does not exist, then, as a part of that world, the *pramāṇas* themselves must be nonexistent, and how can perception or verbal testimony lead us to knowledge if they themselves do not exist?

So, if Vimuktātman accepts that the world exists, then he is abandoning his monistic claim that only *brahman* is real. On the other hand, if he accepts that the world is completely nonexistent, then the means of knowledge, which are part of that world, cannot function to lead us to the liberating realisation of *brahman*. In neither case can there be liberation in the way that Vimuktātman, as an Advaitin, accepts. Liberation should come about through knowledge of the nondual *brahman*. Yet, if the objector in this passage is correct, either *brahman* is *not* “one without a second”, or the means of knowledge cannot lead us to the putatively liberating knowledge of *brahman*.

Vimuktātman responds to this objection by outlining an explanation of his stance that “illusion”—the basis of the empirical world—is indeterminate:

[In response] to this [I, Vimuktātman,] say—There is not so much as a single fault with my view, because [I] accept that the universe is formed from illusion (*māyā*). Since illusion, together with [its] effects, cannot be determined to be truly existent or truly nonexistent, the stated faults, which pertain to the views that the world is real or unreal, do not get so much as a side-glance into my position!

To explain—Since[, in our view,] the world is not truly real, our non-dualism is not compromised. And, since [the world] is not completely unreal, none of the faults stated [above]—perception and so on not being valid instruments of knowledge, etc.—follow, and there is not the failure to establish the existence of *brahman* as [we] have stated *brahman* to be[, i.e., as “one, without a second”]. And since the direct experience of [*brahman*] leads to the cessation of illusion and its effects, [we] have not failed to establish liberation.²⁴

Vimuktātman’s response to the dilemma laid out in this passage is to argue that his opponent’s charge rests on a false dichotomy. The world is an effect of illusion (*māyā*), and *māyā* and its effects are “indeterminable” from the ontological point of

²⁴ *atrocyate—naiko 'pi doṣo 'smatpakṣe, prapañcasya māyānirmitatvābhyupagamāt. māyāyāḥ sakāryāyā api vastutvāvastutvābhyām anirvacanīyatvād vastvavastupakṣadvayāśrayā doṣā nāsmatpakṣaṁ kaṭākṣeṇāpi vīkṣante. tathā hi—prapañcasya vastutvābhāvan nādvaitahāniḥ; avastutvābhāva ca pratyakṣādyaprāmāṇyadyuktadoṣābhāvan na yathoktabrahmasiddhiḥ. tad-darśanāc ca māyātatkāryanivṛtter na mokṣāsiddhiḥ.* (IS: 32–33.) Schmücker (2001: 84–87) gives a translation and discussion of this passage.

view. As an effect of *māyā*, the world is not a real thing (*vastu*), but it is not something completely *unreal* (*avastu*) either. As such, the world does not constitute a second real entity besides *brahman*, so the Advaitin's nondualistic position is not undermined. Yet, since the world is not a complete nonentity, as the nihilistic Buddhist is taken to claim, perception and the other instruments of knowledge cannot be said to lack a basis/object, and we can achieve knowledge of *brahman* through them. For Vimuktātman, indeterminacy has the power to reconcile the possibility of liberation with the doctrine of nondualism.

This response might sound *ad hoc*, but Vimuktātman believes this position about the world can be grounded in an analysis of everyday perceptual illusions like the mother-of-pearl/silver confusion. In another passage of the *Iṣṭasiddhi*, for instance, he presents a case for the indeterminacy of the “silver” as follows:

If the “silver” [superimposed on] mother-of-pearl were existent, then the cognition of it could not be erroneous, just like the cognition of *real* silver; and, just like [the cognition of real silver; this cognition of silver] could not be sublated. If, on the other hand, [the “silver” superimposed on mother-of-pearl] were *nonexistent*, then [one] could not cognise it any more than [one can cognise] a “man's horn”, and there could thus be neither the erroneous cognition [of the “silver”], nor the sublation [of that erroneous cognition]. Nor [can it be argued] that [in the case of the “silver”] there is neither error nor sublation, because it is well-established to all beings [that the cognition of the “silver” is erroneous and that it is sublated by later experience]; and because [these facts] are accepted by all philosophers.²⁵

In this passage, Vimuktātman presents an argument for indeterminacy which would feature frequently in the works of Madhva and his followers. The indeterminacy of the world is prefigured in the mother-of-pearl/silver illusion. The “silver” cannot really exist because then the “erroneous” cognition would be a veridical one, and it could not later be falsified. Then again, it cannot lack existence altogether as the nihilist claims, since then it would be impossible for us to perceive it at all. The illusory “silver” that appears in this episode of perceptual error thus presents us with a case of something that resists determination as being either existent or nonexistent.

25 *sattve śūktirūpyasya taddhīr na bhrāntiḥ syāt, satyarūpyadhīr iva. tad vad eva ca nāsyā bādhaḥ. asattve tu nṛṣṇṅavat tasya na khyātiḥ; ato na bhrāntibādhaḥ syātām. na ca tau na sta eva, sarvajana-tuprasiddhatvāt; sarvavādibhiḥ ceṣṭatvāt.* (IS: 47.) This passage is discussed by Mesquita in his analysis of Madhva's refutation of indeterminacy in the *Viṣṇutattvanirṇaya*. See Mesquita (2000a: 119).

4.3 Prakāśātman's and Citsukha's definitions of illusoriness

Vyāsātīrtha's critique of indeterminacy in the *Nyāyāmr̥ta* is the central topic of Chapter 6 of this volume. The two other definitions of illusoriness that Vyāsātīrtha devotes the most attention to in the opening chapters of the *Nyāyāmr̥ta* are the second and fourth definitions on the list of five discussed above. These definitions take a very similar approach to defining illusoriness to one another. Vyāsātīrtha himself indicates that he drew D² from Prakāśātman's *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa*. To say that something is "illusory" according to this definition is to say that that thing is "the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence in the very thing that was taken to be [its] substrate" (*pratipannopādhau traikālikaniṣedhapratiyogitvam*).²⁶ The "counterpositive" of the absence is the "absentee", that is, the illusory thing itself. So something is "illusory" according to D² if it is permanently absent from the very substrate in which it was (mistakenly) taken to exist. This definition applies to the case where we mistake mother-of-pearl for silver, for instance, because the "silver" is permanently absent from the location that we (mistakenly) took to be its substrate—the piece of mother-of-pearl lying in front of our eyes. Similarly, the empirical world is really permanently absent from *brahman*, the very locus from which it seems to emerge as an effect.

26 Pellegrini (2011: 444) translates this definition as: "To be the counterpositive of the constant absence of an entity in the [same] locus in which it is perceived". He discusses the somewhat unusual use of the term *upādhi* in this definition. It is clear that the participants in the *Nyāyāmr̥ta* debate understand the word in this context as having the sense of "substrate" or "location" (*adhiṣṭhāna*, *adhikaraṇa*, etc.). Śrīnivāsatīrtha explains the compound *pratipanna-upādhau* ("In what was taken for [its] locus") in the definition as follows: *yasya yad adhiṣṭhānatvena pratipannam, tatrety arthaḥ. tucche 'tivyāptivāraṇāyedaṃ viśeṣaṇam, tatra pratipannopādher evābhāvād iti bhāvah*. (*Nyāyāmr̥taprakāśa*, NAB, 1:23). "The meaning [of the compound 'in the very thing that was taken to be [that thing's] own substrate' (*pratipannopādhau*)] is, 'in that which was taken to be the substrate of that thing'. The idea is that this qualifier [i.e. 'taken to be' (*pratipanna*-)] has the purpose of preventing [the definition] from applying inappropriately to what is completely nonexistent (*tuccha*). For, there can be nothing that is 'taken to be the substrate' of [something that is completely nonexistent, because such things cannot be cognised at all, according to the Advaitins]." The Advaitin scholar Yogendranath Bagchi (*Bālabodhinī*, ASV, 1:53.) also analyses the term *upādhi* as meaning "substrate". He says that this definition of *mithyātvā* means: "being the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence that is present in the substrate (*upādhi*)—i.e. the substrate (*adhikaraṇa*)—which is 'cognised' (*pratipanna*)—i.e. which is the qualificandum in a mental judgment" (*pratipanne prattiviśeṣya upādhāv adhikaraṇe vartamāno yas traikāliko niṣedhaḥ, tatpratiyogitvam*). Viṭṭhaleśopādhyāya, in his commentary on Brahmananda's *Laghucandrikā*, derives the term as follows: *upa samīpa ādhyate 'sminn ity upādhir iti*. (*Viṭṭhaleśopādhyāyī*, ASM: 94). I interpret the term *niṣedha* in this definition in the sense of "absence" rather than "negation".

Citsukha's own attempt to define illusoriness (D^4) is very similar to Prakāśātman's. As Vyāsātīrtha formulates Citsukha's definition, something is "illusory" if it "is the counterpositive of a constant absence, which constant absence shares a common locus with that thing itself" (*svasamānādhikaraṇātyantābhāvapratiyogitvam*). In the *Tattvapradīpikā*, Citsukha says that this definition means that something (x) is "illusory" if x is permanently absent from the very thing that was (mistakenly) taken to be x 's own substrate.²⁷ It is difficult to identify a substantial philosophical distinction between Citsukha's definition and Prakāśātman's. Pellegrini (2011: 453) says that D^2 is "essentially the same" as D^4 . Vyāsātīrtha (NAB, 1:38) does attempt to draw some distinction by analysing D^4 as meaning: "[something's] being experienced only in the locus of its own constant absence" (*svātyantābhāvādhikaraṇa eva pratiyamānatvam*). Madhusūdana follows him and adopts this analysis in the *Advaitasiddhi* (NAB, 1:104). Under Vyāsātīrtha's analysis, the emphasis falls on the cognitive part of the definition, not on the "counterpositiveness" itself. However, it is not clear that this amounts to a substantial philosophical difference between D^2 and D^4 .²⁸ In fact, Vyāsātīrtha's treatment of the definition suggests that he thinks

27 Citsukha gives this definition as follows in the *Tattvapradīpikā*: *atrocyate—na tāval lakṣaṇa-sambhavaḥ, yataḥ—sarveṣāṃ api bhāvānāṃ āśrayatvena sammate / pratiyogitvam atyantābhāvaṃ prati mṛṣātmatā // tathā hi—¹paṭādināṃ¹ bhāvānāṃ svāśrayatvenābhimatās tantvādayo ye, tanni-ṣṭhātyantābhāvapratiyogitvaiva teṣāṃ mīthyātvam. na hi teṣāṃ anyatra sattā sambhavinī*. (TP: 39.) "[In response to the objector who claims that there is neither a satisfactory definition of, nor a conclusive proof for, 'illusoriness', I] say—In the first place, ['illusoriness'] does not lack a definition. For: 'The illusoriness (*mṛṣātmatā*) of all entities consists in their being the counterpositive of a constant absence in the very thing that was taken to be [their own] substrate.' To explain—Positive entities such as a cloth and so on are 'illusory' precisely because they are the counterpositive of a constant absence that is located in the very thing that is considered to be their own substrate, [in the case of a cloth, for instance, its own] threads. For, they cannot possibly exist anywhere else." Emendations: (1) *conj.*; the edition reads *ghaṭādinām* here. See Pellegrini (2011: 451–452) for a further translation and explanation of this passage of the *Tattvapradīpikā*.

28 Pellegrini (2011: 453) writes: "As a matter of fact, the definition seems essentially the same as the second. However, to differentiate them MS alters the qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*) and the qualified (*viśeṣya*), so the meaning is (AS3, pp. 182–183): *svātyantābhāvādhikaraṇa eva pratiyamānatvam*, '[the characteristic of actually] being cognised in the locus of its absolute absence.' The second definition, by contrast, means the property of being the counter-positive of the absence which resides in that which is cognised as the locus of the counter-positive". The question of the difference between these two definitions was apparently already an issue when Citsukha's commentator Pratyagrūpa was writing in the early fifteenth century. When commenting on a passage where Citsukha gives these two definitions in the *Tattvapradīpikā*, Pratyagrūpa glosses the tenth definition in this list as follows: *pūrvam svādhiṣṭhānaniṣṭhābhāvamātrapratiyogitvam vivakṣitam. iha tu svātyantābhāvasya svasya caika-tra vartamānatayā pratītiḥ iti nāṣṭamadaśamaśaṅkaraḥ śaṅkantiyāḥ*. (*Nayanaprasādīnī*, TP: 33.) "In a preceding [definition of illusoriness given by Citsukha in this passage, i.e. definition (8)] what was meant is [that 'illusoriness' is something's] 'being the counterpositive of a mere absence [and not a

that the two definitions are not substantially different from one another. When he discusses Citsukha's definition in the opening chapters of the *Nyāyāmṛta*, he simply refers the reader back to what he has already said against Prakāśātman's definition earlier in the text.²⁹

As I will discuss in Chapter 6, a serious challenge for Advaitin philosophers is to show that both of these definitions can do justice to their claim that there is a meaningful distinction to be drawn between what is “nonexistent” and what is “illusory”. This problem dominates the discussion of D² given by Vyāsatīrtha in the *Nyāyāmṛta*. There, Vyāsatīrtha argues that both Prakāśātman's and Citsukha's definitions of illusoriness really just amount to saying that something is “nonexistent”. Both D² and D⁴ ultimately say that the “illusory” thing is absent from all locations, even if it is mistakenly taken to exist somewhere. In fact, for Vyāsatīrtha, to say that something is “nonexistent” is simply to say that that thing is absent from all possible locations at all times. So, if we take “illusoriness” to be Prakāśātman's definition (D²) or Citsukha's definition (D⁴), what exactly is the difference between “illusoriness”/“nonexistence” supposed to be? What is it that distinguishes the Advaitins' position about the world from the nihilistic Buddhist's?

Advaitin philosophers argued that these two definitions distinguish “illusory” things from “nonexistent” ones because we can cognise illusory things, whereas nonexistent things such as the hare's horn can never become the objects of certain types of conscious states. Vyāsatīrtha critiques this position in the *Nyāyāmṛta*, and I will discuss his arguments in detail in Chapter 6. For the moment I will examine another strategy that Advaitin philosophers used to distinguish Prakāśātman's definition of illusoriness from outright nonexistence. Vyāsatīrtha himself discusses this strategy in his *Advaita pūrvapakṣa* (NAB, 1:37). There he gives a modified version of Prakāśātman's definition. Something is illusory according to this definition if it

“is the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence *from the point of view of [its] being ultimately real*” (*pāramārthikatvākāreṇa traikālikaniṣedhapratiyogītvam*).

The definition adds the qualifier *pāramārthikatvākāreṇa* (“insofar as [it (= the illusory thing) is] ultimately real”) to D². This interpretation of Prakāśātman's definition reflects a particular theory about absence which can be traced back to the works of a Prābhākara Mīmāṃsaka known as Sondaḍa Upādhyāya (fl. 1200). According to this

constant absence] that is located in that thing's own substrate. Here [in definition (10)], by contrast, there is the cognition of *both* the constant absence [of the thing in question] *and* the thing itself as being present in one and the same substrate. Hence it cannot be doubted that there is a cross-over between definitions (8) and (10) [in this list].

²⁹ See NAB, 1:104.

theory, it is possible for something to be the counterpositive of an absence from the point of view of a property that that thing never has. The traditional example of such an absence is the absence that seems to be referred to by the expression, “A pot does not exist from the point of view of [its] being cloth” (*ghaṭaḥ paṭatvena nāsti*). In this expression, the abstract noun in the instrumental case (*paṭatvena*: “from the point of view of cloth-ness”) indicates the property that acts as the “determiner” (*avacchedaka*) of the “counterpositiveness” (*pratiyogitā*) that is present in the pot. In other words, it indicates the mode under which the pot is absent from reality. The point is that the pot might *not* be nonexistent from the point of view of its being a pot (i.e. from the point of view of its own essential nature), but it must be absent from all possible locations from the point of view of its being a cloth, because a pot can never be a piece of cloth.

The Navya-Naiyāyikas refer to such an absence as: “an absence the counterpositiveness to which is determined by a property that does not share a common locus [with its own counterpositive]” (*vyadhikaraṇadharmāvacchinnapratyogitākābhāva*). Technically, it is an absence where the property that determines counterpositiveness (the *pratiyogitāvacchedaka*) does not have any common locus with the thing that possesses that property of counterpositiveness (i.e. the counterpositive itself). In the example just given, the determiner of counterpositiveness is “cloth-ness” (*paṭatva*) and the locus of counterpositiveness is the pot. A pot can never be a cloth, so the property of clothness never occurs in the counterpositive of the absence. According to those who defend this theory, such an absence is an example of a universal-positive (*kevalānvayin*) property, since it is present in all possible locations.

Advaitin philosophers applied this theory to defend definitions of illusoriness like Prakāśātman's and Citsukha's. When commenting on Vyāsātīrtha's *pūrvapakṣa*, Śrīnivāsatīrtha gives a clear explanation of this argument:

If the quality that is to be established [as belonging to the world, i.e. illusoriness,] consisted [merely] in “being the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence in what was taken to be [its own] substrate”, then it would follow that [the world] is completely nonexistent. Nor is this a desirable consequence [for the Advaitins], since [they themselves] accept that [the world] is, by essence, different from what is nonexistent, and [thus the inference] would be proving something that has[, in their view,] already been ruled out (*bādha*). With this in mind, [Vyāsātīrtha] says—“*From the point of view [of its being] ultimately real*” (*pāramārthikatva*).

The idea is that there is not the fault [of *bādha* because the Advaitin] is proving that [the world] does not exist from the point of view of [its being] ultimately real, without ruling out [its] having a *practical* (*vyāvahārika*) essence which is different from what is nonexistent.³⁰

30 *pratipannopādhau traikālikaniṣedhapratyogitve sādhye 'tyantāsattvaprapṛtīḥ. na ceṣṭāpattīḥ, asadvilakṣaṇasvarūpāṅgīkārāt; tathā ca bādha ity asvarasād āha—pāramārthikatveti. asadvi-*

A pot is absent from all locations *insofar as it is a piece of cloth*, even though it is clearly not absent from all locations insofar as it is a pot. Similarly, the world could be said to be the “counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence” from the point of view of its being ultimately real, even though it is not the counterpositive of such an absence by its very essence. The expression *pāramārthikatvākāreṇa* in D² thus indicates the “determiner”/mode (*avacchedaka*) under which the world or the “silver” superimposed on mother-of-pearl is the counterpositive of the absence in question. The idea is that when Prakāśātman’s definition is qualified in this way, “illusory” things still retain their essence from a transactional/practical (*vyāvahārika*) point of view, which distinguishes them from what is completely nonexistent. Nonexistent entities, by contrast, are absent from all times and all places from the point of view of their very nature. The definition thus captures the Advaitins’ idea that, even though the world is ultimately nonexistent, it still has such practical existence from the point of view of the non-liberated.

I will return to Vyāsātīrtha’s critique of Prakāśātman’s definition of illusoriness in Chapter 6. It is the one of the three definitions of “illusoriness” that Vyāsātīrtha devotes the most attention to in the opening chapters of the *Nyāyāmṛta*, along with “indeterminacy”, and Citsukha’s definition. All of these definitions state in different ways that the world has appearance but not true existence; like the “silver” superimposed on mother-of-pearl, the world appears vividly to consciousness, but it still stands to be sublated by a deeper awareness of *brahman*. The Advaitins take it that this distinguishes their position from the nihilists’ stance that the world does not exist. For Vimuktātman, moreover, the concept of indeterminacy explains how liberation is possible for the Advaitin. If the world were a mere nonentity, then there would be no world to be released from and no means to execute that escape; the fact of liberation requires that the world enjoys some reality. Similarly, for Citsukha’s and Prakāśātman’s definitions, the world is really absent from its locus (*brahman*), yet it is mistakenly taken to exist there until it is sublated by the awareness of *brahman*.

4.4 What is the Mādhva–Advaita debate about?

However “illusoriness” is analysed, the claim that the “world is illusory” must be incompatible with Mādhva philosophy. As a Mādhva, Vyāsātīrtha accepts unequivocally that the world “exists” in the same way that Viṣṇu does. Viṣṇu is the only truly

lakṣaṇaṃ vyāvahārikaṃ svarūpam anupamādyā pāramārthikatvākāreṇa nāstīti sādhyata iti na doṣa iti bhāvaḥ. (Nyāyāmṛta, NAB, 1:23.)

independent substance, and the world exists in a permanent state of dependence on him. Moreover, existence and nonexistence are, according to Vyāsātīrtha, exhaustive states: there is nothing “indeterminate” that somehow resists being classified as either one of them. The philosophical stances of the Mādhvas and the Advaitins are thus incompatible. Vyāsātīrtha begins the *Nyāyāmṛta* by giving an analysis of what this difference of opinion actually amounts to. For the remainder of this chapter, I will outline Vyāsātīrtha's own reconstruction of Advaita philosophy in the *pūrvapakṣa* of the *Nyāyāmṛta*.

As is common in Sanskrit philosophical literature, the debate between the Mādhvas and the Advaitins which unfolds in the *Nyāyāmṛta* is precipitated by the contents of one of the “benedictory verses” (*maṅgalaśloka*s) with which Vyāsātīrtha begins the text. The verse in question reads:

I serve Hari, who removes all obstacles, the [instrumental] cause of this entire, *existent* world, an ocean of compassion, the friend of Ānandatīrtha.³¹

In this verse, Vyāsātīrtha states clearly that the world is an existent effect of Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa. Just after his benedictory verses, Vyāsātīrtha gives voice to a hypothetical Advaitin opponent, who indignantly refutes this claim, declaring:

Objection (Advaitin): The world is *illusory* (*mithyā*)! ...

Vyāsātīrtha subsequently attempts to clarify precisely what the dispute between himself and Advaitin philosophers entails:

... For, there is the following disagreement about this matter—Is that which is different from *brahman* and which is (1) not liable to sublation either by (a) something other than the knowledge of *brahman*, or (b) a qualificative [cognition], and which is (2) different from what is nonexistent, the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence in the thing that was taken to be [its] substrate, or not? Is it the counterpositive of an omnitemporal absence insofar as [it is] ultimately real, or not?

Even though the world is liable to sublation by the non-qualificative knowledge of *brahman* that is produced by the Upaniṣads which have an impartite sense, it is *not* liable to sublation by either (a) something other than the knowledge of *brahman*, or (b) a qualificative (*saparakāra*) cognition. Hence [the world is *not* excluded from the subject, and the reasons in the various inferences that will be adduced to prove the Advaitin's position] do *not* lack a substrate.³²

³¹ See above, Chapter 3, p. 46, for a complete translation of Vyāsātīrtha's *maṅgalaśloka*s.

³² *nanu mithyaiva viśvam. tathā hi tatra vipratipattiḥ—brahmapramāṇyena vā saprakāreṇa vābādhyatve saty asadvilakṣaṇatve sati brahmānyat pratipannopādhau traikālikaniṣedhapratīyogī, na vā? pāramārthikatvākāreṇa traikālikaniṣedhapratīyogī, na vā? akhaṇḍārthanīṣṭhavedānta-janyaniṣprakārakabrahmapramābādhyam api viśvam, brahmapramāṇyena vā saprakāreṇa vā na*

Vyāsātīrtha here gives here a set of what are technically called *vipratipatti-vākyas* (“statements of disagreement”). He gives them in the same form used by Gaṅgeśa in the *Tattvacintāmaṇi*.³³

The first thing that Vyāsātīrtha does in this passage is to delimit the subject (*pakṣa*) of the dispute, the domain that the Mādhvas and the Advaitins stand in disagreement about. Madhva and Jayatīrtha sometimes referred to this as the “object of the dispute” (*vimata*), without giving any further clarification. Other times they simply said that their dispute with the Advaitins is about “the world”/“the universe” (*jagat, prapañca, viśvam*, etc.). Vyāsātīrtha apparently finds these approaches wanting and tries to circumscribe this domain explicitly in the *Nyāyāmrta*.

What Vyāsātīrtha wants to include in the subject is essentially the “empirical world”, the everyday world that our senses reveal to us. Although they differ fundamentally about the ontological status of this domain, the Mādhvas and Advaitins stand in broad agreement that the “world” in this sense includes both individuated conscious beings (the *jīvas*), as well as the insentient objects they perceive. Vyāsātīrtha, however, attempts to circumscribe “the world” negatively by excluding several domains that should not fall within the scope of the dispute. Vyāsātīrtha’s formulation of the subject in this passage consists in a single “qualificandum” (*viśeṣya*) plus three qualifiers (*viśeṣaṇas*):

- *Qualificandum*: “... what is other than *brahman*” (*brahmānyat*).
- *Qualifier 1^a*: Not being liable to sublation by something other than the knowledge of *brahman* (*brahmapramāṇyenābādhyatva*).
- *Qualifier 1^b*: Not being liable to sublation by a qualificative [cognition] (*saparakāreṇābādhyatva*).
- *Qualifier 2*: Being different from what is nonexistent (*asadvilakṣaṇatva*).

bādhyam iti nāśrayāsiddhiḥ. (NAB, 1:8.) As Gaṅgeśa understands the term, “non-establishment of the substrate” (*āśrayāsiddhi*) refers to a type of pseudo-reason (*hetvābhāsa*) in an inference. It is applicable when the subject of a (putative) inference is something nonexistent/“unestablished”. A standard example of such a fallacious inference is: “The sky-lotus is fragrant, because it is a lotus”. In the final *vākya* of this passage, Vyāsātīrtha explains why he inserted the two qualifiers, “not being liable to sublation by something other than knowledge of *brahman*” and “not being liable to sublation by a qualificative [cognition]”. The point is that if we add either of these qualifiers, the subject still encompasses the empirical world, and thus there is no concern that the subject is an empty domain, in which case the flaw of *āśrayāsiddhi* would apply. Even though the world is liable to sublation, according to the Advaitins it is only liable to sublation through the direct experience of *brahman*, which is also a non-qualificative awareness.

33 See Phillips (2020a: 82–84) for a translation and discussion of Gaṅgeśa’s *vipratipattis* at the beginning of the *Prāmāṇyavāda* of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi*.

Vyāsātīrtha adds each of these components to the subject in order to exclude a particular domain from the scope of the subject that Advaitin philosophers ascribe the property of illusoriness to. The qualificandum (“what is other than *brahman*”) obviously excludes *brahman* itself from the subject. The Mādhvas and the Advaitins disagree fundamentally about the *nature* of *brahman*; however, both agree that he/it “exists” in some sense, so the Advaitins clearly do not want to prove that *brahman* is “illusory”/“unreal”. Qualifier 2 (“being different from what is nonexistent”) likewise explicitly rules out “completely nonexistent” (*atyantāsat*) things such as “the son of a barren woman” and the “hare’s horn”. According to Advaitin philosophers, such things are simply nonexistent, so they cannot legitimately be called “illusory”. Vyāsātīrtha thus excludes them from the subject.

Vyāsātīrtha has so far excluded both *brahman* itself and nonexistent entities from the scope of the subject. However, the specification of “the world” as it stands still seems to include objects of perceptual illusions that are sublated by subsequent experiences of the everyday world—the “silver”, for instance, for which a piece of mother-of-pearl is mistaken. As described above, from the Advaitin’s point of view, the silver is not entirely nonexistent like the hare’s horn, and it shares with the empirical world the property of being illusory. Nevertheless, the mother-of-pearl/silver illusion will act as the example (*dṛṣṭānta*) in the Advaitins’ inferences to prove their position. The example in an inference should be a case where the probandum and the reason are both already established to be present. So if the “silver” in the mother-of-pearl/silver illusion were included in the subject, the inferences the Advaitin is about to formulate would simply be proving something that is, from their point of view, already established (*siddhasādhana*).

Vyāsātīrtha therefore uses qualifier 1^a to exclude everyday perceptual illusions from the subject. This qualifier specifies that the subject does *not* encompass things that are liable to sublation by anything apart from the knowledge of *brahman*. The empirical world is, according to the Advaitins, only liable to be sublated by one kind of “knowledge”—the ultimate awareness of *brahman* that is generated by the deep study of the Upaniṣads. The objects of our everyday illusions, by contrast, *can* be sublated by regular valid cognitions (“this is not silver, but mother-of-pearl!”, for instance). So this qualifier excludes mundane illusions from the subject. The flaw of *siddhasādhana* is thus averted, but the objects that make up the empirical world are retained as part of the subject.

While commenting on this passage, Śrīnivāsaśrīrtha points out that there might be problems with this strategy for excluding everyday perceptual illusions from the subject. What about beliefs about *brahman* itself that are already known to be false? A Buddhist who holds that everything is momentary might falsely attribute the quality of “momentariness” (*kṣaṇikatva*) to *brahman*, for instance. From the standpoint of Brahmanical philosophers, this false belief can be sublated by the knowledge

that *brahman* is an eternal, enduring thing. This sublating judgment is clearly not the kind of liberating awareness of *brahman* that the Advaitin has in mind. Nevertheless, it must surely count as a kind of “knowledge of *brahman*”, and hence the “momentariness” falsely attributed to *brahman* by the Buddhist could be said to be “liable to sublation by a knowledge of *brahman*”. In that case, it would be *included* in the subject formulated in this way. The problem with this is again that the Advaitin would be proving something that is already accepted by his Mādhva opponent. The Mādhva obviously accepts that *brahman*/Viṣṇu-Nārāyaṇa is not momentary, and so the Mādhvas already accept that this quality is “illusory”. So the contents of false judgments about *brahman* such as its being “momentary” might need to be excluded from the subject to avoid *siddhasādhana*.³⁴

Probably for this reason, Vyāsātīrtha allows that we could alternatively exclude the objects of perceptual illusions from the subject by using qualifier 1^b, which specifies that the subject must not contain anything that can be sublated by a conceptual/qualificative cognition. Our illusory cognition of a rope as a snake can be sublated by the later qualificative awareness “This is *actually* a length of rope!”, which attributes a property (“being-a-rope”) to an individual in the real world. By contrast, the world, as the Advaitin understands it, is not liable to sublation by any qualificative awareness, but only by the impartite/nonqualificative awareness of *brahman*. Moreover, inserting 1^b instead of 1^a seems to avert the flaw of *siddhasādhana* just described. The illusory belief of the Buddhists that *brahman* is momentary *can* be sublated by a qualificative cognition, e.g., “*brahman* is not momentary, but eternal”;

34 Śrīnivāsātīrtha explains Vyāsātīrtha’s doubts about qualifier 1^a as follows: *atha brahmapramāṇyenābādhyatve satīty ādy uktau brahmaṇy āropitakṣaṇikatve brahma sthāyīti pramābādhye brahmapramāṇyenety ādi viśeṣaṇajātasya sattvena dharmitvaprāptau tatra mithyātvasādhane siddhasādhanaṭā syād ity asvarasā āha—saprakāreṇa veti. tathā ca na brahmaṇy āropitakṣaṇikatvasya vipratipattidharmitā. (Nyāyāmṛtaprakāśa, NAB, 1:22.)* “Now, assuming that the words ‘... while not being liable to sublation by anything other than the knowledge of *brahman*’ are mentioned [by Vyāsātīrtha in the formulation of the *vipratipatti*], then, since the ‘momentariness’ that is superimposed upon *brahman* [by the Buddhist philosopher] is liable to sublation by the knowledge that ‘*brahman* is unchanging (*sthāyīn*)’[, which can be described as a ‘knowledge of *brahman*’,] then all the qualifiers [that determine the subject in the *vipratipatti*,] beginning with ‘... which is different from knowledge of *brahman* ...’, would be present [in the momentariness that is mistakenly superimposed by the Buddhist upon *brahman*]. As such, [this momentariness] would be part of the subject, and if it were established that [that momentariness is] illusory, [the Advaitin who attempts to prove the illusoriness of the empirical world] would be proving something that is already established [to his Mādhva opponent, who already accepts that the momentariness mistakenly superimposed on *brahman* by Buddhist philosophers is ‘illusory’]. Because of this unsavoury contingency, [Vyāsātīrtha] says—‘Or by a qualificative [cognition]’ (*saprakāreṇa vā*). And thus is the momentariness [falsely] superimposed on *brahman* [by Buddhist philosophers] not part of the qualificandum mentioned in the disagreement.”

hence it is *not* included in the subject, and the Advaitin is not proving something that the Mādhvas already take to be true when they prove that the subject is “illusory”.

By specifying the subject in this way, Vyāsātīrtha takes it that he has precisely defined the scope of the debate between the Mādhvas and the Advaitins. In sum, the subject includes everything *apart from*—(1) *brahman*, (2) nonexistent things like hares' horns, and (3) the objects of mundane perceptual illusions such as the “silver” superimposed on mother-of-pearl. Everything that remains constitutes the subject about which the two traditions stand in disagreement. From now on, I will follow Vyāsātīrtha's convention and simply refer to this domain as “the world”. The hypothetical Advaitin opponent whom Vyāsātīrtha gives voice to in this passage claims that all the things in this domain are not existent, but illusory. I have already discussed the three most important definitions of illusoriness Vyāsātīrtha critiques in the *Nyāyāmṛta* in the first half of this chapter. In the following, I will discuss his general treatment of the topic in his Advaita *pūrvapakṣa*.

4.5 Two further definitions of “illusoriness”

In the foregoing, I have analysed three of the five definitions of “illusoriness” that Vyāsātīrtha devotes serious intellectual attention to in the *Nyāyāmṛta*. I will now discuss the remaining two definitions of these five, which are:

- D³: Being liable to be cancelled by cognition by virtue [of the cancelling thing's] being a cognition (Prakāśātman, *Pañcapādikāvivarāṇa*),

and

- D⁵: The absence of the quality of being existent by essence (Ānandabodha, *Nyāyadīpāvalī*).

Vyāsātīrtha says that D³ is intended to be a sub-definition of “sublatability” (*bādhya-tva*) itself. To say that something is “sublatable” according to this analysis is to say that that thing is “liable to cancellation by cognition, by virtue of the fact that [the cognition that cancels it] is a cognition”. Something is sublatable, in other words, if (1) it can be cancelled by (another) cognition, and (2) the cognition that cancels it does so *because it is a cognition*. Vyāsātīrtha explains that the purpose of the qualifier “by virtue of the fact that [the cognition that cancels it] is a cognition” (*jñānatvena*) is to stop the definition from applying to things that it should not apply to (i.e. the flaw of *ativyāpti*). If the definition were simply “being liable to cancellation by cognition” (*jñānanivartyatvam*), he argues (NAb, 1:38), then the definition

would apply inappropriately to mental tropes in general, all of which are liable to “cancellation” by a subsequent cognition.

This problem stems from the ambiguity of the word *nivartya* (“thing cancelled”, “thing annulled”) in the definition (*jñanatvena jñānanivartyatvam*). The Naiyāyikas and the traditions that followed them thought of mental events as tropes which occur one-at-a-time in the individual self. A standard example they use in this regard is the case of a potter fabricating a pot. The potter might have a cognition of the clay from which she will fashion the pot, followed by a desire to make (*cikīrṣā*) the pot, which is, in turn, succeeded by a mental exertion (*kṛtī*) to fabricate the pot from the clay. The Naiyāyikas regard each of these mental tropes as a cause of the cessation of the trope that precedes it, and so, in a sense, each trope “cancels” (*ni-vṛt*) its predecessor. However, we would not say that a prior cognition is “sublated” by the subsequent cognition in that case. For example, if I have the cognition, (1) “The pot is blue” and then happen for some reason to think immediately after this that (2) “The table is orange”, then we would not say that “(2) *sublates* (1)”, even though (2) is partly responsible for bringing an end to (1) by taking its place in the stream of thought.

How can we distinguish between the operation of a cognition that “cancels” a preceding cognition by taking its place in the self, and the case of a cognition that “cancels” a preceding cognition by sublating/falsifying it? Both can be said to “cancel”/“annul” the preceding mental trope, but they do so in different ways. When discussing D³ in his Advaita *pūrvapakṣa*, Vyāsatīrtha attempts to distinguish these two relationships by differentiating the *mode* under which the second cognition cancels the preceding cognition in each case. Take, for instance, two series of cognitions, A and B. Series A consists in the following series of cognitions, which occur as a sequence in one and the same self:

- (A¹) “The pot is blue”,
- (A²) “The table is orange”.

Series B, on the other hand, is the series of cognitions that occurs in the standard example of perceptual illusion, i.e. the mother-of-pearl/silver confusion. Series B is thus the sequence of cognitions:

- (B¹) “This thing is a piece of silver”,
- (B²) “This thing is actually mother-of-pearl!”.

In both of these series, an earlier cognition could be said to be “cancelled” (*nivṛtta*) by a cognition that comes after it. However, the mode under which A² cancels A¹, and B² cancels B¹ is different. A² cancels A¹ simply by virtue of being a distinguishing property of the self (*ātmaviśeṣaḡatvena*). It pushes the prior cognition out of

existence by taking its place in the stream of mental tropes, in the same way that other mental events such as desires and mental efforts annul the cognitions that precede them. By contrast, we could say that B² “cancels” B¹ *by virtue of being a cognition*. This is because only a cognition can “sublate” a previous cognition by falsifying its contents. In Navya-Nyāya technical language, the term used to show the mode under which a subsequent mental event cancels a prior one is *avacchedaka* (“determiner”, “limiter”).

A² and B² “cancel” A¹ and B¹, so in these two sequences, A² and B² are the cancellers (*nivartaka*) and A¹ and B¹ are the things cancelled (*nivartya*). The Navya-Naiyāyikas and the traditions that follow them express this relation by referring to two abstract properties which appear in the two things that enter into this relationship (“relational abstracts”). A² and B² are cognitions which have the relational property of *nivartakatā* (“being a canceller”) and A¹ and B¹ are cognitions which have the relational property of *nivartyatā* (“being cancelled”).

In the language of Navya-Nyāya, we say that the property of *nivartyatā* in A¹ and B¹ is “described by” (*nirūpita*—correlates with) the property of *nivartakatā* present in A² and B². The key difference is that the property of *nivartakatā* in A² is determined (*avacchinna*) by the quality of “being a distinctive property of the self that occurs [subsequently to A¹]” (*uttarātmaviśeṣaguṇatva*), whereas the *nivartakatā* present in B² is determined by the property of “being a cognition” (*jñānatva*). In other words, A² “cancels” A¹ by virtue of its being a distinguishing trope of the self, whereas B² “cancels” B¹ by virtue of its being a cognition.

Thus in the case of series A, where a trope “cancels” a previous trope simply by replacing it in the self, we refer to:

uttara-ātma-viśeṣa-guṇatva-avacchinna-nivartakatā-nirūpita-jñāna-niṣṭha-nivartyatvam (“The state of being-the-thing-that-is-cancelled that is located in cognition, and which is described by the state of being-the-canceller that is determined by the property of being-a-distinguishing-trope-of-the-self-that-occurs-subsequently [to the cognition it cancels]”).

On the other hand, in series B, where the second trope can be said to “sublate” the prior trope, we refer to:

jñānatva-avacchinna-nivartakatā-nirūpita-jñāna-niṣṭha-nivartyatvam (“The state of being-the-thing-that-is-cancelled that is located in cognition, and which is described by the state of being-the-canceller that is determined by cognitionhood”).

As Śrīnivāsātīrtha points out, in the case of series A, where one cognition “cancels” a prior cognition simply by occurring subsequently to that cognition in the self, the relational abstract *nivartakatā* cannot be said to be “determined by cognitionhood”. The cognition does not cancel the prior cognition *by virtue of being* a cognition, be-

cause the subsequent cognition could equally be cancelled in this way by a desire or a mental effort. By contrast, a sublating cognition can only be said to “cancel” the cognition that it sublates by virtue of being a cognition. No distinguishing property of the self other than cognition can “sublate” another cognition in this way. The relation of sublator/sublated is thus distinguished by specifying the mode under which the relational abstract *nivartakatā* is present in the sublating cognition. In this way, the definition identifies specifically the sublator/sublated relationship that the term *mithyātva* is being taken to express in D³ (“being liable to be cancelled by cognition by virtue [the cancelling thing’s] being a cognition”). From the point of view of Vyāsatīrtha’s *pūrvapakṣin*, D³ thus captures specifically the notion of “sublation”, which occurs when one mental judgment falsifies an earlier, erroneous one.

The final definition of the five that Vyāsatīrtha finds worthy of serious analysis in the *Nyāyāmṛta* comes from Ānandabodha’s *Nyāyadīpāvalī*.³⁵ According to this definition, to be “illusory” is simply to be “different from what is existent” (*sadvivikta*). In the *pūrvapakṣa*, Vyāsatīrtha anticipates a problem with this definition. The problem is that the definition might be read to prove something that the Mādhvas already accept (*siddhasādhana*). The definition might be understood to apply to existent things in general, because, so far as the Mādhvas are concerned, every existent individual is different from all other existent individuals. The definition should say that the “illusory” thing is different from all existent things, but it might be interpreted to say simply that one existent thing is different from another. The definition would thus prove something that is already established to the Mādhva, since the Mādhva already accepts that, e.g., an existent pot is different from an existent table.

To solve this problem, Vyāsatīrtha says that the definition should be interpreted as “lacking the property of being existent by essence” (*sadrūpatvābhāva*). The definition now effectively states that “illusory” things are illusory because they are differentiated from existent things in general, and the definition can no longer be interpreted to refer to distinctions between individual existent things. One potential objection to this solution is that the definition of *mithyātva* now applies inappropriately to *brahman* itself. According to the Advaitins, *brahman* lacks any qualities whatsoever. This means that *brahman* must lack the quality of existence itself.

To solve this problem, Vyāsatīrtha allows the Advaitin to argue that even though *brahman* might lack the property of existence, it can still be existent by essence. He finds precedent for this in the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory of universals. According to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika ontology, universals can only be present in individuals that belong

³⁵ See *Nyāyadīpāvalī*, NM: 1, and Pellegrini (2015) for a further discussion of this definition in Ānandabodha’s work.

to the first of their three categories (substances, tropes, and motions). The remaining four categories (universals, ultimate differentiators, inherence, and absence) never possess universals. “Existence”, according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers, is itself a universal, and, as such, it can never be present in other universals. Nevertheless, universals are by their very nature existent, and we speak of them as such. Likewise, one could say that *brahman* is by its very nature existent, even though it lacks the universal “existence”. So this definition of *mithyātva* need not apply inappropriately to *brahman* itself.³⁶

This completes the list of the five definitions of illusoriness that Vyāsātīrtha subjects to serious intellectual analysis in the Advaita *pūrvapakṣa* of his *Nyāyāmṛta*. He then devotes the following five chapters to proving that none of these definitions is compatible with the Advaitins’ arguments. When critiquing these definitions, Vyāsātīrtha always considers them as analyses of the probandum (the quality to be proved) in the formal inferences that Advaitin philosophers used to establish their position about the world. He argues that however illusoriness is defined, these inferences are intellectually indefensible and riddled with formal fallacies.

4.6 Inferring that the world is illusory

According to the above definitions of illusoriness, the world of our senses is ultimately an illusion which stands to be sublated by a deeper awareness of *brahman*. In the Advaita *pūrvapakṣa*, Vyāsātīrtha also analyses various ways that Advaitin philosophers tried to prove this position about the world. For example, the philosopher Ānandabodha Yati made several inferences to establish that the world is illusory. Vyāsātīrtha ascribes three such inferences to Ānandabodha, writing:

And inference is a proof [that the world is illusory]. For, Ānandabodha says as follows—“The object of [our] dispute is illusory, because [it is] perceptible, because [it is] insentient, [or] because [it is] finite; just like the ‘silver’ mistakenly superimposed on mother-of-pearl”.³⁷

³⁶ *yad vānandabodhokṛtīyā sadvivikṭatvaṃ mithyātvam. tac ca sadrūpatvābhāvāḥ. brahma ca sattārāhitam api sāmānyam iva sadrūpam.* (*Nyāyāmṛta*, NAB, 1:38.) “Or, ‘illusoriness’, following the approach of Ānandabodha, is ‘being different from what is existent’. And [‘being different from what is existent’] consists in ‘not being existent by essence’. [It might be objected that this definition of ‘illusoriness’ applies inappropriately to *brahman* itself, which, being ‘free from qualities’, must lack even the property of existence. However,] like the universal (*sāmānyā*)[, which, according to Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophers, can be spoken of as ‘existent’ even though it lacks the quality of existence], *brahman* is existent by essence, even though it lacks the quality of existence.”

³⁷ *pramāṇaṃ cātrānumānam—vimataṃ mithyā, dṛśyatvāt, jaḍatvāt, paricchinnatvāt; suktirūpya-vad ity ānandabodhokteḥ.* (*Nyāyāmṛta*, NAB, 1:24.) Jayātīrtha presents Ānandabodha’s inferences

Vyāsātīrtha actually presents three different inferences in this passage. They can be written separately as follows:

1. “The world is illusory, because [it is] perceptible; just like the silver [superimposed] on mother-of-pearl” (*jagan mithyā, dṛśyatvāt; śuktirūpyavat*).
2. “The world is illusory, because [it is] finite; just like the silver [superimposed] on mother-of-pearl” (*jagan mithyā, paricchinnatvāt; śuktirūpyavat*).
3. “The world is illusory, because [it is] insentient; just like the silver [superimposed] on mother-of-pearl” (*jagan mithyā, jaḍatvāt; suktirūpyavat*).

Ānandabodha himself is taken to have written three works on Advaita philosophy: the *Nyāyamakaranda*, the *Pramāṇamālā*, and the *Nyāyadīpāvalī*. Vyāsātīrtha refers to all three of these works by name in the *Nyāyāmṛta*.³⁸ In the *Nyāyamakaranda*, Ānandabodha stated explicitly at least two of the inferences that Vyāsātīrtha credits him with.³⁹ Ānandabodha devoted his brief tract the *Nyāyadīpāvalī* to giving a

in a similar fashion at the beginning of the *Vādāvalī*: *nanu katham satyatā jagato 'ṅgikārādhikāriṇi? vimataṁ mithyā, dṛśyatvāt, jaḍatvāt, paricchinnatvāt; śuktirūpyavad ity anumānavirodhād iti*. (VĀ: 1.) In the same passage of the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha ascribes the following inferences to Citsukha: *ayaṁ paṭa etattantuniṣṭhātyantābhāvapratiyogī, paṭatvād, aṁśitvāt; paṭāntaravad iti tattvaprādīpakteḥ*. (*Nyāyāmṛta*, NAB, 1:24.) “[Because] there is the following argument of [Citsukha in] the *Tattvaprādīpā*—‘This garment here is the counterpositive of a constant absence that is located in these very threads, because [it is] a garment, [or] because it is something that consists of parts (*aṁśin*); just like this other garment.’”

38 In the *Nyāyāmṛta* (NAB, 1:47), Vyāsātīrtha refers to both Ānandabodha’s *Pramāṇamālā* and *Nyāyadīpāvalī* when critiquing “perceptibility” (*dṛśyatva*) as a reason in Ānandabodha’s inferences. He refers to the *Pramāṇamālā* also when discussing the reason of “finitude” (*paricchinnatva*) in the inferences (1:198). He refers to Ānandabodha’s *Nyāyamakaranda* by name when critiquing Prakāśātman’s definition of illusoriness (1:68).

39 While defending the Advaita doctrine of indeterminacy in his magnum opus, the *Nyāyamakaranda*, Ānandabodha writes: *tasmān na sat, nāsat, nāpi sadasat; api tv anādyanirvācyāvidyākriḍanam alikānirbhāsaṁ vibhramālambanam iti siddham. sati caivaṁ prapañco 'pi syād avidyāvijṛmbhitah / jādyaḍṛśyatvahetubhyāṁ rajatasvapnadṛśyavat //* (*Nyāyamakaranda*, NM: 127–128.) “Therefore, it is established that the objective basis (*ālambana*) of error is neither existent, nor nonexistent, nor both existent and nonexistent; rather it is a play of beginningless, indeterminate nescience, the appearance of which is illusory. And, this being [established], the world too must have grown from nescience, by reason of [its] being insentient and perceptible, just like the ‘silver’ [superimposed on mother-of-pearl] or an object seen in a dream.” Ānandabodha’s *śloka* in this passage gives a concise formulation of two of the inferences that Vyāsātīrtha ascribes to him in the *Nyāyāmṛta*. The reasons in these inferences are “insentience” (*jādyā*) and “perceptibility”. In the *Nyāyadīpāvalī*, Ānandabodha presents the first of the inferences using the full five-part syllogism used by the Naiyāyikas: *vivādapadaṁ mithyā, dṛśyatvāt; yad itthaṁ tat tathā, yathobhayavādyavivādapadaṁ rajatam; tathaitat, tatas tathā*. (*Nyāyadīpāvalī*, NM: 1.) “The object of the dispute [= the world] is illusory, because [it is] perceptible; that which is so [= perceptible] is [also] illusory,

rigorous defence of the first of the inferences given above, attempting to certify it by demonstrating that it does not suffer from any of the formal fallacies accepted by the Naiyāyikas.

Ānandabodha was always a central opponent for medieval Mādhva philosophers. Madhva himself adopted Ānandabodha's style of argumentation in his works. He devoted a brief topical treatise specifically to refuting Ānandabodha's inference to prove the illusoriness of the world on the basis that it is perceptible (the first of the three inferences given above), a text usually known as the (*Prapañca*)*mithyātvānumānakhaṇḍana* ("Refutation of the Inference to Prove the Illusoriness [of the World]"). Madhva also critiqued Ānandabodha's inferences in a topical treatise usually known as the *Tattvodyota* ("Illumination of the Truth") and in the *Anuvyākhyāna*, his verse commentary on the *Brahmasūtra*.⁴⁰ In these texts, Madhva used Nyāya theories about inference to refute Ānandabodha's inferences, perhaps drawing on the inferential theory of the tenth century Naiyāyika Bhāsarvajña.⁴¹ However, in his *Pramāṇalakṣaṇa* Madhva also used his own distinctive theories about inference and knowledge to refute Ānandabodha.

Jayātīrtha and Viṣṇudāsa both wrote detailed critiques of Ānandabodha's inferences. Jayātīrtha in particular responded in his *Vādāvalī* to Citsukha's defence of Ānandabodha's arguments. In the opening chapters of the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha

just like the 'silver' [superimposed on mother-of-pearl], which is not subject to dispute by the two debaters; [and the world] is so [= perceptible]; therefore it is illusory."

⁴⁰ Madhva refutes the *dṛśyatva* inference, for instance, in *Anuvyākhyāna* 2,2.217–222 (*Anuvyākhyāna*, SMG1, 1:83–84).

⁴¹ Jeffrey Lunstead (1977) argued that Madhva himself followed a modified version of the inferential terminology of Bhāsarvajña (fl. 950) in his arguments against the Advaitins in the (*Prapañca*)*mithyātvānumānakhaṇḍana*. Lunstead concludes that Madhva used Bhāsarvajña's system in part because his Advaitin opponents would be prepared to accept Bhāsarvajña's theory of inference. See Lunstead (1977: 29) for a discussion of Vyāsātīrtha's own reference to Bhāsarvajña in his commentary on the *Prapañcamithyātvānumānakhaṇḍana*. Madhva clearly uses a different system of inferential flaws in the *Prapañcamithyātvānumānakhaṇḍana* than he does in his *Pramāṇalakṣaṇa*. Lunstead points out that Madhva's list of "faulty-reasons" (*hetvābhāsas*) corresponds closely to that of Bhāsarvajña, and that both Madhva and Bhāsarvajña refer to "faults of the example" (*dṛṣṭāntābhāsas*) as an independent category. Lunstead (1977: 33) reasons as follows: "There are two possible explanations for this seeming contradiction. The first is that the system derived from Bhāsarvajña which was used in the *Khaṇḍana* had a purely dialectical function, that Madhva used it, not because he believed in it himself, but because his opponents did. [...] The second possibility is that this was a system developed by Madhva at an early stage in his career, borrowing either directly or indirectly from Bhāsarvajña. The system was then superseded by the system [...] which he [= Madhva] developed later". Lunstead also points out that Ānandabodha and Sarvajñaśātman, two of the Advaitins with whose works Madhva was acquainted, were clearly aware of Bhāsarvajña's theory of inference.

is largely concerned with refuting these inferences. He generally follows the line of argument sketched out by Madhva and Jayatīrtha, but his case is much more detailed. As I discuss below in Chapter 7, Vyāsātīrtha draws frequently on the new epistemological ideas found in Gaṅgeśa's chapter of the *Tattvacintāmaṇi* that is devoted to inference.

Besides Ānandabodha's inferences, Vyāsātīrtha says that the Advaitins could prove their position by adducing passages of scripture which seem to establish their nondualistic stance about the world. Vyāsātīrtha's *pūrvapakṣin* adduces several passages from the Upaniṣads which are taken to support the Advaitins' interpretation of the Veda, before going on to defend this interpretation against the charge that it is incompatible with what perception tells us about the world. I conclude this chapter with a translation of this section because it introduces many of the epistemological themes that I will discuss when I turn to Vyāsātīrtha's analysis of the concept of "existence" in the next chapter:

And *the Veda* proves that [the world is illusory]. For, words such as "without a second" (*advītyam*) in [passages of the Veda] such as, "One alone, without a second ..." (*ekam evādvītyam; Chāndogya Upaniṣad*, 6.2.1) deny that there is any second thing [besides *brahman*].⁴²

The Advaita *pūrvapakṣin* goes on to argue that, despite appearances, there is no deep contradiction between the non-dualistic interpretation of the Veda and our perceptions of a pluralistic world:

Objection: Since [they] conflict with perception, inference cannot prove [the illusoriness of the world], and the Veda must be taken to have a secondary sense [in those passages where it seems to say that the world is illusory].

Reply (Advaitin): This does not follow. For, perception apprehends [only] the *practical* (*vyāvahārika*) existence [of its objects], whereas inference [and scripture] deny the *ultimate* existence [of the objects that make up the world]. For, perception, which grasps only what exists in the present moment, cannot grasp permanent nonsublatability (*trikālābādhyatva*), which is what ultimate existence really is]. The thesis in the [inference] that concludes that "Fire is not hot", by contrast, is sublated by perception only because [it] denies the practical existence of [fire's] quality of "being hot", which is established by [tactile] perception.

And [there is precedent for perception being ruled out by other instruments of knowledge] because [we] observe that our "perceptions" that the sky is dark-blue, or that the moon is the size of [one's] thumb are ruled out by inference and scripture.⁴³

⁴² *śrutiś cātra pramāṇam, ekam evādvītyam ity ādāv advītyam ity ādisabdair dvītyamātranīṣedhāt. (Nyāyāmṛta, NAB, 1:50.)*

⁴³ *na ca pratyakṣabādhād anumānam amānam, śrutiś cāmukhyārtheti yuktam; pratyakṣeṇa vyāvahārikasattvagrahāt, anumānādibhiś ca pāramārthikasattvaniṣedhāt. na hi vartamānamātra-*

Vyāsātīrtha's *pūrvapakṣin* here responds to the charge that their interpretation of scripture is contradicted by our perceptions of the everyday world. Mādhva philosophers, like the Naiyāyikas, argue that perception has a special status among the means of knowledge. Vyāsātīrtha clearly accepts that inference and scripture are valid instruments of knowledge, but he does argue that they always need to be reconciled with the facts that perception reveals to us about the world. If our “inferences” conflict with perception, then we must reject those inferences as invalid, and if our interpretation of scripture is at odds with perception, then so much the worse for that interpretation. Like Madhva and Jayatīrtha, he frequently likens this to the case where someone concludes on some basis that fire is cold, before plunging their hand into it and discovering the truth!

In this passage, the Advaita *pūrvapakṣin* counters this argument by invoking his distinction between “ultimate” existence and practical/transactional existence. He contends that perception can only tell us about the practical sort of existence; questions of *ultimate* existence are beyond its ken. It is true that invalid inferences can be ruled out by perception. However, the inverse is also true: we regularly take ourselves to have “perceived” things which are subsequently ruled out by inference. For example, a young child gazing through their hands at the night sky might conclude that the moon is actually the size of the thumb, only to be corrected by the instruction of an adult who tells them that it is not. So it is not the case that perception automatically trumps the other means of knowledge, as the Mādhvas argue.

4.7 Conclusion

Ānandabodha's inferences were intended to help validate the Advaitins' nondualistic interpretation of scripture by undermining the reality of the empirical world. In the *Nyāyāmṛta*, Vyāsātīrtha turns his attention to these inferences, carefully analysing their core concepts and arguing that they each suffer from a plethora of formal flaws. Perception and what it tells us about the world is at the heart of Vyāsātīrtha's critique. Like Madhva and Jayatīrtha, Vyāsātīrtha argues that Ānandabodha's inferences to prove the “illusoriness” of the world are all “ruled out by perception” (*pratyakṣabādhita*), regardless of how they are interpreted. Vyāsātīrtha builds a case to prove that perception is always stronger than inference and that any adequate interpretation of scripture must be consistent with perception.

grāhi pratyakṣaṃ trikālābādhyatvagrāhi. vahnir anuṣṇa ity atra tūṣṇatvasya pratyakṣasiddhavyāvahārikasattvapratishedhād bādhaḥ. dṛśyate ca nabhonailyacandraprādeśatvagrāhipratyakṣayor anumānāgamābhyām bādha iti. (Nyāyāmṛta, NAB, 1:50–51.)

The kind of radical sublation of perception by scripture postulated by the Advaitins is simply impossible; according to Vyāsatīrtha, perception discloses to us that its objects exist, and neither inference nor scripture have the power to undermine that insight. It is true that perception sometimes errs, but these are exceptional episodes which admit of simple explanations. They lack the power to undermine the trustworthiness of the everyday knowledge we garner through our senses.

As I have shown here, Vyāsatīrtha's claim against Ānandabodha is grounded in his analysis of the nature of "existence" itself. In the *Nyāyāmṛta* he rejects earlier attempts by Indian philosophers to define existence as inadequate, and proposes his own analysis of the concept. Like the Advaitins and the Naiyāyikas, Vyāsatīrtha assumes that "existence" is a type of property that belongs to things we refer to as "existent". However, he rejects these schools' interpretations of existence in his *Nyāyāmṛta* and proposes his own definition of the concept. Vyāsatīrtha offers his analysis as a direct contradiction of the Advaitins' anti-realist stance about the world. He shows that existence is a property we can directly perceive in the objects of our experience. Vyāsatīrtha's analysis of existence and nonexistence, which forms the basis of his critique of indeterminacy, is one of his most important contributions to Mādhva philosophy.