

## *Levels of language – from an old philosophy*

1. Elaborated structure	1
2. Mediating mind	5
3. Seeing in itself	8
4. Beyond all differences	12
Appendix: an old text	14

### **1. Elaborated structure**

Arranged in their respective places,  
different elements of speech  
are carried, spoken, in the air.

That forms *elaborated* speech.  
It's a recording, carried out  
through acts of living energy  
that functions forth from those who speak.<sup>1</sup>

As we speak, different sounds are put together, so as to describe a complex world. Some sounds are names, which can stand as symbols for particular things. As symbols are related together, in symbolic structures, they describe corresponding structures in the world. A typical example is a map, which relates its symbols in a way that corresponds to some represented territory.

In order to describe things better, symbolic structures are elaborated. Where an object has been represented by a single symbol, it may be described in more detail by assigning further symbols to its parts. Then, the object can be more elaborately described, as a structure made of smaller objects that relate to each other. For example, a city may be shown by a single dot on a map; but it may also be shown in more detail, by a map that relates landmarks and neighbourhoods in the city.

Moreover, symbolic structures may be put together, in larger pictures that are both broad and detailed. For example, a large map may show a group of towns in some detail, each with its own neighbourhoods extending into a countryside that relates the different towns together.

Through such elaboration, we build more accurate and more complete descriptions, of objects in the world. The objects are represented by symbols; and relationships between objects are related by relationships between symbols. This is a structural correspondence, which gives the symbols an objective meaning. This correspondence is developed by elaboration.

As, for example, we have greatly developed our maps of the earth's surface, through highly detailed and extensive information recorded by cameras on aeroplanes and satellites. The maps are stored through digital technology, with such a high de-

---

<sup>1</sup> From the *vṛtti* commentary on [Bhartṛhari's Vākya-padīya](#). See [Appendix](#).

gree of elaboration that they can be used to guide cruise missiles over long distances to very small and precise targets.

However, the elaboration comes at a price. As a map gets more elaborate, it shows more information; but that makes it more complicated and more difficult to read. For a machine like a cruise missile, guidance works through mechanical elaboration. A highly elaborated map is electronically stored, as digital information; and a computer reads that information so as to guide the missile to its target. But, for a living person, the data that a computer reads is far too elaborate, mechanically. So, for its living users, a computer has to present its information in ‘a user-friendly’ way, which is much simpler and more meaningful.

There is thus more to meaning than elaborated structure. Objects can be meaningful through a structural representation, as on a map. But they can also be meaningful in quite a different way, by expressing a living understanding. The second kind of meaning is subjective. It involves a living knowledge, which is experienced by a knowing subject. That raises a reflective question, going back into our knowledge of the world. How are objects known, along with the structures that they form?

An object is known in relation to other objects. Since objects are related into structures, each object can be known in two ways. On the one hand, an object can be known *explicitly*, by turning attention to it. Then it appears, standing out from other objects, at the focus of attention. But, on the other hand, an object can also be known *implicitly*, absorbed into some structure that contains it as a part. Then it is understood, without appearing separately, at the background of experience.

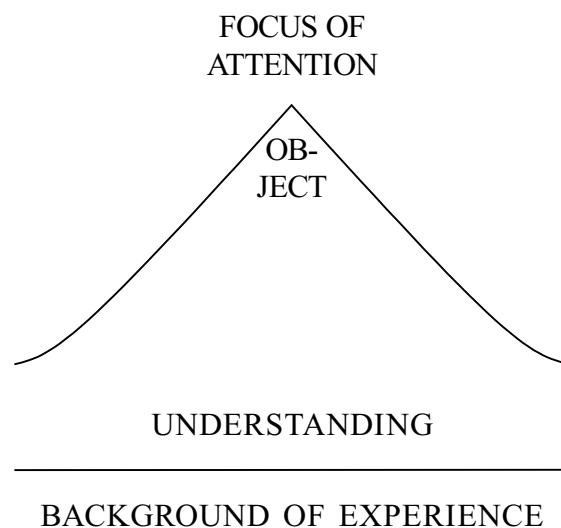
When an object is known explicitly, at the focus of attention, it has been singled out from other things. That may make it *seem* to be separate, but in fact it is not so. For, in the explicit object, other things are understood. What’s understood includes the other objects to which is related, in larger structures that contain it. And further, what’s understood also includes what’s inside the explicit object, with its internal structures that are made from smaller details.

As we go deeper into our understanding of an explicit object, what’s found implied becomes indefinitely broad and comprehensive. Eventually, at the underlying background of experience, we imply an understanding of the entire world. There, what’s implied includes the broadest, most macroscopic extent of the world; together with its finer details.

In short, as an object is known explicitly, it appears at the front tip of a limited attention. But this attention is based upon a much broader depth of understanding, at the background of experience. An illustration is shown in figure 1.

For example, suppose that a map shows several towns and villages, connected by roads, in a surrounding countryside. When one looks at a particular town, as it is shown on the map, then it appears, at the focus of attention. As attention is thus focused on the town, it appears in relation to the other towns on

Figure 1



the map, to the villages and the connecting roads, to the surrounding countryside, and to other things that may be shown or implied by the map. A structure of relationships gets to be understood, by turning attention from one thing to another on the map. And that structure is understood in seeing each particular thing that appears, as attention is focused upon it.

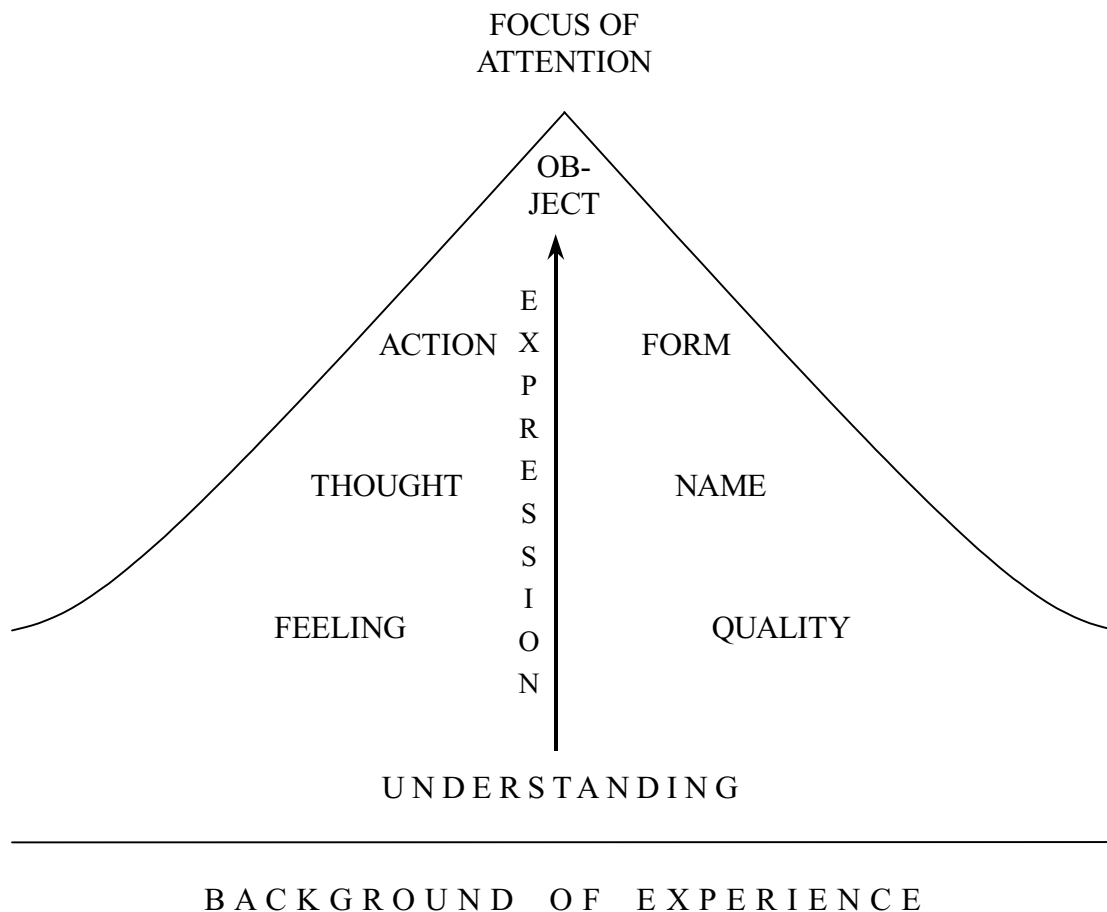
Moreover, in reading a map, much more is understood than the structure that it shows. In fact the structure needs to be kept limited, without too many symbols on the map, so that attention can be directed usefully to individual symbols and what they represent. To help with this direction of attention, we use names, like the name of a town or a road or a landmark or a district. And there is more to naming than a correspondence of mere structure.

A name has of course a form that can be analysed, as an elaborated structure. In its written form, a name can be analysed into letters, and the letters can further be analysed into component shapes. Similarly, in its spoken form, a name can be analysed into syllables and phonemes and into finer details of component sound.

But the internal structure of a name is not like a map. The letters and the phonemes in a name do not stand for objects whose inter-relationships are literally or phonetically mapped out, by the structure of the name. A name does not quite work like that, through an overt correspondence of structured form.

Instead, a name works through evocation. Through its spoken or its written form, a name evokes a living response, from the listener or the reader. The evocation calls out feelings, thoughts and actions, which express an understanding of the name. Thus,

*Figure 2*



attention is directed towards some object that is named.

The name itself is conceptual. It is associated with a level of conceiving thought. But thoughts are motivated by underlying feelings, which make intuitive judgements of quality and value. Thus, feelings work at a level underlying thought. There, they judge quality; in a way that motivates the overlying level of thought, where names are conceived. In their turn, thoughts and names direct actions, which turn attention from one object to another. Thus, thought is overlaid by a level of action: where the turning of attention traces out relationships, and produces the observation of form.

In short, feeling, thought and action work together, as three intermediate levels. Through these three levels, understanding is expressed, as attention is directed to an object. First, immediately above the level of understanding, feelings judge quality and value, thereby motivating thought and action. Second, above the level of feeling, thoughts conceive names and descriptions, thus directing action and observation. Third, above the level of thought, actions turn attention to objects and observe their forms.

These three levels can be illustrated by adding them into the [previous figure 1](#). Thus, we arrive at [figure 2 \(previous page\)](#). It shows how expression rises up into a narrow object, from a much broader base of understanding. That expression is what makes an object meaningful.

For example, on a map, a form of relationships is observed by actions of looking from one symbol to another; and this form gives the symbols an immediate meaning, by locating them in distance and direction. So also, names on the map are interpreted by thought, which expresses in the symbols a richer meaning, by understanding them as buildings or streets or towns or countries. And further, qualities like colour may be judged by feeling, as colours on the map are used to express a more subtle and intangible understanding of climatic influences or environmental and cultural conditions.

This kind of meaning is not found only in objects that are especially symbolic. It is essentially involved in our experience of all objects, in general. For example, it isn't only the symbol of a town or the name of a town that meaningfully expresses understanding. If I go to the town itself, and live there for a while, the town comes to have a meaning for me, positive or negative or neutral. As I experience the town, my understanding comes to be expressed: in actions toward the town and in forms that are thereby observed, in thoughts about the town and in names that are thereby conceived, in feelings about the town and in qualities that are thereby judged.

But, when we talk of meaning in this way, as an expression of some inner understanding, it raises some delicate questions. What is the nature of this expression from within? And how can we describe it and examine it?

Well, in a sense, our expression of meaning is a sort of energy. It is a motivating energy that we commonly experience in our lives. For example, as a person speaks, what's said is motivated by an energy of intention, thought and feeling. That energy expresses understanding in the spoken words, and thus gives them meaning.

But, such an energy is not just physical. It does not act from one object to another. Instead, it is inspired from within, as it expresses an inner depth of consciousness. It is thus a *living energy*, of inner inspiration, functioning through faculties of living purpose, thought and feeling.

This functioning implies what we call 'mind'. It works together with our minds, which mediate between our understanding and the objects we perceive. It is through our mediating minds that understanding is expressed in objects. So, the idea of 'mind'

is another way of describing meaning. And, to examine what mind is, we can reflect back into it. We then reflect inwards: from the objects that we know, into the mental process through which they are known.

## 2. Mediating mind

Mind in itself is made of forms  
that follow on successively,  
replacing what has gone before.

The functioning of living energy  
is thereby left behind,  
as *mediating* speech goes on  
with its continued functioning.<sup>2</sup>

In the world outside our minds, objects are related into structures. In such a structure, different objects can be present at the same time. Differences occur in space, as well as time. Structures in the world are thus ordered in many dimensions, including space and time.

However, in a person's mind, as it is experienced from moment to moment, there is no such structure. Instead, there is only a process of knowing, where mental states replace each other in the course of time. Each state is experienced in the present, as it follows on from previous states. And in its turn, each present state is followed on by future states. Here, the only difference is that of time. Different states are not present, at the same time. They only follow one another, in succession.

Our states of mind are thus ordered by succession, in time alone. And yet, through this successive order, we conceive a structured world of many dimensions, where differences of space are added on to those of time.

A typical example can be seen in our use of spoken language, as words succeed each other in a listener's mind. Through the meaning of successive words, the mind progresses to an understanding of phrases and sentences, which describe a world of complex structures. As the mind takes in the meaning of a word, it proceeds to a new state. And that new state of mind assimilates the word just taken in, so as to comprehend this word along with previous words. It's thus that groups of words are understood together, as phrases and sentences.

For a more particular illustration, consider a simple sentence that describes a geographical relationship: 'Cape Town is many thousands of miles south-east of New York.' First, the two words 'Cape' and 'Town' are understood together, as the name of a city. Then comes the word 'is'. It results in an expectation that what follows will describe Cape Town. Next comes the phrase 'many thousands of miles', which is understood as a distance. Then comes the hyphenated word 'south-east', which is understood as a direction in which the distance lies. Next follows the preposition 'of', which creates an expectation as to where the distance and direction are taken from. The expectation is fulfilled by the subsequent words 'New York', which are under-

---

<sup>2</sup> From the *vṛtti* commentary on *Bhartṛhari's Vākya-pāṭīya*. See [Appendix](#).

stood as the name of another city. In fulfilling this expectation, the whole sentence is understood, as a relationship of distance and direction in between two cities.

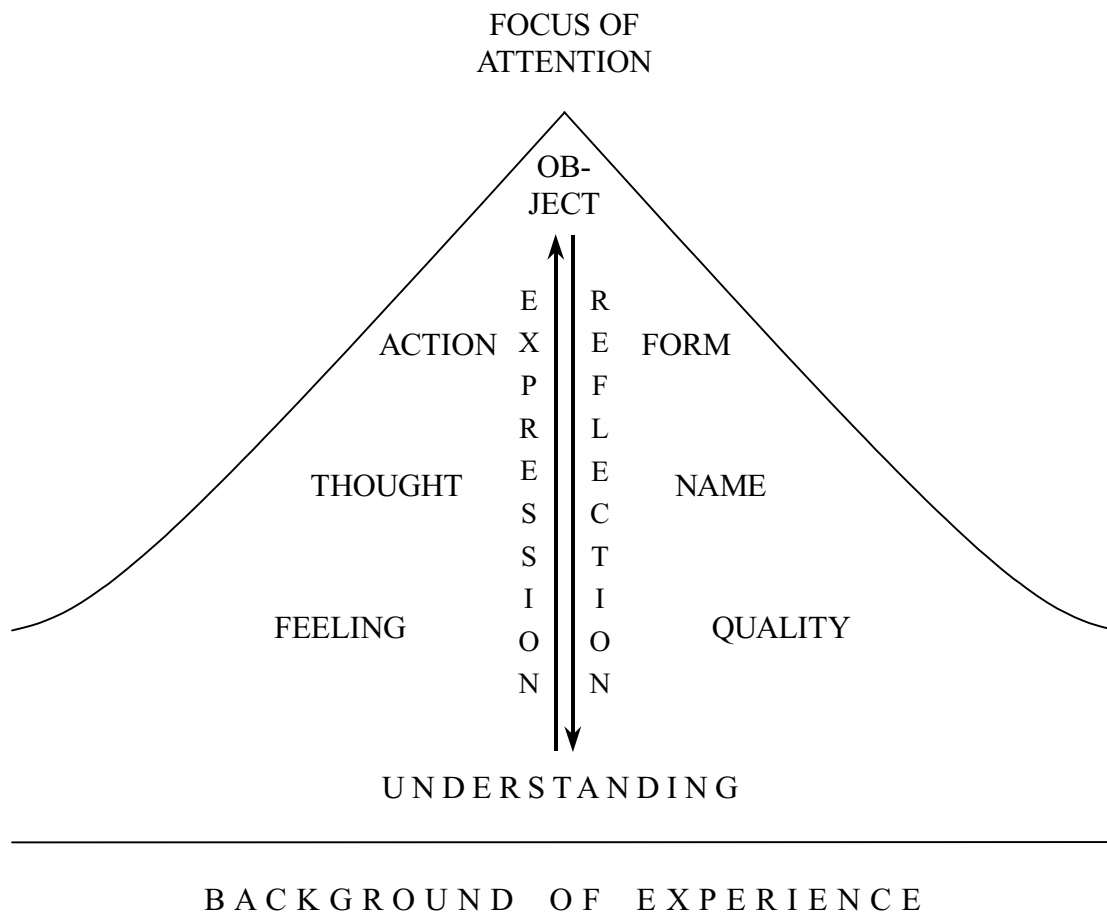
Essentially, the same thing happens as a map is read. The same relationship can be described by pointing to Cape Town on a map and then pointing onward to New York. There again, the city of Cape Town is called to mind, then a relationship of distance and direction, and then the city of New York; so that this succession in time is understood as a structural relationship of space between the two cities.

And further, the same thing happens also with our more direct experience of objects. If I visit Cape Town and travel from there to New York, there is again a succession that takes place in mind: with Cape Town appearing, then a journey of distance and direction, then New York. And again, the succession is understood to show a relationship of geographic structure.

In short, succession is essential to the functioning of mind. Through feeling, thought and action, attention turns to an object, which then appears in mind. This appearance is a state of mind, which does two things. On the one hand, it follows on from the past, from where it expresses an accumulated understanding, in the object that appears. But, on the other hand, as the object is perceived and interpreted, there is a reflection back into the depth of mind. And the reflection gets assimilated into further understanding, from where future states of mind result.

Hence, as mind mediates between understanding and objects, there is a cycle of expression and reflection. When understanding is expressed in an object, the expression is then followed by a reflection back. In that reflection, form is perceived in the

Figure 3



object and its relationships, name is conceived in describing and interpreting the object, and quality is judged in evaluating the object's use and significance. That reflection can be illustrated by a downward arrow, added into the [previous figure 2](#). Thus, we arrive at [figure 3 \(previous page\)](#). Here, the upward and downward arrows show a cycle of expression and reflection, which keeps repeating in the course of time.

As the cycle keeps repeating, attention turns from one object to another, and the mind proceeds through changing states. In the course of one cycle, an object appears, expressing an understanding that has been assimilated from the past. This is the current state of mind. Then, in its turn, this current state gets assimilated, through reflection, into a further understanding. And, from that further understanding, the cycle repeats. The repetition leads to future states of mind, each showing its own object.

This cycle, of expression and reflection, can be considered over different scales of time. On the one hand, it can be considered over an extended period; as for example when I get to know a city over many years, through many visits to its various neighbourhoods and suburbs and the countryside around it. Then the city appears progressively, through a gradual process that repeatedly expresses understanding and reflects back into it. But, on the other hand, the expression and reflection can be momentary or even instantaneous; as for example when some particular news brings the city to my mind in a single flash that gives me a further understanding of it.

In any case, no matter at what scale of time, the mind proceeds through changing states by cycling back and forth, between a variety of different objects and an underlying background of understanding. Each object appears and disappears, as attention turns to it and then turns on to other things.

As an object appears, there is a functioning of living energy, through feelings, thoughts and actions that direct attention to the object and thereby express understanding in its appearance. But that same functioning proceeds to perceive the appearance and to interpret it; so that it gets taken back into the depth of mind, at the background of experience. Then attention is returned into the underlying background; and there the object disappears, as its appearance is assimilated into understanding.

Thus, objects come into appearance and go away again; while their appearances are assimilated underneath, at a background that continues through the changes. The surface of the mind keeps changing all the time, moved by the living energy of feelings, thoughts and actions that show a variety of changing qualities and names and forms in various different objects.

As each appearance is taken in and understood, attention is returned into the background underneath. There, the changes of energetic functioning are left behind. They only appear at the surface, not in the background that continues underneath the changes and the differences of passing time. That underlying continuity is essential to our change of mental states.

In order to see that some change has taken place, there must be some kind of seeing that continues through the change. That seeing must have been present in the past, witnessing what went before. And it must be present now, witnessing what currently appears. It is a seeing that stays present at the background of experience, underneath the changes that appear in mind.

### 3. Seeing in itself

But *seeing* is that partless essence  
always present, everywhere.  
In it, succession is absorbed.

There's only light in its true nature,  
as it is itself, within.  
That is a subtle speaking where  
no disappearance can be found.<sup>3</sup>

At the surface of the mind, perception is a changing activity, which produces different appearances. The differing appearances distract from one another, in a noisy clamour for attention. And yet we can understand them together, as different parts or changing views of something that they show in common.

For example, when a sentence is heard, different words appear, each obscuring others as it passes by. But, as what's said is understood, these different words are seen contributing to a common meaning that the sentence shows. Or, to take another example, when a journey takes a traveller from place to place, different scenes appear, each taking its own turn to occupy attention. Each scene shows different things, differently perceived by mind. But, beneath the differences, a traveller can also understand the scenes as changing views of a common country, with a shared geography and cultural inheritance.

How do we put together these partial and distracting views of mind's perception? We do so on the basis of a silent witnessing, which stays present while perceptions come and go. That witnessing is not an elaborated structure, divided into component objects. Nor is it a changing process, divided into passing states. Instead, it is an undivided seeing, staying present silently, beneath the divided appearances that clamour for attention in the mind.

For example, it is that silent seeing which continues through the different words in a sentence, and which grasps the meaning of the sentence as a whole. And, it is that same seeing which continues through the passing scenes of a journey, thus enabling an assimilated understanding of the country that is journeyed through.

Thus, beneath the noisy clamour of perceptions that succeed each other at the surface, there is a silent depth of seeing at the background of experience, where perceptions are assimilated into understanding. That silent depth is often called the 'unconscious'.

For, at that depth, succeeding experiences are absorbed into a hidden store of implicit potency. As each experience is taken in, it gets absorbed, like a seed implanted in the ground. Thus implanted, it remains beneath the surface, as an implicit tendency of character. Later on, circumstances stimulate the tendency into explicit action, like an implanted seed growing forth into appearance.

So, in the course of time, character becomes conditioned by a hidden store of implanted tendencies, which previous experiences have left behind. Later on, the ten-

---

<sup>3</sup> From the *vṛtti* commentary on *Bhartṛhari's Vākya-padīya*. See [Appendix](#).



dencies grow forth, through changing circumstances, into future actions and experiences. As time proceeds, there is a cyclic process of mental causation: going down from the surface to the depth of mind, and rising up again.

Experiences, perceived at the surface, are implanted at a hidden depth of mind. There, they continue, as unseen causal tendencies that grow up later into seen effects. Viewed from the surface of the mind, the depth beneath seems hidden and thereby 'unconscious'. It is made up of unseen tendencies, whose functioning behind the scenes results in seen effects.

This superficial view makes it seem that consciousness is a stream of changing appearances, like the pictures on a computer screen. The mind is then mechanically conceived, as a machine that functions to produce appearances: like a computer making off-screen calculations that result in the pictures it displays. Thus, consciousness appears to be a passing stream of perceptions, thoughts and feelings, shown by mind. And the 'unconscious' is conceived as an unseen depth of functioning behind the scenes, resulting in the changing show.

When consciousness is viewed like this, as a changing stream, it is shown mixed up with objects of perception. At any time, it seems to be a consciousness of something that appears perceived. In course of time, it seems to be a consciousness of various different objects, which get differently perceived. This consciousness of objects is what seems to change, as it gets affected by its changing objects and the different ways in which they are perceived.

For example, as I hear a sentence, my consciousness appears to change from word to word, affected by the words I hear and how I listen to them. Or, as I journey through a country, my consciousness appears to change from place to place, affected by the things I see and how I look at them.

But, as the consciousness of objects keeps on changing, how do we know that change has taken place? How do we know that consciousness has changed: from one object to another, from one perception to the next? We know this on the basis of an underlying consciousness, which stays present underneath, at the background of experience.

For example, suppose that I am told of two places, one of them described as 'hot' and the other one described as 'cold'. These different words, 'hot' and 'cold', bring to mind two different awarenesses: one of burning, sweaty heat, the other one of freezing and constricting cold. The different words thus bring about a change of apparent awareness, at the surface of the mind. But, as the change takes place, there is a quiet consciousness that carries on beneath it, in the background. That consciousness stays present silently, beneath the change of spoken words and the awarenesses they bring to mind. In the end, the change is known from there, from that background consciousness.

The same is true if I travel through a change of temperature, as for example if I climb from a hot valley to a frozen mountain peak. Then consciousness appears to change: from the stifling sweatiness of valley heat, through the refreshing coolness of the mountain slopes, to the numbing cold above the snowline. These are awarenesses that occupy attention, as they appear and disappear. But, underneath this changing occupation of attention, there is a consciousness that silently remains, witnessing what comes and goes. It stays present through the differing awarenesses: of valley heat, of coolness on the mountain slopes, and of freezing cold above. By its remain-

ing presence at the underlying background, it witnesses the differing appearances that come and go in mind.

There is a basic difference here, between the mind's perceptions and the consciousness by which they are witnessed. Each perception comes into appearance through a mental announcement that grabs attention. Then, as the announcement fades, the perception disappears, and attention is released to get occupied elsewhere.

But consciousness does not appear and disappear, through announcements in the mind. It is present unannounced, throughout experience, witnessing what comes and goes. Each appearance is witnessed by it. So too, each disappearance. Consciousness is present always, through all appearances and disappearances. It's there whenever objects or perceptions appear: as in our states of waking to an outside world, or in our states of dreaming in our minds. And that same consciousness is also present when all objects and perceptions have disappeared, as in the depth of dreamless sleep.

As it stays always present, that consciousness does not depend on what we see or say, through our senses and our minds. What's seen and spoken are perceptions and descriptions that appear and disappear. Thus different objects come and go, perceived and conceived through various changing faculties. But consciousness stays present underneath. It is the unseen principle of seeing, which continues through all differences of sight. And it is also the unspoken principle of speaking, which continues through all differences of speech.

That unseen and unspoken consciousness is what continues, at the background of experience. It is that consciousness from which understanding is expressed, and where reflection must return to comprehend what's seen. This can be illustrated by making a small change in the [previous figure 3](#). Thus we come to [figure 4 \(next page\)](#). The change is at the bottom of the diagram. There, what was called the 'background' is now described as 'consciousness', beneath the horizontal line.

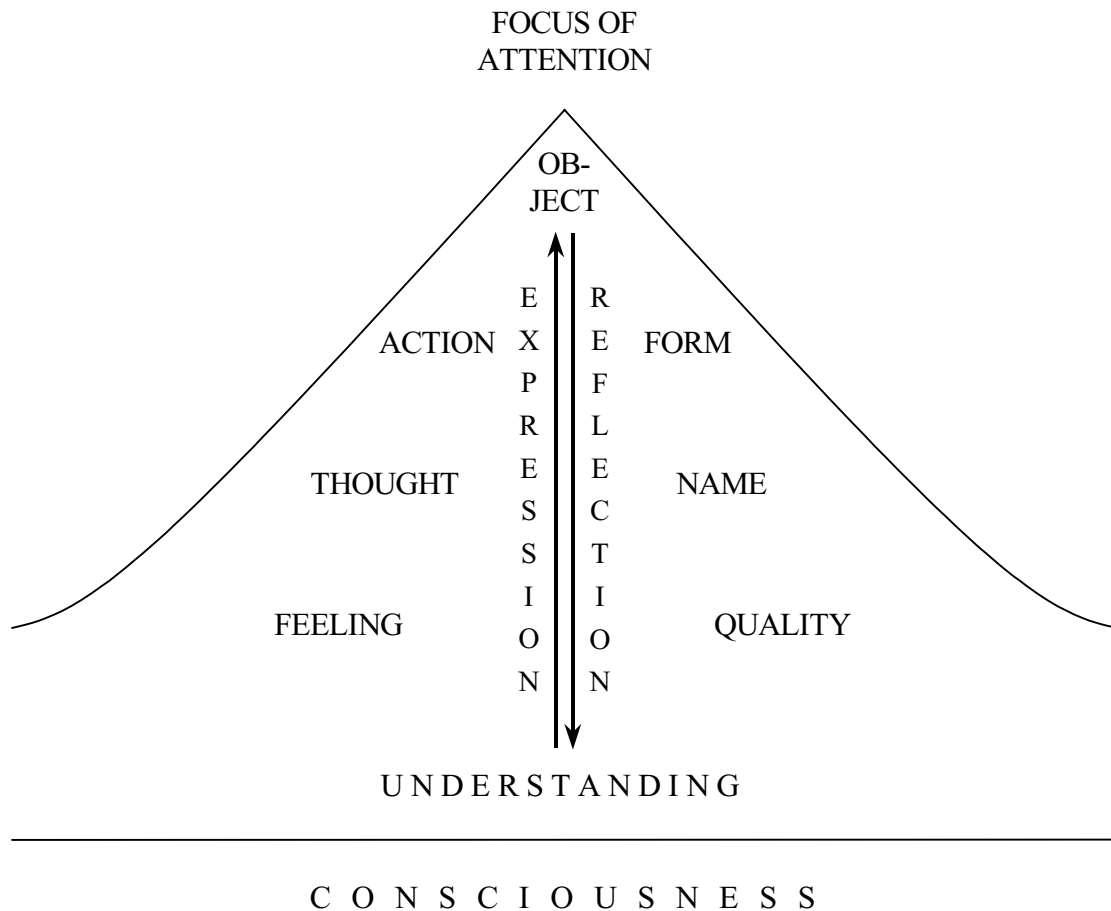
This description is essentially reflective. Here, consciousness is not a changing stream, seen at the surface. Instead, it is an inner principle of knowing light, found by reflecting back within, beneath the changing stream of appearances in mind. That knowing light is pure illumination, unmixed with any passing show that gets illuminated by its witnessing.

In itself, it is just consciousness, unmixed with any changing acts of body, sense or mind. Accordingly, it is completely unaffected by the objects and perceptions that it witnesses. It is *seeing in itself*, beneath the stream of changing show, which it illuminates from deep within.

That seeing in itself is what appears to be the 'unconscious', when seen from body, sense or mind. It appears that way because it cannot be an object of physical or sensual or mental perception. It is always the subjective light that illuminates each picture we perceive. So it can never be a depicted object, in any picture of the world. It is essentially an inner consciousness, shining always from the background underneath the picturing.

There, in the underlying background, no pictured objects are perceived. There's only pure, unpictured light, where objects don't appear. In that sense, the background is 'unconscious of objects'. But this 'unconsciousness of objects' is itself pure light. It is pure consciousness, which shines by its own light. The background of experience is a changeless screen of unpictured light: illuminating from within the changing pictures that appear, superimposed on it.

Figure 4



Though that screen is changeless, it is not inert. Its pictures are not activated from elsewhere, like those on a computer screen. It is not a lifeless instrument, whose living meaning is read into it from outside, like a computer screen. Instead, as consciousness itself, it is the inner principle of life, whose living meaning is spontaneously expressed from its own activating nature. That naturally inspires life and meaning, in its show of pictures, as they express it of their own accord.

As consciousness continues through experience, its knowing presence is inherently alive. Feelings, thoughts and actions are inherently inspired to express it, in the pictures that appear on it. That makes the pictures come alive. It makes them speak to us, animated by a living energy of meaningful expression.

Viewed in this way, by reflecting back to it, consciousness speaks from within. It needs no calculating brain, to produce the pictures we perceive. As we actually experience them, the pictures are inspired from within. They rise from their own knowing light, which is their living source of animating energy. Any calculating brain is only one such picture, illuminated by an inner consciousness that speaks through it.

That consciousness speaks through all differing and changing pictures. It's that which does not disappear, through all the differing appearances that rise from it and disappear back into it.

#### 4. Beyond all differences

It reaches its conditioned form  
by mixing it, with a variety  
of differing disturbances  
that seem to float on it.

But that, which seems elaborated,  
is pure being in itself.  
It is untouched, quite unaffected  
by its show of qualities.<sup>4</sup>

But, when we think of consciousness like this, as an ever-present principle, we are then thinking in a very general and abstract way. The idea of language is then generalized, to include all experience, throughout the universe. Here, everything that happens is conceived as the speaking of a single consciousness: which gets differently expressed in different things, at various times and places. All differences are thus described as a varying display, shown superimposed upon a common consciousness from which each difference is expressed.

This is a general description of the entire universe; but it depends upon a central question that each individual is left to ask, for herself or himself, in particular. If consciousness is everywhere expressed, how can any individual come to know just what it is? Each individual only sees a small few things, among many other things that are not seen, in a much larger universe. So how can any of us comprehend a consciousness that's present everywhere, continuing through everything?

Essentially, consciousness is that which knows. In anyone's experience, it is the knowing subject, as distinct from the objective things that are known through body, sense and mind. But there is a problem here. As a matter of ingrained habit, we often identify our bodies, our senses and our minds as knowing subjects.

Then, problematically, knowing is identified with personal activities. In particular, it is identified with bodily activities, like speaking out loud or recognizing other bodies. Or it is identified with sensual activities, like seeing sights and hearing sounds. Or it is identified with mental activities, like judging and interpreting.

Though knowing is habitually identified like this, the habit is confused and misleading. Our physical and sensual and mental activities belong to what is known, through personality. As such, they belong to the objective world, and they do not know anything. They just produce appearances, which are illuminated by consciousness.

It's only consciousness that knows. But it is not a changing activity, performed by body, sense or mind. It is just a timeless presence, whose unchanging light illuminates all changes and inspires them to express it. Thus, in everyone's experience, consciousness is timeless and undifferentiated, as the knowing subject that is always there. But it is overlaid by changing activities, which have been habitually confused with it.

---

<sup>4</sup> From the *vṛtti* commentary on *Bhartṛhari's Vākya-padīya*. See [Appendix](#).

Because of this confusion, we do not rightly understand the consciousness that knows our own experience. To know that consciousness more clearly, it must be distinguished from personal activities of body, sense and mind. As it is thus distinguished, each individual can get to know it, in particular.

The source of confusion is a false identity, where knowing self is seen confused with an acting personality. The self that knows is mistakenly identified: as body, sense and mind, which are instruments of action. The mistake is corrected progressively, by withdrawing this identity from where it does not properly belong.

First, the body is seen as an instrument that acts toward other bodies in the world. As a person's body acts, it's seen to function as an instrument, through which the senses see a world outside. Next, in their turn, the senses too are seen as instruments, which bring perceptions into mind. The senses act as instruments of mind; which in its turn produces the appearances that come and go before the light of consciousness. So, finally, the mind as well is seen to be an instrument. It is an instrument of consciousness, which does not change and has no action in itself. That consciousness is not an instrument that acts. It's just a self that knows, unmixed with any changing act.

When consciousness is finally distinguished, from all changing acts, it turns out to be utterly impersonal. Seen in the physical and mental world, consciousness appears expressed in changing personality, perceiving a variety of forms and names and qualities. But as it knows itself within, its knowing is no changing act that starts or stops or differs in the course of time.

It does not know by putting on an act, but just by its inherent nature, as self-illuminating light. Its very being is to know, to shine by its own light. And it is known by being it, as one's own self. Returning there, one comes to what one always is, beneath all differences of changing world and personality.

There, consciousness is purely subjective and also completely impersonal. Beneath all names and forms and qualities, there is no way of differentiating it, in different persons or at different times and places. It is the one, same consciousness: found at the knowing centre of each individual, no matter where nor when.

And that same consciousness is found expressed in all appearances of world, at all times and places, no matter who perceives them. The appearances are limited and partial, because they are perceived by limited and partial personalities. But consciousness itself is utterly unlimited and impartial, because it is unmixed with the limited and partial appearances that personality perceives.

Thus, consciousness is being in itself. It is pure being, unmixed with the appearances that show it in limited pieces and in partial aspects. When it is known distinct from its differing expressions, then it is found complete, as all reality. It is the complete reality of the entire universe.

That is its non-duality. It's realized by distinguishing what knows from what is known. But, when the distinction is complete, the consciousness that knows is found expressed in everything. All that's known is nothing else but consciousness. There, no duality is left between a knowing subject and the objects that it knows.

Such a non-duality must be beyond all differing descriptions that may guide an enquiry towards it. Where it is reached, there can be no differences remaining unresolved.

### Appendix: an old text

In the preceding paper, each section starts with a free translation of a Sanskrit stanza. The stanzas are quoted in the *vṛtti* commentary on Bhartṛhari's *Vākya-padīya*, 1.142. Traditionally, this commentary is said to be by Bhartṛhari himself; and he is quoting here from some more ancient text. We do not know quite what that text was, but he regarded it as authoritative. In the Sanskrit tradition, he himself is regarded as something of an authority, on the philosophy of language.

As with many ancient Sanskrit authors, we are not sure when Bhartṛhari lived and composed his works. But it was before the seventh century CE, when the Chinese traveller I-tsing reports that the *Vākya-padīya* was already established in the classical curriculum of learning. Along with other Hindu classics, it was among the works that Buddhist students were taught at the great monastery of Nālandā.<sup>5</sup>

So, the stanzas that have been translated were already ancient in the seventh century CE. They come down from old ways of thought that were rather different from what we are used to now. In translating them, their meaning has been interpreted and then retold in modern terms, which explain things a little more than the condensed expression of the Sanskrit originals. And after the translation, each section in the preceding paper goes on to carry the explanation somewhat further.

In this appendix, the Sanskrit originals are shown transliterated alongside their translations. And it is explained how some traditional ideas have been interpreted in modern terms.

sthāneṣu vidhr̥te vayau kṛta-varṇa-parigrahā	Arranged in their respective places, different elements of speech are carried, spoken, in the air.
vaikharī vāk prayoktṛṇām prāṇa-vṛtti-nibandhanā	That forms <i>elaborated</i> speech. It's a recording, carried out through acts of living energy that functions forth from those who speak.

This first stanza describes 'vaikharī vāk' or '*elaborated speech*'. The elaboration takes place through an articulation of spoken elements (phonemes, syllables etc.), which are carried in 'vāyu' or 'air'.

However, that 'air' is not just physical. As 'vāyu', it is the fourth of five cosmic elements,<sup>6</sup> in our experience of the physical and mental world. It is the 'atmospheric' element of qualitative conditioning: which can be 'felt, but not seen'. It conditions space and time, with a pervading climate of influencing qualities that are intuitively

---

<sup>5</sup> See Harold G. Coward: *Bhartṛhari*, start of chapter 2, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1976; and R.C. Majumdar, Ed.: *The history and culture of the Indian people, Vol 3, The classical age*, chapter 21, §4, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai, 1988.

<sup>6</sup> The five elements are: 'pṛthivī' or 'earth' (gross matter, separated into objects), 'āpas' or 'water' (transforming energy, which flows in dynamic patterns of activity), 'tejas' or 'fire' (illuminating information, throwing light through meaningful representations), 'vāyu' or 'air' (qualitative conditioning, which influences tendencies of character), and 'ākāśa' or 'ether' (connecting continuity, which settles conflicts and harmonizes differences).

felt, through inner judgement and evaluation. These qualities are not seen as gross objects, through outward sense and intellect. Instead, they are more subtly felt, as their conditioning surrounds and pervades the grosser objects of the world. It is through this climate, of physical and mental conditioning, that speech gets articulated, into complex structures.

Moreover, as words are spoken, they express a living meaning, in the structures that they form. This expression is conceived through the Sanskrit word ‘*prāṇa*’. Physically, the word is associated with the flow of breath in our bodies. As air is breathed, in and out, it refreshes our living functions. And it gets vibrated from within, producing sounds that show a living consciousness, expressed in various changing forms and names and qualities of speech. *Prāṇa* is the energy of this expression. It is not a physical energy that acts from one object to another. Instead, it is a *living energy* that rises up from consciousness, which it expresses in the flow of meaningful activity.

Like the energy of modern physics, *prāṇa* acts through subtle vibrations in the conditioning of space and time; and objects are thus interconnected patterns of its dynamic activity. But *prāṇa* is an energy that’s understood biologically, through considerations of living purpose, meaning and value that are specifically excluded from modern physics. Where modern physics is applied externally, through calculation and engineering, the living energy of *prāṇa* is investigated reflectively, through education and intensive discipline.

As words express their meaning, they record a knowledge that continues from the past. This ‘*recording*’ is called ‘*nibandhana*’. Literally, it means ‘tying back’ or ‘tying down’. ‘*Nibandhana*’ is what ties words to the concrete meaning that supports them. It is the grounding of words, in the underlying knowledge that they record.

Here, it is not conceived that a passing knowledge is made to last, by tying it down to material records like written documents. In fact, the conception is just the opposite. Where knowledge is genuine, it is inherently alive and unchanging, in itself. Material records are inherently dead and decaying. They come to life only when their meaning is interpreted afresh, by living speakers, on the basis of a living energy whose functioning grounds words in lasting knowledge.

This is the root meaning of the English word ‘record’. The prefix ‘re-’ means ‘back’; and ‘cord’ comes from the Latin ‘cor’, which means ‘heart’. Thus, the word ‘record’ implies a return to heart, and hence a recalling and a fresh visiting of knowledge that continues in the heart. Material records are only a degraded and decaying means of that living recall.

kevalam buddhy upādānā  
krama-rūp’-ānupātinī

Mind in itself is made of forms  
that follow on successively,  
replacing what has gone before.

prāṇ’-āvṛttim atikramya  
madhyamā vāk pravartate

The functioning of living energy  
is thereby left behind,  
as *mediating* speech goes on  
with its continued functioning.

This second stanza describes ‘*madhyamā vāk*’ or ‘*mediating speech*’. The mediation takes place through mind, and it is of two kinds.

One kind of mediation is called '*krama*' or '*succession*'. Here, mind is a process that takes place in time, mediating between the past and the future. At each moment of time, a state of mind appears, replacing previous states. Each state displays a momentary form of mind, which has been formed by transformation from the past, in a continuing process of perception, thought and feeling. The mind is thus a passing stream of apparent forms, each form a momentary display of the entire process.

But, as these forms succeed each other in our minds, meaning is expressed in them, through our living functioning. That functioning is called '*vr̥tti*' or '*turning*'. It is of course the functioning of *prāṇa*'s living energy. It functions by turning back and forth: between the objects mind perceives, and the consciousness that knows the changing stream of perception in the mind. Here, there is a revolving cycle: as consciousness is expressed in the mind's perception of objects, and as each perception is assimilated back through mind into consciousness again.

By thus going out to perceived objects and then reflecting back within, the mind keeps mediating between a world of changing things and a consciousness that carries on beneath. This is another kind of mediation, which does not stay in passing time. Instead, it repeatedly returns into a timeless consciousness: which knows all changes from beneath.

Each time a perception is absorbed into that consciousness, there is a timeless interval, where mind subsides and disappears. There, mind's living energy has come to rest. Its time-bound functioning is left behind, before new states of mind appear. That's how the mind proceeds from state to state. It keeps going on beyond, to where it is dissolved, transcending its own time-affected functioning.

avibhāgā tu paśyantī  
sarvataḥ samhr̥ta-kramā

But *seeing* is that partless essence  
always present, everywhere.  
In it, succession is absorbed.

svarūpa-jyotir ev' āntaḥ  
sūkṣmā vāg anapāyinī

There's only light in its true nature,  
as it is itself, within.  
That is a subtle speaking where  
no disappearance can be found.

This third stanza describes '*paśyantī*' or '*seeing*'. That seeing is not a changing action of body, sense or mind. Instead, it is a changeless presence, staying present everywhere, through all experiences. As different appearances succeed each other in our minds, it is their common principle of consciousness, which witnesses them all. Its witnessing takes each of them into itself, where all succession is absorbed.

To describe it in itself, it is called '*svarūpa-jyoti*' or the '*true nature of light*'. '*Jyoti*' means 'light' and '*svarūpa*' means 'true nature'. A '*rūpa*' is an apparent form, modified by changeable perception. '*Sva-*' is a prefix that means 'inherent' or 'one's own'. So the *svarūpa* of something is its inherent essence, beneath the changing forms that modify its appearances from different points of view. When something is known from within, as it is in itself, there its *svarūpa* is realized. That is not a looking from outside, taking one of many points of view in the external world. Instead, it is a knowing in identity. It requires that one stands identical with what is known.

So, when seeing is described as the *svarūpa* of light, it is a seeing that knows itself, from within, as self-illuminating light. And it is realized by reflecting back to it, as one's own knowing self, from where all mind and world are illuminated.



From there, it speaks unceasingly, as it is expressed through all experience of the physical and mental world. That speaking is called ‘*sūkṣma vāk*’ or ‘*subtle speech*’. It is too subtle to be heard through outward faculties of sense and mind, whose attention is distracted by the noisy clamour of apparent change and its competing differences. That subtle speaking thus remains unheard and unperceived, by our outward faculties. From outside, it seems dark and silent; even though its nature is pure light, which sees everything and keeps on speaking everywhere.

prāpt’-oparāga-rūpā sā  
viplavair anuṣaṅgibhiḥ

It reaches its conditioned form  
by mixing it, with a variety  
of differing disturbances  
that seem to float on it.

vaikharī sattva-mātr’ eva  
guṇair na vyavakīryate

But that, which seems elaborated,  
is pure being in itself.  
It is untouched, quite unaffected  
by its show of qualities.

Here, there is a description of what came to be called ‘*parā*’ or ‘*beyond*’. In Bhartṛhari’s *Vākya-padīya* and its *vṛtti* commentary, this term ‘*parā*’ is not used to denote a fourth level of speech. Bhartṛhari says that speech is threefold; and he treats the third level of *paśyantī* as ultimate. It’s later on in the tradition that the name ‘*parā*’ appears, referring to a fourth level. As a result, there came to be a fourfold division of levels, which was used extensively, in connection with Shaivite theology. Then, *paśyantī* was treated in a slightly degraded way: not as consciousness itself, but as the silent witnessing through which consciousness illuminates and inspires the changing world.

In this fourth stanza (quoted from the *vṛtti* commentary), consciousness is described as unconditioned, beyond the conditioned differences that are superimposed upon it. This superimposition is called ‘*viplava*’. ‘*Plava*’ means ‘floating’, and the prefix ‘*vi-*’ implies ‘distinction’ and ‘difference’. So *viplava* is a *floating overlay of difference and disturbing change*.

As consciousness appears, it seems thus mixed with a floating overlay, which confuses our understanding. To correct the confusion, consciousness must be distinguished from all the changing and conditioned things that are perceived through mind. When the distinction is complete, consciousness turns out to be pure being, completely unaffected by the limited appearances that are superimposed by partial mind and senses.

That *pure being* is called ‘*sattva-mātra*’. It is the one reality of everything that’s known, throughout the entire universe. Thus, by distinguishing consciousness as that which knows, it turns out to be identical with all reality, where all distinctions are dissolved. By fully separating that which knows from what is known, the duality between them is completed, and a non-dual unity is realized.

This conclusion may seem mystical, but Bhartṛhari approaches it through a reasoned analysis of common experience. He is very much a linguistic philosopher, who is looking for clarity, by analysing the meaning of common words. As he says in the *Vākya-padīya*:

All tying down of truths perceived,  
in objects and their functioning,  
consists of words expressed in speech.

But we don't clearly recognize  
the truth of words, in due respect  
to the analysis of speech.

1.13

Linguistics is a passageway  
to freedom in all disciplines.

Wherever learning is concerned,  
linguistics there appears: as that  
investigative therapy  
which may be used to clear away  
the taints of speech in what is said.

1.14

A further indication of this analytic approach may be seen in the following passage from the *vṛtti* commentary on the *Vākya-padīya*, 1.142. Here, the commentator (said to be Bhartṛhari himself) gives us his own description of *Vaikharī*, *Madhyamā* and *Paśyantī*, as three levels of language. The reader should be warned that the translation below is a rather free rendering, in modern terms.

*Vaikharī* (the 'elaborated') is jointly known, in concert with other people, through its objective sound. It is the form that's heard: particular, restricted to each case. Connected, it touches upon other things, and is thus liable to interpretation. It is articulated by varied syllables, and in other ways that colour its manifestation: both in well-established modes and in degenerate formations. That is the case when it is manifested in [the sound of] a spinning axle, or in a drum, or in a flute, or in a *vīṇā*. It is thus that we conceive of its unmeasured variety.

*Madhyamā* (the 'mediating') is seated backwards, within. It seems comprehended through succession, made up of mind alone. But it is followed by the subtle functioning of living energy. As some would say, its manifest succession is only an outer wrapping, and this succession is liable to be withdrawn.

*Paśyantī* ('seeing') is that in which succession is withdrawn. It is just being, in the absence of differentiation. Thus it is potency: where all succession is contained, at rest. That is continual activity, found in complete absorption back within. It's that which gets obscured, itself completely pure. In it, all form is known contained, all form is utterly dissolved, no form at all appears. It comes into appearance through separated objects, through their connection together, and through their total dissolution. It's thus that we conceive of it, measureless through all variety.

Some say that in all states of speech, human development proceeds from an established distinction of right use from wrong. However, the seeing mode of *paśyantī* is utterly unmixed and unconfused, untouched by all corrupted use. It is beyond all usage in the world. It is approached by attaining to correctness of knowledge, through the analysis of speech. Or through union with the prior source of speech. So it is said in the tradition that some follow....