

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Consciousness and Śakti-based Vedānta cosmopsychism: A philosophical reconstruction of Jīva's Bhedābheda Vedānta

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Abstract

This paper explores the implications of Jīva Gosvāmī's (sixteenth century) Bhedābheda Vedānta for the contemporary philosophical debate on consciousness, thereby contributing to the broader and growing interest in the insights that Indian traditions may bring to current discussions in the philosophy of mind. More specifically, I develop here a metaphysical, coarse-grained partial reconstruction of Jīva's thought, arguing that it can be interpreted as a distinctive form of priority cosmopsychism, which I term *śakti-based Vedānta cosmopsychism*. Needless to say, this involves both a terminological and a taxonomical task, as I seek to clarify how key aspects of Jīva's thought can be articulated through the conceptual framework and vocabulary of contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of mind. In the final part of the paper, I turn to a more fine-grained analysis, examining the implications of śakti-based Vedānta cosmopsychism for central issues in the philosophy of consciousness, including the causal exclusion problem and the explanatory gap problem, here framed as the individuation problem. I also address some few objections, among them a cosmopsychist formulation of the Vedāntic problem of imperfection.

Keywords: priority cosmopsychism; priority monism; individuation problem; causal exclusion problem; Bhedābheda Vedānta; Jīva Gosvāmī

Introduction

Among the major schools of Vedānta, Advaita Vedānta – systematised by Śaṅkara in the eighth century – is commonly held to maintain that ultimate reality, *Brahman*, is impersonal, all-encompassing, and identical with all that exists, though whether this fully reflects Śaṅkara's own position remains a matter of scholarly debate. By contrast, Dvaita Vedānta – developed by Madhva in the thirteenth century – is generally understood as holding that ultimate reality is a personal God, fundamentally distinct from both the world and macro subjects.

Positioned between these two poles is a lesser known but highly influential family of traditions – particularly within Indian philosophical and theological circles – known as Bhedābheda Vedānta. Bhedābheda schools affirm that ultimate reality is simultaneously both different (*bheda*) and non-different (*abheda*) from the world and macro subjects. Important proponents of Bhedābheda Vedānta include Bhartṛprapañca (c. sixth–seventh

century), Bhāskara (c. eighth–ninth century), Yādavaprakāśa (eleventh century), Nimbārka (c. eleventh–thirteenth century), Vijñānabhikṣu (sixteenth century), and Jīva Gosvāmī (sixteenth century). (Although not classified as a *bhedābheda* tradition, Rāmānuja (eleventh–twelfth century) too may be understood as somehow positioned between Śaṅkara and Madhva.¹)

Like most other Vedānta schools – with the notable exception of Śaṅkara’s Advaita – Bhedābheda traditions are realist, affirming the reality of both the world and macro subjects, while maintaining their ontological distinction from ultimate reality. Underlying this is an old Vedāntic doctrine called *Parīṇāmavāda*, which holds that everything that exists is a real transformation (*parīṇāma*) of ultimate reality. In this sense, there is a oneness, or non-difference, between ultimate reality, on the one hand, and the world and macro subjects, on the other – a relation that reflects an ontological continuity extending from the former to the latter.

Because of that, like most Vedānta schools – with Madhva’s Dvaita as perhaps the chief exception – Bhedābheda traditions can be described as monist, or non-dualist. As Parthasarathi Srinivasachari (1950, 280) notes, ‘the cosmogony of Bhedābheda is more monistic than that of Rāmānuja [...] as it traces the world-order to the eternal necessity of Brahman’. Yet this monism is qualified, since Bhedābheda also emphasises difference alongside non-difference. Finally, as with many Vedānta schools, Bhedābheda traditions regard ultimate reality as intrinsically conscious – sometimes describing it as consciousness itself.

The general aim of this paper is to bring these three aspects into dialogue and examine how a particular Bhedābheda school – namely, that of Jīva Gosvāmī, which, as expected, is both monist and realist – can inform contemporary philosophical debates on consciousness. This aligns with a broader and growing interest in the potential insights that Indian traditions may offer to current discussions in the philosophy of consciousness (Duckworth 2017; Albahari 2020; Vaidya 2020; Medhananda 2022a, 2022b; Shani 2023; Silvestre 2024).

More specifically, my goal is to offer a metaphysical, coarse-grained partial reconstruction of Jīva’s thought, arguing that it can be interpreted as a form of priority cosmopsychism. Along the way, I will argue that the type of monism Jīva’s tradition fits in corresponds to what is commonly called priority monism. Needless to say, this will involve both a terminological and a taxonomical task, as I will seek to clarify how key aspects of Jīva’s Bhedābheda Vedānta can be articulated through the conceptual framework and vocabulary of contemporary metaphysics and philosophy of mind.

In the final part of the paper, I turn to a more fine-grained analysis, examining the implications of this reconstruction for central issues in the philosophy of consciousness, including the causal exclusion problem and the explanatory gap problem, here framed as the individuation problem. I also address some few objections, among them a cosmopsychist formulation of the Vedāntic problem of imperfection.

The choice of this particular school is significant for at least three reasons. First, although Bhedābheda schools have been influential within Indian philosophical and theological circles, they remain largely underrepresented in contemporary analytic philosophical discussions of Indian thought and consciousness. Second, even within this already marginalised tradition, Jīva Gosvāmī’s school is comparatively overlooked. Yet it stands out for its distinctly dialogical nature: owing to its controversial status within the broader Vedānta community, its central concepts and doctrines are often developed in conversation with – and frequently in response to – rival schools. Third, many of the features that support the reconstruction of Jīva’s system as a cosmopsychist model are not unique to it but are shared across other Indian traditions, as I will briefly indicate throughout the text.

Some terminological remarks

Before proceeding, some terminological clarification is in order. A mental property refers to any state of mind. This includes states such as belief, desire, and will, as well as conscious or experiential properties – ways of experiencing that are distinguished by what it is like to have them. A physical object is one that instantiates physical properties. The physical world, or simply the world, is the totality of physical objects. A concrete object is one that instantiates physical or mental properties. A subject is a concrete object that instantiates experiential properties.

Human beings and other living beings, such as higher animals (which instantiate both physical and mental properties) and rocks (which instantiate only physical properties) are all concrete objects. However, only human beings and higher animals qualify as subjects. To distinguish these from God – who is likewise a subject and will later be referred to as a cosmic subject – I refer to them as macro subjects.²

I will refer to the key Vedāntic concept – commonly designated by terms such as ‘*Brahman*’, ‘*Ātman*’, and ‘*Tattva*’ (see below) – as ‘ultimate reality’, by which I mean the one fundamental entity that metaphysically grounds all that exists while itself being ungrounded by anything. It is also important to note that the terms ‘mind’ and ‘mental’, as used here, do not correspond to the Sanskrit term ‘*manas*’, which is traditionally translated as mind but functions differently within classical Indian philosophical frameworks.

Metaphysical grounding will be central to what follows, and the exact sense in which I employ the notion will become clearer in due course. For now, it suffices to say that I take grounding to be a non-causal relation of ontological priority among concrete objects, one that supports a metaphysical foundationalist picture: every concrete object is either fundamental or fully grounded in one or more fundamental concrete objects. In addition, I assume that grounding backs ‘in virtue of’ explanations: if X is grounded in Y, then X exists, and is the way it is, in virtue of Y, and facts about X obtain in virtue of facts about Y.³

Jīva Gosvāmī’s notion of ultimate reality

There are several aspects that distinguish Jīva’s Bhedābheda Vedānta from other Bhedābheda schools. Central to his ontology is a verse from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (1.2.11), which states:⁴

Knowers of ultimate reality speak of that ultimate reality (*Tattva*) as non-dual consciousness (*jñānam advayam*), which is referred to as *Brahman*, *Paramātmān*, and *Bhagavān*.

In an important respect, Jīva Gosvāmī treats this verse as expressing a foundational scriptural thesis that discloses the nature of ultimate reality and functions as a hermeneutical constraint on the interpretation of the *Upaniṣads* and other *Purāṇas*.

Following the terminology of this verse – and departing from standard Vedāntic usage – Jīva refers to ultimate reality as *Tattva* (literally, ‘that-ness’) rather than *Brahman*. In his framework, *Brahman* – together with *Paramātmān* and *Bhagavān* – denotes one of the three aspects of ultimate reality, with the distinctions among these three being primarily epistemic and conceptual rather than ontological.⁵ They represent varying ways in which *Tattva* may manifest or be experienced, rather than referring to separate realities. As the verse states, all three terms describe the one non-dual ultimate reality. Because of this, Jīva often uses the three terms – ‘*Brahman*’, ‘*Paramātmān*’, and ‘*Bhagavān*’ – interchangeably, each designating the same *Tattva* or ultimate reality, a convention I will occasionally adopt here as well.

Bhagavān (literally, ‘the one who possesses [all] excellences, or perfections’) is the complete and fullest manifestation of ultimate reality. In him, all kinds of *śakti* – divine powers, glories, perfections, and attributes – are fully manifest. Depending on the extent to which these *śaktis*⁶ are non-manifest, ultimate reality is known as either *Brahman* or *Paramātmān*. When the varieties of *śakti* are completely, or almost completely, unmanifest, ultimate reality is referred to as *Brahman*: a formless, undifferentiated, and impersonal non-dual consciousness. *Brahman* is *Bhagavān*, but with the splendour and glory unmanifest. When the *śaktis* become partially manifest, particularly in relation to the world, ultimate reality is known as *Paramātmān*: the inner controller (*antaryāmin*) of all individual beings, the support and the efficient cause of the world, and the guiding force behind the world’s functioning.

This account entails a hierarchy among the different manifestations of ultimate reality: *Bhagavān* is at the top, *Brahman* is at the bottom, and *Paramātmān* occupies the middle. As a result, *Bhagavān*, as the full manifestation of ultimate reality, is the real foundation of Jīva’s ontology. In alignment with Madhva and other Bhedābheda thinkers, Jīva emphasises the personal nature of ultimate reality, such that his concept of ultimate reality is, ultimately, a theistic conception of God. In its fullest manifestation, ultimate reality is a divine subject – and hence a concrete object – who, from a first-person perspective, instantiates not only experiential properties but also other mental properties, such as thought, belief, and volition.⁷

But the connection between *Tattva* and consciousness runs deeper than what its association with the concept of *Bhagavān* alone might suggest. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* verse defines ultimate reality as non-dual consciousness (*jñānam advayam*). For Jīva, ultimate reality itself is consciousness. Although the term used in the verse is ‘*jñāna*’ – typically translated as knowledge or cognition – Jīva emphatically glosses it as consisting of (undivided) consciousness (*jñānam cid-eka-rūpam*, literally, ‘*jñāna* [is] one-form consciousness’).⁸

Thus, for Jīva, in relation to ultimate reality, consciousness is both attributive – by virtue of the characterisation of *Bhagavān*, and indeed of *Brahman* and *Paramātmān* as well – and substantive, in light of his definition of *Tattva*. Beyond acknowledging that the substantive dimension is present, I will not attempt to clarify what it means to say that *Tattva* is consciousness. My focus here will fall primarily on the attributive aspect.

In this regard, as a methodological assumption, I will take Jīva’s use of the terms ‘*jñāna*’ in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* verse and ‘*cit*’ to correspond – at least approximately – to consciousness in the experiential sense of ‘what-it-is-like-ness’. This is supported, for example, by Jīva’s claim that *Tattva* is of the nature of supreme bliss (*parama-sukha*), which plausibly implies an experiential dimension.⁹ Thus, in my reconstruction, ultimate reality or *Tattva* instantiates conscious or experiential properties.

Śakti and the relationship between ultimate reality, the world, and macro subjects

A central element of Jīva’s concept of ultimate reality is the notion of *śakti*.¹⁰ In its fullest manifested form as *Bhagavān*, ultimate reality possesses several *śaktis*, being therefore known as *śaktimān*, the possessor of [all] *śaktis*. The term ‘*śakti*’ has been translated into English in numerous ways, including power, capacity, energy, and potency. In the context of Jīva and other theologians of his school, the term covers a large range of things, including *Bhagavān*’s divine attributes and realm, macro subjects, and the world with its manifold physical objects.¹¹ All these are ultimate reality’s *śaktis*. Indeed, with the sole exception of ultimate reality itself, everything – especially every concrete object – is either a *śakti* of ultimate reality or constituted by such *śaktis*.

Ultimate reality’s *śakti* is divided into three categories. First, the internal (*antaraṅga* or *svarūpa*) *śakti*, which includes *Bhagavān*’s attributes and the realm in which He resides and

carries out His divine activities (*līlā*). Second, the in-between (*taṭastha*) *śakti*, which consists of the souls, or individual selves (*ātman* or *jīva*) who may inhabit this world. Third, the external (*bahiraṅga*) *śakti* – also known as *māyā-śakti* – which comprises the non-conscious principle (*pradhāna*) that transforms into the world and its manifold physical objects.

Given that souls are inherently conscious, I will, for the purposes of this paper, treat the term ‘*taṭastha-śakti*’ as at least coextensive with the term ‘macro subject’, using them interchangeably.¹² Also, since the world, as defined in the section ‘Some terminological remarks’, also includes macro subjects who instantiate physical properties (that is, embodied souls), it arises from a combination of both the external *śakti* and the in-between *śakti* – something that *Jīva* explicitly acknowledges.¹³ In other words, the world is constituted by these two *śaktis* of ultimate reality. I will therefore often refer to these two kinds of *śakti* – and their products, a distinction I will sometimes overlook – collectively as ‘macro subjects and the world’.

Jīva offers an analogy to clarify his threefold division of *śakti*.¹⁴ The sun gives rise to (1) the fiery radiance within its orb, (2) the rays that extend outward from it, and (3) the sun’s reflection on the surface of a pond, for example. In this analogy, the sun represents *Bhagavān*, while (1) corresponds to the internal *śakti*, (2) to the in-between *śakti*, and (3) to the external *śakti*. A key point in the analogy is that, while (1)–(3) all proceed from and ontologically depend on the sun, their relationship to it varies in terms of proximity and connection.

It is precisely through this gradation of proximity that *Jīva* addresses the classical problem of imperfection within Vedānta: if the world is a transformation (*pariṇāma*) of ultimate reality, then the world’s imperfections, ignorance, and evils must ultimately be traced back to ultimate reality. While acknowledging that the world is indeed a transformation of ultimate reality in its manifestation as *Paramātmān*, *Jīva* maintains that this transformation does not affect its inner nature – corresponding, in the analogy, to the sun and the radiance within its orb – which remains unchanged. The transformation occurs only indirectly, through *Paramātmān*’s inconceivable (*acintya*) *śakti*, primarily in the form of the external *śakti*, but also involving the in-between *śakti*.¹⁵ This ensures that *Paramātmān* remains ‘pure’ and untouched by the imperfections of the world. For this reason, *Jīva*’s doctrine of creation is often described as *Śaktipariṇāmavāda* (Gupta 2007, 205).

Despite this, all three kinds of *śakti* are characterised by an ontological continuity extending from ultimate reality to themselves – a relation that underpins *Jīva*’s *Bhedābheda* doctrine. As the analogy goes, just as there is both difference and non-difference between the sun, its orb, its rays, and even its reflection on the surface of a pond, so too ultimate reality and its *śaktis* are simultaneously different and non-different from one another.

The emphasis on non-difference arises from the fact that *śakti* is intrinsic to ultimate reality’s very nature. Just as light is inseparable from fire – naturally arising from it and sharing its nature – so too the *śaktis* of ultimate reality are intrinsic to its very being (*svabhāva-bhūta*) and non-different or inseparable from its essential nature (*svarūpād abhinna*).¹⁶ In fact, speaking specifically of the in-between and external *śaktis*, *Jīva* Gosvāmī says that although ultimate reality is not tainted by them, they are nevertheless its *śaktis* precisely because they possess the condition of being eternally dependent upon it – *nitya-tad-āśritatā*, literally ‘the condition of eternally being situated upon, resting in, or dwelling within that (i.e., ultimate reality)’ – and because they have no independent existence apart from it.¹⁷ In more strictly philosophical terms, the *śaktis* – as well as their products – are grounded in ultimate reality.¹⁸

Since everything – apart from ultimate reality itself – is either a *śakti* of ultimate reality or constituted by such *śaktis*, it follows that *Jīva*’s use of the term ‘*Tattva*’ satisfies the definition of ultimate reality given in the section ‘Some terminological remarks’ as the

single fundamental reality, the one concrete object in which all other existing entities are grounded.

Discussing this grounding relation between ultimate reality and its *śaktis*, Aleksandar Uskokov (2024, 16–17) notes an important connection between Jīva's thought and Rāmānuja's Viśiṣṭādvaita Vedānta:

this ontological structure of Jīva's is inspired by – even appropriated from – the Śrīvaiṣṇava Viśiṣṭādvaita, where a complex yet organic unity is formed by *Brahman* the substance, *viśeṣya*, of which the insentient matter (*acid*) and the sentient soul (*cid*) are predicated as properties or distinguishing characteristics, *viśeṣaṇa*, to form a qualified unit, *viśiṣṭa*. [...] this is achieved by subsuming the notion of distinguishing attribute under another category, that of *śakti*, i.e., power or capacity [...] the relation [between *śakti* and *Bhagavān*] is defined in the sense of Rāmānuja's notion of *apṛthak-siddhi* or ontological dependence.¹⁹

This is important because it reminds us that, in accordance with the traditional sense of the term '*śakti*', Jīva's three kinds of *śakti* – in particular the in-between and the external *śaktis* – are attributes or properties of *Bhagavān*. In fact, speaking specifically about *mayā-śakti*, Jīva says that it is a particular property (*dharma-viśeṣa*) of *Bhagavān*.²⁰ At the very least, this entails that *Bhagavān* is ontologically prior to His *śaktis*, such that they are grounded in Him and rest upon Him as their locus.

But as Uskokov (2024, 16) aptly notes, *Bhagavān*'s various *śaktis* 'encompass and give rise to whatever may be called a "thing" in the most general sense and in any domain of existence'. In particular, the external *śakti* – and the entities that arise from it – and the several tokens of the in-between *śakti* 'are ontological reals, substances, in their own right, but are treated as attributive to the first principle [*Tattva*]' (Uskokov 2024, 16).

In other words, macro subjects and the world with its manifold physical objects possess a dual nature. In themselves, they are substances; in relation to ultimate reality, they function like properties. Like properties, macro subjects and the world are 'possessed' by ultimate reality and rest upon it as their locus. Yet in themselves, they resemble substances: they bear properties, are ontologically individuated, and persist through time. As Uskokov (2024, 17) observes, 'it is their being simultaneously a substance and an attribute or a property that is the distinctive feature of [Jīva's] ontology of *śakti*'.

One might question the tenability of the thesis that an entity can be both a property and a substance at the same time. Uskokov (2024, 16–17) remarks that

This is less mysterious than it might seem at first blush if read in the light of Rāmānuja's classical illustration. Although a stick is a thing in its own right, when carried by a man, it becomes attributive to the man, to form a complex entity 'man-with-a-stick' (*daṇḍin*). The two may, in addition, share properties, such as colour, such that the property may share properties with what it is a property of.

A perhaps more effective response would begin by clarifying, in philosophical terms, what is meant by 'property' and 'substance' within Jīva's ontological framework.

First of all, in several strands of Indian philosophy, a *viśeṣaṇa* – and, in a closely related sense, a *prakāra* (usually translated as predicate, attribute, or mode) – is not ontologically restricted to the status of a non-substantial property. Rather, a *viśeṣaṇa* or *prakāra* can itself possess a degree of substantiality while remaining dependent upon that which it qualifies or of which it is a mode. This helps explain how *śaktis* can be understood as properties of ultimate reality without thereby denying them some robust ontological status.

Second, against this background, macro subjects and the world should not be understood as properties of ultimate reality in the sense of universals, but rather as closer to tropes – that is, token or particularised qualities (for example, the specific redness of an apple, rather than the universal property of redness).²¹ This finds some support in Jīva's already mentioned statement that Bhagavān's *śakti* is a *dharmā-viśeṣa*, literally a particular (*viśeṣa*) property (*dharma*). So understood, this does not commit one to a bundle theory on which objects are nothing more than collections of tropes.

This point is important, since Jīva operates within a substance-based metaphysical framework. In such a framework, tropes exist only in virtue of the substances that bear them; they are grounded in those substances and, in a crucial sense, are nothing over and above them. This view is consistent with – and in some respects entailed by – Jīva's ontology, according to which the *śaktis* of ultimate reality are inseparable from it and intrinsic to its very nature. Thus, the *śaktis* of ultimate reality – and in particular macro subjects – are, in a sense to be clarified below, nothing over and above ultimate reality itself.

Accordingly – and this is the third point – 'substance' should not be understood here in the traditional Aristotelian sense, as that which exists in itself and serves as the ultimate bearer of properties. In this strict sense, ultimate reality alone qualifies as a substance. Instead, macro subjects and the world, together with their manifold physical objects, may be called substances only in a relative, Cartesian sense: although grounded in ultimate reality, *śaktis* – such as macro subjects and (at least some) physical objects – remain ungrounded with respect to one another.²²

Priority monism

As a Bhedābheda account of ultimate reality, Jīva's ontology is monistic in that it presupposes a fundamentally unitary principle. Throughout the *Sandarbhās*, he repeatedly characterises ultimate reality as *advaya*, that is, non-dual. Yet there are several forms of monism. There is substance monism, which holds that there is only one kind of substance, or one highest ontological category under which all concrete objects fall; physicalism, understood as the view that everything is physical, is a familiar example. There is existence monism, which maintains that exactly one concrete object (token) exists; Advaita Vedānta is sometimes interpreted as approximating this view, insofar as it holds that *Brahman* alone is ultimately real. And there is priority monism, which is the type of monism into which Jīva's Bhedābheda Vedānta fits.²³

In its short formulation, priority monism holds that there is exactly one fundamental concrete object, or one concrete object in which all other existing objects are grounded. In its fuller form, it maintains that the Cosmos – understood as the totality of reality, or the single maximal actual concrete whole of which all actual concrete objects are parts – is this one fundamental object, ontologically prior to its proper parts, even though those parts exist as objects in their own right. While everything is grounded in the Cosmos, the Cosmos itself stands ungrounded.²⁴

This doctrine rests on three main assumptions and yields one main consequence. The first assumption is that there is a Cosmos that has a multitude of proper parts. The second is that the Cosmos is not identical with any plurality of its many proper parts. The third is the priority of the whole, the thesis that the whole is ontologically prior to its proper parts. The consequence is that all facts about the Cosmos's proper parts – whether physical or mental – obtain in virtue of facts about the Cosmos as a whole.

There are two important points to be stressed in this definition of priority monism. First, following Chalmers (2020, 353), I include mentality within the scope of concreteness, while excluding abstract domains such as mathematics. Second, whereas proper parthood is typically construed in terms of spatial inclusion, I adopt a broader interpretation. This is less

about disagreement and more about emphasising what is crucial to understanding priority monism. On my view, the central significance of priority monism's concept of proper parthood lies in ontological priority and grounding.

According to priority monism, proper parthood and grounding are extensionally equivalent: a concrete object *X* is a proper part of the Cosmos if and only if *X* is grounded in the Cosmos. I take this equivalence as the basis for a minimal definition of proper parthood within priority monism: for any two concrete objects *X* and *Y*, *X* is a proper part of *Y* if and only if *X* is grounded in *Y*, being nothing over and above *Y*. From this it follows that the Cosmos can be defined as the single maximal concrete object in which all other concrete objects – apart from the Cosmos itself – are metaphysically grounded.²⁵

Returning to Jīva's ontology, it is clear that it satisfies the short formulation of priority monism. For Jīva, ultimate reality is the sole fundamental concrete object – the one entity in which all other existing objects are grounded. But his ontology also meets the full formulation. Since all concrete objects – including macro subjects and the world with its manifold physical objects – are either *śaktis* of ultimate reality or constituted by such *śaktis*, and thus grounded in it, it follows, by the foregoing definition, that ultimate reality is identical with the Cosmos. At first glance, this may seem odd – after all, according to a common understanding of the term, only the pantheist identifies God with the Cosmos.

Yet, when the Cosmos is understood as the whole of reality, as we have done here, this identification accords with both Vedānta broadly and Jīva's Bhedābheda Vedānta in particular. Jīva explicitly characterises *Bhagavān* as the undivided, all-encompassing reality (*akhaṇḍa-tattva*).²⁶ He also repeatedly invokes the declaration of the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* that 'All this is indeed ultimate reality' (*sarvaṁ khalv idam brahma*).

As a consequence, all concrete objects can, from the perspective of priority monism, be regarded as proper parts of ultimate reality. In this regard, it is significant that the term '*aṁśa*' – meaning portion or part – is frequently used in connection with the in-between *śakti*, which Jīva repeatedly identifies as parts (*aṁśa*) of *Bhagavān*. In fact, Jīva states that macro subjects possess the condition of being parts (*aṁśatvam*) of *Bhagavān* precisely because they are His *śaktis*.²⁷ This, of course, is not unique to Jīva. As Andrew Nicholson (2007, 374) puts it, Bhedābheda theorists in general were under pressure to put the case for 'the theory of the real transformation (*pariṇāma*) of Brahman and the understanding of the relation between the soul and Brahman as one of part and whole'.²⁸

Thus, Jīva's Bhedābheda Vedānta fulfils the full formulation of priority monism: ultimate reality – identifiable with the Cosmos, the one maximal concrete whole – is the single fundamental concrete object, ontologically prior to its proper parts, even though those parts exist as objects in their own right. Beyond satisfying the priority of the whole, Jīva's ontology also meets the other two assumptions of priority monism. As a realist form of Vedānta, it affirms both the reality of the Cosmos and its parts, and it holds that the Cosmos is not identical with any plurality of its many proper parts. The straightforward conclusion, then, is that Jīva's Bhedābheda Vedānta entails a form of priority monism that, lacking a better label, I will call *śakti-based Vedānta priority monism* – or SV priority monism, for short.

Beyond this broader conception of proper parthood and the Cosmos, SV priority monism differs from Schaffer's in one key respect. In Schaffer's account, the Cosmos is roughly identified with what I am calling the physical world, the totality of physical objects. By contrast, SV priority monism conceives the Cosmos as a divine, maximal subject, within which the physical world is but one proper part.

Having established that Jīva's Bhedābheda Vedānta entails a form of priority monism, I now turn to cosmopsychism.

Priority cosmopsychism

From a minimal standpoint, cosmopsychism is the thesis that the Cosmos instantiates experiential properties.²⁹ When combined with priority monism, this yields priority cosmopsychism: the view that the Cosmos possesses a form of consciousness that grounds not only the macro consciousness of human beings and other animals, but everything else. Accordingly, every fact – whether physical or mental – is grounded in consciousness-involving facts about the Cosmos.³⁰

As we have seen, SV priority monism conceives of the Cosmos as a divine, maximal subject that instantiates not only experiential properties but also other mental properties such as thought, belief, and volition. The clear implication is that SV priority monism entails – and indeed constitutes – a form of priority cosmopsychism that, for lack of a better term, I will call *śakti-based Vedānta cosmopsychism* – or SV cosmopsychism, for short.

An important point of contention concerns the precise nature of the priority relation between the Cosmos and its parts. Within cosmopsychism, this relation might be understood in at least two ways: emergentist or grounding (Chalmers 2020, 363–364). I follow Philip Goff (2017, 2020) and Schaffer (2009, 2010) in taking the defining feature of a grounding priority relation – echoing Armstrong’s (1997, 12–13) famous notion of an ‘ontological free lunch’ – to consist in the posterior entity X’s being nothing over and above the ontologically prior entity Y. If X is nothing over and above Y, then X contributes nothing beyond what is already present in Y; its existence introduces no new, independent ontological commitment, but is wholly grounded in Y without remainder.³¹

If Y is ontologically prior to X in a grounding way, then X is nothing over and above Y. Y does not give rise to X; rather, X is grounded in Y, such that facts about X obtain in virtue of facts about Y: all facts about X are fully grounded in or determined by facts about Y. By contrast, if Y is ontologically prior to X in an emergentist way, then Y gives rise to X. In this case, X is something ontologically new – not merely a part or aspect of what is already present – but an entity over and above Y, such that facts about X are not fully grounded in facts about Y.

As suggested by what has been said so far, priority monism – and, by extension, priority cosmopsychism – is conceived in terms of a grounding relation. I will follow Goff (2017, 2020) and refer to this kind of priority relation as grounding by subsumption. Goff (2017, 221) illustrates the concept with the example of a subject’s current experiential state, which encompasses, for example, visual, auditory, and emotional experiences. While one might regard the total experience as a mere bundle of these small experiences, it can instead be understood as a fundamental whole of which the visual experience of colours, the auditory experience of sounds, and so forth, are parts or aspects – subsumed within the subject’s total experience. In this sense, although these experiences may be seen as distinct ‘entities’, they are nothing over and above the total experience.³²

While I acknowledge that an emergentist interpretation is also possible, I want to argue here for a grounding reconstruction of Jīva’s ontology. In other words, what I am calling SV cosmopsychism posits a grounding relation between the Cosmos – or ultimate reality – and its parts, such that the latter are subsumed within the former.

As we have seen, the *śaktis* of ultimate reality are inherent or intrinsic to its very nature (*svabhāva-bhūta*), being non-different, or inseparable, from its own essence (*svarūpād abhinna*), eternally dependent upon it (*nitya-tad-āśritatā*), and possessing no independent existence apart from it. In this regard, Ravi Gupta (2007, 40), reflecting on the analogy of fire and its light, remarks:

First and foremost, the analogy is used to argue for the innate (*svābhāvika*) [literally ‘belonging to one’s own nature’] nature of *Bhagavān*’s *śakti*. [...] the *śakti* of the Lord is

inseparable from the Lord, and proceeds from him as a result of his own nature. In Jīva Gosvāmī's writings, we find a persistent emphasis on the naturalness of the Lord's *śakti*, for his concern here – even more than in the threefold Godhead doctrine – is to preserve the unity and simplicity of the Supreme. The most important scriptural proof-text in this regard comes from the *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad* [6.8] which says, 'It is known that [His] *śakti* is supreme, manifold, and part of his very nature.'

This suggests that ultimate reality's *śaktis* and their products – most notably macro subjects and the world – are grounded in ultimate reality itself, being nothing over and above it. This, in turn, reinforces the idea that they are its parts.

The emphasis on the unity of ultimate reality, as highlighted by Gupta, is crucial, for an emergentist interpretation would appear to conflict with the monistic dimension of Jīva's ontology. If we suppose that ultimate reality is ontologically prior to both the external and in-between *śakti* in the sense of giving rise to them, then the multiplicity of macro subjects, and the world with its manifold physical objects, would constitute genuinely new entities over and above ultimate reality. It is difficult to see in what sense such a picture could still be considered monist. Moreover, the naturalness and inseparability of *śakti* from ultimate reality would have to be reinterpreted in an attenuated sense that risks trivialising these notions. Finally, an emergentist reading would also undermine the claim that *śakti* is eternally situated upon ultimate reality (*nitya-tad-āśritatā*), since emergence necessarily entails a moment of origination in time.

The idea that the *śaktis* are subsumed within ultimate reality itself, being nothing over and above it, is also supported by the view of *śaktis* as trope-like properties mentioned earlier. This point can be further elaborated through another example Goff gives to illustrate grounding by subsumption, namely the relation between an object and its properties. Instead of assuming that at the fundamental level there are objects and properties somehow 'glued together', one might follow Armstrong (1997) and claim that what we find are

objects-having-properties [...] also known as states of affairs [...] The state of affairs of the ball-being-red is a unity more fundamental than either the ball or its redness; both the ball and its redness exist as aspects of that more fundamental unity [...] Rather than thinking of the view in terms of states of affairs, I prefer to construe it in terms of propertied objects. On such a view, rather than creating the state of affairs of electron-e-having negative charge, God created a specific negatively-charged-electron, a fundamental unity that subsumes a given instance of negative charge. (Goff 2020, 149)

In a similar vein, ultimate reality together with all its *śaktis* constitutes a fundamental unity – a kind of cosmic trope-propertied subject. Accordingly, all of ultimate reality's *śaktis* – and their products – which function as trope-like properties, are subsumed within ultimate reality itself, being nothing over and above it.

From this clarification, it should now be evident that ultimate reality not only can but must be identified with the Cosmos – understood as the totality of reality, the single maximal actual concrete whole of which all actual concrete objects are parts. Since everything apart from ultimate reality is either its *śakti* or constituted by such *śaktis*, and these *śaktis* are nothing over and above ultimate reality, it follows that ultimate reality is everything: the totality of all that exists.

It is important to remember that in priority cosmopsychism, and consequently in SV cosmopsychism, every fact – whether physical or mental – is grounded in consciousness-involving facts about the Cosmos, rather than in any other kind of fact about it. It is the

consciousness of the Cosmos, and none of its other aspects, that is fundamental.³³ On this reading, the conscious or experiential properties of ultimate reality may be said to ground all other kinds of properties – whether physical or mental – instantiated by its parts.

Within my reconstruction of Jīva's ontology, this claim may be contested. Some within Jīva's broader tradition might argue instead that it is the spiritual nature of *Bhagavān* – whatever precisely that means – that sustains all of reality, rather than its consciousness. I do not intend here to engage in such theological or exegetical disputes. My more limited claim is that, once it is granted that the ontological relation between ultimate reality and its parts is one of grounding, it is at least reasonable, within Jīva's thought, to maintain that consciousness-involving facts about ultimate reality ground all other kinds of facts. Supporting this is a point already noted: for Jīva, in relation to ultimate reality, consciousness is not merely attributive but also substantive. As we have seen, a consequence of his interpretation of Bhāgavata Purāṇa 1.2.11 – which serves as the cornerstone of his ontology – is that ultimate reality is nothing other than consciousness.

To conclude this section, I note that SV priority cosmopsychism also entails a form of panentheism, broadly understood as the thesis that (i) the universe – which, according to the terminology employed here, includes the world and macro subjects – is in God, while (ii) God is more than the universe. More specifically, it aligns quite closely with what Thomas Oberle (2025) calls grounding panentheism, that is, the view that God's existence grounds the existence of the universe. Drawing on the Bhagavad-gītā, Oberle proposes three desiderata for a minimal account of the God-world relation in panentheism: it must be asymmetric, quasi-mereological, and generative or ontologically productive – conditions that, according to him, are satisfied by the grounding relation. On this interpretation, (i) – that is, the 'in' of panentheism – is understood in terms of grounding, while (ii) is secured by these three conditions.

Some philosophical implications

I now offer some reflections on the implications of SV cosmopsychism, considering both its advantages and potential objections.

The first advantage of SV cosmopsychism – indeed, one of the virtues ascribed to priority cosmopsychism in general – is that it avoids the explanatory gap problem, which concerns how macro-level subjective experience could arise from anything other than experience itself without an inexplicable leap. After all, the experiential properties of subjects are grounded in properties of the same kind at the fundamental, cosmic level.

However, SV cosmopsychism remains vulnerable to a version of the explanatory gap problem – namely, the well-known individuation problem, also referred to as the decomposition, derivation, or decombination problem – which is often regarded as the central challenge to priority cosmopsychism.³⁴ One might ask, for example: if macro subjects are subsumed within ultimate reality – which is *Bhagavān*, a cosmic subject – how are we to account for their subjective individuality, their distinct first-person perspectives, and the structured character of their qualitative experiences?

A roughly inverse concern – one that arises specifically for theistic forms of priority cosmopsychism such as SV cosmopsychism – is as follows: if the mental states of individual subjects are nothing over and above aspects of the cosmic consciousness, then such states are, at best, shared with *Bhagavān*, and at worst, not genuinely their own at all but solely *Bhagavān*'s. This would imply, for instance, that *Bhagavān* is the bearer of flawed and ethically questionable decisions, and possesses mental states such as envy, hatred, and the desire to harm others – all of which are incompatible with the nature of a perfect divine being. This issue is closely related to the Vedāntic problem of imperfection discussed earlier.

In the absence of a better term, I will refer to it as the cosmopsychist Vedāntic problem of imperfection.³⁵

The second advantage of SV cosmopsychism – once again shared with priority cosmopsychism in general – is its capacity to address the causal exclusion problem, namely, the question of how consciousness can exert causal efficacy in a world in which, according to many philosophers, every physical event possesses a sufficient physical cause, thus entailing the causal closure of the physical domain. SV cosmopsychism's approach to the causal exclusion problem, however, is subtle and nuanced (see below).

The third advantage of SV cosmopsychism is that, unlike most forms of cosmopsychism – which usually refrain from attributing thought and agency to the Cosmos (Goff et al. 2022) – it avoids what Chalmers (2020, 368) terms the austerity problem: how rich and structured individual experiences could arise from an unstructured, minimal cosmic consciousness lacking rationality, thought, or agency. This problem simply does not arise in SV cosmopsychism – and in most forms of theistic cosmopsychism (Silvestre 2024, 466–467) – since the Cosmos is conceived as possessing a richly structured mental life, at least as sophisticated as human consciousness.

In what follows, I will show how SV cosmopsychism addresses the individuation problem, the cosmopsychist Vedāntic problem of imperfection, and the causal exclusion problem. Doing so will require a progressive clarification of the grounding relation that both the physical world and macro subjects bear to the Cosmos, along with a more precise account of what these (external and in-between) powers (*śaktis*) of ultimate reality are.

The individuation problem

As we have seen, Jīva conceives of ultimate reality as heterogeneous. As the sun-sunray-reflection analogy suggests, in addition to ultimate reality being analysable into a substratum and its trope-like properties, or *śaktis*, these various kinds of *śaktis* can also be distinguished from one another. Moreover, owing to their dual nature, the several tokens of the in-between *śakti* corresponding to macro subjects, while remaining properties of the Cosmos and thus being nothing over and above it, can nonetheless be regarded as substances in a relative and minimal sense. All this entails some degree of ontological individuation.

To say that X is a substance is to say that X possesses its own particular haecceity, its unique 'thisness', which distinguishes it from everything else. In the case of conscious substances, this further implies a kind of subjective individuation – a first-person perspective uniquely tied to X. Not only are X's experiential states accessible only from X's own standpoint, but X is also such that there is something it is like to be X.

For this to be the case, there must exist some form of individuation or delimitation, allowing the *śaktis* to be distinguished from their substratum, even though the latter remains metaphysically grounded in the former – and also allowing each token in-between *śakti*, or particular macro subject, to be differentiated from the others. Such individuation is implicit in several analogies employed by Bhedābheda thinkers to describe ultimate reality – for instance, ultimate reality as a fire flickering in diverse individual forms, or an ocean tranquil at its depths while its surface is agitated into individual waves, bubbles, and foam. This suggests a distinctive kind of grounding relation characterised by a strong principle of individuation or individualising delimitation, which may reasonably be taken to resolve the individuation problem.

One might be tempted to align this with what Itay Shani (2023) calls generative monism, which in his view includes Kashmir Śaivism and Aurobindo's Pūrṇa Vedānta, to which we may also add Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedānta (Medhananda 2022b, 299–371). This would be mistaken. In Shani's generative monism, individuation results from 'a process of internal

differentiation through which a plurality of distinct entities arises out of an originary state of undifferentiated singleness' (Shani 2023, 55). Discussing Aurobindo in particular, Swami Medhananda (2022a, 99) describes this process as follows:

the Divine Consciousness manifests in the world by limiting itself to the three lower planes of Matter, Life, and Mind. Second, this self-limited consciousness becomes so absorbed in – or 'exclusively concentrated' on – its own limited egoistic purview, grounded in the three lower planes, that it loses its awareness of the Divine Saccidānanda at its basis.

By contrast, in Jīva's system, individuation is eternally given, not generated.

Similarly, SV cosmopsychism diverges from Goff's (2024) recently proposed hybrid cosmopsychism, which holds that macro subjects emerge from the Cosmos through fundamental emergent laws, even though their experiential states remain grounded in cosmic experience. While both views accept that macro subjects are individuated and that their experiential states are grounded in cosmic experiential states, SV cosmopsychism rejects emergence: individuality is a brute fact, directly entailed by Jīva's ontological commitments.³⁶

The Vedāntic problem of imperfection

Be that as it may, this still leaves us with the cosmopsychist Vedāntic problem of imperfection. Even if we grant that each macro subject possesses a first-person perspective uniquely its own – one that secures the ownership of its mental states and experiences – those states nonetheless appear to be *Bhagavān*'s as well. After all, they are all subsumed within the cosmic consciousness. To address this, I must lean more on creative philosophical speculation and, as a critic might contend, move somewhat beyond what is articulated more explicitly in Jīva's writings.

The experiential properties of macro subjects are grounded in the experiential properties of the Cosmos. Yet macro subjects themselves are properties of the Cosmos. The experiential properties of macro subjects, which are themselves properties of the Cosmos, are grounded in other properties of the Cosmos. How is this possible?

One way to make sense of this is to conceive of the in-between *śakti* as a kind of delimiting *śakti* – in the literal sense of a power or capacity – that selectively appropriates certain experiential properties of the Cosmos, or a specific 'experiential space' within the broader spectrum of the cosmic consciousness. In other words, a particular macro subject – a token of the in-between *śakti* – constitutes a unique first-person perspective endowed with the power to appropriate for itself a 'experiential space' within the cosmic consciousness. This appropriation is such that the macro subject enjoys exclusive first-person access to the experiential states within that space – access not shared by the Cosmos itself.

One might object that, even so, the Cosmos – albeit perhaps only in a weak or third-person sense – still possesses mental states such as envy and the like. In response, we can defend that the way the experiential states of macro subjects are grounded in aspects of the 'pure' and divine cosmic consciousness is that they are transformations (*pariṇāma*) of it. On this view, when an experiential property of the Cosmos is appropriated and apprehended by a macro subject X, it undergoes transformation. The underlying principle is that every first-person perspective imprints its own character upon what is experienced. Hence, although an experiential state may belong more broadly to the Cosmos, the fact that it is possessed and apprehended from X's first-person perspective entails that its very qualitative nature is thereby altered and transformed.

This is consistent with the assumption that all of the Cosmos's mental states are 'pure', in the sense of being free from any kind of imperfection. Only when such 'pure' and divine experiential states are appropriated and experienced by X from its unique first-person perspective do they become envy, hatred, and the like.³⁷ Moreover, it is precisely the distinctive character of X's first-person perspective that determines how these divine experiential properties are transformed. Similar experiential properties may be transformed into different mental states when appropriated by different subjects.

This reinforces the point that the experiential states of subjects are fully their own and not shared with the Cosmos. Consequently, ethically questionable or flawed decisions – as well as mental states such as envy, hatred, and the desire to cause harm – belong to macro subjects alone. In this way, the cosmopsychist Vedāntic problem of imperfection is resolved.

The causal exclusion problem

To address the causal exclusion problem, I propose a version of SV cosmopsychism inspired in Russellian monism – a view that holds, first, that physics describes only the causal, relational, and dispositional structure of physical properties, and second, that the intrinsic or categorical nature of these properties (about which, Russell argues, physics remains silent) is fundamentally experiential.

In Chalmers's (Chalmers 2020, 364) formulation of Russellian priority cosmopsychism, for example, the Cosmos instantiates fundamental physical properties – perhaps distributional properties concerning the distribution of matter in space-time, perhaps wave function properties, or perhaps something else – that are causally closed. These properties ground the physical properties instantiated by macroscopic objects and local physical systems, insofar as such properties correspond to localised or structured aspects of the Cosmos's overall physical state. The Cosmos's fundamental physical properties are, in turn, grounded in, or realised by, the Cosmos's experiential properties, so that all physical properties ultimately depend upon experiential cosmic properties, which mirror their structure and enable their causal efficacy. Since macro conscious experiences are grounded in these same cosmic experiential properties and are nothing over and above them, they can be regarded as exerting causal influence on the physical world.

In the proposed Russellian version of SV cosmopsychism, the external *śakti* is conceived as associated with a specific experiential space within the broader spectrum of the cosmic consciousness. The distinctive feature of the experiential properties belonging in this space is that they possess a physical dimension: they ground the causal powers typically ascribed to physical properties – understood here in a Russellian manner as dispositional, relational, and causal – while mirroring their structural organisation. Thus, *māyā-śakti*, or the external power of ultimate reality, is the capacity that certain cosmic experiential properties have to exert causal influence: they ground or realise the causal powers that are unfused in the physical world, or infused into the substratum that transforms into the world.

Solving the causal exclusion problem within this framework requires three additional assumptions, each of which either follows from or is consistent with the ontology developed above, but merits brief clarification.

First, physical properties are causally closed. Note that this does not presuppose physicalism, since, within the present framework, physical properties are grounded in, or realised by, the Cosmos's experiential properties. The claim of causal closure states only that physical effects are fully accounted for by physical causes at the physical level of description. Since physical properties are grounded in experiential cosmic properties, this closure does not exclude experiential causation. On the contrary, causal relations at the physical level are ultimately grounded in, and sustained by, causal relations within the experiential domain.

Second, the causal experiential space – that is, the region of experientiality within cosmic consciousness that grounds the causal powers attributed to physical properties – intersects the cosmic experiential subspace that tokens of the in-between *śakti* (macro subjects) appropriate for themselves. This assumption ensures that macro subjects are not causally isolated from the processes underlying their embodiment. Because macro subjects appropriate regions of the same experiential field that grounds physical causation, their experiential states participate in the very domain in which the causal powers of physical properties originate.

Third, some physical properties of a macro subject X's body – namely, those corresponding to bodily movements under the control of X – are grounded in experiential cosmic properties belonging to this intersection. This assumption secures a particularly intimate grounding relation between macro subjects and their embodied physical structures. Since the cosmic experiential properties that ground some of X's bodily physical properties belong to the experiential region appropriated by X, macro conscious states can legitimately be regarded as exerting causal influence over bodily and environmental physical processes. Note that such influence neither requires interaction between ontologically independent domains nor implies that every physical system corresponds to a macro subject. While all physical properties are grounded in cosmic experiential properties, only those grounded in the experiential region appropriated by X fall within X's sphere of direct causal influence, namely, X's body.

As a final note, I argue that this model preserves the gradation in 'distance' between the various kinds of *śakti* and *Bhagavān*. Since the external *śakti* is merely a dispositional aspect of experiential properties, whereas the in-between *śakti* is a delimiting power that demarcates and circumscribes a subspace within the experiential field of cosmic consciousness, we can say that the former stands at a greater distance from ultimate reality's inner nature than the latter.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I wish to address the following objection to the cosmopsychist model presented here. If macro subjects are ontologically individuated – each possessing a unique first-person perspective – and if their experiential states arise as transformations (*pariṇāma*) of aspects of the cosmic consciousness, then it seems that there is something over and above the Cosmos and its experiential states. In addition to the cosmic subject, with its own first-person perspective and experiential states, there are countless other subjects, each with its own distinct perspective and experiential states, all apparently distinct from the cosmic subject, its perspective and experiential states.

In response, I recall the characterisation offered earlier of ultimate reality as a cosmic trope-property subject – a fundamental unity that encompasses all *śaktis*, which are inseparable from its very essence (*svarūpād abhinna*). Accordingly, all macro subjects – unique first-person perspectives endowed with the *śakti* or power to appropriate and transform states contained within an 'experiential space' of the cosmic consciousness – are nothing over and above ultimate reality, being wholly subsumed within it. Although macro subjects possess their own first-person perspectives and a distinctive power to transform cosmic experiential states, they introduce nothing ontologically novel; their existence is not really distinct from that of ultimate reality itself. With respect to their experiential states, insofar as these are transformations of aspects of the cosmic consciousness, they are fully grounded in it and are nothing over and above it.

I could, in a similar manner, restate and reinforce other aspects of my reconstruction of Jīva's ontology; yet it is likely that my objector would remain unsatisfied. The fact remains

that the perspective and experiential states of ultimate reality differ from those of macro subjects, which seems to suggest that the latter are something over and above the former.

The issue is, in fact, likely a general one – affecting all forms of grounding cosmopsychism that specify the grounding relation in terms of nothing-over-and-above-ness and claim to have resolved the individuation problem. On the one hand, such models maintain that macro subjects are nothing over and above the cosmic subject. On the other hand, if they genuinely succeed in resolving the individuation problem, they must account for the individuality of macro subjects and their first-person perspectives – an account that appears to imply that these are something over and above the cosmic subject and its cosmic perspective. Thus, a contradiction – or, at the very least, a paradox – seems to emerge.³⁸

The paradox could be addressed in various ways. One might argue, for example, that while both *Bhagavān* and His *śaktis* exist, the former possesses a more fundamental and higher mode of existence. From this higher standpoint, there is only one reality – a cosmic subject – with nothing over and above it. From a lower standpoint, however, *Bhagavān*'s *śaktis* do exist, each bearing its own individuality, unique first-person perspective, and experiential states, which are themselves transformations of *Bhagavān*'s experiential states.

One might correctly object that this proposal conflicts with the realist commitments of Jīva's tradition, which maintains that *Bhagavān* and His *śaktis* share the same kind of existence. A response more faithful to Jīva's school, perhaps, is to recognise that the paradox is not a problem at all, but rather an expression of its central tenet: macro subjects are simultaneously different (*bheda*) and non-different (*abheda*) from ultimate reality. They are nothing over and above ultimate reality, and thus non-different from it, while at the same time retaining individuality and a unique first-person perspective, and thus remaining different from it. Capturing this duality may require us to move beyond the strictures of classical logic and instead employ a paraconsistent framework.³⁹

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Notes

1. For an overview of Bhedābheda traditions, see Srinivasachari (1950), Agrawal (1992), Nakamura (2004), and Nicholson (2010).

2. This terminology also serves to distinguish human beings and higher animals from possible micro-level subjects sometimes posited in panpsychist frameworks, that is, subjects associated with fundamental or microscopic entities. Disembodied souls (which instantiate only mental properties) also qualify as subjects. However, because the subjects relevant to contemporary philosophy of consciousness are the embodied ones, I will leave disembodied souls out of the present analysis.

3. I am thus adopting an entity-based, rather than a fact-based, and a separatist, rather than an unionist, view of grounding. Formally, metaphysical foundationalism is obtained by requiring the grounding relation to be a well-founded partial ordering: irreflexive, asymmetric, and transitive, with all chains terminating. For the purposes of this paper, I will set aside any problems that might be raised concerning this conception of grounding. For an overview of the debate on metaphysical grounding, see, for example, Trogdon (2013), McKenzie (2022), and Bliss and Trogdon (2024).

4. Jīva's masterpiece is the *Ṣaṭ-sandarbhā*, or the Six Treatises, a systematic exposition of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. The six treatises are: *Tattva-sandarbhā*, *Bhāgavat-sandarbhā*, *Paramātmā-sandarbhā*, *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā*, *Bhakti-sandarbhā*,

and *Pṛiti-sandarbhā*. To the first four, Jīva appended an auto-commentary, the *Sarva-saṁvādinī*, which is best understood as a continuation and elaboration of their central themes and arguments. References to passages from the *Sandarbhās* are given simply by indicating the relevant section (*anuccheda*), following the numbering in (Jīva Gosvāmin 1998–1999). When citing the *Sarva-saṁvādinī* commentaries, I refer to the reconstructed *anuccheda* to which the passage appears to correspond. The sectional numbering of the *Sarva-saṁvādinī* follows that of (Jīva Gosvāmin 1953).

5. The epistemic character of this threefold division of *Tattva* is evident, for example, in *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* 1, where it is stated that the particular aspects of *Tattva* manifest in accordance with the distinct qualifications of its worshippers.

6. Here I will adopt the convention – though not strictly correct from a linguistic standpoint – of using ‘*śaktis*’ as the plural of ‘*śakti*’.

7. For a comprehensive account of Jīva’s concept of ultimate reality and the corresponding concept of *śakti*, see Kapoor (1962, 90–100), Gupta (2007, 32–48), Taneja (2022), Uskokov (2024, 14–19), and Herbert and Silvestre (2024). The account I give here to the tripartite distinction between *Brahman*, *Paramātmān*, and *Bhagavān* and the corresponding notion of *śakti* (next section) is closer to the one of Gupta (2007) and Uskokov (2024) than to the one of Herbert and Silvestre (2024).

8. It is this interpretive move that justifies the translation of this verse within the context of Jīva’s thought as affirming that ultimate reality (*tattva*) is non-dual consciousness. In Sanskrit, the verse reads: *vādanti tat tattva-vidas tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti śabdyate* (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* 1.2.11).

9. The depiction of *jñāna* as ‘undivided consciousness’ (*jñānaṁ cid-eka-rūpam*) and of *tattva* as having ‘the nature of supreme bliss’ (*parama-sukha-rūpatvaṁ tasya bodhyate*) is found in *Tattva-sandarbhā* 51, which is where the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* verse (1.2.11) first appears.

10. A comparable use of the term ‘*śakti*’ appears in earlier Bhedābheda thinkers, such as Bhāskara and Nimbārka, though each one frames it according to their respective doctrinal nuances. Similar usage is also found in Kashmir Śaivism, where *śakti* denotes the dynamic power of Śiva, as well as in certain *Purāṇas*, such as the *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, and in the *Pāñcarātra* texts, where it refers to divine energy or creative potency. The term is also central in other classical Indian intellectual contexts, including in the works of the grammarian-philosopher Bharṭṛhari (c. fifth century) and the Mīmāṃsā thinker Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (c. seventh century).

11. See Herbert and Silvestre (2024).

12. There are two important qualifications to this co-extensiveness claim. First, I am setting aside the fact that some tokens of the in-between *śakti* may be disembodied; as noted earlier, these will be left out of my analysis. Second, in Jīva’s tradition, all worldly living beings are believed to have a soul (or to be embodied souls). But some of these living beings – such as plants – were excluded from my definition of macro subjects in the section ‘Some terminological remarks’. The reason is straightforward: plants are generally regarded as non-sentient beings, lacking consciousness in the experiential, ‘what-it-is-like’ sense, and are thus excluded from the philosophical discussion on consciousness. This exclusion, however, poses no challenge to the claim that souls are inherently conscious. One can simply say that being an embodied soul does not entail being a conscious subject; some living organisms are not suitable vehicles for the manifestation of the consciousness that is, according to the tradition, latent in every soul.

13. See *Bhakti-sandarbhā* 201, for example.

14. *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* 16. See also Gupta (2007, 42–43).

15. *Paramātmā-sandarbhā* 58. See also *Sarva-saṁvādinī* on *Paramātmā-sandarbhā* 57 and 59. It is important to note that although *pariṇāma* typically concerns only the non-conscious dimension of the physical world – namely, the domain of the external *śakti* – some of the imperfections implicated in the Vedāntic problem of imperfection, such as ignorance, clearly pertain also to the macro subjects that populate the world. In this connection, it is noteworthy that in section 58 of the *Paramātmā-sandarbhā*, when discussing *pariṇāma*, Jīva refers to *dravya-śakti* rather than to *māyā* or *bahiraṅga-śakti*. This is significant, for *dravya-śakti* can be understood in the broader sense of ‘real entities that are powers of *Bhagavān*’ and may therefore be taken to encompass not only the external *śakti* but also the in-between *śakti* – at the same time, in the specific context of Jīva’s doctrine of *pariṇāma*, the term primarily concerns the external *śakti*.

16. *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* 16 and its *Sarva-saṁvādinī* commentary devote much of their discussion to establishing the intrinsicity or naturalness of ultimate reality’s *śaktis*. See also Gupta (2007, 40).

17. *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* 10.

18. This use of the term ‘*śakti*’ closely parallels the rendering of ‘*prakṛti*’ – usually translated as ‘nature’ – in the *Bhagavad-Gītā* 7.4 and 7.5 (Silvestre 2024). There, macro subjects (*jīva* *bhūta*) are described as *Bhagavān*’s superior (*parā*) *prakṛti*, while the eightfold material elements that constitute the world are said to be his inferior (*aparā*) and separated (*bhinnā*) *prakṛti*. Both, however, ontologically depend on *Bhagavān*, being parts, or aspects of His own

nature. It is worth noting that Jīva sometimes treats the terms ‘*prakṛti*’ and ‘*śakti*’ as equivalent. See, for instance, *Paramātma-sandarbhā* 37, where the very same verses – 7.4 and 7.5 of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* – are quoted by Jīva.

19. Note that ‘*apṛthak-siddhi*’ need not be translated straightforwardly as ontological dependence. Literally, the expression denotes a mode of establishment (*siddhi*) in which one entity is established not separately (*apṛthak*) from another. Philosophically, this is typically understood as a relation of inseparable or non-independent existence.

20. *Tattva-sandarbhā* 33.

21. This interpretation of properties as particularised tokens resonates with Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika accounts of qualities as instantiated in individual substances, a framework with which Jīva was likely familiar.

22. Descartes used the term ‘substance’ in two related but distinct senses. In a primary sense, a substance is ‘that which exists in such a way as to require nothing but itself in order to exist’ (Principles of Philosophy I.51). In this strict sense, only God qualifies as substance, since only God exists entirely independently. In a relative sense, Descartes also refers to created things – such as minds and bodies – as substances, insofar as their existence relies solely on God and not on any other created entities.

23. See Schaffer (2018) for an overview of the different forms of monism, with particular emphasis on existence monism and priority monism.

24. See Schaffer (2009, 2010, 2018). This definition of Cosmos follows that of Schaffer (2010, 33).

25. This definition is (at the very least) suggested by Schaffer (2009, 379; 2010, 47), who, quoting Francis Bradley, says that parts – being grounded in the whole – may be conceived as aspects of wholes, isolated only through a process of ‘one-sided abstraction’.

26. *Bhagavat-sandarbhā* 93.

27. *Paramātma-sandarbhā* 39.

28. The meaning of ‘*amśa*’ is discussed extensively in the *Brahma-sūtra* tradition, where various commentators develop nuanced accounts of part-whole relations that often support non-reductive interpretations of dependence and participation. For representative discussions, see classical commentaries on *Brahma-sūtra* 2.3.43–50.

29. Chalmers (2020, 359, 371) defines cosmopsychism as the thesis that the Cosmos instantiates mental properties. In an earlier work (Chalmers 2015, 247), he offers a narrower formulation: that cosmopsychism is the view that the Cosmos instantiates (only) one specific kind of mental property – namely, experiential properties. This latter formulation is essentially the same as the definition provided by Philip Goff (2017, 234).

30. The term ‘priority cosmopsychism’ is from Nagasawa and Wager (2017). Although they refer to and elaborate on priority monism, they do not define priority cosmopsychism in terms of priority monism. Chalmers (2020, 371) roughly equates priority monism with what he calls constitutive cosmopsychism.

31. This, of course, makes sense only if we assume that Y fully grounds X. The idea of nothing-over-and-above-ness is closely connected to the so-called entailment principle, typically associated with the orthodox view of grounding. As Kerry McKenzie (2022, 11–12) puts it, ‘Grounding is a relation of determination, such that the existence of the grounds entails, as a matter of metaphysical necessity, the existence of the grounded. This is often expressed as the “entailment principle” [...] The more fundamental in that sense determines all that remains about the world [...] That it is primarily determination we have in mind when we think about priority is also clear from the “all God had to do” gloss that is frequently put on the fundamental.’

32. Goff offers at least two different, though intertwined, definitions of grounding by subsumption. In Goff (2017, 221), he states that Y grounds X by subsumption iff (i) Y grounds X, and (ii) Y is a unity of which X is an aspect. Later, in Goff (2020, 148), he gives a simpler formulation: Y grounds X by subsumption iff X is a partial aspect of Y. What he calls an ‘aspect’ corresponds basically to my understanding of parthood in priority monist terms.

33. This is why some consider priority cosmopsychism as a form of panpsychism. See Goff (2017, 2020), Chalmers (2020), and Shani (2015), for example.

34. See Goff (2024) for an argument that the decombination problem should be understood as a version of the explanatory gap problem. For reasons of space, I will set aside the nuances of the decombination problem, which is typically understood to involve several distinct subproblems. Following Chalmers’s (Chalmers 2016, 182) taxonomy for the combination problem – a problem pertaining to panpsychism in its micropsychist form – it is common to distinguish at least three decombination problems: the subject problem, the structure problem, and the quality problem. In what follows, I will primarily focus on the subject problem, which is the problem of making sense of ‘the possibility of subject-subsuming subjects, i.e. conscious subjects that are aspects of other conscious subjects’ (Goff 2020, 151). My choice to refer to it as the individuation problem reflects this focus.

35. A more general problem is the following: if every fact about me – including the fact that I (supposedly) freely chose to write this paper – is fully grounded in facts about another subject, even a cosmic one, then it seems that my choice would fail to qualify as an instance of my free will. For reasons of space, I will pursue this problem in a separate paper. That discussion will involve, among other things, examining different conceptions of free will and assessing their compatibility with Jīva’s ontology. The reader may nevertheless notice that the foundations

of a solution are already implicit in my responses to both the individuation problem and the Vedāntic problem of imperfection. It is worth emphasising that this difficulty also arises for panpsychism and priority cosmopsychism in general. See Watson (2025).

36. SV cosmopsychism, of course, bears important similarities to – and differences from – other cosmopsychist and cosmopsychism-adjacent models. Owing to space constraints, however, I must postpone such an analysis to a separate paper.

37. I am assuming here the commonly held panpsychist thesis that mental states such as beliefs, intentions, thoughts, and abstract reasoning – usually seen as non-experiential – are ultimately grounded in experiential states. A defence of this thesis lies beyond the scope of the present paper.

38. The individuation problem itself can be framed in these terms. For an analysis of the issue along broadly similar lines, but differing in scope, see Sider (2015) and Goff (2020). Of course, as noted, the problem arises only if grounding is understood in terms of nothing-over-and-above-ness. It lies beyond the scope of this paper to assess whether this is a reasonable constraint to impose on any relation of (full) grounding – whether entity-based or fact-based. See, for example, deRosset (2013).

39. I have proposed elsewhere (Silvestre 2026) a framework – essentially a reinterpretation of Graham Priest's Logic of Paradox – that may be employed to account for Jīva's seemingly contradictory theology. This proposal fits within the broader context of what I have elsewhere called the contradictory God thesis (Silvestre 2025).

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