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KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION II: ATTAINING LIBERATION IN  
BHĀṬṬA MĪMĀMSĀ AND ADVAITA VEDĀNTA

In an earlier paper,\* I looked at the great debate between Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā and (Śāṅkarite) Advaita Vedānta on whether ritual action on metaphysical knowledge of the self was the means to the attainment of the human end. By focusing on their delineation of the relationship between action and knowledge in general, I aimed to present a general view of the relative importance of action and knowledge as means towards the human end, regardless of or neutral to the exact conception of that end.

A study of several passages in Kumārila Bhāṭṭa (and his commentator, Pārthasārathi Mīśra) and Śāṅkara (and his followers) shows that, while polemical points are indeed made about the sole efficacy of ritual action and metaphysical knowledge respectively, on the whole, much more nuanced positions are adopted. In sum, both sides agree that both modalities are needed for the attainment of a transcendental goal. The disagreement is about which is dominant, which subordinate. A reconstruction of the concept of the dominant-subordinate relationship helps clarify the different emphases the two schools place on action and knowledge.

The focus on the nature of the relationship between and relative importance of action and knowledge allowed the examination to proceed neutrally with regard to the end in question. However, it is obvious that a proper philosophical understanding of this particular debate, whatever its general bearing on the issue of action and knowledge, requires an analysis of what each side takes to be the human end. In the present essay, I propose to look at how the human end, seen commonly as liberation (*mokṣa*), relates to the way action and knowledge are relatively valorised by the two schools. The historical specificity of the theoretical debate on knowledge and action will become apparent here, but also the way in which the general position on their relative importance coheres with the favoured conception of liberation.

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\* 'Knowledge and Action I: Means to the Human End in Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā and Advaita Vedānta', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 28: 1–24.

Clearly, however, this essay cannot become a detailed study of liberation in the two schools. I will therefore concentrate on the area where the conception of liberation meets the debate over action and knowledge.

#### 1. ACTION AND THE CESSATION OF ACTION: THE COMPLEX ROLE OF ACTION IN MĪMĀṂSĀ LIBERATION

When we look more closely at the Mīmāṃsā conception of liberation, we find that two different notions of action are involved in the account of how the highest good is accomplished. The *cessation* of many sorts of actions is as important for the attainment of liberation as the *performance* of some other sorts of action. The idea that certain sorts of action must cease before liberation occurs is widespread in classical Indian thought. It does not represent, by itself, anything unique to Mīmāṃsā. But its presence in the system is interesting in two ways. Firstly, it fits in an elegant manner into Mīmāṃsā's strict and bare conception of liberation. Secondly, it complexifies the Mīmāṃsā case for action as the dominant mode for the attainment of liberation, for the one notion of action seems to contradict directly the other.

In order to see all this, we must first understand what, in its relevant essentials, is Kumāṛila's conception of liberation.

Nothing that is an effect (literally: has a cause) is known to be indestructible. Therefore, one is released only through the absence of the cause [of bondage] due to the destruction of consequential action. There is no cause for the eternity of liberation, apart from the absential (i.e. negative) nature of freedom ... (ŚV, V.16.106–107a)<sup>1</sup>

Kumāṛila draws on a general metaphysical principle. If a thing is created, it has a beginning; and if it has a beginning, it has an end; therefore, anything that is created eventually perishes. That which is created is an effect. If liberation were a particular state caused by prior conditions, then it is their product; it is an effect. If it is such a thing (or a state) with a beginning, then it must have an end, it must perish. But liberation is by definition something that does not end; if a state is one from which regression is possible, then it is not liberation. Liberation, therefore, cannot be caused by anything and it is not the effect of anything. What, then, is it? Kumāṛila answers obliquely: liberation is not bondage. Bondage is the continued presence of the self in a world of suffering, a presence which takes the form of embodied engagement – life – and repeated such engagement – a cycle of lives – in that world. As long as there is bondage, there is no liberation. Therefore, bondage must stop.

Now, bondage can indeed be stopped; there is nothing metaphysically problematic about that. But if there is no bondage, there is liberation, so by definition. It is therefore a result, we may say, analytically; but not substantively. The metaphysical problem of liberation-as-effect is evaded. This is what Kumāṛila means by saying freedom is absential in nature: it is defined purely in terms of the absence of bondage.

Kumāṛila says that this absence is brought about through the destruction of consequential action (*karma*). We will turn to that in a moment, when we get on to the next few verses. First, we must note that such action happens in life or embodied existence; the body is the necessary condition for action, and the consequences accrue to the subject who, as agent, is indirectly connected to action through the body. Pārthasārathi helpfully spells this out in his comment on this verse.

It is being said: Connection to body is bondage; its absence is liberation. Thus, the end of embodiment, its absence through complete annihilation and its future absence through non-production, is liberation. Bondage conditioned by action ceases to be only through the destruction of action ... (p. 475)<sup>2</sup>

Liberation, the absence of bondage, embodiment and action are all therefore intimately connected. The self remains tied to existence because it has to meet the consequences of past actions, which have accrued to it. The performance of such action, the subsequent actions to expiate such consequences as possible, and experiencing those that cannot be so expiated, all require the body; and such embodied existence constitutes bondage. Action thus conditions bondage.

We can see here the emergence of the more complex attitude to action that I mentioned at the start of this section. While we will still see it as the Mīmāṃsā mode of attaining liberation, it is also the conditioning feature of bondage. There is, however, a deeply puzzling point with which we must grapple before we go on. Kumāṛila completes verse 107 with this statement:

And no absence is the result of actions.(ŚV, V.16.107b)<sup>3</sup>

(More liberally: ‘and no action renders any absence its fruit’.) Granted that Mīmāṃsā liberation is strictly only the absence of bondage; if it is not accomplished by any action at all, why has Kumāṛila expended so much energy on arguing that action is the dominant mode in the attainment of the highest good? After all, it is not as if he has merely argued that action is for the virtuous life and for prosperity, i.e. for goods other than the highest. If he had, then he might have been able consistently to say that action falls short of accomplishing liberation, but no Advaitin would then have subsequently disagreed with him. It

would seem that, as the next two verses will demonstrate, he is focused at this stage only on all those actions that bind; in verses 110–111, he will return to action that does function towards liberation. If that is the case, then we should gloss the assertion above as referring to all but some special and especially efficacious actions.

Pārthasārathi, however, gives an interestingly different interpretation, influenced no doubt by his historically available knowledge of Advaita. After Kumārila has said that there can be no eternal liberation other than through the absential nature of freedom, he imagines that the opponent asks whether it cannot be that, ‘even if it is of the form of absence, liberation is accomplished through cognition’.<sup>4</sup> He takes Kumārila’s statement in 107b as being a response to that. That is to say, he interprets the word *kriyā* as action broadly conceived as some prosecuted means, so that gaining knowledge is understood as something the subject *does*. Then the answer is that liberation does not occur through *doing* something like gaining knowledge. Only by so collapsing the traditional distinction between knowledge and action – although, it must be admitted, with some appeal to our intuition about language – can he make this interpretation.

With the puzzle not entirely resolved, we turn now to the next sequence of Kumārila’s thought, where the exact nature of the complex role of action – and, indeed, knowledge – in liberation is made clear.

The fact is that for those who know the truth about the self, past actions are annihilated through fruition (the consequences having been met), and with there being no further residue [of consequences to be faced], the body is not produced again. Our body is produced for the experiencing of the consequences of past actions; if they (past actions) do not exist [any longer because they are exhausted] no body is then produced. (ŚV, V.16.108–109)<sup>5</sup>

Pārthasārathi helpfully reiterates, in his commentary on 108 (p. 476), that the ‘truth about the self’ is that it is distinct (*vivikta*) from the body (*dehasamprayoga*). Pārthasārathi seems to imply that this makes one see no point in acting to gain anything for oneself. What acts and what undergoes the consequences is the body, not the self; yet it is the self that motivates action and appropriates the consequences. When the distinction between them is realised, then the self finds no reason in indulging in consequential action.

Once the consequences are exhausted, and since by then the knowledgeable self has set aside any further consequential action, the need for the body, which alone acts and serves as the locus of (consequential) experience, is gone. Since bondage is embodiment, the end of the need for embodiment is the end of bondage. Thus, liberation.

We have had to go through these moves since they detail the austere Mīmāṃsā conception of liberation. Seemingly against the tide of this essay, we have seen the Mīmāṃsaka argue that liberation – the absentially defined notion of freedom that is the highest good, the supreme state – is accomplished through the cessation of bondage-conditioning action. We will now have to see what then the purpose was behind Kumārila's assertion of the efficacy of action, which in turn led to Advaitic counter-arguments for knowledge.

As the reader with some familiarity with Indian debates on the nature of *karma* will have expected, Kumārila distinguishes between different sorts of ritual actions. The two sorts he distinguishes between are those actions which he conventionally argues must cease and those which he asserts have functional efficacy towards liberation.

One whose objective is liberation does not undertake action which have the purpose of fulfilling desires or actions which are prohibited, but, performing only those actions which are necessary or occasion-specific, seeks to give up sin. (SV, V.16.110)<sup>6</sup>

The first two types of action – those for goods other than the highest and those that are prohibited for being evil – must stop. In their different ways, they bring about consequences, which must be faced and thus perpetuate the need for embodiment. This much we have seen. The obvious and well-known problem is that this cannot result in the suspension of all action. In the specific Vedic context, rituals for the sustenance of order must be performed; more generally, such actions as helping others in trouble too must be performed. There are, therefore, obligatory actions, specifically categorised in the Vedic texts as those that have to be performed regularly, like the oblation to the sun, and those that have to be performed at particular times in the passage of life, like funerary rites. I do not think there is any harm or loss of hermeneutical exactitude in seeing the mention of such actions more generally as covering moral and ethical conduct.

The performance of these obligatory actions, he says, leads to the giving up of sin. There are two interpretations possible of how this can happen. The more obvious one, I think, is that the non-performance of obligatory action by itself will be sinful. Intuitively, it would seem lunatic for those who consider themselves to be truly detached from the concerns of the world to refuse to save a drowning person because they did not wish to be rewarded for saving that person. The same would apply within the Vedic theory of action, for order would not be maintained without lives of proper ritual virtue. Another interpretation, which can better be thought as secondary to the first, is that the painful

consequences of past actions can be expiated through subsequent virtuous conduct, ritual or moral.

Either way, or both ways, such actions fulfil the three functions required of them. First, they acknowledge that life cannot be without action. Second, their performance does not lead to continuing consequentiality and (therefore) bondage. Finally, and combining the implications of the first two, they show how action can and must serve as the dominant mode for the attainment of liberation. This, then, is the conceptual reason for the Mīmāṃsaka's sustained argument for action. It turns out that the relevant action that functions towards liberation is such action as expiates bondage-perpetuating consequentiality and/or fulfils obligations whose non-observance would once more generate consequentiality.

The account needs a final tidying up. The performance of obligatory actions may have the purely negative functions of expiation and the avoidance of the sins of non-performance; but what of their positive function? As Pārthasārathi expresses the familiar worry, in his introduction to verse 111, such obligatory actions as the *agnihotra* ritual are for the purpose of attaining heaven; but this is merely some further experiential state; how then can there be liberation? Kumārila provides an answer that seems conventional to us.

It is known that the effects [of the latter two sorts] accrue only to those who solicit them, and not to those who do not desire them. (SV, V.16.111a)<sup>7</sup>

This is the claim central to the teaching of the *Bhagavadgītā* and as such is well-known in later Hindu religio-moral thought. It is not clear whether Kumārila is explicitly referring to it; he would probably have known it, but it may only just have been emerging as an authoritative text in his time. Pārthasārathi, five centuries or so later, takes the commonality of concern to be obvious; commenting on this verse, he quotes Kṛṣṇa on the adept or the renunciate who is assured of liberation as 'one who performs action indifferent to the fruit of action' (*Bhagavadgītā*, VI.1). The major conceptual problem here, into which we cannot possibly go, is that a general moral claim – that intention is central to the (dis)value of action – is imported into the apparently factual claim that there is a real nomology of action and consequence in the cosmos.<sup>8</sup> Since this idea is accepted by the Advaitin, it is not in contention. Given this acceptance, Kumārila's account of how action leads to liberation according to his conception of it is complete.

## 2. KNOWLEDGE AND THE TRANSCENDENCE OF ACTION IN ADVAITA

Depending on one's judgement, Advaitic liberation is easily conceptualised or virtually impossible to do so; I incline towards holding the latter but feel impelled, in the context of this paper, to behave as if it were the former.

Without attempting to analyse or defend in any detail the Advaitic conception of liberation, as I understand it, I shall now present its general features.<sup>9</sup> The person who seeks liberation is the subject which has the reflexive ascription of its identity determined by its mental and physical apparatus. The consciousness individuated by the psychophysical complex is called the *jīva*. However, consciousness as a general type of existent, which has the unique character of being intrinsically reflexive (i.e. constituted by the nature of having its functioning transparently available to itself), is not to be understood as naturally individuated. In its nature as this 'luminous' (i.e. reflexively aware) and general existent, it is found as the subject(ivity) of all individuals and is called the *ātman*. Consciousness as this general entity is also called 'witness' (*sākṣi*), because it is reflexively transparent towards all particular and specifiable states of awareness. The person is at once the specific locus of consciousness, conditioned by states (of bodily and mental) awareness, and the contingent manifestation of this general, 'witnessing' consciousness.<sup>10</sup>

The astonishing claim of Advaita, of course, is that this general type of consciousness is, irreducibly and ultimately, a general yet singular consciousness. It is this which is the source, in some way (often contested within Advaita itself) of the world. This foundational nature is indicated by the name given to it, *brahman*, from the root word meaning 'to grow', for the world is an evolute (again, in some way) of *brahman*. This cosmogonic claim is, according to the Advaitin, the way to understand the insight of the Upaniṣadic seers: the individuated subject, by virtue of consciousness, is the universal, supporting consciousness. All that remains, philosophically, is to clarify the nature of the identity postulated here . . .

The existential consequence of this insight, of course, is that liberation has to be the de-individuation of consciousness. That is to say, it is the occurrence within the individual subject's consciousness of an awareness of universality, which results in that consciousness ceasing to have its ascriptive individuality and re-attaining its undifferentiated existence as that universal consciousness.

The main reason for the Advaitic rejection of the ultimate efficacy of ritual action, however, lies in a further metaphysical move. The

ultimacy of *brahman* is interpreted by them to mean that the world is not irreducibly separate or separable from it. Its ontological status is not considered co-eval with its source. The non-duality that gives 'A-dvaita' its name is both between *brahman* and the individual conscious beings and between it and the non-conscious world; it is their inner being (*antarbhāvaḥ*)<sup>11</sup> and there is nothing but it in the final analysis. As one would expect, this dramatically expressed monism is qualified in many (sometimes incompatible) ways by Śāṅkara and his successors, so as to save the stubborn appearance of various phenomena of duality and difference. For example, later in the same commentary, on the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*, Śāṅkara admits (or, perhaps, asserts) that all phenomenal things (*vastvāntara*) in this world that are not ultimately real exist both for those who do know that there is nothing other than *brahman* and those who do not so know.<sup>12</sup> His critique of the Yogācāra denial of the external world too is well known.<sup>13</sup>

Why is this deliberate advocacy of an indeterminate status to the world of relevance to the Advaitic rejection of action as the dominant means for the attainment of liberation? Śāṅkara argues that action, howsoever virtue-directed, is nevertheless metaphysically incapable of achieving for the subject that transcendence which the Advaitin calls liberation.

'Now, liberation is the goal of man; it may be [thought to be] attained through effort (i.e. action). As merit from action increases, so too do the results obtained. Thus, it might be presumed that an increase in the best of meritorious action would lead to liberation.' This idea should be discarded. Even the best of actions, combined [though it may be] with (right) cognition, can only go so far. Action and its results have as their locus the manifold [world] of names and forms. Action does not function with regard to that which is not an effect (of any action), is eternal, whole (literally, unmanifold), beyond name and form, and exclusive of the nature of action, its factors and its results. And where it (i.e. action) does function, it is only in the [unliberated existence of the] cycle of lives . . . (BrUBh, III.iii.1, p. 421)<sup>14</sup>

The objection Śāṅkara puts in his interlocutor's mouth is odd for two reasons. First, if this is a Mīmāṃsaka (who else could it be?), he is hardly likely to put it. We have seen that the Mīmāṃsaka is quite clear that action relates to the attainment of liberation only indirectly, by removing the need for bondage. He would not naively hold liberation to be the culminating good fortune of good actions. Liberation cannot be an effect if it is to be eternal, so it must be defined purely in absential terms; the absence is that of experience, which is always binding; but the accretion of merit requires the experience of those meritorious consequences; therefore liberation, as the cessation of experience, cannot be the result of meritorious actions. Śāṅkara, surely, is aware of this argument and the Mīmāṃsaka's awareness of it.



The choice of the question is odd in another way: the response – which is obviously meant to express the Advaitic position here – does not directly bear on the question. Even if there were an interlocutor who put that question, the response would have to deal with how actions that accrue merit are inappropriate for liberation; but that would only be to rehearse the *Mīmāṃsā* case. When Śaṅkara says that actions can only go so far, he is not talking at all about the nature of *actions*. He is talking about the nature of the *world* in which those actions take place. The question he is really answering is as to whether any sort of action at all – whether meritorious in consequence or only negating consequences – can be a direct means to liberation. Then the answer is ‘no’; for the most general reason possible: actions are part of the world whose transcendence precisely is Advaitic liberation.

This strategy reveals a fundamental Advaitic difficulty: they must reconcile a concept of liberation that radically rejects Vedic ritual by calling for it to be transcended, with a conservative acknowledgement of the significance of brahminical orthopraxy. Advaitins therefore tend to assert the general metaphysical principle that the world of action is transcended by knowledge in and of *brahman*, even while simultaneously engaging in debates over the specific potency of ritual action. Thus, for example, Sureśvara, in his early post-Śaṅkara composition, the *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, uses a – shall we say, illuminating – metaphor to make the metaphysical point.

Since liberation arises only from the destruction of miscognition, action does not lead to it. Action cannot remove miscognition, anymore than can darkness arising from darkness (remove darkness). (NS, I.24; p. 37)<sup>15</sup>

Liberation results when the individual subject realises that its consciousness is not different from the singular yet general consciousness from which all experienced reality derives. The de-individuation of consciousness, upon the attainment of the knowledge that it had mistaken its individuated identity, is Advaitic liberation. Sureśvara here goes back to the consensus that action and knowledge are mutually without influence. Given the cognitive content of Advaitic liberation, it follows that no action can affect it.

Having made this highly general metaphysical point, however, Sureśvara too engages in the debate on the types and functions of ritual action.

Since they are declared to be for the consumption of our previous sins, imperative daily acts are not liberating. Since they are associated with such fruit as the celestial world and the like, neither [likewise] are acts of choice [liberating] . . . The avoidance of [both] prohibited acts and those of choice is preached by both of us; and since

imperative acts do not produce [fresh] fruit, liberation is not achieved through action. (NS, I. 26, 28; p. 39, p. 42)<sup>16</sup>

He employs the conventional division of actions. Certain daily rituals that sustain the correctly lived life and acts of duty determined by caste, position, relationship and ultimately, one's humanity, all have to be carried out in any case, if one is to live the virtuous life. They have intrinsic merit. But a virtuous life is one lived for the sake of good alone. It is not to do with any further consideration, like accumulating merit for the agent. The only consequence of virtuous action for the agent is that it counteracts the consequences of past actions. The very fact of virtuous action being an end in itself rules out its being instrumental to something else, including liberation. Liberation, of course, is conceived as the (re)attainment of universal consciousness. But there is the rub. The Mīmāṃsaka conceives of liberation absentially, strictly as the end of the cycle of lives. He would protest that it was perfectly natural to suppose that the virtuous life – which allowed good deeds but did not commit the agent to further consequentiality – was the prerequisite for liberation from life itself. As for acts of choice, made with the attainment of an end in view, the Mīmāṃsaka himself has stated that these might produce results like an infinitely comfortable, celestial existence but not liberation; so that is not an issue. In other words, the repeated Advaitic argument against the liberating efficacy of obligatory actions is of no intrinsic value against the Mīmāṃsaka; it comes down to the different conceptions of liberation involved.

The Advaitic rejection of the functionality of action towards liberation, then, is intimately related to the conception of liberation itself, in that the metaphysics implied by that conception denies the possibility of action having a role. However, the ironic feature of the Advaitic critique of the liberating functionality of action is that that critique applies to cognitive functioning as well. If liberation is transcendence of the world, and action is in that transcended world, so too is cognition. Indeed, that is a central contention of Advaita.<sup>17</sup>

'I am brahman': in this alone do terminate all injunctions and all other means of knowledge. When the understanding of the non-dual self, which cannot be subtracted from or added to, is real, that which is without object and without knower itself is entitled to become a means of knowledge. (BSB, I.i.4, p. 154)<sup>18</sup>

That is to say, the very conditions under which the system of knowledge operates cease to hold.<sup>19</sup> What we call knowledge is bound by the very world which is transcended. Vācaspati makes this explicit in his commentary.

By the word ‘this’ (in ‘in this alone do . . .’), he refers to cognition. Injunctions are, indeed, the means for knowing about virtuous conduct. And these, which are premised on differences of end, means and mode of operation, and give rise to virtuous conduct cannot, when there is oneness of *brahman* and the self, be based on those [differences]; for that would be contradictory. This is the sense [of Śaṅkara’s argument]. This is not what happens just to the sacred teachings that are the means for knowing virtuous conduct, but to all the means of knowledge . . . In non-duality, the object-subject relationship does not, indeed, exist; nor too agency, as there is no action; nor too instrumentality, for the same reason. (Bh, I.i.4, p. 154)<sup>20</sup>

With characteristic precision, Vācaspati points out that the argument against action extends to knowledge. The relevant action is action based on the texts, which is to say, actions performed by following what the texts enjoin. But to do that is to know the texts, for the texts are a source of knowledge (of enjoined virtuous action as well as described self and indicated *brahman*). Knowledge, however, requires the structure of experience, of subject and object, subjective apparatus and objective features. These are exactly what are penultimate, and transcended in de-individuatedness.

The Advaitin maintains that there nevertheless is a difference in functionality. Action remains *within* the unliberated existence of the dually structured world; as we have seen, it provides no way of getting the subject to transcend its individuatedness. Knowledge, in contrast, does take the subject into transcendence; it is self-transcending. Quite how it does this, and whether it is coherent to think so, are matters of intense debate. In a dense and intricate passage, Vācaspati presents the Advaitic account of how knowledge is liberating, even while acknowledging that knowledge has to be transcended in liberation.

Hence it is stated that the internal organ, matured through the contemplation of the meaning of the unquestionable assertions, manifests the immediately experienced referent of the ‘you’ as having the referent ‘that’, through denying the various contingent aspects of the former. But this is not experience of the nature of *brahman* itself, for then it could not even be generated; rather, it is a particular mental state, having *brahman* as its content . . . Nor is the direct apprehension (intuition) of *brahman* through a mental state free from all contingent features, for it [that apprehension] is known to be a contingency incompatible with both itself and other contingent features, itself being on the brink of destruction . . . (Bh, I.i.1, pp. 57–58)<sup>21</sup>

This shows why, in an important sense, liberation is not a state of knowledge in Advaita. Knowledge, whether episodic or dispositional, is effected through the physical apparatus of the body, and is a specifiable mental state or set of states, and both body and mind are individuating. If liberation is de-individuation, it is what can only indicatively be called a state of consciousness, for all consciousness that we – individuated beings – are conscious of is revealed only in and as individuated states. However, the realisation of the unindividuated nature of the conscious-

ness we take specially to be ours is a special state of knowledge. It prompts the cessation of individuation, since it removes the misunderstanding about consciousness that, the Advaitin says, consciousness has imposed primally upon itself. It is therefore the last individuated state. As such, it too is part of the transcended world, but it has functional efficacy towards transcendence. Knowledge is self-denying here, its occurrence destroys just those contingent features of individuation that made it possible in the first place.

Given the Advaitic conception of liberation, action, clearly, does not have this feature. At most, even if it is accepted that obligatory action exhausts consequentiality, the last such act could not have this ability for taking the subject into the transcendent state.

The Mīmāṃsā response to this can be two-fold. One is direct and seeks to controvert the Advaitic claim to the special nature of liberating knowledge (the knowledge, after all, with which the Advaitin is ultimately concerned). Pārthasārathi simply refuses to accept that liberating cognition has the special self-destructive feature that we have seen Vācaspati argues for.

With the free self, the overruling cognition cannot even be imagined, as he is in a condition of insensibility towards all the sensory apparatus, and in the absence of that apparatus, cognition is impossible. Negation of the unrecollected manifold cannot be thought of. Nor is recollection possible in that state, as all memory-traces would have been removed. Therefore, the overruling cognition could not possibly occur. (ŚD, pp. 110–111)<sup>22</sup>

Pārthasārathi apparently imputes to the Advaitins the view that the transcendence of the world is itself the content of a cognition in liberation. This allows him to point out that no such state, requiring as it does just the psychophysical complex that is held to be transcended, can be possible. It would seem that, in this case, the Advaitin, or at least, Vācaspati, wins out, for the transcendence of the world is a fact of de-individuation, not a veridical cognition in de-individuation. But I cannot pretend that the complexity of the arguments for and against has been explored here.

The other Mīmāṃsā strategy is to criticise the Advaitic conception of liberation, which, after all, is what legitimises the Advaitic rejection of the ultimate efficacy of action. But a study of that is beyond the purview of this paper.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In this second of two papers, I have focused on the particular way in which different conceptions of liberation cohere with the different

emphasizes the two schools place on action and knowledge. The original, historical line of dependence is from a position on action and knowledge to a conception of liberation. The Mīmāṃsā concern is originally (even with Kumārila, and certainly for his predecessors, as for the rival Prābhākara sub-school) with a proper understanding and defence of the Vedic ritual texts, because they identify the sacred source of tradition as those texts. Likewise, the Advaita (and subsequent Vedānta) concern is with an understanding and defence of the Upaniṣads, because (following the aphorisms of Bādarāyana), they take the ultimate source of sacred authority to lie in the metaphysical assertions of those texts. It is these original exegetical commitments that drive them into developing their theses on action and knowledge respectively. But the philosophical line of dependence is the other way around. In order to defend the primacy of ritual action as enjoined by the Vedic texts, the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsaka has to elaborate on what seems to him to be the most natural and coherent conception of liberation at and as the end of action. This involves too the presentation of a metaphysical theory of self and world. Correspondingly, the Advaitin (whose understanding of Bādarāyana, we should not forget, turned out subsequently to be only one possible interpretation) has to make knowledge central to the fulfilment of an existence oriented to the teachings of the Upaniṣads.

For the Advaitin, the metaphysics of self and world is intrinsic to the defence of the Upaniṣadic doctrines, since the Upaniṣads precisely are concerned to teach about liberation through radical statements on self and world. The commitment to the chosen sacred texts carries with it a commitment to the thesis of the primacy of knowledge and its attendant metaphysics. In contrast, the Mīmāṃsaka's thesis on action and its attendant metaphysics is extrinsic to the commitment to the Vedic injunctions to action, and virtually forced out of them due to the demands of interlocutors.

Whatever be the nature of the lines of dependence, the respective lines of commitment are as follows. If action is the dominant mode of attaining the highest good, it requires a self implicated in a world in which such action is effective; hence, that world must be ultimately real, such that action can indeed be effective in it. And action can be effective only if the highest good were a matter of a real change in the status of the self seeking that good, for action functions by changing the state of affairs or things as they are. The Mīmāṃsaka does, indeed, consistently argue for the existence of an ultimately real world, although we have not been able to examine that here.<sup>23</sup> He also takes such a real change in the condition of the self to consist solely in the actual

and permanent end of the physical condition of bondage, i.e. embodied existence.

If knowledge is the dominant mode of attaining the highest good, that calls for a self whose cognitive shifts alone effect the change that attainment of the good requires. This is because cognitive states change only the aspect of how reality is understood and not the actual state of affairs as such. Since bondage is bondage in the world, the world cannot be irreducibly or ultimately real if liberation were through change in understanding alone. This is because, if the world were real, so too would bondage be real, and only an actual change in status – which cognitive states like knowledge admittedly cannot effect – could bring about liberation. The Advaitin argues that the world is not irreducibly real (although he tries very hard to account for its apparent reality in a variety of ways),<sup>24</sup> and that liberation is brought about through an epistemic shift in and of consciousness.

It would seem, to return to the very general level of discussion with which the whole project began in the earlier paper, that metaphysics is central to the issue. If action were the way to the attainment of the highest good, then that good must involve a real change in the status of the subject seeking its attainment; and such a process must happen in an ultimately real world. If knowledge were the way, then the highest good must (only) be a shift in aspect or a change in the cognitive state of the subject attaining it, and it must be taken to happen in a world of appearance. It would be interesting to see whether this correlation holds in other times and traditions, so that something general emerges about the nature of this debate.<sup>25</sup>

#### TEXTS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- AS Laugākṣi Bhāskara: *Arthasaṃgraha*, Gajendragadkar, A.B. and Karmarkar, R.D. (eds.), Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984 (reprint).  
 Bh Vācaspati: *Bhāmatī*, as in BSB.  
 BrUBh Śāṅkara: *Bṛhadāraṇyaka-upaniṣad-bhāṣya* with Ānandagiri: *īkā*, Anand Ashram Sanskrit Series, Poona, 1914.  
 BSB Śāṅkara: *Brahmasūtrabhāṣya with the commentaries Bhāmatī, Kalpataru and Parimala*, Introduction by Solomon, E.A. Parimal Publications, Ahmedabad, 1981 (Reissue of N.A. Krishna Sastri and V.L.S. Pansikar (eds.), Nirayasar Press, Bombay, 1917).  
 MS Jaimini: *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* with Śabara: *Mīmāṃsāsūtrabhāṣya*, Nyayaratna, N., Bibliotheca Indica, Calcutta Asiatic Society, 1889.

- NS Sureśvara: *Naiṣkarmyasiddhi*, R. Balasubramaniam (ed.), University of Madras Press, Madras, 1988.
- ŚD Pārthasārathi Miśra: *Śāstradīpikā (Tarkapāda)*, Suri, Dharmadatta (ed.), Nirnayasaagar Press, Bombay, 1915.
- ŚV Kumārila: *Ślokavārttika*, with the commentary *Nyāyaratnākara* of Pārthasārathi Miśra, Sastri, Dvarikadas (ed.), Tara Publications, Varanasi, 1978.
- VP Dharmarāja Adhvārīndra: *Vedāntaparibhāṣa*, S.S. Suryanarayana Shastri (ed.), The Adyar Library, Madras, 1942.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *na hi kāraṇavat kiṃcid akṣayitvena gamyate; tasmāt karmakṣayādeva hetv abhāve na mucyate. na hy abhāvātmakeṇ muktavā mokṣanityatvakāraṇam . . .*

<sup>2</sup> *śarīrasambandho bandhaḥ tadabhāvo mokṣaḥ. tena niṣpannānām dehānām yaḥ pradhvaṃsābhāvaḥ yaśvānutpannānām prāgabhāvaḥ sa mokṣaḥ karmanimittaśca bandhaḥ karmakṣayādeva na bhavātīti.*

<sup>3</sup> *. . . na ca kriyāyāḥ kasyāścid abhāvaḥ phalamīsyate.*

<sup>4</sup> *abhāvarūpasyāpi mokṣasya jñānameva sādhanam.*

<sup>5</sup> *tatra jñātā 'matattvānām bhogāt pūrvakriyākṣaye, uttarapracayā 'sattvāddeho notpadyate punaḥ. karmajany opabhogārthaṃ śarīraṃ na pravarte, tad abhāve na kaścid dhi hetustatrā 'vatiṣtate.*

<sup>6</sup> *mokṣārthī na pravarteta tatra kāmyaniṣiddhyoḥ, nityanaimittike kuryāt pratyavāya jihāsayā.*

<sup>7</sup> *prārthyamānaṃ phalaṃ jñānaṃ na cā 'nicchor bhaviṣyati,*

<sup>8</sup> For a lucid account, combining historical sensitivity with philosophical re-interpretation, on the nature of *karma*, its supposed claim to factuality and its possible ethical role, with specific reference to the *Bhagavadgītā*, see Perrett, Roy, W., *Hindu Ethics: A Philosophical Study*, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, 1998, especially chapters 1 and 4.

<sup>9</sup> I have dealt in slightly greater detail on what follows, as too on the Bhāṭṭa Mīmāṃsā conception of liberation, in Ram-Prasad, C. *Knowledge and the Highest Good: Liberation and philosophical inquiry in classical Indian thought*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, (forthcoming).

<sup>10</sup> See Vācaspati on the nature of witness in the *Bhāmātī*, I.i.4. See Chatterjee, K. and Dravid, R.R. *The Concept of Sākṣi in Advaita Vedānta*, Benares Hindu University Press, Benares, 1979; and Fort, A.O. 'The Concept of *sākṣin* in Advaita Vedānta', *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 12.3, September 1984, pp. 277–290.

<sup>11</sup> E.g., Śaṅkara in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, II.iv.9, p. 348.

<sup>12</sup> *astī cāyam . . . mithyāvyavahāro yeṣāṃ brahmatattvād anyatvena vastu vidyate yeṣāṃ ca nāsti. Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad Bhāṣya*, III.v.1, p. 452.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Ram-Prasad, C. 'Dreams and Reality: A Śaṅkarite Critique of Vijñānavāda', *Philosophy East and West*, July 1993.

<sup>14</sup> *mokṣayāpi puruṣārthatvāt tatsādhyatā prāptā. yāvad yāvat puṇyotkarṣas tāvat tāvat phalotkarṣa prāptih. tasmād uttamena puṇyotkarṣeṇa mokṣo bhaviṣyati āśānkā syāt. sā nivartayitavyā jñānasahitasya ca prakṛṣṭasya karmaṇaitāvatī gatih. vyākṛta nāmarūpāspadatvāt karmaṇas tatphalasya ca. na tvakārye nitye 'vyākṛtadharmiṇya*

*nāmarūpātmake kriyākāraka phalavabhāvavarjite karmaṇo vyāpāro 'sti. yatra ca vyāpāraḥ sa saṃsāraḥ . . .*

<sup>15</sup> *ajñānahāna mātratvān mukteḥ karma na sādhanam, karmāpamārṣti nājñānaṃ tamasīvotthitaṃ tamaḥ.*

<sup>16</sup> *duritakṣapanārthatvān na nityaṃ syād vimuktaye, svargādiphalasambandhāt kāmyaṃ karma tathaiva na . . . niśiddha kāmyayosty āgastvayāpīṣṭo yathā mayā, nityasyāphalavattvāc ca na mokṣaḥ karmasādhanāḥ.*

<sup>17</sup> Curiously, Śāṅkara, in BSB I.i.4 quotes Gotama's *Nyāya Sutra* I.i.2, apparently to support his contention that knowledge is the means to the highest end. 'Of suffering, birth, activity, defects and erroneous cognition, by the destruction of each subsequent one there occurs the destruction of the earlier one, and consequently, there is the final release'. Śāṅkara then writes: 'And the destruction of erroneous cognition results from the knowledge of the oneness of *brahman* and self'. Vācaspati cautiously glosses this passage thus: 'The citation of the aphorism is only for this purpose: that through true cognition erroneous cognition is removed; that, however, which is acceptable to Akṣapāda [Gotama] as true cognition is not acceptable here' (Bh, I.i.4, p. 121).

<sup>18</sup> *ahaṃ brahmāsmīyetad avasānā eva sarve vidhayaḥ sarvāṇi cetarāṇāni pramāṇāni. nahy aheyānupādeyādvaitātāmāvagatau nirviṣayāṇy apramāṭṛkāṇi ca pramāṇāni bhavitum arhanṭīti.*

<sup>19</sup> Śāṅkara repeatedly returns to this, a *leitmotif* of his system. Much later in the text, he interprets a truly enigmatic aphorism in this way; but by then, we have become exceedingly familiar with this theme, and the commentary on this aphorism hardly introduces a new thought. 'True cognition of that [universal supporting consciousness] does not impel action; on the contrary, it uproots all works; this will be stated in the aphorism, 'and thus destruction' (III.iv.16). (BSB, III.iv.8, pp. 873–874) Coming to that aphorism itself, he says, 'Moreover, it is declared that the essential form of the entire phenomenal world that is caused by primal misunderstanding, and characterised by act, instrument and consequence that provide the competence for works, is destroyed by knowledge: 'But when to one all has become just the self, what and by what does one see, what and by what does one smell?' (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II.iv.4) But for one who expects to attain competence for action through the prior [true] cognition of self [learnt] from the Vedānta, the consequence will only be the utter destruction of all competence for action. Thus too is knowledge autonomous' (BSB, III.iv.16, p. 876).

<sup>20</sup> *iti karanena jñānaṃ parāmṛṣati. vidhayo hi dharme pramāṇam. te ca sādhyasādhaneti kartavyatābhedādhiṣṭhānā dharmotpādināś ca tad adhiṣṭhānā na brahmātmaikye sati prabhavanti, virodhāt ity arthaḥ. na kevalaṃ dharmapramāṇasya śāstrasyeyaṃ gatir api tu sarveṣāṃ pramāṇānām . . . advaita hi viṣayaviṣayibhāvo nāsti. na ca kartṛtvaṃ kāryābhāvāt. na ca karaṇatvaṃ ata eva.*

<sup>21</sup> *tasmān nirvicikitsa vākyārthabhāvanā paripākasahitam antaḥkaraṇaṃ tvampadārthasyāparokṣasya tatra dupādhy ākāraṇiśedhena tatpadārthatām āvirbhāvayatīti yuktam. na cāyam anubhavo brahmasvabhāvo yena na janyetāpi tv antaḥkaraṇasyaiva vṛttibhedo brahmāviṣayaḥ . . . na cāntaḥkaraṇavṛttāvapy asya sāksātkāre sarv opādhivinirmokaḥ, tasyaiva tad upādher vinaśyad avasthasya svaparopādhi virodhino vidyamānatvāt . . .*

<sup>22</sup> *muktasya tu bādhakajñānaṃ nāśaṅkanīyamena pralīna sarvakaraṇatvāt karaṇābhāve ca jñānāsambhavāt. na cāsmāryamāṇasya prapañcasyābhāvaḥ śakyeta pratyetum. na ca tasyām avasthāyāṃ saṃbhavati smaraṇaṃ sarva saṃskārāṇām ucchinnatvāt tasmān na bādhasambhavaḥ.*

<sup>23</sup> Kumārila provides a variety of ingenious arguments against the denial of an external world, directed at the Yogācāra Buddhist, in the *Nirālambanavāda* section of the *Ślokavārttika*.



<sup>24</sup> I have presented various Advaitic arguments for a sophisticated non-realism about the external world in several papers: e.g.: ‘Knowledge and the “real” world: Śrī Harṣa and the *pramāṇas*’, *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, June, 1993; ‘Dreams and Reality: A Śāṅkarite Critique of Vijñānavāda’, *Philosophy East and West*, July 1993; ‘Is the experienced world a determinate totality?’, *Journal of the Indian Council for Philosophical Research*, September–December, 1994; and others.

<sup>25</sup> There is potential for some directly comparativist study of this debate and that within Neoplatonism. The Neoplatonists functioned within a ‘locative’ view of existence, to use Jonathan Z. Smith’s notion (Smith, Jonathan Z. *Map is not Territory*, E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1978, pp. 88–103). In it, there is a cosmic order, an order that is the world of the gods, an order which is reflected in human society; and the chief duty of priests and kings is to ‘attune human order’ to the world of the gods. But Plotinus denied that the soul ever descended into a real world; and called sensible matter the cause of the soul’s confusion about itself. The cosmos was then devalued, and ‘this, in turn, denied the value of religious rituals tied to the rhythms of the sensible world’ (Shaw, Gregory *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Penn., 1995, p. 11). In contrast, Iamblichus took it that the ‘task of every soul was to partake in divine mimesis by creating a cosmos’ (Shaw 1995, p. 15). Iamblichus’s metaphysics revolved around a ‘completely descended soul’, i.e. of a soul located in a real world. This served to justify his practice of theurgic rituals. Plotinus’s rejection of ritual practices reflected his view of the soul as ‘undescended’, i.e. not located in a real world (Lloyd, A.C. ‘The later Neoplatonists’, Armstrong, A.H. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 287–293). I shall not labour the point about the scope for comparison; but the general resemblance between Mīmāṃsā and Iamblichus, and Advaita and Plotinus, seems, with all due caution, worth exploring for generalities about action and knowledge.

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