CHAPTER TWO

Cosmopsychism and Non-Śankaran Traditions of Hindu Non-dualism: In Search of a Fertile Connection

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> Imagine a spring that has no source outside itself; it gives itself to all the rivers, yet is never exhausted by what they take.
>
> (Plotinus, The *Enneads*, III.8.10).

1 INTRODUCTION

In the spirit of the present volume, this paper seeks to bring *cosmopsychism*—a contemporary metaphysical position on the nature of mind and consciousness—into contact with the rich philosophical tradition of Hinduism. The connection suggests itself naturally. Cosmopsychism is predicated on the idea that cosmic consciousness lies at the root of all particulate phenomena, and more specifically that such consciousness undergirds the experiential reality of all lesser subjects. Needless to say, such a conception is a staple of Hindu philosophy since the times of the *Upanishads*. In exploring thematic connections of this sort

there would be, to be sure, also other traditions to turn to such as Chinese philosophy, Buddhism, Sufism; Christian mysticism, and the idealist tradition in western philosophy (from Neo-Platonism to late nineteenth-century British Idealism), and more. However, sustained engagement with the definitive theme of cosmopsychism—namely, cosmic consciousness and its relevance to our understanding of ordinary experience—is nowhere more conspicuous than in the predominant philosophical tradition of the Indian subcontinent.

Although cosmopsychism is still fairly young, having gained recognition as a distinct position over the last decade only (see Goff 2017; Jaskolla and Buck 2012; Mathews 2011; Nagasawa and Wager 2017; Shani 2015), it has recently stimulated various works that investigate its potential constructive connection to different strains of Indian philosophy (see Albahari 2020; Ganeri 2020; Gasparri 2019; Maharaj 2020; Vaidya 2020; Velmans 2021).[1] Using the present occasion as a platform, I wish to contribute to this trend from the perspective of someone who is neither a critique of cosmopsychism, nor an expert on one or another school of Indian philosophy, but who is, rather, a card-carrying cosmopsychist with a growing interest in Indian philosophy and in the possibility of benefiting theoretically from tapping into its vastly affluent resources. Precisely because, on certain key points, cosmopsychism's outlook (at least as understood in my own attempts to articulate and defend the position) bears considerable similarity to important strands of Indian philosophy it stands to reason that it has much to gain from engaging constructively with it.

In looking to derive insight and aid from such an engagement, I shall focus on two motivating factors that shaped my own thinking on the subject:

1. The need to identify and clarify the metaphysical underpinnings of cosmopsychism.
2. The obligation to address the critical challenge known as the *individuation* (or 'decombination') problem.

In a recent paper (Shani 2022) I dealt primarily with the second issue, arguing that cosmopsychism need not fall victim to the individuation problem, and that no irremediable incoherence ensues from the assumption that all finite subjects are grounded in a single cosmic consciousness. While that paper also touches upon the metaphysical commitments and character of the cosmopsychist platform, the discussion takes the back seat relative to the individuation problem. In the present work, I plan to reverse course: The individuation problem will be discussed but only succinctly (in section two and in the conclusion), while the metaphysical status of cosmopsychism will assume center stage (see the extensive discussion in Section 4).

Barring further qualifications, talking about metaphysical "status," "character," and "commitments" is, of course, vague. My concerns, however, are somewhat more specific. In particular, I shall focus on the question what

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form of metaphysical *monism* is best suitable to serve as a general scheme for a robust articulation of cosmopsychism.

Stated more accurately, the concern of this question is *token-monism*, that is, the view that only one concrete entity exists or, alternatively, is truly ontologically fundamental (see Schaffer 2018).[2] Cosmopsychism is a token-monist stance since its adherents proclaim either that cosmic consciousness is the only concretum there is, or, more plausibly, that it is the most fundamental of concreta (see below). Following an influential distinction made by Jonathan Schaffer (Schaffer 2010a) it has become customary to distinguish between two alternative token-monist positions: Existence monism and priority monism. *Existence monism* is the view that only one concretum—the maximal being, typically identified with the cosmos as a whole—truly exists. Consequently, the multiplicity of infra-cosmic entities is interpreted as less than fully real. Sometimes, such entities are deemed illusory, as the eighth-century Indian sage Adi Śaṅkara seems to have held. Other times they are judged to be mere quasi-objects congealed within the whole as localized sub-compartments (as per Horgan and Potrč 2000). In contrast, *priority monism* is the view that only one concretum, the maximal being, is ultimately fundamental but that alongside (or rather within) this most fundamental being there exists a plurality of non-basic-yet-perfectly-real concreta. The majority of cosmopsychism's advocates adhere to priority monism.[3] The One, they maintain, is an indubitable first, but the many are true and respectable denizens of the grand totality.

Yet, even within the priority monist camp there is room for substantive diversity. Schaffer's preferred image of monism is that of *organic unity* (2010b: 342): A *unity-in-diversity* in which the One subsumes the many in its midst while the many are integrally woven and interrelated—depending on each other as well as on the overarching context defined by the all-inclusive whole. I will call this monistic outlook *mereological monism* to designate the fact that on the metaphysical picture it conveys the One is depicted as an interweaved meshwork of interrelated proper parts.[4] There is, however, an alternative monistic outlook, one which denies the axiom that the One and the many are necessarily coexistent. Instead, this alternative standpoint's defining feature consists of the assumption that the many are generated from and sustained by the One, to wit: An ultimate reality whose primordial nature is that of an undifferentiated singleness. We may properly tag this sort of outlook as *generative monism*.

A major claim of the present paper is that generative monism is an attractive alternative to Schaffer's mereological framework, both as an abstract metaphysical template and, more specifically, in the context of priority cosmopsychism. Section 4 provides a preliminary account of generative monism and stresses its virtues as a monistic metaphysical scheme of interpretation, as well as its significance in the context of defending and developing cosmopsychism.

Two theoretical desiderata were mentioned above: (i) addressing the individuation problem; and (ii) finding out what sort of monism best fits cosmopsychism and its explanatory aspirations. In regard to both there is much to be gained from constructive engagement with Indian philosophy. In attempting to do so, I chose to focus on two positions that I find closest in spirit to my own understanding of cosmopsychism: The *parādvaita* of Kashmir Śaivism, and the integral (or realistic) *advaita* of Aurobindo. Noticeably, these two forms of advaita differ considerably from the celebrated school of *advaita vedānta* and the teachings of Śaṅkara, which are so often taken as representative of Hindu philosophy. In Section 3 I consider how these two decisively non-Śaṅkaran variants of Hindu non-dualism portray cosmic consciousness, and how they relate it to lesser subjects as well as to the manifest reality in which such subjects find themselves immersed. The point of this exercise is not to provide a proper exegesis of either of these views, a task which exceeds my competence, but rather to identify certain important respects in which they tally with cosmopsychism, or provide it with valuable pointers for growth and inspiration. In succeeding sections, I return to consider these selected respects in light of the specific topic discussed in each section: Monism (Section 4), and the individuation problem (Section 5).[5]

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2 COSMOPSYCHISM: A BRIEF EXPOSITION

In order to inquire into the metaphysical foundations of cosmopsychism, as well as to discuss the relevance of parādvaita and integral advaita for contemporary work on the subject, one must first say a little more about cosmopsychism itself.

Cosmopsychism is a holistic-monistic variant of panpsychism.[6] Like other forms of panpsychism it maintains that consciousness is both ontologically fundamental and pervasive. By "fundamental" is meant that rather than being a cosmological latecomer, emergent from insensate matter, consciousness is primordial and lies at the very foundation of things. By "pervasive" is meant that consciousness presides everywhere (hence the 'pan' in panpsychism), a statement which must, however, be qualified and explained. Panpsychism does not necessitate the idea that all things are conscious themselves: For all we know, corkscrews and pebbles and many other things we call "inanimate" may lack any inner lives of their own. Rather, the pervasiveness thesis consists in the claim that all concrete entities are either conscious beings themselves or are ultimately constituted of conscious beings.[7] On this picture, corkscrews and pebbles (if indeed non-conscious) belong to the second category: Although ultimately constituted of things that are conscious, they lack integral consciousness on their own.

In addition to the commitments to the fundamentality and pervasiveness of consciousness there is yet another important principle by which most panpsychists abide, namely, the notion that the subjective phenomenal lives of non-fundamental subjects are intelligibly grounded in the conscious subjective actuality of the most fundamental beings, whatever they are. This assumption, which we may call the *phenomenal grounding hypothesis* (PGH, for short), is crucial in order to "save the phenomena," that is, to ensure the relevance of a panpsychist metaphysic to the explanation of *ordinary experience,* where by "ordinary experience" I mean the subjective streams of perceptions, feelings, moods, attitudes, cogitations, imaginations, etc. that routinely animate our own person under normal circumstances, and which we readily grant our fellow human beings as well as (at least to a degree) many other biological species. Like the fundamentality hypothesis and the pervasiveness hypothesis, PGH is shared by cosmopsychists and micropsychists (viz., micro-reductive panpsychists) alike.[8]

However, what sets cosmopsychism apart from other panpsychist creeds is the contention that there is only one fundamental concretum—a conscious entity of cosmic proportions often identified simply as the cosmos, or universe (see, for example, Goff 2017: 234), but which I shall call *Cosmic Consciousness*, or CC for short (see also Nagasawa and Wager 2017). On this view, all non-fundamental concreta are, ultimately, ontologically (and asymmetrically) dependent on CC. More specifically, it is not merely the physical attributes of individual objects that are grounded in the primal reality of CC; rather, as stated in PGH, the very subjectivity and phenomenal reality of particulate subjects of experience ought to be intelligibly traced to the subjective character and experiential nature of CC itself.

In the context of micropsychism, PGH gives rise to a challenge known as the *combination problem*, whose most formidable formulation pertains to the combination of subjects, namely, "how could microscopic subjects combine to constitute an ordinary macro-level subject?"[9] In the context of cosmopsychism, PGH gives rise to an inverse challenge which some, myself included, have labeled the "decombination problem" (see Albahari 2020; Miller 2018; Shani and Keppler 2018). However, I now believe that the term *individuation problem* (IND for short), first coined by Freya Mathews (2011), constitutes a superior choice.[10] Be that as it may, the problem consists in the quandary "how could CC individuate into a plethora of lesser subjects, each with its own distinct self?" It is important, however, to be clear about the nature of the challenge. Significantly, the problem does not consist, in the first place, in the absence of a fully satisfying explanation of the precise actual manner in which ordinary subjects are grounded, qua subjects, in CC's elemental consciousness—for philosophy rarely succeeds in (and is arguably unfit for) providing detailed, adequate, causal or procedural explanations. Rather, the

real and more pressing challenge is to demonstrate that such phenomenal grounding is a viable, coherent possibility, or to put it negatively: To ward off the accusation that the grounding of ordinary subjects in CC is an incoherent and hopeless notion.[11]

In a recent paper (Shani 2022) I addressed IND and the incoherence challenge in detail, militating against the commonly held assumption that IND is but a "combination problem in reverse" (Mathews 2011: 145), that is, a mirror-image of the combination problem afflicting micropsychism. Furthermore, I argue that once this symmetry assumption is refuted it can be established that, in contradistinction to the havoc which the combination problem inflicts upon micropsychism, IND does not infect cosmopsychism with any insurmountable obstacle.[12] Interested readers are welcome to examine the argument and make up their own minds but here we must leave this thorny issue aside and focus on the problems that motivate the present paper (I return to this topic briefly in Section 5).

Much more could be said about cosmopsychism, and I have done so elsewhere (Shani 2015, 2022; Shani and Keppler 2018), but for our present purposes what has been related is sufficient in order to, first, provide a rough sketch of the view and, second, motivate a discussion of its potential affinity to certain metaphysical conceptions within the Hindu philosophical tradition.

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3 COSMOPSYCHISM'S EASTERN COUSINS: KASHMIR ŚAIVISM, AND AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL ADVAITA

"The indescribable is the ground of all names and forms, the support of all creation" (*Atharvaveda*: X, ix, 1).[13]

Having articulated the general idea behind cosmopsychism, the present section proceeds to discuss two world-affirming cosmopsychist perspectives developed within Hinduism, namely, Kashmir Śaivism and the integral advaita of Sri Aurobindo. Since world-affirmation is a pivotal motif in linking these Hindu philosophies to contemporary cosmopsychism, I begin by commenting on the prima facie problematic status of such linkage given the prevalent tendency to identify Hindu philosophy with the illusionist non-dualism of Advaita Vedānta.

3.1. The Specter of World-denialism

As mentioned earlier, most work on cosmopsychism is animated by a *world-affirming* sentiment, namely, by the conviction that even though CC alone is ontologically primary there are countless other perfectly real concreta. On this picture, neither ordinary subjects, nor their natural and social environments,

are deemed illusory. This being the case, such an attitude must be borne in mind in any attempt to bring cosmopsychism into fruitful contact with Hindu philosophy (a point made in several recent works, see Gasparri 2019; Medhananda 2021; Vaidya 2020). This observation is especially pertinent given the occidental tendency to identify Hindu non-dualism with the illusionist acosmism championed by Śaṅkara and his followers—as found, for example, in the influential writings of Indologists such as Max Müller and Paul Deussen (see Radhakrishnan 1927: 16–7). On the assumption that Hindu non-dualism pertains exclusively to advaita vedānta in the mold of Śaṅkara the most reasonable conclusion is that it is largely incongruous with contemporary western cosmopsychism, "despite the semblance of similarity evoked by the shared sympathy for a worldview featuring an all-embracing 'cosmic' consciousness" (Gasparri 2022: 77). While it would be a mistake to conclude that such disparity implies that cosmopsychists have nothing of value to learn from a close study of the advaitic standpoint, the rift over the cosmism-acosmism divide counts heavily against any temptation to consider the two outlooks true allies.[14]

Although the identification of Hindu non-dualism with Śankaran advaita remains influential to this day, a growing number of scholars are pushing back against it by stressing the existence of powerful forms of world-affirming alternatives within the Hindu monistic tradition (see Ganeri 2020: chap. 16; Medhananda 2022a, chap. 9–10; and Vaidya 2020).[15] The fact that such alternatives exist is important on many different levels, not least of which because we sometimes tend to forget that the orthodox advaitic position is, itself, but another historical *interpretation* of Hinduism's sacred texts, and, as such, that it may not represent its source with unfailing accuracy.[16] Since one should be wary of pronouncing on matters that transcend one's expertise I shall only relate humbly that my own experience of reading the *Upanishads* resonates firmly with Radhakrishnan's assertion that: "There is hardly any suggestion in the Upanishads that the entire universe of change is a baseless fabric of fancy, a mere phenomenal show or a world of shadows" (1927: 186; for a similar though somewhat more nuanced assessment see Hiriyanna 2014: 93).

3.2. Objective Idealism in Kashmir Śaivism and the Integral Advaita of Sri Aurobindo

Kashmir Śaivism (KS for short) is a Śaiva (i.e., Shiva worshipping) school of thought, developed in Kashmir in northern India, that reached its zenith in the 9–11 centuries AD. Its philosophical outlook is known as Pratyabhijñā (the principle of recognition) or parādvaita (absolute non-dualism). As the term "parādvaita" indicates, KS is committed to an unabashed monism, denying the existence of any irreducible fragmentation within the structure of being.

Instead, all particulate phenomena are seen as manifestations of a single cosmic consciousness identified as Paramaśiva (the highest Śiva) or Anuttara (the Supreme).[17] This absolute CC has two complementary aspects: A *transcendent* and changeless dimension associated with Śiva in its state of repose, and an *immanent* dynamic dimension associated with Śakti-Śiva's energy, or creative power. To these two complementary aspects corresponds also the distinction between *prakāśa*, the inner light of consciousness, and *vimarśa*, the capacity of consciousness for reflective self-reference. It is through self-reflection, often likened to mirroring (see Pandit 1997: 19; Singh 1985: 18), that the cosmic consciousness—Śiva-Śakti—gives rise in its midst to a world of manifest plurality (objective as well as subjective).

KS is thoroughly monistic in that it insists that the entire created universe is a manifestation of, and within, Śiva. There is nothing outside of, or apart from, absolute CC. All lesser beings, including all other subjects, appear as internal differentiations within the cosmic playground of absolute consciousness: They can be thought of as reflections in Śiva's creative mirroring, or as moments in a spontaneous process of self-individuation. In this respect, another significant concept is that of *spanda*, the self-stirring of consciousness. On the KS view of things, consciousness is inherently dynamic and vibratory: It may be calm and repose but it is always potentially active, just as a calm ocean contains the potential to give rise to stormy waves and whirlpools. It is due to *spanda*, the intrinsically pulsating nature of consciousness, that the creative display of a manifest multiplicity is rendered possible (see Dyczkowski 1987: chap. 3; Pandit 1997: chap. 6).

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It is interesting to observe that, from KS's perspective, the reality we identify with the familiar world of subjects, objects, and actions is an outgrowth of Śiva's pure consciousness. The cosmological picture at play is one which emphasizes a gradual *outwardly* movement: From the inwardness of an undifferentiated pure 'I' toward increasing levels of differentiation and absorption in particulate form, culminating in an explicit manifestation of diversity in which subjects and objects exist side by side as co-determinants.[18] Ultimately, then, the monism which KS stands for is a form of *objective idealism*. The universe, with its diverse plurality of existents, is seen as a real projection of Śiva's cosmic substance; it is not an illusory fanfare. In other words, KS is emphatically world-affirming. At the same time, the noumenal and the phenomenal, the undivided and the divided, the single and the plural, are seen as two poles of an overarching totality—the introverted and extroverted movements of spanda, respectively (see Pandit 1997: 17). Such totality consists, in its entirety, of cosmic consciousness: There is nothing in it—neither substance, nor aspect, nor property—which isn't itself a manifestation of consciousness.

A kindred form of monistic objective idealism is found in the "realistic," or "integral," advaita of the twentieth-century Indian philosopher-sage Aurobindo

Ghosh. In Aurobindo's synthetic approach, Brahman, the supreme, is identified with Saccidānanda—existence-consciousness-bliss. This eternal and infinite being is both personal and impersonal, both *saguna* (with qualities) and *nirguna* (without qualities). Although in its furthermost reaches it is ultimately indescribable, the highest positive expression of Brahman is Saccidānanda: An all-encompassing conscious force whose natural and intrinsically motivating condition is a state of pure bliss.[19] Influenced by traditional Śaiva and Śākta schools (Raju 1985: 544) as well as by the teachings of the nineteenth-century Bengali sage Sri Ramakrishna (Medhananda 2021), Aurobindo conceives of the divine along two complementary dimensions: The transcendent Brahman, and its immanent force śakti. Consciousness, *cit*, is therefore an active, creative force in which, and through which, the cosmic drama unfolds. As in KS, this cosmic tale is no illusion. In fact, Aurobindo spends a considerable amount of time arguing against illusionist interpretations of being—both Buddhist and Advaita Vedāntic—and in favor of the notion that the universe, with all its diverse manifold of phenomena, is a real expression of Brahman.

Perhaps the most unique feature of Aurobindo's philosophy is the merging of a Hindu worldview with a thoroughgoing evolutionism. Yet, in contrast to materialist theories of evolution, for Aurobindo "evolutionism" pertains, above all, to the evolution of consciousness. It is, of course, not consciousness per se which evolves for CC is the seed and substance of all there is, a precondition of evolution and not its consequence. Rather, what evolve side by side with the ascent of complexity in biological life *are forms* and *qualities* of particulate types of consciousness. In fact, evolution is but one side of a two-sided narrative, the complement of which is the concept of *involution*. At first, the Lila or dynamic joyous play of Saccidānanda consists of cosmic descent. Voluntary self-concealment and auto-limitation effectuate an increasing fissure in the primal unity of the One and a growing attachment of consciousness—captured in its own play of hide and seek—to particulate limiting conditions. In short, the descent is marked by increasing *ignorance*. Lost in its self-imposed limitation, the invested consciousness is trapped in a positive feedback loop which keeps hurling it further downward, toward states and conditions of lesser and lesser awareness. In the end, it hits rock bottom and assumes the form of the simplest, most elemental, material entities, where all traces of consciousness seem to have disappeared.[20]

Yet, all the while, and despite the descent into ever more fragmented, ineffectual, self-absorbed, and inwardly coiled forms, the immanent presence of consciousness remains the definitive underlying reality. Thus, guided by a dim longing for its lost primal unity this submerged and obscured conscious force begins its long journey home. A journey which sways it in the opposite direction of ontic ascent: Toward ever-increasing complexity of material organization; growing sensitivity, discernment, and adaptive control;

intensified intelligence and depth of experience; and ultimately, recognition of its oneness with the divine source and with all of one's fellow beings.[21] Thus, whereas KS identifies the unfolding of our universe with an outward movement of consciousness, Aurobindo identifies it with the descent and ascent of the involution-evolution cycle.

Clearly, then, in these two heterodox advaitic systems one finds vivid articulations of a sumptuous cosmopsychist edifice. Both argue for an uncompromising monism in which all created beings are seen as emergent modes of a single CC—an absolute idealism which is, at the same time, panpsychist in character. Furthermore, both offer rich accounts of how such undivided CC gives rise to a manifest universe populated with a stupendous plurality of beings, including, of course, individual subjects of various stripes. Finally, both stress that while CC is the alpha and omega of reality, created beings and their co-constructed worlds are nevertheless authentically real in their own right. My own work on cosmopsychism, inspired in part by mystical outlooks of various denominations, converges onto a similar perspective—a world-affirming, monistic, panpsychist idealism—which is why I accord special pertinence to the views surveyed in this section.

It goes without saying that the convictions and sympathies which incline me in the direction of such Hindu sources are not necessarily shared by other advocates of priority cosmopsychism (for a cosmopsychism of a markedly different orientation see Goff 2017). In any event, more needs to be said if one wishes to make the case that cosmopsychism stands to benefit in particular matters by attending to Aurobindo and the medieval seers of Kashmir Śaivism. In the following two sections I try to show that what they have to say is quite relevant for important foundational issues such as the question of what sort of *monism* best fits cosmopsychism (Section 4), and the individuation problem (Section 5).

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4 THE CASE FOR GENERATIVE MONISM

'In the Beginning all this Was Self alone' (*Brihadâranyaka Upanishad*: 1.IV.1).

As explained earlier, cosmopsychism is a form of metaphysical monism. Most contemporary advocates of cosmopsychism adhere to *priority* monism, which, translated to the specific context of cosmopsychism, is the view that CC enjoys ontological priority over all infra-cosmic beings, including all infra-cosmic subjects. In contradistinction to *existence* monism—the view that only the universe as a whole has real being (or translated to cosmopsychism: That only CC itself exists)—priority monism commends realism with regard to such sub-cosmic parts. It holds that while CC alone is metaphysically fundamental, the partialia in its ambit are nevertheless ontologically real. But "priority

monism" is a generic term, equally compatible with two distinct species of monism: Mereological monism, and generative monism—as I propose to call them. The difference between the two is, I believe, profound and merits the attention of metaphysicians. So far, however, the distinction has not (to my knowledge) been properly borne out. The present section is an attempt to articulate what is at stake and to begin to fill this conceptual lacuna. In the next and final section, I comment briefly on how this issue bears upon our understanding of cosmopsychism and its explanatory ambitions.

a. Priority Monism: Mereological or Generative?

By "*mereological monism*" (MM) I designate the view that concrete reality is, fundamentally, an organic unity in which (a) the One and the many, the cosmic whole and its proper parts, coexist and are ontologically interwoven; and (b) the priority of the whole over the parts consists of the fact that the whole provides the overarching principles of order which shape the identity, character, and behavior of the parts. On this view, while the One is always, and necessarily, a unity-in-diversity consisting of interacting proper parts it is nevertheless ontologically *prior* to the many, on account of the (presumed) fact that the latter are asymmetrically dependent on it. Although it is far from easy to articulate with precision the asymmetry which prioritizes the One over the many, the general thrust of this position is clear.

In contrast, "*generative monism*" (GM) is my terminological choice for the view that the One engenders the many, that is, that it literally brings multiplicity into being. Such begetting is not, of course, the creation of a product external to the producer—as depicted in the Book of *Genesis* or in Plato's *Timaeus*—but, rather, a process of internal differentiation through which a plurality of distinct entities arises out of an originary state of undifferentiated singleness.[22] Finally, nor is such generation akin to spawning or splintering. For while the multitude of emergent beings enjoy various forms and degrees of individuality (and in the case of subjects like us, a significant measure of personal and collective autonomy) they remain *inseparable* from their ultimate singular origin—grounded in it and pervaded by its immanent presence. In this respect, a comparison to whirlpools and solitons in a large water body is suggestive, for such metastable emergent forms are locally bounded, functionally discernible, and capable of remarkable behavior, yet are ultimately inseparable from the underlying watery substance that gives them sustenance (see Shani 2015).

Clearly, there is a real metaphysical difference between these two types of priority monism. A picture of reality in which the One and the many are necessarily co-specifying (as per MM) is markedly distinct from one in which the former precedes the latter (as per GM) and is therefore unconditioned by it (at least in its original, pre-cosmic phase). Moreover, whereas MM portrays

the One as a unity-in-diversity, GM envisions it as pure and simple—an undifferentiated oneness. Finally, it follows from the above that while MM is committed to the view that concrete reality is fundamentally *heterogeneous*, GM endorses the opposite notion of primordial *homogeneity*. Doubtlessly, then, we are faced with two alternative conceptions of reality whose differences are consequential.

Needless to say, such momentous metaphysical differences are of interest to cosmopsychism as well. Any attempt to think seriously about CC, and about its relations to ordinary subjects and the manner in which it grounds their individuation, would be heavily affected by one's choice between these two rival frameworks. And, of course, such a choice would also determine the identity of one's potential historical allies—be they oriental or occidental. In short, while Schaffer's (2010a) celebrated distinction between priority monism and existence monism is laudable, it is time for priority monists to go beyond it and pay honest heed to the discrepancy between MM and GM.

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b. Rehabilitating Generative Monism

Intriguingly, when it comes to the contrast between MM and GM Schaffer's influential work on monism obscures more than it enlightens. For while Schaffer is well aware of the fact that more than a few important historical advocates of monism were championing monistic conceptions which correspond to GM (see Schaffer 2010a: 57) he nevertheless narrates his discussion in such a way that the reader is led to *identify* priority monism with its mereological variant. This creates a potential confusion since it misleadingly suggests that a world-affirming monism must coincide with the assumption that fundamental reality is a heterogeneous unity-in-diversity.

Yet, clearly, that is not the case. As the previous section gave us occasion to ascertain, KS and the integral advaita of Aurobindo are two evident examples of a world-affirming monism that takes undifferentiated CC as the ultimate ground of reality. Aurobindo endorses the Advaitic view according to which Brahman is an unchangeable Absolute transcending all multiplicity.[23] At the same time, he maintains—in line with Śaiva and Śākta influences, and in contradistinction to Śaṅkara—that this Absolute is an infinite and inexhaustibly creative force. He insists that the air of paradox is resolved upon realizing that a force may inhere in its bearer latently, hence that Śākti is inseparable from Brahman even while the latter is at full repose (1919/2006: 90).[24] As for KS, suffice it to mention here two pertinent points. First, that the cosmogonic primacy of an undifferentiated point of origin is evident in famous parables such as that of the *seed of the Banyan tree* (see Bäumer 2011: 238), and that of the *plasma of the peacock's egg* (Singh 1985: 17), whose point, it appears, is to stress that, primordially, all things lie as pure potentials in the hidden recesses

of the Supreme (Tantray et al. 2018). Second, that manifestation, or Ā*bhāsa*, is clearly a gradual process that begins in an Ur-state of an "undifferentiated mass" (Singh 1985: 17) and progresses along subsequent steps of increased differentiation and objectification (Pandit 1997: 26–7; Sharma 1972: chap. 7, sections 1–2).

Needless to say, this theme generalizes beyond the two Hindu monistic approaches just mentioned. Indeed, the first chapter of the *Brihadâranyaka Upanishad*, from which the quotation at the opening of this section is taken, illustrates well this perennial theme of the generation of the world's multiplicity of concrete beings from a singular, uniform, conscious ground—the all-pervading Brahman. Such an ultimate ground, let it be stressed again, does not give birth to a world separate from it but, rather, continues to permeate and sustain the entire emergent edifice. In western thought, the most glaring example of the endorsement of GM can be found in the work of Plotinus and, indeed, in Neo-Platonism as a whole, where the ultimate cosmological point of origin is traced to the undifferentiated and indescribable *One*. In Chinese philosophy, one might meaningfully connect the GM perspective to the pivotal concepts of *Dao* and *Taiji*, or supreme ultimate (see Liu 2018: chap. 2; Wang 2012: chap. 2). In fact, variations of this generative narrative are found, in various times and places, in many philosophies and cosmogonies influenced by meditative spiritual practices and by mystical experiences.[25]

Schaffer's *de facto* identification of priority monism with MM is driven, in large part, by a reaction to an argument on behalf of pluralism which can be framed like this (cf. Schaffer 2010a: 58):

1. Fundamental objects must be homogenous.
   Hence,
2. If the cosmos [considered as a single individual entity] were fundamental than it would be homogenous.
   But evidently,
   The cosmos is not homogenous.
   ∴ Therefore, the cosmos is not fundamental (from 2 & 3).

Schaffer's solution consists in denying premise one, namely, the notion that fundamental entities must be homogenous. It thereby seals the fate of GM by fiat. But is it really necessary to deny this premise in order to rebut the pluralist? The argument suggests this move only because it *identifies* the One of traditional monism with "the cosmos," which, by definition, is an ordered totality and therefore an abode of heterogeneity. Since it makes no sense to expect the cosmos to be homogenous it follows that if the monist's basic entity of choice is "the cosmos" she must endorse fundamental heterogeneity. Yet, evidently, nothing about the concept of priority monism per se necessitates

any of that. The idea that the One precedes the many does not, or at any rate need not, commit us to a specific opinion regarding the particular nature of this ontological ultimate—be it that it is fundamentally homogenous or that it is fundamentally heterogeneous. We should not beg the question on this substantive metaphysical issue when all that matters, from a strictly logical point of view, is the formal condition that the One enjoys ontological priority over the many. To satisfy this condition, there is no necessity to identify the One with "the cosmos"; for it could be identified, without contradiction, as an undifferentiated wholeness which, transmuting itself, *gives rise* to the manifest universe (hence, the cosmos) and to the plurality of phenomena contained in it. This, it seems to me, is precisely what GM is all about.

As soon as we refrain from identifying the monist's basic entity of choice with "the cosmos" the anti-monist argument presented above loses its bite since the assumption that the *One* is homogenous does not entail the preposterous notion that the *cosmos* is homogenous, let alone the still more absurd conclusion that the familiar world of our ordinary experience is bereft of variability. In short, when properly analyzed, the argument against fundamental homogeneity must be judged to be founded on confusion.

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That said, proponents of GM are left with a different, albeit related challenge, namely: Assuming that fundamental reality is homogenous how is heterogeneity to be explained? While this explanatory task is by no means trivial there is nothing absurd or seemingly unintelligible in the idea that a primordially homogenous substance, or entity, could give rise to a heterogeneous plurality. Supporters of MM may consider it an advantage of their position that it does not confront such a challenge. Still, the edge this gives them is far from decisive and, as I argue below, it may well be counterweighed by MM's own liabilities. For the time being, and in the spirit of the present paper, suffice it to note that both KS with its detailed theory of ābhāsa or manifestation (Pandit 1997: 24–6; Singh 1985: 17–9), and Aurobindo with his concepts of divine self-limitation and self-absorption (Aurobindo 1919/2006: chap. 13; Medhananda 2020), offer us valuable pointers for thinking coherently and constructively about this generation problem in the context of an idealist generative cosmopsychism.

c. In Support of Generative Monism

It is one thing to plead on behalf of GM's coherence and intelligibility, but it is quite a different task to argue specifically in its favor. On the present occasion I can only offer the germ of a more detailed account which I hope to develop in the future. Unavoidably, then, the ensuing discussion is succinct and tentative.

In considering GM and MM as competing variants of priority monism a key question which must be borne in mind is which of the two reflects better the general contours of reality. In this regard, it is tempting to make the argument that MM is simply incomplete, that is, that it captures adequately a part of

the monistic narrative but fails to realize that it is but a portion of a more comprehensive story. In what follows I try to substantiate this claim with three loosely connected arguments which take their cues, in consecutive order, from biology, cosmology, and mysticism.

i. The Argument from the Deep Nature of Organic Unities

In Schaffer's own articulation of the position labeled in the present paper as MM it is emphasized that such monism centers around the idea of *organic unity*, namely, a unity-in-diversity in which the One subsumes the many in its midst while the many are integrally woven and interrelated—depending on each other as well as on the overarching context defined by the all-inclusive whole (see Schaffer 2010a: 67; 2010b: 342). What makes this position an instance of PM is the idea that organic unities sustain an asymmetrical dependency relation which *prioritizes* the whole over the parts. Just as the limbs, organs, tissues, and cells of a living body depend on the organism as a whole, so do the universe's proper parts depend on the cosmos as a whole.

However, a close look at the organic metaphor reveals that the picture described above is partial and selective. Its perspective on the matter is limited because it neglects to mention *growth* and *differentiation*. The organs, tissues, and limbs of an animal develop from a fertilized egg cell; and the roots, stem, leaves, and flowers of plants and trees grow from a seed. Barring such a developmental dimension, there is no organic unity! Thus, a more adequate picture would have to accommodate the fact that the articulate unity-in-diversity observed in mature organic specimens is an outcome of a process of growth and differentiation traceable to a relatively homogeneous and unstructured point of origin.

It is true, of course, that eggs and seeds (none of which are fundamental concreta, let us not forget!) are not entirely homogeneous and unstructured. Put them under the microscope and you will observe a complex reality. Therefore, the present argument is, at best, a first approximation. But its point is nevertheless important since it illustrates the incompleteness of the organic unity narrative. Organic unities are *historical* entities. They are *generated*, and their generation involves a process of internal differentiation from a seemingly homogeneous point of origin. In a more comprehensive argument, the next step is to demonstrate that this observation fits into a grander cosmic pattern leading, ultimately, to the generation of order and variability from out of a homogenous background.

ii. An Argument from Physics and Cosmology

To my judgment, contemporary physics and cosmology lend substantive credentials to the generative narrative. One source of support is the big bang and early universe cosmology, combined as it is with the standard model of particle

physics. To begin with, the picture which emerges from this cosmological narrative is that of a process in which the entire universe (space, time, and matter) bursts forth from a single dimensionless point of origin. Moreover, all the world's basic structures, the particles and the forces of nature, emerge as a series of processes of spontaneous *symmetry-breaking* corresponding to the various epochs of the early universe (Chaisson 2001: 105–15; Coughlan et al. 2006: 218–21). Such symmetry breakups mark the generation of order and of multiple individual forms from out of a prior state of an indescribably dense unity. The crucial point, then, is that according to this scientific cosmogony the world's heterogeneity arises out of a primal energy which, to all appearances, is entirely *homogeneous*. Furthermore, nor is this primal unity merely a matter of remote history: For the theory also implies that, underneath it all, the variety of emergent phenomena remain connected through hidden-symmetries (see Mee 2012: 218).

A complementary source of support may be garnered from quantum field theory. According to QFT, particles are excitations, or energetic disturbances, of quantum fields. The fields are the fundamental reality (Coughlan et al. 2006; Manton and Mee 2017; Raymer 2017). Extrapolating from this basic fact, it follows that all configurations of matter in the universe emerge from, and are patterns of, quantum fields. Now, in its ground state of minimal energy—the so-called zero-point field—a field is a *vacuum*. There are no real particles involved and no complex physical structures. In short, no explicit heterogeneity.

Combining these two threads—big bang cosmology and QFT—the emerging picture is one in which a heterogeneous unity-in-diversity is an emergent outcome, preceded and sustained by a primal state of *homogeneous wholeness*, which is nevertheless dynamic and creative. This provides a more solid and more comprehensive backing to the contention, made in the previous subsection, that a heterogeneous unity-in-diversity presupposes a more basic form of wholeness.

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iii. The Argument from Mysticism

Mystical experiences are fundamentally transpersonal, involving a sense of unity with, or dissolution in, a cosmic totality. As such, they pertain naturally to monism. In William James's words,

> In spite of their repudiation of articulate self-description, mystical states in general assert a pretty distinct theoretic drift. It is possible to give the outcome of the majority of them in terms that point in definite philosophical directions. One of these directions is optimism, and the other is monism.
>
> (1902/1985: 416)

Thus, to the extent that such experiences are a valid source of information about the nature of reality they provide an alternative, inner, channel for

exploring issues related to monism, a route which is complementary to an external investigation based on science and reason.[26] It is interesting to notice, in this respect, the impressive degree to which reports of profound mystical experiences (obtained through meditation or other means) correlate with the notion that ultimate reality is an undifferentiated wholeness. As mentioned in Section 4.2, experiences of this sort are evident in a rich variety of mystical traditions, and over vast expanses of time and space: from Hinduism, to Daoism, to neo-Platonism, to Christian mysticism—to mention but some.

Moreover, mystics as diverse as the seers of the Upanishads, Plotinus, and Meister Eckhart relate also that unity-in-diversity is experienced as a lower sort of wholeness dependent on, and issuing from, a more basic monistic reality (see Otto 1932/1970: chap. 1; Underhill 1920: 8–11). While scholars may debate the strength and validity of the evidential basis for a clear hierarchical ordering of mystical experiences, it would be myopic to dismiss such cross-culturally-correlated evidence, or to ignore its potential significance.

There is more to be said in favor of GM's commitment to the notion that fundamental reality is homogeneous and against MM's adherence to fundamental heterogeneity. In particular, I'm inclined to believe that there is truth in the age-old (albeit somewhat unfashionable) intuition that absolute being must be absolutely simple, and therefore free of internal diversity. However, since making the point is a taxing exercise unbefitting this late stage of the present work, I must leave it for another occasion. For the time being, I hope that what has been said is sufficient to establish the following two points concerning GM. First that it is a significant variant of monism, conceptually as well as historically, and that it ought to be recognized and discussed. Second, that it is coherent and plausible. In the concluding section, I argue that GM is not only compatible with cosmopsychism but also instrumental in assisting the latter to address the explanatory challenges it faces.

5 CONCLUSION: COSMOPSYCHISM, GENERATIVE MONISM, AND NON-ŚANKARAN TRADITIONS OF HINDU NON-DUALISM

The difference between GM and MM assumes special import when applied to our understanding of cosmopsychism. A detailed discussion of this matter must be postponed for another time but here, in closing, it is possible nonetheless to point to the main issues at stake. In the first place, it goes without saying that a choice between GM and MM affects the manner in which one envisions the nature of CC. A cosmic consciousness whose primordial nature is that of an undifferentiated whole, and which generates plurality as an act of self-manifestation and self-individuation, is clearly distinct from one that can only exist as a unity-in-diversity, subsuming the many in a heterogeneous

whole. Although contemporary cosmopsychism has paid little attention to this partition, the divide is implicit in its various articulations. Thus, Goff's subsumptive approach (2017: chap. 9) is a clear example of a tacit endorsement of MM, and a similar implicit advocacy can be found, though perhaps less decisively, in Nagasawa and Wager (2017). In contrast, GM is presupposed in the work of other proponents of cosmopsychism such as Mathews (2011) and myself (Shani 2015; Shani and Keppler 2018). A recognition of the existence of such differences and attention to their potential philosophical significance are likely to bring greater clarity to the discussion.

One crucial respect in which a choice between MM and GM is consequential concerns the manner in which CC grounds lesser subjects—a question that bears directly on the *individuation problem*, or IND (see Section 2). In a recent paper (Shani 2022) I argue that the combination problem (see Section 2), infamous for burdening micropsychism, arises from the assumption that for micro-subjects to constitute macro-subjects they must also survive as subjects within the compound whole they constitute. In other words, it is the commitment to *constitution-cum-inclusion* that breeds incoherence and renders the combination problem insolvable. In contrast, the allegedly analogous problem for cosmopsychism, IND, can be coherently avoided since cosmopsychism is compatible with the *decoupling* of constitution and inclusion. The details are complicated and need not concern us here but one point is especially pertinent to the present discussion and therefore merits reproducing.

Cosmopsychism implies that CC includes all infra-cosmic subjects in its midst. If such lesser subjects are also *constitutive* of CC, then the situation would appear to be rather similar to the troublesome coupling we've identified in connection with constitutive micropsychism. Now, if one's monistic framework of choice is MM it appears that a commitment to constitution is inevitable. After all, there could be no CC without lesser subjects any more than there could be an organism in the absence of sub-organismic parts.[27] In contrast, a cosmopsychism based on GM emphatically avoids this assumption by maintaining that CC's fundamental being is prior to, and independent of, the actual existence of lesser subjects. As I argue in that paper, this assumption plays a key role in avoiding IND and breaking the presumed symmetry between cosmopsychism and micropsychism. If I am right about that, then this issue provides a very clear sense in which a choice between MM and GM is consequential for cosmopsychism.

Earlier, it was argued that, among variants of Hindu non-dualism, KS and Aurobindo's integral advaita stand out as two potential allies of cosmopsychism. Apart from being emphatically world-affirming, both these views display a clear commitment to GM, offering rich accounts of how an undivided CC gives rise, in its midst, to a manifest world populated with ordinary subjects and objects. Relatedly, both views offer intriguing resources for addressing IND, in

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particular by recourse to the idea that a pluralized individuation is the outcome of a spontaneous process of *self-limitation* in which, by being absorbed in concentration on exclusive localized conditions, CC lends itself to willful self-forgetfulness and alienation from its own true nature.[28] Finally, although both views are exemplars of GM they affirm the notion that as manifestation unfolds from out of the primal wholeness, a holistic order of unity-in-diversity emerges. This underscores an important realization, namely, that there isn't necessarily a contradiction between MM and GM. Rather the two are *compatible* provided that a cosmic order based on organic unity is seen as an emergent phase in a broader narrative captured more adequately by GM.

In sum, while one must bear in mind that other views within the Hindu corpus may be of similar relevance for cosmopsychism, and that other variants of cosmopsychism may stress different lines of pertinence and significance, there is little doubt that cosmopsychism stands much to gain from engaging constructively with the philosophical outlooks of Kashmir Śaivism and of Aurobindo's integral advaita.

ABBREVIATIONS

CC	cosmic consciousness
GM	generative monism
IND	individuation problem
KS	Kashmir Śaivism
MM	mereological monism
PGH	phenomenal grounding hypothesis
QFT	quantum field theory

NOTES

1 See also the contributions to a volume of the *Monist* on "Cosmopsychism and Indian Philosophy," guest-edited by Jonardon Ganeri and myself.

2 Token-monism is distinct from *type-monism*, the generic position according to which there is only one *type* of concrete entities, whether physical, mental, or neutral.

3 For exceptions, see Jaskolla and Buck (2012) and Siddharth (2020).

4 For elegance's sake, unless specifically required, I drop reference to *token-monism* and *priority monism* from now on. Instead, I shall speak simply of "monism" with the understanding that in the present context it is taken to presuppose the abovementioned qualifications.

5 Apart from the question of monism there is another important question concerning the metaphysical status of cosmopsychism, namely, where does it stand relative to metaphysics' traditional "battle of the isms": Is cosmopsychism

best interpreted as a form of idealism, dualism, or perhaps something else, for example, neutral monism or the double-aspect theory? While my own inclination is toward *idealism*, and while this inclination is in line with the views advocated by Kashmir Śaivism and by Aurobindo (see Section 3), considerations of space preclude me from discussing this question any further.

6 William Seager's introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Panpsychism* (Seager 2020) is an excellent and accessible essay on panpsychism. David Skrbina's monograph *Panpsychism in The West* (2005) is a comprehensive historical survey.

7 Notice that the operator 'or' is to be understood as an *inclusive* disjunction, for according to panpsychism all non-fundamental conscious beings (humans, for instance) are ultimately constituted of other conscious beings—viz., of the fundamental entities, whatever they are.

8 Notice that 'phenomenal grounding' is used here in a *broad* sense subsuming both phenomenal properties and subjectivity—it does not pertain merely to grounding relations between phenomenal properties. As for PGH itself, while not all panpsychists, or even cosmopsychists, abide by it (for reasons on which I shall not comment here) priority cosmopsychists surely do. For the purposes of the present paper, that's all that really matters.

9 From this point onward, I use the term "combination problem" to refer specifically to the *subject* combination problem. For a seminal discussion of several distinct types of combination problems, see Chalmers (2017).

10 The advantage of this terminology consists in the fact that it avoids two contentious assumptions, namely: (a) that the problem is strictly analogous to the combination problem (see below); and (b) that CC is fundamentally a mereological whole composed of lesser minds (for a discussion of mereological wholes see Section 4).

11 Anand Vaidya (2022) offers a useful terminological distinction between these two aspects of the individuation problem by calling the first the *mechanical aspect*, and the second (the one I claim to be the more pressing) the *modal aspect*.

12 Of course, much depends on what *type* of cosmopsychism is at stake since, clearly, some forms of cosmopsychism are more vulnerable to IND than others. However, from the standpoint of my argument the crucial point is that it simply isn't true that the problem bears devastating consequences for priority cosmopsychism as such. In this respect, my conclusions are diametrical to those suggested by critics (e.g., Albahari 2019) as well as by a paper in the *present* volume (see Basile 2022).

13 Cited in Sharma (1962: 5).

14 Needless to say, not all commentators agree on how to interpret Śankara's view. See Fasching (2022) for a different take on orthodox advaita combined with a beautiful envisioning of its potential contributions to a world-affirming metaphysics of mind. For my part, I remain under the impression that the world-denying elements in the thought of this influential school are too conspicuous to be downplayed.

15 For further references, see Medhananda (2021: 15).

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16 Should one argue for the illusionist stance on meditative-experiential grounds (for a forceful recent example, see Albahari 2019) it may be observed, in response, that neither is the realist opposition bereft of powerful appeals to such support (see, e.g., Medhananda 2022b).

17 See Bäumer (2011: 269). For a concise yet highly informative exposition of Kashmir Śaivism in comparison to Advaita Vedānta, see Singh (1985). For more extensive treatments see Dyczkowski (1987) and Pandit (1997).

18 More exactly, the movement is *bidirectional* since that which is unfolded can be refolded, and back again, in a repeated cosmic cycle of evolution and involution.

19 Lest it be objected that the ultimate ineffability of Brahman implies that its association with Saccidānanda is an empty ploy it ought to be stressed that on Aurobindo's view "all is one Reality" (1919/2006: 54) and everything is *continuous*. At the ultimate frontiers of human experience one reaches the limits of comprehension and expression, where what we've experienced as Saccidānanda shades off into "something beyond the last term to which we can reduce our purest conception and our most abstract or subtle experience of actual being" (1919/2006: 32). In short, the limits of effability do not imply an ontological breach.

20 To prevent confusion, it ought to be borne in mind that such involuted consciousness does not, in any way, distract from Brahman's inexhaustible reservoir of pure consciousness. As stated in the quotation from Plotinus at the opening of this chapter, a limitless spring "gives itself to all the rivers" without ever being exhausted by what they take. In this respect, Aurobindo's cosmology is reminiscent of Plotinus's doctrine of emanation.

21 While the involution-evolution picture has historical precedents among mystics, none, prior to Aurobindo, has absorbed evolutionary thinking to such a degree.

22 By "*undifferentiated singleness*" I mean a state of homogeneity, displaying no variations or differences and no specializations of form, structure, or function. It is, quite literally, the notion of *simplicity* so often associated in ancient and medieval metaphysics and theology with the ultimate source, or divine ground, of Being.

23 "The Pure Existent" (Aurobindo's term for the transcendent Absolute), he says, "is the fundamental reality" (1919/2006: 85).

24 As for the paradox of an unchanging entity sustaining all change, one must refer again to the metaphorical image of an *infinite* spring, which, on account of its inexhaustibility, can remain unmoved even while it sustains myriads of aquatic activities in rivers and tributaries.

25 Of course, this is not to suggest that *all* mystically inspired metaphysical outlooks embrace GM, but merely to stress that many do.

26 Recent decades have witnessed a lively scholarly debate regarding the nature of mystical experience and the extent to which such experiences convey information about the ultimate nature of reality (for an informative review see Marshall 2005, chap. 6). Significantly, some of the debaters—for example, radical constructivists and reductive naturalists—deny the very assumption that mystical experiences could teach us something about the ultimate nature of reality. Therefore, it ought

to be borne in mind that in debating the question what sort of *metaphysical lessons* could mystical experiences teach us one is emphatically *not* engaged in debating such skeptics (however vibrant their presence might be in the larger contemporary controversy on the question of mysticism…).

27 While one may insist that the whole is prior to the parts (in some specified sense), it is difficult to see how, on such a view, the parts could fail to be *constitutive* of the whole. Or rather, on such a view whole and parts are co-constitutive.

28 For an informative analysis of Aurobindo's self-limitation view and its relevance for cosmopsychism and the individuation problem, see Medhananda (2022b).

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